The present study aims to contribute to research of the linguistic landscape by exploring a new direction for investigation, analysing the possible effect of the "visibility and reliance" of languages used on commercial or public signs on bilingual speakers' linguistic behaviour in a multilingual context such as the Basque Country.

The focus of this project is on the relationship between the languages displayed on signs in the linguistic landscape and the linguistic preferences and language choices of bilingual speakers. Language choice refers to the decision of bilingual speakers to choose which language to use on a given occasion (Svare, 2000). Moreover, the influence of the speakers’ first language (L1) on their perceptions and preferences of the linguistic landscape is analysed. The effect of the L1 on participants’ linguistic behaviour is examined as well.

Subjects were 96 first and second year students of English Philology and Translation Studies from the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). They completed a background questionnaire and all students took part in a session test with visual stimuli to measure their preferences and choices.

The results seem to confirm that the linguistic landscape does exert a certain influence on the linguistic behaviour of Basque-Spanish speakers. Speakers’ L1 was found to have an effect on their perceptions and preferences as regards the linguistic landscape. Country to expectations it seems that there is no influence of the L1 on the participants’ linguistic behavior. A general multilingual preference for the linguistic landscape and an overall favourable attitude of the participants towards the use of both Basque and Spanish in communication was found.

The paper concludes with some implications for further study of the linguistic landscape and of multilingualism in general.

References:

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Resumen:
Linguistic landscape is the term of reference for the characteristics of any written information available on language signs in a given territory. The study of linguistic landscape is a relatively new area in the field of applied linguistics, and it has recently enjoyed a growing worldwide interest, resulting in numerous publications (Gorter, 2006; Jaworski and Thorne, 2010; Slobin et al., 2010). It is also an area of study of minority languages, as the linguistic landscape can reflect the official language policy and the relative power and status of the different languages in a specific sociolinguistic context (Conejero and Gorter, 2006; Slobin, 2006).

The visual information people get from language signs in the urban space is processed constantly, even subconsciously. As such, the languages displayed on signs can influence speakers' perception of different languages, which in turn may affect their own linguistic behaviour (Conejero and Gorter, 2006). The presence of a given language or a public government sign "may stimulate and promote the use of this language in a broad range of language use domains" (Landry and Bourhis, 1997:45).

The study of the linguistic landscape is of particular interest in multilingual contexts, such as the Basque Country in Spain, where language contact and conflict between the minority (Basque) and the majority language (Spanish) takes place (Conejero and Gorter, 2006).