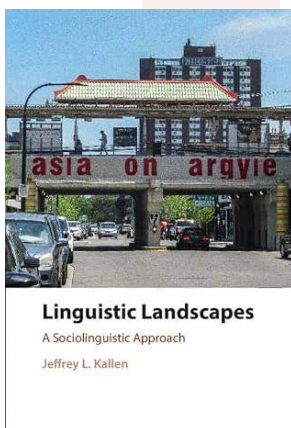


Investigating the sociolinguistics of linguistic landscapes: A discourse perspective

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Linguistic Landscapes: A Sociolinguistic Approach

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Jeffrey Kallen's book is one of the few monographs in the field of Linguistic/Semiotic Landscapes (henceforth LL) to date and it comes as a very welcome addition to the literature at a time of significant expansion which warrants the relevance of a detailed account of LLs from a sociolinguistic perspective. Prof. Kallen's book is remarkable in its breadth of coverage and detailed discussion of major questions which have shaped LL research. The author puts these in historical perspective while underscoring the discourse functions of LL units and the interaction they afford among sign instigators and sign viewers as a core sociolinguistic aspect, at a time when LL research is becoming progressively eclectic and engages in dialogue with a variety of disciplines (cf. Tufi 2025) breaking new ground.

The book consists of a preface, eight chapters, a list of references, and an extensive index. Moreover, it is one of the few books of its kind with abundant photographic documentation, which allows the author to engage in detailed discussion of his data. In what follows, I will take up each chapter in turn and provide a brief overview.

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The first chapter (*Approaching the Linguistic Landscape*) begins by looking at LL units both as linguistic expressions and text-bearing objects and further distinguishes between text signs performing speech acts (i.e. signs which constitute LL units) and text signs which do not perform speech acts and are not, strictly speaking, part of the LL. This distinction highlights the importance of the pragmatic status of signs and underpins the author's view of LL units as performing acts of discourse (p. 16). Moreover, he cautions us that there may be both written and oral components in the LL, especially in rural areas, and shows how layering of past and present LLs may result in extensive LL systems (p. 23, cf. Dressler and Hult 2025). The author aptly uses Stolpersteine, the brass rectangular plaques inscribed with names of victims of the Nazi regime, to claim that these commemorative LL units in contemporary Germany engage viewers in a discourse with cultural and social relevance (p. 24ff). The discussion of discursive aspects of LL units runs through the book as a cohesive device and informs the author's approach to a rich set of data.

Chapter two (*Why Linguistic Landscape?*) problematizes 'the roots of the LL notion which give it a distinctive quality that is especially relevant to sociolinguistics' (p. 28). To this effect, the author draws a distinction between use of the term linguistic landscape and LL as a distinctive field of research and suggests that work relating to the public display of language far predates what we typically consider as formative works (e.g., Landry and Bourhis 1997). He revisits the development of the field as we know it, looking as far back as antiquity, and drawing on work from a variety of sources in-between, before LLs solidified in the late 1990s. This development was underpinned by pragmatic considerations which include – but are not limited to – language policy and community identity (p. 42). The last section (2.2) outlines a genealogy of terms which have been used in researching public signage in English and French, reflecting various traditions and drawing on a variety of sources.

In the third chapter (*Doing Things with Codes*), Kallen engages with how sign instigators use codes in meaningful ways (cf. Peck et al. 2018). He approaches this topic by looking at the 'ways in which sign instigators (1) choose and display codes; (2) map between the content of messages and code choices; (3) manipulate codes for cross-linguistic and intralinguistic effects; and (4) integrate linguistic codes with non-linguistic visual signifiers' (p. 51). This is a tall order, since the author attempts an integration of linguistic and non-linguistic visual signifiers, while taking into consideration translanguaging, interlanguaging, and word play as semiotic affordances and drawing on indexicality (Eckert 2008) as a key concept in code choice. This demanding chapter is diligently and cogently illustrated with data featuring various alphabets and other visual semiotic resources, such as brand-name logos. The author claims that the accomplishment of communicative goals is the major motivation of LL actors and these goals may 'transcend or ignore language boundaries' (p. 68). Moreover, the integration of texts with visual images enhances the sociolinguistic relevance of LL, as it provides insights into the social life of language (p. 77, cf. Blommaert 2013; Blommaert and Maly 2014).

Chapter four (*Space and Landscape*) deals with space as the physical aspect of LLs and focuses on the spatial relationships of LL units. The author argues that LL units should not be understood as simply occupying space, but rather ‘as elements of discourse whose physical and referential properties [...] create spatial relationships’ (p. 80). This point is in keeping with contemporary understandings of space as much more than a background for the emplacement of signs, which has enhanced the social relevance of LL research. The author discusses space both in physical terms and as an index of social life, while underscoring its relation to discourse. He problematizes the view of public space based on the container metaphor and discusses landscape from an etymological perspective. The discussion of indexicality (section 4.3) is informed by the pragmatics of deixis and the deictic field and helps anchor the treatment of emplacement effects which are crucial in LLs. The discussion of spatial relationships pertains both to the regulation of space and to spatial reference (with proximal space being prevalent without, however, neglecting reference to remote or imaginary spaces).

Chapter five (*People*) focuses on sign instigators and viewers, and the discourse they engage in with LL units as the medium and develops ‘a model of social indexicality in the LL which pays particular attention to the social value of communicative choices’ (p. 126, cf. Silverstein 2003); these choices are considered from the perspective of linguistic markedness and the affordances of the code used. The main point is that social indexicality in LLs is not predetermined by sociopolitical institutions but emerges through the discourse afforded by LL units between LL actors (i.e., sign instigators and viewers). LLs may index codes and people (p. 124); however, one should be careful in interpreting both presences and absences in the LL as directly indexing individuals or communities who use a code conversationally (p. 128, 134). The chapter covers issues pertaining to ethnic and immigrant communities as well as population flows relating to tourism, and its focus on people drives home the discourse approach to the LL proposed by the author, which is further developed in the next chapter.

In the sixth chapter (*The Linguistic Landscape as Discourse*), the author approaches ‘the potential for the LL as a whole to be understood as a multitude of discourses’ (p. 164) and suggests that such an endeavor should start by exploiting the LL as performance, in the sense of Hymes, and by looking into with the pragmatic force of utterances (p. 51). Kallen discusses various genres of LL discourses and their particular ways of being performed and recognized through LL signage: from enticing the viewer to buy certain products and services in advertising discourse to regulatory genres such as directions and LL conversations evolving intertextually in protest signage (p. 173ff, cf. Canakis and Martín Rojo to appear). He suggests that ‘[s]ince the knowledge of practices relating to face-to-face conversation is part of the shared knowledge of interlocutors in the LL, it can in itself form a new point of reference for LL units’ (p. 176), which further corroborates his view of LL units as initiating discourse. The author concludes by stressing the multiplicity, indeed the networks,

of discourses, afforded both by single LL units and LL assemblages (p. 210ff), and claims that studying LLs essentially involves focusing on a slice of a greater, complex system which is, nonetheless, intelligible.

The seventh chapter (*Time, Space, and the LL*) is devoted to time and space considerations in inscribing, viewing, and investigating LLs. Kallen claims that ‘a general characteristic of the LL unit is that it performs a speech act in the sign viewer’s present by displaying an act of writing that occurred in the past’ (p. 218), instantiating the THEN IS NOW metaphor. Chronotopic considerations of the emplacement of LL units and assemblages are linked to LL remnants (p. 228ff) and layering (p. 232ff, cf), which have attracted more attention in the field, following the semiotic turn (cf. Jaworski and Thurlow 2010). Memorialization (section 7.5) is one such aspect of the relevance of chronotopic anchoring of LL units (Blackwood and Macalister 2021). On the other hand, the section on repurposing the past (7.6) can be fruitfully linked to the process of resemiotization, a major affordance of LL units which allows them to bridge – and function across – contexts.

The last chapter (*Researching Linguistic Landscapes*) revisits the main points explored in the book and proposes a view of LL research informed by a discourse perspective and relying on pragmatic considerations. Questions of methodology and documentation (cf. Buchstaller and Alvanides 2025), such as the use of photography as evidence, are critically evaluated, and problems of representing LLs in other media are discussed, especially given the offline-online nexus distinction (p. 286ff) which is progressively attracting more attention (Androutsopoulos 2024). Looking towards the future, the author justifiably notes that while geographical coverage of LL is progressing in strides, there are still many places which we know little or nothing about. Temporally speaking, Kallen suggests that ‘LL research has a great deal of catching up to do in order to give an account of the life of the LL in society’ (p. 301) and calls for engaging with LLs from a historical perspective. Materially speaking, the author encourages a sharper focus on a variety of portable (and often commodifiable) LL objects in juxtaposition to fixed terrestrial LL units. Finally, ethnographically speaking, he claims that LL research is not about photographic documentation or counting codes but ‘about probing the knowledge and cultural practices of people who create and engage in the discourse of the LL’ (p. 302, cf. Lou 2017).

Prof. Kallen has written a remarkable book, which is indispensable reading for anyone engaged in LL research. By looking at LL units as emplaced discourse he outlines a discourse approach to the LL which is both complex and impressive in its breadth of coverage and engagement with the relevant literature. This is one of the few monographs in the field (most developments in which are published in collected volumes, handbooks, and journal articles, cf. e.g. Blackwood et al. 2024; Gorter and Cenoz 2025) and can be used both as an introduction for students and as a reference-work for

researchers. For many of us the book will be helpful in revisiting old questions from a new perspective. A lot of the well-chosen examples provided have to do with LLs in which policy-related issues are paramount. This reflects the author's own interests and his long-time involvement in the field. On occasion the reader may feel the detail provided in some discussions is overwhelming, but this is a matter of opinion and so is that some issues – such as chronotopicity (Blommaert 2015), reflexivity (Patiño-Santos 2019), vulnerability (Moriarty and Kosatica 2025), and autoethnography (Peck 2024; Tufi and Peck 2025) – could have been more extensively discussed.

Yet none of this detracts from this impressive and erudite scholarly work.

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