

# Alternative educational approaches and the linguistic/semiotic landscape

BY: Roswitha Kersten-Pejanić

punctum.gr



Greg Niedt and Corinne A. Seals

## Linguistic Landscapes Beyond the Language Classroom.

London et al.: Bloomsbury Academics, 2021, 246 pp., ISBN 978-1-035012-538-4.

This edited volume takes the reader to perceive linguistic landscapes not just well beyond the classroom, as suggested in the title, but also beyond well-trodden paths of urbanized and politically central places into a lot of diverse and often overlooked places of the world. One of the many advantages of this book, then, lays in the fact that most of the studies allow for insights into places and spaces that could be conceptualized as (semi-)peripheral as all the researchers assembled in the volume work in areas remote from central cities and capitals. This is of significance, as it allows for not just a diversified view on the research done in LLS but shows the growing interest in rural, unknown, and in many ways untypical spaces when conceptualizing given spaces and places as (part of) a linguistic and or semiotic landscape of its own kind. What is more, this book draws on a range of methods, many of them showing new approaches and ideas of how to deal with the wealth of material any research on linguistic landscapes is prone to assemble.

The following overview of the book's content will allow for a short outline of each of the eleven chapters (plus introduction) of the volume, while concentrating on the two above mentioned issues, i.e., the untypicality of the landscape discussed and the methodology used.

### ARTICLE INFO:

Volume: 08

Issue: 01

Summer 2022

ISSN: 2459-2943

DOI: 10.18680/hss.2022.0010

Pages: 163-168

Lic.: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

The Introduction (Greg Niedt and Corinne A. Seals) provides the reader with some essential theoretical and conceptual background of LLS, *schoolscapes*, methodologies and recent discussions and achievements in the field. Another relevant matter of the introduction is the acquaintance of the reader with the book's companion webpage [www.bloomsbury.com/linguistic-landscapes-beyond-the-language-classroom](http://www.bloomsbury.com/linguistic-landscapes-beyond-the-language-classroom). The promised additional material to be found here is partial, as some of the authors only put those pictures that were already shown in the book. Yet, for those chapters where there is additional material, or where some of the discussed pictures are online only, the companion site is both useful and interesting. Altogether, the interested reader might have wished for some more pictures to be found here, as LLS is a (mostly) visual approach, and any extra picture (at least when it comes with useful captions) allows for an even better understanding of the given study's context.

Chapter 1, 'From Part of the Scenery to Curricular Resources: Authentic Signs as Portals to Cultural Practices within a Residential German Language Immersion Program' (Justin Quam and Heidi E. Hamilton), leads us to a German language learning village, *Waldsee*, in the USA, featuring both rural, urban, and educational patterns but with the interesting tweak of showing an intentionally created landscape of a German lifestyle in the middle of Northern America. The methodology used for this study shows a thoughtful combination of quantitative and qualitative aspects of pictures taken in Waldsee. Their effective application of Scollon and Scollon's *semiotic aggregate* (Scollon & Scollon 2003) adds some more substance to an already very useful introduction to LLS provided in this chapter.

Chapter 2, 'Unveiling Sign Languages in the Linguistic Landscape: Representations of Sign Languages in Nonsigning and Signing Milieux' (Jami Fisher, Donna Jo Napoli and Gene Mirus), opens up a new research focus on LLS by introducing the *sign language linguistic landscape* (SLLL). This highly relevant addition to the field is introduced through a historic outline of linguistic landscapes based on English sign languages showing its limitations based on long-standing sociopolitical and linguistic exclusions. In my view, this overview would have benefitted from a more class-sensitive approach, as the negative conceptualization of examples of an *apologetic* use of sign languages on peddler cards and the entirely positive framing of multi-million-dollar companies' and banks' usage of sign language as a sign of *deaf pride* can be disturbing. The chapter ends with an explorative case study of a coffeeshop near Gallaudet University in the US, showing a great example of how the usage of sign language can become a constitutive matter of a given linguistic landscape.

In chapter 3, 'New Caledonia: A Semiotic Analysis of the Landscape as an Opportunity for Learning' (Diane de Saint Léger and Kerry Mullan), we are shown another example of how a given linguistic landscape can be integrated into language learning activities and, what is more, also another example of how LLS can be used

to trace the landscape of a language that is not widely distributed in written form. Other than the German-speaking village in chapter 1, it is the real-life linguistic landscape which is used for educational purpose here. And other than is the case with the sign language example, the context discussed here is a post-colonial one, adding another important sociopolitical feature to the research on LLS and education beyond the classroom. Based on Jaworski and Thurlow's *semiotic landscape* (Jaworski & Thurlow 2010) concept and Pennycook's *semiotic assemblage* (Pennycook 2019), the study analyzes students' journals from two study trips to New Caledonia, providing us with an innovative methodology of looking into on-sight impressions of people visiting specific places.

Chapter 4, 'The Linguistic Landscape of Public Health Institutions in Tanzania' (Paschal Mdukula), takes us to the linguistic landscape of public health institutions in Tanzania, showing a striking example of how actual language competencies of regional languages are ignored to the favor of more prestigious languages (more specifically and very typically: English) being used in hospitals, rendering written instructions and warning on signs unreadable for hospital visitors and even for parts of the staff. While calling for a better integration of specialized institutions into LLS, the author uses a multi-layered methodological framework based on pictures of the hospitals' interior and interviews with visitors and staff of different status groups.

Another institutional context is shown in chapter 5, 'Information, Education, and Language Policy in the Linguistic Landscape of an International Airport in New Zealand' (Una Cunningham and Jeanette King). The authors take us into the semi-public realms of the linguistic landscape of an airport, while looking for educational purposes in informative signs. The chapter discusses potential traps of both touristically motivated multilingualism and the usage of minority languages in a given linguistic landscape, linking the first to the danger of racial profiling and the second to further marginalization based on exoticizing a given minority (Māori, in this case). Their methodical link of ethnographically collected photographs with interviews with the airports staff shows an interesting example of how interviews in LLS can provide much deeper understanding of the intentions of the otherwise only visually perceived linguistic landscape.

Chapter 6, 'English Learning Experience in a Textile Company in Turkey' (Yasemin Kırkgöz), shows an intentionally created linguistic landscape of English language learning posters in a workplace in Turkey. Based on the concept of *peripheral language learning* (PLL), the author discusses the educational effects of such a linguistic landscape for passerby workers. The consideration of how the environment creates a learning space is surely one to be taken into research on any linguistic landscape more seriously, and the limited institutional space and the usage of interviews for this research shown in this paper makes a good case study of how LLS and alternative approaches to education may be methodologically linked.

In chapter 7, 'The Public Discourse and Presentation of Migrant Groups within a Museum Space' (Barbara Loester), the author takes us to another highly institutionalized space, i.e., the *SeaCity Museum* in Southampton, UK. Two exhibitions focusing on migrant lives and histories in the city are examined in order to understand the educational possibilities of interaction between the linguistic/semiotic top-down agenda of the museum and the bottom-up agenda of museum visitors. As agency in the linguistic landscape is a matter of great importance and often not easy to trace outside the institutionalized space, studying the *museumscape* regarding its linguistic and semiotic features might allow LLS researchers to look for the interactions of agency in such a limited space more directly.

Chapter 8, 'Exploring Multimodal Story Houses in the Indigenous Paiwan-Rukai Post-Disaster Reconstruction' (Chun-Mei Chen), is part of a long-term ethnographic project on language documentation from the author on different indigenous languages in Taiwan. The mingling of language preservation and education studies with LLS allows for a multimodal study of the given linguistic landscape. By conceptualizing so-called *story houses* (in which both visitors and younger members are educated about the traditional way of life of the studied groups) as nexuses of practice, where not only history and language is shown but where the traditions just as much as the languages are preserved, this study shows another intriguing example of an intentional and institutionalized linguistic landscape.

Chapter 9, 'Activist Teaching through the Linguistic Landscape in Göttingen and Lviv' (Corinne A. Seals and Greg Niedt), opens the range of studied material to the elements of activist bottom-up linguistic landscape, mostly found in graffiti and stickers. With a focus on the educative features of an activist shaping of the cityscape, the authors focus on Göttingen in Germany and Lviv in Ukraine, showing both specificities and peculiarities of the two cities' activism-driven linguistic landscape. Methodologically, the authors chose a mix of qualitative approaches, based on pictures from specific parts of the city centers, to which verbally communicated results of a study group discussion were added, aiming at researcher triangulation.

In chapter 10, 'Educating the Public? Affective and Epistemic Stances as Approaches to Campaigning during Ireland's Eighth Amendment Referendum' (Louis Strange), the focus on activism in the linguistic landscape is set in Ireland's 2018 referendum on abortion rights. Introducing another overlooked analytical perspective, the author studies the matter of *stance* in a given linguistic landscape. Based on poster and leaflet material from different Irish regions as well as interviews with activists from the opposing camps, the study investigates epistemic and affective stances as educative elements during the referendum's campaign and the campaigners aim of educating the public about abortion. This chapter not only gives a good insight into theories and methods relevant for LLS, but also vividly shows what this book is about, when

starting the concluding paragraph of the chapter with the following consideration: “What does this analysis mean for theorizing education in the linguistic landscape? It suggests that the LL can potentially turn spaces—on a countrywide scale, if only for a limited period—into educational spaces” (p. 213).

The concluding chapter 11 of this volume, ‘Dynamic Walking Tour Methodology for LL Research: A Case Study in Jaffa’ (Amir Michalovich, Sarah Naaman, Moraia Trijnes, Iman Agbaria, and Elana Shohamy), allows for a detailed insight into the actual application of a dynamic walking tour and its benefits for both LLS and education about language politics in general. With its concentration on emotional responses of both walking tour participants and interlocutors, the chapter opens the range of observable aspects discussed in this volume to another central field. As the study vividly shows, emotions towards the linguistic landscape and the languages and messages displayed are diverse and crucial for both researchers and inhabitants. And only a fitting choice of methods will allow to capture these emotions and their meaning for the linguistic landscape and education, which is why this introduction of the dynamic walking tour adds another useful layer to the already rich reading of the volume.

As this overview shows, the wealth of landscapes, approaches, methods discussed in this volume makes it an interesting read and I highly recommend the book to anyone interested in LLS and alternative routes of (life-long) education.

There are only few points that show some of the limits of the volume’s general high quality: the discussion of LLS with regard to the individual chapters’ foci is, in some instances, not very clear, showing a focus on educational matters only instead. At times, one would have wished for some more insight into the relation of the material to LLS and some better conceptualization of material that has so far been received little attention in this research strand. While it is highly interesting and inspiring to read about language learning via posters or the diversification of history, a clearer delimitation of different kinds of linguistic landscapes based on the public/private divide of the given place and a careful consideration of the presence or absence of (educative) intention would be useful here. On the other side, the conceptualization of any informative, rhetoric, political material as *educational* could benefit from some better explanation about forms and venues of education in general, as differences between institutionalized and formalized education and other educative forms in a given linguistic landscape in the public space might produce totally different signs and messages. Both readers interested in the linguistic landscape and in the educational aspects discussed in this book would benefit from clearer conceptualization of how spaces are turned into linguistic/semiotic landscapes based on intention, how these intentions might be educational, and what the limitations to the landscape concept in general might be. This does not limit the fact that this book is a great contribution to the field and that all chapters show thought-provoking studies. Rather, it is a call to clarify the relation



(and its benefits for the given study) between the different disciplines in such highly interdisciplinary approaches.

All chapters of this volume show inspiring approaches to LLS with a focus on education, delving into diversified methodological frameworks. The book assembles groundbreaking case studies and each chapter allows for some deep insight into the given lands, places and institutions, providing the reader with an intriguing ethnographic account of the educational features of linguistic landscapes altogether.

## References

- Jaworski, A and Thurlow, C. 2010. Introducing semiotic landscapes. In: A. Jaworski, & C. Thurlow (Eds.), *Semiotic Landscapes: Language, Image, Space* (pp. 1–40). London: Continuum.
- Pennycook, A. 2019. Linguistic landscapes and semiotic assemblages. In M. Pütz, & N. Mundt (Eds.), *Expanding the Linguistic landscape: Linguistic Diversity, Multimodality and the Use of Space as a Semiotic Resource* (pp. 75–88). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Scollon, R. and S. W. Scollon. *Discourse in Place: Language in the Material World*. London/ New York: Routledge.

### AUTHOR

**Roswitha Kersten-Pejanić** Postdoc Researcher (DFG -Fellow) at the Center for Advanced Studies of South-eastern Europe, University of Rijeka, Croatia.

