

# Further advances in Linguistic Landscape research: Language and identity-work in public space

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Robert Blackwood, Elizabeth Lanza & Hirut Woldemariam (eds). 2016. *Negotiating and Contesting Identities in Linguistic Landscapes*. London: Bloomsbury (xx+261pp).

*Negotiating and Contesting Identities in Linguistic Landscapes* is a collected volume featuring selected papers presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> Linguistic Landscapes (LL) Workshop which was held in Addis Ababa (November 2012). Brewed during a time of rapid changes in LL research, in the aftermath of landmark publications inaugurating a wider semiotic and ethnographic turn in LL research (see, e.g., Shohamy & Gorter, 2009; Shohamy, Ben-Rafael & Barni 2010; Jaworski & Thurlow 2010; Blommaert 2013, 2015; Blommaert & Maly 2014; Blommaert & De Fina 2015, to name just a few) and the launching of *Linguistic Landscapes: An International Journal* in 2015 (see esp. Shohamy & Ben-Rafael 2015; Shohamy 2015), it invites interested readers to engage with a whole new range of concepts, methodological innovations, and priorities, while critically revisiting previous findings. Incidentally, anyone who attended the 10<sup>th</sup> LL Symposium, appropriately subtitled *X-Scapes* and held in Bern in May 2018, will understand that the work in the present volume, albeit initiated earlier, has set the tone for the surprising variety of approaches and areas of investigation which were the trademark of *X-Scapes*.

The book is organized in five parts –featuring three papers each– which are the major axes this review shall examine. Although the choice of having a bare minimum of papers in each part of the volume may compartmentalize research, it has an obvious advantage: it suggests (from the very table of contents) that LL is by now a radically interdisciplinary and multi-layered field, even if we limit ourselves to issues of identity construction.

The first part, *Political and Economic Dimensions of Identity Constructions in the Linguistic Landscape*, which follows a short preface, opens with Christopher Stroud's contribution on issues of citizenship in the LL of post-apartheid South Africa, 'a restless society in the midst of an extensive transformation' (p. 3), in which the author documents the (regulation of) circulation of performing bodies-in-place, exploiting both verbal and non-verbal data. Stroud pre-

sents two cases illustrating the inextricable link between semiotic landscapes and the politics of place. His first case study deals with a protest march related to poor services, and is thus directly aimed at citizenship, while the latter deals with 'how representations of place energize particular corporeal performances of identities' (p. 10), also understood as what kinds of bodies fit what place. Drawing on a quickly developing strand of research of semiotic landscapes which encompasses theories of place and person, Stroud argues for the merits of combining sociolinguistic research with insights from social and political theory. The article provides theoretical contextualization for the remaining two papers of this part: Muth's paper on the economic dimension of LL, focusing on street art in Eastern Europe, and Gallina's work on the use of Italian in post-colonial Tanzania, to which I turn next. Sebastian Muth, focuses on the dramatically changing LLs of post-Soviet Chisinau and Minsk, concentrating on street art as a new-fangled commodity which adds a poignant commercial aspect to the LL, and examines it in the light of multilingualism and ideological strife in the post-Soviet world. His treatment of materials and local systems of meaning brings to bear the fact that graffitied signs are rarely, if ever, discussed in the context of commercial signage, since they are viewed as emblematic of anti-establishment stances. Moreover, he highlights the importance of knowledge of Russian in order to decode them. The author provides a rough typology of commercial signs (commercial graffiti, painted commercial signs, commercial stencil, commercial street stencils) which problematizes material, technique, and emplacement, while arguing for the transformation of street art into a marketing tool in the areas he investigates, underscoring their dynamic LLs. Francesca Gallina's research in Tanzania and Zanzibar looks at Italian not so much as a lingua franca in parts of Africa, but rather as a preferential imaginary linguistic resource for the promotion of commodities to a clientele which may or may not speak Italian. A result of high-end tourism and entrepreneurship in the tourist industry in late modernity, Italian in Tanzania functions as an imaginary link with quality commodities and a way of attracting customers. And yet, close and linked as they are, mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar have different uses for Italian: in the former case, Italian serves as a symbol of positive aspects of Italian culture, whereas, in the latter, it mostly functions as a way of getting the many Italian tourists on the island to spend.

The second part, entitled *Protest and Contestation of Identities in the Linguistic Landscape*, features three papers dealing with areas as diverse as Italy, Tunisia and Egypt, and Israel. The contribution by Barni & Bagna focuses on the transient but recurrent LL of 'A day without immigrants' protests organized in many Italian cities on 1 March since 2010. The researchers point out that although this is a day devoted to negotiating immigrant presence and identity in Italy, protest signs are predominantly in Italian and problematize this choice, which may appear as a missed opportunity for enhancing the visibility of the protesters. However, as they cogently argue, given a particularly strong monolingual culture in Italy, LL actors choose Italian as a way defending their rights while showing they are an integral part of the society

they live in. Although other semiotic resources used by the organizers (such as flags, traditional dress, artefacts, and use of color) may index specific identities, the protesters themselves use Italian, the code they share with other citizens. Ben Said & Kasanga examine protest signs from the Arab Spring Revolution in Tunisia and Egypt, adopting a three-stage analysis of a wide range of data and focusing on context-bound meaning. They identify three main frames of interpretation – the Nationalist-Patriotic frame, the Revolution-and-Freedom frame, and the People’s-Agency-and-Power frame – and argue for the intertextual, interdiscursive, and hybrid nature of protest discourse. They discuss these notions and show how protest signs such as GAME OVER, originally found in Tunisia, for example, resurface in Egypt; but this time the equivalent in Arabic literally means ‘we will clean it of Mubarak’. They underscore the complex trajectories of protest signs and argue that studying such non-fixed, transient LL signs allows for a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural and ideological context in which they are produced. Waksman & Shohamy engage in the examination of the flow and transfer of protest LL signs from ‘open’ to ‘institutional’ spaces: specifically, they investigate the effects of the relocation of texts from open public spaces in central Tel Aviv during the 2011 global protest movement to the institutional space of an academic institution, a Teacher Training College in Tel Aviv. The authors problematize institutional spaces as a special frame and point out the transformation of texts in the process of this relocation. They focus on four on campus exhibitions protesting forms of social inequality and note that, despite their differences, they overwhelmingly use the original protest as a pretext for practices which are otherwise aligned with institutional goals and practices. Although social protest agrees with the spirit of the institution, they emphasize that the relevance and edge of social protest may be either lost or otherwise transformed during relocation.

Part three of the volume is devoted to *Negotiating Regional and National Identities* and features research on the LL of the area of Trieste in Italy and on and different regions of strikingly multilingual Ethiopia. Stefania Tufi examines the sociolinguistic situation of Friuli – Venezia Giulia (FVG) focusing on the Slovenian-speaking community in the area of Trieste. She outlines the various historical and sociopolitical factors which have shaped the turbulent history and rich linguistic terrain of this area and concentrates on Slovenian in the LL of Trieste-city and Trieste-province. Her data show that, although Slovenian is heard everywhere in Trieste proper, there is almost total absence of it in the urban LL, which prompts us to reconsider the relation between LL visibility and linguistic vitality while pointing to Slovenian’s relatively low prestige. In contrast, Slovenian is pervasive in the LL of Trieste-province, although the unusually high frequency of official (top-down) signs is most likely the outcome of linguistic legislation since 2001. Still, this state of affairs may allude to a process of identity redefinition and a desire to boost the status of Slovenian. The chapter by Mendisu, Malinowski & Woldemichael focuses on the status of two local languages spoken in different regions of Ethiopia, Gedeo in Dilla and Koorete in Amarro-Keele, vis-à-vis Amharic and English in the LL. The authors note

that, despite explicitly stated language policy protecting regional languages in one of the most linguistically diverse countries in Africa, their absence from the LL functions as de facto language policy competing with legislation. Specifically, their data show that Gedeo never stands alone in the LL of Dilla, while Koorete is totally absent from the LL in Amarro-Keele. In both regions the LL is dominated by Amharic only or Amharic-English signs. The authors problematize the discrepancy between language policy and linguistic practice while offering cogent explanations. In my opinion, key among them is the use of Latin as opposed to Ethiopic Fidel script for Gedeo and Koorete as well as a short history of written representation. The paper by Yigezu & Blackwood investigates the LL of the Eastern Ethiopian city of Harar as an arena for the construction of a distinct Harari identity in the context of official language policy encouraging regionalism, prevalence of Amharic (and Oromiffa), and symbolic value of Arabic due to religious reasons in the area. Despite their small numbers, the Harari people are a distinct (and politically dominant) ethnic group and use of Harari is legitimized in various ways in the LL (after a long period of 'amharization' across Ethiopia). Yet, this research also underscores the mismatch between language practices and the LL. Although Harari does not appear alone, it is included in LL signs featuring the logos of respected international agents such as UNESCO, usually alongside Amharic, Oromiffa, and English. On the other hand, in small businesses, where Harari is usually absent, owners may use a Harari personal name for self-identification.

The fourth part of the volume features research on the negotiation of collective identities in public spaces as diverse as an area of the city Hamburg, a Biennale exhibition in Israel, and football stadiums in Europe. Pappenhagen, Scavaglieri & Redder concentrate on St. Georg, a multilingual area of central Hamburg, with the aim of showing how coexamination of the LL along with the Linguistic Soundscape (LS), and an eclectic methodology informed by action theory and functional pragmatic discourse analysis, may further expand LL research. They suggest that looking at both LL and LS data, vis-à-vis the illocutionary acts performed, allows researchers to understand both continuities and discontinuities in linguistic practices. For instance, their data show that the LL of Lange Reihe manifests 'gentrified multilingualism', whereas in Steindamm there is 'migration-induced multilingualism' indexing the demographic basis of the area. Moreover, their findings show that, in the LS of immigrant-owned businesses, the languages spoken serve different purposes, with German being used transactionally and Turkish, Arabic, Hindi/Urdu, etc. being used colloquially to establish group identities. Yael Guilat looks at the Bat Yam Biennale of Landscape Urbanism in Israel as a semiotic resource in the context of the global trend to use public art events as a means of regenerating or gentrifying cities, a move which has not always enhanced local communities. She argues that examining artistic events through the lens of LL research (i.e., in a sociolinguistic context) we may reach a better understanding of the constant interaction between processes reflecting conflicting claims for ownership of public space. Focusing on data such as banners, posters, the event logo, and permanent signage and on the exclusive use of Hebrew and English in a community

where large part of the population has moved from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, she claims that the event was not used to include locals, but adopted established Municipal policy and portrayed Bat Yam as a tourist destination and a venue for the arts, as a step toward gentrification. The last paper in this part, a contribution by Raymond Siebetcheu, engages in a multimodal (semiotic and linguistic) analysis of banners appearing in football stadiums in Italy, France, and England on a match day with aim of elucidating identity construction during sporting events, especially as regards the *ultras*, the most ardent fans occupying the curve of the stadium (*curva*). The author provides a typology of banner design and proceeds with an external and internal analysis emphasizing multimodality. His linguistic analysis focuses on issues such as proper names, metaphor and hyperbole, euphemism, metonymy, analogy, and world play, which – supported by semiotic analysis – illustrate that ultras consider the *curva* a crucial place for performing their identity (also given the enhanced visibility provided by the media). Banners are rife with rhetorical, cultural, and sociopolitical content and contribute in constructing the *curva* as a social place.

The last part of the volume is devoted to *Identity Constructions from a Comparative Perspective* and features research focusing on Europe, America, Asia, and Africa. The introductory chapter, by Ben-Rafael & Ben-Rafael, investigates aspects of globalization in the LL of the ‘megapolis’ of Berlin. Looking at areas as diverse as neighborhoods in underprivileged Kreuzberg, middle-class Charlottenburg, the upscale downtown shopping area of Ku’damm, and Friedrichstrasse, the authors focus of three structuration principles which are instrumental in accounting for LL actors’ agency: i.e., allegiance to the national language, particularistic solidarity forging collective identities, and supra-societal references. This quantitative study emphasizes two major aspects of globalization in Berlin’s LL: the presence of transnational diasporas in various areas and high visibility of English as a lingua franca which, alongside BCNs, stands as an index of global consumer culture. The authors conclude that a heuristic comparison between areas suggests strong allegiance to German in the middle-class area, high visibility of ‘ethnocultural’ languages in Kreuzberg, and a strong presence of BCNs in the downtown areas. Todd Garvin & Eisenhower embark on a comparative investigation of the LL of the public areas of two middle schools –one in South Korea (NMS) and one in Texas (WGMS)– with the aim of examining similarities and differences in cultural norms, construction and performance of collective identities, patterns of interaction, and educational ideologies in two communities of practice. The authors theorize the LL in educational spaces and provide a putative typology featuring five functional categories of signs which they consider in the light of the wider context. They argue that both LLs index the respective cultures and values, educational programs and activities, and, crucially, educational ideologies and policies. Specifically, the (monolingual) LL at WGMS testifies to a more student-centered approach compared to NMS, whereas the (bilingual) LL at NMS indexes a traditional teacher-centered approach underpinned by the explicit articulation of rules. Yet, identity construction in both communities of practice is

achieved in similar ways. In the last chapter of the volume, Williams & Lanza focus on the LL of urban Bellville in post-apartheid South Africa and investigate the visualization of multilingualism and voice in spaces of consumption. The authors theorize the notion of 'entanglement' as a way of understanding the semiotic intertwining of LL actors and their multilingual practices and voices in a space which has had a long history of segregation and exclusion. They suggest that LL can help us demonstrate how different languages 'are entangled with different types of voices and multilingual communities and their practices' (p. 236). Looking at multilingual signage in Bellville's Central Business District, they claim that cultural discourses and practices are entextualized in the LL and that LL actors draw on a variety of global and local resources both indexing the remains of apartheid culture and contextualizing them through the visualization of practices relating to the negotiation of overlapping and intersecting identities.

One of the great merits of this volume is that it reflects the innovative tendencies in LL research, which has made a decisive turn from mostly linguistic to broader semiotic investigation and from a characteristically policy-related field of study to an interdisciplinary enterprise which has already incorporated aspects of performance as understood in anthropology and related fields in the social sciences and the humanities. The remarkable geographical coverage and variety of methodological and theoretical approaches to the negotiation and contestation of identities makes this volume mandatory reading for anyone interested in state of the art LL research. As such, this is a laudable enterprise, reflecting the intensive work undertaken by seminal contributors to the field as well as the acumen of a younger generation of scholars that has made the field what it is today. The only thing I missed is a short introductory text preceding each of the five parts of the volume, setting the tone for the papers featured therein and highlighting interconnections between them. Although this is partly done in the preface, it would still be a welcome addition.

Perusing this volume in light of the experience afforded me by engaging with earlier research in the field, I believe we are at a turning point; a point at which LL scholarship could take a breath and reconsider the ways in which its various –and often disparate– strands can be tied up together in more coherent theoretical proposals which may ensure wider applicability while setting the pace for the future. The bet of diversity and expansion has been obviously won –and this volume clearly bears testimony to this.

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