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Pedagogical Linguistic Landscapes in the Global South: Raising Awareness of Language Coexistence and Multilingual Practices in Uruguayan EFL Classrooms

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Resumen

Este estudio explora el potencial pedagógico de los paisajes lingüísticos en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera en Uruguay, un campo aún poco desarrollado a nivel local. A partir de un diseño cualitativo de dos estudios de caso en educación superior, la investigación analiza cómo la integración de LLs en el aula puede fomentar la conciencia crítica sobre la coexistencia lingüística, las jerarquías de lengua y las relaciones de poder en el espacio público. El primer caso se desarrolló en un curso universitario de EFL para estudiantes A1/A2 en la frontera Uruguay-Brasil, un contexto marcado por el bilingüismo español-portugués y la presencia del portuñol. El segundo caso tuvo lugar en un programa de formación de docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera en una ciudad costera turística, donde analizaron la presencia del inglés en el paisaje lingüístico local y diseñaron propuestas didácticas basadas en ese análisis. Los hallazgos muestran que el trabajo con LLs permitió a los participantes replantear sus percepciones sobre los idiomas visibles e invisibilizados en sus entornos, cuestionar nociones de prestigio lingüístico y establecer vínculos más significativos entre el aprendizaje del inglés y sus realidades locales. En el caso de la formación docente, además, los LLs funcionaron como un catalizador de agencia pedagógica. Esta investigación aporta evidencia contextualizada sobre cómo los paisajes lingüísticos permiten problematizar las relaciones entre lengua, espacio, poder e identidad en contextos del Sur Global.

***Palabras clave*:** Paisajes lingüísticos, conciencia crítica, jerarquía lingüística, inglés como lengua extranjera, diseño pedagógico

Introduction

The study of linguistic landscapes (LLs) has gained increasing attention in sociolinguistics over the past two decades, particularly as a means of analyzing how languages coexist and compete in public spaces. Research has shown that LLs not only reflect the linguistic diversity of a territory but also index power relations, processes of inclusion and exclusion, and identities negotiated in everyday life. In this sense, public signage operates simultaneously as a mirror of social practices and as a symbolic resource that shapes language ideologies and perceptions of multilingualism (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

Despite this growing body of research worldwide, in Uruguay LLs have primarily been examined from a sociolinguistic perspective with little to no attention to their pedagogical potential. While studies have described the multilingual realities of border regions or urban centers, their implications for language education—particularly in relation to fostering students' critical awareness of linguistic diversity—remain largely unexplored.

In language education, the exploration of LLs has been increasingly suggested as a promising pedagogical tool. It can help learners connect classroom content with the linguistic and multilingual realities of their communities, while also promoting reflection on issues of identity, inclusion, and power (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Malinowski et al., 2021). By engaging with LLs, students are not only exposed to authentic language use but are also encouraged to analyze the symbolic value attached to languages and the sociocultural dynamics underlying their presence or absence in public space. This approach aligns with current views of critical pedagogy, which advocate for contextualized, socially relevant learning experiences.

To address this gap in the Uruguayan context, the present study draws on two classroom-based cases in higher education. The first case, conducted in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university course, investigates the LLs of the border region between Uruguay and Brazil—an area shaped by Spanish–Portuguese bilingualism and the local variety known as Portuñol. The second case examines the presence of English in the LLs of Maldonado, a well-known tourist location, and explores how its analysis informed the design of didactic units by pre-service teachers.

By comparing these two cases, the study seeks to demonstrate how LLs can be integrated into language education to raise awareness of language coexistence, hierarchies, and identities, while also encouraging students to critically engage with the sociolinguistic ecologies of their communities. In doing so, it aims to contribute both to the international debate on the pedagogical use of LLs and to the local discussion on innovative approaches to language education in Uruguay.

Building on these considerations, this study pursues the following aims: (a) to examine how LL-based pedagogical designs can foster critical awareness of language coexistence, visibility and invisibility, and power relations in Uruguayan higher-education EFL settings; and (b) to explore how such designs can be articulated with concrete language teaching and teacher education practices in the Global South.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do LL-based pedagogical interventions in two higher-education contexts in Uruguay raise participants' critical awareness of language coexistence, hierarchies, and (in)visibility in the public space they inhabit?
2. How can LLs be integrated into EFL teaching and teacher education to connect classroom practices with local linguistic ecologies in a Global South context?

Literature Review

Conceptualizing LLs

The concept of linguistic landscapes (LLs) was first systematized by Landry and Bourhis (1997), who define it as the "visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" (p. 23). This includes private signage such as billboards, advertisements, and shop signs, as well as public signage such as street names or governmental notices. According to these authors, LLs serve not only as geographical markers that delineate the linguistic boundaries of a community but also as indicators of the sociolinguistic hierarchies between languages. In multilingual territories, LLs reveal whether a language occupies a position of predominance or subordination, particularly in diglossic settings such as the one described in the first case study of this research. In this sense, LLs fulfill both an informational function (by signaling which languages are used to access services) and a symbolic function (by signaling the status and power attributed to those languages) (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). This dual role is further reinforced by Gorter (2012) who argues that LLs do more than simply mirror language diversity; they also expose the underlying ideologies and power struggles negotiated among different stakeholders or members of distinct language communities. Shohamy and Gorter (2009) exemplify this by showing how official language signage can fail to represent how local residents linguistically construct their own public spaces—an act that can be understood as a form of resistance to top-down language policies.

LLs in Educational Contexts: The Schoolscape

The exploration of LLs has also been extended to institutional contexts, a line of research often referred to as *schoolscaping*. Brown (2012), for instance, examined the coexistence of the regional language Võro and Standard Estonian in kindergartens and elementary schools located in Southeastern Estonia, revealing the continued predominance of the latter despite recent revitalization efforts for Võro as a minority language. Similarly, Wedin (2021) investigated how the diverse linguistic repertoires of newly arrived students in a Swedish upper secondary school were represented—or, in most cases, rendered invisible—within the school's LL. Her findings revealed that languages other than Swedish and English were largely absent, highlighting how schoolscapes can reinforce dominant language ideologies that do not necessarily reflect the actual linguistic behaviors of their communities.

Beyond examining how LLs reveal how languages interact within a community, their potential as a pedagogical tool—particularly in language education—has also attracted increasing scholarly attention. Several studies have explored how LL-based activities can enhance students' linguistic awareness, connect theoretical knowledge with real-world language use, and encourage reflection on multilingualism and inclusion. For instance, Romera Manzanares (2023) engaged university students enrolled in a Spanish language course in analyzing LLs from their local area to link the theoretical modules of the course—Spanish phonetics, phonology, morphology, lexis, and syntax—with linguistic phenomena encountered in street signage. Similarly, Rivera (2021) reported positive results when international students in an introductory Hispanic linguistics course were encouraged to document and discuss the LLs of Madrid and nearby areas through a collaborative class blog. Lourenço and Melo-Pfeifer (2022) went beyond the structural analysis of language to use LLs as a means of fostering plurilingual awareness and developing global citizenship skills. Their study proposed a three-stage model for working with LLs in the classroom: first, observing and identifying linguistic diversity in the environment; second, reflecting on the social and ideological factors underlying that diversity; and third, intervening in the landscape to promote more inclusive representations of language use within the community.

LL for Foreign Language Teaching

The growing body of LL research in the fields of linguistics and education prompted studies around the potential of LLs in second language learning and teaching. In this area, LLs appeared as an opportunity for students to become explorers by researching the LLs in their communities and connecting the classroom with the outside world while developing their language command, translingual competence, and pragmatic and multimodal analysis skills (Solmaz, 2021). In her study, Hayik (2020) used the LL of an Arab-Israeli area to improve college EFL students' writing skills while raising awareness of their underrepresented language and the related life quality as a minority group. This adds a more critical layer to the implementation of LLs in the classroom. Navas (2025) explored LLs within a Spanish undergraduate course in the UK, where students identified, documented, and interpreted how Spanish was represented in public spaces. This approach proved particularly beneficial in this non-immersion context, where opportunities for interaction with Spanish native speakers are limited. The author reflects on the usefulness of LLs as a pedagogical resource for foreign language teaching, highlighting its potential to motivate students and engage them in analysing authentic input from their everyday settings.

In this context, the authenticity of LLs is an invitation for teachers to create opportunities for L2 learners to go beyond the mere study of linguistic features. Solmaz (2023) showed this by analysing how LLs can be incorporated into the EFL pre-service teacher training by asking future teachers to work with researchers who collected photographic evidence of LLs in their area. The study showed that this design encouraged students to reflect on the presence and the role of English in their daily life through street signage and to consider how they could integrate this approach into their own teaching practices. In another study, Solmaz (2024) also implemented this approach during a professional development workshop with Turkish EFL in-service teachers, who, after being introduced to the LLs framework, designed their own LL-based lessons. Results showed how this workshop participation improved teachers' awareness and understanding of the affordances of LLs as a pedagogical tool to be incorporated in their curricula.

A significant contribution to the pedagogical integration of LLs into language education was made by Solmaz and Przymus (2021), who proposed a literacies-based pedagogical model designed to guide the systematic incorporation of LLs into L2 teaching and learning contexts. Their model builds on the Multiliteracies Framework (New London Group, 1996) and the Bridging Activities Framework (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008), combining the principles of literacy pedagogy and critical engagement with real-world semiotic environments.

The model is structured around four flexible and cyclical phases: situated practice, where learners observe and document LLs instances in their environment; guided exploration, where they analyze linguistic and semiotic features under teacher guidance; creation, where they design their own multimodal LLs artifacts; and transformed practice, which encourages students to interact with authentic LLs beyond the classroom and reflect critically on their social and ideological dimensions. This progression mirrors the principles of multiliteracies by moving from observation to analysis and from production to social action, positioning learners as active participants and meaning-makers rather than passive recipients of language input.

In a similar vein, recent work in educational LLs written by Przymus and Solmaz (2025) has proposed a holistic macro–meso–micro model to account for how LLs can be leveraged pedagogically across different levels of educational practice. This model conceptualizes the macro level in relation to global language ideologies and transnational practices, the meso level as shaped by community dynamics and local institutions, and the micro level as grounded in school and classroom-based engagements with LLs. Central to this approach is the idea that pedagogical value

emerges when awareness of the surrounding linguistic environment is transformed into critical learning, allowing educators and learners to examine language visibility, hierarchies, and power relations in situated contexts.

LLs in Uruguay

In Uruguay, research on LLs remains limited and has focused almost exclusively on their sociolinguistic dimension, with scarce attention to their potential educational applications. Most existing studies examine LLs as reflections of language contact, coexistence, and power relations—especially in border regions where Spanish and Portuguese converge—but do not explore their use for pedagogical purposes or their potential as tools for foreign language teaching and learning, particularly in the field of English language education.

Souza and Domingo (2023) analyzed the LL of the Jaguarão–Río Branco border, aiming to give visibility to the area's linguistic diversity and to understand what local signage reveals about language practices. Their study found that Portuguese and Spanish coexist harmoniously in most signs. This work, *Las lenguas que habito: Estudio de la paisagem linguística da frontera Jaguarão–Río Branco*, was part of a broader research project conducted by the Federal University of Pampa (UNIPAMPA), which also included contributions by undergraduate students majoring in Spanish Language and Hispanic Literature. Although these studies are valuable for documenting regional multilingualism, they are primarily descriptive and lack a pedagogical perspective.

Tristant (2023) conducted a similar study focusing on the commercial LL of Sarandí Avenue in the border city of Rivera, where the first case study in this paper takes place. Her analysis revealed that Spanish was the most dominant language in commercial signage, reflecting its national and prestigious status, while English appeared second, symbolizing international prestige and global influence. Surprisingly, Portuguese—despite being widely used in everyday communication—was largely absent from primary signage and appeared only secondarily to convey practical or informative content to consumers.

While these studies shed light on how languages coexist, compete, and acquire symbolic meaning in public spaces, no published research in Uruguay has yet examined the pedagogical affordances of LLs for language education at either the primary, secondary, or tertiary level. In particular, there is no evidence of studies exploring LLs as a resource for English language teaching or teacher education. This gap underscores the originality and relevance of the present study, which integrates LLs into EFL education to promote critical awareness of multilingualism, linguistic hierarchies, and the social meanings embedded in the LL.

Methodology

This section presents the methodology of this study, structured around two classroom-based designs, adopting a qualitative approach, and aiming at exploring the pedagogical potential of LLs in English language education. Organized as a comparative case study of two pedagogical LL models, the research was grounded in the principles of qualitative enquiry which emphasize participants' experiences, reflections, and meaning-making processes.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative two-case design that brings together two complementary higher-education EFL contexts in Uruguay: a border-region university course for A1/A2 learners (Case 1) and a teacher education course for pre-service English teachers in a tourist-oriented coastal city (Case 2). Case 1 examined a module integrated into an EFL course that focused on analyzing local linguistic landscapes. Data sources included students' journals, the

teacher's field notes, semi-structured interviews, and final products (digital presentations and LL designs). Case 2 involved pre-service teachers exploring LLs from a pedagogical perspective and connecting their analyses to their own teaching contexts. Data consisted of lesson plans, written reflections, interviews, and the teacher's journal. A convenience sample was used for both cases, as each course was taught by one of the researchers.

These two cases were brought together to examine the pedagogical affordances of LL-based work across different higher-education EFL profiles: learners with basic language proficiency and advanced users of English preparing to become teachers. This contrast allowed for a broader understanding of how LLs function as pedagogical tools across the EFL spectrum. The cases also differ in their sociolinguistic settings: a multilingual, commercially active border region and a predominantly Spanish-speaking coastal city shaped by tourism. Besides, the two-case design also allowed the researchers to examine emerging pedagogical dimensions from LL-based work: namely, the development of critical awareness among learners and the pedagogical agency of pre-service teachers, who were encouraged to critically reflect on LLs as both learners and future practitioners.

Context and Settings

Context 1

The first study took place in an area with very remarkable characteristics: the open border between Brazil and Uruguay, known as *Frontera de la Paz.* Divided by only one street that serves as an imaginary line that separates the Uruguayan city of Rivera from its Brazilian counterpart, Santana do Livramento, this area lacks strict migration controls. This ensures an impressive mobility of people and trading products, which is exacerbated by the fact that it is a duty-free zone.

The border area between Uruguay and Brazil is known for its linguistic diversity, which can be experienced in the aforementioned neighboring cities. Despite the frequent reference to Uruguay as a monolingual country, the area of Rivera and Santana do Livramento is proof of the coexistence of two standard languages—Spanish and Portuguese—and one local regional variety in the northern Uruguayan area. This variety is popularly known as *dialecto fronterizo, DPU, portugués uruguayo, portugués fronterizo* or *portuñol* (Barrios, 2018). Bertolotti and Coll (2014) linked the origin of this regional variety to an 1877 Uruguayan education policy that enforced the use of Spanish as the only medium of instruction in Uruguay at a time when Portuguese was seen as a threat to the country's national identity. It was not until that time that Spanish formally came into contact with the lusophone community that populated the border at that time, giving birth to this local dialect. According to General Law of Education N° 18437, Portuñol has been recognized as the mother tongue of many inhabitants of the border, mostly associated with lower social classes, as posed by Albertoni (2021). However, it is still stigmatized as an informal and uneducated linguistic variety. All this has meant that Rivera, experiences a particular linguistic context which is both bilingual and diglossic, as one variety is used for academic and official purposes, whereas the other is limited to family and informal contexts. In the last decades, the status of Portuguese and Portuñol has shifted for the better. Portuguese has gained prominence mostly due to a commercial and political alliance between Brazil and Uruguay, while the status of the local dialect has been revitalized by intellectuals and artists who consider it part of the country's regional heritage.

Context 2

The second study was carried out in Maldonado, one of Uruguay's coastal departments located in the southeastern region of the country. The area is home to the internationally renowned

city of Punta del Este, a major tourist destination attracting visitors from all over the world, particularly Argentina, Brazil, and Europe. This cosmopolitan flow of tourists and seasonal residents has positioned Maldonado as one of the most economically dynamic regions in Uruguay, where the tourism industry plays a central role in shaping both the local economy and cultural life.

Regarding the LL of Maldonado, it reflects this strong touristic orientation. While Spanish remains the predominant language used by residents in everyday communication, English occupies a visible and symbolic position in public spaces, especially in commercial, gastronomic, and real estate signage. Its presence (often alongside other languages such as Portuguese) tends to project prestige, modernity, and international connectivity rather than reflecting actual patterns of local bilingualism. In this sense, the visibility of English in the city's public spaces is closely tied to its association with global tourism, business, and consumption.

Case Study 1

The study reports on a five-week unit integrated into an A1/A2 EFL university course, focused on analyzing local linguistic landscapes on the Uruguay–Brazil border. Delivered through weekly in-person sessions complemented by out-of-class tasks, the module aimed to raise students' awareness of language coexistence, inclusion, exclusion, and multilingual practices as reflected in local signage. Sixteen local students participated in guided local research and analysis of LLs, culminating in the design of an original or modified LL that promotes inclusivity. The unit was organized into five stages, each implemented in a face-to-face session with pre- and post-activities (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Case Study 1: Stages of the Research Design

Stage 1 – Exploring LLs

- Define LLs & taxonomies.
- Collect 10 photos of local LLs + geotags.

Stage 2 – Research Design & First Coding

- Share & discuss collected data.
- Brainstorm research questions.
- Upload data to *Lingscape.*
- First individual coding.

Stage 3 – Collaborative Coding and Individual Analysis

- Collaborative second coding.
- Individual data analysis / Answer RQs.

Stage 4 – Peer Learning & Final Group Analysis

- Share individual analyses.
- Identify challenges & strategies.
- Group data analysis / Answer RQs /digital presentation.
- Compare to published paper.
- Plan LL group intervention.

Stage 5 – Final Reflection & Product Presentation

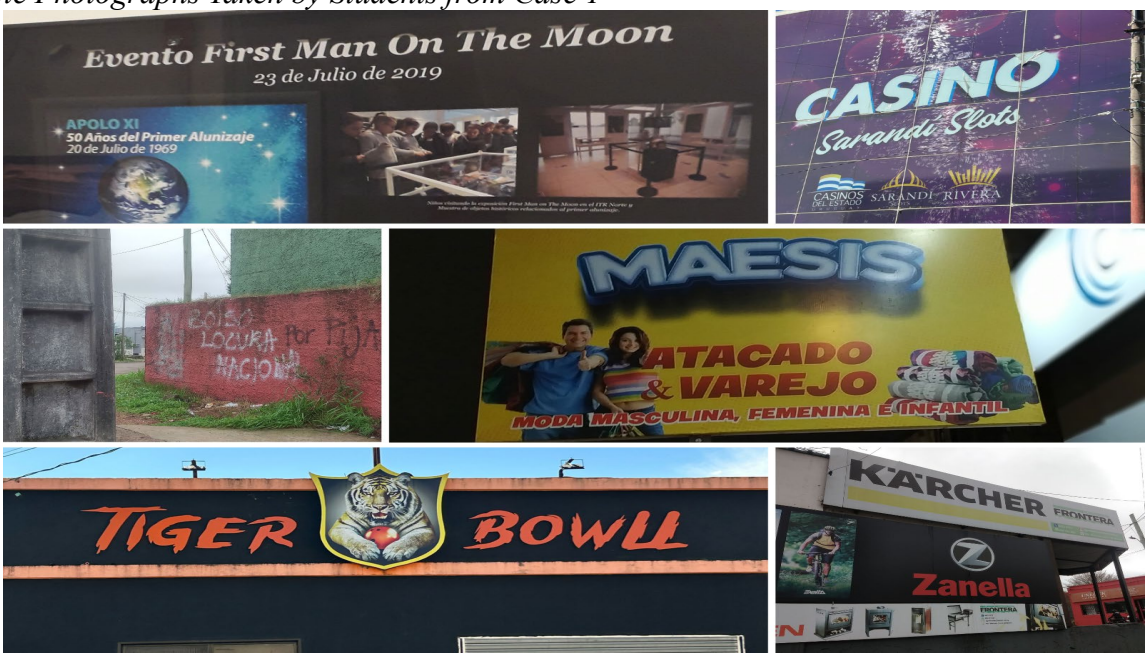
- Reflection Hall activity.
- Present final LL products.
- Peer & teacher feedback.

Procedure

The first stage introduced students to the concept of linguistic landscapes through a review of key definitions and a reflection on examples from their local context. Supported by a collaborative sample analysis conducted in class, students were then familiarized with basic LL taxonomies from Lingscape focusing on location, purpose, status, and languages used. Following this preparation, students collected data by photographing at least ten local signs from their neighborhood, university, or border area, uploading them with location details to a shared WhatsApp group. The stage concluded with a reflective journal entry on their initial experience analyzing LLs.

Figure 2

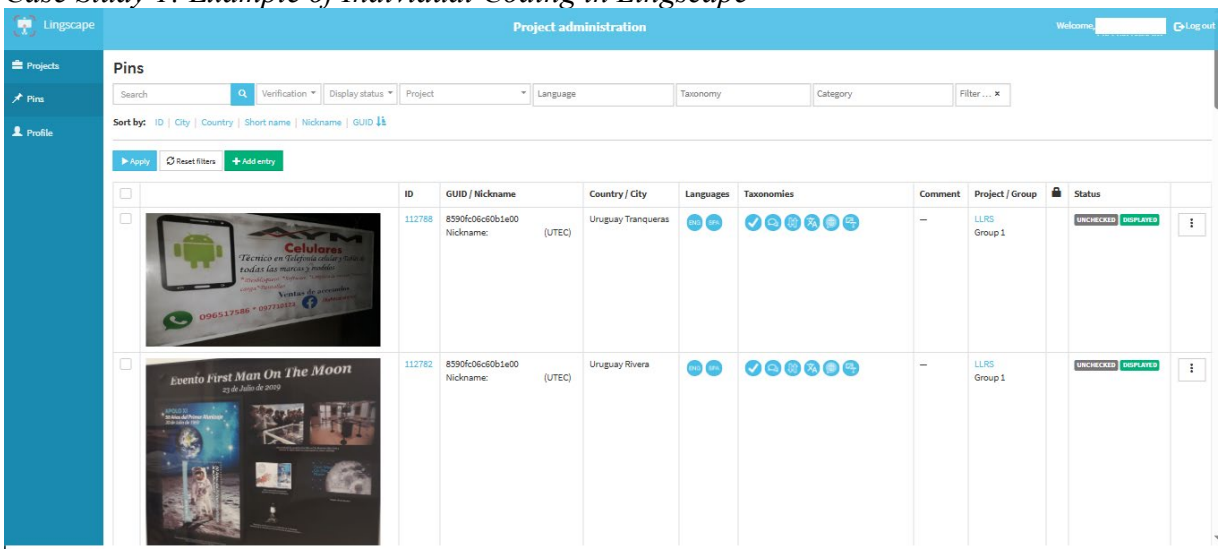
Sample Photographs Taken by Students from Case 1



During the second stage, students shared and documented their initial findings, collaboratively brainstorming and selecting research questions aligned with their interests. They then uploaded their collected images to the Lingscape app and conducted an initial individual coding of the signs using established and newly introduced taxonomies. The stage concluded with a reflective journal entry on what linguistic landscapes can reveal about language coexistence in the community.

Figure 3

Case Study 1: Example of Individual Coding in Lingscape



In the third stage, students collaboratively revised their initial coding using a shared Google Sheet and then individually analyzed the data, answering the research questions and graphing results to support their interpretations.

The fourth stage focused on peer learning, as students shared challenges, strategies, and preliminary analyses, revising their work in small groups. They then worked in groups to answer assigned research questions and created audiovisual presentations explaining their analytical process and findings. As follow-up tasks, students compared their results with a published local LL study and designed their own inclusive linguistic landscapes based on the module's insights. They also responded to some questions to give context to their LLs, namely dealing with the LL's purpose, how languages coexisted, and what they communicated in terms of inclusion or exclusion of certain languages.

The fifth stage was devoted to reflecting on the final takeaways of the module in a "reflection hall," where participants read and selected statements and opinions regarding LLs that best resonated with them, and presented their final product to the class.

Scaffolding, Language Barriers and Correspondence to EFL Course Objectives

Although students had only a basic command of the foreign language, this did not hinder the implementation of LL activities, as several pedagogical strategies were adopted to support learning. Simple and accessible language was used for informational analyses, specifically when referring to the taxonomies used to analyze LLs. Also, support was offered through in class modelling and collaborative sample analyses that helped clarify key terminology. When activities required deeper reflection on symbolic meanings, students were encouraged to draw on their full linguistic repertoire through translanguaging which enabled richer expression of personal experiences. Writing-focused practices (such as reflective journals and in-class guided research tasks) allowed students to carefully develop their ideas with time and the help of online dictionaries, class materials, or AI-powered writing assistants. Furthermore, the design of the tasks in small groups and the relatively small cohort size enabled the teacher to give more personalized feedback during the process. Additionally, students' prior familiarity with basic research processes facilitated engagement with analytical tasks, which were also completed in class. The integration of LLs into

the EFL classroom was closely connected to concrete language learning objectives in relation to reading, writing, vocabulary development, and critical literacy. LL-based activities were embedded within the second unit of the course which focuses on expository texts, providing students with meaningful, real-world contexts through which to develop elementary literacy skills. While engaging with local LLs, students practiced key reading strategies, which were part of the course objectives. These activities also required learners to identify purpose, audience, and main ideas, thereby strengthening their analytical reading abilities. The unit culminated in the production of their own linguistic landscapes as expository.

Case Study 2

This classroom-based study was conducted within the framework of the course *Linguistics I*, taught in the third year of a State English teacher education program in Uruguay. The course primarily focuses on Sociolinguistics, and for the purposes of this project, the topic of linguistic landscapes was explicitly integrated into the syllabus. The study was designed as part of the regular coursework and was evaluated as the students' second mid-term assignment. This ensured both curricular relevance and consistent student engagement.

The project extended over six weeks and involved pre-service English teachers working in pairs or groups of three. A total of eleven students participated. The overall aim was to introduce LLs not only as an object of sociolinguistic inquiry but also as a pedagogical resource, to allow students to bridge theoretical perspectives with their future professional practice. To achieve this, the design combined four interconnected stages: as can be observed in Figure 4, theoretical input, fieldwork, critical reflection, and pedagogical application.

Across the four stages, the project was explicitly linked to EFL learning goals such as vocabulary development, interpretive reading of multimodal texts, and critical discussion of language use in context. LL images functioned as multimodal texts that students had to describe, interpret, and recontextualise for their own learners, thereby combining the development of disciplinary knowledge in sociolinguistics with practical lesson design skills.

Figure 4

Case Study 2: Stages of the Research Design

Stage 1 – Theoretical Foundation

- Video lecture on LLs.
- Selected readings (theoretical and analytical frameworks).
- Guiding questions for reflection.

Stage 2 – Fieldwork (Photo Collection of LLs)

- Exploration of local environments.
- Photographic documentation of public signage (official, commercial, graffiti). Focus on Spanish and English.

Stage 3 – Analysis & Reflection

- Upload of photographic corpus with short analyses. Guiding focus: languages present, intended audience, sociocultural meaning, and motivations.
- Individual reflective essay (200–300 words) connecting LLs to cultural and linguistic dynamics.

Stage 4 – Pedagogical Application

- Group creation of original EFL lesson plans using LL images as realia.
  Learning objectives, communicative activities, and skills specified.
  Activities: vocabulary building, audience/purpose analysis, role-play, and reflection.
- Lesson summary linking LLs to learning outcomes.

Stage 5 – Written Reflection

- Individual written reflection (200-300 words)
- Focus: connection between LL analysis and broader cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical insights
- Guiding questions.

Procedure

The first stage established the theoretical foundation through a video lecture and selected readings on LLs, addressing definitions, analytical frameworks, and sociolinguistic implications. These resources guided students' reflection on how public signage reflects language attitudes, on factors that influence language choice, and on pedagogical applications of LLs, providing the conceptual tools needed for the following stages.

The second stage involved fieldwork, with students documenting LLs in their local environments by photographing official and informal signage. Attention was given to the presence of Spanish, English, and other languages (as well as multilingual and hybrid practices) in order to create a photographic corpus capturing the linguistic diversity of their communities.

In the third stage, students uploaded their photographs and completed written analyses addressing language use (see Figure 5), target audiences, social meanings, and motivations behind linguistic choices. In addition, they also wrote a short reflective essay examining how the observed linguistic landscapes related to broader cultural and linguistic dynamics, including reflections on unexpected findings and implications for community identity and interaction.

Figure 5

Case Study 2: Initial Photograph Classification

Picture (Downtown/Stores)	Composition	Directedness	Discourse	Distribution	Form	Linguality	Placement	Status	Temporality	Variety
1-Store	Text	Bottom-Up	Commercial	Fragmentary	Store Sign	Bilingual	Above the Store's Entrance	Authorized	Permanent	Standard
2-Store	Text	Bottom-Up	Commercial	-	Store Sign	Monolingual	Barber Shop Sign	Authorized	Permanent	Standard
3-Store	Text	Bottom-Up	Commercial	-	Store Sign	Monolingual	Above the Store's Entrance	Authorized	Permanent	Standard
4-Store	Text	Bottom-Up	Commercial	Fragmentary	Store Sign	Bilingual	Above the Store's Entrance	Authorized	Permanent	Standard
5-Store	Symbol-Text	Bottom-Up	Commercial	Fragmentary	Store Sign	Bilingual	Above the Store's Entrance	Authorized	Permanent	Standard
6-Store	Symbol-Text	Bottom-Up	Commercial	Fragmentary	Store Sign	Bilingual	Above the Store's Entrance	Authorized	Permanent	Standard
7-Store	Symbol-Text	Bottom-Up	Commercial	-	Store Sign	Monolingual	Above the Store's Entrance	Authorized	Permanent	Standard
8-Store	Symbol-Text	Bottom-Up	Commercial	-	Store Sign	Monolingual	Above the Store's Entrance	Authorized	Permanent	Standard

9-Store	Symbol-Text	Bottom-Up	Commercial	Fragmentary	Store Sign	Bilingual	Above the Store's Entrance	Authorized	Event-Related	Standard

The final stage focused on pedagogical application. Based on the corpus collected, each group designed an original EFL lesson plan using LL images as realia. Lesson plans included clear learning objectives, a sequence of communicative activities, and skills to be developed. Common activities included vocabulary expansion, audience and purpose analysis, role-plays, and reflective discussions connecting classroom learning with students' everyday linguistic experiences. Each plan also included a brief summary explaining how the use of LLs supported the proposed learning goals. An example lesson plan is included under Section 4.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed separately for each case to preserve their specificity, using an iterative thematic coding process. Case 1 drew on students' journal entries, group digital presentations, and final interviews, while Case 2 included students' journals and written reflections, semi-structured interviews, lesson plans, and the teacher's field notes.

In Case 1, analysis began with students' responses to an initial journal task in which they reflected on language predominance in the LLs of Rivera, Santana, and the border based on photographs they had taken. Responses were anonymized and initially coded to capture early perceptions of language presence; additional themes emerged, such as the role of English and perceptions of linguistic adaptability. Students' final presentations were then analyzed to identify shifts in perspectives, followed by thematic analysis of interview transcripts, which yielded three main themes: new ways of reading LLs and space, language inclusion and exclusion, and language hierarchies.

Case 2 data were first read holistically to identify recurrent ideas related to perceptions of LLs, language hierarchies, and pedagogical affordances. In a second coding cycle, these were consolidated into broader themes such as shifting perceptions of local space, visibility and invisibility of languages, tensions between prestige and everyday use, and pedagogical recontextualization.

To enhance trustworthiness, coding procedures and preliminary findings were shared and discussed through peer debriefing, and data were revisited to refine codes and themes when discrepancies emerged.

Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study. Their presentation begins with the primary findings from Case 1, organized around the two research questions guiding the study, and are followed by the results of Case 2, which are structured in the same manner.

Case Study 1

Research Question (RQ) 1: How do LL-based pedagogical interventions in two higher-education contexts in Uruguay raise participants' critical awareness of language coexistence, hierarchies, and (in)visibility in the public space they inhabit?

Initial and Final Perceptions of Language Presence

Following students' initial photographic collection, their assumptions about which languages would appear in local LLs were explored in class. These initial reflections were quantified and later contrasted with the research findings.

At this stage, participants' expectations varied. Three participants believed that a single language, either Spanish or Portuguese, would predominate, while five participants expected bilingual or trilingual signage, reflecting the official languages of the bordering countries. Five students anticipated a strong presence of English alongside Spanish, although no mention was made of other languages. Finally, one participant assumed that the closer to the border line, the more variety of languages would be present.

Language presence was linked to different factors: Portuguese to Brazilian cultural influence, Spanish to regulatory use in Uruguay, and English to its symbolic function of adding sophistication and attractiveness to commercial signage rather than to tourism.

A salient belief that emerged was that Uruguayans tend to adapt to other languages, particularly Portuguese, in ways perceived as non-reciprocal: "*Uruguay se adapta a los* Brazilian customers*, mientras que* Brazilian people *no nos toman en cuenta, o sea el* Spanish."[1]

Research findings contrasted these assumptions. Spanish was the most frequent language in Rivera's LLs, followed by English, while Portuguese appeared only marginally. In the limited sample from the borderline, Portuguese predominated, contrary to initial expectations of linguistic mixture. Although students initially overlooked other languages, Italian and French were later identified, while the absence of Portuñol was attributed to its primarily spoken nature.

Tensions Between LLs and Local Culture

In the interviews, two participants referred to an implicit tension between public and private signs. One of them understood the former represented the official language of the place, while the latter tended to represent the local culture and languages. Another participant reflected on how different registers coexisted in LLs depending on the line of business, for example associating more formal language with real estate agencies and more familiar, local, and everyday language in shops.

Given the fact that it is a border location, a student highlighted that he did not expect a strong presence of English and instead emphasized the lack of Portuguese-Spanish bilingual signage. A common view among participants was that English appeared in the landscape as a marker of sophistication or commercial attractiveness, as it was included in advertisements and business signage. Regarding the role of minority languages (i.e., Italian and French) present in street signage, some students connected it to specific fields such as cuisine and cosmetics.

One participant brought attention to the different hierarchies languages had, highlighting the higher social status of English, Spanish, and French, as opposed to Portuñol. With reference to this comment, another student pointed out how the local dialect was excluded from the signs, even though it is closely connected to local culture and identity.

RQ2: How can LLs be integrated into EFL teaching and teacher education to connect classroom practices with local linguistic ecologies in a Global South context?

Developing Analytical Awareness

In all cases, participants reported a change in perspective on how they view the geographic space they inhabit, the street signage, and the languages represented there, stating that working with this module gave them a new lens through which to see their own area.

[1] Uruguay adapts to Brazilian customers, while Brazilian people do not take us into account, that is Spanish.

Regarding this issue, one participant said the module gave the class the chance to challenge their preconceptions, which ended up being refuted by the research findings: "*ideas que nosotros teníamos que pensábamos que eran correctas, pero resulta que se vinieron abajo*."[2]

Some students stated they started to question the motivation behind the inclusion of certain languages in street signage, moving beyond touristic purposes to consider political and cultural factors. These included governmental decisions, the association of certain linguistic codes with specific fields or social status, and the ways linguistic choices in signage respond to the community where it is situated. One student commented that *"el entorno modifica el idioma y las cartelerías no pensando en quién va a ir, sino en la gente que vive ahí, que transita en el lugar a diario*."[3]

Critical Awareness of Inclusion/Exclusion

Drawing on the collection of photographs and their analysis, several students concluded that languages can be used to either include or exclude members of the community, therefore recognizing linguistic inequalities in their area. To illustrate this, one of the participants noticed that even though Rivera is a multicultural city, this was not reflected in its LL, as most of its signs were in Spanish, concluding that it's not as friendly and open as it may seem. He goes on further to assert that "*el idioma muchas veces, creo que más que incluir también acá en la frontera, excluye distintos sectores, o sea, es como un filtro…*"[4] Along this line, one student questioned the absence of Portuguese in the LL, for its relevance in this context, whereas another participant mentioned that the city was not prepared for tourism, as city signs were in Spanish and were not informative enough for anyone speaking other languages. This was reinforced by the comment that the more languages that appear in the LL, the more people can feel included when they are in the area.

Case Study 2

Taken together, the findings from the Maldonado case suggest that integrating LLs into EFL teacher education can serve dual purposes: on one hand, as a critical lens through which teachers and learners can examine how language operates within social hierarchies and global discourses of power; and on the other hand, as a pedagogical resource that contextualizes language learning and bridges classroom and community.

RQ1**:** How do LL-based pedagogical interventions in two higher-education contexts in Uruguay raise participants' critical awareness of language coexistence, hierarchies, and (in)visibility in the public space they inhabit?

Language, Power, and Representation in LLs

Students' reflections frequently focused on the visibility of English in public spaces and the social meanings attached to its use, particularly in commercial signage. Participants observed that while store names usually remain in Spanish, English is commonly used in promotional messages (e.g., "30% SALE"), prompting discussions about English as a symbolic resource associated with prestige, modernity, and consumer appeal rather than communicative necessity.

Commercial LL images from Maldonado show how English is visually mobilized to hint urgency and modernity. Expressions such as *sale* and *off* are embedded in Spanish promotional

[2] ideas that we thought were right, but went to pieces.

[3] the environment modifies the language and signs, not thinking about who is going to visit the place, but about those who live there, and go around it daily.

[4] Many a time, more than including, also here in the border, the language excludes different sectors, that is, it's like a filter…

phrases and often emphasized through larger fonts or contrasting colors, positioning English as the semiotic resource that carries prestige. Mixed-language signs combining Spanish product descriptions with English brand slogans and discount formulas like “Termos Stanley since 1913. 18% *Descuento* OFF” and “*Juguetes*. 50% Off en la segunda unidad” construct an image of global connectedness while addressing local consumers (see Figure 6).

As they analyzed LL photographs from their own neighborhoods, several pre-service teachers reported becoming aware of how pervasive English is in local commercial signage for the first time. As one student wrote, “words like *shop, cash* or *off* are so common that people treat them as if they had always been part of our language.” Another reflection pointed to how this ubiquity both indexes prestige and raises accessibility concerns: “I was genuinely surprised to realize that almost eight out of ten store signs contain one or two words in English, which makes local businesses look *chic* and *modern* but may also make the space feel less accessible for those who do not understand these words.”

Another recurrent theme emerged from the observation of house names in residential areas, where English words or foreign names appeared frequently. Participants discussed how such naming practices could signal aspirations toward social distinction or international belonging, illustrating how linguistic choices become markers of identity and status. These analyses provided a powerful entry point for discussing language ideologies and power relations, allowing pre-service teachers to link abstract sociolinguistic concepts such as symbolic capital or linguistic prestige to tangible examples drawn from their own communities.

Importantly, these reflections sparked a research-oriented curiosity among participants, many of whom began to formulate new questions that extended beyond the visible aspects of the LL. Some wondered, for instance, whether English was also used in interpersonal communication inside the stores that displayed English-language signage or whether its presence was confined to marketing and visual aesthetics. Others expressed interest in exploring the attitudes of local residents toward the increasing presence of English in public and commercial spaces. These emerging questions demonstrated the transformative potential of LL-based pedagogy—not only as a means of teaching English through authentic materials, but also as a way of cultivating critical awareness, curiosity, and reflexivity among future educators.

Figure 6

Case Study 2: Sample Photographs

RQ2: How can LLs be integrated into EFL teaching and teacher education to connect classroom practices with local linguistic ecologies in a Global South context?

Pedagogical Value of Linguistic Landscapes

In the Maldonado case, LLs also became a catalyst for pedagogical agency, as pre-service teachers were required to translate their sociolinguistic insights into concrete lesson plans, materials, and classroom tasks. Through this process, they began to position themselves not only as analysts of LLs but also as designers of LL-based lessons for their future learners.

The Maldonado case revealed a wide range of creative and context-sensitive ways in which pre-service teachers engaged with the pedagogical potential of LLs. One of the most relevant findings was how participants were able to adapt the concept of LLs to their own teaching realities, transforming them into concrete pedagogical resources rather than purely theoretical notions. Instead of viewing LLs solely as objects of linguistic analysis, the students conceptualized them as realia that could enrich classroom activities and make English learning more meaningful and connected to everyday life.

One of the LL-based lesson plans, for instance, focused on how English is used in local advertising and sales signage. Working with photographs of shopfront signs and discount offers from their city, pre-service teachers designed a sequence that guided learners through noticing and analyzing sales-related vocabulary, discussing target audiences and purposes, role-playing customer-shopkeeper interactions, and reflecting on how English connects with global consumer culture in their everyday environment. The main elements of this lesson plan are summarized in Appendix A. The lesson drew on photographs of local shopfront signs and discount offers as central LL artefacts (as shown in Figure 6).

In addition to the Maldonado lesson mentioned above, pre-service teachers produced several other lesson plans drawing on LL photographs collected in their local contexts. As an illustration, Appendix B presents a sample set of classroom materials based on pictures taken at the local airport and designed for a lesson plan focusing on mobility, airport procedures, and English as a lingua franca.

Some participants encouraged their students to explore LLs in both physical and digital environments while others designed tasks that involved observing local signage or identifying English use on social media. This broadened the concept of LLs beyond street-based spaces and highlighted hybrid landscapes where physical and virtual domains intersect, helping learners view language as a socially embedded practice rather than a classroom-bound construct.

Pre-service teachers' lesson plans also showed their ability to connect LL input with curricular content. Rather than relying on established academic typologies (such as official vs. non-official signage or top-down vs. bottom-up signs), participants organized collected materials into thematic categories aligned with teaching objectives (e.g., travel, commerce, public services). This

reflected an emerging sense of pedagogical agency, as LLs were adapted to local needs instead of fitting instruction to predefined frameworks.

Overall, the process demonstrated the flexibility of LLs as pedagogical tools for integrating linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic content. Using authentic public texts supported communicative, situated activities and fostered vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, and intercultural reflection. This phase of the project illustrates how LL-based pedagogy can promote contextualized, learner-centered, and locally grounded approaches to English teaching.

Discussion

The findings from the two case studies demonstrate the pedagogical potential of linguistic landscapes to foster critical, contextualized language learning in Uruguayan EFL education while also highlighting teachers' pedagogical agency in interpreting and mobilizing local spaces for learning. In both contexts, LLs functioned simultaneously as objects of inquiry and pedagogical resources, enabling learners and teachers to engage with language as a social practice shaped by local sociolinguistic ecologies. At the same time, each case illuminated distinct configurations of language visibility, identity, and power.

In the Rivera–Livramento border context, students' initial assumptions about language presence were challenged by their empirical findings. While many expected bilingual/trilingual signage or LLs dominated by either Spanish or Portuguese, analysis revealed the pervasive presence of English and the near invisibility of Portuguese. This discrepancy encouraged learners to critically examine linguistic hierarchies and to thoughtfully consider the historical and political factors underlying them. The marginal presence of Portuguese and the absence of Portuñol were interpreted as reflecting long-standing processes of stigmatization and contested linguistic legitimacy as documented by Bertolotti and Coll (2014) and Albertoni (2021), fostering students' emerging critical awareness of how languages compete for symbolic space in the public sphere.

In Case 2, participants increasingly interpreted LLs as ideological artifacts that reveal social hierarchies and cultural aspirations. In Maldonado, English emerged as a language of symbolic power, which was strategically used in commercial and domestic signage to convey prestige and cosmopolitanism. Discussions around the selective and decorative use of English (e.g., in store names or sale announcements) revealed a growing understanding of language as a system of values that operates beyond communicative function and prompted new research-oriented questions about how English circulates across communicative domains and shapes perceptions of identity and status.

From a pedagogical perspective, both cases illustrate how LLs can catalyze pedagogical innovation and critical inquiry. In Maldonado, pre-service teachers demonstrated pedagogical agency by recontextualizing LLs into lesson plans and classroom materials, bridging curricular content with students' lived experiences through contextualized and experiential designs. In Rivera, LL-based tasks enabled students and teachers to critically interpret their own environments and reflect on the social consequences of language visibility and invisibility. As a whole, these cases show how LLs can support culturally relevant pedagogical design across educational levels.

Taken together, the two cases illustrate complementary perspectives on the pedagogical and sociolinguistic dimensions of LLs. The Rivera-Livramento study foregrounded language awareness and critical observation, showing how learners perceive the multilingual complexity of their everyday environment and uncover the hidden linguistic hierarchies that shape their environment. The Maldonado case, on the other hand, emphasized pedagogical agency and reflective practice,

highlighting how teachers can transform their local LLs into meaningful instructional tools. In both settings, engagement with LLs moved participants beyond surface-level language description toward a deeper, more critical understanding of the relationships among language, space, and power. These two levels of awareness echo the first two stages identified by Lourenço and Melo-Pfeifer (2022): first, observing and identifying linguistic diversity in the environment, and second reflecting on the social and ideological factors underlying that diversity. In parallel, these stages align with Solmaz's (2021) pedagogical model, particularly the move from situated practice to transformed practice, where learners first engage with the linguistic realities of their context and subsequently reframe them through critical reflection and pedagogical transformation.

Besides, this research directly engages with and empirically substantiates the claim that increased awareness of the LLs surrounding us can be transformed into vital pedagogy and critical learning in educational settings (Przymus & Solmaz, 2025). By integrating LL-based activities into an EFL university course and a teacher education program in Uruguay, the study illustrates how the development of critical awareness is not an end in itself but a process that becomes pedagogically meaningful when connected to participants' lived territories and teaching practices. Moreover, this study resonates with the holistic understanding of educational LLs at the meso level, as suggested by the above-mentioned authors, and exemplifies two pedagogical designs that could bring together community-level linguistic dynamics and classroom practices.

From a cross-case perspective, the border and coastal settings highlight complementary dimensions of LL-based pedagogy. In Case 1, shifts in how beginner EFL learners perceive the multilingual complexity of their everyday environment emerged, whereas in Case 2, pre-service teachers recontextualized LLs into lesson plans and classroom materials, which implies pedagogical agency and critical decision-making in teacher education.

From a broader perspective, these findings position LL-based pedagogy as a promising avenue for EFL education in Uruguay and other Global South contexts where English is both desired and contested. By integrating LLs into classroom practice, teachers and learners can reframe English not as a distant, decontextualized school subject but as a social and cultural phenomenon intersecting with local realities. This approach fosters the development of critical, reflective, and socially aware educators capable of questioning linguistic hierarchies and connecting language education to issues of inclusion, visibility, and global discourse. In this sense, the two cases contribute to broader debates on pedagogical LLs by showing how glocally designed LL projects can serve as a resource for critical language awareness in language education, moving beyond mere contextual novelty. Ultimately, LL-based pedagogical practices can help bridge the gap between global language ideologies and local linguistic ecologies, opening new paths for language teaching that are both context-sensitive and socially transformative.

Conclusion

This study explored how linguistic landscapes can be integrated into English language education in Uruguay, uncovering their potential to bridge classroom learning and the linguistic realities of students' everyday environments. Through two contrasting cases, one located in the bilingual border region of Rivera–Livramento and the other in the coastal city of Maldonado, the research illustrated that LLs can do much more than mirror the sociolinguistic diversity of a place; they can also become meaningful pedagogical tools connecting learners and teachers with the languages that surround them.

When participants began to observe and analyze the signage in their communities, they developed a new awareness of how language circulates in public spaces and how it reflects social hierarchies and cultural identities. This change in perspective moved language learning beyond the classroom walls, turning it from an inquiry into lived experience. Such engagement, even when modest in scale, fostered key components of a more critical and situated approach to EFL education: reflection, curiosity, and a sense of belonging.

The study also points to broader pedagogical implications. Incorporating LLs into teacher education can help future educators design lessons that are context-sensitive, locally grounded, and socially relevant. It encourages teachers to see language not only as a code to be mastered but as a social practice shaped by power, ideology, and space. In contexts like Uruguay, where English is taught as a foreign language within an apparent monolingual system, this shift can open new paths toward more inclusive and reflective forms of teaching.

This study is not without limitations. It is small in scale and focused on two higher-education contexts in Uruguay with heterogeneous participant profiles. The findings are not statistically generalizable but offer contextually grounded insights into the pedagogical affordances of LLs in Global South settings. Future research could extend LL-based pedagogical designs to other educational levels, proficiency ranges, and institutional contexts, as well as explore longitudinal projects to trace the development of critical language awareness over time.

Despite these limitations, the findings point to the value of LLs as both an object of study and a pedagogical tool. Future work could examine linguistic ecologies in other regions of Uruguay and expand LL-based projects through collaborations between educational institutions and local communities. Integrating LLs into EFL classrooms and teacher education can help connect language learning with students' lived realities, highlighting how public language use reflects coexistence, power, and place.

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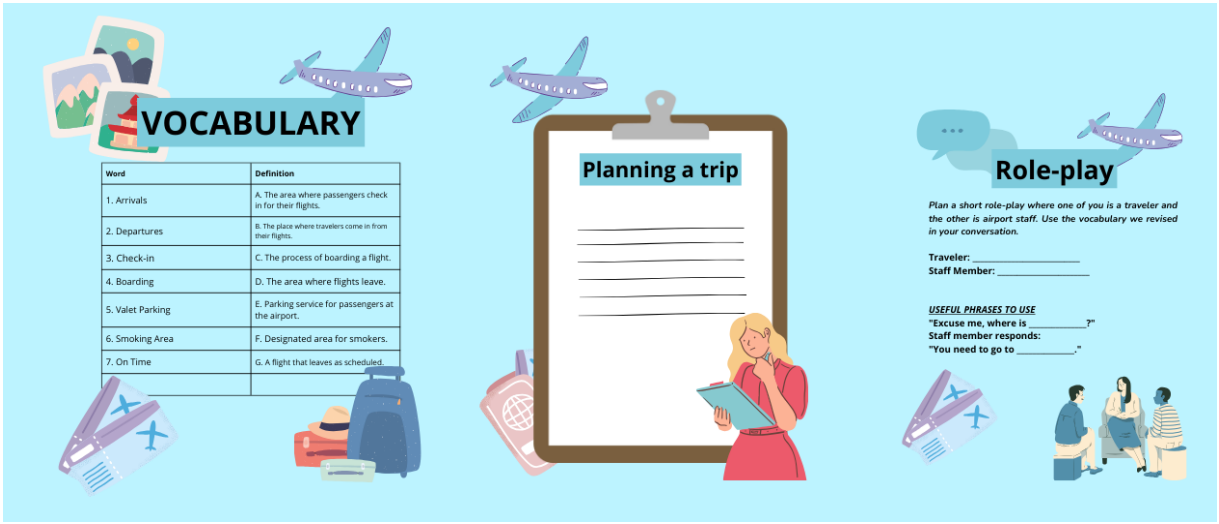
Appendix A
Sample LL-Based Lesson Plan on Local Advertising in Maldonado (Case 2)

LESSON PLAN[5]	
Element	**Description**
Target group	A1 secondary EFL students (approx. 25 learners) in a public school.
Lesson topic	"Thinking ahead: English in sales and advertising signs."
Lesson objectives	Students will be able to: (a) identify and analyse language used in sales and advertising signs; (b) expand vocabulary related to consumer culture; (c) discuss the intended audience and purpose of language in public spaces; (d) reflect on the impact of English in global consumer culture and compare it to local advertising.
LL materials	Photographs of advertising signs and discount offers from the local cityscape (in English and in the local language).
Main activities	**Warm-up:** whole-class discussion on where students see English in their city and why shops might use it. **Vocabulary building:** in pairs, students explore LL images of offers and discounts and extract key sales vocabulary. **Analysis:** small groups discuss target audiences, purposes, and persuasive language choices. **Role-play:** store owner–customer dialogues based on selected signs. **Reflection:** whole-class discussion on (un)understood English sale signs and how English affects the perceived attractiveness of offers.

[5] Lesson designed by Julieta Bares, Facundo Pereira, and Camila Fachelli.

Appendix B
Instructional Presentation Slides for the Airport LL Lesson and Sample Teaching Materials for the Airport LL Lesson[6]



[6] Lesson and materials designed by Abril Tejera and Victoria Vera.