

Linguistic Audit as a Professional Activity¹

Olga Iu. Ivanova² & Nataliia A. Kalevich³

Abstract

The subject of this research is linguistic (or: language) audit. The term is new and not being widely used so far. Linguistic audit, in particular, is offered as a service of linguistic-consulting agencies' activities. Modern linguistic consulting, according to the author, is a form of stimulating theoretical and practical development of linguistic ecology, a new branch of applied linguistics, which, in turn, predetermines development of communication ecology as a new direction of integrated humanitarian research.

Today, the most representative form of linguistic ecology is linguistic landscape, which, in the space of a certain society, demonstrates the most characteristic visual dialects of that society. Studying visual dialects makes it possible to judge the language situation in a society, the degree of vitality of languages represented in it; levels that its culture, science and education are at. The linguistic landscape has a high level of representativeness as well as a significant impact on the various circumstances of life and activities of a society, including its culture, religion, politics, science, education and even economy. Stability of a particular society as a whole can be determined by the level of linguistic landscape ecology. Linguistic audit is considered by the author from the functional and integrative point of view. Conducted by language means and aimed at studying and evaluating visualized forms of speech activity, linguistic audit (provided its algorithm has been systematically and conceptually developed) can become an effective tool to optimize language and communication ecology. Using the modeling methodology, the author offers and substantiates her own model algorithm of organizing and conducting linguistic audit institutions in the field of restaurant business in Moscow, Russia, to optimize their activities, improve their status and an optimal impact of their names on various aspects of their social interaction.

Keywords: Language Ecology; Linguistic Landscape; Visual Dialects; Linguistic Audit; Names of Catering Establishments.

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² Corresponding author, Russian New University, Moscow, Russia.

³ Russian New University, Moscow, Russia.

1. Introduction

The problems considered in the article are related to the sphere of language ecology and in broader terms to problems of communication ecology as a component of culture ecology. The ecology of language as well as the ecology of communication are relatively young interdisciplinary areas of modern humanities (Hearn & Foth, 2007; Dzyaloshinsky, 2018; Communicative ecology. URL) although the concept “ecology of language” was formed in the early 1970s (Haugen, 1972) and the concept “ecology of culture” (Likhachev, 1985) in the 1980s. It is language that is a major functional component in each of the three areas: ecology of language, ecology of communication and ecology of culture. Being the denoting factor which relates to the denoted one (content and its functions, culture and communication) and reflecting a degree of culture and communication ecologies, it unites them in a system of linguistic landscape. In other words, culture and communication are realized in the linguistic landscape. If we look at the three ecologies (language, communication and culture) as intersecting research directions, the linguistic landscape is a visualized space, an available “field” for experimental observation, which by means of language reflects the state of culture and communication at a particular moment of existence of a particular community, its boundaries determined by the size of the data the researcher is interested in. The linguistic landscape is in fact the settings of a house people live in: the house could be private, communal, universal (from rooms to flats to states and the world at large). Any hierarchically built level of a community looked at in terms of linguistic landscape has its own house/home. Ecology (from ancient Greek οἶκος ‘house’), literally, is a science about (one’s) house/home. Its furniture, accessories and decoration are determined by the level of culture, education, individual aesthetic preferences, family traditions, the level of material security of its owner/owners and its logistics.

Linguistic landscape, being a visual realization of language ecology, communication and culture, is a fundamental concept that determines conditions of human existence, formed at the intersection of linguistics and geography. But while the geographical landscape could be understood primarily in the context of a descriptive approach, the linguistic landscape, understood as a dynamic formation (Cosgrove, 1998), assumes reflection implemented in hermeneutic and prescriptive approaches as a tool of its research. We not only try to interpret what is reflected in the linguistic landscape, why and how, but on the basis of that kind of analysis we also try to formulate recommendations to optimise its ecology, develop a transformation strategy (much like doing the household chores and repair works), think about what needs to be done to make it better, and give recommendations to our family and neighbours.

Linguistic landscape has become a subject of intensive research and study due to expansion and intensification of language contacts. As a result of cross-cultural interactions, certain groups of people in certain regions of the world began to notice that their language habitat was changing; for example, there appeared posters, etc in other languages or other visual dialects (which may be cases of language interference, mixed morphological forms, odd borrowings, neologisms, etc.). Perception of these changes, its intensity and nature, could be different: from a simple statement to shock to indignation because of potential, or quite real, harmful effect on the native language. Similarly, people pay attention to the air they breathe when it becomes polluted. So, studies of the language landscape are associated with ethno-linguistic vitality (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), language conflicts (Pavlenko, 2009), and problems of multilingualism in general (Gorter, 2006).

Problems of studying the linguistic landscape provide a wide space for interdisciplinary integrative research. At the moment, the concept “linguistic landscape” includes a variety of visual means of constructing a territory both in the context of several languages, one language, different visual dialects and in the context of a collapse of the visual narrative. The linguistic landscape is being studied from a variety of perspectives – social, political, ethnic, economic, and social interaction perspective in the context of media technologies as well (Roushkoﬀ, 2013; Bolton, 2012; Gorter et al., 2012; Kasanga, 2012; Puzey, 2012; Backhaus, 2006; Blackwood, 2011).

In Russia, and in the world in general, research from this interdisciplinary point of view is just beginning (Duridanov, 2018). Linguistic landscape is not our research topic in this article though; rather, here, it is intended to represent the object (field, space) in relation to which we will consider the issue of acceptability/unacceptability of applying linguistic audit in presentation and perception of information today, including expressed verbally.

Human civilization (or rather its exemplary, classical cultural values) formed in the Mediterranean and the Middle East back in the pre-Antiquity times. For thousands of years they have been the source of pride and an object of culture translation to preserve cultural continuity and cultural ties of generations, but now they are subjects of aggressive discredit and distortion, expressed in particular by a de-lexicalisation, examples of which are given in Klyukanov’s article (2011).

Information society and digital communication offer us ways of seeing and interpreting the world that differ from those of previous generations. In fact, today’s emphasis on information visualization, now a priority, is not new. It was visual forms of art (sculpture, painting, architecture) that informed educated citizens of ancient Greece city-states, and massively illiterate inhabitants of medieval European cities,

would learn from about the world and its meaning, its laws, God and deities, man and nature; for the former from the standpoint of anthropocentrism, for the latter from the standpoint of theocentricism. Even the stone-carved inscriptions and the hand-written books (parchments with Homer's hexameters, or old manuscripts with Bible texts) were, first and foremost, to influence the recipient visually. The thing is that visual information in those days was an attempt to reflect the deep meanings aimed at forming initially given systematic understanding of the universe. Means of presenting visual information and the information itself in its particular content would be sort of puzzles; by arranging those in the sequence specified by a myth, or cult, the target receiver re-created in their mind a given pattern of the world order – a universal text, whose language it was necessary to be able to “read” (i.e. to interpret in two possible ways: rationally and/or aesthetically) to understand those meanings. The adopted forms, methods and mechanisms of “aesthetisation” of that information provided the depth of its understanding (without much rational understanding sometimes) formed adequate and consistent interpretation through emotional harmony, a kind of synesthesia of the author whose thoughts and mind had been organized according to a system and of the recipient whose thoughts and mind had been organized in much the same way (and in accordance with the given norm/algorithm at that). In using the term “aestheticization” (from ‘aesthetics’) we are guided by Lossev's understanding of aesthetics given in his works (Lossev defines aesthetics as the science of “expressive forms of being” (Lossev, 2000). “Expressive forms of being” cognition allows to think about the world systematically. In the consciousness of humankind, each visual image correlates with a common Idea, with the System of the world; and the main purpose of comprehending the world is its meaning understood as a synthesis. The Idea, the System, and the synthesis as a way leading to them, were treated as given. As for presentation and perception of information today, a significant part of humankind lives, according to American philosopher, Alvin Toffler; in a “clip culture” (Toffler, 1980). Perception of the world in the clip culture ceases to be systematic, since the world, although it is a hypertext, (i.e. obeys the law of the text unity) is not being thought of as a system from the point of view of individual consciousness; the world comprehension has turned divergent, it does not involve the synthesis of its ultimate goal any more, the world is perceived in a mosaic, fragmentary way and, as a consequence, superficially. In the process of endless browsing, we could just fail to put the puzzle together. Instead of the systematic thinking, built in the form of movement from a given algorithm of analysis to a given algorithm of synthesis, comes clip thinking (Girenok, 2014), where the world is perceived as a series of successive fragments, or “pictures”, having a degree – greater or lesser – of influence, of attraction, which, ultimately, is the main reference point, determining directions of cognitive movements of individual consciousness. The world has been and remains “a stage”, but “men and women” there increasingly turn

from being “merely players” into just spectators these days. In clip thinking, the ontological essence of being has been lost, its unity and the essence of aesthetics as a field of “expressive forms of being” (where each visual image reflects the Idea and correlates with the deep meaning, and the force of attraction manifests itself precisely in the degree of correlation) has been re-interpreted. The essence of the clip attraction, as some researchers believe, is the reaction “only to a blow” (Girenok, 2014). Established by researchers, clip thinking despite many an observation remains ambiguous. There are positive views of the phenomenon alongside negative ones (Cojocar, 2014; Dokuka, 2013).

To sum up

1. We argue that today information about the world is transmitted and perceived primarily visually. Modern visual perception (and the way of presenting visual information as well) is mainly clip, mosaic, and therefore superficial. The essence of attraction (arresting attention, creating a direction for browsing) is – “to land a blow”. It is a “shock”, an emotional blow, that can truly attract attention today and indicate directions of cognitive movements.

2. Universal, public space of producing, translating and receiving visual information is a dynamic linguistic landscape. And within its boundaries, a favourable ecology of language, culture, communication is being realized (or not realized), which can affect the following aspects of human communication:

- social, e.g., interaction with language and ethnic minorities;
- political (affecting, e.g., levels and adequacy of a society’s receptiveness of the authorities’ steps and innovations);
- psychological (which is how close people feel connected to their habitat due to a comfortable, or uncomfortable, language landscape);
- ideological (e.g., how much voices of various-ideas groups are heard);
- physical aspects of communication and life (as expressed, for example, in the fact that health literally depends on the linguistic landscape, whether polluted or not).

The aim of this study is to show that in a society, combined efforts of linguists can build up a rational policy of positive impact on the linguistic landscape even though there exists that clip-specific translation and reception of visualized verbal information. Linguistic audit can be an effective tool used at the initial stage of such activities. The author considers it possible to use linguistic audit as a complex

tool and direction of well-organized and purposeful professional linguistic activity. We believe that an extended version to the definition of linguistic audit and its functional paradigm as a specific tool of the linguist's professional activity can be offered, as well as an algorithm of its application. To demonstrate those, a model of linguistic audit of verbally expressed visual information of Moscow catering institutions (restaurants, cafes, bars etc.) is offered below. Recommendations after an audit has been completed could lead to solving social, political, psychological and other problems of inter-city communication.

Because of the usual way of carrying out work aimed at analysis and assessment of certain facts and events, there may arise a question about the ratio and certain functional equivalence of audit and monitoring. The author of this article insists that to optimize the ecology of culture and communication it is necessary to use audit as a tool, not monitoring, since these forms of activity differ in their organization and relationship with each other. It is important to remember that monitoring is a more general concept. Audit can be considered a monitoring tool, therefore audit cannot include monitoring. Monitoring is ambivalent: it can be conducted both continuously and discretely; audits, on the contrary, have exceptional discreteness. Independence and consistency (plan, regulatory documentation, etc.) are mandatory requirements for audit. Those requirements are not mandatory for monitoring. The actual practice of audit demonstrates its frequency and versatility in positions that are close to objectives of this study. Of course, most often audit is used in relation to financial (accounting) statements. However, “in the broad sense and in accordance with traditional business turnover, as well as business vocabulary, audit is a procedure of independent verification and evaluation of reporting accounting data and activities of an organization, as well as its system, process, project or product” (<https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki>). There are various types of audit been documented: technical audit, operational audit, quality audit, environmental audit, linguistic (language) audit. The problem is that as a term for a comprehensive set of tools with a wide and diverse operational functions, audit has not yet been fixed lexicographically. We consider it necessary to raise the issue in our study.

2. Materials and Methods

Initial materials for writing this article were published studies (see above) aimed at addressing issues of language, communication and cultural ecology, ethno-linguistic vitality, linguistic landscape. The source of information about the linguistic landscape of Moscow and, in particular, of its catering enterprises were “field” research, observation and Internet data. The methodology of information collection, systematization and analysis was used. The comparative methodology of evaluating data obtained was also used in organising the study. For example, the use of the term

"audit" outside its traditional accounting sphere was monitored and the recorded situations of its use in the tools of linguistics and communication studies were analyzed in comparative terms. The theoretical basis for choosing linguistic audit as a tool for ensuring ecology of a linguistic landscape was consideration of the concept "audit" in the context of the tools of various areas of linguistic consulting and ecology of communication, presented in the article by I.M. Dzyaloshinsky (2018), which considers problems of the new research branch. Defining the structure communication ecology and referring to specifics of media communication, Dzyaloshinsky introduces the category of audit as a tool for assessing a situation. He writes: "It is obvious that improving the quality of media content in terms of enriching it with a significant humanistic meaning involves introducing an ecological media audit. The concept has not yet appeared in any document. However, if no one doubts the existence of media ecology, sooner or later it will be necessary to raise the question of analysis methods of the media environment. There are already precedents of those: there are different types of audit such as informational, social, etc. The meaning of an ecological media audit should be checking the media and other subjects of mass communication processes for compliance of their activities with the requirements of national and international legislation, as well as internationally recognized codes of media practice. The purpose of the environmental media audit should be to assess the activities of the media to ensure the protection of the national and global media space from false, discriminatory and other inappropriate information" (Dzyaloshinsky, 2018, 31).

It was found out that in companies' practices, engaged in various types of linguistic and didactic, translation and other types of professional linguistic consulting activities the term "audit" has also been increasingly emerging in recent years. Thus, linguistic (language) audit is used by "EGO Translating" company, the term been defined as "a service that allows to carry out a comprehensive analysis of foreign language competences that have been formed. This analysis provides for reliable data of foreign language proficiency of employees who use the language in their professional communication" (Linguistic audit – [https](https://)). It is in this sense that the term "language audit" is used by other agencies and companies, as a comparative analysis of the collected materials shows. Cf. also what the company "Interlingua", Voronezh, Russia, thinks about language audit: "Language audit is the basis for corporate foreign language training as it provides the necessary and sufficient information to form the content of corporate training. Language audit is also a tool for quality control and evaluation of the effectiveness of training, i.e. it performs a controlling function for the company's executive board. Language audit is quite a universal method which has a number of indisputable advantages: a high degree adaptability, reliability of its results, while demonstrating a wide coverage of the needs for intercultural foreign language professional communication... Traditional

diagnostics of language competences does not allow a comprehensive study of the language needs for professional communication of the target environment. It is only the modern language audit technology, such as international LCCI exams (London Chamber of Commerce and Industry), that allows a comprehensive analysis of the language needs, including the language needs of the customer-customer and customer-consumer, and to meet the society's needs" (Zamenhof, <https>).

3.Results

The linguistic landscape of Moscow, like any modern metropolis, includes many components represented by different visual dialects in their frequency, form, content and pragmatics. The visual dialect of public catering enterprises can and should be considered as a specific component that occupies a significant place in the linguistic landscape of the city, equally using business and recreational spheres. The population of Moscow, with visitors included, is about 14 million people, according to statistics. As the electronic Atlas "2GIS" shows, more than 2,700 bars, cafes and restaurants are registered in Moscow, the visual presentation of which includes the name, advertising activities, design. In this study, we are only interested in the problem of naming. The study was based on a random selection, and its conclusions can only be considered as preliminary. It is an interesting fact that the names of those in the central districts of the city are, as a rule, correct and correlate with linguocultural realities (historical events, characters, myths, etc.) or precedent texts; they are often written in the old Russian graphics, sometimes having in their spelling letters removed from the Russian alphabet a century ago. In the names "Cafe Pushkin", "Dobrynya" (from Russian epics), "Gambrinus", "Oblomov", "Behemoth" (on Patriarch's Ponds), "Babel", "Golden Fleece", "U Pirosmeni", for example, Russians recognise authors, works and characters of Russian and world classics, art, mythology. Some names even speak of rather well-informed minds of their owners and even offer a certain ambivalence, suggesting both generalized neutrality and, for insiders, connection with precedent texts at the same time. Examples of this can be stylized names of restaurants at quays on boats: "Lastochka" at Luzhnetskaya quay (Alexander strovsky's *swallow*), "Chaika" in Krasnopresnenskaya embankment (Anton Chekhov's *seagull*). Of course, to interpret those names one needs to have sufficient background knowledge. There also a number of restaurants having meaningful place names in their names: "Berlin", "Minsk", "Caucasus", "Brighton", "Bodrum Lounge", "Tifflis", "Bonjour, Provence", "Bora Bora Café" (French Polynesia). Those who had offered the last two, written in Latin, hardly expected a recognition of the place presented in the name; more likely, as in most cases, the authors using foreign words in the names of restaurants, were counting on visual shock as a way to attract attention. In pursuit of a "landing a crushing blow" (cf. specifications of clip thinking mentioned above) pseudo-English labels are created

often leading to obviously illiterate nonsense, both in English and in Russian: Brasserie Beerness (Serpukhovskoy Val), Bertram (Pr. Dezhneva). Alongside historical Russian names that, fortunately, have not changed since the pre-revolutionary times (a positive example is restaurant “Zagorodny” at “Shchukinskaya” metro station), or those that are preserved today rather as pseudo-vintage: “Poplavok” ‘float’, “Veterok” ‘breeze’, “Volna” ‘wave’, a significant part of the list are Italian or pseudo-Italian, as well as English or English names; the “Italian” group as a tribute to Italian cuisine, the latter as an obvious result of globalization (La Piola, Terrazza del Sole, Il Canto, Pescatore, Bellissima; Pub BeerNation, Beef Time, Humans Seafood Bar, The Mad Cook, Max’s Beef for Money, to name just a few). In recent years, the wave of migration has also opened many national (of Former Soviet Union republics) restaurants. Restaurants and cafes of Georgian, Armenian cuisine are multiplying, some names are familiar to Moscow residents (like “Gayané” for example), others previously have not been encountered. Incomprehensibility of the latter could both attract and alienate visitors. Take the name of the authentic Greek restaurant “Molon Lava”, which does not correlate with any possible associations in the Russian-speaking environment. There are at least two obvious discrepancies – or rather, absurdities – here in the name. First and foremost, what does a fact from the Greco-Persian Wars behind the name have to do with nutrition? And the story behind it runs as follows: the brave warrior King Leonidas, of Sparta, said: “Come and take” to the demands of the Persian King Darius the Great to surrender. Secondly, since that historical episode refers to Ancient Greece, the Greek text of this statement is usually read in the tradition of reading ancient Greek texts; so it is “Molon Labé”, an option also more correct in terms of Russian-speaking reality because it does not cause unwanted associations with ‘lavé’ (slang for ‘money’) or quite popular in the 1990s, and still not forgotten Viktor Pelevin’s “LV” (‘liberal values’).

There are sometimes problems with spellings: for example, “tchaikhona” and “tchaikhana” (‘teahouse’). Some orientalists try to explain that particular case referring to specifics of transferring one and the same notion into Russian from more than one Eastern language.

Recent observations of catering institution names have shown that some owners did feel responsible when naming; given names correlate with cultural values, cultural characteristics, precedent texts and assume certain cognitive work in the process. However, most names, especially in places rather remote from the city center (including those where there are migrants from the FSU republics) will not care much about the pragmatics of Russian-speaking city or are solely aimed at the clip perception. Using names incomprehensible, inadequate to Moscow’s linguocultural environment and meant only for shock attraction could, in certain situations, lead to

tensions and misunderstandings of social, linguocultural and even medical nature (the already mentioned-above feeling of “polluting” the language landscape).

4. Discussion

Linguistic audit can be offered to optimize, among other things, the linguistic landscape in naming cafes and restaurants. The work can be structured in different ways and carried out centrally within a city and relevant city services, or within one big company (for example, NovikovGroup, which has an extensive network of catering enterprises in Moscow.) For linguistic audit the following universal model can be offered, which can be used to assess all components of urban linguistic landscape:

- preparing grounds for linguistic audit integration in the work plan of city services (or in the work plan of a company);
- meeting with heads of relevant city services (or company managers) to agree on the functions and determine the algorithm of interaction;
- identifying problem areas and the scope of work needed;
- developing methods and algorithms according to actual state of affairs in a city or company; preparing tools;
- analysing the audit results;
- reporting on the audit carried out, with recommendations on city/company policy in naming.

5. Conclusion

Linguistic landscape is an important component of modern life, being a complex space for implementing all forms of today’s human activity. The quality of the linguistic landscape and its ecology determine the quality of modern life, as language permeates all its spheres. Linguistics as a professional activity should be focused on specific problems of man and life.

An important modern branch of applied linguistics could be development of a paradigm and effective linguistic audit as a comprehensive tool for assessing and correcting a given linguistic landscape from the perspective of all its visual dialects. On completion of a linguistic landscape audit, there could be formulated priority language policy directions in choosing names – to overcome adverse effects of clip thinking; also, new culturally valuable names demanding certain cognitive efforts from the target audience may be recommended. Important also is use of grammatically correct forms of lexical units; unacceptable are deliberately wrong orthography and punctuation as amplifiers of advertisement effect.

Development of proper educational programmes aimed at training specialists in linguistic audit could be of significance in the new branch.

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