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Exploring linguistic landscapes in semi-public spaces: An inter-cultural project for students

In my talk, I'm going to present both the conceptual design and the results of a class on the sociology of language taught at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense in spring term 2015 for students from three different fields of study: (i) international business communication, (ii) business, language and culture, and (iii) philology. The most prominent task for the students was to learn how to apply the approach of linguistic landscapes (LL) research, i.e. examining occurrences of visual (written) language(s) in the public space by documenting and analysing public or commercial signs and inscriptions, sometimes supported by interviewing the "owners" of the signs. But the "territory" explored by the students for their own small projects in this class was not restricted to public space; instead, attempts were made to transfer and to expand the LL-approach to (accessible) semi-public spaces in organisations or institutions, be they public or private, local or international. When exploring visual language in spaces such as the railway station, restaurants offering international cuisine, the local university or shopping centres, the students were able to map both obvious and hidden LL-examples, which led them to finding clues to the organisations' or institutions' (more or less explicit) language policies, intercultural awareness, and multilingual realities. As a main result, the multilingual realities appeared more complex than expected, whereas intercultural awareness seemed to be merely superficial. Since a certain share of German language and culture was part of all the students' curriculum, a special focus was directed on the presence (or absence) of the German language.