

# Proposal for the 11<sup>th</sup> National Symposium on Spanish as a Heritage Language

## **Title of presentation:**

“Translation in the linguistic landscape along the US border with Mexico”

## **Abstract for conference program:**

Bilingual cities offer opportunities to examine the extent to which translation, including the decision to not translate, plays a role in shaping the public spaces of cities. This paper seeks to do that by reporting on a linguistic landscape study carried out in Brownsville, Texas.

## **Presentation description:**

### Abstract

Cities are the hubs of the modern world, and in border towns between states with different languages, these hubs are bilingual. Such bilingual towns offer opportunities to examine the extent to which translation, including the decision to not translate, plays a role in shaping the public spaces of cities (see González Núñez & Meylaerts). This presentation seeks to do that by relying on the methods developed for the study of the linguistic landscape (e.g., Landry & Bourhis). It will report on such a study as carried out in Brownsville, a city that sits on the Texas border with Mexico. The study surveyed two streets in Brownsville with a special concern for both untranslated and translated signs as a way of thinking about what the presence of each type of sign indicates. Special attention was paid to the presence of English and Spanish in public signs. The presentation of the study’s findings will serve to discuss the role of both non-translation and translation in creating a public space that may (or may not) be inclusive of the local population in terms of language. This will help draw conclusions about what the use of translation in the linguistic landscape can tell us regarding public policy, particularly among bilingual Spanish/English populations in the United States. These conclusions include the observation that the linguistic landscape is not the result of organic developments taking place in a *laissez-faire* language system but rather a reflection of public policy choices in favor of the hegemonic language.

### References

GONZÁLEZ NÚÑEZ, Gabriel, and MEYLAERTS, Reine, eds. (2017): *Translation and public policy: interdisciplinary perspectives and case studies*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.

LANDRY, Rodrigue, and BOURHIS, Richard Y. (1997): Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 16(1):23-49.

**Three to five learning objectives:**

The *laissez-faire* development of signs in Spanish and English may not be enough to create a linguistically inclusive city environment.

Language choices reflected through signage may act as a gauge for linguistic equality in a city.

Pressures exercised by public policy can result in privileging the spontaneous use of the hegemonic language (in this case English) over the minoritized language (in this case, Spanish).

**Presentation format:**

Individual presentation (20 minutes, plus 10 minutes for discussion).