

English in the Japanese linguistic landscape: A motive analysis

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Abstract

Societal multilingualism manifests itself in myriad ways in both spoken and written modes of expression. As a relevant tool of inquiry, linguistic landscape research seeks to account for the visible displays of multilingualism on public signage. While signage surveys of the linguistic landscape provide evidence of language contact and language mixing in a given area, people's interpretations of multilingual language practices on signage are less immediately obvious to the researcher. Moreover, even after eliciting people's stated understandings of linguistic phenomena, the analyst is faced with 'interpreting the (participants') interpretations' of the roles and functions of language on public display. To this end, this article introduces the discourse analytic method known as pentadic analysis or motive analysis, developed by the critical theorist and rhetorician, Kenneth Burke. Burke's focus was on the way people impute motives to human action, both theirs and others', and what this implies about people's perspectives on events. Drawing on the opinions of Japanese university students, it is possible to identify three distinct characterisations of the motivations behind English language use in Japanese society. The article concludes that motive analysis is an especially useful tool for uncovering people's individual and shared worldviews, which underlie their interpretations of particular linguistic practices

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