

Signs of Patient-Centeredness?

A Comparative Photovoice Assessment of the Linguistic Landscapes in Austrian and Canadian Hospitals

Laryn McLernon, MA / PhD Candidate

Background & Aims:

Wayfinding in hospitals is a complex issue, as patients are usually under stress and often have to navigate to multiple locations within a single visit. Also, medical students, junior doctors and temporary staff have difficulties in route planning and lives are potentially endangered as a result. The time required to redirect patients and visitors, is estimated to correspond to ten additional hours per patient per bed per year (Arthur & Passini 2002). Research on wayfinding in healthcare comes from various disciplines, such as environmental psychology, health literacy, policy, management and sociolinguistics. Research on linguistic landscapes in the health sector deals with the multilingualism and accessibility of orientation- and health-promoting signage and how they symbolically design the health care system. This project examines the perception of the linguistic landscapes of hospitals in Austria and Canada from a patient's perspective.

Results:

Participants ranged from ages 25 to 64 years. 3 out of 4 participants were Caucasian and one participant was Asian. 2 participants had German as their first language, 1 participant's mother tongue was English and 1 participant was a bilingual Tamil and English speaker. The participants selected a total of 24 photos of signs, maps, symbols, posters and works of art.

The descriptions include five discourses:

- 1) wayfinding
- 2) patient centeredness
- 3) health promotion
- 4) regulation
- 5) multilingualism

4 common themes emerged from the photovoice pictures and captions documented in Canada: clear signage, the importance of hand hygiene, the relevance of multilingual signs and feeling connected to the staff. The photovoice pictures and captions from Austrian hospitals revealed 3 common themes: the need for clear wayfinding information, trust in the competence of the staff and feelings of irritation and confusion. All participants found medical jargon on signage difficult to understand. The multicolour center of this poster visualizes each participant and their perceptions.

Methods:

A purposeful convenience sample of 4 participants was selected for the pilot phase of this project. Participants were recruited based on their age and their language proficiency. As older patients experience difficulty with wayfinding 1 participant over the age of 60 was selected from each country. While language barriers influence the perception and comprehensibility of signage 1 non-native speaker from Austria and Canada were selected. For the purposes of privacy participants were assigned the code names A1 (Older Austrian), A2 (Second Language Speaker in Austria) and C1 (Older Canadian), C2 (Second Language Speaker in Canada). The study was conducted in the entrance and lobby areas of four general hospitals in Canada and Austria. The questionnaires, photographs and descriptions were analyzed from a discourse analytic perspective.

Conclusion & Future Perspectives:

This pilot study shows that hospitals in Austria are hardly adapted to serve multilingual populations with their signage. In Canada, multilingual signage appeared to be more symbolic than practical, and most of the information appeared in English only. Based on participant perceptions, it appears that Austrian and Canadian hospitals are linguistic spaces tailored to native speakers. All appreciated signage and messaging that took their needs and dignity into account. Thus this pilot study laid the foundation for future larger-scale projects and collaborations between the University of Vienna, the Global Health Literacy Academy, Management Center Innsbruck and the European Union.

The aim of these collaborations is to continue to integrate patient-centeredness into curriculum and practice at regional, national and international levels. This project and all my future projects are in honour of Dr. Florian Menz whose life's work forged the path for clearer, more patient-centered communication in the Austrian healthcare system especially for those most vulnerable. Florian, your fighting spirit, your love and your light will continue to guide us in the right direction.



universität
wien

