



Ethnolinguistic Vitality of Downtown Eugene

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Introduction

Linguistic landscapes are necessary for ethnolinguistic communities to be comfortable in their place of residence. "Ethnolinguistic vitality is a group's ability to maintain and protect its existence over time as a collective entity with a distinctive identity and language"³.

When a city shows its willingness to create a safe space for all residents and visitors, people are more likely to be actively involved with the community thus stimulating economic growth.

Research Question

How does the absence of multilingual signage around Downtown Eugene deprive the Spanish-speaking community of obtaining full access to communal activities and resources?

Methods

This research used two phases to accumulate and analyze the data of the ethnolinguistic vitality of Eugene. Quantitative and qualitative research, the coding of images, and ethnographic data collection were used to grasp the entire picture.

Phase 1: Documentation of Spanish on public signs

- Eight groups of walking tours in Downtown Eugene to document all signage in existing corridors, the ratio of English to Spanish, the function of the sign, and the amount of sociolinguistic diversity in Downtown Eugene.
- The images were then coded to examine location, function, uniqueness, author, text type, and what is specifically written in English or Spanish (or other languages).

Phase 2: Target interviewing with members of the community

- Interviews with members of the Eugene community who speak Spanish
- Interviews were then compared to the quantitative data collection

Result 1

In order to create a welcoming environment, the implementation of bottom-up signage is crucial. Bottom-up signage comes directly from businesses and individuals rather than municipal actors¹, such as the City of Eugene itself, Lane Transit District, and other government-owned operations. The City of Eugene must make a conscious effort to promote Latino businesses and events to cater to the Latino community. With more Latino businesses and events present, the Latino community will feel welcome and excited to visit downtown.

Result 2

Currently, Downtown Eugene shows how Latino communities live and adapt to white public space. "An arena in which disorder on the part of Whites is rendered invisible and normative, while the behavior of racialized populations is highly visible and the object of constant monitoring"² (Hill 1998). Although there is a considerable amount of sociolinguistic diversity represented through the signage of Downtown Eugene, there is not a balance between bilingual regulatory signs and inclusive and welcoming signs. Data from the walking tours found that 50% of the signs documented were regulatory³. The qualitative and quantitative data concluded that in order to create an inclusive community, the signage in Eugene must communicate the seriousness for diversity by including more pragmatic translations of English to Spanish, and signs that are equal in their physical layout between English and Spanish, as noted below.



The sign to the left is an example of how literal translations can be misconstrued. This is a politically incorrect translation. Regulatory translations that convey messages in culturally recognizable phrases can help create an inclusive community rather than support the linguistic hierarchy of English to Spanish.

The sign to the right prioritizes English by placing the English phrase first and in an easy-to-read color and font while the Spanish portion is a less visible color and in smaller font beneath the English portion.



Conclusions

The analysis shows that there is a lack of signs of Spanish in Downtown Eugene. The implementation of multilingual signage is necessary to create a more welcoming community for both residents and visitors of all backgrounds.

In order to create an inclusive community for Latinos in Downtown Eugene, the current linguistic English-Spanish hierarchy must be destabilized.

Ethnolinguistic vitality includes many prominent parts but more Spanish signage and the promotion of Latino businesses and events held Downtown are considerable strides towards the vitality of the Spanish linguistic community of Eugene.

Something as simple as welcoming signs in store fronts and people's front yards or regulatory signs that provide community resources for those in need are great examples of an inclusive and thriving Downtown community.



References

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- ²Hill, Jane H. "Language, Race, and White Public Space." *American Anthropologist*, vol. 100, no. 3, 1998, pp. 680–689., doi:10.1525/aa.1998.100.3.680.
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