

UNIVERSIDAD SAN FRANCISCO DE QUITO USFQ

Colegio de Posgrados

The Problem of Evaluating Ecuador's Apparently Low English Proficiency

Mecanismo de Titulación: Capstone Project

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Trabajo de titulación de posgrado presentado como requisito
para la obtención del título de Máster en la Enseñanza de Inglés Como Segundo Idioma

Quito, 8 de junio de 2023

UNIVERSIDAD SAN FRANCISCO DE QUITO USFQ
COLEGIO DE POSGRADOS

HOJA DE APROBACIÓN DE TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN

Problem of Evaluating Ecuador's Apparently Low English Proficiency

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DEDICATORIA

Para la voz divina que siempre me acompaña y salvaguarda mi bienestar emocional, espiritual y físico. Siempre me acuerdo de ti.

Para las personas que recorrieron este camino conmigo, me siento dichosa por recibir su apoyo incondicional y porque nunca han dejado de creer en mí.

Para las innumerables guías y consejos de todos mis mentores y ejemplos a seguir que me han ayudado a tener metas más altas y nunca dejar de romper esquemas.

AGRADECIMIENTOS

Agradezco a la Universidad San Francisco de Quito por abrirme las puertas y acogerme de la manera más cálida. A Scott Gibson por ser un guía excepcional a lo largo de mi trayectoria en la institución y a todos los docentes que fueron parte de mi formación, así como al personal administrativo que siempre me brindó la mejor disposición. Quiero hacer una mención especial a mi familia y amigos que han sido un gran apoyo e impulso a lo largo de este proceso. A mi director de tesis Tiago Bittencourt que no se limitó a ser un apoyo únicamente académico y a las personas que asistieron a la defensa que me dieron ánimos y la mejor energía.

RESUMEN

Con el fin de explorar la presente problemática en relación con el dominio del inglés en Ecuador, esta investigación se centra en explorar los paisajes lingüísticos (linguistic landscapes) en diferentes zonas socioeconómicas de la capital. El análisis comparativo está dirigido al contraste de disponibilidad del inglés en los entornos próximos de una universidad pública y una universidad privada. Los hallazgos más destacados referencian la diferencia cuantitativa en cuanto a la disposición del idioma en los diferentes entornos, así como el tipo de temática que estos invocan a través de la utilización del idioma. El sondeo proporciona resultados inesperados en cuanto a la disposición y uso del inglés en la población capitalina, que demuestran similitudes en la misma, a pesar de la diferencia socioeconómica en las zonas de investigación.

Palabras clave: paisajes lingüísticos, disponibilidad lingüística, socioeconómica, inglés, español.

ABSTRACT

In order to explore the current problem regarding English proficiency in Ecuador, this research focuses on exploring linguistic landscapes in different socioeconomic sites of the capital. The comparative analysis is aimed at contrasting the availability of English in the close environments of a public university and a private university. The most outstanding findings refer to the quantitative difference in terms of the availability of the language in the different environments, as well as the thematic that they invoke through the use of the language. The probe provides unexpected results in terms of the availability and use of English in the capital's population, which shows similarities in it, despite the socioeconomic difference in the research areas.

Key words: linguistic landscape, language availability, socioeconomic, English, Spanish, bottom-up.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

English teaching was introduced in Ecuador in 1912 (Macías Mosquera and Villafuerte Holguin, 2020). During its early years, English was restricted to private, fee-paying schools located in large urban centers. The language soon became highly demanded amongst rural and minority populations in the country. For these communities, learning English represented an opportunity for social mobility. Responding to the demand for equal opportunities, Ecuador's government partnered with the British government to create CRADLE¹, as well as other programs such as the PDE² that strived to establish policies and appropriate curricular materials for English language learning. Yet, English remained an optional subject for schools to implement according to each school's own needs and resources (Macías Mosquera and Villafuerte Holguin, 2020). This began to change in 2016, when a national curriculum reform was implemented. Amongst the stipulations were articles aligned to the CEFR³, with the purpose to root a permanent professional development system that would enable teachers to provide equal opportunities for students to learn English across all educational institutions in the country. Amongst these programs was the "I want to be a Teacher"⁴, which aimed to promote training to prospective teachers, including those aspiring to be English teachers. Intriago et. al, (2017) states that the "I want to be a Teacher" program helped elevate teacher quality in the nation momentarily. Nonetheless, the program was short-lived, since the revenues that funded this program were reduced because of downturns in the national economy.

While measures such as the 2016 curricular reform helped increase access to English education, it has not achieved its desired goals of language proficiency. EF EPI statistics show that Ecuador consistently ranks amongst the lowest performing countries in the organization's yearly standardized English tests (see Table 1). Ecuador's highest marks in the EF EPI index correspond to the years 2014, 2015 and 2016. The latter year coincides with the Ministry of Education decision to

¹ Curricular Reform for the Development of the Learning English or Curriculum Reform and Development for the Learning of English

² Plan Decenal de Educación

³ Common European Framework of Reference for Teaching

⁴ Programa Quiero ser maestro

reform the country’s educational policies making English a mandatory subject. EF EPI statistics show that the government’s reform did not improve the country’s position in the rankings. Instead of ranking higher due to mandatory English exposure at schools, the English proficiency level dropped with each passing year until 2021. Aside from the EF EPI statistics, there is no further research that can explain or justify why Ecuador ranks so low in English proficiency. What is positive from the EF EPI statistics is that for the last two years, Ecuador ranking has improved. However, it is important to note that the EF EPI is a for-profit organization that keeps certain information private and works in conjunction with the private sector and government. De Angelis (2023) criticizes the media's coverage of the EF EPI rankings, which focus on suiting the public's need to believe in the struggle of learning English. This causes a negative perception of public education, increasing the demand for private institutions to provide better education quality.

Table 1: EF EPI indexes

| 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 82/111 | 90/112 | 93/100 | 81/100 | 65/88 | 55/80 | 47/72 | 38/70 | 35/63 | 48/60 | 43/54 | 37/44 |
| 73.9% | 89.4% | 93% | 81% | 73.9% | 68.8% | 65.3% | 54.3% | 55.6% | 80% | 79.6% | 84.1% |

Row one shows the years of each EF EPI ranking.

Row two shows Ecuador’s position over the total number of countries who participated.

Row three shows the country average situated above Ecuador according to the EF EPI rankings.

Nonetheless, the persistently low English proficiency in Ecuador is often attributed to a disconnect between policy intentions and the material realities of public schooling. This is partially due to the limited financing of public education within the country which often leads to a lack of professional development for teachers and inadequate infrastructure. Intriago et. al, (2017) add that given other more pressing priorities, improving English instruction is often not a public school’s main concern. They state, “many secondary schools lacked EFL teachers, many high school principals considered that English was not an important subject and parents were not able to pay for extra

English language texts for their kids” (Intriago et. al, 2017). Moreover, Prosser (2018) suggests that once public-school teachers receive professional development, they often leave the public system for the higher salaries available in private schools.

These limits on English language instruction often do not affect middle-class families and students. For instance, Bittencourt (2020) notes that Ecuadorian middle-class families often avoid the inadequacies of public education, by establishing and enrolling their children in private schools where resources are obtained independently. Moreover, unlike public schools that are only beginning to provide English-language instruction, private schools have decades of experience. Martínez Novo and de la Torre (2010) argue that English language instruction has historically been used by private schools to provide their students with a competitive advantage compared to their public-school peers, as proficiency in the language not only improved job prospects but enabled access to prestigious universities abroad. Due to this, English proficiency levels between public and private institutions, and amongst social classes in Ecuador differ greatly.

While differences in English proficiency level between public and private institutions within the academic literature has been attributed to issues of funding, few studies have considered how socio-cultural gaps and experiences unfolding outside of the school may affect language learning. Indeed, as other studies have shown “languages on display in public spaces are an important resource for language learning and teaching, and they can also be used for raising language awareness” (see Gorter et. al, 2021). In other words, language learning is not restricted to what unfolds within a school, but its availability to the public might serve to increase linguistic proficiency. Therefore, understanding the extent of linguistic availability in public spaces is an important variable in ascertaining why English proficiency varies amongst people transiting different social areas. It is for this reason that this study strives to interrogate the availability of English exposure in distinctive social spaces around the city of Quito, Ecuador.

To do so, I will answer the following question: How does language availability through signposting vary within two distinctive social spaces? Examining the external language availability,

will probe the tendency of the usage of English through signs outside these spaces instead of within them. Data will be collected outside a public university and a private university in Quito, Ecuador. In this paper, Ecuador's approach to English language policy will be explored thoroughly, along with the theoretical overview of linguistic landscapes which will set emphasis on the scant literature available locally. Later, an overview of the study will be detailed in conjunction with the site selection, data collection and data analysis processes. Qualitative and quantitative methods will be applied to process data, while addressing the external linguistic development taking place outside the universities. The comparative study will allow elicitation of linguistic knowledge and culture of the groups inhabiting these spaces. Findings will provide data to observe the amount and type of English signage students inhabiting distinctive social spaces are exposed to, drifting into the paper's discussion and its corresponding conclusion. Records from this study can be used for further diachronic investigations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language Policy in Ecuador

According to Macías Mosquera and Villafuerte Holguin (2020) and Intriago et. al (2017), English language teaching, as well as English teacher training emerged around a century ago in Universidad Central del Ecuador. Even though EFL⁵ education was introduced through a public entity, the gap between private and public education grew wider as time went by due to the lack of education assets in the country. In response, the government of Ecuador initiated several policies and reforms to implement and promote equal English education in the country. These include teacher training programs, resource and material gathering, modifying laws and agreements, curriculum improvements, joining international projects and programs, making English optional in schools, making English mandatory in schools, and more. In the late 1980s, the government withdrew investment in education sponsored by coffee and oil exportation companies, causing the level of education in rural areas of Ecuador to drop significantly (Macías Mosquera and Villafuerte Holguin, 2020). Simultaneously, private schools invested in providing English instruction up to 20 hours per week through qualified instructors (Macías Mosquera and Villafuerte Holguin, 2020). During the 2010s global decrease in oil prices negatively affected the national economy. This resulted in removing funding from the “I want to be a Teacher” program which had helped increase the number of educated professionals with a master's degree (Intriago et. al, 2017). Private schools kept teaching English, while the educational budget provided by the government for public schools almost disappeared.

Despite the downturn in the economy, The Ministry of Education continued to invest resources in an effort to diminish the proficiency gap between the public and private sector. These include the project “It is time to teach in Ecuador 2016”, the “Go Teacher program 2016-2018”, the “Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages” (PINE) 2017, the implementation of the Common

⁵ English as a Foreign Language

European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to the national curriculum, and the requirement that those who want to become English teachers must graduate from university with at least with the B2 level (Macías Mosquera and Villafuerte Holguin, 2020). Unfortunately, reaching the B2 level has never been accomplished. The British Council of Educational Intelligence (2015) showed that only 1% of teachers met the B2 level requirement. Sevy-biloon's study (2017), reveals that 74% of all current Ecuadorian English teachers were at an A1 or A2 level. Intriago et. al's study (2017) revealed that from a sample of 120 English teachers and educational institutions administrators from the coast and highlands regions of Ecuador, only 24.30% possess a B2 level while 53.90% of the participants possess a lower level. Only 1.50% had a C1 level and the remaining 21.40% lacked an English certification. De la Cruz Fernández et. al's study (2021) which sampled 4 public universities, exhibits that “the majority of English teachers (38.46%) investigated do not have an international certificate that guarantees their command of the language, 26.92% have B2 certification, 17.30 % have a C1 international certification, 7.69% have an A2 certification; 4.8% have a B1 certification and 3.8% achieve a C2 certification”⁶.

The most recent modification in the English Teaching Curriculum in Ecuador happened in 2016, when the government stated that approaches such as the Grammar Translation Method should be replaced by the Communicative Approach. This approach focuses on developing the four English skills of writing, reading, speaking, and listening. The CEFR was introduced to the English Teaching Curriculum as a reference, and English proficiency is expected to match the levels stated by the CEFR. Authorities decreed that English teaching should begin in primary school, continue through middle school, high school and even university. Macías Mosquera and Villafuerte Holguin (2020) state that “The current EFL curriculum in Ecuador recognizes that not all students in this country are Spanish language speakers, and there are varying degrees of bilingualism because of the population's linguistic and cultural diversity” (p. 84). The latest reform of the English Teaching Curriculum in

⁶ En la tabla No 5 se puede evidenciar que la mayoría de los docentes de inglés (38,46%) investigados no cuentan con un certificado internacional que avale su dominio de la lengua, el 26,92% tienen certificación B2, el 17,30% tienen una certificación internacional C1, el 7,69% cuentan con una certificación A2; el 4,8% tienen una certificación B1 y el 3,8% alcanzan una certificación C2.

Ecuador promotes equality in learning opportunities for all students, but reality differs from theory due to the challenge of inclusive teaching practices and inclusive culture (Macías Mosquera and Villafuerte Holguin, 2020).

Before 2016, English was an optional subject that schools could implement according to their needs. The latest reform established that students who want to graduate from higher education institutions must reach a B1 level before graduation. In addition, the government produced a plan to accredit up to 500 schools into the IB program in 2017 to demonstrate that they would spare no resources when prioritizing education. Through the incorporation of the IB to public schools, the idea was to provide equality in education for every student. However, the implementation of the IB in these pioneering schools started creating an even bigger gap among students inside the institutions (Bittencourt, 2021). Being part of the IB represented a greater challenge than expected for public institutions who lacked assets to enable the program and to transmit its benefits.

The results of Sevy-biloon (2017), de la Cruz Fernández et. al (2021) and Intriago et. al (2017) studies demonstrate that more than half of English teachers do not meet the CEFR language level requirement to teach, resulting in English proficiency levels being exceptionally low and the education system not producing students with the necessary linguistic competence (de la Cruz Fernández et. al, 2021). Social exclusion emerges since “the most advantaged members of society can reap the benefits of English, while those facing social and economic barriers have little chance to access socioeconomic mobility and social inclusion with or without English” (De Angelis, 2022). The government's attempts to promote equity through the implementation of English nationwide have led to a disproportionate underperformance between social class groups. English learning policies implemented in the country focus on accountability and standardization, rather than suiting the diverse learners' needs and improving equality in language acquisition. Studies on the topic usually focus on what is causing the proficiency gap inside educational establishments, but the motives affecting English acquisition outside the confines of these establishments have barely been considered, leaving an entire field in the means to be explored.

Previous Research on Linguistic Landscapes

Linguistic landscape is a new term that has not been fully explored yet, but researchers are setting their focus on it. It targets linguistic availability in textual form and can be exposed through billboards, signs, windows, posters, notices, etc., in public spaces of a determined place. The “landscape” part of the term refers to a delimited public place that has been symbolically constructed based on the textual or written information it provides. Linguistic landscapes are constructed to suit the needs of either the government (top-down) or the population (bottom-up), making these constructions vulnerable to changes over time. Previous studies focused on various aspects of what a linguistic landscape entails, such as the mixture of languages found in big cities such as Bangkok and Tokyo as an effect of globalization, struggles for power and the attempt to highlight one culture over another (Gorter, 2006). These studies have been conducted to compare the diversity of languages in regions where it is common to have two languages co-existing, plus a foreign language that helps promote tourism. Such is the case of the city of San Sebastián in Spain, where the native language is Euskera, but Spanish is also highly spoken. In this study the focus is directed towards how language is acquired through linguistic landscape and signage providing information in different languages, which can help people associate words and promote language acquisition (Gorter et. al, 2021). Another type of objective for implementing linguistic landscapes is to get a deeper insight of the culture living in the determined area, such as Hazleton, Pennsylvania, where a study was conducted to analyze the Hispanic identity growing in this community (Spier and Herrera Ruano, 2020). Another study was conducted in different Orlando plazas along a popular highway in the city, where the researcher focused on locating Spanish text signs to recognize the growing Hispanic population in the area and how they marked their identity through signposting (Amgott, 2021).

Studies have also been conducted to contextualize the linguistic landscape term and provide a background for it. Blommaert's book (2012) attempts to situate linguistic landscapes as part of the field of sociolinguistics, and relate it with history, ethnographies, semiotics, and sociolinguistics to explain the concept of superdiversity. Another book analyzes the impact it can have in different fields

such as sociolinguistics, economy, language ecology, classification of proper names, mapping, state rules and policies, ideology, identity, awareness, tourism, science, semiotics, negotiation, education, modalities, and cultural meanings (Shohamy and Gorter, 2009). Blommaert (2012) has even provided a theory employing linguistic landscapes in analyzing numbers. Research in this field is still scarce, but it is growing through studies that take place all over the world. Linguistic landscape has emerged in academia to address multiple contexts where humans are exposed to language through signposting. It can be used to determine the linguistic composition of any space, as well as its linguistic diversity. Blommaert (2012) argues that the analyzed landscapes, despite being public, are not neutral since they mirror the community's ideology or real values. Signs vary depending on who is building them and with what purpose, the qualitative analysis of these also influences the way in which results might be appreciated. Linguistic landscapes can be interpreted "as a synchronic and descriptive diagnostic of the complexities of the sociolinguistic system it circumscribes" (Blommaert, 2012).

Previous Research on Linguistic Landscapes in Ecuador

There are 6 studies done regarding the linguistic landscape in Ecuador up to the first trimester of 2023. One of these studies is part of a book with limited access, which took place in the city of Otavalo, Imbabura in the Andean region of Ecuador. In this study, three languages were considered: Kichwa, Spanish and English. After analyzing and interviewing people, the study concluded that distinctive linguistic signage is mostly used for commercial purposes (Gubitosi et. al, 2021). The other five studies analyze associated topics. One of them also takes place in Otavalo, but its perimeter is limited to the analysis in Plaza de los Ponchos. This study focuses on the linguistic power struggles between Kichwa, Spanish and English (Katz, 2018). The author expects Kichwa to be prominent in the designated area, based on the Bourdusard hypothesis. However, after conducting the study, Katz realizes that Spanish is the dominant language and proposes explanations for this, suggesting that "the lack of Kichwa signage [is] not directly [due] to the standing of Kichwa as a language, but rather to the lack of orthographic support" (2018).

Another study targets commercial names using Kichwa in the city of Quito, Pichincha. In this case, the author concludes that “the dominant social population commodifies Kichwa and its use as a current cultural exploitation by being used in an instrumental way suitable for commercial interests that do not seem to bring clear benefits to the language or its speakers”⁷ (Enríquez Duque, 2022). The fourth study focuses on the implementation of Kichwa to name commercial food products. Zambrano et. al study (2022) reveals a trend of commercial food product names using Kichwa, which is referred to as "commodification" of the language. Both studies have shown that Kichwa is being decontextualized, sometimes even deconstructed, to fit in with the commercial purposes of certain companies. Kichwa is mixed with Spanish and English to attract attention from the public and enhance the trade of the product. Linguistic landscape focuses on analyzing the semiotics of language, how they are being used, and the possible impacts the connotation given by companies to Kichwa might cause on how the native language is appraised.

The next study focuses on the city of Tena, Napo, which forms part of the Amazonian region of Ecuador. Kichwa is analyzed to distinguish power struggles over language employment in the community, as well as political and cultural disputes (Wroblewski, 2020). The native language is analyzed and compared to Spanish, but English does not take part in the research. This study considers top-down signage implementation in the city, while others focus on the bottom-up construction of linguistic landscapes. From the 6 studies found in Ecuador, 5 show that language availability emerges from a bottom-up model, while only the one done in Tena shows the government’s initiative to distribute signage through a top-down model. This study is the only one that takes place in a different region of the country, situated in the Amazon. All the previous studies take place in the Andean region of the country and so does the last one.

The last study takes place in Azogues, Cañar, to analyze unusual characteristics of language through the linguistic landscape displayed by businesses’ signs. The author concludes that there is a

⁷ En Quito, la población social dominante comodifica el Kichwa, y su uso es una actual explotación cultural al ser utilizado de una manera instrumental conveniente para intereses comerciales que no parecen traer beneficios claros para la lengua ni sus hablantes.

“use of bivalency as a linguistic strategy in the LL of Azogues, Ecuador, noting the importance of English as a linguistic commodity in the repertoire of the city” (Lavender, 2017). The literature demonstrates how linguistic landscapes shape identities in different Ecuadorian communities, and how languages are mixed and used for different purposes such as commerce, fake authenticity, power roles, identity, etc. Previous investigations targeting linguistic landscapes in Ecuador are associated with identity and cultural globalization, as well as the expanding existence of English worldwide and the attempt to rescue minority or native languages (Gorter, 2006).

The literature states that linguistic landscapes can be connected to any field that employs language as a medium to communicate. Focusing on the research done in Ecuador, five out of six investigations target Kichwa, five out of these same six investigations target English and all of these studies target Spanish (see Table 2). Four of these studies focus on the three languages, while one is centered only in Kichwa and Spanish and the other one only focuses on Spanish and English. The fields explored through these studies include sociolinguistics, language ecology, identity, ideology, language awareness, tourism, semiotics, negotiation, modalities, and cultural meaning. Although most of the studies target some of these fields indirectly, the linguistic landscape analysis usually involves more than one area of investigation. Since language is employed in everyday life to communicate, not only social aspects of society are revealed through the analysis of signposting, but also aspects regarding culture, politics, and economics.

Table 2: LL studies done in Ecuador

| Language | Otavallo | Plaza de los ponchos | Quito | Food | Tena | Azogues |
|----------|----------|----------------------|-------|------|------|---------|
| Kichwa | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | - |
| Spanish | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| English | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | - | ✓ |

(✓) Shows it appears in the study and is analyzed.

(-) Shows it might or might not appear in the study, but it is not analyzed.

As seen in Table 2, only one of the studies focuses on the bivalency between Spanish and English. The four studies that analyze and compare the three languages, English, Spanish, and Kichwa, have focused on the usage of Kichwa in various places around Ecuador. In all the studies that involve English, linguistic landscapes have been constructed by using the bottom-up model, while the only study that excludes English from its analysis is using the top-down model. It can be deduced that society is shaping their environment to become culturally globalized, since the government is not fully promoting the expansion of English in the country outside schools. On the other hand, the government has implemented signage that fosters the linguistic development of Kichwa in the city of Tena. Aside from this specific case in Tena, it is the people who take the initiative of building their linguistic landscapes.

The studies done in Ecuador have reached concrete conclusions about how bilingualism or multilingualism is happening in specific cities around the county, but none of them incentivize further research in the field. Interest in rescuing and enhancing native and foreign languages is growing but has not yet been fully addressed. Investigations should continue to explore the effects of linguistic landscapes as it relates to globalization, power struggles, attempts to prioritize one culture over another, etc. Linguistic landscapes can also help to acquire deeper insights of the culture living in the determined areas through longitudinal or in-depth studies that will show the evolution of language. Top-down and bottom-up analysis of language availability can be used to understand how society is shaping the written environment and their perception of linguistic needs. Information about language tendencies, incidental exposure, and urbanization can be studied to better understand the impact of language availability in different environments. The literature shows that in many regions of the country, it is common to have two languages co-existing, plus a foreign language that local populations are interested in acquiring. Globalization and the rescue of native languages are discussed in local studies, with linguistic diversity being a growing issue, even though literature on Ecuador's linguistic landscapes is scant. Studies focus on specific places of the country, but when these are compared similarities in linguistic tendencies are found in each region. Comparative studies and

analysis of linguistic availability can be used to uncover similarities and differences among distinct locations in Ecuador, as well as a general overview of the nation's linguistic tendencies.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Site Selection

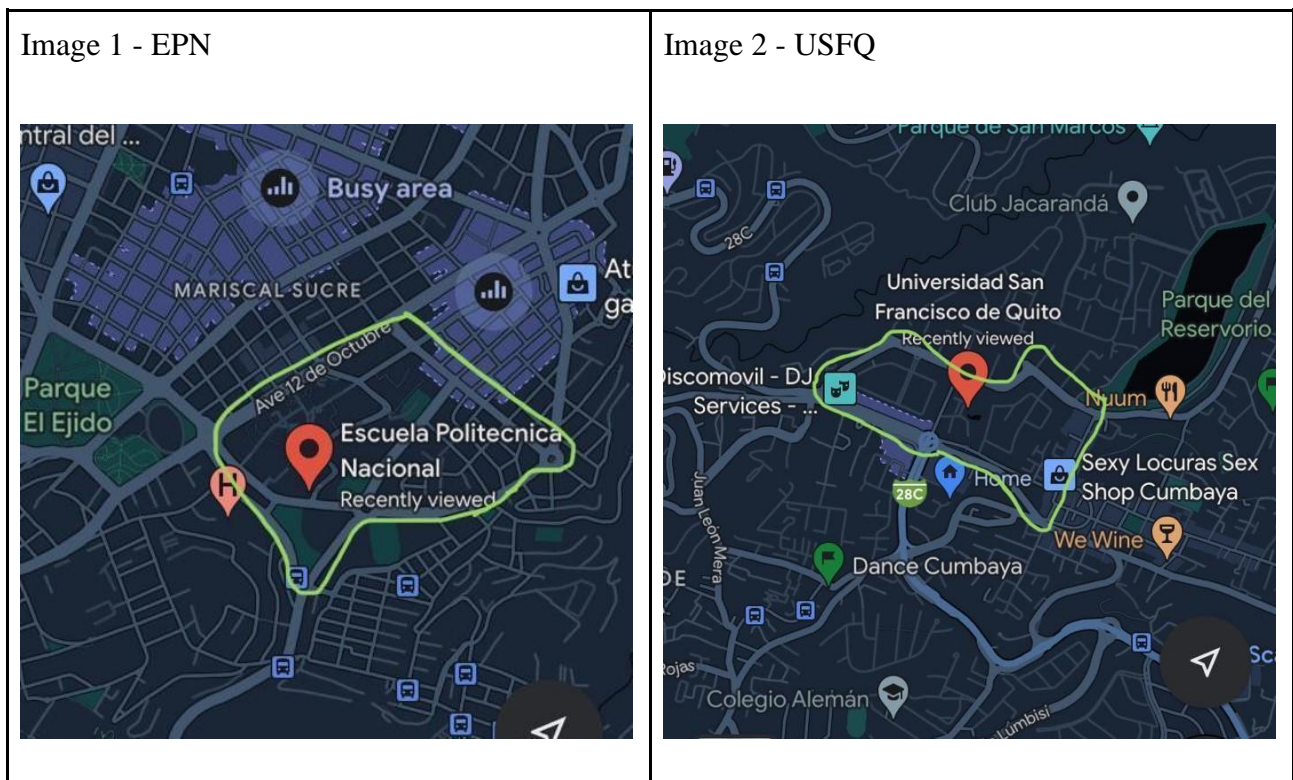
This study's purpose is to answer the question of: How does language availability through signposting vary for students inhabiting distinctive social spaces? The study is based on comparing the linguistic availability in English in two distinctive social spaces. To accomplish this, I decided to examine different neighborhoods surrounding a public and a private university in the city of Quito. I used the public and private universities as proxies for social class. The choice is admittedly imperfect, as social class is a complex concept. Nonetheless it aligns with other studies that have used the public-private divide within education in the effort to better understand issues of social class in the field (see Bittencourt, 2021).

Differences in social stratum can be identified using a public and a private university as proxies, since the targeted spaces belong to different neighborhoods in the city where people from different social strata reside. My choice of universities was guided by the publicly available information of higher education in Ecuador found in the SENESCYT⁸ website. According to SENESCYT, there are a total of 15 universities in the city of Quito. From these, 5 are public and the other 10 are private. From the public institutions, I focused my attention on Escuela Politécnica Nacional (EPN) since they state on the official website, "The emerging Polytechnic was conceived as the first teaching and scientific research center, as an integrating piece of the country and a generator of national development" (2023). I consider that being the "first teaching and scientific research center" is prominent because of the status the institution has kept over the years, making it one of the best in the country. Regarding the private university chosen it was based more on an intrinsic motivation, rather than objective facts. Although USFQ ranks high, as well as EPN, it is the institution where I am carrying on my postgraduate degree. EPN is in the central-eastern sector of Quito in the La Floresta parish, where there is an influx of middle-class people. USFQ is located to

⁸ Secretaría de Educación Superior, Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación

the east of the Ecuadorian capital in the Cumbaya valley and parish, where people who transit this area are usually identified as upper middle or upper class. The social difference analyzed by using EPN and USFQ as proxies is not very distant, since the population inhabiting these spaces will generally belong to the middle, upper middle or upper social class.

Once both universities were chosen, I proceeded to try to define the radius the study would have. Initially I was ambitious and defined the radius within a few blocks surrounding the chosen locations. I designated highways as cutoffs, as well as social barriers such as neighborhoods in each location. I focused on the walking mobility students might have outside their institutions and walking distances that are traversable daily. Since blocks are not equally distributed in the city of Quito, I chose not to do it based on this factor in either location. The area of each radius was approximately the same size. Images 1 and 2 show the initial idea of the radius that was delimited for both chosen universities.



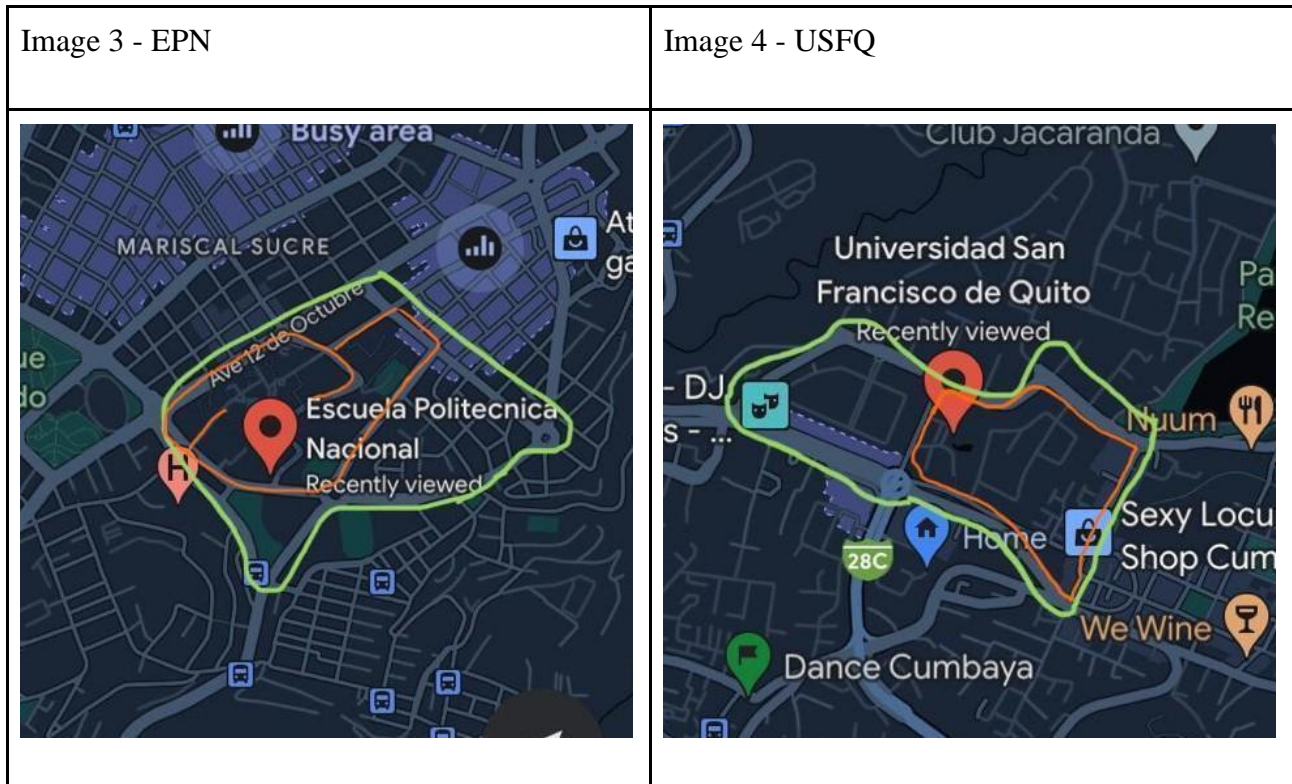
Data Collection

Before going to collect data, the idea was to document every sign found in English in the bounded spaces with the goal to broaden the linguistic landscape because it was expected that not

much text was going to be found in the targeted foreign language. The initial purpose was to document all the signage available in public spaces inside the designated perimeters being these: billboards, graffiti, street signs, photographs, text in windows, posters, advertisements, notices, flyers, text outside buildings, etc. With this idea in mind, I decided that my first in-field action was going to be at EPN's surroundings. This visit took place the 14th day of March of 2023 and lasted an entire morning. What I did was head towards the main entrance of EPN and start walking around the block. One issue that emerged is that blocks in Quito are not regulated. The block surrounding EPN is shared with Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCE), which is a private university. Some of the streets that used to be open to public access have become part of these universities and are of exclusive access. This makes the blocks even bigger because of the previous public streets that are now used as part of the university's property and purposes. The orange line in Image 3 presents a brighter notion on how the block of EPN and PUCE is distributed. It has some streets that are only accessible until a certain point, where the university's entrance cuts it off, and it unites blocks that were not united. This line also marks the bounded area where documentation for the public university of the study took place. As seen in the image, the green outline was reduced to the orange one that matches the perimeter of the block of EPN.

A total of 65 written signs containing English were found in this space, representing a larger number of signs than expected. Before gathering more data, I was advised to visit the other site first and then decide if the collected information will suffice the purpose of the study or if there was a need to keep documenting. Since the data found surpassed the expected number of signs found in English and considering that the nearby area holds the same characteristics as EPN's block, it was considered that the 65-item sample would suffice for the purpose of the study. Another reason not to go further from EPN's surrounding block is the fact that a residential area is located in its northern side, while two different avenues correspond to the west and southern boundaries of the block. In these sites the availability of signposting in general decreases due to the lack of commerce found in the areas. Expanding to the east of EPN could have helped to collect more data, but the eastern side of USFQ

presents incompatible characteristics to the area near EPN. It was reviewed that keeping the perimeter strictly closed to each of the universities' surroundings would prevent inconsistencies in the study from happening.



After doing the first in-field visit which took nearly four hours, I decided to divide the private university data collection process into two visits. On the first one I proceeded in an analogous way to the visit to the public institution. The first visit to USFQ's surroundings took place the 21st day of March of 2023 and lasted half a morning. I headed to the main entrance of USFQ and started walking around the block. During the first visit I documented signage containing English on half of the block surrounding USFQ. The second visit took place the next morning, and during this visit I did the other half of the block surrounding USFQ. Each day it took me less than two hours to walk the determined space while collecting data. The same block division issue that happened at EPN showed up, but in this case instead of sharing the block with another institution, USFQ shares it with private neighborhoods and businesses. Again, some of the streets that used to be open to public access have become private property and are now areas of exclusive access. Causing the same effect as in EPN's surroundings, the block surrounding USFQ is huge due to the street privatization. In this case there

are no cut-off streets since neighborhoods and businesses begin right on the main street limits. The orange line in Image 4 shows a clearer vision on how the block of USFQ is distributed. This same line marks the bounded area where documentation for the private university of the study took place. As seen in the image, the green outline was reduced to the orange one that matches the perimeter of the block of USFQ, similarly to what happened with EPN.

A total of 113 written signs containing English were found in this space, also representing a larger number of signage than expected. Since the data found at USFQ almost doubled the number of signs documented at EPN, the total number of items collected in both universities' surroundings corresponds to 178 pictures containing written forms of English. With a corpus of a total number of 178 items to process and analyze, it was considered that the information found in the visited perimeters would represent a reasonable sample of the linguistic landscapes in both areas. Other reason not to go further from USFQ's surrounding block is that, in contrast to EPN, the southern and western areas of USFQ are commercial spaces containing shopping malls and plenty of businesses. To suit the marketing needs of businesses, it is likely that an excess of signage in English could have been documented. The northern part of USFQ is a residential area followed by a gully and the eastern side of the university changes drastically due to the existence of a low-income neighborhood's location. Maintaining the perimeter closed to USFQ's direct surroundings also prevented inconsistencies in the study from happening, since the areas surrounding both universities present prominent unlike socio-cultural and economic characteristics that would have interfered with the data collected on the different sites.

Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of both a quantitative and qualitative approach. The quantitative approach focused on analyzing data through frequency counts. From the total data collected in each site, signs were analyzed to see if the text was appropriately classified as English. Some of the signs were in a different file and excluded from the sample, since they included commercial chain names (i.e., Western Union) or specific words that are used in both languages and mean the same (i.e., club).

This phenomenon was identified in both sites. The signs that were considered as carriers of the language were then subdivided into monolingual signs that contained only English, and bilingual signs that contained Spanish and English text. The final corpus has a total of 158 pictures containing either English, or Spanish and English signage. Table 3 shows the results from the frequency counts done in both sites and contrasts them.

A total of 65 written signs containing English were found in EPN's surrounding space. From these 65 signs, 13 are part of the corpus of the study, but they are not going to be considered as significant English input since some of these belong to international brand's proper names (i.e. TikTok) that cannot be translated into Spanish or are words that are used in both languages without a corresponding translation from the English word to what would be the Spanish term for it (i.e. digital). From the 52 signs that were part of the analysis, 10 were monolingual and presented text only in English, while 42 were bilingual and used Spanish and English.

In USFQ's surrounding space, a total of 113 written signs containing English were found. From these 113 signs, 7 are part of the corpus of the study, but they are not going to be considered as significant English input since some of them belong to international brand's proper names (Rappi) that cannot be translated into Spanish or are words that are used in both languages without a corresponding translation from the English word to what would be the Spanish term for it (e.coled). Of the remaining 106 signs that were part of the analysis, 41 were monolingual and presented text only in English, while 65 were bilingual and used Spanish and English. The quantitative classification was done to contrast the amount of signage containing English in each of the locations, as well as to document which proportion corresponds to the usage of English in a monolingual versus a bilingual way in the signage.

Table 3: Qualitative data collection

| Language | EPN (n = 52) | | USFQ (n = 106) | |
|----------|--------------|---|----------------|---|
| | n | % | n | % |
| | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---------------------|----|------|----|------|
| English | 10 | 19.2 | 41 | 38.7 |
| Spanish and English | 42 | 80.8 | 65 | 61.3 |

The qualitative approach focused on analyzing data through thematic coding and content analysis. From the final corpus, containing 158 items, signs were analyzed based on their available text, which helped to establish a framework in which themes were identified. The items were categorized according to their thematic idea, being these: Food and drinks, Services, Stores, Entertainment, Security, and Work and living. These categories were designated based on the meaning and relationship text provided through the signs. To group themes into bigger categories, the purpose of the signs was considered. In the case of the biggest category in both sites, Food and drinks, they were put together because both relate to intake, being liquid or solid. Also, at EPN there were no drinking stores located nearby, but the food stores also sell drinks and one can go and only buy a drink. Purposes and concepts portrayed by the signs were aligned and the categories were made, making themes with a small amount of data part of larger ones. The qualitative classification was done in order to determine the purpose of each signage and see how this content might be relevant in terms of input and exposure for students who attend these distinctive social spaces. Table 4 shows the results from the thematic coding and content analysis done in both sites and contrasts them.

From the 52 signs that were part of the analysis situated at EPN's surroundings, 19 were classified into Food and drinks, 12 were classified into Services, another 12 items went to the category of Stores, Entertainment has a total of 5 items, while Security has 3 and Work and living only 1. In USFQ's surrounding space, of the 106 signs that were part of the analysis, 37 fit into the category of Food and drinks, 31 were classified into Services, 23 items went to the category of Stores, Entertainment has a total of 7 items, while Work and living has 5 and Security has 3. The qualitative analysis was done to contrast theme and content English available through signage in each of the university's surroundings. The proportion of signage corresponding to each of the designated

categories was also documented, as well as the purpose given to the presence of English through signposting in each location.

Table 4: Quantitative data collection

| Category | EPN (n = 52) | | USFQ (n = 106) | |
|-----------------|--------------|------|----------------|------|
| | n | % | n | % |
| Food and drinks | 19 | 36.5 | 37 | 34.9 |
| Services | 12 | 23.1 | 31 | 29.3 |
| Stores | 12 | 23.1 | 23 | 21.7 |
| Entertainment | 5 | 9.6 | 7 | 6.6 |
| Security | 3 | 5.8 | 3 | 2.8 |
| Work and living | 1 | 1.9 | 5 | 4.7 |

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Quantitative (see Table 3)

When organizing the data, considering the two distinct categories (English, and Spanish and English), in both cases bilingualism primed over only English signs. In the case of EPN 80.8% of the signs correspond to bilingual signage, while 19.2% of them are only in English. From this result it is observed that English is not commonly found on its own, but rather it is accompanied by some text in Spanish. This accompanying Spanish text provides extra information about the signage's purpose as it can be observed in images below. In USFQ the difference between the percentages between categories is less, but still bilingual signage is greater than only English signs. In this environment Spanish and English signs correspond to 61.3% while only English signs represent the 38.7%. In general, signage available only in English is less common than bilingual signs.

The total number of all the only English signs ($n = 51$) is only a number less than the whole sample collected from EPN. When adding all the bilingual signs ($n = 107$), the total is just a number greater than the total sample collected from USFQ. Bilingual signs more than double the only English signs found outside both locations. Bilingual signs outside the USFQ ($n = 65$) surpass the total number of signs found outside EPN ($n = 52$). I will provide a short sample consisting of visual representations to contextualize the way in which language is exposed outside the different sites. When regarding the Spanish and English signs, the number of words in both languages will be quantified in each of the examples from the sample. This will be done with the purpose to find out how commonly are English words being used in the sign, and what percentage of the words from the sign does English represent.

EPN sample



Image 5 – Bilingual EPN

In this sign 40% of the words are in English since there are a total of five words and two of them use English. Image 5's words in English are "cars parking" and the sign is accompanied by imagery.



Image 6 – English USFQ

Image 6 is the English only image from EPN. In this case the name of the business consists of a conjunction of two words "chili" and "wings". Both are in English, and they are accompanied by imagery.

From the quantitative analysis focused on the delimited perimeter near EPN targeting bilingual signs, English represented less than 50% of the entire content. When in conjunction with Spanish, English acquires a secondary position in relation to the native language spoken in the country since Spanish holds the major quantity of words in bilingual signs. English is not commonly used in signs in this environment and when it is used, it is usually linked to Spanish explanations or other

types of visual support that will help the observer understand the foreign language based on the context surrounding the English words. In the case of only English signs, most are accompanied by a visual representation of the message the signage wants to convey.

USFQ sample



Image 7 – Bilingual USFQ

The sign corresponding to Image 7, has a total of five words, from which two are spelled in English. This represents 40% of the words of the sign.



Image 8 – English USFQ

For Image 8 there is also a proper name forming part of the word count and it will be considered English as well because of context. In this case this sign contains three words in English.

From the quantitative analysis focused on the delimited perimeter near USFQ, English found in bilingual signs is higher than the one found in EPN's surroundings. When in conjunction with Spanish, English still acquires a secondary position in relation to the native language. English is used

with more frequency in signage in this environment in contrast to a public university's surroundings. Compared to EPN's environment, when Spanish is used in bilingual signs outside USFQ, it is not always linked to providing extra information to enable the understanding of the foreign language. In the case of only English signs, as shown in the sample, it is not common for the signs to be accompanied by a visual representation of the message portrayed. In contrast to EPN's surroundings, in USFQ' environment it is not common to see signs containing words that can be used both, in Spanish and English, but rather the vocabulary found becomes more diverse and not so intuitive.

Qualitative (see Table 4)

When organizing the data, considering the six distinct categories: Food and drinks, Services, Stores, Entertainment, Security and Work and living, the category with the highest percentage and numerical value in both locations is Food and drinks. In the case of EPN Food and drinks represents 36.5% of the sign's message, with the next categories falling more than 10% behind. At USFQ surrounding, the percentage representing Food and drinks signage corresponds to 34.9% with the second category falling a little over 5% behind. The top three categories hold more than 80% of the total data collected from the study in both environments and the messages they project are Food and drinks, Services and Stores. The data demonstrates that in the public and private university settings food trade has the top position. The bottom three categories hold less than 20% of the data in both locations. The data acknowledges that these spaces are not polar opposites. People constructing linguistic landscapes in both locations have similar objectives. Despite having different social circumstances, English fulfills a primary function which is associated with consumption, being the main category for commerce Food and drink.

EPN sample

Going back to Image 5, it is not using English as part of the main name of the commerce. In this case there are two clear English words which are "cars" and "parking". The rest of the text is in Spanish, and it says "parqueo seguro" meaning "safe parking" and "parqueadero" meaning "parking

lot”. English is in the top part of the sign while the phrase in Spanish is underneath the English words, and the Spanish word is in the bottom of the sign. The parking word is redundant since it is written once in English and then twice in Spanish. The Spanish words make it noticeably clear that the sign refers to a parking lot where the entrusted vehicles will be safe, again appealing to the trust of the customer by offering a parking service. This sign also contains a graphic representation of the enterprise's logo located in the left top corner ahead of all the text and it shows a car in a diamond box.

In the case of Image 6 represents the only sign in English from the EPN surroundings. In this case the imagery alludes to a chili and wings. The chili is used in the first letter of the sign as well as an independent image right after the name of the commerce. The wings form part of a middle letter and conform the image right next to the name. It can also be seen that another letter has horns as if representing the devil and the letters contain assorted colors, but this one is red. This symbolism might provide extra information to contextualize the English name of the store and make it easier to understand, rather than only having the letters. It is common for only English signs to show visual representations accompanying the text in EPN's surroundings.

From the qualitative analysis focused on the previously delimited perimeter near EPN, in all the cases of bilingualism, English words are contextualized by explicit words in Spanish either surrounding or accompanying the foreign language. The Spanish words are the same words as the one in English (Image 5). All the bilingual images in this setting use imagery accompanying the text, which provides a visual base to facilitate the understanding of the language mixture. Regarding the only English sign it is accompanied by plenty of imagery. Even though the name of the store is fully written in English, it provides visual content for the customers to contextualize what the name means.

USFQ sample

At USFQ surroundings, Image 7 uses English as part of the main name of the sign too. There are two English words which are “Divine” and “Brows”. The rest of the text is in Spanish, and it has

three words specifying the store's expertise "cejas", pestañas, uñas" meaning "eyebrows, eyelashes, nails" respectively. English is in the top middle part of the sign extending horizontally all over it while the words in Spanish are underneath the English name in the middle of the sign. The word "cejas" is redundant since it is written once in English and once in Spanish. The Spanish words make it clear that the sign refers to a business that offers aesthetic services. This sign does not contain a graphic representation of the enterprise to help the clientele acquire more information.

While Image 8 is only composed of the shop's name. The name is written in the top middle without any slogan or graphic representations. In this case there is no extra help from imagery that will make the English text easier to contextualize.

From the qualitative analysis focused on the priorly delimited perimeter near USFQ, English words in bilingual signs are contextualized by explicit words in Spanish either surrounding or accompanying the foreign language. Image use decreases in the surroundings of the private university. Regarding the only English signage, none of them uses words that can be considered either English or Spanish and it is not common to find imagery in these.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Discussion

According to current international rankings, Ecuador has one of the lowest levels of English proficiency on the continent. The studies conducted by the Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI, 2022), show that Ecuador was rated 82 out of 111 nations in terms of English proficiency in November of 2022. Other national popular sources have published in different articles similar news. An article from *El Comercio* communicates that "Ecuador remains one of the two Latin American countries with the worst level of English language proficiency, situated only above Mexico" (Castillo, 2021). The headline in *El Universo* reads, "Ecuador, ranked 82 in English proficiency worldwide, according to the publication of the Index" (2022), while the headline in *El Mercurio* reads, "Ecuador ranks 82 out of 82 countries in the world". According to De Angelis (2023), by publishing news of this nature, the pressure on high standard public education is released and an increase in the demand of private institutions arises. Private schools have decades of experience, and English language instruction has historically been used by private schools to provide their students with a competitive advantage. De Angelis (2023) also offers a unique perspective to the matter, criticizing the media's coverage of the EF EPI rankings, which focus on suiting the public's need to believe in the struggle of learning English. As a result, middle-class families often avoid the inadequacies of public education, by establishing and enrolling their children in private schools where resources are obtained independently.

The difference in resources between public and private institutions is tangible through the assets they offer, but this deviation might be happening outside institutions as well. To address the difference in linguistic availability outside distinctive social spaces, linguistic landscapes are implemented. Up until the first quarter of 2023, 6 studies have been conducted regarding Ecuador's linguistic landscape. It targets linguistic availability in textual form and can be exposed through billboards, signs, windows, posters, notices, etc., in public spaces of a determined place. Previous studies focus on distinct aspects of what a linguistic landscape entails, such as the mixture of

languages found in big cities as an effect of globalization, struggles for power and the attempt to highlight one culture over another. Linguistic landscapes are constructed to suit the needs of either the government (top-down) or the population (bottom-up). The literature shows that the bottom-up model is more common than the top-down. 5 out of the 6 studies done in the country evidence the implementation of bottom-up when symbolically constructing a delimited public place through text. This model focuses on how people build their linguistic environments based on their interests and needs, regardless of the government. From the corpus, only one sign has a governmental origin, corresponding to signage constructed by the town hall of the city. English implementation in spaces through signage is being shaped and constructed by the population and it is important to notice that these constructions are vulnerable to changes over time.

This result shows that English signage is often accompanied by Spanish text, providing extra information about the signage's purpose. In the neighborhood surrounding USFQ, the difference between the percentages between categories is less, but bilingual signage is still greater than only English signs. The quantitative analysis focused on the delimited perimeter near EPN targeting bilingual signs found that English represented less than 50% of the content, while near USFQ it was observed that English found in bilingual signs is higher than the one found in EPN's surroundings. When combined with Spanish, English acquires a secondary position in relation to Spanish in both locations. English is not commonly used in signs in the public university environment and when it is used, it is usually linked to Spanish explanations or other types of visual support. In this area, the only English signs, most are accompanied by a visual representation of the message the signage wants to convey. Compared to EPN's environment, when Spanish is used in bilingual signs outside USFQ, it is not always linked to providing extra information to enable the understanding of the foreign language. In contrast to EPN's surroundings, in USFQ' environment it is not common to see signs containing words that can be used both, in Spanish and English, but rather the vocabulary found becomes more diverse and not so intuitive. On the qualitative side, Food and drinks has the highest

percentage and numerical value in both locations. English fulfills a primary function associated with consumption.

Concluding Thoughts

This research aimed to compare the differences and similarities between English language availability through signposting within two distinctive social spaces. Based on quantitative and qualitative data processing methods, this study shows minimal differences between English-availability within the selected social spaces (private vs. public spaces). Even though there are social differences regarding these environments, there is an overarching lack of English availability that extends beyond consumption. English is found both in the private and public spaces, however its presence is primarily due to commercial purposes. In both locations, English is predominantly used for the marketing of consumer products such as food and drinks. Similar to previous literature (see Enríquez Duque, 2022), English seems to be employed in an instrumental way that satisfies commercial interests. Related to the use of Kichwa in commercial food products, English might as well be commodified by being availed for attracting clientele. Based on the way in which native and foreign languages are implemented in most of the studies conducted in Ecuador, questioning as to whether existing forms of language availability do indeed provide emergent linguistic gains.

Although English is usually exhibited along with Spanish or imagery that helps contextualize the foreign language, its regular presence was unexpected. Linguistic availability found through signposting during the study surpassed my expectations, in terms of quantity, in both sites. The bottom-up construction of signage is conferring a mercantile role for the foreign language around the city, where people do not need to know the language to be able to interpret it. Dragging from Anderson Benedict's (2006) concept of imagined communities, he gives the idea that any community beyond face-to-face interaction must be imagined. In this case, people carrying on the bottom-up construction of linguistic landscapes in Quito may be envisioning themselves as belonging to a certain community they do not actually physically interact with, nonetheless it is real. Breuilly (2016) states that "it was through people's newfound ability to conceptualize abstract others as their equals, as

metaphorical kinsfolk, that the imagined community of the nation was made possible”. In this case, people might be appealing to the implementation of English signage to show their imagined community and use it as a means to bring prestige to their businesses.

An arising conflict may come into play when part of the population might aspire to belong to an imagined community beyond their local culture, while others reject this culture shift. Cultural dissonance is known as this sense of confusion and discord experienced by the people amid a cultural transformation is often unaccountable for them, due to differences in cultural dynamics. The implementation of English signage in social spaces might be considered a threat to the local culture unleashing cultural dissonance (see Enríquez Duque, 2020). The literature shows that English is being implemented in Ecuador to suit commercial needs. From the data collected in this study, only few signs required advanced English knowledge to be understood, while most of them could be deduced and interpreted based on context. Businesses are implementing English into their signage as a merchandising strategy, so it would be interesting to see if this is happening with native languages too, which would disregard the issues that may arise regarding imagined communities and cultural dissonance.

Aside from the commercial employment of the language, there is an overall lack of English linguistic availability in public spaces, even those that are considered elite. This might be related to elites not utilizing public spaces often, since their life mostly unfolds in private spaces. As Bittencourt (2021) mentions “[the elite school] students, on the other hand, noted that issues of safety often limited their mobility, restricting their access to private spaces inhabited by people who shared their same social characteristics”. This study shows that English is mostly employed in an instrumental way in public spaces (see Images 5, 6, 7 & 8), but it lacks investigation on how English unfolds in private spaces. The supposition is that in private spaces English implementation goes further (i.e., music, events, and signage at Shot Me). Language learning extends beyond notions of grammar and vocabulary and includes issues of identity. People who frequent private spaces are usually the same group, while other groups frequent public spaces creating their own cultural identities. English is

implemented in private spaces (i.e., music, events, and signage at Club Rancho San Francisco) through a different purpose than it is given in public spaces, and this in some way may be limiting the linguistic availability for the public.

This research illustrates that English linguistic availability in the distinctive and public social spaces is limited. Moreover, the commercial use of the language stands out even if the policies stated in the EFL national curriculum claim that students should graduate with a B1 CEFR level from high school. The government has tried to solve the proficiency issue in the country by adjusting the EFL national curriculum, but how feasible are these policies if language remains unavailable outside the confines of schools? While the sample is not big enough to generalize results, it also raises the questions of what is the role of English in the country, and what can that inform about language learning in the county? Further research is needed to fully understand the relationship between linguistic landscapes and their possible influence in language acquisition and proficiency within Ecuador. What has been found through this study is that despite having chosen different social spaces to gather data, English fulfills a primary function which is associated with consumption. Regardless of the purpose on which English is applied in signage, the quantitative processing shows a broader English content in the private university surroundings, rather than the public one. Nonetheless, most signs found are bilingual on both sites. Similarities with reference to both sites constantly appear in terms of quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the signs, although the signage was collected from different social spaces.

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