The linguistic landscapes in two bilingual cities in Finland – Language users’ perceptions and preferences

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In this poster I will present the preliminary results of an on-going study of the linguistic landscapes in bilingual Finnish cities. The aim of this study is not only to describe the linguistic landscapes, but also to survey how language users living in the cities experience it (as done in previous studies, for example in Shohamy et al. 2010: Part 4). Through a study of the linguistic landscapes and residents of the bilingual cities of Kauniainen/Grankulla and Karjaa/Karis in southern Finland I want to answer questions about language users’ perceptions of these linguistic landscapes and their preferences for the use of one language rather than the other in a bilingual community.

To get an objective picture of the actual conditions in these linguistic landscapes, I have photographed all signs (with text) within the central areas of the two cities. This material is then compared to answers given by language users on a questionnaire about their own perceptions of and preferences for language in public space. Participants in the study represent different ages, genders and languages groups (Swedish-speaking, Finnish-speaking and bilingual) residing in these cities.

Although the composition of especially official signs in Swedish and/or Finnish is motivated by language policies in the cities in a relatively straightforward manner (for example on the basis of the number of first-language speakers), the perceptions and preferences of language users do not follow the official policies. This is even more the case when we consider the global trademarks and other elements in foreign languages that can be found in the linguistic landscapes: different language users experience the amount and purpose of these in wildly different ways.

Reference:

Keywords: Bilingual communities, Linguistic Landscape, Finland.