Научная статья

The Leading Function Analysis of the Confucius Institute Linguistic Landscape in Teaching Standard Chinese to International Learners

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Abstract

This paper is based on the Scollon & Scollon's place semiotics framework combined with the Kress & van Leeuwen's multimodal theory and Sockett and other scholars' informal learning theories. By means of qualitative and quantitative methods, the leading function of the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape in teaching Chinese to foreigners is analyzed. It is shown that the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape plays a leading role at the initial stage of the Chinese language acquisition. This role is based on the main function of the Confucius Institute and is manifested in three mechanisms: attracting attention, shaping an image, and stimulating further learning of Chinese. The results show that to be effective in international communication, mastering Chinese should not be limited to classroom teaching, but it should also focus on various language practices outside the classroom. The linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute serves as a supplement to classroom teaching, and the visual space it provides is obviously different from that of Chinese textbooks and test papers which are mainly focused on text reading. In addition to keywords, linguistic landscapes also provide other symbolic means, such as multimodal visual media, image symbols, plate-like structures, and color patterns. This pioneering method of teaching can greatly enhance foreign students' cognition and understanding of the Chinese culture and their interest in learning Chinese. Linguistic landscape and Chinese classroom teaching complement each other in teaching Chinese internationally. To sum up, this research focuses on the leading function of the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape, attempting to explore its mechanism and role in the international spread of the Chinese language.

Keywords

International spread of Chinese, Chinese teaching as a foreign language, Confucius Institute, linguistic landscape, multimodality, leading role.

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Анализ основных функций языкового ландшафта Института Конфуция в обучении китайскому языку как иностранному

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Аннотация

Основой для данной статьи послужили концепция семиотики места Р. Сколлона и С. В. Сколлон (R. Scollon & S. Wong Scollon), теория мультимодальности Кресса и ван Лёвена (Kress & Van Leeuwen), а также теории неформального обучения Дж. Сокетта (G. Sockett) и других ученых. Сочетая качественный и количественный методы, авторы статьи анализируют роль языкового ландшафта Института Конфуция в обучении китайскому языку как иностранному. В ходе исследования удалось выяснить, что языковой ландшафт Института Конфуция играет ведущую роль на начальном этапе обучения китайскому языку. Она связана с основной функцией языкового ландшафта и реализуется с помощью трех механизмов: привлечения внимания, формирования образа, впечатления и стимулирования интереса к дальнейшему изучению китайского языка. Как показывают результаты, чтобы быть эффективным, общение на китайском языке не должно ограничиваться обучением в классе: следует также уделять внимание различным языковым практикам за его пределами. В процессе изучения китайского языка еще до освоения правил важнейшее значение приобретает языковой ландшафт. Языковой ландшафт Института Конфуция служит дополнением к аудиторным занятиям, а визуальное наполнение пространства явно отличается от того, что представлено в китайских учебниках и сборниках заданий, которые в основном предполагают чтение текстов. Кроме того, языковые ландшафты предоставляют и другие символические средства, такие как мультимодальные визуальные средства, изобразительные символы, пластинчатые структуры и цветовые шаблоны. Такая передовая форма общения может значительно повысить уровень понимания китайской культуры иностранными студентами и их интерес к изучению китайского языка. Лингвистический ландшафт и преподавание китайского языка в классе дополняют друг друга, обеспечивая более эффективное международное общение на китайском. В данном исследовании рассматривается основная функция лингвистического ландшафта Института Конфуция, предпринимается попытка изучить механизм и роль лингвистического ландшафта в международном обучении китайскому языку, а также проанализировать пути и методы реализации его главной функции.

Ключевые слова

международное распространение китайского языка; обучение китайскому языку; Институт Конфуция; языковой ландшафт; мультимодальность; ведущая роль

Introduction

Confucius Institutes overseas mainly use Chinese classroom teaching and often teach and practice relevant rules in grammar and vocabulary development [Kramsch, 2008; Peng, 2012; Jiang, 2013]. However, informal language learning environments are also very helpful in language learning. Sockett believes that "informal learning is the basic knowledge of language that results from language learning outside the classroom" [2014, p. 7]. Scholars, such as Ellis et al. [1994], suggest that the basic cognition of language is related to various types of language learning, including learning in informal

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contexts. The Confucius Institute, as the main venue for the international promotion of the Chinese language, has a linguistic landscape as an informal language learning environment outside the classroom, which is connected with the formal classroom environment, creating a language ecosystem and enabling international learners to master Chinese. The linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute plays a leading role in teaching Chinese to foreigners at the initial stage.

Firth [1997] criticizes the traditional concept of L2 acquisition that separates language acquisition and language socialization and proposes that there should be balance between the cognition and society in applied linguistics. The new approach emphasizes the important role of the environment in language learning. Combining the two activities (learning language rules and use of the language in a social environment) impacts the development of language teaching and students' language learning activities. Van Lier [2004] also believes that language learning is a social activity. Language learning environment enhances the effect of language learning, at the same time, the learning activities impact the learning process cognition. Thus, the social dimension emphasizes an important role of the language environment in language learning and the interaction and cooperation between actors and the environment. On the one hand, language functions and mechanisms are achieved in different language environments, on the other hand, different language environments combine and interact with each other to form a new language learning environment effect [Bronfenbrenner, 1979]. In teaching Chinese as an international language, the leading function of the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape that implements classroom teaching in social environment should be taken into account.

1. Literature Review

Teaching Chinese to international learners is a process that requires some preparatory work. However, this stage of Chinese international teaching is often neglected. Therefore, this research provides some effective ways in formalized Chinese learning on the one hand, and on the other hand, it introduces the linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute for further consolidation of the learners' knowledge of Chinese. Foreign scholars have done a lot of empirical research on the characteristics and laws of language use in linguistic landscapes from the perspective of multilingualism, globalization, and teaching [Backhaus, 2007]. However, as far as the current domestic linguistic landscape research is concerned, most scholars focus on the systematic review of the theory and the empirical discussion of the urban multilingual linguistic landscape and the linguistic landscape of ethnic minority areas [Shang, Zhao, 2014a, 2014b; Tian, Zhang, 2014]. While this paper, starting with the social dimension of language learning, focuses on analyzing the leading function of the Confucius Institutes linguistic landscape and discusses its important role and mechanism in language learning in general.

2. Theoretical Framework for Multimodal Linguistic Landscape Research

The linguistic landscape within a certain domain may seem chaotic and disordered, but the linguistic landscape formed within a specific domain and place has obvious unity, integrity and indexicality [Vickers et al. 2015]. To be more exact, the language or images in the linguistic landscape are not simply present in public space, but there are often deep-seated laws and creation mechanisms behind them. This paper focuses on the linguistic landscape of Confucius Institutes. The Confucius Institute, as foundation for Chinese education, the multimodal linguistic landscape of pictures and texts reflect the essence of the Chinese language and culture promotion. Therefore, when discussing and analyzing the linguistic landscape of Confucius Institutes, we should proceed from a multidisciplinary approach and adopt a multidisciplinary theoretical perspective. This paper is based on the place semiotics framework proposed by R. Scollon & S. Scollon [2003], combined with the multimodal theory of Kress & van Leeuwen [2006] and the informal learning theory of Sockett [2014]. This study analyzes the function of the linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute in the international promotion of Chinese.

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2.1. Place Semiotics Framework—Visual Semiotics Perspective

Based on the visual semiotics framework proposed by Kress & van Leeuwen, Scollon & Scollon studied "discourse in place", also known as geosemiotics, looking at how words express meaning in specific places. Place semiotics is a subsystem of geosemiotics, a set of frameworks for analyzing the language symbol system in the real environment. It consists of code preference, inscription, emplacement and other subsystems.

Code orientation refers to the position or priority relationship among various languages on multilingual signage. When language signs involve more than one language, the problem of code sequence arises, thus reflecting its social status within the language community. Word engraving refers to the meaning system of the way the sign language is presented, including fonts, materials, additional components or extensions, state changes, etc. Placement studies the meaning activated by the act of placing a sign at a location, which is the most fundamental concern of geosemiotics. Placement includes three forms: decontextualized placement, deviant placement, and scene placement.

2.2. Multimodality-Social Semiotics Perspective

Symbolic linguistic landscape is the combination and interactive generation of language and visual communication [Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006]. The biggest goal of multimodal image-text combination is to achieve the interaction between language and visual communication and to exert its symbolic meaning and function. The text is composed of multiple compatible and coexisting languages in the context of a variety of written languages that are mixed on the linguistic landscape logo. The colors, words and pictures on the logo are not just simple explicit decorations. Having a symbolic nature, this multimodal text forms a new visual literacy text, the written style itself being a form of visual communication [Kress, 2006]. Linguistic landscape is a cultural landscape that is communicative and indicative. For foreign students who do not fully understand Chinese and are studying Chinese at Confucius Institutes, the linguistic landscape is a multimodal text with symbolic meaning and retrieval function, which helps foreign Chinese learners to form a preliminary understanding of the Chinese language. What happens is a transition from shallow understanding to deep understanding of Chinese characters and knowledge popularization. Chinese in the linguistic landscape fully reflects the transition from "spatial intervention" to "cultural intervention". The symbols occupying visual space gradually penetrate into students' ideological concepts and cultural awareness through the symbolic function of linguistic landscape. In the process of "cultural intervention", the symbolic function of the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape has a significant impact on acquisition of Chinese.

3. Research Design
3.1. Research Questions

Based on the above mentioned theories, the most topical question in the study of the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape is: what role does the linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute play in teaching Chinese? Specifically: (1) What elements and mechanisms are used to realize the function of the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape in teaching Chinese to foreigners? (2) What role does the linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute play in international teaching of Chinese?

3.2. Research Methods and Research Objects

This research combines qualitative and quantitative analyses. First of all, from the official website of the Confucius Institute, the official WeChat account, as well as from the field investigations of Confucius Institutes in some countries (such as the Confucius Institute at the University of Lagos,

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etc.), through website screening and field photography, we collected information covering Asia, Africa and Europe. 672 valid Confucius Institute linguistic landscapes from 32 countries along the "Belt and Road" (Russia, Cambodia, Thailand, etc.) were collected and photographed from September 20, 2019 to November 5, 2021. In defining statistics, we adopted the following criterion: if the vector had more than two sides, then each side was regarded as an independent research sample.

Secondly, in addition to data collection, we also conducted interviews on a series of issues such as learning Chinese, the status of Chinese, the attitudes of local overseas people towards Chinese and their understanding of China, etc. The interview results show that overseas people and students in particular think that Chinese not only exists in the Confucius Institute classrooms, but also gradually becomes popular among people, an example of which is the Russian-Chinese Culture Film Festival organized by consulates and the Confucius Institute classrooms. These activities promote international spread of the Chinese language, contribute to a deeper understanding of China, and create a positive image of the country. This makes it obvious that teaching Chinese internationally should not be limited to classroom teaching, but should also focus on the middle-level context, so as to find diverse ways to ensure its effective dissemination.

4. Results Analysis
4.1. The Leading Function

The leading function of the linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute in teaching Chinese to foreigners needs to be realized through three basic elements: (1) attracting attention—by means of the sequence of spatial positions, getting students' attention before the classroom; (2) shaping an image—through the multimodal interpretation of the same keyword via multimodal structure of the linguistic landscape, the meaning associated with the keyword can be retrieved for foreign students, and help them shape an image of China and Chinese culture before regular language instruction begins; (3) cultivating interest—by shaping images, foreign students can increase their interest in learning Chinese, thus facilitating classroom teaching. These three basic elements generally take place in a diachronic form, and together constitute the leading mechanism of the linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute at the preparatory stage of the Chinese language acquisition.

4.1.1. Strategies for Attracting Attention

From the perspective of space, the environment in which the linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute occurs is not a Chinese classroom, although there is a spatial connection with the Chinese classroom [Bronfenbrenner, 1979]. Before entering the classroom and receiving formal instruction, foreign students actually have to go through the transfer of space. Therefore, the first step in the space transfer is the language environment of the Confucius Institute outside the classroom. The language environment in and outside the classroom form a language learning ecosystem that facilitates the transition from micro-context to meso-context, thus producing the meaning and value of language learning.

The mechanism of attracting foreign students' attention is the first step in the process requiring a variety of design strategies. A typical strategy is concerned with the transformation of spatial carriers. Placement comes in three forms: decontextualization placement, deviant placement and scene placement [Scollon & Scollon, 2003].

Character inscription refers to the meaning system of the linguistic landscape presentation, including fonts, materials, additional components or extensions, state changes, etc. Placement mainly studies the meaning activated by the behavior of linguistic landscape setting in a certain space (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). The linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute is presented in form of metal plates, banners and posters, and is posted on the outer walls of the Confucius Institute build-

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ings. This means that students are exposed to these linguistic landscapes after entering the Institute, before entering the classroom, and during the practical activities within the Confucius Institute space. These linguistic landscapes create a field of Chinese elements, which fulfills a preparatory and guiding symbolic function in students' classroom learning.

As a Chinese educational space, Confucius Institute is an excellent place for learners to carry out their daily activities. This kind of linguistic landscape has existed for a long time as an important part of its visual space. Before entering the classroom, an international student first feels this special atmosphere. In the long-term process of classroom instruction, the impact of the visual atmosphere will be repeated and strengthened continuously. Its effect is largely determined by the spatial location design of the linguistic landscapes.

Another important strategy to attract foreign college students' attention, is the choice of materials and design of the board. The hardness of materials is closely related to the fixity of places [Scollon & Scollon], and the choice of materials is related to the type of the linguistic landscape discourse. Among all kinds of linguistic landscapes, the linguistic landscapes made of metal are often more grave, while those made of plastic and paper are more lively. This shows that there is a certain relationship between the style of the linguistic landscape and its material. Metal materials are stronger and therefore more official and formal. We usually see the name and logo of the Confucius Institute on the linguistic landscape of this type of material.

4.1.2. Forming Means of Multimodal Structure to Shape an Image

Informal language learning is unorganized and seemingly purposeless, but it is the most extensive and important learning content in people's daily life. In contrast, formal language learning is structured, purposeful and classroom-based. The linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute is neither a grammaticalized sentence structure nor a complex sentence combination, but a display of keywords with the colored subject words. Keywords are not clearly decomposed, and there are no rules to follow. The study of non-clear keywords by foreign college students is a preparatory process before they formally accept the rules of learning. Secondly, classroom learning is more reflected in the interaction between teachers and students, while the linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute aims to transmit a relatively vague and general information about the Chinese society and Chinese culture to the recipients. Therefore, at the initial stage of learning Chinese, the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape, which is a silent and non-grammatical language before formal and regular learning, has initially played a preparatory role in the process.

Impression-making (or shaping an image) is an important part of the leading function. Kress & van Lueewen [2006] propose that linguistic landscape symbols have a representational function. This function is not only the reproduction of specific things, but also that of abstract features, which is especially well-felt in the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape design. Designers often present images of typical Chinese cities, buildings, and cultural elements corresponding to the text content to promote Chinese images to viewers, in order to provide a certain foundation for classroom teaching.

This study conducted a questionnaire survey through the Questionnaire Star platform, with a total of 635 valid questionnaires (the start and end time of the survey was January 20, 2019—October 22, 2021), SPSS23.0 was used to correlate it. Through questionnaire analysis, it can be seen that foreign students' learning of Chinese is highly correlated with two important factors: the practical value of Chinese (0.459) and its beauty (0.515), and it is moderately correlated with the additional use of Chinese (0.383). The practical value of Chinese, as well as its aesthetic value correspond to the two poles of the "life-aesthetic" dimension . From this point of view, the content keywords of the linguistic landscape pictures are mainly based on these two endpoints, which meet the needs of foreign learners of the language. Thus, the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape may be a good motivator for international learners of Chinese. Some of the Confucius Institute linguistic landscapes amply demonstrate the strategy of shaping images through their content. For example, a picture of

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men looking directly at the audience and smiling. The men's facial expressions are the external manifestation of their self-confidence. In the picture the smiling characters are writing the word "success", as if sending the viewers the message "Success is in your hands!" [Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006]. What makes it still more meaningful is that the word "success" is spelt in Chinese. So, another message of the picture is "learning Chinese leads to success".

4.1.3. Forming elements and means of cultivating interest

Another manifestation of the leading function is cultivating interest. Before foreign students enter the classroom, they go through an informal language learning linguistic landscape stage. Language is a symbolic system that expresses meaning in social culture. Linguistic landscape is actually a kind of "symbolic landscape", which is constructed by multimodal semiotic resources collaboratively to construct spatial discourse [Jaworski, Thurlow, 2010]. This, in fact, corresponds to the above mentioned function of shaping an impressive image, which is further achieved by arousing an interest in the viewer. So, the designer is continuously trying to arouse the viewer's interest in participating in the activities they are involved into.

4.2. "Indexing" Function of Keywords

To sum up, the leading function of the Confucius Institutes linguistic landscape in popularizing the Chinese language is realized through three basic elements: attracting attention, shaping an image and cultivating interest. This function plays its own unique role. Its core is that the linguistic landscape often presents a certain meaning in form of a "keyword". The process of assigning meaning to keywords is referred to as the "indexing function" of keywords. The "indexing meaning" of the Confucius Institute's linguistic landscape through the "indexing function of keywords can increase the interest of foreign students in learning Chinese, and it is also the leading mechanism of the Confucius Institute's linguistic landscape.

4.2.1. Indexing of Chinese Cultural Background by Keywords

The referential meaning pointed to by the index of the Chinese cultural activities is fun. To help students index the meaning of fun, the keywords of the linguistic landscape must revolve around the recreational nature of the activity.

First, as mentioned before, the linguistic landscape itself attracts the viewer's attention through its spatial location and then shapes an image in their minds. However, the linguistic landscape itself does not have many elements that directly point to "interest" here. Secondly, the linguistic landscape uses some keywords, such as "the New Year's party", pointing to the activities outside the linguistic landscape. The relationship between linguistic landscapes and activities is intertextual. These two texts are juxtaposed to each other, there are elemental associations: the common use of Chinese and the common appearance of Chinese elements, in this way a referential relationship in meaning is formed. That is, the words "the New Year's Party" in the linguistic landscape just point to the event itself. Through these three basic strategies, linguistic landscapes and activities constitute an intertextual text system. Furthermore, the "fun" meaning of the activity itself will be indexed by the linguistic landscape through the mechanism of intertextuality, thus arousing the viewer's further interest. Through this indexing of the "fun" meaning of the activity, the linguistic landscape may be helpful to complete three basic functions of attracting attention, shaping an image and cultivating further interest, all through the keywords "The New Year's Party".

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4.2.2. Index Reference of Keywords to Chinese Cultural Background

The indexed meaning points to the index of the Chinese culture. Based on this, this kind of linguistic landscape often requires the indexing of meaning around the knowledge-based keywords. For example, the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape about the Mid-Autumn Festival uses "Mid-Autumn Festival" as the meaningful elements contained in it can be roughly divided into three categories. The first category directly corresponds to the keyword "Mid-Autumn Festival", including the words *Mid-Autumn Festival* and their English translation, moon-related legends, such as the Moon, the goddess of the Moon's jade rabbit (嫦娥), and moon-related poems. The second category is another group of elements related to China, such as Chinese classical architecture. The third category includes the elements that represent the image of official institutions, such as the logo of the Confucius Institute. These three types of elements point to the symbolic function of linguistic landscapes [Landry & Bourhis, 1997], and such linguistic landscapes symbolize *Chineseness* to a high degree. In the meantime, the intertextuality between the activity and the linguistic landscape forms a visual and spatial re-symbolization, which further highlights the symbolic meaning [Kramsch et al. 2008].

4.3. The Value and Role of the Linguistic Landscape

In the past, applied linguistics focused more on teaching Chinese in the Confucius Institute classrooms, ignoring the impact of other language elements in the spaces outside the classroom. Therefore, the leading role of the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape is mainly manifested in two functions: preparing and guiding. In formal language learning settings, the focus of learning is the language itself. In contrast, in informal settings, the focus of language learning is meaning [Lightbown & Spada, 2001]. Therefore, at the preparatory stage of acquisition of Chinese, foreign college students will be exposed to the language elements in the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape before engaging in formal classroom learning. This preparatory stage is related to the formal learning stage in the classroom. There is not only the order relationship of spatial transformation, but also the transformation from the irregular state to the regular state. The rule is the regular classroom teaching rule, before international students enter the classroom; at this stage occurs spatial transformation and transformation from the irregular state to the regular one before the rule.

At the same time, the linguistic landscape plays a guiding role when learners enter the long-term process after formal classroom learning. As far as this stage is concerned, foreign college students are in the process of accepting a formal Chinese classroom situation, and when they enter the space on which the linguistic landscape is based, they are integrated with the relevant activities of the Confucius Institute. Linguistic landscapes help students to reflect on what they have learned and provide knowledge and impressions about it. At this point, the linguistic landscape of the Confucius Institute enters a guiding stage.

Conclusion

Based on Scollon & Scollon's place semiotics framework, combined with Kress & van Leeuwen's multimodal theory and Sockett and other scholars' informal learning theories, through corpus collection and questionnaire interviews, this paper explores the role of the Confucius Institute linguistic landscapes in teaching Chinese internationally. The research shows that the Confucius Institute linguistic landscape is indexed and functions by keywords. This indexing function is reflected in the fact that foreign students who learn Chinese can participate in different activities (from the interest in watching to the interest in participating), and finally realize the "leading effect" of keywords.

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