

The Role of the Japanese Language in Venice

A Multidisciplinary Perspective on Japanese Linguistic Landscape

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Abstract This paper focuses on the description and analysis of the Japanese linguistic landscape of the historic centre of Venice to understand the heterogeneous relationships among languages, its users and the involved urban context. After a brief theoretical introduction, the phase of fieldwork has been integrated with a more comprehensive qualitative approach, consisting of interviews conducted with both Japanese native speakers and Italian native speakers. This multilayered approach sheds light on the role that the Japanese language plays in creating and modifying the linguistic context of Venice, underlining its functions in relation to users' attitude and linguistic behaviours.

Keywords Japanese language. Linguistic landscape. Multilingualism. Context-driven methodology.

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1 Introduction

This paper focuses on the description and analysis of the Japanese linguistic landscape of the historic centre of Venice. Although Linguistic Landscape (henceforth “LL”) can be categorized as a sub-field of sociolinguistics, this area touches many other neighboring fields: linguistics (proper), demolinguistics, demography, sociology, cultural geography and statistics. All these disciplines have offered different perspectives and point of views which contribute to the understanding of this case study. Three goals have been elaborated for the present research: a quantitative and qualitative analysis of Japanese LL; an understanding of the reasons and necessities which motivate authors to display Japanese language; the understanding of the potential concordance or discordance between the authors’ interest and the effective reception of the transmitted message.

2 General Overview on Terminology

Ever since the seminal and pioneering article of Landry and Bourhis in 1997, LL has rapidly become a widespread field of investigation. Indeed, the theorization of LL both presented was influential enough to constitute the starting point for most of the following researches:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboard, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. (Landry, Bourhis 1997, 25)

As emerged from this definition, the term “Linguistic Landscape” refers to all exposed and visible linguistic elements which can be seen in public space such as streets, quarters, urban areas or cities. But, whereas Landry and Bourhis cited only six types of signs, (public road signs, advertising billboard, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs), nowadays communication takes place also through:

electronic flat-panel displays, LED neon lights, foam boards, electronic message centres, interactive touch screens, inflatable signage, and scrolling banners. (Gorter 2013, 191)

For this reason, the study and analysis of LL has always to be contextualized to the conditions of the specific time and space. The study of LL offers not just a multi-layered and multileveled overview on how linguistic interaction take place, but also a different point of view

on how multilingualism reflects itself in a specific urban space at a specific point of time. As explained by Seals (2017), LL reflects how places and spaces change in order to be suitable for the people who inhabit there.

After the publication of Landry and Bourhis (1997), a great number of studies on LL have been conducted across the world. As a consequence, we can witness a noteworthy growth of definitions and perspectives on LL. After some publications, focused on the role of English language in different European cities that appeared in the journal “English Today”,¹ some researchers started focusing on other features and roles of language(s) in contemporary society. In doing so, they re-adapted definitions and theoretical criteria to expand the study of LL to different disciplinary points of view. Scollon and Scollon (2003) made an important contribution to the study of LL, since they set up their research around the concept of “geosemiotics”, showing the intricate relationship between material placement of the linguistic sign and its meaning/role.²

Geosemiotics – the study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world. [...] All of the signs and symbols take major part of their meaning from how and where they are placed. (Scollon, Scollon 2003, 2)

Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) adopted a sociological point of view in describing LL as they focussed on the public display of language as a “social action”.³ In other words, they stressed the role of language in being the means of interaction between people and space. In these terms, LL is the sum of all interactions among a myriad of social actors.

As a consequence of these various theoretical perspectives, methodological questions have been raised through the earlier works in LL. As explained by Backhaus (2007), previous researchers have used either qualitative or quantitative approaches, postulating the supremacy of one approach over the other. What Backhaus stressed is that in order to create a solid and cohesive methodology, it is important to implement the quantitative outcomes with qualitative observations. Moreover, as years went by, researchers started including more cross-disciplinary criteria and transcultural perspectives to better understand the multifaced world of LL (Seals 2017, 269).

From this brief excursus on the different prospective on LL that came in succession since its first theorization, the close relationship

¹ “English Today” is an academic journal founded in 1985 by Cambridge University.

² Indexicality.

³ In their work they cited the sociological theories of Bourdieu (1991), Boudon (1990) and Goffman (1963).

between LL and its linguistic, demographic or ethnographic components has become increasingly clear. LL cannot be considered as a fixed phenomenon or as an immutable object which can be studied using the same paradigms or methodological structures everywhere at any point of time. Rather, LL has to be interpreted as a fluid and changing process, subject to the modern mobility that take places in society and public space (Seals 2017, 269).⁴

As emerged from this overview, some keywords are common to the different studies, regardless of their research domain. In fact, the concepts of visibility, frequency, saliency or vitality (although they may have been interpreted in a slightly different way), can be found in almost every study on LL since the publication of Landry and Bourhis (1997).

2.1 Visibility, Saliency and Vitality

The three concepts of visibility, saliency and vitality are extremely important as they represent the main decisional criteria for the understanding of the LL and its consequent description. While visibility refers to the “physical” feature of the linguistic sign, saliency and vitality are the indicators taken into account for the understanding of the relationship between languages and the community.

The term “visibility” indicates the crucial criteria for the identification and recognition of the linguistic elements composing the LL. According to the definition mentioned above, LL is constituted by all those elements visible in public space. Visibility is also an important indicator to uncover language hierarchies (and consequently speaker community hierarchies). In fact, as Coulmas (2007) clearly states, from a sociological point of view, being “linguistically visible” is an important strategy or means for any group of speakers who want to show (or impose) their own presence in a specific context. In fact, the analysis of visibility can reflect not only the power relationships between the coexisting languages, but also the dynamics that exist between the ethnolinguistic communities in the analysed urban context. The concept of visibility has often been associated to the one of “frequency”, because the more a language is frequent in the LL the more it will be visible.

The term “saliency” refers both to the visual aspect (such as the colour, the size or the font used to write a linguistic sign) and the semantical recognition involved in observing the LL. These two possible realizations of the concept “saliency” in the concrete world of

⁴ For a more comprehensive discussion see Backhaus (2019), Blackwood, Lanza, Woldemariam (2017), Blommaert (2013), Seals (2017).

LL led us to consider “saliency” as an indicator of the relevance that a certain language has in the analysed context. In fact, in a multi-lingual context (or LL), the more a language is frequent and visible, the more it could become recognizable, memorizable and, eventually, understandable to its readers.⁵ As a result, in the area of LL, the degree of saliency shows how a certain language is relevant (and possibly how this language has become relevant), using both visual and semantic criteria in a qualitative (visibility) and quantitative (frequency) approaches.

The term “vitality” constitutes an important sociolinguistic indicator in being a synthesis of both language in use and its speaker community. In the field of LL, “vitality” indexes not only the presence of a certain language in the linguistic scenario, but also the presence of a speech community that uses (and decides to use)⁶ that language (Berruto 2009, 173-98). In fact, “linguistic vitality” refers to the status of a certain language which can be alive, obsolete or dead, taking into account the amount of people who actually use it. As emerged from this brief description, the term vitality is linked to the users of a certain language. For this reason, the sole quantitative analysis of LL, in some cases, could not be enough in the representation of linguistic vitality because LL is concentrated in the public domain. As pointed out by Barni and Extra, in fact:

In this sense, the outcome of linguistic landscape research should be read with care; they do not intend to present a faithful mapping of the linguistic make-up of population in a given place. (Barni, Extra 2008, 3)

These three terms are therefore very important in the analysis and description of LL, in order to create a faithful representation and overview of the urban context in which it has been studied. With urban context, we mean also the demographic sphere that constitutes it.

5 In the field of LL the question of saliency (together with the frequency and visibility of a language) is often linked to the problem of endangered languages or even dialects. Heinrich (2016) has discussed on the absence of Ryukyuan languages (despite commonly spoken and understood) in the linguistic landscape of Okinawan Prefecture. In this case, authorities’ linguistic choices are the consequences of a linguistic ideological process, claiming for the linguistic unity. This example shows how the index “saliency” highlights the process which brings a language to become more relevant than the others.

6 This is a sociopsycholinguistic acceptance of the term “vitality” because it considers the triadic relationship among people, spoken language and the language choices.

2.2 Informative and Symbolic Function of the LL

The two concepts of informative and symbolic function indicate the strategical meanings LL can assume in the phase of contextual and sociolinguistic analysis. In other words, they shed light on the value a certain linguistic phenomenon has in a multilingual context. They are helpful in the interpretation of the role a certain language plays in a given territory.

The informative function shows how languages (and linguistic groups) behave and interact in a specific territory. In other words, it provides information about the socio-ethnolinguistic composition of the urban context (Landry, Bourhis 1997, 26). Consequently, it highlights in-group and out-group dynamics involved in the creation of a linguistic hierarchy. The symbolic function, on the other hand, refers to the sociolinguistic and demolinguistic implications that the presence of a certain language has in a territory. It thus represents all those processes of identification (or symbolic construction of identity and space) which take place through the use of language in public space (Landry, Bourhis 1997, 28).

2.3 People, Language(s) and Interactions

These previous paragraphs have already pointed out that LL should not be interpreted as a linguistic product or object, but, more appropriately, as a dynamic and mobile process. For this reason, it is important to examine who decides to write and participate to the construction of LL and, at the same time, who is supposed to be the reader of those linguistic signs. As Backhaus (2007) has pointed out, recognizing and tracing the “authors” and the “reader” of an LL can offer a more complete view of the case study in question.

Following Backhaus’s approach, it is therefore crucial to investigate on who writes or participates in the construction of LL and, consequently, on the reasons that motivate them to do so. Traditionally, researchers have divided and classified the authors of LL into two distinct groups: official and non-official. Although the nomenclature used to indicate these unit of analysis has changed over the years, the dichotomous principle at its base remained the same. For this case study, the terminology “top-down” and “bottom-up” will be used to distinguish these two type of authorships. With “top-down sign” we indicate:

Government signs refer to public signs used by national, regional, or municipal governments in the following domains: road signs, place names, street names, and inscriptions on government buildings including ministries, hospitals, universities, town

halls, schools, metro stations, and public parks. (Landry, Bourhis 1997, 26-7)

Therefore, the so called “top-down” signs are created and displayed by official and institutional authors who, even if animated by different aims, show their power through linguistic presence. On the other hand, the “bottom-up” signs (non-official signs) are those that are written in private initiatives. These include, for example, advertisements or commercial signs. In the study of LL, this kind of categorization is extremely important because it highlights “who” really contributes to the creation, the change and dynamism of LL. The study and analysis on who does intentionally interact with LL by exposing a linguistic sign is important because being aware of the origin and the motives behind an inscription can enhance our understanding of power relationships among ethnic groups.

The other category of people interacting with LL is constituted by the readers of those linguistic inscriptions; in other words this group includes all those social actors to whom signs are addressed. The role of the reader is important because every linguistic inscription is the product of many decisional processes which include questions such as “To whom do I want to address this inscription?”, “Why should I use this language for my message?” but also, “Why this addressee is important for my aim?”. These questions highlight the importance of a preliminary analysis on possible or even desirable linguistic interactions which are at the base of some linguistic, stylistic or even visual and aesthetic decisions. Another socio-demographical aspect that should be considered is the way through which the readers interact with LL. In fact, the category of “readers” may include residents of a certain city, people who just temporarily live there or tourists who pass through a given space. It is therefore evident how the way through which these people interact with space and LL can fundamentally differ: tourists, for example, have a shorter permanence in a certain urban context and, consequently, have different linguistic and informative needs.

This brief introduction on the various linguistic interactions people may have in space, has shown how LL is subject to all the continuous changes which take place in urban contexts. It has also shed light on the impossibility to use *a priori* a universal terminology. Every context has its own unique sociological features at a given time. Lastly, it has been pointed out how the study of LL cannot leave the demographical analysis out of consideration because of its intricate relationship between people and language(s). Based on these insights, the next part will be dedicated to the description of the case study of this paper: the Japanese Linguistic Landscape of the Historic Centre of Venice. The definitions and categories which have been already introduced here will be readjusted to be fully suit-

able to the context, and consequently to be flexible enough to do justice to this case.

3 Methodology

Methodological issues have always played a crucial role in the study of LL. As pointed out by Backhaus (2007), each approach to LL is strictly linked not only to the research questions, but also to the research domain (linguistic, historical, sociological, economic, demographic, sociolinguistic). Regardless of the academic field in which the analysis may have been set, research can usually be structured at least into three different phases: preliminary theoretical construction of the criteria for the “unit of analysis” and the observed context; fieldwork on the chosen context and the final examinations and considerations based on the collected elements. In addition to these, each research may develop and use different tools that is considered appropriate for the specific research questions, in order to understand the plexus of linguistic and sociolinguistic interconnections. In the following paragraphs the methodological criteria will be discussed together with the geographical and sociolinguistic description of the case study: Venice. At the end, a context-driven methodology will be presented together with the research questions of this case study.

3.1 Presentation of the Case Study: Venice

The Historic Centre of Venice⁷ includes the six “Sestieri” (an Italian world referring to the six parts of the city): Cannaregio, Dorsoduro, Castello, San Polo, San Marco and Santa Croce, with a total surface area of 8 km² (canals and Lagoon surrounding the Historic Centre are not included, just as Burano and Murano Island and the section of Lido-Pellestrina). The distance between Sant’Alvise and the lower edge of Giudecca (the two latitudinal poles considered) is 3 km circa, while, for what concerning the longitudinal pole Piazzale Roma and Sant’Elena, the distance is about 5 km. For this research, the whole surface of the Historic Centre has been taken into account. There are two reasons behind this decision. The first is linked to

⁷ The urban context taken into account is the historic centre of Venice, of which a geographic and demographic description will be presented. It is important to specify that the historic centre of Venice is just one of the six boroughs of the whole *comune* of Venice (which is composed by the historic City, Lido-Pellestrina, Favaro Veneto, Mestre, Chirignano-Zelarino, Marghera). For this reason, sometimes it was not possible to obtain specific data referring to this area, since some reports and documents analysed the whole city of Venice.

the structuring of the research itself: understanding and describing the presence and the role of Japanese language in this peculiar urban context. Consequently, also the examination of sparsely attended places emerged as a priority. In fact, it would be misleading taking into account only the areas located nearby tourist attractions (for example San Marco Square or Rialto Bridge) or highly frequented and crowded zones (the railway station or waterbus stops). The second reason is determined by the lack of “exclusion criteria”, significant enough to make one Sestiere (or a single portion thereof) prevail over others. No real geographic orientation markers have been selected for the fieldwork phase. The whole Historic Centre has thus been segmented into six subsets (one for each Sestiere): the beginning and the end point of each Sestiere (visible everywhere by indications written on walls) constituted the boundaries for the above-mentioned survey area.

Furthermore, in order to formulate an accurate overview of the social actors interacting in this context, a demographical description was found to be useful. It allows to investigate the nature of the relationships between people (writer and reader of LL) and the languages. For the demographical analysis two important sources have been used: the official website of the city of Venice and the ISTAT website.⁸ These two official sources contain up-to-date data from the census survey of 2017.⁹ In 2017, 53,799 residents had been living in Venice, of which 4,164 (7.74%) were foreigners, just 0.3% of them were Japanese. The overview shows how this percentage is decisively too low to suppose the existence of a Japanese community living in Venice. Then there are all those who currently live in Venice but cannot be considered as officially resident (overseas students, degree seekers, visiting students or International Credit Mobility). The number that had been provided by Ca' Foscari University and IUAV University of Venice is very low: 88 Japanese students have arrived for the Academic Years 2016/2017 and 2017/2018. In addition, 10 Japanese language assistants had then been teaching at Ca' Foscari University. It becomes clear, in any case, that the amount of Japanese people regularly interacting with the Venetian urban context is small.

Another important category that has to be considered are tourists. The Historic Centre of Venice is world-famous as a World Heritage Site. In fact, as explained in the website of the City of Venice,¹⁰ in 2017 the number of the arrivals was about 3,155,548 people, but

⁸ <https://www.istat.it>.

⁹ All the data are aligned in 2017.

¹⁰ <https://www.comune.venezia.it>.

the Annual Report of Tourism¹¹ does not specify the country of origin of the tourists arrived in the Historic Centre of Venice.¹²

3.2 A Context-driven Methodology

The present survey has been structured into three phases: (1) the theoretical determination and circumscription of the survey area, followed by (2) the description of the “unit of analysis” and then (3) the fieldwork of cataloguing and analysis of collected items (through which units of analysis have been photographed and social actors have been interviewed). During this third phase the interviews were analysed in order to understand correlations between LL and the social actors.

The need of a context-driven methodology was a consequence of the demographic features of the case study. In fact, while previous research on LL analysed more ethnolinguistic communities coexisting in the same place, no Japanese community exists in Venice. For this reason, the roles of visibility, vitality and saliency of Japanese language (and of the Japanese language itself) need to be also examined through qualitative lens of interviews. In fact, in this scenario, the value acquired by languages is subject to the role people play in this context. Thus, interviewing both the authors and the readers became an important tool for the interpretation of the LL. Consequently, in order to justify this methodological apparatus, interpretative and descriptive criteria have been adapted to the context.

3.2.1 Theoretical Phase

As for every other data-driven study, the question concerning the theoretical determination of the “unit of analysis” is as important as problematic. In order to create a coherent and linear *modus operandi*, a clear definition of what is a unit of analysis plays a crucial role. In fact, as noticed by Gorter (2006, 71), the definition of the unit of analysis is central both in the creation of the “exclusion criteria” (through which every item which does not satisfy the preliminary description will not be included in the data collection) and in the final classification of them. In other words, defining a unit of analysis means creating the guideline for the fieldwork phase, in that this first step indicates what will be selected and recognized as data.

11 Aligned in 2017.

12 It only specifies that 129,722 Japanese tourists have arrived in Venice in 2017. We can anyway assume that those tourists have mainly arrived in the Historic Centre even if no data attest it.

For what concerns this study, the term “unit of analysis” refers to all those inscriptions or billboards containing Japanese language (big enough to be read). After these physical and linguistic criteria have been fixed, another feature was explicated: the permanence of a certain unit of analysis in space. In other words, though it was clearly established that LL is subject to constant change caused by social actors’ interactions, a distinction between “moving signs” and “static signs” is an important theoretical criterion. For this research, in fact, “moving units of analysis” such as tickets, signs written on t-shirts or on public transport, have all been excluded because they could have compromised the qualitative and quantitative reliability of the LL.

3.2.2 Fieldwork and Interviews

The phase of fieldwork was carried from July to October 2018 and the 52 units of analysis have been photographed using a smartphone. Every documented element was associated with a tagline containing the address and the name of the Sestiere where it has been located. In this phase two limitations were encountered: firstly, some zones of Venice were so overcrowded that it was necessary to trace some areas more than once. Secondly it was hard to sift every part of the Historic Centre, due to the ease with which you can get lost there.

Furthermore, during the fieldwork phase, 55 interviews have been conducted (45 to authors and 10 to readers, namely Japanese tourists). The questions addressed to the “writers” of LL were the following 5. Interviews were conducted in Italian:

1. Has Your shop/restaurant been founded in Japan? (Is your shop Japanese?)
2. Do you sell/offer Japanese products or services?
3. Why have you decided to expose a translation, or a sign written in Japanese outside your shop/restaurant?
4. Does anyone (inside the shop/restaurant) speak Japanese language?
5. Why the Japanese translation is located in this portion of the banner?¹³

For what concerns the questions addressed to Japanese tourists, it is important to specify that the interviews had been conducted *in loco*, that is, nearby the place where the unit of analysis has been found, in order to catch the psychological process of semiotic association between language and context. The interviews were conducted in Japanese:

13 This last question has been asked only in case of more than one translation of the same content.

1. Do you believe these kinds of inscription are useful?
2. What do you think you can find inside this shop/restaurant?
3. Do you notice other signs written in Japanese language in the Historic Centre? If yes, do you think those are enough?

3.2.3 Analysis and Classification of the Linguistic Elements

In this phase all the collected units of analysis have been organized and classified. In order to examine the LL by both along qualitative and quantitative approaches, the elements were gathered along the following criteria:

- Bottom-up and Top-down groups;
- Monolingual elements and multilingual elements;
- If multilingual, the element was organized according to the communicative function of Japanese language: translations, transcriptions or complementary use;
- Geographical distribution and concentration.

In this study a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis has been used. Any items have contributed simultaneously to the understanding of the consistency and composition of the LL. For this reason, two criteria have been created to develop a coherent quantitative examination. Firstly, if the same linguistic element had been found in different places, then it would be counted as one. The main reason for doing so is that the repetition of the same linguistic element (even if important for the analysis of the frequency and saliency) would have compromised the quantitative overview. Secondly, if different unit of analysis¹⁴ had been found in the same place (it is the case of various billboards or signs displayed on the same shop), they would be counted individually as “more elements”. In addition to these categorizations, the analysis has also involved the responses in the interviews, in order to create a complete description of the LL in its interconnection with a social actor point of view.

4 Results

The context-driven methodology created for this case study, includes both quantitative and qualitative approaches, taking also into account criteria and paradigms from disciplines other than linguistics or sociolinguistics. In this way it was possible to highlight how Japa-

¹⁴ That is unit of analysis conveying different semantic contents or visually different compositions.

nese language interacts with other languages, people and the peculiar urban context of Venice. Moreover, it was possible to shed light on the importance of the decisional processes of LL: by doing so, the presence of Japanese language can be understood not only as a reflection of people’s (communicative) interest but also as the symbolic creation of space. The 52 collected items have been categorized and examined in accordance with the classical theoretical distinctions previously delineated.

4.1 Top-down and Bottom-up Signs: Authorship

Of the 52 collected items, only 4 are top-down and the remaining 48 are bottom-up:

Table 1 Pani 2019, bottom-up and top-down elements

Type of signs	Number of items	%
Top-down	4	8%
Bottom-up	48	92%

In accordance with the theoretical definition given above, the top-down signs have been installed by the Municipality and, except for one of them (San Marco Square police station), they have all been found several times in the context analysed. For example, the sticker “*Ocio al tacuin*” (written in Venetian dialect) presents 8 different translations of the advice “Attention pickpockets”. It can be found in many highly frequented places due to its informative function.



Figure 1 Example of top-down multilingual element photographed nearby Accademia’s Bridge, Venice, 2018

All these top-down elements are multilingual and present translations (parallel multilingualism) in a variable number of languages. It is therefore clear that the interest of top-down authorship is to reach a group of “readers” as large as possible, in order to communicate advice or behavioural norms. Furthermore, considering the communi-

cative value that these elements have, an economic-commercial purpose could not be observed. What emerged from this brief outline is that the number of top-down elements is decisively small, especially if we consider that the number of top-down elements that do not including Japanese language is large. Top-down authorship of Japanese signs in Venice is exceptional.

As regards the bottom-up elements, the question is more articulate from a stylistic, aesthetic and linguistic point of view, even if all these 48 units of analysis share one common goal: an economic and commercial one. That becomes clear at first sight (reading and understanding the signs) and, at a later time, it has been confirmed by the interviews of authors of the bottom-up signs. Due to the heterogeneity of these elements, the criteria adopted for their presentation is based on the arrangement of the contained language(s): 7 monolingual and 41 multilingual signs.

For what concerns multilingual bottom-up elements, 20 were translations, 3 were transcriptions, and the other 18 contain phenomena labelled here “various multilingualism”. The first group contains, for example, translations of restaurant’s menu or of the list of products available inside the shop. Sometimes the Japanese translation provides information about shop’s opening hours or other indications. For the second group, a preliminary explanation on disambiguation criteria is necessary, in order to explain two opposite cases. The main question is the role of the Latin script (*rōmaji*) in the inscription. This script is part of Japanese orthography. Thus, this kind of phonetic transcription (which, in that case, would be categorized as “transcription”) can also be seen as a display of various Japanese scripts (i.e. being part of Japanese language, that would thus be categorized as “monolingual element”). In order to create a disambiguation criterion, the pragmatic role of those inscriptions have been analysed. Through this observation, the pragmatic role of the *rōmaji* emerged, and it became possible to determine if the phonetic transcription in Latin script has been written as an auxiliary version or as a principal and predominant source of information. As for the case of the sign next to the clothing store “Camilla”, in San Marco Square (San Marco Square 112), where the katakana version “カミッラ” is next to the Latin script version. This transcription (which has been displayed next to the Latin one) contains no “independent meaning”.¹⁵ It has thus been displayed with the aim of creating a mental association between the Japanese reader and the shop: after the initial linguistic recognition and legibility, the presence of a Japanese script makes the shop visible and recognizable. On the oth-

¹⁵ The katakana word カミッラ does not mean anything.

er hand, the example of the “Osteria Aiki”¹⁶ shows how the Japanese language (in this case both *rōmaji* and *kanji* script) has been included in the sign as a visual ornament, in order to create an “oriental atmosphere” and to signal to the reader that this restaurant serves Japanese food. Therefore, this use of the Japanese language as an ornament or as an aesthetic resource shows how, in this case, the exposition of Japanese script has followed the *rōmaji* version, legible and understandable by all the Latin script readers. Lastly, the third group of multilingual bottom-up signs (18 units in our analysis) is mainly made up by newspapers and magazines cuttings showing what the Japanese press thinks about the particular shop (or, more precisely, about the products that can be purchased inside it). These elements have thus been exposed not only in order to catch Japanese people’s attention, but also to convince them about the quality of the products and services offered, showing to this end how the Japanese press appreciates these.

The 7 monolingual items that were collected can be subdivided in two groups: some elements have been created and written by the owner of the shop or restaurant, clearly showing their interest in becoming visible to Japanese tourists. The second case is made up by newspaper or magazines cuttings containing only Japanese language. In this case, too, as for the third group of multilingual bottom-up signs, the aim was to decorate and adorn the shop window.

This overview has shed light on the relationship between the commercial interests of authors (whether they are top-down or bottom-up) and the linguistic choices involved in the creation of Japanese signs. It is furthermore evident how different necessities have different linguistic realization in space, as this also becomes visible just by watching the signs. In order to have a more accurate and multidisciplinary vision of the interactions between authors, readers and the LL, a series of interviews were conducted. An analysis of these interviews offers a different perspective on the decisional processes which precede the public exposition of Japanese in the LL. Furthermore, this qualitative approach highlights how readers notice and interpret LL in the situated context. In other words, the interviews can confirm the already hypothesized vision of an LL that is mainly oriented towards commercial and tourism-oriented interests or, on the contrary, can reveal a different interpretation. Since interviews have been oriented both to the “writers” and to the “readers” of the LL, this double vision can underline the relationships not only between the two groups of social actors, but also between people and languages, thus shedding light on the effective role Japanese language plays in this context.

16 Dorsoduro, 3958, Venezia.

Before presenting an overview of the results gained in this analysis, it is important to point out a methodological premise on the type of authors interviewed. Since it proved impossible to contact the top-down authors, only the 45 bottom-up “writers” have been interviewed. In addition, also 10 Japanese tourists were interviewed. For what concerns the authors’ answers, a general homogeneity of the content can be observed. Except for the case of Muji shop in Fondamenta Santa Lucia 23, all the other shops, bars or restaurants have no direct connection with Japan. As regards the reasons involved in the linguistic choice processes, a general inclination toward the need for visibility, attractiveness and confidence emerged. In fact, the prevalent answers by the authors were *“to communicate also for people who speak Japanese language what can be purchased inside this shop”* and *“Usually, there are many Japanese tourists in this area; with a Japanese description it is possible for me to show them what I sell”*. Analysing the reasons expressed by the authors who have exposed multilingual or even monolingual newspaper and magazines cuttings, a slightly different motivation emerged. In this case, beyond any semantic-communicative content, the principal “message” authors wanted to transmit was a sense of proximity to the reader. This aim can be reached by showing, for example, a Japanese newspaper cutting in which *“my shop is described and showed”*. In so doing, a certain sense of symbolic verification or fidelity is established. In some cases, also a sort of lack of linguistic awareness could be observed. In fact, some people admitted that they have exposed those magazines cutting just for a decorative intention, not knowing that they actually contained in Japanese. For what concerns the position of the Japanese translation, which is always in the lowest part of the unit of analysis for all signs analysed here, all the interviewed people have specified that the visual priority is given to *“globally known languages such as English”*. Lastly, just a few people acknowledged that inside their own shop or restaurant sales assistants or waiters are able to speak (some) Japanese.

10 Japanese tourists have been interviewed in proximity to the collected Japanese items of LL in order to gain a contextually informed understanding of the relation between readers and language. All interviewed people admitted that they considered the top-down signs such as the already mentioned sticker *“Ocio al tacuin”* useful. For what concerns the understanding of the bottom-up elements, although all the Japanese informants agreed in considering useful the translation exposed outside shops or restaurants, none of them actually expected to find Japanese products inside. The last question, centred on the perception of Japanese tourists on LL, confirmed what had already been expressed in the theoretical introduction. The frequency can determine a bigger linguistic visibility and, consequently, saliency. In fact, the interviewees affirmed that they have “visually”

perceived top-down signs, because of their frequency and presence in highly frequented places. What emerges from this analysis, is that there is a certain concordance between author's necessity, linguistic realization and Japanese tourists' interaction with space. Once we acknowledge the absence of a Japanese community living in Venice, Japanese tourists become the addressees or readers of the LL.

4.2 Monolingual and Multilingual Elements

Of the 52 collected items, 7 are monolingual (13%) and 45 are multilingual (87%). The case of multilingual signs can be divided by using the already presented categories of translations (24 cases), transcriptions (3 cases) and various multilingualism (18 cases).

The largest group is that of translations (46%): considering those signs as unit of analysis containing at least four different languages (parallel multilingualism), it becomes evident that the aim of the authors is to simply reach out not "only" to Japanese hypothetical reader, but "also" to Japanese hypothetical reader. That is confirmed by the small number of monolingual elements (13%). The signs containing translations show therefore the hierarchy of languages referred to the target readership, presuming that readers are imagined to be monolingual or insufficiently multilingual (Reh 2004). From a semantic point of view, the content reveals the reason why the authors have decided to use and also expose the Japanese language, while the kind of multilingual arrangement shows the role Japanese language plays for the authors. All these considerations on the role of the Japanese language on signs, if intersected with the already presented demographical overview, underline the essentially economic and commercial nature of Japanese LL. In fact, what has emerged by the interviews of the authors is also evident by an analysis of the linguistic arrangement on the signs: the use of Japanese (from bottom-up authors) aims at making the shop or restaurant visible to hypothetical readers by using Japanese both in a communicative and decorative way.

4.3 Geographical Distribution

The distribution of Japanese signs in Venice can be seen as an important sociolinguistic indicator of the role that language plays in this context. The irregular distribution across the city of the items show how the needs and interests of the authors may change according to the location. In other word, an area with an elevated concentration of Japanese language in public space may imply a bigger interest from "writers" in becoming noticed by Japanese people. What emerged from this study is that in the San Marco district and the San

Polo district the concentration of Japanese signs is high (18 and 15 elements, respectively); at the opposite end of frequency, only one element was found in the Santa Croce district. This could be explained by the fact of a higher concentration of shops and restaurants but also by the fact that these areas comprise the most famous touristic attractions. Predicting a large number of hypothetical readers, authors use Japanese in order to make a message intelligible (behavioural top-down content) or to become visible and attractive (commercial bottom-up content).

5 Conclusion

The present case study has started with a preliminary re-conceptualization and a necessary re-adaptation of the existing concepts and terminology. The reasons therefore are all linked to the sociological, demographical, urban, economic and linguistic features of the analysed setting. In fact, as for every study on Linguistic Landscape, the central question is the role that the public space plays in the creation of the linguistic interactions. It makes clear that also the methodology has to be created in a way that it does justice to the context and the purpose of the case. The context-driven methodology departs from the theoretical structures adapted in *ad hoc* fashion for the case study, and it assembles various approaches and evaluative paradigms. The disambiguation criteria adopted and created for the understanding of the case study can be considered as flexible tools, complex and cohesive enough to highlight the multilayered structure of the case study.

Each perspective contributes to our understanding of the Japanese linguistic landscape in Venice. In so doing, a coherent picture emerges.

Thus, what has emerged is that the LL is essentially motivated by private initiatives (92% bottom-up and 8% top-down): the owners of restaurants, bar, shops or hotels, in fact, aim to reach passersby and become visible to Japanese. In a competitive context, it is essential to stand out from others. In this respect, LL appears as the compromise between the necessity of bottom-up authorship and the provision on the hypothetical passersby. The commercial and tourism-oriented nature of the LL can be confirmed by three types of evidences: the absence of a Japanese speech community in Venice, the higher concentration of Japanese signs in famous touristic places, and the remarkably low number of top-down elements in Japanese. This last fact underlines that the interest of official and institutional authors toward Japanese is neglectable.

The semiotic interaction with LL (through a message or inscription containing a specific content) and the creation of proximity to

and trustworthiness with the reader (using, for example, newspapers and magazines cuttings) are strategic tools used by authors. The aim is to become more visible. This shows how the visual representation of Japanese language is, in any case, subjected to a constant dynamic and flexible compromise between the authors' needs and the hypothetical readers' necessity. The analysis of this case study shows how different points of view can bring to different descriptive perspectives on LL which, if considered in unison as a composite analysis, can become a tool for understanding contemporary multilingualism. It demonstrates how a given language interacts with other languages, people and spaces.

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