

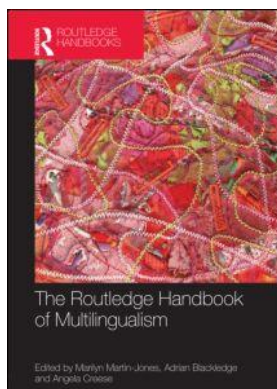
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### **Linguistic landscapes and multilingualism**

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# Linguistic landscapes and multilingualism

*Elana Shohamy*

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## Language in public places

The study of Linguistic Landscape (LL), referring to research about the presence, representation, meanings and interpretation of language displayed in public places, has become a dynamic area of research in the past decade. Languages are spoken and heard, they are also represented and displayed, at times for functional reasons, at other times for symbolic purposes. These items offer rich and stimulating texts on multiple levels: single words with deep meanings and shared knowledge, colourful images, sounds and moving objects, billboards, graffiti as well as a variety of text types displayed in cyber space, open without being physically present. All these items shape the ecology in local, global and transnational contexts and in multiple languages. Most studies of LL build on a definition offered by Landry and Bourhis:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration.

*(1997: 25)*

Yet these displayed languages of the public space are closely related to people as people are the ones who hang the signs, display posters, design advertisements and create websites. It is also people who read, attend to, decipher and interpret these language displays, or at times choose to overlook, ignore or erase them. Indeed work on LL not only focuses on signs per se, but on how people interact with them.

The main goal of LL studies is to describe and identify systematic patterns of the presence and absence of languages in public spaces and to understand the motives, pressures, ideologies, reactions and decision making of people regarding the creation of public signage. In other words, for LL researchers, language in public spaces is not arbitrary and random. Rather, they attempt to explore systematic patterns in the relationship between LL and society, people, politics, ideology, economics, policy, class, identities, multilingualism, multimodalities and to describe and analyse various forms of representation. Research on LL is grounded therefore in multiple theories and varied disciplines, such as applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, language policy,

literacy studies, sociology, political science, education, art, semiotics, architecture, critical geography, urban planning and economics. The very research in the field therefore employed methodology grounded in these disciplines using qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches. In the past few years, there has been growing interest in broader definitions of the notion of LL. It has been argued that LL research should go beyond the varied text types displayed in public spaces of written languages on signs, and it should include images, sounds, drawings and movement, in line with current theories about multimodality.

Research on LL has been very dynamic as can be witnessed by the large number of publications and presentations on the topic in the past few years in the form of journal articles, conference symposia and colloquia, books and edited collections. There have also been three international conferences focusing on the topic (Tel Aviv 2008; Sienna 2009; Strasbourg 2010). Although attention to language in public space is not new, as studies on the topic were carried out in the past, the current attention paid to the field of LL can be explained by the growing attention to multilingualism, the increased focus on ecology and on the environment in understanding linguistic and social phenomena and the emergence of the fields of eco- and geolinguistics. In addition, the advances in documenting technologies have played a role, particularly the advent of digital cameras and access to cyber space, with its multimodal forms of representation. We now have a heightened awareness of the significance of languages in public places and spaces.

### Relationship with multilingualism

Although there has been interest, for some time, in the ways in which written languages are displayed in public places (Coulmas 2009), one of the main characteristics of this new strand of research on LL lies in its special focus on multilingualism and researchers have been spurred on by the realization that the study of language in public spaces offers a unique lens on multilingualism. Thus, a large number of LL studies focus on the presence or absence of *multiple* languages and of hybridized language forms in public spaces. A substantial body of work also investigates forms of representation, motives for and reactions to the display of different languages. The focus of such studies varies enormously and ranges from the impact of English as a global language to public display of national, official, heritage and transnational languages in various types of spaces. This research into language displayed in public places can provide additional indices and criteria for building an understanding of multilingualism in local communities beyond the study of everyday spoken language. The language forms displayed in local public spaces do not always reflect the actual spoken uses of languages by local people. This is the reason why the phenomenon of LL is referred to as the ‘*symbolic* construction’ of the public space (Ben Rafael *et al.* 2006; Ben Rafael 2009).

### Early developments in the field

Coulmas (2009) writes that ‘linguistic landscaping’ is as old as writing and that the beginning of writing coincided with urbanization and the creation of the public sphere. Several early studies documented language use in public spaces in urban settings and tried to understand the phenomenon by drawing on the sociolinguistics theories of the time. One such study is that by Spolsky and Cooper (1991), who documented multilingualism in the public spaces of the Old City of Jerusalem. They placed the LL they observed in the early 1990s in Jerusalem within a wider sociolinguistic and historical context, sketching out key dimensions to bear in mind when studying communities and neighbourhoods. A study by Landry and Bourhis (1997) in French

Canada triggered the current interest in LL. They drew attention to the significance of language in public spaces and showed how LL provided major indicators of language attitudes and of relevant information about societies, about the vitality of particular languages and the inter-relationship of linguistic and ethnic groups, especially in areas of language contestation. The focus of the work of these researchers was on attitudes and perceptions and these were investigated by means of sociolinguistic surveys and questionnaires.

### **Current research: different themes and foci**

In current studies, there has been a methodological shift towards actual documentation of LL in public spaces. The earliest set of publications using this approach appeared in the 2006 thematic issue of the *International Journal of Multilingualism*. They were later published as a thematic book (Gorter 2006). Whereas Landry and Bourhis examined reactions to LL, the current studies focus mostly on documentation and analysis of actual LL practices, on what actors who produce and interpret LL actually *do*. They also take account of different semiotic modes: written language, images, colour and so on. As to the specific methods of analysis, once the languages in the public space are documented using different sampling methods, the frequency of the occurrence of signs in different languages is calculated and analysed using a variety of criteria and statistical methods. This makes it possible to make general statements about the degree to which different languages are represented in various locations. Also, comparisons are made between different kinds of signs, for example ‘top-down’ versus ‘bottom-up’ flows. ‘Top-down’ refers to signs posted by government offices and other central authorities, whereas ‘bottom-up’ refers to signs posted by individual actors such as shopkeepers or organizers of local events. This work is increasingly interdisciplinary and draws on different orienting theories.

Research on LL in multilingual settings has different foci, and different themes have emerged. I discuss some of these below, with reference to particular studies. A number of these articles have been published in a recent edited collection (Shohamy and Gorter 2009).

#### ***Research focusing on particular cities and neighbourhoods***

Some recent studies have taken one urban neighbourhood as the main research site. Take, for example, a study by Bogatto and Hélot (2010) in the Quartier gare (railway station district) of Strasbourg, in France. These researchers found that the commercial signage in the area reflected the multilingual composition of the neighbourhood. They also showed that the regional language (Alsation) intermingled with the other languages displayed in the local LL.

There is also research that documents the emergence of new diasporic spaces within cities. For instance, Miriam Ben Rafael and Eliezer Ben Rafael (2010) report on changes in local LLs in the city of Netanya in Israel, which reflect the presence of French-speaking Jews who have recently settled in the country and who continue to define themselves as a distinct group.

#### ***Comparisons across multilingual settings***

Some recent studies of LLs in multilingual urban settings have had a comparative design: there have been comparisons across cities within the same country and also cross-national studies. I will focus here on two studies that provide particularly good illustrations of the value of comparative work.

A study by Ben Rafael *et al.* (2006) focused on the uses of Arabic and Hebrew in LL in different cities in Israel. These researchers documented top-down and bottom-up signs in a range of settings. The top-down signs were in settings that included religious, governmental, municipal-cultural, educational and medical institutions. They also took into account public signs, such as announcements and street names. The bottom-up signs included those of shops, private businesses, private announcements (e.g. ‘want ads’, sale or rentals of flats or cars). The data collection method was the systematic documentation of each and every sign in the downtown areas of several cities and the use of still photography to capture the detail of a sample of signs in the top-down flow. The study focused on the representation of each of the two official languages of Israel, Hebrew and Arabic, and on the presence of English.

The main findings were that there were significant differences in the representation of the three languages depending on the patterns of residence in the different neighbourhoods. Thus, in the Jewish areas, there were mostly Hebrew and English signs; in Arab areas the signs were mostly in Arabic and Hebrew and in East Jerusalem (an area that is considered by some as occupied by Israel), it was mostly Arabic and English and hardly any Hebrew, except in top-down signs. The results were analysed per city, per neighbourhood, per direction of flow (top-down vs bottom-up) and per area of social life.

Figure 32.1 shows how one can learn about language hierarchies in certain neighbourhoods from the study of LL, based on actual documentation of this kind. The findings of the study by Ben Rafael *et al.* (2006) were explained as follows: the top-down flows in the different urban areas reflected the official status of Hebrew and Arabic, the official languages of Israel. In contrast, the bottom-up flow reflected two key aspects of social life: *either* the demands of commerce and the everyday business of buying and selling, *or* local ideological or political concerns. The use of English was explained with reference to broader commercial and market principles, to the presence of English speakers and to its potential as a status symbol. This study provides us with a deeper understanding of the ways in which LLs are given shape by specific economic, ideological and political forces and conjunctures. However, it is also important to note that the public display of languages did not reflect the actual linguistic diversity in the different neighbourhoods in the study. A wide range of languages are spoken

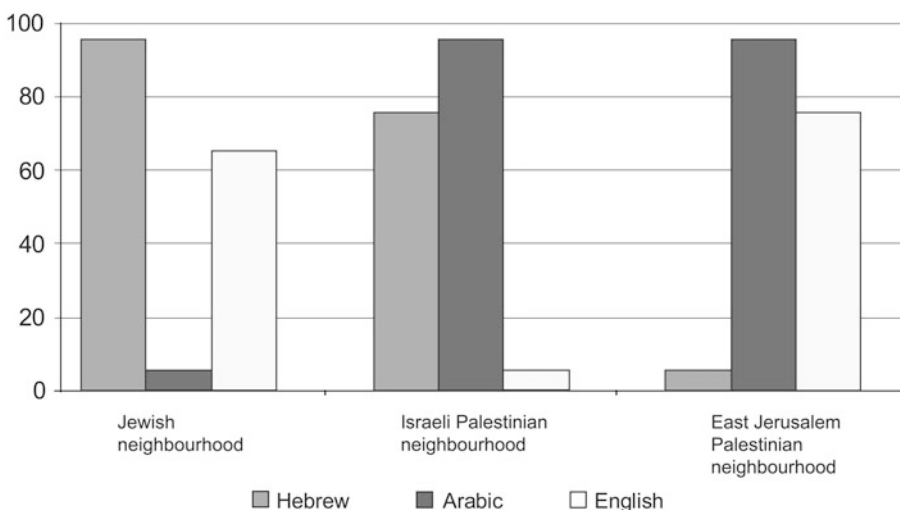


Figure 32.1 Representations of Hebrew, Arabic and English in Israel (Ben Rafael *et al.* 2006).

among different groups in multilingual Israel. So the public signage documented in this study favoured only the official languages and English.

Whereas Ben Rafael *et al.* (2006) compared different urban settings in one country, Cenoz and Gorter (2006) conducted a comparative study of minority language use in urban LLs, in two different areas in Europe. Their study was carried out in two cities where minority languages are widely spoken: San Sebastian (in the Basque country, in the north-west of Spain) and Leewarden (in Friesland, in the North of the Netherlands). Their data was collected in the two main streets of the two cities and the main focus of the study was on examining the presence and/or absence of the minority languages (Basque and Frisian, respectively) in relation to national languages and English. Cenoz and Gorter documented and analysed the different constellations of multilingualism in the LLs of the main thoroughfares of these cities.

Another recent study, comparing the presence and absence of a minority language in regional urban LLs was carried out by Blackwood (2010). In this study, two cities in France – Rennes and Perpignan – were compared. Breton is the minority language spoken in Rennes and Catalan is spoken in Perpignan. The role of these two languages in local LL was found to be very different.

### ***The impact of globalization***

There is also a growing tradition of research on the impact of globalization and the global spread of English on LL in cities. Several studies of this kind have been done in East Asia and in South East Asia.

One study was carried out by Heubner (2006). He demonstrated how language hybridization between English and Thai is becoming an increasingly salient phenomenon in Bangkok. The linguistic hybridization of local LL in this context includes both codemixing and the creative use of different writing systems. This hybridization is clearly a consequence of globalization and, especially, the global movement of people (e.g. through tourism). A similar study of the presence of different languages, including English, in the landscape of Tokyo was conducted by Backhaus (2006) and published as a book (Backhaus 2007).

### ***Signs, scripts and identities***

Some studies of LL have addressed issues of identity as manifested via LL. These studies have investigated the ways in which individual, collective and national identities are represented and/or contested. Curtin (2009) has explored the ways in which collective national identity is constructed in and through the indexical properties of the scripts used for different languages in the LLs in public spaces in Taipei, Taiwan. She describes the competing systems for the Romanization of Chinese in official signage and demonstrates how these systems evoke intense public discussions regarding ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political and (trans)national identities. Former group identities are being challenged and new ones, associated with social and political change in Taiwan, are unfolding. Throughout this process, notions of ‘Chinese-ness’ versus ‘Taiwanese-ness’ are being interrogated as debates unfold about their political, historical, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic and even geographic import. Curtin argues that LLs are being *experienced* as an important part of the fluid processes of identification at work in contemporary Taiwan.

The construction of national and ethnic identities in LLs has also been described by Trumper-Hecht (2009) in the politically charged context of towns in Israel with both Jewish and Arab residents. She has focused on the mixed Arab–Jewish city of Upper Nazareth and

has analysed the legal battles for the representation of Arabic on public signs and on private signs in the city's mall. In this context, the use of LL in the public space is hotly contested as Arabic-speaking groups see the presence of their language in the local LL as recognition of their collective presence in this city.

Kallen (2009) focuses on issues related to LLs in Ireland where Irish is used, alongside English, in LLs in urban spaces that are regularly visited by tourists. The purpose of this use of Irish is symbolic: it is designed to evoke a distinct Irish identity and it is one of the ways in which the Irish language is commodified for the tourist gaze. Kallen shows that this Irish signage is placed in anticipation of the arrival of tourists, so as to fulfil their need for an 'authentic' experience of Irishness. He applies this approach to the bilingual signage in 'an Irish walkabout', focusing on the LLs of four urban areas in the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland.

### ***The discursive construction of urban spaces***

Some current work (e.g. Shohamy *et al.* 2010) focuses on LLs in rapidly changing urban spaces, examining particular dimensions and themes associated with such urban spaces. Du Plessis (2010) has, for example, focused on cities in South Africa in the post-apartheid era and has documented the transformation of linguistic landscapes: this transformation is occurring as part of a wider process involving the standardization of orthographic conventions for writing place names. A study by Leeman and Modan (2010) was based in Washington DC where LLs are being constructed as part of official city policy to commodify them and to drive the symbolic economy. Another study by Jaworski and Yeung (2010), based on different neighbourhoods in Hong Kong, focuses on the ways in which the nature and form of LLs is shaped by economic factors. Another study by Lou (2010), also about Washington DC, shows how the values accorded to various forms and varieties of the Chinese language in Chinatown are contingent not only on spatial scales but also on the discursive reconstruction of Chinatown, which involves conjuring up contemporary China and simultaneously disconnecting Chinatown from its original history as an immigrant enclave. Lastly, there is a study by Waksman and Shohamy (2010) on how the municipality of Tel Aviv is using various types of LL in public spaces to deliver a redefinition of the city as part of preparations for its centennial.

In addition to these studies of changing urban LLs, there are a number of studies about the reactions of passers-by to the LLs in public spaces in cities. These include the following: research by Aiestaran *et al.* (2010) into the perceptions of the value of multilingual signs; an investigation by Trumper-Hecht (2010) into reactions to signs in mixed Arab–Jewish cities; and a study by Garvin (2010) into the reactions of pedestrians to urban LLs using a method called 'the postmodern walking tour interview'. In this study, participants provided self-reports of their emotional responses to and visual perceptions of the LLs in their city of Memphis.

### ***Linguistic landscapes and official language policies***

A number of LL researchers have explored the connections between LLs and official language policies, that is, between top-down and bottom-up flows. One example of studies in this area is that by Pavlenko (2010), which describes LL in Kiev, Ukraine. Pavlenko shows that, despite the government's efforts to relegate Russian as a 'foreign language' and to promote the Ukrainian language, top-down imposition of linguistic policies in LLs are not all-powerful.

Ideologues and politicians tend to see the public space as an arena over which to exercise influence and to deliver messages. This often results in the dominance of certain languages over others within this sphere (Shohamy 2008). In addition to the study by Pavlenko, mentioned briefly above, studies of the role of LL in language policy have been conducted in places as diverse as Canada, Japan, Belarus, Czech Republic, Israel, Slovakia, Ethiopia and Italy. For example, it has been shown that people constructing LLs often defy formal and explicit policies. New words and new orthographic conventions are created and displayed in public spaces and we see the emergence of hybridized language forms and fusion of local and global varieties. Thus, in some LLs in public spaces, we see the creation of language policy from below. This is especially noticeable when examining language in cyber space. There, mixing of languages is commonplace, and new linguistic rules of syntax and spelling are applied, often combined with other semiotic modes such as sounds and images.

Backhaus (2007) conducted a comparative study of LL policy in Canada and Japan. He analysed and compared rules and regulations imposed by the government of the province of Quebec, Canada regarding the use of French, with the *laissez-faire* approach regarding the use of English and other foreign languages in Tokyo, Japan. He argued that Quebec and Tokyo can be placed on two opposite poles in the broad spectrum of LL policies worldwide. He also noted that linguistic landscaping in Quebec was highly regulated with respect to both status and corpus planning issues.

I will make brief mention here of three other studies of LLs and language policy in multilingual settings. My aim is to show how widely this approach has been applied. The first study was conducted by Sloboda (2009). He carried out comparative research into the dialectical relationship between LL and state ideology in three countries in Eastern Europe: Belarus, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. These are all countries that have recently undergone substantial social and political transformation since the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, Sloboda found that state ideology is still manifested in LLs. In particular, the state still takes on the role of a mediator between the local and the global.

The second study is one based in sub-Saharan Africa: in Ethiopia. Lanza and Woldemariam (2009) carried out extended research of the LL in the regional capital of Mekele, where three languages are used: Tigrinya, the official regional language; Amharic, the national working language; and English. In their research, these researchers showed how Tigrinya, Amharic and English compete in the public space in this urban setting. They focused on how language choices for signage were made. In some cases, the choice of language was strategic and conscious and in other cases this was guided by force of habit and uncritical acceptance of language hierarchies.

The third LL study is one done by Dal Negro (2009) in a rural context, in three small mountain villages in the North of Italy. The sociolinguistic context was multilingual and reflected the history of the region: Italian, German and local varieties of German were in everyday use in these villages. Dal Negro showed that local language policies had an influence on the ways in which these different language varieties were used in the LL. In the province of South Tyrol, language policy dictated the use of (standard) German and this accounted for the preponderance of bilingual German–Italian signs. However, in the German speech enclaves outside South Tyrol, where local varieties of German were spoken, local language varieties were used more often in LL to reflect local traditions and ‘uniqueness’.

The studies that I have reviewed in this section are only a few examples of a much larger repertoire of studies that examine the relationship of LL to language policy. This is a key area of empirical work on LL in multilingual settings, urban and rural, in different parts of the world.



## Diverse theories and interdisciplinary perspectives

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, LL studies have been grounded in the traditions of research associated with different disciplines and have been guided by different orienting theories. For example, Cenoz and Gorter (2009) have introduced an economic perspective on LL research in multilingual settings. They have adopted the ‘Contingent Valuation Method’, which has been applied in studies of environmental economics. They argue that the economic values of signs can be determined by focusing on non-market values. In their most recent work (Aiestaran, Cenoz and Gorter 2010), they demonstrate how this method can be used to approximate values of LLs as well as aspects of multilingualism and language diversity.

Spolsky (2009) argues that there is still scope for theory-building in the LL field. He claims that LLs need to be understood with reference to the state of literacy in the multilingual population where the various languages are spoken. Otherwise it would not be possible to explain why a language is or is not written. Drawing on the data collected for the Spolsky and Cooper (1991) study in Jerusalem, he also focuses on the problem of conceptualizing agency in LL research and the processes by which signs are produced. The theory he offers is anchored in a sociolinguistics of language choice, which is in line with his own theory of language policy. He calls this approach ‘language management’.

Heubner (2009) contextualizes his LL research within the tradition of linguistic anthropology. He proposes the use of the ‘SPEAKING’ model offered by Hymes (1972) as a means of determining appropriate units of analysis and argues that analyses of LL need to take account of the setting, the participants, the ends, act sequences, the key, instrumentalities, norms and genres. In order to illustrate this approach, he draws on his own research in Thailand and on other LL studies. He highlights the importance of the immediate context of a sign, the authors of the sign, the passers-by and the ‘place’ in which the sign appears.

Hult (2009) contextualizes LL research within an ‘ecology of language’ approach, specifically addressing aspects of multilingualism that are mapped through individual language choices in their social environment. He argues for grounding LL research in the combined theories of both ‘ecology of language’ and nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 2004). He claims that these theories can be used in conjunction to foreground the ecological dimension of LL research in multilingual settings.

Ben Rafael (2009) proposes that LL can be accounted for by drawing on sociological theories that represent LL as a mass of symbols that structure public space. He argues that LL is like a text into which one may read power, specific areas of influence and the traces of processes like globalization, the assertion of national identities or ideological and political agendas. He also argues that, in such texts, the peculiarities of the various scenes of the public space are also manifested in LLs, with all their incoherence and contradictions.

## Methodological developments

A significant number of LL studies have incorporated mixed method approaches, combining qualitative with quantitative analysis. However, qualitative, interpretive research predominates. Some qualitative studies have focused on classifying, documenting and characterizing the signs observed in particular locations. Others have combined description and analysis with interviews with sign producers and/or passers-by. Now, we are beginning to see the development of more advanced and specialized methods of analysis being employed.

One such advanced method of data collection and analysis is used by Barni and Bagna (2009), consisting of documentation and mapping using advanced computer programs taken

from the field of geography. The research tool developed is entitled 'MapGeoLing' and it has been used in a study of LL in different cities and regions of Italy. The focus of the study has been on documenting LLs in immigrant neighbourhoods in Rome and in other urban areas. They have also utilized this method to document 'Italianisms' in different neighbourhoods and in different urban settings in 21 different countries. The software has the built-in possibility of adding different codes for the signs documented, for example, codes relating to the text genre, the domain of use and the context, as well as the linguistic features of the texts in the signs.

In a study in northern California, Malinowski (2009) has explored the potential of the interview in LL research. He is especially interested in the 'authorship' of LL signs and has conducted in-depth interviews with Korean-American business owners in Oakland, in the San Francisco Bay Area. The interviews focused in particular on their motivations for writing and displaying signs in specific languages and on the symbolic and political significance of the adoption of Korean or English on their bilingual signs. Malinowski's study is also anchored within the recent strand of research on the multimodality of LL.

### **Expanding definitions: the multimodality of LL**

A broader perspective on LLs has been emerging in the past few years. It is now widely agreed that definitions of the concept of LL need to go beyond the verbal, written texts of signs, whether monolingual or multilingual, so as to include other semiotic modes such as images, objects, sounds, designs, maps, diagrams, spectacles, poems, memories, gestures, and placements in time and space (Shohamy and Waksman 2009). This approach follows the seminal writing of Lefebvre (1991, 1996), who argued that the public space is a dynamic, flowing, non-linear and interactive arena that allows for the production of varied and diverse text types. Lefebvre also views the public space not as a neutral arena but rather as negotiated and contested, and as embedded in history, culture, ideology and geography. This approach to LL research enables us to provide deeper insights into the meanings associated with LLs in particular public spaces. As Canagarajah (2007) has reminded us, meanings are socially situated, contextualized and sensitive to ecological resources.

This newer approach to LL research stretches back to early, interdisciplinary work in semiotics (Barthes 1985; Mitchell 1986, 2002) and, at the same time, builds on recent advances in the study of multimodality. In particular, it builds on the seminal work on multimodality by Auge (1995), members of the New London Group (1996), Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and Scollon and Scollon (2003, 2004). Scollon and Scollon, in particular, have demonstrated the importance of understanding the ways in which objects are placed and presented in the physical world and how this contributes to meaning making.

The study of graffiti illustrates particularly well the need for an expanded view of LLs as it involves the creation of hybrid forms of text and pictures. Moreover, it is now clear that the multimodal resources that graffiti artists draw on have both global and local meanings. Pennycook (2009) shows that local instances of graffiti need to be interpreted as part of a transgressive semiotics, within a global flow of practices. He raises questions about why some signs have more importance than others, how and why signs are made, how they are read and interpreted and how different linguistic resources are used. Graffiti is not only illegal (in most cases), it also is about production, about learning skills, about style and identity, as well as about different ways of claiming space by interacting with it. Various other studies have also examined LL from this expanded perspective (see Jaworski and Thurlow 2010).

## The implications for language education

Growing attention has been given recently to the role of displayed languages in language learning. Immigrants and tourists coming to new places are often drawn to signs in their primary encounters with new cultural practices. They also use public signage as they try to make sense of new environments and the messages they convey. Thus, a LL can serve as a powerful tool for learning second and foreign languages and for language awareness. For example, Dagenais *et al.* (2009) are engaged in a large study in Quebec and Vancouver where elementary school students are documenting their contacts with a variety of languages in their local communities. They are describing how children co-construct representations of languages, language speakers and language learning through these language awareness activities. These researchers recommend the use of LL as a tool for increasing language awareness. They show how children engaging in multilingual awareness activities can develop a critical perspective on language diversity and literacy practices, especially in socially and politically contested areas.

Other studies also show how LLs can serve as resources for teaching languages and for raising cultural and linguistic awareness. Thus, Sayer (2009) showed how a LL can be used for pedagogical purposes via a study in Mexico. He involved students as language investigators employing multiple research methods to analyse the social meanings of public signs where English was used. He presents a framework distinguishing between intercultural and intracultural uses, and between iconic and innovative uses of English on signs. He argues that the project is useful both for thinking about the innovative ways in which people use the language in local contexts and as a template for a classroom-based project that teachers can implement. This is a means of engaging EFL students in investigating and talking about social aspects of language use.

Hanauer (2009) focused on the LLs of educational institutions. He presented a study of the different genres incorporated in the wall display of a microbiology laboratory. This laboratory was part of a project where high school and undergraduate students were brought together to engage in joint microbiological inquiry. Wall space was used to facilitate the flow of knowledge throughout the laboratory and to illustrate the procedural aspects of conducting scientific inquiry. Hanauer used genre analysis and multimodal analysis to show how an understanding of this type of LL can promote the scientific and educational aims of learning and knowledge exchange.

## Linguistic landscapes as contested spaces

LLs provide rich contexts for learning about the ways in which meanings are constructed and manipulated using a variety of signs. The study of linguistic landscapes reveals the tip of the iceberg of meaningful phenomena in society and the ways in which signs are embedded in history and culture. LLs not only reflect social structure and the dynamics of social relations but they are also arenas through which various agendas are dictated, battled over or negotiated. Moreover, space and geography are not separate and passive dimensions, but rather are actively drawn on in the theatre of the social life. LLs are constructed by different discourse communities with multiple and often contradictory ideologies regarding the role of the *shared* public space. Texts in public spaces are displayed and created within a larger ecology, which is not neutral. Kramersch's account of language ecology is particularly apt here. She defines it as follows:

A nonlinear, relational human activity, co-constructed between humans and their environment, contingent upon their position in space and history, and a site of struggle for the control of social power and cultural memory.

*(Kramersch 2002: 5)*

The contestation and claiming of public space often originate from underlying assumptions about its ownership. Public space is sometimes referred to as a free zone that belongs to and is shared by all. However, questions need to be raised about the extent to which it does indeed belong to all and about what ownership really means and implies. Does it mean that municipalities and corporations can shape the space according to their own interests? Or does the crafting of a public space need to be addressed and negotiated with local people (e.g. displaying an advertisement of a nude man/woman in public)? To what extent is contestation possible? As I see it, struggles, negotiations and contestation over LLs originate from underlying assumptions about ownership of public space. The LL issues that now need to be addressed relate to the social and political levels of public space. They include questions such as: are certain groups included/excluded by displaying different LL texts? How do those processes of inclusion/exclusion take place through the use of multimodal, multilingual resources? Policy makers (that is, politicians and economic czars) mark public space with specific languages in order to exercise influence and disseminate propaganda, so the study of LLs allows us to throw light on these social and ideological processes.

### Future research issues

Various issues in relation to LLs are still left unanswered: on the conceptual level, Landry and Bourhis (1997) set us a compelling challenge: that of providing a visual record of the identities, values and relationships within a given territory, region or urban area. However, a number of issues have emerged in devising research projects aimed at addressing this challenge. I outline some of these issues below and I point to areas of LL research that need to be addressed in the future.

There are still different views in the field about what constitutes a LL: does it refer to language only or to additional signs and modes of communication, such as images, sounds, buildings, clothes or even people? Can these even be separated from one another? What is public and what is private, in this day and age? How are signs, and people, and languages connected in LL? What role does a LL play in policy making and what effects does it have on de facto language practices? What kind of reality does a LL create and shape? What motivates people to display different languages? With regard to this question, we need a special research focus on the author. How do people value LL? What messages are being delivered to passers-by? How do they interpret these messages? What types of language resources and what hybrid forms are being created in the public space? How do images and all other representations interact? How different is the spoken/heard language from the represented variety? What are the applications of LL to education and to language learning? Can contemporary LLs be accounted for within existing theories or should we perhaps create theories of linguistic ecology and space? What does the study of LL in its many perspectives add to our understanding of language, society and people?

Now that the Pandora's box of language in public spaces has been opened, endless opportunities for its exploration are available and researchers across different disciplines are articulating different ways of seeing LLs. Within the field of applied linguistics, the notion of ecology is getting to be seen as an increasingly important lens on language in social life. I would argue that it is a key analytic tool in applied linguistic research in the multilingual and multimodal world in which we now live. Moreover, our research methods are becoming more refined: the technology for collecting and analysing LL data is becoming much more accessible, so this area of research is gaining more attention. Interest is likely to increase in the years to come and many of the questions listed above are still open. We need further data, from different

cultural and historical contexts, and more interdisciplinary theory-building. The task ahead is that of achieving a deeper understanding of the use of different languages, in different forms, in the increasingly diverse urban spaces of the late modern era.

### Related topics

Multilingualism and the media; multilingual literacies; multilingualism and multimodality; multilingual pedagogies.

### Further reading

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