THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF A COLOMBIAN CITY FOR FOSTERING MULTILINGUAL AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

EL PAISAJE LINGUISTICO DE UNA CIUDAD COLOMBIANA PARA EL FOMENTO DE COMPETENCIAS MULTILINGUES E INTERCULTURALES

Leidy Dayan Perlaza Torres[1]

Heberth Caicedo Saldaña[2]

Walter Vargas Urrego[3]

Yurani Giraldo Toro[4]

Universidad Uceva

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Abstract:

When you go out on the streets, it can be observed how linguistic representations have become diverse environments in social, economic, cultural, and linguistic terms, which leads to the idea that society is surrounded by a Linguistic Landscape in its daily life, whether it be banners, signs, posters, advertisements, and so on. This article, framed in a qualitative

1   *Leidy Dayan Perlaza Torres - Docente del programa de Lenguas Extranjeras con énfasis en inglés en la UCEVA, Colombia. Coordinadora del programa de Maestría en Bilingüismo y Educación. Docente investigadora del grupo Investigación en Lingüística Aplicada – ILA. Magíster en Bilingüismo y Educación. Licenciada en Educación Básica con Énfasis en Lenguas Extranjeras - UCEVA. lperlaza@uceva.edu.co https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7676-6211*
2   *Heberth Caicedo Saldaña – Docente asociado del programa de Lenguas Extranjeras con énfasis en inglés en la UCE-VA. Director del Grupo de Investigación en Lingüística Aplicada – ILA. Doctor en Ciencias Lingüísticas. Magíster en Bilingüismo de la Universidad del Valle. Licenciado en Lenguas Modernas y Traducción - Universidad del Quindío. hcaicedo@uceva.edu.co https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2609-3383*
3   *Walter Vargas Urrego– Docente de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación de la Unidad Central del Valle del Cauca UCEVA, Colombia. Estudiante de Doctorado en Educación, Venezuela. Magíster en Educación Bilingüe de la Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, España. Licenciado en Educación Básica con Énfasis en Lenguas Extranjeras - UCEVA. wvargas@uceva.edu.co*
4   *Yurani Giraldo Toro – Docente del programa de Lenguas Extranjeras con énfasis en inglés en la UCEVA. Magíster en tecnología para la educación. Licenciado en Lenguas Extranjeras con énfasis en francés y español - Universidad de la Salle. ygiraldo@uceva.edu.co.*

research and sociolinguistic design, analyzes the contribution of the Linguistic Landscape of Tuluá to the strengthening of Linguistic and Intercultural Competence in the process of developing multilingualism of students in the Foreign Languages program. Through a photographic corpus, qualitative survey, and field journals, data were collected from 95 commercial establishments that had their name in a foreign language or in a different one to compile the perceptions and experiences shared by the establishments' workers regarding the recognition of the Linguistic Landscape. The findings demonstrated that the LL of Tuluá offers a rich context for developing Linguistic and Intercultural Competence, fostering intercultural awareness and appreciation of linguistic and intercultural diversity. Therefore, it is concluded that the incorporation of the analysis of the Linguistic Landscape can contribute significantly to foreign language students as it can enrich learning experiences and the development of the skills necessary to face the challenges of today's world.

Key-Words: -Linguistic Landscape, Linguistic competence, Intercultural Competence, Multilingualism, Linguistic and cultural diversity.

Resumen:

El entorno urbano se configura como un ecosistema donde las representaciones lingüísticas se manifiestan en una diversidad de formatos desde letreros y pancartas hasta anuncios publicitarios, reflejando dinámicas sociales, económicas, culturales y lingüísticas, las cuales se denominan Paisaje Lingüístico (PL). Este artículo, enmarcado en una investigación cualitativa de diseño sociolingüístico, buscó analizar la contribución del Paisaje Lingüístico de Tuluá al fortalecimiento de la Competencia Lingüística e Intercultural en el proceso de desarrollo del multilingüismo de estudiantes del programa de Lenguas Extranjeras. Para ello, se recolectaron datos a través de un corpus fotográfico, una encuesta cualitativa y diarios de campo. Se analizaron 95 establecimientos comerciales que exhibían denominaciones en una lengua extranjera o distinta a la nativa, complementados con las percepciones y experiencias compartidas por sus trabajadores respecto al reconocimiento del PL. Los hallazgos revelaron que el PL de Tuluá constituye un contexto fértil para el desarrollo de competencias lingüísticas e interculturales, promoviendo una mayor conciencia intercultural y una apreciación de la diversidad lingüística y cultural. Se concluye que la integración del análisis del Paisaje Lingüístico en la formación de estudiantes de lenguas extranjeras puede enriquecer sus experiencias de aprendizaje y potenciar el desarrollo de habilidades esenciales para afrontar los retos del mundo actual.

Palabras Clave: Paisaje Lingüístico, Competencia Lingüística, Competencia Intercultural, Multilingüismo, Diversidad Lingüística y Cultural.

Introduction

Linguistic and cultural interactions have become crucial in shaping competent and socially aware citizens in an increasingly globalized and diverse world. Scientific, technological, economic, social, and cultural developments have expected that societies adapt to new realities, situations, and challenges, requiring individuals to develop skills and abilities that enable them to effectively interact in varied and multilingual contexts. So, the ability to understand and navigate diverse multicultural and linguistic environments is not only essential for daily life but also to respond to the global needs and requests in an interconnected market (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993).

Colombia is a country characterized by its great linguistic and cultural diversity, with more than 68 indigenous native languages coexisting alongside Spanish, what reflects the complexity and depth of its traditions, customs, cultural elements and cultures (Landaburu, 2004); what offers an ideal scenario to explore how these interactions contribute to the development of multilingualism, intercultural education, linguistic and intercultural competence due to, this multilingual and multicultural context allows for the study of the role that languages play in the social and cultural life of its inhabitants, providing insight into how minority and majority languages coexist, interact and influence each other.

The cultural diversity strengthens social interactions, intercultural processes, and enables the knowledge construction and appropriation through experiences and meanings specific to each culture through the recognition of linguistic and cultural representations present in different public places in a context. Those signs, posters, advertisements, graffiti and texts in different languages that are visible in a given public, urban or rural environment represent the Linguistic Landscape (Landry and Bourhis, 1997) which emerges as a key tool for understanding and strengthening linguistic and intercultural competences, not only in the educational field but also in the integral development of communities owing to, this visual representation of languages provides valuable information about how languages are used and perceived in different contexts, offering a view of power dynamics, identity, and cultural coexistence in a given territory.

Despite being a relatively new concept, the study of the Linguistic Landscape (LL) has been important in the fields of sociolinguistics and pragmatics (Landry and Bourhis, 1997; Gorter, 2006). Languages are present in a space, but also how these languages interact, their social status, and how they influence the identity and

social cohesion of communities is essential. Thus, this set of linguistic representations helps to understand how languages reflect and shape the sociocultural dynamics and identities of the groups that inhabit these spaces, revealing fundamental aspects of inclusion, coexistence, and cultural diversity (Ben-Rafael, 2009; Guarín, 2021).

The Linguistic Landscape of Colombia (LL) reflects its vast cultural and linguistic diversity, which enriches the urban environment in many regions; Although research on this topic has advanced, especially in cities such as Bogotá, where this linguistic representation show a combination between native and foreign languages in signs, advertisements found in public spaces, there is still much to be explored in other parts of the country. Maldonado (2020) highlights how Linguistic Landscape analysis not only shows the coexistence of languages but can also serve as an educational tool for teaching Spanish as a foreign language (ELE). The study "*El Paisaje Lingüístico de la ciudad de Bogotá como recurso pedagógico en la clase de ELE*" underlines the importance of Linguistic Landscape as a pedagogical resource to foster intercultural awareness and a deeper understanding of the sociolinguistic environment. So, at the national level, Linguistic Landscape is rich and diverse, although there are still under-researched areas, making it a promising field for future studies.

In the Valle del Cauca department, there is no research related to Linguistic Landscape, which demonstrates this concept has been scarcely explored and evidences a gap in knowledge about how the different languages, dialectal varieties, and cultures are articulated in this region. In Quindìo, Guarín (2021) has carried out the study *"Los pronombres de tratamiento en el paisaje lingüístico quindiano (Colombia)"* to offer a valuable reference on how forms of treatment are manifested in the public space

and the way in which they influence everyday language. This work encourages the analysis of the extent to which everyday language is influenced by the different advertisements found, and even the understanding of a foreign language, either with words or phrases contained in these advertisements. Nonetheless, in Tuluá, the Linguistic Landscape could reflect particularities of the cultural and social identity of the community, as well as the presence of diverse linguistic influences that have not yet been systematically documented.

Accordingly, the Linguistic Landscape analysis becomes particularly relevant in this city located in the center of Valle del Cauca, Colombia (*see Figure 1*) due to its geographical position and sociodemographic diversity. Tuluá is known for being a strategic point for various commercial and transportation routes since it connects the country's interior with the Pacific coast, becoming a dynamic economic and social hub. This city, with its great cultural and linguistic diversity, provides an example of how languages can coexist and enrich each other in the same space (Cenoz and Gorter, 2008; Pennycook, 2010), because its privileged location has attracted a diverse population, including indigenous, Afro-descendant, and international migrant communities, who have their own languages and cultural traditions.

Figure 1. *Geographical location of the municipality of Tulua.*

Note. This figure shows the political division of the Municipality of Tuluá. *Source*: Geographic Information, Mayor's Office of Tuluá.

The Linguistic Landscape can reflect social trends, migrations, and changes in the linguistic demographics of an area. The economic sectors and activities in Tuluá show that intercultural communication and interaction are fundamental to navigating cultural differences and participating in meaningful intercultural relationships that allow for promoting the development of an equitable, sustainable, progressive, and tolerant society. Tuluá's Linguistic Landscape reflects not only the dominant presence of Spanish but also that of indigenous and foreign languages, especially English, which has gained a notable presence due to global influence and educational policies

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promoting its learning (Cenoz and Gorter, 2008; Pennycook, 2010).

The linguistic representations are found in places such as restaurants, stores, cafes, and public spaces, which offer an opportunity to observe how linguistic and cultural diversity manifests in a real environment. LL can reveal aspects of a community's cultural identity and the dynamics of power and influence between linguistic groups. Thus, the study of the Linguistic Landscape in Tuluá allows for the analysis of how these linguistic representations contribute to the development of intercultural and linguistic competences among students in the Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages with an Emphasis in English at the Unidad Central del Valle del Cauca (Uceva). Interaction with the local Linguistic Landscape offers students the opportunity to experience how languages coexist and integrate into the same space, fostering a greater awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity (Shohamy and Waksman, 2009). Therefore, this approach promotes an education that values and encourages intercultural understanding, preparing future professionals to act in an increasingly globalized and diverse world.

LL works as a tool that facilitates the construction of sociocultural identity and the development of key competencies for coexistence in a global society (Scollon and Scollon, 2003). The presence of multiple languages in the public spaces of Tuluá, from traffic signs to commercial advertisements, not only informs citizens but also symbolizes the diverse identities and cultures that make up the community. Accordingly, these linguistic representations serve as meeting points between different cultures, reflecting the dynamics of power and social relations that exist within the environment.

The messages of the Linguistic Landscape are inspired by cultural and social meanings that reflect the dynamics of power, identity, and belonging of the linguistic groups and cultural communities present. Therefore, the study of the Linguistic Landscape in Tuluá not only allows a better understanding of the linguistic and cultural dynamics of the city, but it also contributes to strengthening their intercultural competencies and the ability of students to navigate multilingual environments. It represents being a valuable tool for promoting intercultural dialogue and cooperation, essential elements in the construction of more inclusive societies. So, by analyzing how languages coexist and relate in Tuluá's public spaces, students will not only develop linguistic skills but also gain a greater appreciation and respect for cultural diversity (Gorter, 2013; Brown, 2021).

Besides, this linguistic representation's set becomes an essential pedagogical resource that should be integrated into academic programs, particularly those aimed at foreign language learning and the development of intercultural competencies. LL provides a real and authentic context where students can observe and analyze how languages are used in everyday life, allowing them to apply their linguistic and cultural knowledge in a practical and meaningful way (Landone, 2018). In this way, exposure to a multilingual and multicultural Linguistic Landscape not only enriches language learning but also fosters inclusion and respect for diversity, promoting values such as tolerance, empathy, and respect.

Accordingly, the analysis of the Linguistic Landscape in Tuluá offers a detailed view of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the city, and it provides a framework for understanding how languages and cultures coexist and influence each other. By focusing on the relationship between languages and sociocultural identity, the importance of integrating the LL into academic programs as a tool for the development of intercultural and linguistic competencies is underscored (Rezaei and Bahrami, 2019). Thus,

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this qualitative study seeks to analyze how LL of Tuluá contributes to strengthening the linguistic and intercultural competencies of students in the Bachelor's Program in Foreign Languages with Emphasis on English at Unidad Central Valle del Cauca (UCEVA).

LL encompasses any unit of written language and its interaction with space (Moustaoui Srhir, 2019), which makes it possible to characterize it as an element of great influence in the development and change of socio-cultural and educational factors that provide a deeper understanding of the interactions between languages and context. It is an essential tool for strengthening language teaching and learning by highlighting the linguistic and cultural diversity of a specific context; cities can be compared to open books, filled with signs that reveal various aspects of a society's identity, culture, and forms of communication over time.

This conception focuses on how these linguistic representations create a visual panorama that reflects the linguistic and cultural diversity of a place. Landry and Bourhis (1997) recognized that Linguistic Landscape has an informative function, providing practical information, and a symbolic function which conveys cultural meanings and representations of community identity through different languages. So, Moustaoui (2019) considers that sociolinguistic researchers began to study the Linguistic Landscape to understand the sociocultural dynamics of communities and their expressions in the surrounding.

Although Landry and Bourhis' study is considered pioneering in the Linguistic Landscape field, the development of this concept has roots under different designations; Spolsky (2009) highlights that the study of signage has a longer history, starting in 1972 with the research conducted by Masai on commercial signs in Shinjuku, Tokyo. So, in the 1970s, studies on public signage were carried out, which were focused on analyzing texts in public spaces, the languages in which

they were written, and their relationship with the communities. Nonetheless, some researchers inspired by Landry and Bourhis' ideas have carried out numerous studies that have focused on examining the functions and roles of languages in both public and private spaces.

Todd (2010) quoted in Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, and Barni (2010) focuses on how individuals respond cognitively and emotionally to the Linguistic Landscape in urban places of Memphis, Tennessee; this study points out that LL can be seen as a way of capturing a moment in time, reflecting the use of language in a specific place and context owing to, LL represents the patterns of communication in terms of ethnic cultures, values, and history of a community. Thus, it could be argued that the Linguistic Landscape reflects the linguistic diversity and power dynamics in a community, and it can change over time due to factors such as globalization, migration, and language policies, which affect the visibility and use of languages in public spaces.

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Often, texts in the Linguistic Landscape are combined with visual elements and materials that can enhance the message, making the environment more attractive and communicative. Cities have been creating and shaping a Linguistic Landscape stemming from both their own culture and neighboring ones. "*Un análisis de la identidad hispana y el paisaje lingüístico en español en Hazleton, Pennsylvania*" (Spier and Herrera, 2021) shows that when determining the functions of Spanish in public signs and the extent to which these signs represent the identity of the Hispanic community, it is evident that, Spanish language is highly present in the city's Linguistic Landscape due to Hispanic immigration, allowing the recognition of identity markers within the Latino community through commercial signs. Therefore, the study of Linguistic Landscape is a valuable resource for understanding the linguistic and intercultural experiences of immigrants (Blommaert, 2013).

Maldonado (2020), when carrying out the study "*El Paisaje Lingüístico de la ciudad de Bogotá como recurso pedagógico en la clase de ELE,*" demonstrates that the Linguistic Landscape is used for analyzing how languages in public signage work, as well as its importance as a methodological tool for exploring sociolinguistic phenomena and enhancing the linguistic competence in educational contexts. Hence, it serves as an ideal input for the recognition of cultural topics in the classroom, facilitating the intersection between the Linguistic Landscape and foreign language teaching and learning (Rowland, 2013). Besides, LL enables the design and implementation of pedagogical proposals and didactic materials in the classroom, contributing to the development of students' linguistic and communicative competences, understanding, and appreciation of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity (Wisniewska, 2021). Thus, LL can be perceived as a vital framework for understanding the visual representation of language in public spaces and its role in shaping a society's linguistic diversity.

The linguistic representations found in public settings also give visibility to the languages from different mechanisms and means of communication, so the study of Linguistic Landscape has become an essential tool to represent the language in different scenarios because one of its main functions is to provide practical information (Landry and Bourhis, 1997). However, Ferrari (2020) reflects that it is a way of dialogue through which it is possible to communicate ideas, thoughts, perceptions, and experiences. His qualitative study "*Escribirse en el territorio, resistir en las piedras: conflicto armado y luchas indígenas en el Cauca Nasa (Colombia)*" sought to analyze the Linguistic Landscape of Toribio, Cauca. This region represents one of Colombia's most vulnerable contexts due to the pervasive presence of illegal armed groups. The research focused on the Nasa Indigenous community, who have

been able to create a new form of mediation and dialogue through the written word in the various places where the guerrillas leave their threatening or territorial messages.

Thus, through a corpus of 77 photographs that integrate texts written by the armed groups and those of the Nasa indigenous community, it was possible to identify that the Linguistic Landscape of this territory has provided as a mean to sow fear and threat in the population of the town of Toribío, and it also is a symbol of resistance composed of different words, phrases, and symbols to reflect the interests that the Nasa indigenous community wanted to express. This demonstrates how LL can simultaneously reflect instruments of intimidation and acts of profound community agency.

LL not only analyzes the linguistic elements but also the linguistic realities of the places. Within this framework, an exploration of the LL in Quindío, considering factors such as context, socioeconomic status, age, and sexual orientation, revealed that local interactions significantly influence the linguistic dynamics of the territory (Guarín, 2021). Individuals adapt their language use based on cultural background and place of origin, shaping communicative practices.

This perspective underscores that the analysis of everyday public language, as reflected in advertisements and other public texts, is influenced by varying linguistic, social, and economic contexts (Ferrari, 2020; Guarín, 2021). Consequently, the study of the LL is not confined to the identification of linguistic features; rather, it involves interpreting the inherent background and intended messages conveyed by all public texts encountered in streets and commercial venues. This approach elucidates how LL research provides insights into the complex interplay between language, space, and social meaning.

Intercultural contexts are built through the Linguistic Landscape, as it serves as a dynamic reflection of the linguistic and cultural diversity within public spaces. The Linguistic Landscape acts as a visual and communicative tool that not only mirrors the socio-cultural realities of a community but also facilitates the understanding of power relations, historical shifts, and migration patterns that shape the use and visibility of languages. Besides, LL stands out as an essential tool for consolidating the identity of a community, allowing to recognize the cultural breadth that exists in a given place.

At a pedagogical level, studying LL within learning scenarios could overcome cultural barriers and build bridges between individuals and communities and it promotes autonomous and informal learning, fostering the development of Intercultural Competence (IC) among social actors (González et al., 2024; Sossouvi and Lin, 2020), therefore, its pedagogical use can enhance students' growth as global citizens, enabling them to discover linguistic diversity while promoting the development of Intercultural Competence (Parrança da Silva, 2024).

Recognizing, understanding, and valuing how cultural dynamics are reflected and shaped through written communication in public spaces is conceiving the Linguistic Landscape as a way of identifying the interaction and coexistence of different cultures, and perceiving the diversity of one or several communities through texts, posters, art, graffiti, and advertisements present in public spaces. Interculturality refers to a relevant aspect in the communicative process of people since it is related to the transmission of different ideals that are conveyed by speakers of different languages, and which come from different cultural, social, ethnic, etc. contexts.

Doyé (1999) argues that Interculturality is a dynamic process in which each person interacts while sharing thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and positions resulting from a great deal of personal,

family, cultural, ethnic, and social baggage. Orduna (2003) and González et al. (2021) point out that interculturality implies strengthening communication through intercultural educational action and relations between different cultures to guarantee a common space, without leaving aside individual identity. Thus, Interculturality helps to foster enriching exchange between individuals, respect for differences, and promote the understanding between people in a given context, so it not only improves communication but also contributes significantly to the development of more inclusive and cohesive societies.

Immersion in diverse contexts and in different cultures behind the language being taught is complex because the functional and structural components of the language cannot be ignored. So, teachers must facilitate students' interaction with some aspects of other cultures so they can explore while understanding the cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors of other societies (Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey, 2002; Perlaza, Macias, and Romero, 2021). Hence, the teacher's job is to avoid overwhelming and introducing foreign cultures to students too quickly, as this will only result in superficial learning (Byram and Stevens, 2001, quoted by Paricio, 2014; Byram, 2002). Besides, educators should aim to create a balanced approach, integrating cultural elements into classes so students can connect linguistic structures with cultural contexts, which allows them to promote a deeper understanding, appreciate the complexity of the culture where the language is spoken, enhance their communicative abilities and global awareness, and avoid the appropriation of fragmented or superficial knowledge.

Interculturality and the Linguistic Landscape reflect the coexistence of diverse cultures and languages in public spaces, fostering mutual respect and understanding through communication. These key components enable

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people to develop communicative, intercultural, and social abilities to navigate multicultural contexts effectively and empathetically. Accordingly, by integrating cultural elements into language teaching, educators can enhance students' linguistic and cultural awareness, promoting deeper learning and global engagement. Besides, current changes and demands require the implementation of alternatives and strategies to bridge social gaps and barriers and promote the development of skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to coexist peacefully and harmoniously with others and with different cultures (Soto, 2008). Intercultural Education could be perceived as a dynamic process that fosters cultural diversity, diverse interpretations of reality, and pathways for innovation and transformation of society (Bastida and García, 2012).

Adopting an intercultural approach in education further supports cultural enrichment, multilingualism, and values like empathy and tolerance, helping students acknowledge the value of diversity. This approach promotes cultural reciprocity, encouraging individuals to challenge biases, identify similarities and differences, meanwhile they reinforce their sense of identity. Deardorff (2006) argues that for Intercultural Education, it is necessary to foster critical thinking and meaningful dialogue, as it encourages people to challenge assumptions and grow in cultural awareness, thereby enriching their overall learning journey.

For example, in classrooms with international students, the exchange of values, emotions, and experiences between teachers and learners provides valuable learning experiences that apport understanding of cultural diversity (Peinado, 2020). So, emphasizing multilingualism is equally fundamental since it enables students to approach different languages with an appreciation of cultural diversity. Hence, Intercultural Education should

extend beyond foreign language instruction to include the acknowledgment and preservation of current languages, fostering inclusivity and cultural awareness (Byram and Wagner, 2018).

Linguistic diversity is evident in the streets, social settings, educational surroundings, and other sites where people can exchange ideas, interact, and socialize. This communicative and linguistic competence plays a fundamental role in enabling individuals to formulate effective responses to demands and requirements, fostering communication and facilitating relationships with diverse cultures and their broader contexts. Bilingualism and multilingualism are recognized as phenomena that enhance communication, promote the dynamic exchange of ideas, knowledge, and experiences, and directly contribute to robust cognitive, social, cultural, and communicative development, thereby fostering deeper intercultural exchange and understanding.

Bilingualism serves as a mechanism for fostering social and cultural connectivity, facilitating communication among individuals from diverse backgrounds. Within public spheres, the discernible presence of multiple languages reflects deep cultural diversity but also underscores the dynamics of social interaction and the power asymmetries between dominant and minority languages (King, 2017). "*Apuntes sobre paisaje lingüístico. Un paseo por algunas ciudades estadounidenses*" (Betti, 2018) explores the manifestation of the urban linguistic landscape reflecting the presence of Latino communities in the United States. Employing a photographic corpus gathered over five years (2013-2018), the study documented linguistic texts in public and private establishments across a diverse range of cities. Findings revealed that LL of these cities serves as a robust indicator of pervasive bilingualism, biculturalism, and a dual cultural sensitivity forged through two distinct cultural spheres: Latino and American.

Multilingualism, a multifaceted concept, encompasses both individuals proficient in multiple languages and the societal contexts where various languages are actively used. The academic study of multilingualism necessitates an understanding of the intricate interactions between linguistic communities and their acceptance of linguistic diversity (Council of Europe, 2021). This phenomenon is often deeply embedded in individuals' daily experiences, frequently occurring unconsciously through interactions with surrounding cultures and local commerce. Thus, multilingualism fundamentally refers to the linguistic situation of a geographical entity, be it a city, society, or nation-state, where multiple languages are spoken or coexist (Council of Europe, 2021).

The educational landscape needs to promote global learning among foreign language learners. This involves encouraging an open-mindedness towards diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering awareness of complex social dynamics, and deepening the understanding of cultural and linguistic meanings embedded within immediate contexts. Landone's (2018) study on the urban Linguistic Landscape of migration in Milan used a pragmatic methodological approach, highlighted the influence of urban semiotics on colloquial communication. By analyzing a photographic corpus of approximately 750 texts (e.g., advertisements, graffiti) collected between 2014 and 2017, Landone demonstrated how public signage reflects intricate social, identity-related, and commercial patterns, while simultaneously revealing the vitality of native languages.

LL represents a communicative act, reflecting the socio-cultural realities of an area. Maldonado's (2020) study into the Linguistic Landscape of Bogotá as a pedagogical resource in Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE) classrooms affirmed its high effectiveness. The study revealed that Bogotá's LL, rich in sociocultural references and authentic language examples,

provides invaluable input for exploring cultural topics within genuine texts. This approach demonstrably fosters significant cultural awareness and facilitates a strong cultural and linguistic interconnectedness in the classroom.

Methodology

LL can be perceived as a pedagogical alternative to promote the development and strengthening of linguistic and intercultural competence. Therefore, this study is framed from a qualitative approach to understand the meanings and situations from the analysis of the contribution of the LL of Tuluá to the strengthening of these competences in the development process of multilingualism (Ñaupas et al., 2018; Jiménez-Domínguez, 2000). The study's design is based on the principles of sociolinguistics to understand complex social phenomena related to LL. By examining its impact on linguistic and intercultural competence and on multilingualism, the study delves into the daily lives of Tuluá's inhabitants. It explores their interactions with linguistic and cultural diversity and investigates how these encounters shape their worldviews (Hernandez-Sampieri, 2014).

The population is represented by 7,568 commercial establishments registered in Tuluá's *Camara de Comercio.* Employing a non-probabilistic convenience sampling method (Hernández, 2012), 95 establishments were filtered using the linguistic criterion of having their name or slogan in a foreign or indigenous language, focusing on those reflecting the city's linguistic diversity.

Data collection instruments and techniques

The photographic corpus is a useful tool in Linguistic Landscape studies, as it enables the capture and analysis of visual representations of linguistic diversity in a specific context (Reche,

2012). In this study, a photographic corpus of 95 images was collected, depicting commercial signs, advertising banners, and other visible texts in the streets of Tuluá. The images were captured during October and November 2023 in public areas accessible to any passerby, such as Via 40, Zona Rosa, the town center, and the shopping centers: La Herradura and Supercentro Tuluá, areas known for their concentration of establishments with names in foreign and indigenous languages. Besides, to their location, another criterion for photographing the multimodal texts of the Tulueño PL was their static character, those signs that were easily legible and were captured on stable and immobile surfaces.

The field journal is a qualitative instrument that allows documenting and reflecting on observations and experiences throughout the research process (Porlán and Martín, 2000; Moreno, 2003). It was used to record observed situations and characteristics of the population, as well as relevant comments from employees and owners of the establishments included in the photographic corpus, which helped capture attitudes and perceptions regarding linguistic and cultural diversity in Tuluá, providing a basis for the analysis of results.

The qualitative survey is an instrument that enables the exploration of the population's meanings and experiences through the collection of descriptive data from the opinions, perspectives, and perceptions of the population (Mendez, 2009). The survey is made up of 10 questions and was designed for the owners or managers of the commercial establishments, aiming to understand how they perceive linguistic diversity in their environment and how they interact with the Linguistic Landscape of Tuluá. The surveys provided valuable insights into how these individuals interpret and value the presence of foreign and indigenous languages in their daily lives.

Findings

When analyzing the Linguistic Landscape of Tuluá, the presence of foreign languages and indigenous languages is notable. This landscape revealed the great linguistic and cultural diversity that surrounds the citizens of this place. Tulua's Linguistic Landscape can contribute to the development of multilingualism and the strengthening of the linguistic and intercultural competence of the Foreign Languages program's students. Data from the photographic corpus showed that the languages present are English, Spanish, Japanese, Italian, French, Chinese, Thai, Hebrew, and indigenous languages like Quechua. The field journals and survey data indicated that the linguistic diversity present in Tuluá's commercial landscape supports exposure to different languages and promotes cultural awareness among the inhabitants.

Thanks to the responses from employers and business owners, who not only answered the survey thoroughly but also shared the stories and origins of their business names, recorded in the field journals, it was possible to analyze in greater detail the perception of the linguistic landscape in Tuluá. These results suggest that the visual surroundings of Tuluá, composed of signs, banners, posters, and billboards in multiple languages, can facilitate vocabulary learning and the development of linguistic, communicative, and cultural skills since it provides an authentic, immersive environment where students of foreign languages can encounter and interact with various languages in everyday contexts.

By engaging with the diverse linguistic representations found in commercial spaces, students not only enhance their vocabulary but also gain insights into different cultures, making the learning process more meaningful and contextually relevant. The findings highlighted the LL as a powerful input for teaching cultural topics, as it provides authentic sociocultural texts and examples of local language use. Accordingly,

this exposure and immersion to multilingualism provided by LL allows Foreign Languages students to recognize implicit meanings in visual messages, and it could foster the linguistic awareness development while connecting them to diverse sociocultural contexts and settings.

Although the Foreign Languages program promotes the development of communicative competence in English, contact with other languages enables learners to enrich their learning from a more global perspective, therefore, as stated by Landry and Bourhis (1997) the Linguistic Landscape, from its symbolic function influences the development of multilingual communicative competence and a greater intercultural sensitivity within a given context (Betti, 2018; Bengochea, 2019; Ferrari, 2020; Maldonado, 2020; Spier and Herrera, 2021; Council of Europe, 2021).

The Linguistic Landscape of an environment serves as a reflection of its linguistic diversity, offering valuable opportunities for learning and cultural exploration. In Tuluá, the LL is marked by a variety of languages showcased on commercial signs, banners, posters, and billboards, providing foreign language students with diverse linguistic stimuli. This exposure grants learners access to vocabulary, dialects, and colloquial expressions used in commercial contexts, thus promoting the acquisition of foreign languages.

As education adapts to global social transformations, the teaching and learning of foreign languages face new challenges, necessitating the development of innovative tools, strategies, and materials to foster linguistic and intercultural competence. These competences, as outlined by Byram (1997) and Rico Troncoso (2018), empower individuals to engage with diverse cultures, recognize and value differences, and shape their personal identity. Moreover, as noted by Temoltzin (2019), globalization offers learners opportunities to interact with various languages and develop

cultural awareness, and understand the contextual meanings of words and expressions. Moreover, as noted by Kim (2020) globalization offers students the use of their knowledge of phonology, lexicon, grammar, and pragmatics to understand, relate to, and interact productively and empathetically with other human beings.

Besides, the findings point out that LL in Tuluá could contribute to the linguistic and intercultural competences development from a social perspective. Employers and employees recognize that the presence of other languages in commerce increases the flow of foreign buyers and fosters local interest in understanding the meaning and culture behind these terms (Landone, 2018; Ariolfo, 2019; Spier and Herrera, 2021). Since in questions such as ¿Considera usted que, si los nombres de los comercios o las indicaciones están en lengua extranjera, este aspecto puede ayudar a fortalecer el conocimiento de personas que manejen esas lenguas? The survey and the field journal data indicate that 68% of them think that establishment names or signs in foreign languages help strengthen knowledge of these languages, as they see learning a foreign language as something that "ayuda a aprender palabras en diferentes idiomas"; "favorece la adquisición de vocabulario"; "favorece el aprendizaje de nuevas palabras".

These perceptions corroborate what was stated by Sossouvi and Lin (2020), who highlighted that Linguistic Landscape can serve as a didactic material to support language learning and intercultural understanding, as their study in Benin demonstrated how LL exposes learners to authentic texts in foreign languages, fostering autonomous and informal learning, and contributing to the development of Linguistic and Intercultural competences. The findings related to LL of Tuluá showed that the presence of foreign languages in public spaces not only enhances vocabulary learning and acquisition

but also encourages a deeper engagement with the cultural and social dimensions of these languages.

Nevertheless, there are a small number of participants (16%) who consider that having the shop name in a foreign language might not contribute in the foreign language learning, as they note that recognition of language strengthening depends on buyers' interest levels, due to "algunas personas tienen curiosidad en conocer que significan esas palabras, pero otras no"; and even they points that the linguistic representations "no contribuye al aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera porque a las personas no les interesa conocer el significado de los nombres de los locales". These perceptions are related to the research findings of Huebner (2016) owing to they indicate that exposure to commercial names in foreign languages does not correlate with improved linguistic competence. Similarly, Cenoz and Gorter (2017) remark that while LL offers potential for incidental learning, the real learning outcome depends more on active engagement and curiosity from individuals, so without these factors, Linguistic Landscapes are unlikely to foster meaningful language learning.

In a key question *¿Cree usted qué el Paisaje Lingüístico del municipio de Tuluá favorece el aprendizaje de vocabulario técnico de comercio*? The survey findings revealed that 59% of local merchants acknowledge that LL does afford the learning of such vocabulary. As one respondent has stated, "llama la atención de los clientes y de estas cortas frases se puede aprender el idioma". The use of English in business names also sparked interest among customers, encouraging them to seek translations, as one merchant explained, "…Tener el nombre en inglés... promueve que las personas se interesen por buscar la traducción de esa palabra en español, lo cual serviría para la adquisición de vocabulario". Another respondent highlighted that, "...el tener el nombre comercial en inglés

no atrae clientes, pero sí favorece la adquisición de vocabulario pues mencionaba que gracias al almacén 'dollarcity' ella había aprendido como se decía ciudad".

These insights align with the conclusions drawn by Cenoz and Gorter (2008), who highlight the role of the Linguistic Landscape as an authentic, contextualized source of input in foreign language acquisition. In their study, they emphasize that incidental learning often occurs when learners encounter language in public spaces, such as through signs or advertisements, without the intention of explicitly studying the language. The use of English in Tuluá's commercial signs, as noted by local merchants, provides real-world exposure to foreign vocabulary, creating opportunities for learners to acquire new terms in context.

The study of the Linguistic Landscape of Tuluá shows a dynamic interaction between various foreign and native languages in the urban context, conveying cultural values and reflecting a community's identity through the linguistic diversity displayed (Landry and Bourhis, 1997; Ferrari, 2020; and Latorre, 2020). The variety of languages found on signs and commercial advertisements allows the city to be seen as a space that communicates the cultural identity and historical legacy of its inhabitants so, it turns the city into a kind of "book" written by people from different backgrounds, where visual messages display multicultural narratives and capture the community's attention, informing them about the different cultures coexisting in the environment (Latorre, 2020). Consequently, LL can be perceived as a resource that not only represents the identity of a group but also creates an ongoing dialogue between residents and the languages present in the urban space (Ben-Rafael, 2009).

Commercial variety of Tulua presents a great diversity at a linguistic level and provides

essential aspects with which people identify and understand the meaning of words found in other languages, which might contribute both to learning new vocabulary and to the understanding of it. Thus, the Linguistic Landscape of Tuluá affords the learning of a foreign language and the development of linguistic, communicative, and intercultural competence of the population. The analysis of the responses from interviewed employers and employees regarding the importance and necessity of learning English in the commercial environment reveals that 94% of them agree on the value of languages in this domain since *"... los idiomas son muy importantes en el ámbito laboral y que los nombres de los locales pueden ayudar a las personas a aprender del lenguaje en cuestión"; "…aprender una L2 es importante para las personas que tienen negocios hoy en día."; "hoy en día en la parte comercial, el aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero tiene más entradas y oportunidades."*

This finding suggests that, given the current demands, needs, and dynamics, the learning and use of foreign or indigenous languages are essential in everyday interactions, as people engage with others and their surroundings. Thus, in academic, social, cultural, and commercial spheres, the linguistic representations within the LL act as direct sources of understanding and interpreting the meanings and cultural characteristics of the groups or communities in the environment. This connection between individuals and diverse languages facilitates their practical use in real-life contexts. Ariolfo's (2019) qualitative research, *Comida, lengua e identidad en el paisaje lingüístico*, conducted in Genoa, Italy, demonstrated how members of the Latin American community navigate their surroundings through the linguistic elements present in signs and advertisements, which allow individuals to apply linguistic knowledge in dynamic, practical ways, such as within

commercial and social settings, illustrating how the LL bridges theoretical learning and real-world usage.

These interactions also contribute to the recognition, appreciation, and preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity since incorporating an intercultural approach in education encourages the promotion of empathy and tolerance, which are essential for understanding and valuing diversity (Hernández, 2012). This perspective places individuals in a context of cultural reciprocity, where questioning stereotypes and reshaping preconceived notions help them discover shared experiences and distinct differences that strengthen their identities, as it is reckoned that *"...esto ayuda a que las personas aprendan sobre el idioma y las claves de la cultura detrás de este."* In this sense, the foreign languages present in the Linguistic Landscape (LL) of Tuluá create opportunities for learners to interact with diverse cultural elements, enabling them to apply critical thinking and gain a deeper understanding of the various perspectives represented within their community. By engaging with these cultural and linguistic aspects, learners enhance their intercultural competence, making LL a vital tool for personal and academic growth.

Moreover, cultural enrichment fosters new points of view and perspectives that deeply shape human experiences. In modern classrooms, the presence of students from different cultural backgrounds facilitates a meaningful exchange of ideas, values, and emotions that benefit the development of IC for both teachers and students (Ortiz, 2015). This exchange broadens the educational experience, allowing participants to better understand the richness of diversity while fostering mutual respect so, LL of Tuluá reflects this dynamic interaction, where exposure to foreign languages and cultural symbols stimulates critical analysis and encourages

learners to embrace multilingualism as a valuable tool for personal growth and cultural understanding. Owing to, these experiences not only enhance linguistic competence but also contribute to a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment that values cultural diversity as a cornerstone of educational development.

The development of linguistic and intercultural competence through the Linguistic Landscape highlights the critical intersection between Intercultural Education and the study of LL. Interculturality plays an essential role in social processes, emphasizing coexistence, respect, and democratic living as its most positive attributes (Hernández, 2012; Ríos, 2020). It is deeply rooted in principles of equality, recognition of differences, and the creation of educational processes that promote mutual understanding across diverse contexts, from international perspectives to regional nuances within Colombia. Education serves as the driving force for individual development, and integrating intercultural perspectives into teaching expands learners' awareness of cultures and civilizations, fostering a more inclusive worldview. As Corbetta et al. (2018) asserted, achieving IE requires embracing diversity not as a segregating factor but as an enriching, integrative, and unifying element. Thus, the LL of Tuluá becomes a relevant educational tool that not only reflects cultural diversity but also facilitates meaningful engagement with it, reinforcing the importance of interculturality as a foundation for educational and social growth.

Conclusions

The investigation into the Linguistic Landscape of Tuluá reveals its significant contribution to strengthening linguistic and intercultural competence and promoting multilingualism. This study highlights the diverse linguistic and cultural environment in Tuluá, enriching future language

teachers' linguistic and intercultural competence. Therefore, it is concluded that, by engaging with these linguistic representations, students acquire knowledge and skills and participate in a promising scenario for bilingualism, multilingualism, and the preservation and appreciation of cultural diversity.

The results of this study enable to conclude that languages such as English, Spanish, Japanese, Italian, French, Chinese, Thai, Hebrew, and indigenous languages like Quechua coexist within Tuluá's LL; this coexistence reflects significant linguistic diversity and emphasizes the cultural and social richness of the region. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of considering sociocultural and historical contexts in analyzing LLs and calls for inclusive language policies to support the preservation and revitalization of minority languages in the municipality.

Moreover, Tuluá's LL serves as an authentic and immersive environment for students to develop linguistic and intercultural competence. Exposure to this multilingual context allows them to engage with diverse linguistic and cultural representations in everyday activities, fostering the unconscious acquisition of linguistic knowledge and cultural meanings. These interactions enable students to analyze and understand the linguistic diversity around them while gaining insights into the complex social and cultural dynamics associated with language use. But, this study suggests creating spaces that promote linguistic and cultural awareness through activities such as lectures, workshops, exhibitions, and community initiatives. This includes establishing strategic partnerships with educational institutions to foster research on the Linguistic Landscape.

The findings confirm that Tuluá's LL significantly impacts the development of Intercultural Competence among students. From the perspective of Applied Linguistics, the LL offers opportunities for students to deepen their

understanding of various languages and develop a greater sensitivity to cultural differences. This sensitivity empowers both students and community members to recognize, value, and respect linguistic and cultural diversity locally and in international contexts. Therefore, it is also recommended to implement educational programs focused on linguistic and cultural diversity. These programs could include practical activities that enable students to explore and appreciate local linguistic varieties, promote multilingualism in educational settings, and facilitate dialogue among students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This investigation demonstrates that Tuluá's LL provides rich and authentic scenarios for language learning and intercultural communication. The diversity of languages and cultural representations in public and private spaces offers future foreign language teachers' meaningful opportunities for linguistic immersion. These experiences prepare them to engage effectively in a diverse and interconnected world by enriching their understanding of linguistic, cultural, and social aspects in real-life communication contexts. So, it is fundamental to provide future professionals in foreign languages with opportunities to deepen their understanding of linguistic studies during their academic backgrounds.

Finally, this study affirms the relevance of analyzing an LL as a tool to enhance foreign language learning and the development of linguistic and intercultural competence. The LL's variety of languages, meanings, and representations enables students to acquire vocabulary and apply their language skills in authentic communicative situations. Besides, LL fosters encounters with diverse cultural elements, perceptions, and identities, providing students with dynamic scenarios to deepen their understanding of cultural complexities and

enrich their professional preparation as future language educators.

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