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SPECIAL ISSUE
SIGNS IN CONTEXT: MULTILINGUAL AND MULTIMODAL TEXTS IN SEMIOTIC SPACE

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Signs in context: multilingual and multimodal texts in semiotic space

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This special issue on “Signs in context” is the outcome of an academic dialogue that began with a panel organized by Mark Sebba and Anastassia Zabrodskaja during the 18th Sociolinguistics Symposium held in Southampton in 2010. The purpose of the panel was to critically engage with current research on “public signage”, a body of scholarship that has come to be known and institutionalized as “Linguistic Landscape” (LL).

Originally employed in an article by Landry and Bourhis (1997), the expression “linguistic landscape” has not only gained currency as a key theoretical notion in the study of the sociology of language; it has also established itself as a strand of academic inquiry in its own right, complete with multiple journal articles, edited collections and monographs, an annual conference and, in the near future, its own journal. That being said, the notion of “linguistic landscape” is somewhat of a “floating signifier” (Hall 1997). Different scholars assign different meanings to it, resulting in a wide variety of methodologies (see Shohamy and Gorter 2009; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010).

A diachronic glance at the development of this academic field reveals that some earlier studies followed large-scale, quantitative approaches. For example, some investigations explored how many times different languages occur separately or together in urban environment “public texts” (Sebba 2010) such as street names, shop signs or advertising billboards in underground stations (see in particular Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Backhaus 2007; Lanza and Woldemariam 2009; see Laitinen, this issue, for a rare example of a rural linguistic landscape). These numerical tokens are interpreted as indicators of larger ideological and political language processes. As such, the relatively strong presence of English and the absence of Arabic in Jewish areas of Israeli cities is understood to be the concomitant manifestation of globalization and Israeli nationalism (Ben-Rafael 2006). In many ways, this early work was radical because it drew our attention...
to public signage, rather than policy documents, as the tool through which language policies are not just implemented, but are also contested and resisted (see Zabrodskaia, this issue; Muth, this issue; Lamarre, this issue).

Recently, however, research on public signage has taken a more qualitative turn. Relying on smaller data sets, studies have highlighted the importance of transcending the purely linguistic element of public texts so as to also grasp their multimodal and multi-semiotic nature. This has resulted in a focus on the dynamic interplay of language, visual elements and other semiotic means in public signage (see e.g. Stroud and Mpendukana 2009; Pennycook 2010; see also Curtin, this issue; Lamarre, this issue; Milani, this issue). Moreover, Stroud and Mpendukana (2009) have urged us to engage more seriously with the “material” conditions underpinning sign production as well as the enabling and constraining aspects of the spaces in which these material and semiotic objects are located (see also Blommaert and Huang 2010). This qualitative turn has also entailed a shift of attention from static items to mobile artefacts such as advertisements on public transport or even T-shirts (see, in particular, Reh 2004; Coupland 2010; Sebba 2010).

Finally, most current work also takes a phenomenological, post-humanist orientation that is not limited to critical analyses of public texts per se. Instead, the emphasis is on understanding the human-sign interface, thus exploring the different and very complex ways in which individuals perceive and engage with public signage in their everyday lives (see Leeman and Modan 2009; Malinowski 2009; Todd Garvin 2010; Trumper-Hecht 2010; Stroud and Jegels, this issue; Milani, this issue).

Although this brief historical overview served to highlight broad trends in the development of the study of public signage, it is important to note that it is by no means a linear phenomenon. As the articles in this special issue illustrate, quantitative approaches (Edelman, this issue; Muth, this issue; Zabrodskaia, this issue) co-exist, even within the same study, with qualitative, multi-semiotic analyses (Laitinen, this issue; Lamarre, this issue; Milani, this issue; Woldemariam and Lanza, this issue; Zabrodskaia, this issue) and with investigations that are more phenomenologically oriented (Milani, this issue; Stroud and Jegels, this issue).

The heterogeneity of the articles in this special issue is an important component of research on language in public spaces as well as a key ingredient of a truly interdisciplinary academic enterprise. All the contributors place the linguistic/semiotic study of public signage within the context of other established fields such as language policy and language ideologies, language contact and the sociolinguistics of orthography, language attitudes and post-Soviet studies, “ethnographically formulated sociolinguistics” (Blommaert 2010: 3) and gender
and sexuality studies. More specifically, the contributions look at multilingual and multi-semiotic public texts in order to examine: (1) how language legislation affects signs and generates interesting (bilingual) language play, which in turn can reveal the linguistic affiliations and identity expressions of linguistic landscape actors and users; (2) how language practices take shape in public spaces where the status of majority and minority languages is regulated by official language policies; (3) how commercial and tourism discourse is discursively constructed through different forms of linguistic creativity (language and orthographic choices); and (4) how space itself is socially shaped and acquires meaning in everyday interactions.

According to Blommaert (2010: 5), “every horizontal space (e.g. a neighbourhood, a region or a country) is also a vertical space, in which all sorts of socially, culturally and politically salient distinctions occur”. In a similar vein, the contributors who consider the connections between public spaces and language legislation discuss two different types of spaces: (1) “unregulated spaces” (Sebba 2009), where there is no official policy concerning the language to be used in public space (Cape Town, Helsinki, Mekele, Adama) and (2) highly “contested spaces” (Pavlenko 2008), where instruments of official language policy dictate which languages can be used on signs (Chisinau, Montreal, Tallinn, Taipei).

In the latter, the linguistic/semiotic landscape is constantly shaped by collisions between language policies “from above” and transgressive acts “from below”. Such tension can lead to the emergence of creative multilingual signs, labelled “bilingual winks” by Lamarre (this issue). It can also lead to what Curtin (this issue) calls “cosmopolitanism from below”, a form of sociolinguistic subversion characterised by “exotic orthography” (English or French in Taiwan) and non-standard spellings in the target language. This linguistic creativity notwithstanding, and despite the fact that much of the official signage in Taipei is now in both Mandarin and English, Curtin highlights the fact that Mandarin remains the de facto official language of Taiwan.

Also considering the relationship between language legislation and grassroots language practices, the articles by Muth and Zabrodskaja examine a very different type of multilingual interaction in public space. Both articles are dedicated to contexts in which the relationship between Russian, on the one hand, and Romanian/Moldovan (Muth) and Estonian (Zabrodskaja), on the other hand, has been reshuffled in post-Soviet conditions. Or put more suggestively: “The list of languages present in the [sociolinguistic] ‘soup’ remained the same, while the ‘recipe’ changed” (Jacobs 2005: 271).

Other contributions focus on the idea of locality as applied to language. Pennycook (2010) has written that:
To talk of locality is not just to indicate the obvious point that all language use happens somewhere, or simply to start with a “bottom-up” as opposed to a “top-down” version of language. The local is too often equated with the “micro” rather than the “macro”, with smallness, with embeddedness. (Pennycook 2010: 6)

Taking this into consideration, the township of Manenberg outside Cape Town as analysed by Stroud and Jegels provides a contrasting picture with Taipei as described by Melissa Curtin, where attempts at the “erasure of local” can be seen. Stroud and Jegels attempt to fully grasp the symbolic and discursive nature of linguistic landscapes by illustrating how locality is constructed “from the point of view of what one ‘ought to know’ about a particular zone”. The authors interpret linguistic landscapes from an internal “micro-perspective” based on the understandings of people who walk through and inhabit the space.

It is not just locality that is placed under a critical spotlight, but the notion of language itself is questioned in several of the articles. In their analysis of monolingual and multilingual texts found on signs, Zabrodskaja, Lamarre, and Woldemariam and Lanza all make the point that it is not always clear-cut whether “signs are ‘in’ one language or another” (Pennycook 2010: 68). The main argument made by these authors is that, in the realm of language contact, new, more “ambiguous” sociolinguistic phenomena emerge that cannot be explained using a monolingual yardstick. Therefore, analysing bilingual utterances in terms of two monolingual varieties or postulating constraints on “morphosyntactic conflicts” may simply not make sense.

The comparative perspectives on English across various settings also need highlighting. During the last two decades, the world has witnessed a range of changes as a result of globalization. This can be seen in the strong presence of English in various public and private spaces all over the world. In his contribution, Laitinen describes the forms, functions and ideologies of English in the LL of urban areas in Finland, a country that has two national languages (Finnish and Swedish). He illustrates that, despite globalization, local ideologies of English in the LL in Finnish urban areas are characterized by diversity and uniqueness. By the same token, Edelman investigates whether the linguistic landscape in different regions of the Netherlands might mirror the languages spoken by the local speech communities. Interestingly, the author discovers that in the province of Friesland, which is home to a Frisian-speaking minority, “the dominance of Dutch and English over all other languages is similar to that in Amsterdam”.

In the two studies above, English is a transnational language whose omnipresence is “one of the most obvious markers of the process of globalization” (Cenoz and Gorter 2009: 57). A case study in Montreal (Lamarre, this issue), on
the other hand, shows what happens with English when it is “local, and it operates with a local scale-level, as part of the production of locality” (Blommaert 2010: 27). On a different and final note, Milani points out in the issue’s concluding article that an exclusive focus on language(s) and multilingualism has perhaps made us blind to other important categories which structure public spaces, in this case gender and sexuality.

In conclusion, the articles in this special issue address various issues related to the semiosis of public spaces, highlighting a variety of socio-political factors that influence the linguistic landscapes either directly or indirectly (Ben-Rafael 2009: 41). Most crucially, the contributions do not simply add new empirical data and new contexts to a burgeoning field of inquiry; but they also open up methodological and theoretical challenges about what counts as linguistic landscape inquiry.

Acknowledgments: Many of the ideas that underpin this special issue derive from Mark Sebba (Lancaster University), who has been a pioneering scholar in the field of Linguistic Landscape. We are indebted to him for pushing the study of public space in new directions. We want to thank Mark by dedicating this special issue to him.

References


Anastassia Zabrodskaja and Tommaso M. Milani


Loulou Edelman

The presence of minority languages in linguistic landscapes in Amsterdam and Friesland (the Netherlands)

Abstract: This article describes an investigation of linguistic landscapes in the Netherlands. By means of a detailed quantitative analysis, it explores the extent to which the linguistic landscape reflects the languages spoken by the speech community. The study took place in both the capital city of Amsterdam, which has many immigrants and foreign tourists, and in the province of Friesland, which is home to a Frisian-speaking minority. The main finding is that in the linguistic landscape in both field sites, Dutch and English prevail, whereas minority languages have a limited presence. Differences in the ethnolinguistic composition of Amsterdam and Friesland’s populations are partly reflected in differences between the linguistic landscapes.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, the Netherlands, Dutch, English, minority languages

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1 Introduction

This article describes an investigation of the linguistic landscape which was carried out in the Netherlands. The study took place at two field sites, which differ widely from each other. The first was Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands. Of the larger cities in the Netherlands, Amsterdam has the highest percentage of immigrants, who make up almost half of the population (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2010). This makes it a suitable place to investigate the use of immigrant minority languages in the linguistic landscape. Amsterdam also attracts several million foreign tourists per year. The largest groups come from the United Kingdom and the United States (O+S Amsterdam 2008: 388). Amsterdam is thus also a good place to study the use of the international language English. The second

1 A more comprehensive account of this study is given in Edelman (2010).
field site was the Dutch province of Friesland. The number of immigrants and foreign tourists in this province is much lower than in Amsterdam, but the fact that the regional minority language Frisian is spoken there makes it another interesting area for research on multilingualism.

Often, the languages spoken by various groups in society are not represented proportionally in the linguistic landscape. This study aims to answer the following research question:

To what extent does the linguistic landscape in the Netherlands reflect the languages spoken by the speech community?

In order to answer this question, a detailed quantitative analysis of linguistic landscapes in the Netherlands was carried out, based on the approach developed by Ben-Rafael et al. (2004, 2006) and Cenoz and Gorter (2006). The study is of an explorative nature, given that the linguistic landscape is still a relatively new subject of research.

In Section 2 the concept of linguistic landscape is explained, and the linguistic landscape and its construction are related to several ideas from the social sciences involving issues of identity, vitality and power. The sociolinguistic setting of the Netherlands is described in Section 3, focusing on multilingualism in Amsterdam and Friesland. The methodology that was applied is outlined in Section 4. In Section 5 the results of the study are presented. First, the focus is on differences between and within Amsterdam and Friesland. After that, the differences between signs displaying proper names and those displaying other text are shown. Finally, in Section 6 answers to the research questions are formulated and conclusions drawn.

2 Linguistic landscapes

For “the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs,” Landry and Bourhis (1997: 23) use the term “linguistic landscape”. Linguistic landscapes do not occur in a social vacuum. Relating this notion to the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality, Landry and Bourhis (1997) show that the linguistic landscape can be seen not only as a marker of the vitality of the ethnolinguistic groups inhabiting a given area, but also as a factor that contributes to this vitality.

Kallen (2009) points out a limitation in Landry and Bourhis’ focus on language and territory, as they do not take the transience and linguistic diversity of tourists into account as an essential part of the social environment. He notes that one can hardly speak of the ethnolinguistic vitality of tourists. Ben-Rafael et al.
(2006) criticise Landry and Bourhis for their view of the linguistic landscape as a given context of sociolinguistic processes and their lack of attention to the dynamics of the linguistic landscape and the factors that give it shape. Ben-Rafael et al. also take the “LL-actors” (linguistic landscape actors) into consideration, i.e., those “who concretely participate in the shaping of LL by ordering from others or building by themselves LL elements according to preferential tendencies, deliberate choices or policies” (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 27).

Ben-Rafael (2009) provides a sociological framework for linguistic landscape research. In order to explain the diversity in the linguistic landscape and to challenge the impression of chaos that it may leave behind, he proposes four principles of structuration. These principles derive from more general sociological theories of social action. They are:
1. Presentation of self
2. Good reasons
3. Power relations
4. Collective identity

The first three of these structuration principles were applied in Ben-Rafael et al.’s (2006) study in Israel. The principle of collective identity is first described in Ben-Rafael (2009) and has not been applied to linguistic landscape data in previous research.

According to the principle of presentation of self, actors in social life try to reach their goals by expressing their identities, for example, through their linguistic choices. In the linguistic landscape, signs compete with one another for the attention of passers-by. Actors try to win this struggle by presenting advantageous images of themselves and by showing their uniqueness.

As linguistic landscape actors try to influence the public, they adapt to the values of the audience and focus on the expected attractiveness of the signs. Because of these rational considerations, their choices converge. This is called the good reasons principle.

Power relations refer to the extent to which actors are able to impose patterns of behaviour on others. Dominant groups may impose the use of a given language on subordinate groups, which is the case when an official language is prescribed for signs.

Finally, the principle of collective identity implies that actors assert their particular identities, exhibiting a commitment to a given group within the general public. Examples of this are signs of food stores displaying the words halal or kosher to attract potential clients on the basis of common fellowship. Ben-Rafael (2009) emphasises the difference between the presentation of self and the collective identity principles, both of which pertain to the identity of actors. According
to the principle of presentation of self, actors show their *uniqueness*, whereas according to the collective identity principle, actors show their *likeness* to a part of the public. All four principles are compatible and do not exclude one another, he observes.

Shohamy (2006) notes that the presence or absence of certain languages in the public space sends both direct and indirect messages with regard to the centrality or the marginality of those languages in society. When in Israel street names appear in Hebrew, Arabic and English, this may provide some recognition that Arabs or Arabic speakers reside in the area, but when those in authority use only Hebrew on street signs, even in Arab neighbourhoods and towns, this may imply that the Arabs are being overlooked. The linguistic landscape may reaffirm power relations by marking who is dominant and who is not, but it may also upgrade the status of certain weaker language groups (Shohamy 2006).

### 3 Sociolinguistic context

In this section the sociolinguistic context of the field sites is described. After all, as Sebba (2010: 75) argues, “the relationship between the visible universe of public texts and the language communities themselves will always be mediated by a complex combination of literacies, literacy practices, language policies, constraints on the use of public space, economic, and other factors”.

Many different languages are used in the Netherlands. Dutch is the official state language and the mother tongue of the majority of the population (Eurobarometer 2006: 7). The Dutch economy is one of the most highly globalised economies in the world (Thrift 1994). English is the most important international language, and many people have some command of German and French (Eurobarometer 2006). Apart from foreign languages learnt at school, there is another significant group of languages from abroad, namely the languages that immigrants have brought with them to the Netherlands. Almost 20 percent of the country’s population are immigrants (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2009), many of whom have a first language that is not Dutch. The immigrants who have settled in the country include citizens from (former) Dutch colonies (Indonesia, Suriname, the former Netherlands Antilles and Aruba), so-called guest workers and their families from the Mediterranean (e.g., Morocco and Turkey), immigrants from Western countries, and refugees from all over the world. Of all the different immigrant minority languages, Turkish, Arabic and Berber are the most common, and Turkish is the most vital (Extra et al. 2002). These languages are associated with two of the larger immigrant groups: the Turks (Turkish) and the Moroccans (Arabic and Berber). The Dutch government strongly encourages
immigrants to acquire and use Dutch, but there are no official guidelines for language choice on private signs. It has already been mentioned that apart from immigrant minority languages, a regional minority language is also used in the Netherlands. This language, Frisian, is spoken in Friesland and is recognised by law as an official language alongside Dutch in the province. Many speakers of minority languages are multilingual.

Public opinion on multilingualism in the Netherlands is ambivalent. Some languages are seen as an asset, whereas others are considered a problem. On the one hand, being fluent in English, German or French in addition to Dutch is seen as a communicative resource. On the other hand, many people do not value minority languages in the same way, even looking down on them in some cases. Moreover, immigrant minority languages such as Turkish and Arabic are considered obstacles to integration into Dutch society.

3.1 Amsterdam

The first field site in the present study was Amsterdam, the capital and the largest city of the Netherlands, with over 743,000 inhabitants (O+S Amsterdam 2007b). Aside from the Dutch, the largest population groups living in Amsterdam have Surinamese, Moroccan or Turkish backgrounds (O+S Amsterdam 2007a). Compared to the proportion of immigrants in the Netherlands as a whole (19 percent), the share of immigrants in Amsterdam (48 percent) is considerable.

However, there is another group that contributes to the diversity in languages as well, namely the many tourists that the city attracts. The hotels in Amsterdam accommodate almost 5 million guests per year. The largest group of hotel guests is from the Netherlands itself. Other large groups come from the United Kingdom and the United States, both predominantly English-speaking countries (O+S Amsterdam 2008: 388).

Hinskens and Muysken (2007) observe that in the Netherlands, but particularly in Amsterdam, the use of English has grown tremendously. They point to public information in English, bilingual Dutch-English signs and postings, and the English spoken in the streets. In the absence of systematic studies of this phenomenon, Hinskens and Muysken speculate that it may result from three factors: tourism, the important role of Amsterdam as an international trading and cultur-

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2 Of the relevant statistics that are provided every year, the figures of the situation on 1 January 2007 are presented in this article, as the linguistic landscape data were collected in and around that year.
al centre, and the fact that English is the *lingua franca* among many recent immigrant groups.

### 3.2 Friesland

Friesland was the second of the two field sites in which the linguistic landscape study was carried out. The province has about 642,000 inhabitants (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek 2008), which is a slightly lower figure than the number of citizens living in Amsterdam.

In Friesland the numbers of immigrant inhabitants and foreign tourists are relatively low. Its multilingual nature is mainly due to the use of the regional minority language Frisian in addition to Dutch. Frisian is the home language of 55 percent of the provincial population. Dutch is the second largest home language, with 33 percent, and several dialects account together for 11 percent (Gorter 2005). The vitality of Frisian is high in the countryside but lower in Leeuwarden, Friesland’s capital. All Frisian speakers also know Dutch, so they are at least bilingual. In everyday life, Frisian and Dutch do not have the same status. Dutch is usually the unmarked language while Frisian is the marked language (Gorter 1993). The provincial government conducts a prudent language policy to protect the Frisian language. Frisian is much more a spoken language than a written one. This is the result of a former diglossia situation (Gorter et al. 2008).

Nowadays Frisian has a relatively strong position in the domains of family, work and community, whereas Dutch dominates in the domains of education, media, public administration and law (Gorter et al. 2001). Frisian has a marginal position as a language for teaching at all levels of education. It is an obligatory subject for all primary schools in Friesland, but only a small percentage of schools use Frisian as a medium of instruction (Gorter 2005).

### 4 Methodology

The collection and analysis of the data are explained in the following sections. The survey areas, the survey items, and the coding are discussed, respectively.

#### 4.1 Survey areas

It was decided that the linguistic landscape of shopping centres would be studied because a high density of signs can usually be found there. Eight shopping cen-
tres were selected: five in Amsterdam and three in Friesland. These shopping centres are collections of retail stores and service establishments in a street or on a square.

The sampling method that was applied is called diversity or heterogeneity sampling. The purpose of using this method in the present study was to get a broad spectrum of linguistic landscapes, including the unusual ones, rather than to represent all the linguistic landscapes proportionately. The particular shopping centres were chosen because the neighbourhoods in which they are situated differ greatly in their ethnolinguistic composition. Sections of the shopping centres, including 15 to 23 connected establishments, served as survey areas. Within the shopping centres that were selected, the survey areas started at the establishment with the lowest house number and preferably ended at a natural boundary, such as a side street. At the same time, across the survey areas a comparable number of signs, around 300 to 400 signs each, were aimed for.

The shopping centres in Amsterdam comprise Rooswijck, Kalverstraat, Bos en Lommerplein, Javastraat and Ganzenpoort. Neighbourhoods that are home to relatively large numbers of immigrants are included, as well as neighbourhoods where few immigrants reside. Rooswijck is a shopping centre in a neighbourhood where, based on the parental birth country criterion, mainly Dutch people live (64 percent). One in five people populating the neighbourhood is a Western immigrant. It is situated in the south of Amsterdam. Kalverstraat is the main shopping street in the centre of Amsterdam. People living around Kalverstraat are mainly Dutch (58 percent) and Western immigrants (28 percent). Bos en Lommerplein, Javastraat and Ganzenpoort are shopping centres in different neighbourhoods where relatively many immigrants live. Bos en Lommerplein is a shopping square in the west of Amsterdam. The population of the neighbourhood surrounding it consists mainly of people of Dutch (50 percent), Moroccan (13 percent) or Turkish (11 percent) descent. Javastraat is a shopping street in the east of Amsterdam. In Amsterdam, Javastraat is known as a multicultural street. Among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood surrounding this street are people with a Dutch (32

3 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (the Dutch central bureau of statistics) distinguishes between Western and non-Western immigrants. The “Western” countries of origin include all European countries (except Turkey), North America, Oceania, Japan and Indonesia. The “non-Western” countries of origin are Turkey and all countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia (except Japan and Indonesia). The reason for this distinction is the difference in socio-economic and cultural position of Western and non-Western immigrants. Groups that strongly resemble the Dutch population from a socioeconomic or cultural viewpoint are counted as Western immigrants (Keij 2000). It can be inferred that the differentiation between Western and non-Western immigrants in fact mainly serves to distinguish elite immigrants from non-elite immigrants. Among the Western immigrants are many expatriates and foreign students.
percent), Moroccan (21 percent), Surinamese and Turkish background (both 11 percent). Ganzenpoort is located in the southeast of Amsterdam. The neighbourhood surrounding Ganzenpoort houses Surinamese people (34 percent), a diverse group of “other non-Western immigrants” (26 percent) and Dutch people (22 percent), among others. Percentages were derived from O+S Amsterdam (2007c: 22–24).

The composition of the resident population in the city centre surrounding the main shopping street of Kalverstraat may be of less relevance, however, since the centre attracts people from all over Amsterdam and far beyond (O+S Amsterdam 2009). The survey area in Kalverstraat is immediately adjacent to the popular tourist attraction of Dam Square. Tourists do not usually go to the other shopping centres in the sample, which are further away from the city centre.

Apart from the five shopping centres in Amsterdam, the study also comprised three shopping centres in Friesland, namely Wirdumerdijk in Leeuwarden, Dijkstraat in Franeker, and Schoolstraat in Burgum.

Leeuwarden, a town with almost 87,000 inhabitants, is the provincial capital of Friesland. Franeker is a smaller town west of Leeuwarden, with a population of nearly 13,000. Burgum is a rural village east of Leeuwarden housing some 10,000 people. Population numbers were derived from Provincie Fryslân (2009). A section of the main shopping street served as a survey area in both Franeker and Burgum. In Leeuwarden, a section of a side street of Nieuwestad, the main shopping street, constituted the survey area, as the linguistic landscape of Nieuwestad had already been investigated by Cenoz and Gorter (2006).

The distribution of mother tongues in Leeuwarden, Franeker and Burgum varies. Leeuwarden has the highest share of native Dutch speakers (54 percent), whereas Tytsjerksteradiel, the municipality in which Burgum is located, has the highest proportion of speakers of Frisian as a first language (70 percent). The figures for Franekeradeel, the municipality in which Franeker is situated, are in between (Provincie Fryslân 2007: 22).

4.2 Survey items

In order to obtain a systematic inventory, all the signs in the survey areas were photographed. This was done between March 2005 and April 2008.4

In accordance with Backhaus (2006: 55), a sign was considered to be “any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame . . . including anything

4 Hyke Bierma collected the data in Franeker, the other data were collected by the author.
from handwritten stickers to huge commercial billboards”. Graffiti is usually also seen as a “sign”, although in this case there often is no frame; in the present investigation, this kind of text was also counted as a sign. In the survey, only signs that were displayed outside or in a shop window were included, so texts that were in the interior of a shop were not taken into account. When a sign occurred more than once, all instances were coded separately.

Nameplates of residents as displayed, for example, on a block of flats were left out of consideration. After all, the research question is: To what extent does the linguistic landscape in the Netherlands reflect the languages spoken by the speech community? If in a neighbourhood where many Turkish immigrants live, their Turkish names were included in the research, then obviously a language spoken by the speech community would be reflected in the linguistic landscape. However, this is not a matter of choice because the language of the names is a given. Apart from nameplates, all the signs photographed in the survey areas were considered. The data collection comprised a total of 3,089 signs.

4.3 Coding

Using the statistical package SPSS, the signs were coded according to, among others, the following variables:5

1. Survey area
2. Presence of proper name(s) and other text
3. Languages

The coding of each of these variables is explained below.

4.3.1 Survey area

In all likelihood the language(s) used on a sign will vary depending on the neighbourhood where the sign is found. Therefore, for every sign the survey area was coded.

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5 Jan-Willem van Leussen did much of the coding of the signs from Rooswijk, Kalverstraat, Bos en Lommerplein, Javastraat, Ganzenpoort and Wirdumerdijk, whereas Hyke Bierma coded the signs from Dijkstraat. The author made sure that the coding by the two researchers and herself was consistent.
4.3.2 Presence of proper name(s) and other text

It was coded whether the sign contained one or more proper names, other text, or both. This approach makes it possible to consider the different types of sign separately. Proper names include shop names, for example. The classification of proper names by language is discussed extensively in Edelman (2009).

4.3.3 Languages

The languages on the sign were coded in order of appearance. In cases where a word could be assigned to more than one language, the context played a decisive role in the coding. For example, a gift shop in Kalverstraat displayed the text in (1).

(1) Blender
    van €199,95
    voor €99,95

The English loanword *blender* is included in the most authoritative dictionary of contemporary Dutch (Den Boon and Geeraerts 2005) and is used on the sign in a Dutch context, formed by the words *van* ‘from’ and *voor* ‘to’. Therefore, the sign was labelled “Dutch”.

5 Results

In the present section the findings are presented.

5.1 Comparison of Amsterdam and Friesland

First of all, a comparison between the different field sites in this study is made in order to illuminate the extent to which the linguistic landscape reflects the languages spoken by the speech community. In this section, the survey areas in Amsterdam are taken together and compared to those in Friesland. As the survey areas were not drawn randomly, they are not representative of the linguistic landscapes of Amsterdam and Friesland as a whole, and one cannot generalise from the samples to any populations (for example, the complete collection of signs in Amsterdam or the Netherlands). This has to be kept in mind when considering
the outcomes. Still, a comparison between the different field sites indicates interesting similarities and differences.

Table 1 gives an impression of the spread of languages on signs in the survey areas in both Amsterdam and Friesland. In all survey areas together, a total of 31 different languages were found. Only the nine most-used languages are displayed here, in order of frequency.

In both the Amsterdam and Friesland survey areas, Dutch was used most frequently, followed by English. Table 1 shows an unexpectedly large gap in the percentages between Dutch and English and the remaining languages. Remarkably, in Friesland the dominance of Dutch and English over all other languages is similar to that in Amsterdam. The nine most common languages further include European languages that seem to have high prestige in advertising in the Netherlands (French, German, Italian, Spanish), Frisian, and Turkish and Arabic. In general, minority languages do not appear very frequently on the signs. However, if one compares the distributions in the survey areas in Amsterdam and Friesland, differences in the ethnolinguistic composition of the two field sites do appear to manifest themselves in the linguistic landscape. In the Amsterdam survey areas, Turkish and Arabic featured on some of the signs, showing the presence of immigrants, while in Friesland Frisian played a modest but significant role, showing that there are indeed speakers of this regional minority language.

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**Table 1: Languages on the signs in the combined survey areas in Amsterdam and Friesland (percentage)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Amsterdam</th>
<th>Friesland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Dutch</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 English</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 French</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Frisian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 German</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Italian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Turkish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Arabic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Spanish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N 1,826 1,078

---

6 If a sign contained both Dutch and English, for instance, it is represented twice in Table 1. Thus, the total percentages per field site exceed 100. Also the columns in Table 4 below give percentages that add up to over 100 percent. As in Table 1, this is due to the occurrence of multilingual signs.
A considerable share of the signs in the sample (about one in three) featured English. In fact, most of the messages in English were addressed to non-native speakers of that language, as in the Netherlands the number of people with English as their mother tongue is limited. Although in the combined survey areas in urban Amsterdam more English was used than in rural Friesland, the difference was small (36 versus 32 percent). So even in Friesland, with its low number of immigrant inhabitants and foreign tourists, quite some English messages were found. Similarly, Laitinen (this issue) shows that English enjoys high visibility in both urban and rural areas in Finland.

Extra et al. (2002) demonstrate that of the immigrant languages, Turkish and Arabic are used in the largest number of homes of immigrant children. The present study shows that these are also the immigrant languages that, overall, occur most frequently in the linguistic landscapes of the sample. Extra et al.’s finding that Turkish and Arabic are spoken relatively frequently in the home is probably related to a relatively high proportion of writers and readers of signs who know one of these languages.

From their study in Israel, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) conclude that linguistic landscape items do not faithfully represent Israel’s linguistic repertoire. The present study in the Netherlands yields a similar outcome. Languages of the larger minority groups are present in the linguistic landscape, but to a limited degree. Moreover, not all languages that are spoken have a presence in the survey areas, for instance, Berber. The fact that it is a mainly oral language lacking a strong written tradition may be an important reason for why this immigrant minority language is completely lacking in the linguistic landscapes under study. The four structuration principles provided by Ben-Rafael (2009) help us to understand why the linguistic landscape is not a straightforward reflection of the languages spoken by the speech community.

Although other languages were found, the large majority of the signs were in Dutch and/or English. Ben-Rafael’s (2009) good reasons principle may be at work here: actors adapt to the values of the public, so that their choices converge.

The discussion of the sociolinguistic context of the Netherlands in Section 3 makes it clear that the position of Dutch as the dominant language seems to be unchallenged by any other language. The principle of power relations as applied by Ben-Rafael (2009) may help to account for the fact that the language of the dominant ethnolinguistic group is used much more in the investigated linguistic landscapes than the languages of subordinate groups.

The principle of collective identity helps in understanding why some actors use minority languages on their signs. These languages may serve to exhibit the actors’ identity and their commitment to a minority group. However, as minority languages feature on a limited percentage of the signs in this study, the principle
of power relations seems to often have more weight in the Dutch context than the collective identity principle.

In Section 2, the linguistic landscape was related to ethnolinguistic vitality. The fact that 31 different languages have a certain presence (even if modest) in the survey areas under investigation may be seen as a token of the vitality of the ethnolinguistic groups concerned. On the other hand, many languages were not encountered at all. This shows that there is no direct link between language vitality at home and language presence in the linguistic landscape, but the presence is also influenced by other contextual factors. One of the factors probably playing a role is that a number of languages spoken by immigrants do not have a (strong) written tradition.

Ben-Rafael (2009) posits that the more tolerant of sociocultural differences a setting is, the more the linguistic landscape should allow room for signs to express particular identities. In general, the immigrant minority languages spoken in Amsterdam are not used very frequently on the signs there. This may be related to the social climate in the Netherlands, which does not encourage the use of immigrant languages. In casual conversation with some of the immigrant shop owners, they seemed to be proud of using Dutch on signs. Using Dutch is a symbol of assimilation, and shop owners may wish to be identified with this language.

In this section it was shown that the linguistic landscapes in Amsterdam and Friesland differ most of all in the use of minority languages. In Amsterdam some of the signs analysed include immigrant minority languages, whereas in Friesland some of the signs contain the regional minority language Frisian. Regarding the research question, it can be concluded that the linguistic landscape only reflects the languages spoken by the speech community to some extent. Many other factors play a role, such as power relations, prestige, symbolic value, identity issues, vitality and literacy. In the following sections, the survey areas in Amsterdam and Friesland are analysed separately in order to see if this general answer to the research question will hold.

5.2 Amsterdam: immigrant minority languages

In this section, the individual survey areas in Amsterdam are addressed. They vary in the percentage of immigrants and Dutch people living in the neighbourhood, but also in the number of tourists that visit the areas. Table 2 shows the distribution of languages on signs in these survey areas.

Table 2 makes clear that in the Rooswijck survey area, which is situated in a neighbourhood where mainly Dutch people live, a relatively large share of the
signs contain Dutch. Of the immigrant languages, Turkish is hardly used and
Arabic does not occur at all. A considerable Jewish community and also a rela-
tively large number of Japanese immigrants reside in the surrounding area. The
sign of a dry cleaner in the Rooswijck survey area displayed in Figure 1 is an indi-
cation that the sign’s author was aware of the presence of different ethnolinguis-
tic groups. The sign welcomes potential customers in English, French, Japanese
and Hebrew. English and French may be meant to address Western immigrants
(other than the Japanese) who make up 20 percent of the neighbourhood. Unlike
the Hebrew text, the Japanese text is romanised. It is not clear why.

In the survey area in Kalverstraat, the central shopping street, Dutch and En-
glish are present in nearly equal amounts. In Kalverstraat the relative amount of
Dutch is lower and that of English is higher than in the other, less central neigh-
bourhoods. This may be due to the large amount of tourists visiting the centre of
Amsterdam. The largest groups of foreign tourists are from the English-speaking
countries the United Kingdom and the United States, and English also seems
an appropriate language to address tourists from various other countries. Shop
owners in Kalverstraat may deliberately use English to try to sell their goods to
these foreign tourists. In other words, the good reasons principle (Ben-Rafael

7 In Table 2 and in further tables, an asterisk indicates a statistically significant difference at the
0.05 level of probability. In this case, it means that the differences found in the presence of Dutch
on signs in the different survey areas are statistically significant. The survey areas are not
random samples of the linguistic landscape in Amsterdam. However, the eight survey areas may
be regarded as random samples of the different shopping centres. Therefore, it was considered
reasonable to test the statistical significance.
may play a role here. Using English does not exclude possible Dutch customers, as many of them will also be able to understand English signs. If one only considers signs with solely “other text”, and not proper names, the contrast between Kalverstraat and the other survey areas is even more striking. Whereas in Kalverstraat, 38 percent of these signs included English, the percentage in Rooswijck, Bos en Lommerplein, Javastraat and Ganzenpoort only ranged from 5 to 15. The fact that the English language is used more often for transmitting factual information in Kalverstraat than in the other survey areas makes it plausible that the presence of foreign tourists as presumed readers has contributed to the relatively high presence of English in this survey area.

Of the immigrant languages, Turkish occurred most frequently in the sample, although the Turks do not constitute the largest immigrant group in Amsterdam. For example, although the Moroccans slightly outnumber the Turks in the neighbourhood around Bos en Lommerplein, more Turkish than Arabic was used. This may be related to the fact that Turkish is one of the most vital immigrant languages in the Netherlands (Extra et al. 2002). The Turkish community may also be more prone to display its collective identity than the Moroccan community. There is much more of a sense of overall community in the Turkish immigrant group than in that of the Moroccans (Hinskens and Muysken 2007). It is not clear why Dutch occurs relatively frequently in the Bos en Lommerplein survey area and English relatively little. It is conceivable that Dutch is used there as a lingua franca
to reach as many ethnolinguistic groups as possible. In Ganzenpoort, as discussed later, English seems to have this function instead.

The Javastraat survey area especially stands out because of the relatively high proportion of signs that included Arabic. This finding is probably related to a high presence of speakers of this language in the neighbourhood. As mentioned in Section 4.1, more than one in five residents is Moroccan, so actors may assume a relatively large share of the readers know Arabic.

In the survey area in Ganzenpoort, more English was used than in the other residential areas of Rooswijck, Bos en Lommerplein and Javastraat. It may well be the case that there are more native speakers living within the immediate area of Ganzenpoort, immigrants from Ghana, for example, where English is the official language. English may also be used as a lingua franca between people from many different countries. Although many Surinamese people live in and around Ganzenpoort, not much Sranan is used on the signs. Sranan is not very vital in the Netherlands (Extra et al. 2002), and a large majority of the Surinamese immigrants are proficient in Dutch (Turkenburg and Gijsberts 2007) because Dutch is the official language in the former colony of Suriname. Moreover, Sranan is hardly used in its written form.

The differences between the survey areas in Amsterdam that came to light in this section suggest once again that the linguistic landscape is not a direct reflection of the languages spoken by the speech community but in complex ways is also influenced by other factors.

5.3 Friesland: regional minority language

The previous section dealt with the languages on signs in the survey areas in Amsterdam. Now we move on to the individual survey areas in Friesland. Section 5.1 already made it clear that Frisian has a small presence in the linguistic landscape of Friesland, no more than 10 percent overall. As shown in Section 4.1, the municipalities in which the survey areas are situated differed with regard to the proportion of native Frisian speakers. Table 3 shows the distribution of languages occurring on the signs in the three survey areas.

Table 3 demonstrates that some Frisian is used in the survey areas in Franeker and Burgum, but that it hardly occurs in the more urban Leeuwarden survey area. This is probably related to the higher proportion of native Frisian speakers in Burgum and Franeker. Monolingual Frisian signs did not occur in the survey area in Leeuwarden. In Franeker and Burgum they made up 3 and 2 percent of the signs respectively. In Franeker, of the signs with only ‘other text’, and not proper names, 7 percent included Frisian. In the other two survey areas, none of these signs
contained the regional minority language. Given that Frisian is the home language of 55 percent of the provincial population, the percentages of signs including this language is rather low. One explanation for this is that due to a former diglossia situation, Frisian is much more a spoken language than a written one (Gorter et al. 2008).

The Frisian-Dutch sign with opening hours that is given in Figure 2 is a clear example of the use of language as a display of identity. The owners wrote the text in their own language, Frisian, on top and larger than that in the other language, Dutch. Identity issues were decisive in the choice to use Frisian. In an interview, one of the owners of the ice cream parlour in Franeker expressed that the Frisian language was very important to them and that they felt closely connected to it (Bierma 2008). The owners’ motives are an example of Ben-Rafael’s (2009) principle of presentation of self.

The comparison of the survey areas in Friesland in this section shows that in this province the linguistic landscape also reflects the languages spoken by the speech community to some extent. The interplay of both this and other factors results in the current appearance of the linguistic landscape.

### 5.4 Proper names and identity

Texts in the linguistic landscape often contain proper names, such as brand and shop names. It may well be the case that this category of words is written in a foreign language more frequently than other texts. From a pilot study in Kalverstraat (Edelman 2006), it was concluded that proper names contribute greatly
to the multilingual appearance of the linguistic landscape. In the present study, every name was assigned to its original language, and for each sign it was coded whether it consisted of proper name(s), other text, or both. This approach makes it possible to consider the different types of sign separately. The figures are given in Table 4.

**Table 4: Languages on signs by type of text (percentage)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proper name(s)</th>
<th>Other text</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch*</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English*</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frisian*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>1,471</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The difference between the types of text is statistically significant (p < .05).
Table 4 has to be read as follows. Of the signs that only contained one or more proper names, such as a sign listing brands that are sold in a shop, 53 percent included Dutch and 35 percent included English. Of the signs that only displayed text other than proper names, such as a “push” sticker on an entrance door, 90 percent featured Dutch and 12 percent featured English. For signs with both one or more proper names and other text, the figures were 81 percent Dutch and 47 percent English.

There was a difference in the languages used between signs displaying one or more proper names, and signs displaying other text. A large majority of the signs with only “other text” were written in Dutch. Also, English was sometimes used for “other text”. Other texts in other languages rarely occurred. Signs with only proper names show a different pattern; they are linguistically more diverse. Only a small majority of these signs were written in Dutch whereas about a third of them contained English. In a small percentage of the cases languages like French, German, Frisian and Italian were used for proper names. Proper names such as shop names and brand names can easily be written in a language that is not used or fully understood by the audience, as they do not have the purpose of transmitting factual information. One could say that proper names in particular can be used for presentation of self or for the display of collective identity.

Table 4 reveals a striking difference in the use of the two main languages Dutch and English. Whereas Dutch occurred less frequently on signs with only one or more proper names than on signs displaying other text, for English the situation was the other way around. Thus, there seems to be a tendency for Dutch to be used more for referential purposes, and English more for symbolic purposes (see also Muth, this issue). Actors may consider the Dutch language more suitable for transmitting factual information and may use English mainly for brand and shop names.

To summarise, in this section the linguistic content of the signs, whether they contain proper names, other text or both, was identified as an additional factor that influences properties of signs. Signs with proper names are linguistically more diverse than signs displaying only other text. This finding suggests that names such as shop and brand names are especially used as a display of identity.

6 Conclusion

In the previous section the findings of the empirical study are presented so that answers to the research question can be formulated and conclusions can be drawn. The research question was: To what extent does the linguistic landscape in the Netherlands reflect the languages spoken by the speech community? The
results show that the different ethnolinguistic compositions of the two field sites in this study, Amsterdam and Friesland, result in different outcomes in the languages used. In Amsterdam, immigrants have left their traces in the linguistic landscape, while in Friesland the Frisian speakers are represented to some extent. Within Amsterdam the linguistic landscape differs according to whether or not many immigrants live around the shopping centre concerned, and according to whether or not it is frequented by tourists. In Friesland there is a difference between more urban and more rural municipalities. Although the ethnolinguistic compositions of the neighbourhoods are reflected in their linguistic landscapes to some extent, minority languages have a relatively small presence. Apart from the languages spoken by the speech community, many other factors play a role, such as power relations, prestige, symbolic value, identity issues, vitality and literacy. The interplay of all factors has resulted in a limited display of multilingualism. Moreover, it is important to note what kinds of words a sign displays. For proper names, a larger diversity of languages is used than for other text, which is usually written in Dutch and sometimes in English.

In Section 3 it was noted that the public opinion on multilingualism in the Netherlands is ambivalent, in that some languages are seen as a resource whereas others are considered a problem. A similar division can be seen in the linguistic landscape. If one compares the occurrence of Turkish or Frisian to the occurrence of English, it becomes clear that the English language has much more presence in the linguistic landscape. Thus, the fact that English is valued more than Turkish and Frisian is also expressed there.

Shohamy’s (2006) considerations, as conveyed in Section 2, show that the linguistic landscape may reaffirm power relations by marking who is dominant and who is not. The present study demonstrates that this was indeed the case in the survey areas. For example, all street signs in the sample were monolingual Dutch, regardless of the minority languages spoken in the Netherlands.

Ben-Rafael’s (2009) sociological framework captures power issues in the principle of power relations, which refer to the extent to which actors are able to impose patterns of behaviour on others. The fact that Dutch, the language of the dominant group, has a much stronger presence in the linguistic landscape than the languages of subordinate groups may show that power relations play an important role. Although the government does not prescribe the use of Dutch on signs, public opinion sometimes condemns the use of other languages, especially immigrant minority languages. The results of this study do indeed point to rather strong normative pressures to use the Dutch language, which leads to a rather low presence of minority languages and thus to limited multilingualism in the linguistic landscape. This is related to the marginal place that minority languages have in education, and to the emphasis the government puts on learning and
using Dutch. Given the relatively small presence of languages other than Dutch and English, power relations and good reasons may be the major structuring principles in the Dutch context, although many other factors may have had an effect.

References


Informal signs as expressions of multilingualism in Chisinau: how individuals shape the public space of a post-Soviet capital

Abstract: Informal and transient displays of written language such as graffiti, announcements and notes attached to walls and lampposts form an integral part of an urban linguistic landscape. Especially within multilingual contexts, individuals constantly shape the public space by the languages they use and make language choices that do not always reflect official language policies, commonly held perceptions or the demographic makeup within a certain area. The capital of the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, proves to be an interesting area of research here, as – apart from a Romanian-speaking majority – the city is home to a large share of speakers of Russian, a language long considered to be the lingua franca of the country. The aim of the current study is to analyse signs made by private individuals that are not part of shop fronts or billboards, namely those that are found all over the city and advertise for language courses, work opportunities abroad or express political opinions. The quantitative basis of the study is made up of two corpora with over 750 different items from various parts of Chisinau surveyed in 2009 and 2010 both in the centre of the city as well as in suburban residential areas. For better traceability and to ensure transparency in linguistic landscape analysis, the 2010 corpus is accessible online. The survey shows that Russian is widely used as a local lingua franca, contradicting official policies that declare Romanian Moldovan the sole national language.

Keywords: linguistic landscapes, informal signs, multilingualism, Moldova

1 Introduction: linguistic landscapes and Moldova

This study analyses informal and transient displays of written language in Chisinau, the capital of the Republic of Moldova. In this article the focus is laid
on informal displays of written language installed by individuals and private entrepreneurs such as placards, notes or graffiti. This is done by narrowing down the scope of the analysis to signs where language use is neither prescribed nor sanctioned by government bodies or other public actors, but that are parts of a largely unregulated linguistic landscape.

The present study on the cityscape of Chisinau draws from a number of distinct strands in linguistic landscape analysis, among them surveys on ethnolinguistic vitality (Cenoz and Gorter 2006), indigenous languages (Pietikäinen et al. 2011), the symbolic representation of languages and power structures (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Woldemariam and Lanza, this issue; Zabrodskaja, this issue), the discourses of globalization, international tourism and trade (Backhaus 2007; Edelman, this issue; Kallen 2010), advertising (Cenoz and Gorter 2009) and sociolinguistic aspects related to language shift and change (Muth 2012; Pavlenko 2009, 2010). Yet apart from a wider context that relates to historical, political and socioeconomic factors, surveys of post-Soviet linguistic landscapes require a refined approach. This includes both quantitative observations on the vitality of languages within a community as well as an ethnographic perspective that considers signs and language in the public sphere as cultural texts that “articulate the cultures that generate them” (Coupland 2010: 78–79; Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003; Stroud and Jegels, this issue; Milani, this issue). Both perspectives are equally important in understanding language change and shift as well as post-Soviet nation-building that is frequently centered on ideologies of the monolingual nation-state (cf. Pavlenko 2011).

The main focus of this article lies in the documentation and interpretation of the vitality and visibility of the country’s most widespread minority language Russian and raises the question, to what extent the former lingua franca of the Soviet Union is used by individuals in the cityscape of the Moldovan capital. Similar to other countries of the former USSR, the status of the Russian ethnic minority and their language continues to raise concerns by policymakers and local inhabitants alike. Advocates of policies pursuing a nationalistic revival in countries like Latvia and parts of Ukraine see the language as a burdensome remnant of a Soviet past that needs to be overcome. General tendencies in the post-Soviet realm point towards “derussification” and “de-sovietization” (Pavlenko 2008: 282), processes that have resulted in a significant loss of status and prestige of Russian in the region. Within this context a survey of the informal linguistic landscape of urban Moldova provides insights into patterns of language use by individuals that might help to give us an understanding of the current language situation, the prestige and functional domains of both the titular language Romanian and Russian as a minority language as well as the negotiation of different linguistic identities mirrored in the linguistic landscape.
1.1 Language, culture and politics

Moldova became independent in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and “like many other regions along the borderlands of recently dissolved empires, the country is distinctively multi-ethnic and multilingual in character” (Ciscel 2007: 1). It is one of the few countries of the former Eastern Bloc in which a distinct political and cultural identity has not yet emerged and in which a connection to pre-war traditions of statehood has not been possible per se (Hirsch 2005). The stretch of land between Romania and Ukraine had been part of the Russian Empire until the Russian Revolution when most of present-day Moldova was integrated into Romania as the province of Bessarabia (King 2000). After the war, the Moldavian Soviet Republic was established and included both Bessarabia and parts east of the river Dniester that constituted the former Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR). The formation of Soviet Moldova went alongside efforts to industrialize the Republic. The region subsequently witnessed a heavy influx of workers from Russia, Ukraine and other parts of the USSR, especially into urban areas. In 1989, an impressive number of 550,000 speakers of Russian lived in Moldova out of a total population of approximately 4.3 million inhabitants (Nygren 2008: 82).

Similar to other parts of the Soviet Union, Russian became the language of wider communication and was essential to know in most domains, while the functions of the titular language Romanian were fairly limited (Ciscel 2007: 12). Its script was changed from Latin to Cyrillic, and Soviet scholars tried to fabricate a distinct Moldovan language to create a distinct Moldovan cultural identity by highlighting linguistic differences between Romanian and the dialect of Moldovan (Rom. Moldovenesc) (Pavlenko 2008: 280).

Language and identity continued to be decisive issues in independent Moldova as well. Already two years before the country became independent in 1991, Romanian in Moldova was changed back from Cyrillic to Latin script and Russian lost its status as an official language. As in many other former Soviet Republics, such as Estonia and Latvia, this left a considerable share of the population with a first language not officially recognized by the authorities. However, policies which would promote the titular languages were not pursued with the same rigor as in the Baltic Republics (Pavlenko 2008, 2011) and until today Russian is spoken by most of the ethnic Russian population in all domains. It is also an L2 for other minority language speakers of the country, including Ukrainian, Gagauz and Bulgarian (Ciscel 2008: 103–104).

The reasons for the current language situation and the strong status of Russian in the country are complex, but the largely failed quest for a genuinely Moldovan political identity as well as work migration and strong economic ties to
the Russian Federation and Ukraine can be regarded as crucial factors. As such, Moldovan political elites did not succeed in creating such a distinct cultural and political identity after the country’s independence, resulting in a low-level national cohesion among the country’s inhabitants (King 2000). Although Russian lost its status as an official language following the breakup of the Soviet Union and the independence of Moldova, it is widely used in the economy and the media. This has led to a high degree of uncertainty about the identity of the national language, which is “in stiff competition with Russian for many social functions and roles” (Ciscel 2008: 99).

2 Methodological aspects: cityscapes in multilingual settings

A broad definition of what constitutes the linguistic landscape of a given area refers to “any sign or announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location” (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 14). This has the advantage of delivering insights on how frequent different languages are visible in the public sphere. Nevertheless, counting signs alone does not tell much about the different authors in the linguistic landscape, their motivations to display or omit certain languages or the specific domains they are used in (Coupland 2010; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010). By adding a discursive perspective to such quantitative observations, it is possible to determine the forms, function and prestige languages have in a multilingual environment such as the Moldovan capital Chisinau. This helps to determine if certain minority languages like Russian are just expressions of cultural belonging that “transcend physical distance” (Coupland 2007: 122) or genuine tools for wider communication within the whole community.

Most of the time urban landscapes are diverse places and neighborhoods usually differ in their demographic makeup, architectural characteristics and status. Bearing this in mind, we cannot expect the same audience, and subsequently the same patterns of language use in city centers as compared to peripheral residential districts with regard to the display of written language in the public sphere. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge certain factors that might account for a diverse picture in patterns of language use in a linguistic landscape, for example a particular location near a university, school, transport hub or market.

2.1 Areas of research

Although Chisinau appears to be rather small and compact with approximately 600,000 inhabitants, it is Moldova’s prime transport hub as well as its economic
and cultural center. Roughly one third of the population claims to speak Russian as a first language (see Table 1) as opposed to almost 60 per cent who state to speak the national language that is considered either Romanian or Moldovan, depending on the political affiliation and cultural views of the individual (Ciscel 2008; King 2000). Keeping these figures in mind, it can be expected that a survey of informal and transient displays of written language provides insights into everyday patterns of language use by individuals. In that respect, census data can do more than just reflect social reality and plays a “key role in the construction of that reality and in the creation of collective identities” (Barni and Extra 2008: 19).

To ensure a certain degree of representativeness, the discussion is backed up by two corpora. The first corpus comprises a total number of 1309 items collected on various locations in four districts of the Moldovan capital in March 2009. The second corpus includes 744 signs visible on one of the city’s main thoroughfares, the centrally located str. Puşkin collected in March 2010. Both corpora were designed to include all informal displays of written language visible to passersby within a designated area, regardless if they were shop-signs, advertising banners, billboards, placards or examples of transgressive signs. To be able to compare patterns of language use on formal and usually static private signs with informal

1 Although Moldovan is largely considered a dialect of Romanian spoken in the Republic of Moldova as well as in the adjacent Romanian region of Moldavia, the concept of a distinct Moldovan language was introduced during Soviet times to help fabricate a distinct Moldovan cultural and linguistic identity. Today the terms Romanian and Moldovan are used interchangeably when referring to the language spoken in the Republic, but the reference to Romanian suggest a political and cultural orientation towards Romania and Central and Western Europe.

2 This corpus includes the affluent downtown area of Centru, the mixed business and residential district of Rişcani and two peripheral low-prestige residential areas, Botanica and Ciocana. Within Centru, parts of Moldova’s main shopping street bulevardul Ştefan cel Mare as well as adjacent streets were surveyed. Furthermore, data has been obtained around the bus and train station and on str. Cosmonaţiilor in the north and str. Grenoble in the very south of the district. In Rişcani, sampling areas included segments of its main thoroughfares bd. Renasterii, str. Kiev and bd. Moscova as well as str. Matei Basarab and the eastern part of str. Petricani and around str. B. P. Hasdeu. Within the residential area of Botanica in the south-eastern part of Chisinau, the north-eastern side of the district’s main through road bd. Dacia as well as three side streets, str. Independentei, bd. Traian and str. Sofia were considered. In Ciocana, the least prestigious of the four districts located to the north-east of the city, the main roads str. N. Milescu Spătaru and the north-eastern part of str. Vadul lui Voda were surveyed. Also, parts of str. Ginta Latina, str. Otovasca as well as str. Tabacavia Veche were surveyed.

3 All 744 items that constitute the 2010 Chisinau-corpus surveyed on str. Puşkin are available online at http://celum-web.rz.uni-greifswald.de/webgate_anglistik;keyword.html?currentContainerId=175andpageNr=1. This corpus of 744 items includes all specimens of written languages visible on the entire street, ranging approximately 2.5 kilometers from the corner of str. Alexei Mateievici in the south to str. Albişoara in the north.
displays of written language ranging from graffiti to placards attached to lampposts and trees, both numbers will be presented and discussed. Based on those findings the various functional domains of the languages that constitute the “individuals’ linguistic landscape” of Chisinau will be determined. When possible, local informants were asked to provide additional information on the function and purpose of particular signs.

3 Signs as an expression of language awareness and identity

When exploring the Moldovan capital on foot for the first time, it is noticeable that the national language Romanian is just one part of a plethora of languages visible to passersby. Whereas shops and international corporations usually display their advertisements in Romanian and occasionally add English catchphrases such as sale, discount center or register now to them, a look at non-static informal signs posted on trees, lampposts or graffiti written on walls reveals a far more diverse picture. These signs made by private individuals and small-scale entrepreneurs often do not convey their message in Romanian alone, but also include Russian to reach their audience. In that respect, a language shift away from Russian towards Romanian as the predominant language of wider communication is at least debatable.

In what follows, the linguistic landscape of the city will be explored from a quantitative angle with a general overview of the distribution of different languages on signs from the two corpora. At first, all signs in a wider sense...
considered to be private displays of written language will be discussed to give a general understanding of the linguistic landscape. After that, the notion of non-governmental and municipal signs will be narrowed down towards the aforementioned units of analysis that include informal and transient signs such as placards, notes, graffiti and other transgressive signs. Besides that, a discussion of selected signs that are to a certain extent representative for the two corpora will help to establish and assign certain functional domains to the languages displayed. Although the notion of transgressive (Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003: 188–189) is not clear-cut and determining a sign that is “in its wrong place” leaves room for interpretation, it allows for a more refined perspective in this particular setting. Unlike an analysis that gives the term private sign a broad definition and includes every display of written language that has not been installed by public and institutional actors, this will show the salience of language boundaries within the private domain.

The audience addressed by signs on a particular street is the same, but nevertheless certain factors might attribute to differences. On the one hand Moldova is, among other post-Soviet nations such as Estonia and Latvia, one of the few European countries that officially regulates language use on static signs such as shop fronts and denies entrepreneurs the sole use of Russian and Cyrillic spelling when naming their establishment (Ciscel 2008: 111). Instead, Latin script has to be used, and shopkeepers who speak Russian as a first language tend to use English instead of Romanian (Muth 2012). On the other hand, informal placards and notes rarely enable the author to include more than one language because of the limited space available to them and the choice to display a particular language is determined by the author’s perception of the linguistic environment. In cases where the intentions that lay behind the display of a certain language or the reasons to display that particular sign in the first place were not clear, inquiries with local informants were made.

3.1 The audience matters – which languages do Moldovans use on signs?

A quantitative study on the general distribution of different languages on signs in four districts underlines the status of Chisinau as a bilingual Romanian and Russian city, exemplified in Table 2. Considering all informal signs (shop fronts, billboards, placards and graffiti), Romanian is the dominant and preferred code used on more than 70 per cent of all signs, either as the sole language displayed or in conjunction with Russian, English or both. The share of signs that use Russian as one of the preferred codes is slightly smaller and, depending on the
The data presented in Table 2 also indicates that English found its way into the linguistic landscape, often in conjunction with Romanian. English has a symbolic function and serves as a marker of internationality, an expression of youth culture as well as a neutral alternative for those entrepreneurs who reject Romanian-language shop names. An exclusive focus on informal displays of written language and a more rigid interpretation of the notion of bottom-up signs that just considers placards, notes, graffiti and other transgressive signs in the corpus results in significant differences as shown in Table 3.\footnote{The 2009 corpus has an overall count of 284 informal signs. This is a low number given that a total 1,309 items were surveyed, but in the study, no special focus was laid on informal signage.}

The most striking difference is the increased use of Russian on informal signage. In the central district of Chisinau, the number of placards is almost four times as high as the overall count in the same area in Table 2 and even in the residential areas Botanica and Ciocana, the percentage of signs that exclusively use Russian to convey information more than doubles. Along with the dominance of Russian on such informal signs, Romanian on the other hand does not seem to be the preferred code on them. Especially within the two residential areas Botanica and Ciocana, the absence of Romanian on small posters and notes attached to walls and lampposts was striking, and most authors solely relied on Russian to reach their target audience. Bilingual signs in both Russian and Romanian made up just under a quarter of all items surveyed. Those either solely used Russian

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Distribution of languages on non-governmental/municipal signs surveyed in Chisinau by district in per cent (n = 1,309)\footnote{Also see Muth (2012).}}
\begin{tabular}{lccccc}
\hline
                  & Centru & Rişcani & Botanica & Ciocana \\
\hline
Romanian         & 27.7   & 27.7    & 19.6     & 19.7 \\
Russian          & 10.6   & 19.1    & 19.2     & 22.4 \\
Romanian/Russian & 19.1   & 14.2    & 27.8     & 27.3 \\
Romanian/English & 16.5   & 17.5    & 11.0     & 16.9 \\
Russian/English  & 3.2    & 6.1     & 2.0      & 2.2 \\
Romanian/Russian/English & 9.5 & 2.7 & 7.8 & 3.8 \\
English          & 4.9    & 6.8     & 2.4      & 4.9 \\
Other*            & 8.5    & 5.8     & 10.2     & 2.6 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\footnotesize{* This category includes other multilingual signs}
\end{table}

area of research, ranges from just over 40 per cent in downtown Chisinau up to roughly 60 per cent in residential areas such as Botanica or Ciocana.
and just depicted an address or a shop name in Romanian or provided the audience with information in both languages.

The second corpus compiled in March 2010 on str. Puşkin in the Centru district confirms the strong presence of Russian on informal signage. The corpus presented in Table 4 consists of a total of 744 items and, unlike the first corpus, attempts to cover all specimens of written language visible in a predefined area. The relatively high number of informal signs when compared to the first corpus can be attributed to the high number of placards attached to trees in downtown Chisinau, especially around the intersection of str. Puşkin and bul. Ştefan cel Mare as well as in the western section of the street adjacent to the State University of Moldova, USM. The number of informal signs that use Romanian confirms the findings in Table 3, but an overall decrease in the use of the national language is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Distribution of languages on informal signs (placards/notes/graffiti) surveyed in Chisinau by district in per cent (n = 284)</th>
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<td>Romanian</td>
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<td>Romanian/Russian/English</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<td>Other*</td>
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* This category includes other multilingual signs

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<th>Table 4: Comparison of languages displayed on informal signs and formal signs and billboards surveyed on str. Puşkin in per cent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
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<td>Russian/English</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multilingual/other*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n = 497) (n = 247)

* This category mainly includes trilingual signs that display Romanian, Russian and English

The relatively high number of informal signs when compared to the first corpus can be attributed to the high number of placards attached to trees in downtown Chisinau, especially around the intersection of str. Puşkin and bul. Ştefan cel Mare as well as in the western section of the street adjacent to the State University of Moldova, USM. The number of informal signs that use Romanian confirms the findings in Table 3, but an overall decrease in the use of the national language is
visible when moving away from the core area of the city that is constituted by the Centru and Rișcani districts. The observations on str. Pușkin showed that individuals and political groups rarely express themselves through transgressive signs, the only exemption are stickers by pro-Romanian political pressure groups attached to billboards, occasional personal messages like “I love you” in Russian as well as additions made to Romanian-language road signs, usually in the form of a direct translation into Russian. These patterns were also observed in other parts of the city, but most of the time those were personal messages scribbled on walls in Russian or occasionally in English. English does not share the same functional domains as Romanian or Russian and is used symbolically to highlight a certain international orientation and to appeal to young people, a pattern observed in various settings. It is a language associated with upper social strata, but in a broader sense a language of “international orientation, modernity, success, sophistication and fun” (Cenoz and Gorter 2009: 57; Edelman, this issue). Most of the time, English catch-phrases were displayed on small placards and notes advertising language courses, opportunities to work and study abroad or concerts by local and foreign pop artists.

The cityscape has been approached from an empirical angle that confirms the initial claim that the urban space of Chisinau is predominantly bilingual Romanian and Russian. But, as a linguistic landscape in itself is a highly complex sociolinguistic phenomenon, a quantitative observation of a large number of signs of different genres only does not necessarily lead to meaningful and generalisable results concerning patterns of language use by individuals. Counting signs might be a good way to learn about general patterns of language use within a community, but tends to neglect such factors as language variation, language contact phenomena as well as authorship and specific type of sign (Coupland 2010). Especially when making assumptions on the spread, function and vitality of a language within a community, counting different languages on shop signs and billboards alone does not necessarily provide new perspectives with generalisable data on the language situation in a given community. Instead such data shall serve as a foundation for a further discursive analysis of signs and a thorough study of the forms and functions of publicly visible written language in a cityscape.

3.2 A close-up look – forms and functions of informal signs

A close-up look on informal signage is crucial in order to determine specific functional domains and the status of the various languages that constitute the linguistic landscape of the city. In order to provide for a broad perspective on the differ-
ent forms and functions of such signs, a select number of items from both corpora that serve as typical examples of the informal displays of written language observed will be discussed. For such a discursive perspective, a categorisation of the most common forms of informal signage surveyed is essential. At first, forms and functions of advertising posters and placards, the most common form of informal signs found in the linguistic landscape, will be discussed. This category is a very common type of informal sign and the information given on them is “considered relevant for a certain amount of time” (Reh 2004: 4).

Focus will be laid on transgressive advertising that was used mainly in peripheral areas and includes phone numbers and small advertisements sprayed or painted on walls. These advertisements are a common phenomenon in countries in the developing world. In her study of multilingual writing in Ugandan municipalities, Reh (2004: 4) labels them as “written announcements”, a categorisation that can also be applied to the linguistic landscape of Chisinau. They are flexible in use and may be “computer-written or handwritten”, often put up by individuals selling products or announcing sporting events (Reh 2004: 4). Transgressive notes by individuals, often observed in the form of small messages scribbled on walls or park benches, are closely related to the latter category, but have to be discussed separately here. The forms of such messages are certainly equal to transgressive advertising, but the functions are entirely different, as these are not intended to sell goods and services or announce events, but instead are transgressive texts that are intended to locate the author “within a particular spatial, class and ethnic subculture of the city” (Pennycook 2009: 307). This will be concluded by a look at a fourth category labeled political messages and alterations to the linguistic landscape. In this group the focus is laid on informal signage by political activists. This also incorporates makeshift Russian-language street signs displayed in addition to already existing top-down signage in Romanian.

### 3.2.1 Advertising posters and placards

The city center is characterised by a plethora of informal signs by both small-scale businesses and individuals alike. The first item shown in Figure 1 is part of the 2010 corpus and exemplifies a very common phenomenon observed in all cities throughout Moldova and highlights the popularity of foreign language learning especially by young Moldovans. The sign was attached to a tree and located on str. Puşkin close to the main building of the State University of Moldova USM.

Initially one has to define it as a multilingual sign, depicting among other languages Romanian, Russian, Latin and English. Still one clearly notices a
pattern recognizable on many comparable items in the linguistic landscape of Chisinau, namely a clear-cut distinction between the informative and symbolic meaning of the different codes, one of the main dichotomies introduced by Landry and Bourhis (1997). The addressee will recognise eight different languages; the only ones that actually carry information in order to understand the message of this advertisement are Russian and Romanian. The name of the establishment, Centrul European de Limbi Străine Quo Vadis is expressed in both Romanian and Latin, with the Latin phrase Quo Vadis having a multilayered meaning considering the rather grim perspectives of young Moldovans at the moment, but the course details and various offerings depicted beneath are given in Russian and Romanian. Both languages share equal space and font and it appears that the placard is not aimed at any particular speech community but tries to include as many recipients as possible. In addition to that, already documented features of the cityscape of the Moldovan capital (Muth 2012) can be observed: on the one hand, the offer to study abroad, Rus. Обучение за рубежом, Rom. Studii în Străinătate, provided in both languages right above the center’s contact details; on the other hand, catchphrases such as “international” and “Business English” depicted as part of the email-address of the establishment.

Another example from downtown Chisinau that is part of the 2009 corpus was taken on the main artery of the city, bul. Ștefan cel Mare, in close proximity

6 European Centre of Foreign Languages Quo Vadis.
to both the Moldovan Parliament and the Presidential Palace and was attached to a lamppost. It is shown in Figure 2 and represents a bilingual Russian-Romanian placard promoting courses to become an accountant. The two languages share equal space and font, but contrary to Figure 1 the distribution of both Russian and Romanian is equal and neither of the two is dominant on the sign. As the degree of repetition of the content is high, it is a typical bilingual sign (Reh. 2004: 3). The contents and key components of the course are given as direct translations in both languages and even the stubs people ought to take home as a reference are bilingual, showing the willingness of the linguistic landscape actors to reach the widest audience possible. This pattern goes along with a willingness to use both languages interchangeably. On the one hand, the Russian abbreviation TEJI for telephone is used in the upper left-hand side of the placard; on the other hand, the Romanian abbreviations for floor, et. (nom. etajul) and office, of. (nom. oficul) are found in the same line. The web address www.cursi.md is given in Romanian, but would allow for an interpretation in Russian as well, as the phonetic realization of the plural form of the Russian noun курсы is in fact quite close.

Figure 3 is a typical example of an informal, non-static sign that uses Russian to convey actual information and English to symbolize a certain degree of internationality and worldliness. It is an advertisement from the 2010 corpus placed by a small Fitness-Club calling itself FitoSHAPE, offering different fitness classes.
The actual activities are depicted in Cyrillic and include Russian loan translations such as аэробика (aerobics), фитнес-йога (fitness-yoga) and степы, shortened from ‘step-aerobics’. Furthermore, English pseudo-loan such as шейпинг ‘shaping’ as well as Russian words as футболы ‘footballs’ and душ ‘shower’ appeared. The address of FitoSHAPE in the lower part of the placard is written in Russian as well, but one of the street names mentioned – ул. Диордица is a transliteration of the Romanian name str. Diordiţă, whereas ул. Космонавтов is the Russian version of the Romanian name of the street, str. Cosmonauţilor. Кедем, the actual name of the place the courses are held in, is a Russian-language acronym for Кишиневский единый дом евреев Молдовы, known as ‘Moldova’s Joint Jewish Center in Kishinev’. Although the remainder of the Jewish population of Chisinau mostly speaks Russian, the placard is aimed at all passersby interested in gym-classes. Russian is the language of choice as the authors most likely assumed that L1-speakers of Romanian have the ability to comprehend Russian.

The characteristics of Figure 4 from the 2009 corpus underline this claim. This placard offering to buy hair was found in the district of Ciocana on str. N. Milescu Spătaru, a neighborhood characterised by multistory apartment blocks from the Soviet area. It is written predominantly in Russian apart from the Roma-

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7 The use of the plural form футболы ‘footballs’ is unusual and suggest that the author is no L1-speaker of Russian; if the author of the sign wanted to indicate that it is possible to play soccer during their classes the singular form футбол ‘football, soccer’ would have been appropriate.
nian name of the establishment, *TRANDAFIR* ‘rose’ set in inverted commas. All of the actual information the audience needs in order to understand is written in Russian, dominated by the catchphrase *ВОЛОСЫ*, the Russian plural form for ‘hair’. Similar placards were found throughout the city in central as well as peripheral areas and the authors exclusively used Russian on them. From a contextual perspective these placards highlight the bleak economic situation many Moldovans are facing today. Given the limited space placards offer and the fact that speakers of Russian and Romanian are equally affected by a largely failed economic transition, Russian was chosen because the authors most likely assumed that the use of this language enables them to reach the widest audience possible.

Figures 5 and 6 represent one bilingual Romanian-English as well as one predominantly English sign. They are part of the 2010 corpus and were taken near the main building of the State University of Moldova *USM*. Similar to Figure 1, both are aimed at students, promoting the “Work and Travel USA” program that is very popular among young Moldovans. It offers the opportunity to spend a year in the United States, mainly working in the service sector of the American economy. Apart from providing the opportunity to travel through the US after having worked for a certain time, the program also allows participants to reclaim income taxes earned once they arrive back in Moldova. Most agencies rely on such placards attached to trees or lampposts, preferably near institutions of higher education.
The use of English on both placards is an obvious choice, as those potentially interested in the program will have a sufficient command of English. Still, English has a much more important symbolic function on both signs that signals modernity, success and an international orientation. “Student Travel” relies on an American flag and a matching color combination, while the exclamation “Last Call” and a stylised megaphone suggest that the observer has to act immediately in order to get into the program. This is reinforced in Romanian in the lower part of the placard, stating NU EZITA ... SUNĂ ACUM! ‘don’t hesitate ... call now’. “Wide travel” on the other hand employs a theme from the American West and displays a wanted poster that includes the obvious catchphrase as well as the dollar sign to appeal to a wide audience and their image of the United States. Russian was almost never used on such placards; other agencies mostly used Romanian and English on their placards.

### 3.2.2 Transgressive advertising

The urban landscape in the northern part of str. Pușkin is characterized by car repair shops, public utility companies, other public institutions and apartment blocks. The forms of informal signage differ if compared to the core area of the city around the intersection of str. Pușkin and bul. Ștefan cel Mare. Because of the small number of shops in that particular area, the linguistic landscape of the
Informal signs in a post-Soviet capital neighborhood is dominated by informal signs in Russian. Figure 7 taken from the 2010 corpus represents two prototypical examples that were either painted or sprayed on a wall. The sign on the top is an advertisement for a moving and transport company that was located right next to the sign but seemed to be out of business. Below that, an example of a transgressive advertisement offering tattoos (татуировки) and piercings (пирсинг) is shown. Both are English loan-words that have been integrated into Russian. A local phone number is given as well, signaling that this sign is not graffiti, but an advertisement that might be aimed at teenagers attending a nearby school.

A similar advertisement was found on str. B. P. Hasdeu in Rişcani shown in Figure 8 (2009 corpus). It was sprayed on a house wall and after inquiring about the sign, locals living nearby claimed that nobody gave permission for it. It is a bilingual Russian-English sign similar in its language choice to advertisements on billboards and bus stops by enterprises selling IT-hardware. On this particular sign, English serves as a tool that enables the observer to connect to English-language computer terminology (“GIGABYTE computers”) and to well-known catchphrases used on signs in the retail trade throughout Chisinau (“save”). The company logo, a stylized “G” for GIGABYTE is presented as a sophisticated icon for the brand that can be easily recognised. Russian complements the meaning of the message by announcing big discounts and savings, but the audience has to be able to comprehend either parts of the company’s name, “GIGABYTE” or “computers” to understand what the company has to offer. The Russian catchphrase экономь с нами ‘save with us’, that corresponds with the web address of the
company, is depicted above the web address. The reason why Romanian is not used might lie in the transgressive nature of the sign and the limited space available to the author(s), but nevertheless a combination of Russian and English was chosen to appeal to their potential customers.

3.2.3 Transgressive notes

Figures 9 and 10 show one of the few examples of transgressive notes surveyed in the city. Both are part of the 2009 corpus and were taken on str. 31. August 1989 in front of the National Palace (Palatul Naţional), a popular concert venue in downtown Chisinau.

Both pictures are typical visual expressions by local teenagers and usually Russian, Romanian and English are used. Unlike graffiti that is “generally not intended to be interpretable by people outside the subculture of hip-hop/graff writers” (Pennycook 2009: 307), the authors of such notes intend to communicate their message to a wide audience and are probably aware of the language choices they make. In Figure 9 Russian is used to tell the world that Vlad plus Dasha equals love, symbolised by a heart. In Figure 10 passersby learn that Romanian-speaking Ana and Oleg are passionately in love, yet they had doubts on how to spell puternica ‘passionate, intense’ right. Obviously nothing is known
about the authors or their intentions. It could either be a hoax or written by the very same persons mentioned, but it can be assumed that each individual chooses to express such a message in his or her own mother tongue or in the language of those they interact with. Nevertheless, just by looking at names written on a park bench it becomes clear that Vlad is not only a nickname of the Russian name Vladimir, but a common name among Romanian-speaking Moldovans as well. Oleg, who is referred to in Romanian, is a name rather used among speakers of Russian than among those who speak Romanian, at least allowing the assumption that they are growing up in a bilingual environment. The third note reads that Alena and Nastja are girlfriends. Their names are written in Russian, but underlined by the English word “girlfriends” and a symbolic smiley, both known and understood in many parts of the world especially by young people. The use of English in this particular case does not tell us much about language proficiency

Fig. 9: Love note in Russian in front of the National palace near str. 31. August 1989 (Centru district)

Fig. 10: Love notes in Russian, Romanian and English in front of the National palace near str. 31. August 1989 (Centru district)
in Moldova. Rather, it tells that the authors were aware of the symbolic meaning of their expressions and were sure that others would understand them as well. As there is also no expression for the term girlfriend in Russian that can be used with the same meaning as the English equivalent, one can assume that it might be a conventionalized borrowing in local youth speech.

3.2.4 Political messages and alterations in the linguistic landscape

Informal signage by individuals or private businesses had no political implications in the linguistic landscape of Chisinau per se, but political slogans by right-wing political groups that displayed anti-Russian and anti-Soviet slogans sprayed on walls and lampposts were visible throughout the city. The example shown in Figure 11 is part of the first corpus and was surveyed in spring 2009, a time of political tension right before the parliamentary elections that led to civic unrest and the toppling of longtime president Vladimir Voronin (Ciscel 2007; King 2000). Obviously, the example is written in Romanian and states that June 22, 1941, the day of Germany’s and Romania’s attack on the Soviet Union, was the beginning of the liberation of Bessarabia, a historic name of the stretch of land between the Prut and Dniester rivers that largely constitutes contemporary Moldova but excludes those parts dominated by ethnic Slavs in present-day Transnistria.8 The date known to many in the region and the Romanian word INCEPUTUL ‘beginning’ dominate the sign and are intended to catch the eye of passersby. The goal of rightwing groups such as Basarabia Pământ Românesc9 lies in the quest for a “Greater Romania” that includes Moldova and rejects any cultural or political influence from neighboring Slavic nations. Nevertheless this sign was one of the few informal displays of written language that actually depicted only Romanian.

Figure 12 is another example from the 2009 corpus where the use of a particular language alone could already be interpreted as a political statement. It was found on str. B. P. Hasdeu in Rîşcani. Street names in Cyrillic painted next to official street signs that only use Latin script are a common sight in Chisinau. In this

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8 Transnistria is a breakaway republic on the territory of Moldova east of the Dniester River that declared independence after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Roughly 65 per cent of Transnistria’s population speaks either Russian or Ukrainian as a mother tongue. Although it is officially trilingual Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan (Romanian written in Cyrillic), Russian is the language of choice in all domains. Consider King (2000) for a comprehensive view on the reasons of this conflict.

9 Eng. ‘Bessarabia is Romanian soil’.
case, the address of a repair shop, Б. П. ХАЖДЕУ 5 ‘str. Б. П. Hasdeu’ was painted on a wall at an intersection by the owner. One assumes that the obvious reason to transliterate the very same street name into Cyrillic letters might be related to feelings of oppression, the marginalisation of Russian in some domains and discontent with the fact that Romanian is the sole national language of the country. Yet it was possible to get hold of passersby who confirmed that there were
probably no political intensions behind it. They assumed that some of the repair shop’s Russian-speaking customers were not able to read the street name in Latin script and thus the Cyrillic form was added to the wall. This observation highlights the economic function of signs and shows the eagerness of linguistic landscape actors to react to communication problems and “avoid their costs” (Cenoz and Gorter 2009: 66). Nevertheless, such alterations also bear an underlying political dimension and, in general, language choice of private actors “cannot be divorced from the larger political context in which they operate” (Trumper-Hecht 2009: 250). Trumper-Hecht (2009) discusses patterns of language use on signs in several Israeli municipalities and similar patterns apply to the Moldovan capital. Throughout Chisinau, one also notices older street signs from Soviet times where the Cyrillic version was either crossed out or deliberately removed, a pattern observed in other bi- and multilingual communities were official language policies are contested (cf. Sloboda et al. 2010).

Generally, Russian is the language of choice when conveying information necessary to understand the meaning of an informal sign. Especially in informal advertising, signs that just display Romanian are not common, as authors are probably aware that this would unnecessarily limit the reach of their advertisement. Russian, on the other hand, seems to function as a local *lingua franca* as linguistic landscape actors seem to be aware of the ability of many ethnic Moldovans to navigate the public sphere in Russian. Transgressive advertising showed the same patterns, and practical reasons such as the confined space available to the author might be attributed to the dominance of Russian on them. The domains Romanian was used in on informal signs was limited to posters announcing pop concerts, offering opportunities to study or work abroad, and political slogans. Instances of code-mixing on displays of written language as observed by Zabrodskaja (this issue) in post-Soviet Estonia were unexpectedly scarce. Although Moldovans do not necessarily adhere to standard Romanian or Russian in oral communication (Ciscel 2007; 2008), variation and the use of non-standard expressions was unusual.

4 Concluding remarks: Chisinau as a bilingual metropolis?

Informal displays of written language constitute the majority of signs in the linguistic landscape of Chisinau and are an expression of the bilingual language situation in the city. On informal and transient signage, individuals and private businesses are free to choose whichever language they deem suited to communi-
cate their message to the public and most of them choose Russian. This is surprising to a certain degree as demographic data in Table 1 shows that Russian is a minority language in the city and in most parts of the country as well. In Chisinau, it is spoken by roughly 20 per cent as an L1, but because of its strong presence in the media and in the economic sector, and due to its historic legacy as the lingua franca of the USSR it prevails as the second language of the city and as a language of interethnic communication throughout Moldova (Ciscel 2008: 108–109). On a broader scale, a comparative perspective related to surveys of the linguistic landscapes of other post-Soviet countries shows that the Moldovan capital is no usual case. Such a continuously strong status of Russian is rather uncommon in many former Soviet republics and scholars have observed a decline of functional domains of Russian primarily in Estonia (Rannut 2008), Latvia (Pavlenco 2011), Ukraine (Bilaniuk and Melnyk 2008; Pavlenko 2011) and, to a certain extent, Kazakhstan (Smagulova 2008). In many parts of the former USSR, “derussification” and “de-sovietization” (Pavlenko 2008: 282; Pavlenko 2011) are common phenomena. Although pro-Romanian political elites and pressure groups continue to further confine Russian to the status of a home language, it is an integral part of the linguistic landscape of the Moldovan capital. Because of the promotion of Romanian as the national language, Russian has lost ground in Moldova and is rarely seen on top-down signage by government bodies and other public institutions.

In the private domain, however, bilingual Romanian-Russian shop signs and billboards are a common phenomenon. On informal signs, Russian even seems to dominate the linguistic landscape, leading to the assumption that in certain domains like advertising, linguistic landscape actors accommodate Russophones to reach a wider audience or sometimes to deliberately target specific language groups. Romanian is more prevalent on top-down signs and the second corpus confirmed that on unregulated informal signage, monolingual Romanian signs were not frequently observed. English is often used on signs aimed at the socially mobile, signaling internationality, openness and modernity. On transgressive signs, it is used in a more or less superficial way, highlighting the author’s readiness to express certain catchphrases presumably known to the public, although it is rarely used to convey actual information.

The findings of this study point towards further possibilities in linguistic landscape research, especially in bi- and multilingual areas where language use is contested and where claims that predict language shifts can be taken into question. Although a survey of informal signage within a cityscape does not necessarily give finite answers to universal patterns of language use, it provides for insights on how individuals perceive the languages spoken in their community regardless of top-down policies and regulations. As to the question whether
Chisinau is a genuinely bilingual metropolis that has not disposed of its former lingua franca, we can attest that Russian is far from being marginalised. On the contrary, Russian is the individual’s first language of expression, at least on publicly visible displays of written language.

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References


Informal signs in a post-Soviet capital


Mikko Laitinen

630 kilometres by bicycle: observations of English in urban and rural Finland

Abstract: This article discusses selected observations of English usage in signage in Finland, a Nordic nation in which the significance of English has become more pronounced in recent decades. The background for this study comes from a large quantitative survey, carried out in 2007, charting the role of English in the Finnish society. One of the topic areas in this survey deals with people’s encounters with English and its visibility in their daily life, and this article aims to add a qualitative angle to these results. The observations discussed here were collected in 2009 during a six-day bicycle trip from Helsinki to the regional centre of Oulu. The analysis moves from mere quantitative recording of signs to a more nuanced analysis of interpretations of their situated meanings in public spaces. These observations show that the presence of English in both urban and rural areas of the country is far from a simple phenomenon, and illustrate how charting signs in space provide valuable information on language contact situations.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca, geosemiotics, globalisation and the English language, linguistic urbanscapes vs. landscapes, fieldwork

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1 Introduction

This article presents and discusses selected findings of linguistic landscape that were collected during a circa 630-kilometre bicycle trip in Finland in the summer of 2009. My observations focus on the uses of English, and the broad background of this study is the on-going global spread of English (McArthur 2002; Graddol 2006). Finland is one of the many nations in which the significance of English has clearly become more pronounced in recent years (Leppänen and Nikula 2007;
Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008), and this material collection was motivated by the need to accumulate systematic data of English in signage from various parts of the country, not only from urban centres. It is obvious that cities are hubs for various socio-cultural activities and innovations (e.g. Burgess and Bogue eds. 1967; and in linguistics Labov 1972; Labov 2001: 437), and thus the role of a city is unequivocally important in linguistic landscape research (Jaworski and Yeung 2010; Curtin, this issue; Edelman, this issue). However, cross-sections through a range of spaces should be equally important when trying to understand the global spread of English and the role of English in the meaning making in various spaces. So even though this article deals with the observations from the Finnish context, it highlights the role of rural and borderline areas between cities and the countryside in linguistic landscape research.

A more precise motivation for my data collection stems from the large survey of the uses and functions of English in Finland. This survey was carried out by a group of researchers at the Research Unit of Variation, Contacts and Change in English at the University of Jyväskylä in 2007, and its purpose was to chart people’s attitudes to and perceptions of English in the 2000s. The data were collected with the help of a questionnaire, covering various thematic areas, and our data set consisted of 1,495 respondents collected by random sampling stratified according to gender, age and place of residence. The results (Leppänen et al. 2011).

One of the survey questions charts the degree of visibility and audibility of English in Finnish society (Leppänen et al. 2011: Figures 17 and 18), and thus provides a quantitative backdrop for the observations in this study. The results show that nearly everyone in Finland encounters English in the streets of cities, towns and villages (78.8%), and the visibility of English is high in shops/stores (73.2%), restaurants and cafes (69.7%), means of transportation (61.2%) and in places of employment (53.8%). Much lower proportions of encounters were reported in places for hobbies (34.7%), hospitals (23.9%), banks (20%) and offices (12.5%) There are, however, considerable regional differences, and those living in rural areas report statistically significantly lower number of encounters than those in cities and towns (Leppänen et al. 2011: Table 14a.4). The results also show that encounters with English are primarily linked to commercial contexts, and English is not often seen or heard in institutional settings, i.e. offices, libraries, churches or hospitals.

The material presented here offers a qualitative angle to the survey as I wanted to explore to what extent systematic empirical observations would supplement the quantitative survey results and provide a more varied picture of how speakers make use of English in various contexts. The focus during the material collection was to observe the variability in the use of English and pay special attention to those cases that might define and structure the border areas between
urban and rural. This is to say that the use of the English language in discourse in public space may form, together with the other physical objects, social and cultural boundaries between what constitutes urban and rural (cf. Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003: 147). Moreover, the goal was to observe a range of places through fieldwork and explore whether the regional differences in the visibility of English are concrete or whether the observed differences in the survey results could be due to other factors. These other factors might include conceptual factors, so that the survey results could merely indicate people’s idealized perceptions of what cityscapes and rural places are thought to include.

Various recent studies focusing on the uses of English in public space have highlighted the importance of urban areas (Shohamy et al. 2010), but the goal in my material collection was to observe rural areas alongside the urban ones systematically. The analysis below moves from quantitative recording of signs to more nuanced interpretations of their situated meanings, including the communicative motivations and intents of the participants in linguistic landscapes and the possible functions of English in signs (Kallen 2009; Huebner 2009; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010; Sebba 2010). The purpose is to highlight the variability encountered in rural areas where there are fewer textual signs visible overall than in urban centres. The selected observations below are signs that were predominantly produced by non-institutional actors for local audiences, and they may, therefore, complement the knowledge of rural multilingualism involving English beyond what is accessible through quantitative surveys.

2 English in urban and rural spaces

Plenty of evidence exists of the use of English in public spaces, and its omnipresence throughout the world is widely documented. For instance, Cenoz and Gorter (2009), while talking about the economic aspect of linguistic landscape (LL), point out that the presence of English in public spaces is a marker of globalisation, and that the economic value of English is likely to be substantial (also Cenoz and Gorter 2006). The use of English in public signs tends to be associated with modernity, success, fun and international orientation (Piller 2003).

Those studies that discuss the role of English in linguistic landscapes tend to draw their evidence from urban areas (i.e. centres for cultural, political, social and economic activities with a recognised status) rather than spaces outside these centres. For instance, Schlick’s (2003) survey shows that English is visible not only in large cities in Europe, but also in provincial towns and centres. In Thailand, Huebner’s (2006) observations show that English is prominent in the city centre of Bangkok. Ben-Rafael et al.’s (2006) study shows high degree of
variability in the proportions of English, alongside Hebrew, Arabic and Russian, in various urban locations in Israel.

It is clear that the role of urban areas is important. I would, however, be hesitant to go as far as Coulmas (2009) who asserts that the focus of linguistic landscape studies should primarily be on cities. It seems that rural spaces in linguistic landscape research need to be rethought not only as superficial opposites to urban spaces but rather as a dynamic category alongside urban and suburban, much in the same way as what McCarthy (2008) suggests in geography. Indeed, there are recent studies in linguistic landscape research that have highlighted the importance of peripheral areas. One example is Pietikäinen et al. (2011), who explore multilingualism in the linguistic landscape of seven villages above the Arctic Circle, in the region called the North Calotte. They point out how the uses of various languages – national, indigenous and other minority languages in the region – result in a multi-layered and multilingual Arctic linguistic landscape.

Similarly, if one wants to connect linguistic landscapes to topics like language contact and the global spread of English, it is obvious that focusing solely on cityscapes and urban centres is deceiving for at least two reasons. Firstly, such a focus might lead to oversimplifications of how extensive contact actually is. Recognising the continuum from the most urban to most rural might help to understand the depth and the density of contacts with English as a lingua franca, or reveal diachronic aspects that are only visible through micro-level observations (as was the case in Pietikäinen et al. [2011]). Secondly, extending the geographic scope of one’s material and observing suburban or rural spaces alongside urban areas might provide perspective to how unique the observations in urban centres actually are. It is clear for instance that the developments in information and communication technologies have considerably blurred the boundaries between centres and peripheries, and made it possible for most people, no matter where they reside, to establish global contacts. All in all, the recognition and inclusion of the urban-rural continuum helps understanding the social meaning of signs.

This idea brings me close to Scollon and Wong Scollon’s (2003: 3) geosemiotics and the notion that places are semiotic aggregates shaped and accommodated by various elements in space. These elements include the physical and semiotic settings of space, the intended interactions of signs and the experiences of the actors in space. It is not necessarily possible to understand a semiotic sign in isolation, as a single system, but rather, as Kallen (2010) puts it, it ought to be interpreted through coming together of various systems, all of which play a role in how participants interpret them. These systems consist not only of language choices in signs, but also of their visual composition, their pragmatic functions
and interactional purposes, as well as the possible audiences in context (also Kallen 2009). One might go as far as Blommaert (2010) who sees that viewing semiotic signs as localised acts of communication turns spaces into culturally, socially and politically regimented objects. In other words, spaces are defined by signs that structure and organize them (also Jaworski and Yeung 2010). Moreover, signage in space signals ownership (be it real or imagined), control and entitlement of what is normal in the space. Blommaert (2010) uses the concept of demarcated zones that are established by the use of signs, and these zones communicate membership, legitimate behaviour and ownership to those who encounter them. This approach highlights the audience’s role, much in the same way as the geosemiotic approach, which suggests that semiotic aggregates are not formed all at once, but each actor forms his/her own semiotic landscape (Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003: 205).

This article discusses the social meanings of signs that were formed when passing through various spaces in a country where the role and status of English is undergoing a shift from foreign language to a lingua franca that serves a wide range of uses. There exists plenty of systematically-collected empirical evidence of the changing role of English in Finland. For instance, Taavitsainen and Pahta (2008), drawing evidence primarily from institutional and media contexts, suggest that English is increasingly becoming a new type of second language for many. This means that it is used as a lingua franca for international communication but is, at the same time, adopted for local uses and meaning making. They suggest that it is in some cases used in intranational contexts and is in many instances connected to creative, playful and even satirical uses that require advanced skills from speakers and audiences to understand the intended meanings in the context.

Moore and Varantola (2004) discuss the uses of English in outdoor spaces in one Finnish city, Tampere, and point to differences in the types of business that resorted to English in their outdoor advertisements. They observe how undertakers and funeral parlours only communicate in Finnish, but those businesses “associated with beauty enhancement, sex, gambling, alcohol, music, and information technology” tend to use English in their names (2004: 135). Moreover, the use of English in public (both institutional and commercial) signage in Finland has occasionally been a hotly debated topic in newspapers and on-line discussion fora (Jinkerson et al. 2010). A case in point was the on-line discussion following the opening of a municipal library in the metropolitan Helsinki region, which is an officially bilingual (Finnish/Swedish) area. This public debate mainly centred on the fact that the English word library was more prominently displayed than the Finnish and Swedish words above the main entrance of the library.
Before moving on to the material collection, it should be pointed out that the language legislation in Finland does not concern private and commercial spaces. The legislation only decrees the availability of services in different languages in the civil administration, parliamentary work, and the judicial system. Separate language legislation exists for education and religious institutions.

3 The material collection

I collected my observations during a six-day bicycle trip through Finland in July 2009. This trip started from the Central Railway station in Helsinki and proceeded northwards towards the city of Oulu, which is a regional administrative centre and a hub for various IT related industries. My route, shown in Figure 1, followed smaller rural roads, passing through larger cities and towns along the way.

The objective was to observe signage that contains English, used either alongside the national languages Finnish or Swedish (and/or other languages) or independently in monophonic code. The guiding principle in the observations was Backhaus’ (2006: 55) definition of a sign as “any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame”. This definition is obviously broad as it may contain anything from large commercial billboards to torn off stickers in lamp poles. As a result, the sheer number of semiotic material with English turned out to be so large that instead of quantitative results this article presents selected observations and impressions of this cross section of the southern and central parts of the country.

It is clear that the distance covered daily on this journey (ranging from some 90 to nearly 200 kilometres per day) and the physical exercise involved put certain limitations on the observations. Combining physical exercise with systematic observations is not an ideal combination, as one needs to worry about safety as well. It is worth noticing, however, that this type of an out-to-the-society
Fig. 1: The route travelled during the material collection (source: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/maps/maptemplate_fi.html, accessed 2 March 2011)
approach and observing spaces intensively and systematically for several consecutive days has apparent advantages over more casual and sporadic forms of material collection. My impression during the journey was that a few days of observations helps make one more receptive for identifying and spotting semiotic signs. Paying attention to and noticing signs became easier day-by-day. The observations were photographed and their locations recorded.

The route was designed to avoid possibly the linguistically-loaded areas in Finland. Finland is an officially bilingual nation (see Note 2 and Note 3), and the political climate in general is consensus driven. Only few topics raise broad public concern, but occasionally language policies and language-related issues are debated in the media. This debate largely deals with the status of Swedish as one of the national languages. Helsinki is in the middle of the bilingual region on the southern coastal region, covering roughly the area between the city of Turku and the town of Loviisa in the east. On the Western coast, the Swedish-speaking municipalities are located in the narrow section that spans between Vaasa and Kokkola. My objective was to ride away from the Helsinki metropolitan region quickly and to focus on the area that is predominantly Finnish speaking. Avoiding the coastal regions meant eliminating one possible variable, and my future plan is to carry out a similar fieldwork that passes through the Swedish-speaking municipalities.

Apart from the decision to avoid the coastal regions, the route was not planned ahead in detail, and the only thing known beforehand was the end point, the city of Oulu. The decisions on where to go and what particular routes to take were made each morning. The rationale was to ensure that the route and the signage encountered would be as randomly selected as possible. The route started from the city centre of Helsinki, which has nearly 600,000 inhabitants (1.3 million in the surrounding metropolitan area). The route passed through two larger cities, Tampere which is circa 160 kilometres north of Helsinki (c. 210,000 inhabitants and 330,000 in the region), and Seinäjoki (60,000 inhabitants and 140,000 in the region). Otherwise, I rode from one village to another, ending up in Oulu (c. 140,000 people).

The observations collected throughout the journey should provide a qualitative angle to the survey results mentioned in the introduction. My intuition before the material collection was that these regional differences would not necessarily be matched in the real-life situations, but would reflect more of the respondents’ ideal image of what cityscapes and rural areas are supposed to contain. My observations, 210 photographs taken during the trip, confirm that the English code was present throughout the journey, as the number of observations in urban locations was 137 and 73 in rural ones. Its presence was obviously greater in urban areas because of the greater frequencies of signage overall.
4 Selected observations of signage

4.1 Demarcating spaces

It was a surprise where English was encountered and particularly so in terms of the functions it filled. English was present even in remote rural locations, like the one shown in Figure 2, which illustrates a sign directing passersby to a lakeside beach in the region of Häme, some fifty kilometres south of Tampere. The photo was taken in an out-of-the-way location and far from tourism areas and routes, which suggests that the intended audience is primarily local. Its location was in the middle of an agricultural region a few kilometres outside the nearest village, and in addition to the traffic signs, it was the only visible sign and clearly semiotic material produced by private individuals, as opposed to the traffic symbols by the authorities. The lakeside beach is officially maintained by the municipality, though there were no official signs directing visitors to the beach.

The text combines a vernacular genitive form of a family name (Luttuset, nom. pl. → Luttusten gen. pl. → Luttus, vernacular gen. form reduced to a prefix-like element) with an English lexeme.

The materials used in the sign suggest that it has been erected as a non-permanent sign. A simple way of explaining its existence could be that it simply

Fig. 2: Demarcating space with the use of English
provides directions, and, at the same time, it is used to advertise a lakeside beach. Following Kelly-Holmes’ (2005: 8) descriptions of the function of semiotic signs in advertising, the use of English in *Luttus-beach* suggests poetic functions in which the aim is to communicate meanings that otherwise cannot be communicated. Meanings such as youthful, fun, play, summer activities are apparent in combining the English code with Finnish, which is further strengthened by the vivid blue colour of the text. One possible meaning could be that the sign is intended for international audiences (i.e. tourists), but the fact that the location is far from tourism attractions, speaks against it.

So how should one understand this particular sign and the function of the lexeme *beach* in it? Producing and placing a sign always constitutes a socially and communicatively meaningful act (Kallen 2009), but the physical properties and the language choice here suggest that a simple interpretation of the sign fulfilling the informational function and guiding international visitors to the beach is not necessarily sufficient. Instead, drawing from Scollon and Wong Scollon’s (2003) geosemiotic approach, it seems clear that mixing two languages in such a sign (i.e. a non-permanent one in a remote rural location) suggests that there are social meanings attached to it. Without visiting the location itself, it is fairly safe to say that these social meanings stem primarily from the use of English code in it, and they include informing the possible audiences that this location is distinct from the rural, agricultural (and also monolingual) cultural traditions of this region. At the same time, the inclusion of the family name suggests that these local traditions are present, and the English code has been adopted alongside the local ways of living.

The use of a single English lexeme suggests that whoever produced the sign wanted to define the control and the psychological ownership of the location (cf. Blommaert’s 2010 notion of signs demarcating spaces). The fact that the Finnish term (*ranta*) has been replaced by *beach* creates a social boundary, and it, together with the colours, also makes the sign more conspicuous. The sign does not merely inform, but rather defines the space and signals a highly context-specific meaning. The *beach* signals control of this space, and it indicates that the location is reserved (unofficially most likely, judged by the physical properties of the sign) by somebody, and the use of *beach*, not the more unmarked domestic variants, communicates temporary psychological ownership. That is, the location was, most likely, used for (a) a specific occasion (in which case the boundaries should be more concrete) or (b) it might still remain in public use, but the mixed-code in the sign informs the passersby that a group (or groups) might want to reserve it for their own activities (such as a special occasion or a party, etc.). Reserving the location through code-switching means that whoever produced the sign wanted to indicate that a certain type of behaviour is to be accepted and tol-
erated on the beach, and the sign functions as an indicator of the presence of
such behaviour before one enters there.

What I have suggested here does not mean that the use of English in Finland
would always demarcate spaces and signal psychological ownership. Demarcat-
ing spaces, according to Blommaert (2010), is a property of signs not the English
code. In Finland, English is a good candidate to be used in such a function, be-
cause it tends to be widely recognised, and evokes intertextual connotations to
popular culture. Indeed, English was the only foreign language that was encoun-
tered in rural areas in these types of code-mixing signs directing people.

4.2 Multilingual glocal mixes

One of the most difficult, yet fascinating tasks during the material collection was
to try and locate signs in which global and local semiotic material were mixed
to create new meanings. Interpreting such meanings requires the audience to
draw from both global sources and local ones, and the aggregate then result in
a glocal semiotic interpretation. These glocal signs are meaningful blends of
local and global dynamics. Robertson (1995) points out how local, national and
global topics form meaningful interrelationships that are associated with trans-
nationalism and multiple flows across geographic, political, cultural and social
boundaries.

Such glocal language practices are central in language and cultural contact
situations because they indicate to what extent English (or some other language)
is a resource utilised in intranational communication, not only a foreign language
used to communicate meanings to outsiders. It is obvious, as previous studies
often point out, that English serves a sign of modernity, progressiveness and fun
in many contexts, but it is vital to avoid simplifications and search also for stylis-
tic innovations, such as creative and jocular uses in a range of public spaces, both
urban and rural.

The picture displayed in Figure 3 shows one illustration of a creative glocal
use in which English forms the basis and plays an important role in creating its
situated meaning, but the text itself is in Finnish. The sign is located in a small
town south of the city of Tampere. This town is part of the greater Tampere region
and is a Finnish version of a thriving suburb from which many people commute
to work in the city. It used to be an agricultural community, but its location next
to a regional hub for economic growth has contributed to transforming the village
into a prosperous small town.

The sign advertises a locksmith enterprise, and consists of various semiotic
elements. The primary textual unit (LukkoLuket Oy) is a nearly homophonic word
play of Lucky Luke, a cartoon character of a lonesome cowboy set in the imaginary American Old West in the 19th century. It was created by Belgian Maurice de Bevere and the translated stories have been popular in Finland throughout the years.

The sign illustrates a glocal communicative practice that requires drawing from various sources and clues to interpret the meanings. The global meanings are related to the cartoon character, a superhuman cowboy who owns a horse with human-like characteristics and who always manages to capture his evil enemies. These humorous connotations are highly different from the local connotations, i.e. informing the passersby of a presence of a nationwide chain of security solutions. It is noteworthy that the name in its entirety is a non-sense word that consists of one recognisable element, lukko (a lock) and one non-Finnish word, luket. The name is supported by a sketch on the left of two key hole figures wearing cowboy hats typically associated with the American West. Below the brand name, the text in the box is in Finnish telling the passersby that the establishment is a locksmith (the Finnish text translates into English as ‘professionals in safety’). The façade is covered by signs of a well-known producer of locks and

4 The abbreviation Oy is a Finnish term for a limited company.
locking systems and technology in Finland, as if to reassert that despite the humorous name the business is credible and trustworthy.

If one considers personal and property safety overall, it might be assumed that safety relies heavily on establishing trust, and designing a semiotic sign requires delicate balancing between creativity and reassuring style in advertisements. It seems clear in this case that, in addition to the jocular word play, additional semiotic material are needed. In this case, this reassuring function is achieved through relying on the positive connotations to Lucky Luke, a heroic though humorous character, and relying on an established brand name as part of the shop front.

My observation during the material collection was that these types of creative word plays in Finland are not an exceptional phenomenon. However, in the data set that I collected, their meaning creation in the great majority of the case draws from English or predominantly relies to Anglo-American popular culture or like in the case of Lucky Luke to concepts that derive from it.

One usage type of English outside the largest urban centres in Finland is closely related to the homophonic wordplays like LukkoLuket above. It concerns the creation of non-sense English compounds, such as the one shown in Figure 4a and Figure 4b. These uses seem to be firmly established in the linguistic landscape in smaller towns and rural areas around the country, and they serve as indicators of how extensive the contacts with English are. In what follows, I take a closer look at one case and approach its social meanings from two perspectives: their intended audiences and the visual composition (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006).

It is clear that that the intended audiences of such signs ought to be able to interpret the proposed meanings. The question of audiences and intended meanings interfaces with the notion of collective identities in interpreting semiotic signs in space. This is a question raised by Ben-Rafael et al. (2010: xvii) who point out that one relevant perspective to semiotic material in space is the assumption that signs produce “actors’ particularistic identities” that might be different from the all-societal identity (see the discussion on Fuck authority below). So in a contact situation like in Finland, a question to be asked is what type of regionally, socially, culturally, economically or religiously particular meanings are expressed using English in Finland in the early 21th century.

The three signs displayed in Figure 4a and Figure 4b are located in the town of Kannus in the Central Ostrobotnia region. They were highly distinct from the other signage in the town centre where English appears primarily in national or international brand names and their outdoor advertisements. These (inter)national signs tend to be produced elsewhere for more generic uses and audiences, and are of minor interest in analysing local spaces. In this particular
instance, the signs were produced for local communicative purposes, and understanding their situated meaning and audiences requires contextual information. Firstly, there is the URL address that is an advertisement of a local canine service business. The business is called *dogness*, and the web address takes an occa-

*Fig. 4a and Fig. 4b: English expressions in a system of visual discourses*
sional visitor to a canine service centre that operates in the premises. The entire website, except for the name, is in Finnish (accessed 29 September 2011). The business is run by an adjacent educational unit under a regional consortium of municipalities (the Federation of Education in Central Ostrobotnia) that provides, among other fields, vocational training in canine care. The consortium of municipalities co-operates in offering secondary level education together with the local secondary school, and the lower sign on the left advertises this joint education. The names of the two schools are in Finnish, and the information at the top (i.e. informing local audiences of the possibility of such possibilities) is in English. The sign on the right, with three visual elements, marks the entrance to the canine service centre itself.

Knowing all the information related to the site is important for understanding how such a sign might have been produced for this small community. This, in turn, might help to recognise the processes involved in how a *lingua franca* permeates there. Figure 4a and Figure 4b suggest how two social factors seem to play important roles in these types of local signs. One of them, obvious from the content of these signs, is education and the meanings associated with it. Secondary education is offered in Finnish, but the social meaning and the ideal essence of *MISSION:POSSIBLE!!* suggest how education is one of the factors that promotes the use of English (cf. also Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008). The second factor is implicit and requires drawing contextual information. According to the information available on the webpages of the educational consortium, the canine centre was the result of a program in the 2000s funded by national governmental agencies and the European Union. So despite the fact that intended audiences in these signs are clearly domestic, political and cultural factors in contributing to the spread of English ought not to be underestimated in local signage.

In terms of the visual composition, English plays a central role in these signs, but seems to be restricted to expressing ideal information, as opposed to real and more specific type of content (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 186–193). The layout in both the left and right hand signs is vertical in that it opposes top and bottom, and the information that is real and more down-to-earth appears in Finnish. That is, the names of the schools as well as the information on the canine service centre (*Koirapalvelukeskus*) are in the “domestic language”, whereas the idealised information in both cases is in English. The use of *dogness* in the business name highlights the ideal function that expresses positive connotations in a compound that involves a crucial element for interpreting the intended meaning, i.e. *dog*. Moreover, it rhymes with global and recognisable notions (such as *Loch Ness*), and might therefore evoke positive connotations more likely than the other dog+suffix/nominal element compounds (*doglike, dog(gy)style*, etc.).
4.3 Monophonic English signage

Taavitsainen and Pahta (2008), while investigating multilingual media practices in Finland, note that English occasionally occurs without translations in long and complicated stretches of text. They show that such uses may take place even in formal contexts and conclude that such uses are indications of the changing role of English as it is moving from a foreign language to a second language resource used in public discourse. For that reason, one of the points of interests in the material collection was to find instances of monophonic English signage.

My material collection indicates that English in public signage outside the largest urban centres appears primarily in various types of polyphonic or mixed translations with the national languages (cf. Figure 2, Figure 4a and Figure 4b). Monophonic English code was rare in the landscape. Indeed, only five signs with no domestic elements were spotted during this material collection, and instances in which the English material appeared as a translation were far more frequent. Despite this infrequency, wherever they were present, such monophonic signs seemed to play a considerable role in contributing to a space formed into a place (Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003).

What is important here is first of all the language choice as no other widely-studied languages (German, French, Russian or Italian) were encountered in monophonic signs in rural areas. Moreover, none of these five instances were meant to inform or persuade audiences, or to regulate their behaviour. Rather, the semiotic material appeared in an auxiliary communicative function expressing meanings that cannot necessarily be expressed otherwise (cf. the discussion on Kelly-Holmes’ [2005] poetic function above), and one such case is show in Figure 5.

It shows an observation from the small town of Kaustinen in the Central Ostrobothnia region. The photo was taken in a roadside restaurant that was adjacent to a gas station chain. The sign itself was part of the interior décor and was the centrepiece of a wall in the location. It is a poster explaining in detail the so-called Murphy’s law and combines a photograph with a long stretch of text in English. Neither explanation nor translations were available despite the fact that the text is complex and understanding it requires at least intermediate reading skills.

This sign is clearly a commercial product produced elsewhere. The poster serves for decorative purposes more than informative ones, but the meanings created by its presence are important. It seems to challenge a commercial space because its purpose is clearly not to persuade anyone to consume, but rather to downplay commercialism (cf. Shohamy and Waksman 2009: 325–326). Without
going into details of what the *Murphy’s law* might indicate, suffice it to say that
the concept of the perceived perversity of human life is well-known globally, and
the numerous versions of the same light-hearted “principles” are also familiar in
Finnish.

The fact that such a sign appears in a commercial establishment means that
it is intended to support the business operations in some ways. It exists for a
purpose because semiotic material in a commercial setting is typically used to
create trust between the company (its owners and employees) and the potential
customers (Dasu and Chase 2010). Following Kallen’s (2009) argumentation, this
monophonic poster is a speech act that aims at creating positive connections be-
tween the establishment and the various audiences who encounter it. These con-
nections are speculative. However, they are achieved by referring to the “law”
which may be felt as humorous (thus fulfilling the interactional dimension) or as
contributing to the sense of a location (the cognitive dimension in Kallen [2009]).
Yet, its presence points to the expectation that the intended audiences are able to
understand its rough meanings, and establish a connection between the semiotic
material and the owner.
Blommaert (2005: 205) points out that our identities are always produced and socially constructed. They are performed by others when they recognise the semiotic acts that we make use of. In this particular case, the identity is clearly multilingual, involving Finnish and English, even though the social meanings expressed by the semiotic material are relatively abstract.

The presence of such a sign is important because it conforms to the findings of the national survey mentioned earlier. For instance, one of the main findings concerning linguistic landscape was the presence of English primarily in commercial settings more than in official locations, like hospitals and libraries. The sign provides evidence of the types of sign people might encounter in their daily lives. In addition to single lexemes, like the one shown in Luttus-beach or Dogness above, longer pieces of discourse in monophonic English code are also visible contributing to the meaning making repertoire that define places.

My last example is related with the previous one, and concerns the use of English and its social meanings contributing to a sense of a place. It is motivated by Jaworski and Yeung’s (2010) insightful discussion on identity construction through discursive practices in urban residential areas. Their discussion uses data from eight areas in Hong Kong and focuses on recently-gentrified neighbourhoods. Their observations show that foreign languages in public signage in these neighbourhoods tend to be used to create a sense of elitism and power typically through code-crossing and intertextual references to distant, yet highly-regarded locations.

Such practices were nonexistent in Finland, at least in the residential areas that I crossed. There were, however, a few cases that belong to the same functional domain of signage used to create a sense of resident’s aspirational identities and, remarkably, all such instances made use of English, and not the domestic languages. In this case, the sign was spotted in a suburban residential area. It was small in size, but its prominent location by the main road was visible to everyone entering the area, which makes it socially highly significant. Moreover, it was not related to commercialization or possibly global identity aspirations, but rather to a social change in which a previously working-class residential neighbourhood is undergoing gentrification.

The photo displayed in Figure 6 was taken in the residential area of Pispala just outside the city centre of Tampere. The area was previously known as a working-class neighbourhood in the city, which is the industrial capital of the country and commonly referred to as Manse (a wordplay stemming from its nickname the Manchester of Finland). A considerable part of the social history of the city of Tampere is related to its civil war heritage since the battle and the fall of the city in the hands of the socialist uprising in 1918 was one of the culmination points of the Finnish civil war. Pispala grew next to the city without zoning regu-
lations in the late 19th and early 20th century. The densely populated area had a blue-collar image throughout the century, but it gradually started attracting artists and creative classes. By the late 20th century, the already fashionable district, drawing from the working class background, was gentrified; it changed into a high-end residential area that offers not only gorgeous views over the two lakes that surround the city but also a sense of history.

Due to its proximity to the centre, the area and its multilingual signage were among the most interesting residential neighbourhoods throughout the journey. The sign was one of two dozen posters and stickers placed on the electric boxes and lampposts. Nearly all of them contained English either as code-switching elements or were overlapping translations. This particular sign was part of a larger collage of other signs as seen in the photo. It was selected because it seems as if the sticker had been there for a long time. It is partly torn, but the message is clearly visible. Taking into account the gradually changing socio-demographic composition of the area, the sign constitutes a transgressive activity of maintaining the area as a place that has a certain type of identity. It seemed as a reaction against the gentrification process, and a form of reverse luxurification that is clearly intentional aiming at enforcing the identities of certain types of people in the area. Identity of a place, as Thurlow and Jaworski (2006) suggest, is constructed through discursive practices. At the same time, such practices demarcate space and indicate control and entitlement of what is normal and what can be
expected in a particular location (Blommaert 2010). In this functional sense, this sign was highly similar with the code-mixing sign in Figure 2.

It is noteworthy how the use of English is an integral signal in the sign. The message of challenging the authorities manifests the presence of alternative subcultures. At least when encountered in the location, the message “sounded” more subtle in English than it would have been if it had been expressed in the dominant language of the region, Finnish. In addition, the selection of English is important. Interestingly, English in Finland has regularly been labelled as the killer language in the public debate on language issues (Leppänen and Pahta, forthcoming). The sign in an illustration of a hybrid message which embodies identities belonging to subcultures and alternative lifestyles (and makes intertextual references to alternative music scenes) but, at the same time, makes use of English, the killer language according to the public debate.

5 Conclusions

This article has aimed at complementing the results of a quantitative survey on the role of English in Finland. As my brief discussion in the introduction shows, these results indicate that English is visible in both urban and rural areas of the country. They show, however, statistically significant differences in the positive answers from various parts of the country, thus motivating material collection through fieldwork. This article has presented observations from the field and thus taken a more ethnographically oriented perspective to the linguistic landscape of this Nordic nation.

This is to say that, firstly, the aim was not to try to quantify my encounters with English, but rather to highlight the need for material collection in various parts of the country, not only focusing on urban commercial centres but rather concentrating on a range of public spaces, both urban and rural. Secondly, I wanted to move to a more context-specific analysis of the signage encountered to see how the geographical site of a sign, together with its possible audiences, physical properties, visual composition and possible histories, affect its meaning.

The observations presented should be seen as a cross-section to the diverse practices involving English in Finland. This cross-section shows that English enjoys high visibility in both urban and rural areas of the country. Accordingly, linguistic landscape research ought not to disregard areas outside urban centres. It is clear that rural and borderline areas between cities (both urban and suburban) and the countryside should be investigated in more detail.

The observations presented here show that the presence of English in rural areas is far from a simple phenomenon, since it is used in a range of ways in the
Observations of English in urban and rural Finland

meaning making. It is highly visible not only in code-switching in advertising and in simple lexemes borrowed to complement the otherwise Finnish message, but also in more complex meaning making phenomena as was the case in the many examples above. It is clear that those interested in signs and language in the landscape must be prepared to tour and observe the countryside in order to document these uses.

References


Hirut Woldemariam* and Elizabeth Lanza

Language contact, agency and power in the linguistic landscape of two regional capitals of Ethiopia

Abstract: The issue of language contact in the linguistic landscape has been rarely addressed, especially in regards to issues of agency and power in this domain of multilingual practices. The linguistic landscape provides an arena for investigating agency as related to literacy, language rights and identity. In this article, we explore the linguistic landscape of two different regions in Ethiopia to provide an analysis of language contact that takes place between regional languages, which only recently have made the transition to literacy in the country as the result of a new language policy, and Amharic, the federal working language, which has a long and established history of literacy. The study is based on data collected through field work and participant observation from two federal regions in the country – Tigray and Oromia – two regions that have fought for the recognition of language rights, for Tigrinya and Oromo, the former a Semitic language like Amharic and the latter a Cushitic language. Results indicate ways in which speakers of the regional languages draw on their multilingual resources to create a new arena for language use and thereby assert their agency in developing new literacy practices.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, language contact, agency, power, literacy practices

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1 Introduction

Studying language in the public sphere, the linguistic landscape, has proved to be a fruitful approach to investigating the sociolinguistic status of languages in multilingual societies (cf. Landry and Bourhis 1997; Gorter 2006; Shohamy and Gorter 2008). Indeed Gorter (2006) has referred to the study of the linguistic landscape as a “new approach to multilingualism”. In more recent work, focus has
been on signage in major world cities and its role in the construction of social and cultural meaning in urban space (Ben-Rafael et al. 2010). Little attention, however, has been given to the study of the linguistic landscape in urban sites in the Global South (but see Reh 2004; Kasanga 2010). Moreover, the issue of language contact in the linguistic landscape has been rarely addressed (but see Huebner 2006), especially in regards to issues of agency and power in this domain of multilingual practices.

The linguistic landscape provides an interesting arena for investigating agency as related to literacy, language rights, and identity. Agency is generally defined as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” and language is an important medium for investigating agency since language is indeed a form of social action (Ahearn 2001: 130). Although agency may be assigned to the individual, a group or collectivity dimension is implicated in linguistic anthropological approaches to the notion. For example, De Fina (2003) investigates identity as agency through dialogue and action in the narratives of border crossing by Mexican immigrants and illustrates a collective diminished agency for this group. Agency has been inextricably linked with the notion of power and this is illustrated well in critical literacy studies where issues of identity, power and access are undeniably linked with agency, as producing “... texts is a form of agency that enables us to choose what meanings to make” (Janks 2010: 156).

In this article, we explore the linguistic landscape of two urban yet peripheral capitals in Ethiopia to provide an analysis of language contact that takes place between regional languages, which only recently have made the transition to literacy in the country as the result of a new language policy, and the federal working language, Amharic, which has a long and established history of literacy and dominance. Societal conflicts among various ethnic groups in the country have left their mark historically; however, the new language policy of ethnic federalism in the country has contributed to a greater potential of regional and individual agency, and hence power, through an assertion of linguistic equality. Nonetheless, certain ideologies of linguistic hegemony from the past are often perceived to prevail through the apparent dominance and influence of Amharic in various domains, including the linguistic landscape of the two regions in question.

In the following, we will first present a historical background for language and literacy in Ethiopia, with a focus on language policy. Notions of power are indubitably intermeshed with ideology, with ideologies always being deeply rooted in history, particularly language ideologies (Blommaert 2005). Ethiopia's language policy provides the backdrop for evaluating the use of language in the linguistic landscape, as the current policy opens up for more regionalism in regards to language in education and hence literacy. We focus on two fed-
eral regions in Ethiopia that have fought vigorously for the recognition of language rights: Tigray, in the far north of the country, and Oromia, a large region extending towards the south of the country. After the presentation of our methodology, we examine the linguistic landscape in the capitals of these two regions with a focus on language contact. While language contact work often deals merely with structural properties of language, a more functionalist perspective, as noted in Matras (2009: 4) rests on a view of language as social activity for which “bilingual (or multilingual) speakers have a complex repertoire of linguistic structures at their disposal”. In conclusion, we offer various interpretations for our findings and their implications in light of agency and power.

2 Ethiopia: multilingualism and language policy

Ethiopia is located in the Horn of Africa bordering Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya and Eritrea. With a population of approximately 80 million, the country is multilingual, multiethnic and culturally pluralistic – a conglomeration of various peoples, each claiming a particular language (Levine 2000; Crass and Meyer 2008). As Trudell (2010: 404) points out, in sub-Saharan Africa, language communities identify themselves primarily with one language that also functions “as one of the most obvious markers of their culture”. At present, Ethiopia’s major ethnic groups include the Oromo, who speak a Cushitic language of the same name and who make up about 40% of Ethiopia’s total population. The Semitic Amhara and Tigrayans (also referred to as Tigreans) comprise only 32% of the population; however, historically they have dominated the country politically. Despite the common Semitic background of the Amhara and the Tigrayans, their languages are mutually unintelligible as Amharic has diverged significantly from the other Semitic languages of Ethiopia due to the widespread contact with Cushitic and Omotic languages (Yimam 2004: xvii–xix). Amharic is used as a *lingua franca* by all peoples of various origins who have adopted it as their own language, regardless of their ethnic background. The historical hegemony of the Amharic language and a form of domination often regarded as ethnic in character demanded changes in official language policy (Cohen 2006). Language policy in Ethiopia has undergone significant milestones that have coincided with important historical upheavals in the country.

During Emperor Haile Selassie’s reign (1930–1974), a process of *amharization* became institutionalised. The language policies of that era were aimed at producing an Amharic-speaking society and, consequently at discouraging the use of
other Ethiopian languages. The development of written forms of language other than Amharic was therefore forbidden (Cooper 1976, 1989; Cohen 2006). Underlying this policy was the assumption that the use of one language would be necessary to produce national unity. Haile Selassie’s government came to a dramatic end with the overthrow of the regime by a military coup and the transfer of power to a Soviet-backed communist junta, referred to as the Derg. Contrary to the former language policy, during the Derg regime there were some attempts at enhancing the status of regional languages. In order to conform to the ideals of socialism and to demonstrate political change, the military government of the Derg attempted to use 15 regional languages as part of the national literacy campaign. However, while regional language development was an articulated aim of the government, regional languages continued to be restricted to orality. Hence, the use of Amharic as the most prestigious language, particularly in literacy, continued nationwide.

In 1991, the country underwent a dramatic change in regimes and several major political, social and economic changes came about at the same time (cf. Pausewang et al. 2002; Smith 2008). The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the ruling political coalition in Ethiopia with the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) as the dominating party, was responsible not only for the overthrow of the Derg, but also for other important changes. A new constitution advocating a policy of ethnic federalism was initiated. Accordingly, Ethiopia’s Federal Constitution (specifically, Articles 5 and 39) guarantees that persons belonging to various ethnic and linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture and to use their own language. Various proclamations have been made to undertake decentralisation of decision-making between central and regional administrations. Today there are nine autonomous federal regions, so-called ethnically based administrative regions, and two chartered cities, including the capital Addis Ababa.

Until 1991 Amharic was used as the language of instruction and literacy in primary education. After the downfall of the communist military regime, the newly formed government introduced a national educational policy based on the use of “mother tongues” as the medium of instruction in all public schools. The stated purpose of the policy was to foster national unity, identity and development while respecting cultural diversity. Yet the implementation of the educational policy shows that the regionally dominant language serves as the official working language and language of education throughout the region which is also a homeland for other minority linguistic groups. Hence “mother tongue” meant in reality and still generally means the regional language (cf. Duchêne and Heller [2007] on discourses of endangerment, including the need for mother tongue instruction).
The introduction of the policy of ethnic federalism was based mainly on the recognition of the various ethnolinguistic groups in the country, and the official use of regional languages has as a goal to satisfy the diverse needs of Ethiopia’s multiethnic and multilingual population. There is, however, no clear statement of language policy concerning how this goal should be attained. Rather it has been through decisions taken by official bodies that policies about the use of languages have been articulated. Today regional and local languages are widely used in the educational, administrative and judiciary systems as well as in the media. As a result, currently more than 28 regional and local languages have been manifested in written form in primary education, official uses, media print and in the public spheres. Tigrinya, Oromo and Somali (only very recently) are used in daily TV programs, while other local languages are used in the radio programs of the localities. Also, in the regional cities, regional and local languages have become visible in the public sphere, that is, the linguistic landscape – at federal and regional offices, businesses, shops, streets – a situation that is relatively new in the Ethiopian context.

3 The two regions in focus: Tigray and Oromia

Examining the linguistic landscape in two regions that have been associated with linguistic and social struggles can provide insight into the impact of language policy and the relationship between languages. In the following, a general introduction to current linguistic practices in various domains in each region is presented; this forms the backdrop for assessing issues of language contact in the linguistic landscape. As noted, the two regions have not been chosen randomly.

As the two largest languages of the country aside from Amharic, Oromo and Tigrinya occupied and still occupy a special place in the debate about language rights and language use in Ethiopia. . . . Oromos and Tigreans were in the forefront of the demand for the use of their own languages in all the apparatus of modern life in Ethiopia. Language rights were conceived as one of the first and most tangible facets of the recognition of other ethnicities’ rights. (Appleyard and Orwin 2008: 277)

The struggle for language rights invokes a power dimension associated with the use of various languages (Patrick 2007). Given the historical dominance of Amharic, one would expect a move towards divergence from that language in the assertion of various regional languages’ newfound linguistic rights.
3.1 Tigray and Tigrinya

Tigray Regional State of Ethiopia, which is mostly inhabited by people of Tigrayan origin, is the northernmost of the nine autonomous regions of federal Ethiopia, with the current estimated population at 4.3 million. This federal region, with Mekele as the capital and administrative center, is generally composed of highlands, although there are major towns and urban areas. Mekele, founded in the 19th century as a capital city by Emperor Yohannes IV, is a point on a major axis of urbanization along the route from Ethiopia’s capital city, Addis Ababa, to Asmara in Eritrea, and is located 650 kilometers north of Addis Ababa (cf. Tamru 2007). Since its founding, Mekele has grown to be one of Ethiopia's principal economic centers. The city has greatly flourished and expanded and a significant population growth has taken place making it the largest city in northern Ethiopia. According to Census 2007 (the most recent available statistics), Mekele had an estimated total population of about 215,546 and a high population density. Given its significant growth and thriving commercial interests in the region, Mekele presents an excellent point of departure for investigating the linguistic landscape (Lanza and Woldemariam 2008).

Tigrinya, the official language of Tigray, is spoken by nearly 3 million people in the federal region. Despite Tigrinya’s dominance in Tigray, there are other minority languages spoken in the region, including Afar, Saho, Agew, Oromo and Kunama, all of which belong to other non-Semitic language families. According to the language policy of the region, Tigrinya serves as the official working language and the language of education, used as a medium of instruction from Grades 1–8. Recently, Kunama (a Nilo-Saharan language) and Irob (also known as Saho, a Cushitic language) have been introduced as a subject in Grades 1 and 2 in the respective localities of the region. On the other hand, the role of Amharic in Tigray has been reduced and is currently only introduced to students as a subject from Grade 3 onwards. Furthermore, the basic curriculum calls for English to be taught from Grade 1.

According to Ethnologue (Lewis 2009), relevant at the time of data collection, the literacy rate in Tigrinya as L1 was 1%–10% while in Tigrinya as an L2, it was 27%. No reliable up-to-date government statistics are available on literacy rates. Similar to Amharic, Tigrinya uses Ethiopic script, also called Fidel (cf. Abebe 2007). Tigrinya is also Eritrea’s national language and since that country’s independence from Ethiopia in 1993, the language has been developed with written material available. Tigrinya speakers in Ethiopia do not have access to this material as there is no political contact between the two countries and the borders are closed. Since the introduction of the new language policy in Ethiopia, the language is being developed and literacy in the language
has been relatively speaking increasing, especially among the young generation in Tigray.

### 3.2 Oromia and Oromo

Oromia is the largest of the nine federal regions of Ethiopia, in both size and population, covering a vast area of the south of the country and with a population of about 24 million people. This region covers most of the territory of the Oromo people, who had originally migrated into the area during the 16th century and are now the largest single ethnic group in Ethiopia (Marcus 2002). The capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, is located in this territory and was also considered the regional capital of Oromia until 2000 when the Ethiopian government moved the Oromo capital to Adama, a city that is located along a major road in the region that connects the capital with other urban centers as well as to the port of Djibouti. This was a highly political move interpreted by some as an attempt to dissociate the country’s capital with the Oromia region and its people; however, the government insisted that the development of the Oromo language and culture, as prescribed in the new Constitution, would be best accomplished outside the capital of Addis Ababa. Adama, the new capital, was previously referred to as Nazreth, as Emperor Haile Selassie had renamed the town after Biblical Nazareth. In 2000, the city officially reverted to its original Oromo language name, Adama, though Nazreth is still widely used. In 2005, following the highly contentious national elections that resulted in the victory of the opposition to power in the city of Addis Ababa, the regional government of Oromia was moved back to Addis Ababa although Adama remains culturally and economically the hub of Oromia. According to Census 2007, the population of Adama is 222,035.

Oromo, also known as Afan Oromoo or Oromiffa(a), the most widely spoken Cushitic language of the Afro-asiatic Phylum, is the official language of the federal region of Oromia. It is spoken as a first language by more than 25 million Oromo and neighboring peoples in Ethiopia and Kenya. Since 1991, under the new system of ethnic regions, Oromo has been introduced as a medium of instruction in elementary schools throughout the region (including areas where other ethnic groups live speaking their languages) and as a language of administration within the region. Oromo is written with a modified Latin alphabet called Qubee, which was formally adopted in 1991. As Pasch (2008) notes, the introduction of the Latin or Roman alphabet in Africa was the first attempt of mass alphabetisation on the continent. However, the choice of the Latin alphabet as the basis for Oromo literacy has indeed ideological roots and may be interpreted as an assertion of linguistic and cultural identity in contrast with the dominating Amhara and
Ethiopic script. Since the adoption of Qubee, it is believed that more texts were written in the Oromo language between 1991 and 1997 than in the previous 100 years. Literacy rates vary across the different Oromo-speaking areas from 1% to 15%, according to Lewis (2009). As with Tigrinya, no reliable up-to-date statistics are available for current literacy rates in Oromia.

4 Language contact with Amharic in the linguistic landscape of the two federal regions

Amharic, the language that had enjoyed the status as the only written Ethiopian language in the public arena for so long, is still widely visible in the linguistic landscape of all regions and localities in Ethiopia. Many signs with regional languages are bilingual with Amharic. As the new language policy allows for the use of written regional languages in the public sphere, the degree to which these regional groups’ language rights are drawn upon by individual agents, within a given region, is an empirical question. We now turn to our study, which is based on a critical observation of the linguistic landscape in the two regional centers in focus, Mekele and Adama, the capital cities of Tigray and Oromia regional states, respectively. First, we present our data collection methods.

4.1 Methodology

The linguistic landscape study of Mekele, Tigray, was part of a larger ethnographically oriented study on language ideology and use in the federal region in which both authors participated (see Lanza and Woldemariam [2008] for details). The authors engaged in participant observation of the linguistic landscape in the heart of the city. In line with what may be considered the first wave of studies of the linguistic landscape, an important area of the city was chosen, the main shopping district that was precisely demarcated by certain streets and squares, and photographs were taken of all tokens of written texts. A locally trained field assistant took digital photos of all tokens of environmental print found in the public domain including signs, names on buildings, advertisements, commercial shop signs and public signs on government buildings, amounting to a total of 376. There was no need for official permission to engage in data collecting; however, we did inform the local urban planning office, who expressed interest in the project. The shop owners invariably responded with curiosity at the picture-taking and when questioned, the field assistant informed them of the project. No objec-
tions were raised to the activity. The data were subsequently categorised according to the frequency of representation of specific languages and according to the visual presentation of the languages in the material, polarised as top and bottom. Furthermore, ethnographic interviews with randomly selected shop owners were carried out along with the local field assistant during which questions were asked concerning language choice in the shop signs (cf. Malinowski 2008). Tigrayan shop owners extolled the use of the regional language, as noted in their own shop signs while those whose shop sign was written in Amharic were themselves Amhara.

The issue of language contact was brought up in Lanza and Woldemariam (2008) as an issue deserving further attention. Consequently, the researchers decided to investigate the extent to which such language contact involving Amharic was evident in other regions. Hence, the linguistic landscape of Adama, the capital of Oromia, was chosen and data were collected in a follow-up study undertaken by the first author. Initially, interviews and consultations were made with graduate students of linguistics at the University of Addis Ababa, who came from Oromia, in order to elicit their intuitions based on earlier observations. They received a general orientation on linguistic landscape research, and data indicating language contact examples in the linguistic landscape of Mekele were presented to them as a demonstration. The students confirmed that they had noted the same phenomena in Adama, that is, language contact between Oromo and Amharic. Subsequently, two graduate students who used to reside and work in Adama for quite some time were selected for fieldwork to take pictures of the linguistic landscape. Nearly 100 pictures of monolingual Oromo signs, bilingual signs involving Oromo and Amharic, and trilingual signs with Oromo-Amharic-English were collected. The overall linguistic landscape profile in Adama, though interesting, is not addressed in this study as the focus in this article warrants special attention to be given to signs demonstrating language contact.

We now turn to our analyses of language contact in the linguistic landscape of Mekele and Adama. As language contact is the unit of analysis, Table 1 presents a schematic overview of the languages in question; further details will be provided in the respective sections.

All three Ethiopian languages are typologically SOV languages (Subject-Object-Verb word order). In noun phrases, however, Amharic differs in word order as compared to Tigrinya and Oromo, as we see in Table 1. Shop names are typically noun phrases (NPs) and hence are a test case for examining word order in a language contact situation. In Section 4.2 we examine the shop names the owners used for instances of language contact between Amharic and Tigrinya in Tigray while in Section 4.3 we focus on language contact between Amharic and Oromo in Oromia.
Table 1: Overview of the Ethiopian languages in the linguistic analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Language family</th>
<th>Word order in noun phrase (NP)*</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Script</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amharic</td>
<td>Afro-asiatic: Semitic</td>
<td>Right-headed: Modifier + Head</td>
<td>Official national working language</td>
<td>Ethiopic/Fidel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tigrinya</td>
<td>Afro-asiatic: Semitic</td>
<td>Left-headed: Head + Modifier</td>
<td>Official regional language, Tigray</td>
<td>Ethiopic/Fidel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>Afro-asiatic: Cushitic</td>
<td>Left-headed: Head + Modifier</td>
<td>Official regional language, Oromia</td>
<td>Latin/Qubee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Except for a small set of Ge’ez originated compound nouns that are left-headed.

4.2 Amharic in the linguistic landscape in Tigray: the case of Mekele

Shop owners in Mekele used Tigrinya noun phrases not only with Tigrinya word order, but also with an Amharic syntactic pattern, as observed in the linguistic landscape of the city. While sharing basic sentential word order, the two languages exhibit a word order difference in their noun phrases, as noted in Table 1 (see Nega 2003). This structural difference occurs in noun phrases generally, as well as in compound nouns as shown in the two examples in (1). Note that the Ethiopic script has been transliterated in the examples.

(1) Tigrinya Amharic
   a. *bet migibi* migib bet
      ‘house food’ ‘food house’
   b. *kilil Tigray* Tigray kilil
      ‘Region Tigray’ ‘Tigray Region’

In (1), we see that noun phrases in Amharic are right-headed while their equivalents in Tigrinya are left-headed. Nega (2003) notes that right-headed NPs are not considered grammatical Tigrinya forms in the spoken language and their occurrences are believed to be in use due to the influence of Amharic (see also Reda, 2013). Information secured through ethnographic interviewing among Tigrinya speakers supports the claim that this type of language contact is not widely attested in spoken Tigrinya (but see below for an important exception).

In shop signs that involve more than one noun phrase or in structures that constitute a noun phrase embedded within another noun phrase, it was also common to find a combination of Amharic and Tigrinya structures. This means that either the main or the embedded noun phrase followed the Amharic struc-
ture and, consequently, we find a range of structures reflecting both languages in one or the other component of the expression. As a result, apart from the NPs following the prototypical Tigrinya or Amharic structure, it was not uncommon to encounter structures involving either the main or the embedded noun phrase following Amharic structure. A case in point was the name for stationery shops, which sell office supplies, used by the shop owners in Mekele. The Tigrinya expression used for 'stationery', which literally means “writing instruments shop”, involves two noun phrases: ‘writing instruments’ and ‘shop (“selling place”)’. This expression was realised by the shop owners in various forms in the linguistic landscape of Mekele, as presented in Table 2. In other words, the Tigrayan shop owners themselves chose a particular pattern while all four patterns were represented in the main shopping district, the site for data collection.

In Table 2, the four different syntactic structures are listed in the first column that were attested in the linguistic landscape for ‘stationery shop’, with the forms transliterated from Fidel, the Ethiopic script. Their respective syntactic structures are described in the second column. In all of the expressions in the first column, the lexical items are from Tigrinya.

As exhibited in Table 2, language contact in the linguistic landscape data includes examples of Tigrinya noun phrases following a typical Amharic word order (4) or containing a mixture of structures of both Amharic as well as Tigrinya (2 and 3). An example of structure (2) is given in Figure 1.

An example of structure (4) that involves a complete Amharic structure is illustrated in Figure 2.

In addition to the patterns listed above, we also came across a debatable structure that contains a Tigrinya prepositional element nay- that is used to express genetic relations within a noun phrase following a typical Amharic word

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**Table 2: Various syntactic structures of NPs used for ‘stationery shop’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>[madabir [masarihi s’ihfat]]</td>
<td>‘shop instruments writing’ [TIG [TIG]] Both the main NP as well as the embedded NP follow Tigrinya word order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>[madabir [s’ihfat masarihi]]</td>
<td>‘shop writing instruments’ [TIG [AMH]] The embedded NP follows Amharic word order while the main NP follows that of Tigrinya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>[[masarihi s’ihfat] madabir]</td>
<td>‘instruments writing shop’ [[TIG] AMH] The embedded NP follows Tigrinya word order while the main NP follows that of Amharic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>[[s’ihfat masarihi] madabir]</td>
<td>‘writing instruments shop’ [[AMH] AMH] Both the embedded NP as well as the main NP follow Amharic word order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 1: Language contact between Amharic and Tigrinya word order

Fig. 2: Language contact between Amharic and Tigrinya word order
order (Halefom 1981; Nega 2003). An example of this structure in the linguistic landscape is \([\text{nay-s’ihfe}\text{t masarihi} \text{ madəbir}]\) ‘of writing instruments shop’. In this case, the element \text{nay} precedes the noun that modifies the head noun. According to some Tigrinya speakers who were consulted, who are also graduate students of linguistics at Addis Ababa University, the use of \text{nay} in this particular structure is not conventionally acceptable as grammatical since the relationship between the two nouns \text{s’ihfe}\text{t} and \text{ masarihi} is not of possession but that of instrument or purpose. Nonetheless there is evidence that some variation in the spoken language does reflect this structure (cf. Reda, 2013). A plausible interpretation is that this structure in the written as well as spoken language may be the result of contact with Amharic, which would allow the possession marker \text{yə} - in a similar Amharic construction, \text{yə-s’ehefet məsarya} (‘of writing instrument’). However, this structure will require further empirical investigation before any conclusions can be made concerning language contact. In sum, what we witnessed in the linguistic landscape is that Tigrayan shop owners, who decided to use Tigrinya in their shop names, have the choice to employ only Tigrinya word order or other options that involve Amharic linguistic patterns.

There is no official language policy concerning the linguistic landscape; in other words, there is no written decree that dictates which languages can be used in the public sphere. Nonetheless, as demonstrated in Lanza and Woldemariam (2008) concerning the general choice of language, language ideologies were consistent in promoting Amharic, Tigrinya and English to the exclusion of other local languages. Hence Tigrinya shop owners are indeed potentially powerful agents that can assert a language ideology through language choice. Even shop owners who chose Tigrinya in many cases also used expressions in the signs that exhibited Amharic word order, as noted in Table 2, either in the embedded noun phrase (structure 2) or in the main noun phrase (structure 3) or even at both levels (structure 4). As noted earlier, Amharic historically was the only Ethiopian language used in literacy and in the written public sphere. Moreover, a pervasive language ideology in Ethiopia holds that Amharic still exerts linguistic influence in the area and, consequently, structural dominance in certain linguistic practices in Mekele – an ideology that would undermine the agency and hence power of the Tigrayans in asserting language rights. We will return to this issue.

4.3 Amharic in the linguistic landscape of Oromia: the case of Adama

The linguistic landscape in Oromia was observed in Adama, the capital city of the region, which is located 100 kilometres southeast of Addis Ababa. Like the
situation in Mekele, the linguistic landscape in Adama exhibits three languages: the national language, Amharic; the regional language, Oromo; and English, the de facto official second language. In addition, English transliterations of Amharic and Oromo expressions are also found. Of the signs examined in the main street of Adama, the great majority made use of Amharic, either in combination with English and/or Oromo, and never alone. Amharic appeared in trilingual as well as bilingual signs while there were only a few Oromo monolingual signs. Nonetheless the vertical placement order of languages used in trilingual signs is Oromo, Amharic and English respectively, hence attributing more prominence to Oromo (see Figure 3).

As in the case with Mekele, it is interesting to see that Amharic not only has high visibility in the linguistic landscape in Adama, it also enters into the signs of shop owners in their written Oromo. Hence the situation in the two regional capitals is similar, despite the fact that Oromo and Amharic belong to two different language families (cf. Table 1). While Tigrinya and Amharic are both Semitic languages written in Ethiopic script, or Fidel, Oromo is a Cushitic language, written with a modified form of the Latin alphabet, as noted above. Significantly, this alphabet was chosen by the Oromo people in order to assert an independent identity from Amharic, once the language policy of ethnic federalism paved the way for literacy in other Ethiopian languages, particularly in education. Prior to 1991, during the literacy campaign under the Derg (see Section 2), any texts in Oromo were written in Fidel.

As demonstrated in Mekele, shop owners in Adama also employed noun phrases for names of shops and business centres in which Amharic word order was involved. Moreover, the written Oromo appearing in the linguistic landscape of Adama also reflected certain elements of the phonological and morphological properties of Amharic. As noted, Amharic and Oromo are genetically unrelated and typologically different languages, yet speakers of these languages have been in close contact in Ethiopia due to historical and sociopolitical factors and hence their languages have been able to influence each other over the centuries. It is in fact believed that Amharic borrowed a number of phonological and lexical features from Cushitic languages. Affricate consonants in Amharic, for instance, are the result of such an historical language contact (see Yimam 2004: xvi). However, in Adama Amharic is perceived by many to exert an influence on the other Ethiopian languages, at least in the written domain. Once again the noun phrases used by the shop owners in their signs created the context for genitive constructions. As noted in Table 1, Oromo and Amharic differ in the way noun phrases are formed. And, as in Mekele, we witnessed signs in which shop owners chose structures involving language contact. Before we present examples in the linguistic landscape of this phenomenon, let us first examine the structure of
noun phrases and specifically that of the genitive noun phrase in the two languages to illustrate how shop owners not only employ word order but also phonological and morphological properties of Amharic in signs with Oromo lexical items.

In Oromo the genitive is usually formed by lengthening a final short vowel of the possessor noun by adding -\textit{ii} to its final consonant, or by leaving its final long vowel unchanged, features that are also reflected in writing. The possessor noun follows the possessed noun in a genitive phrase (see Owens 1985: 122–124), as noted in (2).

\begin{equation}
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{obboleetti} & \text{namichaam} \\
\text{sister} & \text{man (Definite)} \\
\text{‘the man’s sister’}
\end{array}
\end{equation}

In Amharic, on the other hand, the opposite order of constituents is used in the noun phrase with the qualifier adjective preceding the head noun. In a genitive noun phrase in Amharic, the possessor is followed by the possessed noun, as in English. In addition, the use of the prefixal element \textit{ya-} affixed to a genitive noun is a typical feature in Amharic, as noted above (Yimam 2004: 101). In the linguistic landscape of Adama, however, one may find a genitive noun phrase in Oromo framed within the structure of Amharic. In some cases, one can even come across the Amharic genitive marking element, \textit{ya-}, used with an Oromo expression (see Figure 4, note the spelling with \textit{ya}.). For instance, in a monolingual sign of a cafeteria, the shop owner wrote the name of the cafeteria as \textit{ADAAMAA KAFITEERIYAA ‘Adama Cafeteria’}, illustrating such a genitive construction with lexical items following Oromo written conventions yet put into the structure of Amharic. We may say that the shop owner has transliterated Amharic into the Oromo phonological make up and Qubee, the Oromo modified Latin orthography. Further sociolinguistic research is needed to investigate the authorship of these signs, the decisions made during the construction of the signs, and how persons in the landscape read and react to them. In this section, we attest to the general patterns that we found in the linguistic landscape in Adama interpreted in light of participant observations and our field workers’ reports.

In a complex noun phrase, which allows an embedded noun phrase to appear within a noun phrase, it is common to see some sort of structural hybrid of Oromo and Amharic, as was noted with Tigrinya in Table 2. In such a construction, some part of the phrase, either the embedded or the main phrase, tends to follow the structure of Amharic while the other part follows that of Oromo. Hence cases of structural language contact are attested in the linguistic landscape in Adama. See Figure 3 for an example of this point in discussion.
In the sign illustrated in Figure 3, the shop owner has used an Oromo noun phrase, *Meeshaalee Aadaa Gurgurtaa Maatii* (‘Maatii cultural objects/souvenir shop’) in which the main phrase (*Meeshaale maatii* ‘Maati shop’) follows Oromo word order while the embedded noun phrase, *Aadaa Gurgurtaa* (‘cultural objects’), follows Amharic word order. This renders a hybrid Oromo/Amharic phrase structure, as indicated in (3).

(3) Hybrid Oromo and Amharic construction

Sign:

$$[\text{Meeshaalee} \ [\text{Aadaa} \ \text{Gurgurtaa}_{\text{Amharic}} \ \text{Maatii}_{\text{Oromo}}] \ \text{shop [cultural objects] Maati (name of a person)}$$

Conventional Oromo structure:

$$[\text{Meeshaalee} \ [\text{Gurgurtaa} \ \text{Aadaa}_{\text{Oromo}} \ \text{Maatii}_{\text{Oromo}}] \ \text{shop [objects cultural] Maati}$$

‘Maatii cultural objects/souvenir shop’

As illustrated in (3), the phrase begins with the conventional Oromo word order but involves Amharic order in the structure of the embedded phrase. The shop owner who was Oromo has thus employed both languages on his shop sign although the lexical items are from Oromo.
On the other hand, we have examples in which shop owners use a phrase structure that begins with the pattern of Amharic in its main phrase but dons the conventional Oromo structure within the embedded phrase. For example, a qualifier of a complex phrase which is expected to occur at the end of the phrase occurs at the beginning of the structure, as it occurs in Amharic, while the embedded phrase that occurs inside the structure follows the conventional word order of Oromo, as shown in (4).

(4) Hybrid Oromo and Amharic construction

Sign:
Adama selling ceramics

Conventional Oromo structure:
[[Meeshaa Seeraamikii] Adaamaa]
selling ceramics Adaama

‘Adama ceramics selling (place)’

As mentioned above, the use of the element $yə$- as a genitive marker is the typical feature of Amharic in genitive constructions. However, in the linguistic landscape, we encountered the element $yə$- in Oromo texts associated with the same grammatical function as in Amharic. For instance, the structure was attested in a trilingual signboard designating a clinic. Interestingly, the Amharic genitive marker $yə$- occurs in both the Oromo as well as the Amharic versions realized in different orthographies, as we see in Figure 4 and parsed in (5).

(5) Use of Amharic $yə$- in Oromo

Sign:
Kiliniika Giddugaleessa $yə$- hiwat
clinic medium GEN- Hiwat

Conventional Oromo structure :
Kiliniika Giddugaleessa Hiwot-ii
clinic medium Hiwat-GEN

‘Hiwat medium-level clinic’

Though the sign designer used an Amharic morphological element, the main word order applied in the construction appears to be Oromo. On the other hand, genitive constructions that do not involve the Amharic element $yə$-, but follow the
typical word order of Amharic and still lack the genitive marker of Oromo, are also attested in the linguistic landscape as in (6).

(6) Oromo in Amharic word order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign:</th>
<th>([Cawaanash \quad [Nuug \quad Zayit]<em>{\text{Amharic}})</em>{\text{Amharic}}</th>
<th>3 \quad 2 \quad 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conventional Oromo structure:</td>
<td>([Zayita \quad Nuug-ii] \quad Cawaanash)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil \quad Nuug-GEN \quad Chawanesh (name)</td>
<td>1 \quad 2 \quad 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Chawanesh oil of Nuug’ (a kind of leguminous oily seed)

In the structure shown in (6), instead of the Oromo structure, that of Amharic is used in both the embedded as well as the main phrases. As a result, the structure appears to be exactly the reverse of what is conventional in Oromo. Moreover, contrary to conventional word order and morphology in Oromo, the Oromo genitive marking element \(-ii\) is not used.

Hence in the linguistic landscape of Adama, shop owners and sign designers used noun phrases that can possibly exhibit structures of the two languages,
framed partly within the structure of Oromo and partly within that of Amharic. Moreover, a morphological marker from Amharic can be used in an Oromo structure. The fact that such structures occur freely in the linguistic landscape but not in the actual spoken language may imply that such grammatical properties of Amharic have been considered standard in the transformation of the spoken languages into literacy, as noted previously. The generation of shop owners did in fact receive their education and literacy training in Amharic. Hence on the surface it appears that the dominance of Amharic in the public sphere still remains not just by its wide occurrence in signs in Amharic, but also through its structure manifested with items from other languages. According to a pervasive ideology among speakers, Amharic still dominates linguistic practices throughout the country.

5 Discussion

In a presentation of the linguistic landscaping of locality, Pennycook (2010: 68) asks, “In public, globalized spaces, is it so clear that signs are ‘in’ one language or another?” Although Mekele and Adama are indeed not on the same scale as the bustling metropolis of Melbourne in Pennycook’s work, the same blurring of language boundaries is present. The question is, how can we explain this? In any explanation we may offer, we are to be reminded of what Purcell-Gates (2007: 23) points out, that “Language and literacy practices and policies are never neutral; they always exist within political bodies and, thus, reflect ideological perspectives that, themselves, reflect relations of power”. Individuals make the signs; however, they do not live in a socio-cultural vacuum.

In previous centuries, literacy practices in Ethiopia were left to members of the elite and those belonging to religious communities of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, an important institution in the country. The language of learning was Ge’ez, a now extinct Semitic language, and it was limited to the Bible and other religious works. Subsequently, Amharic assumed the role of Ge’ez especially in non-religious domains. Amharic’s dominant role until 1991 enabled the language to be the most developed literary language in the country. Hence Amharic was historically the language of literacy in all non-liturgical arena until the new language policy of ethnic federalism, which promoted the development and literacy of other regional languages. As illustrated in this study, when regional languages such as Tigrinya and Oromo assumed the position in the respective locality that was normally reserved for Amharic, such as the linguistic landscape, people nevertheless are found to employ elements of Amharic structure in writing their own language. Hence there is an apparent common practice to
employ regional languages in writing containing some Amharic word order and functional elements. Such examples of language contact are not widely documented in the spoken forms of Tigrinya or Oromo, yet they appear in the linguistic landscape.

This literacy practice, moreover, is not only a phenomenon of the linguistic landscape. Signs in the linguistic landscape may be considered “unregulated spaces” (Sebba 2009), as the shop owners independently make their signs. However, contrary to what may be expected in “regulated spaces” where monolingual norms prevail, the same type of language contact occurs. We find this literacy practice in other textual materials, for example, in the production of written materials for education in both Tigray and Oromia. Textbooks in Tigrinya and Oromo used in the elementary schools are reported to have elements of direct translations of the Amharic textbooks, which had been in use for decades. Hence comparable to what has occurred in the linguistic landscape data, Amharic structure is often employed. This is indeed also the case in such a regulated space as the official media broadcasts. Although the language contact in question has not been widely documented in everyday spoken language, an interesting phenomenon concerns the spoken texts used in media broadcasts. For the past 20 years, airtime of a one-hour transmission per day has been allocated to both Tigrinya and Oromo. According to information from media broadcasters who were interviewed, the Amharic news is taken as the main source for the respective transmissions in Oromo and Tigrinya, as the regional programmers translate it into the respective languages of the program. In the process, there is a tendency among the broadcasters to fill in lexical items of the respective languages into the structure of Amharic as opposed to taking the meaning and expressing it in the target language. This results in what is perceived by Ethiopian audiences as a somewhat stilted language that is associated with the register of media broadcasts. Examining the sociolinguistics of multilingualism requires “an approach to language from the vantage point of the social circulation of languages across spaces and different semiotic artifacts” (Stroud and Mpendukana 2009), such as the various media involved in these case studies in Ethiopia. As noted above, a pervasive language ideology in the country points to the general dominance of Amharic.

The question remains as to how to interpret these findings. One may be tempted to merely deem these texts in question as “poor” translations, which is often the interpretation given by Ethiopians. Yet the pattern of structural borrowing persists. One clear factor for such structural borrowing is the historical status of Amharic in the country and the intensive contact between the regional languages such as Tigrinya/Oromo, on the one hand, and Amharic on the other. Most of the speakers of regional languages are bilingual in Amharic, a situation that
allows the languages to be in extensive and long-term contact. Nonetheless the type of language contact exemplified in this article involves literacy practices, both in writing and in the transmission of written texts through media broadcasting. The shop owners are of the generation for which Amharic was still the medium of instruction in schools and hence the key to literacy. Despite the regional acquisition of new language rights regarding written language in the public sphere, given the widespread pattern of language contact and its tacit acceptance, as exemplified in this article, and the fact that Amharic has traditionally been the language of literacy, it appears reasonable to assume that Tigrinya and Oromo speakers somehow continue to perceive Amharic to be the language of literacy although they employ their own language in writing. In any case there is implicit acceptance of this language contact. Leeman and Modan (2009: 332) point out that “landscapes are not simply physical spaces but are instead ideologically charged constructions”. And hence the written texts in the landscapes of the two regional capitals in focus in this article can be seen to reflect “ideological perspectives that, themselves, reflect relations of power” (Purcell-Gates 2007: 23). Therefore, in one sense we may claim to witness the covert power of Amharic, despite the reduced role of Amharic in current language policy.

Languages, however, are not agents; agency is a capacity of speakers. If we take the view of language as local practice, as opposed to the analyst’s view of language contact between two separate “reified” entities (cf. Makoni and Pennycook 2007), what we are witnessing is how speakers of the regional languages draw on their multilingual resources to create a new arena for language use – an arena that develops a new register for the regional language. Hence in the words of Makoni and Pennycook (2007), we as analysts need to “disinvent” our conceptions of language as preset notions in regards to multilingualism, and rather “acknowledge that languages are inherently hybrid, grammars are emergent and communication fluid” (Canagarajah 2007: 233). Indeed research on code-switching has stressed the monolingual bias in dealing with language contact (see Auer 2007). Thorne and Lantolf (2007) promote a “linguistics of communicative activity”, which is “based on a view of language as a historically contingent emergent system”. Furthermore, multilingualism should not be seen as merely a collection of ‘languages’ that a speaker controls, but rather as a complex of specific semiotic resources, some of which belong to a conventionally defined ‘language’, while others belong to another ‘language’. (Blommaert 2010: 102)

Such a view of linguistic resources is certainly empowering to speakers. Thus these Tigrayan and Oromo speaker-writers can indeed be perceived as active agents in adapting their multilingual competence to new linguistic practices.
6 Conclusion

Apart from revealing what actors do in the construction of the public space, the linguistic landscape of a certain locality can also reflect aspects of language contact, language dominance and speaker-writer agency. In this article, we explored the linguistic landscape of the capitals of two different regions in Ethiopia to provide an analysis of language contact involving regional languages and Amharic, the national working language. The linguistic landscape manifests examples of a process in literacy practices whereby in communication a change takes place in the structure of a regional language in order to approximate the structure of Amharic, the federal working language that has enjoyed an exclusive visibility and dominance in the entire country for ages. Hence despite the new policy of ethnic federalism that in principle elevates the status of regional languages, we may say that a persistent covert ideology extolling the national language still pervades literacy practices and more formal use of spoken language. Yet by assuming a more communicative approach to the conception of language, we may in fact interpret these findings of language contact as products of the active wielding by the speaker-writers of their multilingual competencies. Examining the linguistic landscape in a multilingual area provides an interesting arena for evaluating agency and power, as demonstrated by the shop owners and sign designers. This study was mainly based on the actual textual productions of the shop owners, which demonstrated similar language contact patterns across regions. Future research can follow up with investigating through in depth interviews the individual language ideologies of the shop owners, sign designers and last but not least passers-by who read the signs. Indeed an interesting follow-up study would be to interview passers-by of various ages on their perceptions of the signs, particularly those signs involving language contact.

Janks (2010: 155) notes that in the field of critical literacy, there has been less attention paid to critical writing “despite the importance of resisting dominant forms and ‘writing back’ to power”. The linguistic landscape investigated in this article has been created by a generation of speakers educated during a period in which the federal working language Amharic was the language of instruction and literacy. A new generation of Ethiopians is coming of age, having been educated and socialised under the new policy of ethnic federalism during the 1990s. To what extent this new generation will maintain these written literacy practices or whether literacy in regional languages will promote the production of texts, or “a form of agency that enables us to choose what meanings to make” (Janks 2010: 156), will remain an object of future research on language contact and power in the linguistic landscape and elsewhere in the Ethiopian context. Indeed these
speaker-writers may well become active agents of language change not only within more written language use but also in spoken discourse.

References


Anastassia Zabrodskaja

**Tallinn: monolingual from above and multilingual from below**

**Abstract:** This article presents a microanalysis of multilingual signs collected in Tallinn, a city composed of approximately 50% Estonian speakers and 50% Russian speakers. The data reveal that despite the official language policy promoting Estonian as the dominant language, “multilingualism from below” is widespread. The graphic representation of languages in multilingual texts sometimes involves creative forms constructed from the combination of the Estonian and Russian languages or the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets (“script-switching” or “script-mixing”). Caught between the requirements of a Language Act that promotes Estonian as the country’s official language and the real-life multilingual situation, businesses try to balance the official policy and desire of Estonian-speakers with a wish to attract the attention of local Russians and tourists towards their services and goods. This ethnographic study of the Tallinn linguistic landscape is supplemented by qualitative data regarding the perceptions of Russian- and Estonian-speaking students. Individual interviews provided information about how speakers with different mother tongues and linguistic backgrounds perceive Estonian-Russian signs. Estonian students show rather negative reactions to the presence of multilingual signs and bilingual wordplay, whereas Russian-speaking students express mainly positive responses to the Russian-Estonian hybrid signs.

**Keywords:** multilingualism, language awareness, post-Soviet, public signage, Estonia

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1 **Introduction**

During the 2000s, there have been several calls for studies on the language of signs which could integrate different disciplines of linguistics and social sciences (e.g. Gorter 2006; Backhaus 2007). This article is theoretically grounded by the term “linguistic landscape” (LL), which is defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25) as “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street
names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings”. Metalinguistic and metadiscursive language ideologies “overlay, more or less explicitly, all language use with value, be it social, cultural, political, moral, economic or otherwise” (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010: 11). Therefore, in an analysis of an LL, it is not only a particular sign that is relevant. It is also important to consider the hypothetical author of the sign, the potential reader and the language policy rules of the surrounding sociolinguistic context. While official language policies regulate public space “from above”, authors and LL actors who use language on signs follow their own unofficial policy “from below” (Landry and Bourhis 1997). In Estonia, historical and policy factors serve as a starting point for language planning and language use on public signs. However, the nature of the linguistic environment and the demands of everyday social life also greatly affect the language(s) used on public signs.

Tallinn is an excellent location for research in public linguistic space. Slightly over 50% of its 400,000 inhabitants are Estonian-speaking, while slightly fewer than 50% are Russian-speaking. In addition, the city is a popular destination for foreign tourists and international students. Thus, the Estonian capital city is the ideal site for exploring both the individual linguistic behaviour that shapes the LL from the bottom up and the top-down legislative initiatives that have been put in place by the so called “nationalizing state” (see Brubaker 1995) during the “national revival” in the 1990s and the “national safeguarding” in the 2000s. Tallinn LL offers a picture that varies by neighbourhood, as there is a noticeable presence of minority language speakers whose identity is negotiated in bi- or multilingual LLs (Gorter et al. 2012).

Russian-speakers, both ethnic Russians and other non-titular Russophones, are different from typical minority or immigrant communities in that they are part of a once dominant group that has since lost its high status. Their situation also differs from typical postcolonial settings in that the Russian language has not retained its powerful position (for more information on the language environment in Estonia, see Verschik [2005]). This rare state of affairs makes processes such as the re-symbolization of city space, the appearance of new cultural markers in the 1990s, and self-assertion in the globalising multilingual world of the 2000s very interesting.

The purpose of this article is to discuss features of written multilingualism in the LL of the Estonian capital. Using a corpus of photographs of advertising in Tallinn (the data is described in detail in Section 4), I will demonstrate how the Language Act (passed 21 February 1995 and replaced by a new Language Act on 1 July 2011) is interpreted “from below” by LL-actors who try to communicate effectively with Estonian-speakers, Russian-speakers and tourists. In addition, the paper presents the results of a qualitative study of attitudes and perceptions
towards written multilingualism among speakers of Estonian as L1 and speakers of Russian as L1 with Estonian as L2.

The article starts with a comprehensive overview of the sociolinguistic environment of Estonia and Tallinn, presenting some general characteristics of the ethnic groups and widely used languages. This section aims to facilitate an understanding of language ideologies and attitudes from above and from below as related to the *de facto* and *de jure* status of the Russian language.¹ Next is a formulation of the theoretical background for LL study in Tallinn. The article continues with a description of the official language policies relevant to LL formation from above, juxtaposed with what actually occurs in LL formation from below. Then the methodology of the study is addressed. After that, the article presents the results of an ethnographic survey of Tallinn LL. These results are followed by an analysis of qualitative data, in which an effort is made to further our understanding of LL users’ attitudes towards multilingual signs and popular perceptions of the challenges in LL formation that result from Tallinn’s ethnolinguistic diversity.

## 2 The sociolinguistic environment in Estonia and Tallinn

To contextualize the results of the Tallinn LL study, a brief overview of the history of the Estonian language context is provided. The main focus of this overview is on the 20th century, as this turbulent century’s legacy greatly affects the current language policy and the attitudes and ideologies coming from above and from below.

For most of its history, Estonia has been under the influence of its powerful neighbours: Russia to the East, Sweden to the North and Germany to the West. By the beginning of 20th century, the key speech communities in Estonia were the Baltic German nobility and the emerging Estonian nation in the context of the Russian empire. German and Russian were used in official and higher educational domains, while Estonian was used in primary education, culture and business (alongside German and Russian).

Although Estonian national awakening had begun in the 1850s (see more on the national movement in Raun [2003]), it was not until after World War I that Estonians created a nation-state, establishing Estonian as the only official language. In higher education, science and all other walks of life, Estonian became

¹ The status of English falls outside the scope of the present article.
Regardless of which language was the official language, Estonia and its capital Tallinn were relatively multicultural and multilingual throughout the beginning of the 20th century and the first period of independence from 1918–1940 (see Table 1). The concept of kolm kohalikku keelt ‘three local languages’, i.e. Estonian, German and Russian) was commonplace.

Proficiency in the three main languages was an advantage for a person whose profession required communication with clients. This did not necessarily imply full command of the languages, but rather functional bilingualism, the ability to understand and communicate in narrow domains. This phenomenon continued in the Republic of Estonia until the first Soviet occupation (1940–1941), and is illustrated by local job announcements: “Needed: a girl who knows the three local languages and is able to type”; “Polite, healthy young man who knows the three local languages, needs any job”; “Woman looking for any kind of work, knows the three local languages” (Ariste 1981: 33–34).

After World War II, Russian became the de facto dominant language in Soviet Estonia. Large scale immigration of Russian speaking people into the Baltic region occurred during the period of Soviet annexation, encouraged both overtly and covertly by the Soviet regime. As a result, the Russian community became an even more important speech community in Estonia than it had been before.

During the Soviet era, most Russian speakers were monolingual, whereas Estonians needed to learn Russian. This one-sidedness was due to the official linguistic imperialism that involved “a transfer of a dominant language to other people” (Phillipson 1992: 65). Soviet language policy promoted Russian as the lingua franca, which meant monolingualism for Russians and bilingualism with a subsequent shift to Russian for others. For example, so-called third ethnicities (e.g. Ukrainians, Byelorussians or Tatars) in Estonian SSR were linguistically assimilated into Russian. Despite the official dominance of Russian, the “totalitarian language planning” which prescribed the strict norms and standards for written Estonian helped to diminish Russian influence on the Estonian language (see Verschik [2005] and references therein). In addition, the strong

| Table 1: The ethnic composition of the population (according to the census) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Estonia in 1934                                              | Tallinn in 1934 |
| Estonians (992,520)                                          | Estonians (117,918) |
| Russians (92,656)                                            | Russians (7,888) |
| 88.1%                                                       | 85.6%  |
| 8.2%                                                       | 5.7%   |
national and linguistic identity of Estonians prevented the complete displacement of Estonian from higher education and academia, as opposed to other Soviet republics like Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan or Kyrgyzstan, where the national languages were replaced by Russian in essentially all important domains (Pavlenko 2008).

After the independence of Estonia was restored in 1991, Estonian became the country’s only official language, with the goal being to promote bilingualism amongst the Russian speech community living in Estonia. As a result, the percentage of Russian speakers who could speak Estonian increased from 14% in 1989 to 44.5% in 2000 (Population and Housing Census Data). Although census data reflect respondents’ self-assessment of their knowledge of the official language, this self-report data nonetheless provide an indication of the current language situation.

According to the 2011 census, there are 1.29 million people in Estonia. Russian speakers include, in addition to Russians, representatives of other ethnicities whose dominant language is Russian (e.g. ethnic Ukrainians, Belarusians and other nationalities who settled in Estonia during the Soviet period). Almost half of the Tallinn population is Russian-speaking (see Table 2).

Current Estonian laws and policies do not facilitate the maintenance of the Russian language. Language, citizenship and education laws regulate only the knowledge and use of the Estonian language. However, the situation of Estonian Russian-speakers is not comparable to the situation of Turkish immigrants in Holland, Germany etc., where a sociolinguistically dominant language is one of the Indo-European languages (Dutch, German) and this gets into contact with an immigrant language. The linguistic rights of local Russian-speakers are a challenge currently faced by Estonia, as it works to balance the needs of the majority and minority populations (to get an insight into differing views on the topic, see Ozolins [1999]; Hogan-Brun et al. [2008]; Pavlenko [2011]).

Many Russian-speakers are descendants of Soviet-era immigrants who considered Estonia to be part of Soviet territory. Describing the Soviet language policy, Pavlenko (2011: 38–39) argues against the usage of the term “colonizers” in relation to Russians. She states that some space for the cultivation of national languages was provided in the USSR, and Russian-speakers were not more

<table>
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<th>Estonia in 2011</th>
<th>Tallinn in 2011</th>
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<tr>
<td>Estonians</td>
<td>69%</td>
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<td>Russian speakers</td>
<td>29%</td>
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privileged than speakers of other languages. The major themes running through her paper are an explicit concern with a refinement of the definition of “colonizers” and a call for a clear distinction between language rights vs. speakers’ rights.

The conflicts over Russian language status and mother-tongue education . . . citizenship and employment laws . . . had raised difficult questions. . . . Initial Western attempts to teach the newly emerging countries ways in which “‘good’ liberal democracies” resolve language policy dilemmas quickly led to the realization that . . . there is in fact no normative theory of language rights. (Pavlenko 2011: 44)

In post-Soviet Estonia, a possible solution to the question of Russian minority rights could be an adaptation of the term “transitional minority” (see Ehala 2008: 7). In this notion of conditional rights, the more Russian-speakers integrate into Estonian society, the more rights they will get.

With regard to the Russian language in Tallinn, it should be noted that Russian is often used in advertising, in shop transactions and in the public sphere in general. For example, flyers often have a Russian version, and Estonian main banks issue information on their websites in Estonian, Russian and English. Furthermore, a working knowledge of Russian is considered an asset in Tallinn, and it is even required in many chain-stores, private companies, banks, etc.

Globalization and tourism have resulted in other languages also becoming more prominent in Estonia and Tallinn. This is especially true in Tallinn, which is visited by approximately 80% of all foreign tourists who come to Estonia. The number of foreign tourists was especially high in 2011 (523,097 Finnish, 109,688 Russian and 73,396 German tourists), when Tallinn was one of the two European Capitals of Culture for the year. The high number of Finnish tourists has resulted in an increasing presence of Finnish (or quasi-Finnish) in Tallinn. In addition, “the influence of English is evident in advertising and entertainment, law and administration, economy, business and banking, information technology” (Kirtsi et al. 2008: 20). Everyday life in Tallinn provides a large number of possibilities for oral and written multilingual communication. For example, the website of the Tallinn municipality is in six languages: Estonian, Russian, English, German, Swedish and Finnish.

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3 Verschik (2012: 276) calls quasi-Finnish a cluster of varieties used by Estonian speakers who deal with Finnish customers. This “is a conscious creative manipulation of language resources. Material similarities between the varieties in question are recognized . . .”.
In sum, the language environment of Tallinn is developing in the interplay of the Estonian and Russian speech communities, in the context of the European Union and in the global trend of English as the international *lingua franca*. With these sociolinguistic realities in mind, the discussion now turns to the theoretical paradigm underpinning the current research.

### 3 Sociolinguistic and socio-cultural transformations in post-Soviet LLs: theoretical considerations

In an effort to offer a unifying approach to the varied perspectives on LL that range from theoretical and methodological solutions to critical and applied angles, Ben-Rafael (2009: 47–48) lists four structuration principles. These principles allow one to: (1) understand the connections of LL items to actors; (2) see interrelations between LL items and the public in general; (3) analyse the interrelations of groups of LL actors to segments of the public; and (4) compare groups of LL actors with each other. This framework aside, the main driving force behind language use in LL is expressions of societal discourses between dominant and minority groups. This is especially true in post-Soviet countries which have experienced growing ethnically-based nationalism since 1991. This increased nationalism has resulted in a discursive “reinterpretation of the history of the Soviet Union” (Blommaert 2006: 151) and efforts to un-do russification (Pavlenko 2009). Everyday linguistic practices and the (re)negotiation of identities among new titular and minority groups during the transformation of the post-Soviet urban socio-cultural-linguistic environment have attracted scholarly interest “as a contested linguistic space, where emotional exchanges over language-related issues are fodder for the daily news” (Pavlenko 2008: 275).

Scholarly output has dealt with the trends of official language policy, the intersection of language legislation and language practices in the post-Soviet context of competing local-national ideologies and the resulting LL of particular cities or countries (e.g. Bever 2010; Muth 2012; Pavlenko 2012). A general

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4 Even during the Soviet era, the strong oppositional identity of Estonians resulted in a polarization of the two language communities rather than the Soviet-desired “voluntary” russification.

5 In Estonia, the situation between the two language communities has always been calmer in comparison with countries such as Latvia or Ukraine, although some actions of officials have caused ethnically-based conflicts (Ehala 2009).
analysis of LL in former Soviet republics (Pavlenko 2009) reveals the striking heterogeneity present in the new post-Soviet time and space. There have been multiple sociolinguistic changes since the break-up of the USSR in 1991 related to the de facto and de jure status of the Russian language and the challenges faced by competing and coexisting national ideologies. Two main results have been the massive outflow of Russian-speakers from the new national republics during the 1990s and the efforts to recognise, revitalise and institutionalise the new national languages in order to avoid the continued dominance of the formerly-universal Russian language.

The current situation in Estonia differs from typical postcolonial settings in that Russian has not retained the powerful position that, for example, French and English have retained in much of present-day Africa or India (Schneider 2007). Curtin (this issue) also points out how a language of the formal colonizer – Mandarin Chinese – remains an official language of Taiwan. A radical shift in language policy can provoke the clash of old and new language ideologies, resulting in the confrontation of “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine 1989: 255). Given the presence of a titular group and a group of Russian-speakers in bi-ethnic Estonia and Tallinn, the debate surrounding language is constant and intense.

Strong opposition to russification occurred throughout the Soviet era, and a resilient national and linguistic identity prevented the displacement of the Estonian language from higher education and academia. Although the notions of sovietisation and russification are not the same, they have merged into one concept in Estonia. While colonisation, sovietisation and russification were intended to bring modernisation to other areas of the Soviet empire such as Central Asia or the Caucasus, this was not true for the Baltic countries, which were considered to be the most “Western” Soviet republics (e.g. the Latvian capital Riga was often referred to as the Soviet Paris).

The resistance to russification and sovietisation led Estonian group members to create the legislative basis for a national language policy as early as 1989. This policy restored the Estonian language to its official status after re-independence was achieved in 1991. New models for the provision of information on public signs were implemented in the Estonian LL. The linguistic, sociocultural and

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6 Even in a small country like Estonia, Russian-speakers do not fall into a single category with a uniform value system and attitudes. Instead, five different subgroups can be distinguished that differ from each other in a number of parameters (Ehala and Zabrodskaja 2014).

7 See the discussion in Remnev (2011), which argues that in the anti-imperial discourse, four concepts are being confused: colonisation, sovietisation, russification and modernisation.
ideological phenomena related to de-russification and the *lingua franca* shift from Russian to English are negotiated by linguistic, cultural and semiotic resources. These processes are well specified by Pavlenko (2009): language erasure, language replacement, language upgrading and downgrading, language regulation and the shift from above resulting in the appearance of transgressive signs.

The official Estonian policy of de-russification in LL was carried out in four means of part writing as summarised by Backhaus (2007: 91): homophonic (mutual translation or transliteration completely available), mixed (mutual translation or transliteration partially available), polyphonic (mutual translation or transliteration not available, information given in two or more languages) and monophonic signs (mutual translation or transliteration not available, information given in only one language). Backhaus compares these notions with standard multilingual writing types such as “duplicating” multilingualism, “fragmentary / overlapping multilingualism” and “complementary” multilingualism (Reh 2004). However, one cannot claim that two of the standard monolingual varieties in contact on a sign necessarily cause that sign to be multilingual.

An analysis of a multilingual sign as simply a combination of two monolingual varieties is not valid. Comparison of bi- or multilingual utterances to monolingual grammars brings up the notion of monolingual bias, i.e., a tacit assumption that a monolingual speaker can serve as a yardstick. Monolingual bias has governed the field of contact linguistics since its acknowledged pioneer Weinreich (1953: 7) stated that, based on the assumption that “every speech event belongs to a definite language” (Lotz 1950: 712), it is possible to determine some elements in an utterance that belong to another language. However, not “every speech event belongs to a definite language” (Lotz 1950: 712). Sometimes it can be hard to determine which element belongs to which language and why. Verschik (2012) shows very convincingly that there are Finnish-Estonian compromise forms and new creations that are not unambiguously determinable. Pavlenko (2012) is even forced to exclude Russian-Ukrainian bivalent signs from her analysis of Kyiv LL. It is not possible for her to identify which element belongs to which language because the languages are so closely related.

Bilingualism cannot be considered a simple “overlay” of one language over another (Auer 2007), because the resulting constructions and items cannot always be identified as belonging to a particular variety. The phenomenon is more complex. Grammar can mean different things to LL actors who possess two or more linguistic systems, each with its own grammatical rules and lexicon. True multilingual texts on a sign are created from the interaction between lexical elements and grammatical rules from the individual languages. For the
patterns of multilingual information provided on signs are more subtle and diverse than just the opposition between two monolingual varieties. This is especially true in Tallinn, where people with differential degrees of command of Estonian, Russian and other foreign languages interact across ethnic boundaries on an everyday basis. These language interactions in public space are affected by the official language policy that regulates the use of the former imperial language (termed a foreign language) on the micro level.

I now turn to the presentation of top-down and bottom-up language planning in Estonia. LL is not only a reflection of a city’s linguistic and ethnic-demographic composition, but is also shaped by former and current language policy “from above” and cultural legacies, language dynamics and language attitudes “from below”. These varied dynamics determine whether or not the LL exhibits covert or overt presence of certain varieties, contested linguistic hierarchies and so forth.

### 3.1 Regulation of public space from above and initiatives from below

Top-down language planning is essentially the state’s regulation of language use (Hogan-Brun 2010: 91). Bottom-up language planning is defined by Linn (2010: 115) as “allowing the views and priorities of language users, rather than top-down political will, to dictate the direction of language policy-making”. Signs in public space are traditionally considered to be either top-down signs issued by public authorities (e.g. government, municipalities or public agencies) or bottom-up signs such as advertisements, notices or handwritten notes published by individuals, associations or companies that act autonomously within the limits prescribed by official regulations (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 8).

Although the usual practice in fundamental LL research is to classify collected data into top-down and bottom-up items (e.g. Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Backhaus 2007), it is difficult to have a clear-cut distinction between the two (Coupland 2008; Sebba 2010). In Tallinn LL, a sign on the door of a municipal institution is a prototypical top-down item while a piece of cardboard in a market with the name and price of goods is a prototypical bottom-up item. This being said, one must take into account the power and regulations of official language policy when considering whether signs are from below or from above.

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8 A microsociolinguist deals with language processes on a micro-level, believing that social interaction is itself the basic datum of analysis. Applying this term to LL research, it is not the linking or counting of languages that is important but rather seeking an answer to how different linguistic resources are employed.
In contrast to Finland, where the language legislation does not concern private and commercial spaces (Laitinen, this issue), Estonian language policy regulates the use of local languages in the whole public space through the following laws: Estonian Language Acts (1995–2011; 2011), Place Names Act (2003) and Advertising Act (2008). All types of signs, ranging from a small hand-written sticker to a big banner on an official ministry building, are affected by the Estonian language policy. Therefore, no matter by whom the signs were placed – government agencies or private individuals – they all fall under the same regulations. With regards to language, Estonian public space cannot be divided into private and official, as these two concepts have essentially been merged.9

As explained by Siiner (2006: 164), “Language planning in Estonia is implemented through numerous laws and regulations, comprising the National Constitution, the Language Act and over 400 laws, lower legal and normative acts, regulating the public use and status of the Estonian language”. An important legislative tool of language planning is the new Language Act (2011), which replaced the old Language Act of 1995. The new Act, like the old one, stipulates that the only official language is Estonian and classifies all other languages as foreign. The new Language Act continues to impose mandatory use of Estonian for employees at state, municipal and private institutions. Because the data discussed in this paper was collected during 2006–2011, it is also important to mention an amendment to the old Act that came into force in March 2007 which allowed information to be translated into a foreign language in a less visible script. This is still allowed today under the new Language Act.

As laid out by Ben-Rafael et al. (2010: xvi–xix), there are four perspectives for how to perceive signs in space: (a) through power relations; (b) through rational considerations in accounting for how actors behave in space; (c) through the subjectivist perspective of how individuals may react to various signs; and (d) through the collective identities formed by participants in producing, designing, displaying, encountering, observing, and interpreting signs.

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9 Here new questions for future research arise. Do graffiti artists or those who produce hand-written placards really care about the official language policy? Would the Language Inspectorate fine a grandmother for placing a handwritten note in Russian on a lamp pole? In my personal experience, salespeople at the nearby market often ask me to translate or check their Estonian-language labels. One of my Estonian colleagues even wrote on Facebook that one morning she went to the market. She was already familiar with some sellers and talks with them predominantly in Estonian. One woman who sells apples looked at her in a strange way and then smiled, adding: “Now the name of the type of apple came to my mind – valge klaar ‘white juice’ ” (in Estonian). Such examples demonstrate how greatly language policy affects private space and mind.
Addressing the question of what makes Russian a minority language in the Ukraine, Pavlenko (2012: 42) emphasises that the answer “is not based on numerical size, but on clearly observable differences among groups in relation to power, status, and entitlement” (May 2006: 255). This also describes the Estonian situation, where ideological discourses from below that address political topics and aspects of the Russian language status reinforce top-down LL construction. The top-down approach is an attempt to attach greater importance to the Estonian language and to protect it and its spelling standards from globalising forces. This can be seen in the main differences between the new Language Act that came into force on 1 July 2011 and the Language Act of 1995:

1. Text in the public arena must comply with the Estonian Literary Standard; the same text may also be presented in a dialect in regions where dialects are used;
2. Public signs, advertisements, political advertisements and the part of a business’s name that provides information about its activities must be in Estonian;
3. A translation into another language may be added to public signs, advertisements and business names, but the Estonian text must be placed first and cannot be viewed as less important or worse than the translation;
4. When a language other than Estonian is used in a trademarked name for a business or advertising (according to the previous Language Act, trademarked names could not be translated), the part of the name that gives important information about the location, services or products of the business must also be presented in the Estonian language. This translation may be at the entrance of the business.

The adoption of the new Language Act led to much discussion amongst a variety of social actors. The main problematic point of the new Language Act is the requirement that trademarked business names in foreign languages must now be translated if they contain substantive information about the business. For example, if there is a Lounge Kaheksa [Lounge Eight] the word ‘lounge’ will now have to be translated into Estonian; the same applies to words such as ‘pub’, ‘café’, ‘bar’ etc. that are in the name of an establishment.

It is not only the Language Act that impacts public signs. The Place Names Act (2003) decrees that all street and other place names must be in Estonian only (a similar practice can be found in Latvia [Pavlenko 2009], Lithuania and Moldova [Muth 2012]). Therefore, road and street name signs must be in Estonian and in the Estonian-Roman alphabet. This strong emphasis on the official status of Estonian resulted in changes in toponymy in some cases. Information on public signage is also regulated by the Advertising Act (2008), the Alcohol Act (2001), the Medicinal Products Act (2004) and the Food Act (1999).
The Language Act created a Language Inspectorate with the mandate of ensuring that regulations governing language use are observed. The Inspectorate is able to issue fines in cases of non-compliance. The results of the involvement of the Language Inspectorate are discussed in Section 5 and could be more closely examined in a diachronic study of Estonian LL.

4 Structure and methodology of research

This section presents the methodology of data collection and analysis used in the study. In order to obtain the most comprehensive picture of the nature of multilingual commercial signs in Tallinn and readers’ attitudes towards them, the study was conducted in three steps.

First, various examples of mono- and multilingual signs in Tallinn were collected from 2006–2011 following data collection traditions established by LL studies (Backhaus 2007; Barni and Bagna 2009) and semiotic landscape analysis (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010). This corpus of 8,095 pictures consists of images collected of streets, bank and shop windows, the insides of shops, restaurants and cafes, labels in the market places, and other advertising material (e.g. local Russian-language newspapers). As much data as possible were collected in order to be able to detect tendencies and make generalizations. When collecting and storing data, a sign was defined as a publically displayed “piece of written text within a spatially definable frame . . . including anything from handwritten stickers to huge commercial billboards” (Backhaus 2006: 55). Each sign served as one unit of analysis.

The sociolinguistic environment can change very quickly, especially in a newly-independent and dynamic society as Estonia. As such, new patterns of multilingual signs can supplant previous ones. Pictures were therefore taken of the same sign diachronically when possible (e.g. if there were changes in language choice on the same sign over time). The interpretation of new patterns and phenomena would gain more meaning if compared to the previous context (see Pavlenko [2009] who points out that diachrony remains an under-exploited area of LL research).

The data collection areas were the Old Town, the city centre, the predominantly Russian-speaking district of Lasnamäe and the harbour. It is important to acknowledge that signs take a major part of their meaning from how and where they are placed (Scollon and Scollon 2003), and the LL is directly affected by the

10 The limits of the current article do not allow for either a quantitative analysis or a thorough examination of changes in the LL that occurred during the five years of surveying.
number and density of speakers of different speech communities in a particular area. Therefore, established paradigms in LL research were followed by choosing: (a) the main commercial artery with numerous shops and cafes; (b) the most historically attractive place for tourists; (c) the most Russian-speaking city district; and (d) an area where Finns arrive to Tallinn on a ferry.

After collecting the photo data, commercial signs were separated from the non-commercial into a different corpus. I then composed a field diary with descriptions of which languages and scripts were present on multilingual signs. Multilingualism can be defined as “a complex of specific semiotic resources” (Blommaert 2010: 102) and creativity defined as an “imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value” (NACCCE 1999: 30). Combining these two terms, one research aim was to find out how multilingual creativity manifests itself through stylization, the creation of hybrid and linguistically ambiguous forms and the different orthographies found on signs, particularly in the city centre and the predominantly Russian-speaking neighbourhood of Lasnamäe. Then I went through all commercial signs and separated them into types. Next, I found four photos that would best represent the main types of multilingual creativity.

In order to explore the links between the creation of multilingual texts and metalinguistic awareness, the third stage of research consisted of individual interviews with Tallinn University students whose specialisation is languages: 10 students with Russian as L1 and 10 students with Estonian as L1. The students were asked 15 specific questions about shown photos that aimed to ascertain their attitudes towards the actual language practices used in the composition of public signage. According to James and Garrett (1991: 3), “[l]anguage awareness is the ability to think about and to reflect upon the nature and functions of language”. I was interested in exploring students’ awareness of the linguistic creativity manifested on multilingual signs. This data source would possibly provide evidence that multilingual proficiency and a multicultural background are essential components in understanding linguistically and culturally creative public space.

Keeping the above discussions in mind, let us now turn to the findings of the empirical study on Tallinn LL and features of its commercial signage.

5 Tallinn linguistic landscape

The overall picture of language in public space in Tallinn is very heterogeneous (see its comparison with more homogenous Vilnius in Zabrodskaja and Verschik [forthcoming]). In the Old Town, English, Finnish, Russian, German and occasionally French appear on signs that cater to foreign tourists. In the city centre,
Estonian is dominant but Russian is also quite common. In Lasnamäe, Russian is sometimes more visible than the official language, showing that the area is a Russian cultural space. However, even here the official language is displayed, indicating the official importance of the Estonian language. In the harbour, Finnish is used on signs to communicate with Finnish tourists. In all four areas, English is the *lingua franca*, and serves as the language of commerce and trade. The combined use of Cyrillic and Roman characters in many commercial signs in the city centre and Lasnamäe demonstrate how multilingual and multicultural identities are expressed, as shopkeepers balance the requirements of the Language Act with the real language repertoires of their customers.

As noted earlier, LL data reveal the dynamic interplay between language policy regulations from above and language practices from below. In Estonia, the Language Inspectorate gives demerit marks or fines in cases of non-compliance with the Language Act. Figures 1 and 2 provide an illustration of the situation. The owner of Café La Couronne (Crown) in the Old Town – the most popular touristic area in Tallinn – received a warning from the Language Inspectorate because the front window contained only the French word describing the type of establishment – café.

Some days later, the French word café was replaced by the Estonian word baar ‘bar’. The word baar is an English borrowing that has been integrated into the Estonian phonetic system and is therefore in accordance with the Language Act.

![Fig. 1: Front window of La Couronne Café using a French-language sign](image-url)
Act. It is likely that the use of a well-known internationalism instead of the direct translation of café into the Estonian word kohvik was a deliberate choice of the café owner to provide a sign intelligible to a multilingual clientele. This example found in the LL of the Old Town shows how similarities across languages can be cleverly used.

When examining the interplay between commercial signage and official language policy, one finds new and creative forms of orthographical modification. The aim of what follows is not to detect every type of commercial sign in Tallinn, but rather to map general strategies employed by LL actors. Particular attention is paid to phrases and individual words because this micro level is where languages and grammars come into contact.

A commercial sign, for instance, might feature a compromise in orthography. In the picture below, a Russian lexical item, городок ‘small town’, is transliterated with Latin characters (gorodok) according to the rules of Estonian spelling (Figure 3). This may signal an appreciation of Estonian or perhaps just obedience to the Place Name Act.

As mentioned earlier, languages do not have clear borders, and in everyday language use, multiple discursive practices constitute languaging (Blommaert 2010; Pennycook 2010). LL actors sometimes create a compromise form that is a combination of multiple languages and/or scripts. For instance, Figure 4 shows
Fig. 3: Drawing a fine line between the requirements of the Place Name Act and the ethnolinguistic composition of Lasnamäe (cf. Russian город becomes город ‘town’; Russian городок becomes городок ‘small town’)

Fig. 4: A commercial street sign that displays four languages and Russian and Estonian script-mixing
an advertisement with words written in four languages (Estonian *allahindlus*, Finnish *ale*, English *sale* and Russian *скидка*) that appeared in the heart of the city centre on Narva road.

Not only has the Russian word *скидка* been given in Cyrillic letters, but the main word in the sign also presents interesting orthographic choices. Written entirely in capital letters, *МОЕЛÕИКЕЛЕ* (from the Estonian nominative *moelõige*, allative form *moelõikele*) literally means ‘to the fashion cut’. This grammatical choice, together with an exclamation-mark, calls on Tallinn citizens and visitors to visit the shop. One can assume that the replacement of the Estonian letter *l* with the Russian letter *л* is a way to re-create a slogan reminiscent of the Soviet era. The Estonian letter Õ (a composition of the Latin letter O with the diacritic mark tilde) is left as an element of locality and makes the sign exotic for tourists.

Containing the image of a young woman and a young man holding a pair of scissors aloft, the advertisement also contains a multimodal intertextual reference to Vera Mukhina’s monument known as “Worker and Kolkhoz Woman”. This

*Fig. 5: “The people and the army are united” (retrieved on 3 November 2012 from http://antykvaryat.blog.tut.by/2008/11/26/plakaty-sssr-narod-i-armiya-ediny/)*
famous symbol of the Soviet epoch is a dynamic sculpture of two figures with a sickle and a hammer raised over their heads. Although the monument is located in Moscow, it is recognisable to local inhabitants and visitors from a Soviet background because it has been used as the logo of the Soviet film studio Mosfilm since 1947. Those with a strong background in Soviet art history will also realize that this placard is actually an adaptation of a Soviet poster called “Народ и армия едны!” [The people and the army are united] (Figure 5).

All in all, this sign presents a high degree of semiotic complexity: Russian and Estonian orthographic elements co-exist in a way that appeals to the Russian-speaking community while also creating a sense of Estonian “locality”. It is also particularly interesting how post-soviet Estonian consumerism has re-appropriated Soviet cultural stereotypes in some instances.

The next poster features a young woman sitting in a provocative pose on a chair (Figure 6). The slogan accompanying her advertises Viru Keskus, the main commercial artery in Tallinn’s city centre, as a naudingute labor ‘laboratory of enjoyments’. Script-mixing appears once again on a word level. The Cyrillic letter

![Fig. 6: NAUDINGUTE LABOR ‘laboratory of enjoyments’: a Cyrillic character appearing in an Estonian phrase](image-url)
б was used in the word labour, possibly to get the attention of readers. My speculation is that the letter б might also serve to create associations with the Russian word блядь ‘prostitute’. Quite often Russians do not pronounce the whole word, but only the first letter б (e.g. Она одета как б ‘She is dressed like a prostitute’). This supposition is supported by the manner in which the young woman is dressed (sexual underwear, white pantyhose and high heels) and how she is posed – with her hands tied with a red belt behind the back of the chair.

The four examples discussed above demonstrate that regardless of a language policy that promotes Estonian as the single official language, “multilingualism from below” is widely practiced in the design of Estonian public signs for consumerist purposes. This phenomenon of “multilingual from below” is also referred to as the use of “languaging” (see Blommaert 2010; Pennycook 2010). Figure 7 is a diagram of the interaction between the two main forces that form Tallinn LL: language legislation to protect the Estonian language coming from above and the sociolinguistic realities and globalisation processes from below.

In conclusion, LL actors apply different LL management strategies to negotiate between the mainstream language policy and the needs of a multilingual

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**Fig. 7: Interaction of forces from above and from below in the formation of Tallinn LL**
community. (Zabrodskaja and Kahu [forthcoming] show that there are multiple methods of outsmarting the Language Inspectorate since advertising campaigns usually last for a short period of time and are taken down before the occurrence of serious consequences or fines). To a certain extent, Tallinn is similar to Montreal, where legislation also regulates the language of public and commercial signage, causing the appearance of English-French “bilingual winks” as creative manifestations of complex linguistic identities (Lamarre, this issue). It is important to note that such phenomenon is not only characteristic of de jure (Quebec) or de facto (Estonia) bilingual communities. Martin (2010) shows that even in France, a fairly monolingual country that has legislation protecting the French language, “Frenglish” is “skilfully crafted and positioned so as to avoid fines for illegal use of English in French media” (Martin 2010: 83). It will be shown next that different combinatorial principles present challenges for LL readers and their understanding of multilingual information.

6 Attitudes towards multilingual signs in bi-ethnic Tallinn

This section examines the reactions of a group of Tallinn University students to the signs discussed above. The main focus is on the students’ perceptions of the different languages and scripts. As Gorter (2006: 1) notes, “language is all around us in textual form”, but in an analysis of LL processes, it is important to study the reactions of LL users, because different readers with different linguistic repertoires may have different understandings of the same sign. The wealth of data about Tallinn LL was used in interviews with the students to contribute to a better understanding of LL readers’ attitudes towards written multilingualism and creativity.

A multilingual sign in Tallinn might symbolize the creative thought of an LL actor (shop or café owner, etc.) who uses it as a tool for communication with the entire community. Multilingual commercial signs on a shop or café might also feature LL actors’ expressions of identity. Needing to satisfy the two main language groups, the shopkeepers try not to lose Estonians’ interest by using too much Russian on advertisements. On the other hand, they also wish to attract the patronage of local Russian-speakers.

Among the Estonian-speaking respondents, the most representative attitude towards Figure 6 can be captured by the following statement: “This is a sign that does not carry any message at all. Something new is advertised. I do not understand what the Russian should mean here”. The attitudes of Russian-speaking
students are encapsulated in the following: “It advertises a shop. *NAUDINGUTE LABOR* – laboratory of enjoyments. The advertisement means to say that a shop is like a laboratory that people attend to get some enjoyment. The Russian Ɂ symbolizes the creativity and modernity of the goods offered there.”

With regard to the most creative sign *МОЙОИКЕИЕ* (Figure 4), the discourses again fall into two categories. The Estonian-speaking students ask: “In what language is this message meant to be? It seems that this is a shop sign but it deserves no credit. They try to ‘accommodate’ both the Russian- and Estonian-speaking communities but the result reminds me of a circus banner.” In contrast, the Russian-speaking students responded in the following manner: “The message is clear. Most probably this sign was captured in the Tallinn city centre. The same message is translated into different languages for tourists’ convenience. It emphasises that all customers are welcome to the shop on equal rights.”

Notably, neither linguistic group perceived the reference to Mukhina’s sculpture. One might suggest that the graphics of this advertisement are unclear because dusty colours are together and it is difficult to distinguish shapes. If so, this would affect the overall coherence of the semiotic background. Another possible explanation is that being of a young age, the respondents were not familiar with the sculpture.

In general, the attitude among Estonian-speaking students was as follow: “There were some misunderstandings because my Russian language knowledge is not good and I did not understand the play with languages on the signs. I could only make some suggestions” and “I got confused while reading these advertisements. My Russian is not strong at all, maybe it is my problem, but I was disturbed because of non-understanding”.

This is in contrast to the Russian-speaking students’ attitudes towards the advertisement strategies: “I would draw attention to the fact that Russian-Estonian bilingualism is not accepted; its existence is barely even acknowledged. They ignore the usage of the Russian language but still want people to know about things and be involved somehow”. In addition, some Russian-speaking respondents expressed opinions such as: “I am happy to see how much Russian is actually used in Tallinn public space”.

It is important to mention that the findings presented in this section might be rather subjective; the group of Estonian and Russian-speakers surveyed was homogeneous, consisting only of students who receive higher education in linguistics. It would be instructive to also study ordinary people’s perceptions of multilingual creations found in Tallinn LL. This would further our understanding of the extent to which language awareness and metacognitive knowledge functioning play a role in language attitudes.
7 Conclusion

The example of Tallinn as a post-Soviet urban multilingual space introduces a wealth of new empirical LL data. It is a relatively unique place where traditional notions of majority/minority are approached from a different angle, as the “majority” speaks a small language and the “minority” speaks Russian. LL actors in Tallinn try to achieve mutual understanding and recognition in a society ridden with conflict over language. In an effort to manage signs in public space, individuals and businesses produce multilingual texts that are accessible to speakers of both the majority and minority languages. The contrast between the two main languages and alphabets combined within a single word is sharp, but most probably appreciated only by bilingual readers.

Collected data show that multilingual resources can be employed in various ways in different situations. Furthermore, the reader does not always have an adequate explanation for why the Estonian or Russian items are sometimes written with their own script and sometimes not. The qualitative analysis of interviews demonstrates that youth bilingual in Russian and Estonian express mainly positive responses to the signs containing the Russian language or an Estonian-Russian hybrid, viewing the multilingual signs as creative and successful. According to them, multilingualism broadens access to information provided on a sign. Native Estonian-speaking students, on the other hand, state that the employment of different languages and/or scripts on a sign only complicates its understanding. They show rather negative reactions to the presence of multilingual creative signs, especially those that include the Russian language or a Russian-Estonian hybrid.

This article is meant to provide background for a better understanding of dynamic multilingual processes occurring in Tallinn LL and to contribute to the larger body of studies on multilingual space in former Soviet republics. It is also intended to provide empirical evidence about the nature and characteristics of multilingual signs in the cityscape and the complex identity processes in multicultural contexts. The research presented in this article is only one step towards a full understanding of LL processes in Tallinn. It is hoped that further study will shed even more light on the complex phenomena playing out in the dynamic city.

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References


Tallinn from above and below


Patricia Lamarre

Bilingual winks and bilingual wordplay in Montreal’s linguistic landscape

Abstract: In Québec, legislation regulates the language of public and commercial signage. As intended, this has transformed the linguistic landscape (LL) of Montreal, which looks more French than just three decades ago. But if we stop looking and actually listen to the city’s soundscape, what is clear is that Montreal is a much more bilingual and multilingual city with a population increasingly able to read signs both in English and in French. Interestingly, in the Montreal LL can be found a number of commercial signs that are nothing less than wry “bilingual winks” that circumvent legislation, sometimes with quite wicked skill, and play with French and English. These bilingual winks are clearly intended for a population with the language skills to catch the wink and can be interpreted as manifestations of the increasing number of complex language repertoires, but also of a bilingual aesthetic that revels in disrupting and claiming space. It would also seem, however, that while a certain amount of covert bilingual creativity has been inspired by the legal constraints imposed in Québec, bilingual wordplay has simply found ways of creeping into the LL, despite the politics of language and legislation.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, bilingual wordplay, bilingual winks, Québec, language legislation, Montreal

1 From linguistic battlefield to linguistic playing field: emergence of bilingual wordplay within a city redefined

When I moved back to Montreal in 1994, just prior to Québec’s second referendum on sovereignty, I was hit by the changes in the language dynamic that had occurred over a decade of my being away. A first surprise was that there seemed to be a lot more “Anglophone” bilinguals, a whole generation of young adults who had been brought up and/or educated in both languages, using both languages in their daily lives (Lamarre 2007). Similarly, walking the streets of Montreal, I was
struck by the number of immigrants who were using both French and English, as well as other languages, in everyday interactions. Census statistics confirmed these impressions, showing a quite remarkable increase in knowledge of French in Québec’s non-Francophone population. While this marks the success of a projet de société, a societal project launched during Québec’s Quiet Revolution to improve the status of French and French speakers, it also reveals a new linguistic dynamic taking shape in unexpected ways. Historically, bilingualism in Québec tended to be unidirectional with French speakers shouldering the “burden of bilingualism” (Gouvernement du Québec 1972). Out of the push given in the 1970s to franciser Montreal and its workplaces, a more complex linguistic dynamic has emerged in which bilingual skills are of value to all. Québec’s efforts to give French dominant status have resulted in a growing number of people who can read and write the city’s LL in both English and French.

It was while walking down the main shopping street of Westmount, historically a bastion for the Anglophone wealthy, that I first caught a “bilingual wink” in the linguistic landscape. It was a shoe store with the witty name Chouchou, a term of endearment in French which translates along the lines of ‘sweetiepie’ and is pronounced “shoe-shoe”. But why would a trendy shoe store in a predominantly English-speaking neighbourhood choose a name like Chouchou and why interpret this sign as a bilingual wink? To unpack this, a brief look at language legislation and signage in Québec is required, moving analysis beyond the flat surface of the LL and into the context as proposed by Pennycook (2009), a context which in the early 1990s had just weathered an angry “sign war” over what languages could and could not be used on commercial signs.

2 Language legislation and the visage linguistique of Montreal

In the mid-twentieth century, Québec was marked by a social class divide, which paralleled a linguistic divide (Gouvernement du Québec 1972). A colonial history had left in place an English-speaking economically dominant minority (roughly 10% of the province’s population) and a French-speaking population and workforce who, although they were the demographic and political majority, had yet to wield their numeric clout to bring about changes to Québec’s power relations. The Quiet Revolution in the 1960s marks the beginning of an era in which French speakers pushed to improve the status of French, particularly in Montreal, a city represented as the “battlefield” on which the struggle over language was being fought and would eventually be won or lost (Levine 1997). Québec’s Language
Charter of 1977 is often considered the turning point for change in the linguistic dynamic and, within the Charter, five areas of language use are addressed: the language of administration, of the workplace and of business, of public schooling, and, interestingly, of signs (Corbeil 2007).

The Charter’s clauses imposed unilingual signage in French, a political response to the predominance of English on signs in downtown Montreal. This older LL can still be read today, glimpsed here and there on the city’s walls, an underpainting testifying, albeit with peeling and fading paint, to how English once dominated (see Figure 1). By the 1960s however, the position of languages in Montreal was being called upon to change, and change quickly, including in respect to the linguistic landscape: “Look at downtown, the St.Catherine-Peel area: almost all of the large signs are only in English and this despite the Quiet Revolution (oh, so quiet) and the French-speaking majority on which this downtown thrives…” (Lorraine [1966: 80] in Bourhis and Landry [2002], my translation).

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1 Bourhis and Landry (2002) offer a thorough overview of legislation and court rulings impacting the LL of Québec.

2 “Regardez au centre de la ville, dans le quartier Sainte-Catherine-Peel par exemple: presque toutes les grandes enseignes sont uniquement en anglais, et cela, malgré la fameuse Révolution tranquille (oh, ce tranquille!) et la majorité française qui fait vivre même le centre de la ville…” (Lorraine [1966: 80] in Bourhis and Landry [2002])
The clauses within the language charter, put in place to transform *le visage linguistique* or linguistic face of the city, aimed at sending a strong and immediate symbolic message to all: that French speakers were reclaiming a space and that a major change in the linguistic dynamic and its underlying power relations was underway (Bourhis and Landry 2002; Rocher 2000). In Québec, there is absolutely nothing hidden about the symbolic function of language on signage. The linguistic landscape is generally understood, not only by academics but also by the general public, as a space of symbolic competition and struggle between language groups. The symbolic power of this LL is made very plain in an extract from a letter sent by René Levesque, then premier of Québec and leader of the Parti Québécois, to Alliance Québec, the Anglophone spokesgroup, in 1982:

> It is important that the face of Québec be French foremost, if only to not revive in the eyes of immigrants the ambiguity of the past as to the character of our society. . . . Every bilingual sign says to immigrants: ‘There are two languages here, English and French, and you are free to choose’. It says to Anglophones: ‘No need to learn French, everything is translated’. This is not the message we want to send. It is vital that all be aware of the French character of our society. (Levesque quoted in Bernard [2008: 366], my translation)

To send this message, the Charter imposed French unilingualism on all public provincial signage, including road signs, an area clearly under its jurisdiction, but it also moved into what the architects of the Charter considered to be part of the public sphere, imposing French unilingualism on commercial signage. Signs used by religious, cultural and political organisations were exempted from this clause.

Contestation of Québec’s right to do this was quick and the “sign law” was soon challenged in court, giving rise to angry polemic and even street demonstrations. In 1988, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that unilingualism on commercial signage went against both the Québec Charter of Human Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court ruling added, however, that

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3 Toponomy is another area in which the Québec government acted to reclaim public space and erase a colonialised past from Montreal’s linguistic landscape. Many city streets and squares have been renamed since the Quiet Revolution.

4 « Il est important que le visage du Québec soit d’abord français, ne serait-ce que pour ne pas ressusciter aux yeux des nouveaux venus, l’ambiguïté qui prévalait autrefois quant au caractère de notre société. . . . Chaque affiche bilingue dit à l’immigrant: ‘Il y a deux langues ici, l’anglais et le français, on choisit celle qu’on veut’. Elle dit à l’anglophone: ‘Pas besoin d’apprendre le français, tout est traduit’. Ce n’est pas là le message que nous voulons faire passer. Il nous apparaît vital que tous prennent conscience du caractère français de notre société. » (This citation appears in a letter sent by R. Lévesque, then prime minister of Québec, to Eric Maldoff, then president of Alliance-Québec, 5 November 1982, quoted in Bernard [2008: 366].)
Québec could impose French as the dominant language of commercial signs, but could not impose French as the only language (Corbeil 2007). This judgment leaves unclear the question of whether commercial signs are part of the public domain or not, as, on the one hand, shop owners were considered individuals entitled to freedom of expression, while on the other, the right of governments to impose the presence of French on commercial signage was also recognised.\(^5\) The Supreme Court ruling provoked such a strong reaction among Francophones that the Québec government chose to stand its ground on signage, opting instead for a derogation clause from the Canadian Charter to keep legislation in place. This clause would have to be renewed every five years, guaranteeing that the sign law would be back in public debate at regular intervals.

By the late 1980s, imposed unilingualism on commercial signs had become one of the major irritants between Francophones and Anglophones, more so apparently than language of schooling or the workplace. Surveys also showed that it was considered only somewhat effective in promoting the use of French and that a good number of Francophones would at this point accept bilingualism on signs as long as French dominated (Bourhis and Landry 2002: 115). In 1993, as the derogation clause was coming to the end of its first five-year term, the sign law received another blow. A committee of the United Nations, asked to examine whether imposed unilingualism on commercial signs represented an infringement on human rights, concluded that this did in effect violate the right to freedom of expression. At this point, the Québec government chose to not renew the derogation clause, but to make changes to legislation instead.\(^6\) Subsequently, Bill 86 was adopted, allowing for other languages on storefront signage as long as French dominated (twice as big as other languages, making evident the symbolic function of language on signs). Since then, the “sign war” seems to have come to an end, despite periodic flare-ups. The language of signs remains a prickly issue and the Québec government continues to mandate studies on le visage linguistique montréalais and there are regularly calls to better police the LL from those who keep a wary eye on the encroachment of English in Montreal. In the spring of 2011, as it geared up for a provincial election, the Parti Québécois passed a motion to return to unilingualism on commercial signage within its political platform. This was quickly overturned thanks to senior members in the party who had lived through the experience of the Supreme Court ruling and the UN committee report, obviously not anxious to reignite a contentious “sign war”, deeming other linguistic “battlefronts” more important.

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5 For a discussion of legislation on signage in other countries, see Leclerc (1989).
6 In conformity with the earlier Supreme Court ruling.
Québec’s efforts to transform the linguistic face of Québec, clearly reveals the LL as a “field of forces” (Bourdieu 1982), on which struggles over power take place and in which signs can be understood as having a symbolic as well as an informational function, as proposed by Landry and Bourhis (1997). Bourhis and Landry (2002), however, also propose that what is put on walls to be read can also have a more subversive purpose. Texts in linguistic landscapes are authored by different players and can be written to challenge authority. Obvious examples of this are graffiti and tags, authored generally by a counterculture that appropriates walls, often to put forward the subversive (Billiez 1998; Pennycook 2009), sometimes the racist, but also sometimes as a canvas for creative “street art” (Visconti et al. 2010). To approach the LL from this angle, as a space of contestation and competition clearly moves analysis into the social and political realm.

3 Linguistic landscape – going beyond cartography

Most of the work conducted in a first wave of research on linguistic landscape is descriptive and can be essentially considered cartography (Pennycook 2009). Many studies use distributive analysis of languages on public signs to determine the presence and dominance of languages in the LL and from there extrapolate on the vitality of languages within a given context. Problems underlie this type of approach. For one, it doesn’t treat the LL as a space of human activity (Harvey 1996; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010; Lefebvre 1991) where struggles over public space take place. Recently, research with a critical perspective has emerged, taking into account the sociopolitical contexts of LLs and their material and historical traits (Papen 2012; Pavlenko 2010; Leeman and Modan 2009, 2010; Shohamy et al. 2010). These studies ask, from a Hellerian take (Heller 2002): what are the stakes underlying the linguistic landscape, what stands to be lost or gained, and who stands to lose or gain? In the Québec context, answering these questions is easy and the positioning of language communities as related to signage is something that requires no sophisticated unpacking. But the study of linguistic landscape also begs the questions: who authors the text? who reads the text? (as proposed by Malinowski [2009]), as well as the more sharp-edged question: who has the skills to read the texts and who is left out? Calvet (1994) brings in this dimension, proposing that the texts of cities are not easily accessible to all: texts are sometimes cryptic and aimed at an audience of readers who are culturally and linguistically able to decipher their meaning. While this is true in “unilingual”
settings, looking at who can or can’t decipher a text in contexts where bilingualism and multilingualism are major traits becomes a potent area of investigation. What can be asked in the contested language space of Montreal is: who is able to get a bilingual wink in the LL and who are we hoping to slip one passed?

The flip side of reading the linguistic landscape is, of course, writing the linguistic landscape. Writers, as cultural agents, take part in the public sphere and write for an imagined readership. Considering agency in the writing of texts suggests that there is perhaps another area to turn to in the analysis of bilingual winks and wordplay: the study of humour and of aesthetics. I would like to propose not just any aesthetic, but an “edgy” bilingual aesthetic à la Sommer (2004, 2006) that makes mischief with meaning and uses cultural agency to “irritate the state” as well as express identity and humour. As a framework, it allows us to consider the agency of bilinguals, as authors and interpreters of texts, as well as the use of humour in dealing with constraints.

It seems important to clarify at this point what is meant by bilingual winks and bilingual wordplay on signs. Basically any sign that has more than one language on it can be described as a bilingual or multilingual sign. At the federal level of government, Canada has bilingual signage that simultaneously meets informational and symbolic functions, informing Canadian citizens in the two official languages, at the same time as it provides symbolic recognition of two official language communities. Then there are of course the bilingual and multilingual commercial signs that are being mapped in much of the research on LL. Found over storefronts, often in ethnic neighbourhoods and intended for readers from more than one community of language speakers, these announce that specialised products or services in different languages can be found within. The bilingual winks and bilingual wordplay in the linguistic cityscape of Montreal stand apart from these forms of signage by the fact that they transgress the norms and boundaries of languages understood as separate entities, as well as challenge legislation that fundamentally rests on the “separateness” of the languages being “managed”.

Essentially, bilingual winks and bilingual wordplay are humorous transgressions, examples of one language sneaking or crossing over into the domain of another. They play with languages either slyly to get around legislative constraints, in which case to my mind they are covert, a bilingual wink; or they mess more blatantly with the line drawn between languages, in which case, they are bilingual wordplay but without the wink. In either case, they draw on humour. Jokes, puns and wordplay are obviously things people do in any language, and this because languages “contain ambiguities which can be deliberately exploited to create verbal duplicity” (Chiaro 1992). As Chiaro proposes, languages in effect seem to contain hidden traps at all levels of linguistic analysis, so that a trans-
posed sound or syllable or a misplaced preposition can potentially wreak havoc to the general meaning of an utterance. An inherent trait of language then is ambiguity and flexibility, allowing us to say different things, but also providing room for everyday linguistic creativity (Carter 2004).

Catching a bilingual wink in the LL requires recognition that language has been toyed or played with, that there has been a messing around with things, and perhaps more than just language:

Speech play provides implicit and explicit metacommentary – in the form of both the praxis of everyday life and artistic performance – on systems and structure, social and cultural as well as interactional and (socio)linguistic. It explores and indeed flirts with the boundaries of the socially, culturally and linguistically possible and appropriate; for this reason it is often felt to be simultaneously humorous, serious and aesthetically pleasing. (Sherzer 2002: 1)

Verbal play can be understood then as having more than one level of message. In an effort to identify the different functions of verbal play, Sherzer (2002) unpacks the many meanings of the word “play” itself. Among these is play as manipulation, which requires a certain amount of freedom, but within something recognized as a set of rules. Language play can also be likened to the “play” of a door or a window within their frames, the margin of give-and-take needed so that they are not completely tight. But “play” can also mean performance, as in the playing of a musical instrument or a sport, the notion of skill is present in the word. Then there is the interesting question of the relationship between play and games: not all play takes the form of frames, with sides and winners and losers, whereas some forms, such as verbal duelling, quite clearly do. Sherzer proposes that “play” is sometimes the opposite of serious or literal, for which the Latin-derived term *ludic* has been used and that play in this sense offers a major source of aesthetic creativity and innovation.

What needs to be added to this are the extended possibilities for verbal duplicity in situations of language contact, in which many (but not all) have the skills to play with more than one language and many (but not all) have the skills to catch the play. This brings us to a bilingual aesthetic, which takes skills to produce, the agile *jogo de cintura*, or cagey sidewise move proposed by Sommer, which expresses identity and which thumbs its nose at the normative in sly ways: “Where structures or conditions can seem intractable, creative practices add dangerous supplements . . . angles for intervention . . . room for maneuver” (Sommer 2006: 3). It is in this room for manoeuvre between constraints, but also between two languages and two identity “footings”, that people find creative cultural agency, what Sommer calls the “wiggle room” to act up. Sommer’s notion of “wiggle room” proposes caginess over confrontation.
These elements of a bilingual aesthetic open up new paths for analysis in critical sociolinguistics, allowing a focus on agency within material and political constraints. Sommer’s bilingual aesthetic and emphasis on cultural agency is liberating and potent: “Instead of tracing the familiar routes from inequalities back to power, where movement gets stuck and protesters feel paralyzed, cultural agency pursues the tangents of daily practices to multiply creative engagements with power . . .” (Sommer 2006: 20).

As will be seen, not all of the bilingual wordplay in Montreal’s LL falls tidily within this “bilingual aesthetic”. This said, all seem to slide out from under the weight of normative discourse on language and revel in messing with the imagined and discursively constructed lines that keep “languages” separate.

4 Bilingual play in the linguistic cityscape of Montreal

So what kind of bilingual wordplay can be found in the linguistic cityscape of Montreal? I have been collecting bilingual winks and puns7 for over a decade and realized recently that I had been catching not only verbal play but quite possibly an evolution in the language dynamics of Montreal, the movement away from “language as battlefield” towards “language as playing field”.

The first winks caught in the early 1990s tended to be in traditionally “Anglophone” neighbourhoods and this at a time when legislation imposing French unilingualism on commercial signage was still in place. These first winks are clearly marked by humour, but also by slyness and seem to be about contestation. The shoe store Chouchou offered earlier is an excellent example, playing in a show of deviant creativity and skill with pronunciation and meaning in two languages, as it got around Québec’s legislation on unilingual commercial signage. Chouchou (Figure 2) is not only about contestation, but also a demonstration of plurilingual semiotic and phonetic skill. The sign also says something about the authors, but also of their intended readers, those able to get the wink, an increasingly bilingual AngloMontréal population with the linguistic resources to appreciate the crossing-over between languages.

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7 I would like to take the opportunity here to thank Luk Van Mensel for his help in photographing identified bilingual winks and in adding to the corpus. A number of people have also sent me bilingual wordplay on signs from other places: Monica Heller, Mark Sebba, Didier de Robillard, Laurence Mettewie. *Merci!*
Other winks found in this part of town, also play with the ambiguity of pronunciation, drawing on the clever use of marks of abbreviation, in particular the “&” as in “T & biscuits”. This is a particularly clever example of a wink since it can be read many ways: as “tea and biscuits” if you are a unilingual Anglophone, or thé et biscuits if you are a unilingual Francophone, but then, if you are bilingual and able to catch the wink, you can enjoy reading it both ways with a sense of slightly devious pleasure. In the same way, “lmnop”, the sign over a clothing store for children, offers more than one way to be read, as do “adam & eve” and “olive & olives”. Essentially it’s the reader, the shopper, the passerby, who gets to choose. The sly wink in these signs is that some readers might not even be aware of having made a choice. These signs neatly sidestep the whole issue of which language dominates and even, which language is actually being used, and it does this while respecting language legislation, but in ways that quietly and wittily “thumb their nose” at the constraints of the sign law. They are sly in that there is nothing here to warn the unwitting reader that the sign can be read in French in English or in both. It is when readers recognise that signs are doing this, that they become
a shared wink and where bilingual wordplay reveals its potential for a shared aesthetic and mildly subversive pleasure.

“Niü dentisterie esthétique” takes the wink a bit further, into the realm of “pulling a fast one”. This sign for a dental business, specialising in giving clients a brand “niü” smile, does this partially thanks to spelling: the umlaut being used deviantly as disguise. The umlaut, however, actually does more: quite wittily, putting a happy face on the brand niü smile being promised. While outwardly respecting language legislation, the author of this sign had fun playing with the word “niü”, fun which some readers might not even notice.8 “Shü”, another shoe store, is another example of a sign that plays with disguise, but not with bilingual punning. Both of these signs rely on a deviant use of spelling to express the meaning of a word in English and both further play on disguise through the sexy use of the umlaut, the ültra über ü. Boutique “extc” is another example of a sign that relies on disguise (the code of textmessaging) and can be read in English, but has no meaning in French. “U & I”, the name of a cool clothing store, similarly, can be read in English but has no meaning in French, and it does this without violating language legislation.

These signs can be categorised as bilingual winks, part of a sly and disruptive aesthetic, which parallels in some ways the new forms of furtive art that the art critic Ritter characterises by the ability to go unnoticed in the everyday world:

How can we learn to recognise a furtive practice? It is, by nature, performed in secret. It takes pains to avoid being observed. A furtive art often disguises itself by mimicking something else, inserting itself into the social fabric almost seamlessly. It makes use of language and the ways we read the city as a semiotic space. Also, if we call an artistic action furtive, then we also imply that is not intended to be confrontational, at least, not in a way that is immediately obvious. Its politic is not performed or spoken; it is imbedded in the nature of the activity. The furtive is risky because, like irony, there is the chance that it will not be noticed. But this chance of misrecognition is what makes the discovery of the furtive act rewarding. It underscores the possibility that furtive actions may be performed around us every day, yet go unnoticed (Ritter 2005: 1).

Interestingly, almost all of these initially caught winks are on the west side of Montreal or on St. Laurence boulevard, the linguistic dividing line between east and west. These initial bilingual winks can be interpreted as contestation of Québec’s language legislation, but also as the expression of a new bilingualism in “Anglophone” neighbourhoods, reflecting a growing ability to play with two

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8 This part of the wink actually slipped passed me. I have an unnamed (but very helpful) reviewer to thank for pointing this out to me!
languages. In this respect, bilingual winks can be considered “play” in more than one way: (1) they toy or mess around with the ambiguity inherent to language and to languages, but (2) they are also play in the sense of performance or skill. Furthermore, these winks serve as a quiet ironic way of marking the public space and even of “marking a point” and can be considered a bit like verbal duelling.

What is intriguing about these bilingual winks, beyond being small creative acts that are artful and foxy, is that they are subversive but without breaking any legislative rules and without bringing down the wrath of those officially mandated with enforcing legislation on the use of languages on signs . . . and quite possibly, without even catching their attention. If noticed, like irony, bilingual winks are perhaps best left alone: to react is to run the danger of appearing loutish and seriously unfunny. If it’s about “irritate the state”, well, bilingual winks count on flying just below the radar, much like stealth or furtive art.

So when is a bilingual sign a wink? The best ones are when you can read it one way, or read it another way, and, if you are quick to get the joke and are able to recognise a “furtive practice”, you will read it both ways and get the wink. Bilingual winks rely on slyness and clever duplicity. A bilingual sign becomes a wink when it’s clear that it will be caught by a limited audience, who will have to actively unravel it to catch it. Some of these bilingual signs count on ambiguity, a strategy of “I’ll be whatever you would like me to be”. This is much like one of the strategies used for some time now by bilinguals in social interactions in Montreal: the “hello-bonjour” often used to greet clients in stores or in service situations in some west end neighbourhoods and downtown. What the “hello-bonjour” sends as a message is “You choose the language. I’ll be whatever you would like me to be. I will speak whatever you would like me to speak” (Heller 1982; Lamarre et al. 2002). This type of strategy can also be found in signs over shop fronts that rely on the large degree of similarity of words in English and French and then play with spelling to make the language not easily identifiable as either. Business names of this type are rampant in Montreal: “Crocodile”, the name of a bar is a good example of a business name that can be read “Englishly” or “Frenchly”, but others like “Klinik” and “Maskarad”, rely on deviant spelling to maintain this ambiguity – and somehow don’t quite make it into the realm of the aesthetic.

More recently, I have collected a series of signs on both sides of Montreal’s linguistic divide that are much more blatant and in your face and it would seem that the need for disguise or ambiguity is less present in the current context. These signs are not bilingual winks as they warn the reader to watch for the pun or the play on languages. Some of these puns seem written by and for “Anglophone bilinguals” and tend to be on the west side of town; while others seem intended for bilingual “Francophones” and are on the east side of town. They can, however, be appreciated by anyone with skills enough in the other language to
get the pun. A good example is a pet food shop with the name “Paw-tisserie” (Figure 3), which plays with the French word *pâtisserie*, meaning ‘pastry shop’. The humour, like *Chouchou*, requires crossing over from one language to the other to get the joke. As a sign, it completely escapes categorisation in a distributive analysis approach, which relies on clearly bounded notions of French and English.

“Bijoutree” is another example of mixing things up and is the name for a store selling all sorts of accessories including junk jewellery. The play this time is on *bijoutrie*, the French word for jewellery store. Another example of a bilingual pun is “Soups’on”, which read in English is the equivalent of “come and get it”, but which can also be read as *soupçon*, an elegant culinary term for a pinch of an ingredient in both French and English. The placement of the apostrophe warns the reader that there is something to unpack. Then there is the second-hand English language bookstore with the quietly witty name *déjà lu*, which translates as ‘already read’ and which plays with the term *déjà vu*, a French term which has crossed over into accepted English – like the word *soupçon*. None of these puns are sly or furtive – rather they are clearly in-your-face bilingual play. They do, however, acknowledge bilingual resources as a shared characteristic among those who are the imagined readers of signs. Given where they are situated in the city (the west side) and how they have messed things up, they seem intended for a bilingual Anglo-Montreal audience. One particularly good example of
bilingualism as a trait of a new generation of Anglo-Québécois is the advertisement hung on large billboards for a local TV station, actually legally exempt from language legislation through its status as a cultural institution. This local TV chain often chooses to play with bilingualism on its ads, as in the slogan for its evening newscast “News de chez nous”.

Overt bilingual play is not only found on signs in “English neighbourhoods” but can also be found in what were traditionally French neighbourhoods. The more recent emergence of these bilingual puns on signs on this side of town seem to be telling us that there is a more relaxed attitude towards bilingualism than a generation ago. Part of the fun on these signs is that they take into account how French speakers pronounce certain sounds in English as in “Lucif’hair” and “Planet-hair”, two hair salons. The signs announce the type of business with the English word “hair”, but the pun really comes into its own when “hair” is pronounced “frenchly”, including the dropping of the “h” on hair, to get Lucifère and planetaire, words recognised as French.

Also on the east side of town can be found “Bio-T-iful” (Figure 4), an obvious play on the English word “beautiful”. The pun is best when pronounced by playing up a French speaker with a tendency to pronounce all of the vowels: “BI-O ti-FUL”. The “bio” at the beginning is a common abbreviation of the French word biologique, which translates as ‘organic’ and refers to the use of natural products in this particular beauty salon. (In Québec, we buy bio and we are bio, as in “green”.)
Ambiguity is also a strategy used in bilingual wordplay on signs east of Montréal’s St. Laurent Boulevard, the “Main”, the traditional dividing line between English and French-speaking Montreal. Again we see the use of the umlaut in the sign Nüspace and, in this store, the shop owners take überness a bit further, posting “Bienvenü” (bienvenue as in ‘welcome’) on the door. As Piller (2001) points out, advertising increasingly draws on multilingualism to position consumers as global players who are über cool. The use of texting is another example of advertising that is cool, young and carrying considerable sex appeal. BMW, the luxury car company, recently put up billboards that simply stated “snstnl”, which, thanks to the lack of vowels in texting, has the added advantage of language ambiguity, allowing the reader to read “sensational” or sensationnel. Is this French or is this English? Once again, it’s up to you – you can read it either way.

Some signs look like bilingual wordplay but actually reflect “un parler québécois”, a way of speaking French in Québec, strongly marked by a long history of contact with English. A fun example of this is the sign for a summer comedy festival L’été sera show (Figure 5). While this sign looks like bilingual wordplay, it
actually indexes Québécois French while punning with the word “show”, a word that has been picked up by local “French” speakers (as in *man, il a fait tout un show hier soir*). “Show” remains a pun, as it is pronounced like the French adjective *chaud* meaning ‘hot’, a word that can mean sexy in French and English. So *l’été sera show* is basically saying: “this summer is going to be hot – thanks to the comedy festival”. In terms of wordplay, it is quite a masterpiece, but it also gives pause to think. This sign, even though it blatantly uses an English word “show”, English spelling and all, might not be considered a crossing-over, as it’s such an accepted word in the everyday language practices of Québécois French speakers. In Québec, we go to *des shows* and we have fun at *des partys* with *les boys*. Kids can be *donc bien cute*. And when we have a story to tell, we might start with *écoute b’en la shot*… While this marks a way of talking French influenced by contact with English, on the other side of the fence, AngloMontrealers tend to buy milk late at night at the “dep” or *dépanneur*, and they ride the *métro* and are likely to order “a” coffee and get “inscribed” rather than registered in courses. What this sign brings to the fore then is the question of the fuzzy dividing line between languages. As Auer (2007) has so brilliantly argued, when we look at what has traditionally been thought of as “code switching”, how do we determine the boundary between languages, in this case, where French starts and English ends? This sign clearly completely “messes” things up for treating languages as clearly bounded phenomenon, forcing us to rethink the blurry middle ground (Heller 2007). Furthermore, it presents an interesting dilemma for those who keep an eye out for the use of English on signs in Québec’s LL. Other examples of this kind of sign are *côté-kid, rock-moi* and *très hot couture* – easily recognised by Québécois as informal and everyday ways of speaking French, and not as necessarily as bilingual play or crossover.

Finally, I would like to offer one last sign that requires more than linguistic skill, drawing on cultural knowledge to be fully unpacked. It’s the sign *Bobépine* for yet another hair salon on the east side of town. This is recognisable on one level as *parler québécois: bobépine* is commonly used to refer to *épingles à cheveux*, a ‘bobby pin’, and to most French-speaking Montrealers is probably not even noticed in everyday speech, let alone thought of as an English word. But to be fully unpacked, this sign requires intertextual knowledge – more precisely, knowing the local rock star Plume Latraverse, who, back in the 1970s, wrote a song, still popular, about a girl called *bobépine*. It would appear that bilingual winks and puns on commercial signage not only target language legislation and

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language norms, but they can also be winks to other texts and to local culture. Jokes and wordplay, whether unilingual or bilingual, go beyond linguistic code and sometimes require knowledge of cultural referents to be understood. This underlines that jokes, quips and asides do not normally occur in isolation, but as an integrated part of spoken and written discourse, whether they appear in signs or in everyday conversation.

So is there anything special going on in Montreal? It would seem so, even if bilingual jokes and puns can be found in other settings. Close to home, there is “Mangiacake” in Toronto, a witty Italian wink to the putdown term used to describe non-Italians and their fondness for eating cakey things. I also found, on Queens Street in Toronto, a particularly delightful trilingual wordplay: the “Pho Pa” clothing store: a play on faux pas, an expression for a social gaffe that has made its way into English from French, but spelled to look Vietnamese. Trilingually delicious and much like the quip déjà lu, “Pho Pa” reminds us that the crossing-over of words and terms is nothing new, but part of the history of language cross-over that runs in tandem to the history of human mobility, a history that tends to be erased in the discourse on language norms and calls to protect the “purity” of a language.

If bilingual winks and wordplay can be found in the linguistic landscapes of other cities, it does seem that bilingual puns are more likely to emerge in cities where there is a historical context of language contact and a targeted population of bilingual sign-readers and writers. Quite possibly, bilingual winks that rely on slyness and disguise are more likely to emerge when there are legal constraints on language use, as suggested by a study comparing bilingual wordplay in Montreal and Brussels (see Lamarre et al. 2012).

5 In conclusion

From this discussion, what is evident is that there is a wide range of ways of playing with language on signage in Montreal and that different strategies are being deployed and quite probably, different types of functions, beyond informational and symbolic, being met as well as different imagined audiences being targeted. One thing seems clear: you can't keep bilingualism (Heller 2007) or bilingual play out – not even when there are strong legal constraints on language use and a very pervasive normative discourse on the need to protect language and its “quality”, as is the case in Québec. It is perhaps both of these things, restrictive legislation and normative discourse on language, that have provoked the creative urge to “toy” with the lines drawn between languages and find the “wiggle room” to express many different and quietly disruptive things. Bilingual wordplay sometimes
seems a quiet contestation of the constraints of language legislation, but at other times, simply a humorous expression of the linguistic resources that authors and readers of signs can draw on. It can at times seem a form of one-upmanship, as well as a claim to the space occupied by speakers of the “other language”. Bilingual wordplay can also, however, simply reflect ways of speaking in contexts of language contact, un parler québécois, not necessarily considered by local speakers as wordplay or even as “bilingual”.

When sly bilingual winks or wordplay are present in the LL, questions should be raised as to what is being contested and who is looking for creative “wiggle room” to mess with things. If we ask the Malinowski (2009) question on who authored the text in the LL, the reply is obviously people with the linguistic resources to play with the ambiguities offered by crossing over languages, people who are making meaning within a very specific context within very specific legal constraints and who trust that there is an audience for these signs and who are playing not only with language, but the sensibilities around language legislation but also in respect to language norms. Meaning then is not only in the text but also in the context.

Some of the examples of bilingual play caught on signage in Montreal can be considered a form of bilingual humour which “makes mischief with meaning”, the really sly and witty bilingual winks marking “communication with a cut or a tear that comes close to producing an aesthetic effect” (Sommer 2004). Some bilingual wordplay can be understood as the “jogo de cintura”, the clever sidestep that switches from legitimate language to hidden code and to skilled play, providing “a modest thrill of disruption”. All of the bilingual play, however, caught in Montreal’s LL, can be considered expressions of an “aesthetics of unruly living language that pulls away from the center . . . language moves that are like stealing home base” (Sommer 2004). As Sommer (2004) argues: “Everyone can experience language as arbitrary and slippery; but bilinguals can hardly avoid the (aestheticizing) risk/thrill of slippery speech. Veering from one signifier to another, in ways that affect the signified, is a technique of disguise, or escape, or privileged association that marks multilinguals even when we are not trying to be funny” (Sommer 2004). In some instances, bilingual wordplay is clever, sly, a release from repression. In others, it is simply a break from the ordinary and the expected, examples of everyday creativity in everyday language use (Carter 2004), and of escaping out from under the weight of language norms.

In the case of language dynamics in Montreal, bilingual wordplay marks perhaps a new willingness to make a bit of distance from a previous generation’s sensibilities (an older Anglophone generation who yelled persecution and an older Francophone generation driven by the fear of language loss). It signals perhaps a new and friendlier take on the language situation, experienced more
like a playing field where many players have the skills needed to play, rather than as the mined battlefield of the 1970s and 1980s. In an ironic way, bilingual humour marks the success of the Québec’s Language Charter that aimed at strengthening the position of French and French speakers. It would seem that Québec has come a fair way from its colonial linguistic past of “speak white”10 et nègre blanc d’amérique,11 and that there is a willingness to engage in verbal play and humour that acknowledges bilingual resources. It is important to underline also that the corpus on bilingual humour in the Montreal LL caught another phenomenon: signs which index a parler québécois, a reflection of how people talk, which requires a rethinking of the fuzzy line between languages as well as consideration of the evolution of languages over time, as people and codes bump into each other. Crossover between French and English is really nothing new (Walther 2001).

A final comment: the one type of sign where I had never found bilingual play or the use of an informal parler québécois were the signs authored by the Québec government. It is not at all surprising that the symbolic function of signs authored by the state requires that a stricter line be maintained between languages, as compared to signs in the greyer zone of commercial signage, which allow for more “wiggle room”. That is, I’d never found a sign until a year ago, when I came upon a sign authored by the city of Montreal to promote buying from local businesses: “Made icitte vs made ailleurs” (translation: Made here vs made elsewhere). It would seem that not even public administrators can resist forever the urge to play with languages on a sign.

This interpretation of bilingual wordplay in the linguistic landscape of Montreal has its limits. Although it proposes a contextualized, historical and critical approach to the analysis of Montreal’s linguistic landscape, taking into account constraints, but also recognizing agency, it remains the interpretation of a researcher walking down the streets of the city and enjoying making sense of bilingual play. It is by no means a “signography” (Pennycook 2009: 305), which would look at authorship and readership from the readers’ and writers’ perspective. À suivre (as we say in French). To be followed . . .

10 The expression “speak white” apparently originated in the American South and targeted slaves. It eventually became an insult levelled at French-speaking Canadians who spoke French in public places. It was picked up by the poet Michèle Lalonde who wrote the poem “speak white” and performed it publicly for the first time in 1969.
11 Pierre Vallière’s “Nègres blancs d’Amérique: autobiographie précoce d’un terroriste québécois” was published in 1968 at Éditions Parti Pris (translation: White niggers of America).
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Melissa Curtin

**Mapping cosmopolitanisms in Taipei: toward a theorisation of cosmopolitanism in linguistic landscape research**

**Abstract:** While frequently referenced in linguistic landscape (LL) research, the notion of “cosmopolitanism” has generally been under-theorised in the field. This article, in keeping with the call for an ethnographically grounded, multi-centric understanding of different varieties of cosmopolitanism, traces the emergence of a “bona fide cosmopolitanism” in the LL of Taipei, Taiwan. This overarching cosmopolitanism is cumulatively indexed via orthographies employed in several domains of the LL: (1) traditional Mandarin Chinese characters and Romanisation systems thereof; (2) non-Chinese scripts in official and unofficial domains; and (3) graffiti. Furthermore, each domain contributes to several varieties of cosmopolitanism. Drawing upon theorisations of social indexicality, distinction and transgressive semiotics, these varieties have been given the working labels of “presumptive, distinctive and transgressive cosmopolitanisms”. This article thus demonstrates that cosmopolitanism in the LL is best apprehended as multi-centric and recursive, as well as highly situated.

**Keywords:** linguistic landscape, cosmopolitanism, cultural geography, social semiotics, Taiwan

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**1 Introduction**

In both our everyday lives and in scholarly research, there has been a growing interest in how the display of orthographic scripts in a locale’s linguistic landscape (LL) moulds public space (e.g., Shohamy et al. 2010). This ethnographic study of the linguistic landscape of Taipei seeks to add to LL research in two key ways. Firstly, whereas most LL research has involved synchronic investigations, this project is a diachronic study of an urban/regional environment that has undergone remarkable change over the past 15 years. As a diachronic ethnography, it is able to more fully capture the dynamic nature of both the processes of identification and the production of place. (See also Backhaus’ [2007] consideration of
“layering” in the LL of Tokyo and Pavlenko’s [2009] study of Kyiv’s LL; Pavlenko especially argues for more diachronic LL research.)

Secondly, in tracing the emergence of a bona fide cosmopolitanism in the LL of Taipei, the analysis integrates theorisations of cosmopolitanism with those of identity and place. A review of LL publications to date reveals that conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism have thus far been under-theorised. That is, there are frequent but mostly passing references to cosmopolitanism, such as: (1) a cosmopolitan city (e.g., Tel Aviv – Waksman and Shohamy 2010); (2) a cosmopolitan practice (e.g., dining in “ethnic” restaurants in Washington, D.C. – Leeman and Modan 2009); (3) a language indexing cosmopolitanism (e.g., English in Thailand – Huebner 2006; English in Tokyo – Backhaus 2007); (4) “exotic” orthographies indexing an achieved localised cosmopolitan identity (e.g., English, French, Japanese and “vogue European” in Taipei – Curtin 2007); (5) a script denoting an aspirational prestige cosmopolitan identity (e.g., English in Poding-tse-Rolo in rural South Africa – Kotze 2010); or (6) the general coexistence of modernity and cosmopolitan identity (e.g., symbolised in streetwise English in French advertising in DR Congo – Kasanga 2010). (While they don’t discuss cosmopolitanism per se, see Stroud and Mpendukana’s [2009] excellent discussion of consumerism, politics of aspiration, and translocality.)

In contrast to these brief references to rather generalised notions of cosmopolitanism, quite sophisticated theorisations of the phenomenon have been developed by scholars in a range of fields, including sociology and transnational anthropology (e.g., Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Beck and Grande 2010), global studies and cultural anthropology (e.g., Nederveen Pieterse 2006), and economic geography (e.g., Donald et al. 2009). As cosmopolitanism is often mentioned in LL research, it seems clear that more refined theorisations of the concept should be integrated into our work. Current theorisations are divergent and complex, but I present a number of points below that are directly relevant to this project, as well as to LL research more generally. I then outline a preliminary “typology of cosmopolitanisms” as these are situated in the LL of Taipei, and follow with a brief conclusion. However, it is necessary to begin with a brief orientation to the sociolinguistic context of Taiwan.

2 Situating the LL of Taipei

With a population of about 23 million, Taiwan is typically described as having four main ethnolinguistic groups (e.g., Copper 1999). Three are of ethnic Han heritage, the Hakka (12%), the Holo (73%) and the so-called Mainlanders (13%). The fourth is comprised of various Taiwan Aboriginal Peoples (1.7%; 14 officially
recognised tribes). Recently, a fifth group has been added, foreign nationals (guest workers and non-ROC spouses) who now comprise another 2% of the population. The majority of guest workers are caregivers and blue-collar workers from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam; most foreign spouses come from Mainland China, Vietnam, Japan and the United States (Taiwan Yearbook 2010).

The three Han Chinese groups differ in ancestral birthplace, time of arrival on the island, cultural practice and language. The Holo and the Hakka are descended from Mainland migrant groups who began settling the island in the 17th century. Most Holo speak Taiwanese Southern Min; however many of the younger Holo have limited productive skills in their heritage language. Of the Hakka, the older generation in particular speaks the Hakka language (Library of Congress 2005); many of the younger Hakka speak Southern Min in addition to Mandarin. Both groups are commonly referred to as “native born Taiwanese” or bĕn shĕng rén (‘original-province-people’). Neither Southern Min nor Hakka have fully standardised writing systems.

The “Mainlanders”, or wài shěng rén (‘outside-province-people’), include those who came to Taiwan after World War II and their descendants. They are largely associated with the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) party that took control of the island after retreating from the Mainland upon losing the civil war to the Communists. Although having different first language backgrounds (e.g., Cantonese, Hunanese and Shanghainese), the Mainlanders have strongly supported their lingua franca, Mandarin, as gúoyǔ (國語) or ‘national language’. The majority live in Taipei and its environs.

Mandarin, Taiwanese Southern Min and Hakka are not mutually intelligible languages (DeFrancis 1990). However, due to the KMT’s aggressive National Language Movement, within forty years (1945–1986) the island’s population shifted from having few speakers of Mandarin to nearly everyone being highly proficient in both oral and written Mandarin. More recently, the Language Development Bill, passed in early 2007, rendered all languages of the island “national languages”. However, Mandarin remains the lingua franca; it is the primary language of government and education; it is also centrally important for the largest export market, Mainland China. Realistically, Mandarin will remain the de facto “official” language of Taiwan (Klöter 2004: 63).

Although there is now an explicit embracing of a vibrant, pluralistic Taiwanese national identity, most Taiwanese residents generally consider themselves in relation to a Taiwanese/Chinese continuum. Overall, however, there has been a marked shift in Taiwanese vs. Chinese identifications since the early 1990s. According to the Election Studies Center at National Chengchi University, between 1992 and 2010, respondents identifying as “Chinese” declined from 26% to under
4% whereas the number of those identifying as “Taiwanese” increased from about 18% to nearly 53%. The number identifying as both “Taiwanese and Chinese” decreased somewhat from about 47% to 40%. The percentage identifying as neither was 2.7%. Moreover, there is a high degree of variability as to what political, historic, geographic, cultural, ethnic, economic and/or linguistic aspects of identity these labels might signify. For example, some speak of being politically Taiwanese but culturally Chinese (Schubert 2006).

During this same period, Taiwan’s gross domestic product (based on purchasing-power-parity per capita) increased from about $12,000 USD in 1992 to nearly $36,000 USD in 2010 (The World Factbook 2010; Index Mundi 2012). Now, with the 2010 signing of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), the KMT has greatly increased Taiwan’s economic integration with the Mainland. By comparison, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) members generally consider Taiwan a sovereign nation and have warned against economic integration. On the whole, ethnolinguistic identities are inevitably intertwined with Taiwan’s geopolitical identity – whether Taiwan is a sovereign state or part of China (Shih and Chen 2010). It is within this overall context that we should consider the role of the capital city’s LL as a semiotic resource in processes of Taiwanese identification.

3 Theorizations of cosmopolitanism relevant to LL research

What is cosmopolitanism? Vertovec and Cohen (2002) present six common frames for the concept, as: (1) a socio-cultural condition; (2) a type of world-view; (3) a political project towards building transnational institutions; (4) a political project for recognizing multiple identities; (5) an attitudinal orientation; and (6) a mode of practice or competence. These conceptualisations may be broadly understood as belonging more or less to two primary “faces” of cosmopolitanism, the political versus cultural (Hannerz 2006). Political cosmopolitanism concerns issues of global democracy and world citizenship and, while it certainly can be relevant to LL work, is not the primary focus of this paper. Nevertheless, several concepts from both political and cultural cosmopolitanism can be fruitfully incorporated into our analyses as one way to capture the role of the LL in a “post-identity politics of overlapping interests and heterogeneous or hybrid publics” (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 1). This approach thus allows us to consider specific ways in which the LL is an important resource for people who are “increasingly experiencing not only socioeconomic globalization but globalization of consciousness” (Silverstein 2003b: 534).
To begin, many aspects of a LL – such as shop signs, advertising and product labels – are directed toward “cosmopolitan consumers” and thus readily recognised as features of capitalist cosmopolitanism. The common emphasis on consumption in LLs around the world may be seen as supporting Nederveen Pieterse’s (2006) contention that capitalist cosmopolitanism (both corporate and consumer) is a dominant variety which provides a false promise of emancipatory cosmopolitanism (e.g., “if one buys/consumes/drives/wears this, one will feel liberated from everyday drudgery”). Nevertheless, much of a city’s LL also involves other types of cosmopolitanism. For example, cosmopolitanism as a socio-cultural condition (Vertovec and Cohen’s first rubric) highlights that we are living in a socially and culturally interpenetrated world that enriches the cultural repertoires of many people, thus contributing to a vibrant level of cultural creativity.

A brief stroll about the cityscape of Taipei quickly attests to the creative employment of rich linguistic and cultural repertoires in much of the semiotic landscape. One entertaining example is the Oola Mexican Grill, 歐喇, a small but popular eatery located near two prominent universities (Figure 1). This name entails a clever four-way language play involving Chinese, Spanish, French and English. The Mandarin name, 歐喇 – ōu lā or ōu là in hanyu pinyin (IPA [ɤʊ̯] [lɑ]) – approximates the pronunciation of the Spanish word hola. But this is more than a transliteration of the sound of the Spanish word into Mandarin characters. The first character, 歐, means European and by local semantic extension can generally signify ‘western’ and thus relates to a Western style of cuisine. The

![Fig. 1: Clever four way language play (Chinese, Spanish, French and English) in the naming of the Oola Mexican Grill, 歐喇.](image-url)
second character, 喂, may be read as lǎ (third tone) for its phonetic value or as là (first tone) for its onomatopoeic value (e.g., a cheer or an expressive in a song). Either way, it can also be homophonic word play, evoking the word 辣 (lā, fourth tone) which means ‘hot spicy’. This reading is visually reinforced by the clever graphic representation of the letter “l” in Oola as a thin red chili pepper.

But even more interplay is at work here. The name is written in Roman letters as Oola instead of Hola because most Taiwanese, unfamiliar with Spanish pronunciation, would employ English phonology and thus pronounce the “h”. But Oola also allows an English language pronunciation of “ooh la” (IPA [uː] [lɑ]) which may trigger the French expression of surprise, “oh là là”, and also allow an intertextual reference to Ooh La-La, a song by the wildly popular South Korean girl group, Girls’ Generation. In this one example, then, we see a linguistic and cultural repertoire at work that simultaneously indexes cosmopolitan Europe, “exotic” Mexican and/or Mexican American food (reinforced by the visual of a cactus), and Korean popular culture, all grounded within a local Taiwanese frame. This multilingual/multi-script (and image) interplay illustrates ways in which the LL can invoke a cosmopolitanism that embraces cultural multiplicity and that challenges, to a degree, conventional models of identity and belonging. As Vertovec and Cohen state, many people today are “prone to articulate complex affiliations, meaningful attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, people, places and traditions that lie beyond the boundaries of their resident nation-state” (2002: 2).

Nevertheless, some are concerned that the global interpenetration with the local promotes a culture of mass consumerism that threatens local and national cultural practices and identities. This concern has been expressed by locals and academics alike (e.g., one Taiwanese worried that the proliferation of Starbucks threatened local tea culture; e.g., Miller et al.’s (2005) discussion of U.S. cultural imperialism and the influence of Hollywood). It is doubtless true that certain LL features of many locales promote a mass consumerism that contributes to the transformation and in some cases, near erasure, of the local. For example, such transformation-verging-on-erasure seems especially salient in more elite settings such as in high-end malls and airports where one routinely encounters yet one more set of Hermès, Omega and other luxury good shops. These settings may be exemplary of what Augé (1995) dubs “non-places” which often feature the “de-territorialized sophistication” of a jet-setting elitism (Kurasawa 2004: 237). But of course elite cosmopolitanism does not entirely (or always) involve erasure of the local. For example, in the very high-end Taipei 101 Mall, we see many well known establishments such as Armani Collezioni, Coach, Hermès, Omega, PRADA and Swarovski; but the co-presence of East Asian luxury shops, such as 富御 || RICH JADE and Shiatzy Chen (夏姿), indicates a recursive cosmopolitanism with ten-
sions between the universal and the particular as these come together at the intersection of global, national and regional scales (cf. Levy 2010). See Figure 2.

Yet, aesthetic cultural cosmopolitanism is not restricted to the relatively privileged or elite. Citing Kurasawa (2004), Nederveen Pieterse discusses “cosmopolitanism from below” – that of diasporas, migrants, traders, artisans and scholars who have long moved about in the world – and “poor people’s cosmopolitanism”, including that of working class migrants and refugees (2006: 1254). Regarding LL research, then, one should consider how scripts and images might index various non-privileged cosmopolitanisms such as that indexed in the “poor people’s scripts” of guest workers in Taipei who are targeted by ads in Thai for wiring money home or ads in Indonesian for buying ginseng wine (Figure 3). One can also consider how governmental materials may accommodate cosmopolitanism from below, such as the Indonesian, Thai and Vietnamese versions of the *Handbook for Pregnant Women* distributed to foreign wives married to Taiwanese labourers and farmers.

These examples present several facets of a complex of cosmopolitanism(s). The “poor people’s cosmopolitanism” may be regarded as a particular socio-cultural cosmopolitan condition of living between two or more (economically marginalised) worlds (rubric one). The government’s response to this “cosmopolitanism from below” may likewise be seen as an attitudinal orientation, a political project of recognising multiple identities, and a mode of competence (rubrics four, five and six). And while less relevant to Taipei’s LL, cosmopolitanism is not
limited to an urban centre, such as that of Togo’s Kabre cereal cultivators who are enmeshed in a world of “flux, uncertainty, encounters with difference, and the experience of processes of transculturation” (Hannerz 2006: 15 [citing Piot 1999]). Nor is transnational mobility a necessary (or sufficient) condition for cosmopolitanism, a point made by Hannerz in discussing townspeople in the urban Zambian Copperbelt who have not travelled internationally but whose “horizons and imagined worlds have been affected by new media engagements, and new consumption patterns” (2006: 18 [citing Ferguson 1999]).

Another type of non-elite cosmopolitanism in Taipei’s LL involves an everyday cosmopolitan aesthetic indexed in “vogue or display language” – “global scripts” displayed on movie posters, housing complexes, scooters, school notebooks, magazines, clothing and other artefacts of consumption. These scripts are similar, but not limited, to “mood or decorative” English employed in Europe and Asia (e.g., Brock 1991; Kay 1992). Specifically, the label display (or vogue) language is meant to capture several characteristics, including: (1) being “on display” in public settings; (i2) possessing a visual distinctiveness (salience); (3) featuring a claim of distinction (aesthetic taste); (4) carrying a primary semiotic value via the visual form; and (5) involving a multi-indexicality such as being creative, hip, fashionable, savvy, educated, affluent, and/or cosmopolitan (cf. Prelli’s [2006] “rhetorics of display” where “display” is associated with [1] general appearance, [2] exhibition and [3] showiness/ostentation).
Display language may be thought of as “banal” (Beck 2002) or “quotidian” (Breglia 2009) cosmopolitanism. One example is featured on a Taipei break dancer’s t-shirt that boldly declares “WE NEVER GIVE UP” (Figure 4a). By virtue of being in English (in contrast to Chinese characters dominating the LL), this script is highly salient and thus “on display”. But not all vogue language in Taipei is in English. In fact, over the past fifteen years, display English has lost some of its cachet and now shares the field with a growing range of other non-Chinese languages. For example, one local woman’s t-shirt sports display Japanese which, taken literally, promotes a rice cooker that uses “ninja power” to cook rice quickly (Figure 4b). School notebooks also commonly carry vogue language; whereas fifteen years ago these were predominantly adorned with display English or Japanese, they now feature a wide range of vogue languages, such as one with “display German” proclaiming “PAPETERIE HUG Ihr Schreibwaren-Fachhändler an der Nordsee!” ['STATIONERY HUG your stationery retailer at the North Sea!'].

Figs. 4a and 4b: T-shirts sporting display language index quotidian distinctive cosmopolitanism.

The referential content of the Japanese and German messages is not accessible to most locals; rather the scripts’ visual form is of primary semiotic value and indexes a cosmopolitan connection with (middle class) others around the world. However, some examples of quotidian cosmopolitanism do involve scripts that are referentially accessible, such as one notebook (sporting a cute hedgehog,
flowers and spools of thread) pondering in whimsical display English, “Is preparing the sewing set What shall I make today? I am unexpectedly good at the needlework thing.” The referential meaning is accessible to many locals; when queried, however, they explain that they usually do not read the message but instead appreciate the fashionability of the non-Chinese script. In general, then, the semiotic value of much vogue display language, referentially accessible or not, is in the “cosmopolitan image” of the script.

It may be argued that LL features that could diminish the local should also be considered in relation to Vertovec and Cohen’s fourth view of cosmopolitanism – recognising that people have multiple key identifications. Yes, these identifications include locality and homeland, but they also include gender, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity and even cultural hybridity itself (and, we should add, social class). Although this framing of cosmopolitanism has been viewed as a political project, it is also very much a cultural one. For example, Figure 5 exhibits a common advertising scheme that targets middle and upper class East Asian women – beauty products for skin whitening, in this case, Olay’s White Radiance skin cream. These ads target subjects on the basis of multiple identifications: gender and age (feminine; young and attractive), sexuality (arguably, normatively heterosexual), purity of race and ethnicity (lighter Asianness vs. darker Indigeneity), and social class (higher class women do not labour outdoors and are thus lighter complected). But they also invoke ideologies of female beauty that stem from a long established merging of traditional Asian values (predating colonialism) and Western ideologies which both promote an idealisation of whiteness (Li et al. 2008). This example nicely illustrates that cosmopolitan identifications are often,

Fig. 5: Advertising for skin whitening targets women via multiple cosmopolitan identifications, illustrating that local identifications involve translocal relations of power.
if not always, multiple. It also reminds us to consider broader historical contexts when analysing the interpenetration of the global and the local. And it illustrates that local identifications are not always counter-hegemonic as they often involve translocal relations of power.

Vertovec and Cohen’s last two conceptualisations of cosmopolitanism, an attitudinal orientation and a mode of competence, are closely connected. Cosmopolitan competence entails the ability to manoeuvre through many systems of meaning (Friedman 1994). Such competence necessarily involves a cosmopolitan attitude, “an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other” (Hannerz 1990: 239). It also entails a respect and enjoyment of cultural difference and a sense of global belonging that can be integrated into everyday life practices (Tomlinson 1999: 185). A number of features in a locale’s LL may involve both cosmopolitan attitude and competence. For instance, the quotidian cosmopolitanism indexed in display language and language/image play conveys a (banal) cosmopolitan interest in engaging with the Other. And official multilingual materials, such as official bilingual signage (Figure 6), attest to an increasing cosmopolitan competence and disposition in Taiwan, that is, a willingness to engage with and accommodate the Other.

These brief examples illustrate that theorisations of cosmopolitanism can enrich LL research, particularly as we analyse the role of a locale’s LL in processes of identification and place making. The point, however, is not to dictate a template or absolute typology of cosmopolitanisms to apply in cookie cutter fashion to any locally-globally interpenetrated phenomenon. Rather, as discussed below, the goal should be to ground our theoretically informed analyses of cosmopolitan

Fig. 6: Official bilingual signs attest to an increasing degree of cosmopolitan competence and disposition in Taiwan.
practices in specific instances as well as to consider patterns of commonality (and
difference) across settings.

Moreover, as Waldron (1992) describes the cosmopolitan self, there is no
guarantee that the incorporation of various bits of partial cultural competencies
will necessarily form a unified cosmopolitan whole. Similarly, we should not
presume an entirely integrated or consensual understanding of the cosmopolita-
nisation of a locale’s LL. Just as real cosmopolitanisms are situated and often
polemical (Nederveen Pieterse 2006), there are often contestations concerning
the presence of particular languages and/or scripts as well as tensions regarding
what identities and stances these semiotic resources index. One common exam-
ple is graffiti – to some it signifies vandalism, to others a transgressive cosmopol-
itan appeal that creates alternative spaces of belonging and connectedness (lo-
cally, regionally and globally). Importantly, then, we need to pursue “a more
comprehensive ethnographic mapping of the actually existing varieties of cosmo-
politanism” (Hannerz 2006: 23). We should also work toward conceptualizing a
multi-centric, critical, cosmopolitanism that is historically situated and avoids a
monocultural, West-centrist view (Levy, Nederveen Pieterse, Vertovec and Cohen,
and others underscore that cosmopolitanism is not just a “Western concept”,
such an attitude itself being quite anti-cosmopolitan).

4 An ethnographic mapping of cosmopolitanisms
in Taipei’s LL

4.1 Taipei’s LL then (late 1990s / early 2000s) and now

In an analysis of Taipei’s LL based on ethnographic data from the late 1990s and
early 2000s (Curtin 2007), I argued for a non-Western-centric view of cosmopo-
litanism in Taipei’s LL. I contended that from a local, ratified participant’s perspec-
tive the display of “exotic orthography”, most commonly English, French and
Japanese, denoted an achieved East Asian cosmopolitan identity rather than an
aspiring Western one. At that time display language often contained, from a pre-
scriptive viewpoint, “errors” in spelling, syntax or sociopragmatics; sometimes
these writings were entirely nonsensical or nonreferential (the graphemes didn’t
form known lexical items, or lexical items were syntactically sequenced into in-
comprehensible strings).

Examples included misspellings such as “berry berry Christmas” on a shop
window, “fasion” in a clothing ad, and the “Eslite Bookstore” (“Elite” was re-
portedly misspelled on the original registration forms). Sociopragmatic errors
included a cute notebook cover featuring a girl in pink and declaring in large block letters, “FART FART GIRL” (a literal translation from the Mandarin that according to local sociopragmatics “sounds cute”) and the “Fuckin’ Restaurant” (apparently intended to be “Truckin”, based on the iconic image of the big-footed man striding along). Examples of non-referential script included Japanese romaji (Roman letters) combined into nonsensical words that nevertheless fashionably decorated a school notebook, or random English letters scattered across a t-shirt or handbag. At that time there was also a rather dizzying array of Romanisations used for street and place names in official signage and other materials. For example, 忠孝東路 on signs, maps and bus schedules was variously rendered as JungShiau E. Rd, Chung Hsiao E. Rd., Zhongsiao E. Rd, ZhongXiao Dong Lu or Jhongsiao Dong Lu (but in most Chinese second language textbooks as Zhōngxiào Dōng Lù).

While examples such as these often bemused (or, in the case of confusing Romanisations, exasperated) many expatriates, I argued that expats were non-ratified participants and that, from a local ratified point of view (Goffman 1981), the distinctive image of the non-Chinese scripts carried the semiotic value of cosmopolitan-ness. Therefore, these scripts should be interpreted as indexing an achieved East Asian-centric, cosmopolitan sensibility, not an aspiring Western-centric one.

Drawing on current data, I am moved to adjust my analysis somewhat. Yes, non-Chinese scripts at that time did index an achieved East Asian cosmopolitan sensibility; however, they also signalled an aspiring global cosmopolitan sensibility, a point that is now more apparent via comparing the city’s current LL to that of the late 1990s / early 2000s. These changes, in concert with other developments such as the sleek metro system, new architectural designs and general economic prosperity, contribute to the city’s current “achieved, bona fide cosmopolitan” feel.

Of course, traditional Chinese characters still dominate and are central in framing Taipei as a distinctively East Asian cosmopolitan centre (Figure 7). However, street/place names in official signage are now consistently Romanised using hanyu pinyin (e.g. 忠孝東路 as ZhongXiao East Road). Also, much of the official signage is now bilingual, in Mandarin and English – at the airport, along the highway, at the train, subway and bus stations, even on signage for construction sites informing us of the names of the project designer and supervisor. This practice of using traditional characters plus a standardized Romanisation system, along with English and/or other international languages in official signage, now allows non-locals to navigate the city much more easily (Figure 8). There are also multilingual materials to enable easy travel about the city; for example, in preparation for the grand 2010 Taipei International Flora Exposition, metro maps and
Fig. 7: The majority of Taipei’s LL is in Mandarin Chinese, using traditional characters.

Fig. 8: Official signage in Taipei is now consistently rendered in one system of Romanisation, *hanyu pinyin*. 
informational brochures were produced in Arabic, English, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese, as well as in simplified Chinese characters. In general, then, there is now a much greater effort to accommodate cultural “others”, linguistically and otherwise.

Changes in display language in the LL of Taipei also contribute to the bona fide cosmopolitan feel of the city today. In the late 1990s, because of the predominance of traditional characters in the LL, shop signs that featured non-Chinese names and scripts were especially salient in the visual landscape. Oftentimes, they would also be rather quirky, such as in the charmingly named Subconscious Restaurant and the culturally lost-in-translation Cattle Offal Restaurant. By comparison, many shops and restaurants throughout the city today sport fancy signs with names in languages from around the world. Some of these are of well-known, elite establishments such as the shops and restaurants in the upscale Taipei 101 Mall. Others are more middle-brow shops such as the Casa de Pasta ristorante, 京桃山 Kyomomoyama and Ponderosa Steakhouse restaurants in the more middle class, rather Disney-fied Tai Mall (near the Taoyuan airport). (From a prescriptive viewpoint, the first should read as Casa di pasta ristorante.)

Also, in addition to English, French and Japanese (the most common non-Chinese language scripts in 1990s Taipei), one now encounters many other languages in the LL including East and Southeast Asian languages (Korean, Thai, Vietnamese and Indonesian), more European languages (Italian, German, Danish, Spanish, Hungarian), and a bit of Russian and Mongolian. At times these scripts are used for referential purposes to convey information to multilingual visitors and residents. At other times they are employed for aesthetic purposes, their visual presence declaring the cosmopolitan connectedness of the establishment, its product, or their clientele. Creative language play in the LL of Taipei also continues today, but employs a richly expanded linguistic repertoire, such as that described in the naming of the Oola Mexican Grill. Additionally, whereas in the late 1990s graffiti in Taipei was virtually nonexistent, today there is a vibrant graffscape in many locations around the city. As one street artist declared in an email (in 2011), “we changed the visual landscape of Taipei. Advertisement copied us”. This statement is not an exaggeration. Style writers have contributed to a much changed visual landscape of the city (Figure 9). It is also true that the lines between graffiti and advertising are frequently indistinct.

Taken as a whole, the bona fide cosmopolitan feel of Taipei’s current LL is cumulatively achieved via the multilingual scripts on display throughout the city. Overall, these developments indicate “an attitudinal orientation to cosmopolitanism” (Vertovec and Cohen’s fifth type). And while misspellings or other errors are not unusual, there is nevertheless a high degree of competence in accommodating others via current practices in the city’s LL. Additionally, the expanding
usage of a wide range of non-Chinese languages in display language signals both an enjoyment of cultural difference and a sense of global belonging as these are integrated into everyday practices (Tomlinson 1999).

My discussion has thus far focused on ways in which theorisations of cosmopolitanism may be applied to an analysis of LL data in general. While useful, this approach stops short of Hannerz’ (2006) call for an ethnographic mapping of actual varieties of cosmopolitanism. Therefore, I now turn to a consideration of several types of locally situated cosmopolitanism that cumulatively index the achieved, bona fide cosmopolitanism of Taipei’s LL today. Drawing upon notions of social indexicality, distinction and transgressive semiotics, these varieties have been dubbed “presumptive”, “distinctive” and “transgressive” cosmopolitanisms.

4.2 Mapping cosmopolitanisms in Taipei’s LL: presumptive, distinctive and transgressive cosmopolitanisms

4.2.1 Presumptive cosmopolitanism

The name presumptive cosmopolitanism is intended to capture the expectations of many world travellers upon arriving in a global city – that the city’s LL should
help them negotiate the urban environment without necessarily being literate in the local language(s). The label draws upon Silverstein’s (2003a) conceptualisation of presupposed, nonreferential indexicality wherein certain contexts of the situation are presumed as fixed before the communicative act occurs. In this case, the presupposition is that a global city’s LL should include a widely accessible international language so as to accommodate visitors’ communicative needs. Presumptive cosmopolitanism is thus a type of “instrumental cosmopolitanism” (Hannerz 2006: 24) and is widely evidenced in Taipei’s current LL (e.g., bilingual signage, consistent Romanization, English menus, multinational businesses).

Such presumptive cosmopolitanism, however, does have its price. For instance, English as a lingua franca reinforces the hegemonic grip of English throughout the world and decreases opportunities to promote other languages of the island (e.g., Aboriginal, Southern Min or Hakka languages which are, for the most part, notably absent in the capital city’s LL). There is also contestation over the multi-indexicality of hanyu pinyin. Devised in the Mainland after the Communist takeover and widely used there, hanyu can index Communist China and thus signal too cozy an attitude toward reunification. Having been promoted by the nationalist KMT party in Taiwan, it also indexes the KMT and/or the Mainlanders (ethnically, culturally and/or politically). Both readings are due in part to hanyu having replaced tongyong pinyin which was developed in Taiwan and promoted for a brief time when the opposition DPP party was in control. Frequently used elsewhere on the island, tongyong indexes for some both an effort at internationalization and Taiwanese national and/or ethnic identity (see Curtin 2009).

In certain ways, then, practices of presumptive cosmopolitanism in the LL of Taipei can be plagued with concerns of a diminishing of both the local and national. Additionally, while standardizing LL practices to accommodate visitors may stem from both a cosmopolitan attitude and competence, some of these visiting “others” may themselves be viewed as too Western-centric and as acting in a less than cosmopolitan fashion by relying upon English and the Roman script. An analysis of attitudes toward particular practices of presumptive cosmopolitanism in the LL can thus reveal tensions within a cosmopolitan agenda.

4.2.2 Distinctive cosmopolitanism

Borrowing from Bourdieu’s notion of distinction (1984), the label distinctive cosmopolitanism foregrounds the role of aesthetic taste and social distinction in certain LL practices. This type is most evident in display language, with different features contributing to a cosmopolitanism sensibility. One feature is the salience
of the script, i.e., not Chinese characters. Display language is not solely dependent on the script, however. For example, in Taiwan, Chinese characters may feature in display language, such as when a particular style or font is used, and/or when the materiality of the sign calls attention to the characters on display.

Referential and poetic functions of display language can also factor into distinctive cosmopolitanism. For example, display French entails an aura of distinction whether it is referential (“authentic”) or employs accents to make some display script “look French”. An example of the latter is the Japanese cosmetic line, Kosé, with a French sounding/looking name. Display language with the poetic function of clever language play can also signal distinctive cosmopolitanism, such as in the example of the Oola Mexican Grill. One very successful example is the name of the Taiwanese shoe company, La New (Figure 10), featuring French and English-Mandarin wordplay accompanied by creative imagery. To begin, La is readily recognised as French and indexes French fashionability and product quality. The word new is readily recognised as English and is commonly used in advertising that may otherwise be completely in Chinese. But new is also homophonic play with the Mandarin word for cow (牛 niú [ni ̯ ɤʊ̯]), a point visually reinforced via the clever brand image of a steer’s head that is devised of two shoes with horns. Taken together, this name and image promises leather (via wordplay) shoes (via image) which are newly fashionable and high in quality (via French and English). It also hails a distinctive clientele that appreciates the witty branding.

![Image of La New shoe company logo](image.png)

**Fig. 10:** The brand name and logo for La New shoe company features clever language and image play, indexing a middle-class, distinctive cosmopolitanism.

As these examples attest, distinctive cosmopolitanism in the LL can involve brand name products of local, regional, and international companies. Moreover, as social class inheres in this type, one can discern differing classes of distinction.
ranging from “distinction from below” to “quotidian distinction” to “elite distinc-
tion.” Distinction from below may be discerned in the advertisement for ginseng
wine that is targeting Indonesian (male) labourers (Figure 3). A more middle
class, quotidian distinction is indexed in vogue display language on scooters and
clothing as well as in middle class businesses such as La New or the very popular
Uniqlo casual clothing company from Japan (devised from “unique clothing”).
Elite distinctive cosmopolitanism is evidenced in high-end shops such as Hermès
and Shanghai Tang.

However, there are tensions in this cosmopolitanism which is closely articu-
lated to social class and consumption. Yes, it involves a cosmopolitan connected-
ness with the other, but this other belongs to a similar social class strata; it thus
reinforces social class distinctions in everyday practices (Bourdieu 1984). As a
capitalist based cosmopolitanism (both corporate and consumer), distinctive cos-
mopolitanism may thereby be implicated with a false emancipatory cosmo-
politanism (Nederveen Pieterse 2006). Nevertheless, distinctive cosmopolitanism
can involve a progressive agenda, such as that evidenced in the display English
on a local banner urging city dwellers to be environmentally conscious and ride
bicycles.

4.2.3 Transgressive cosmopolitanism

The third type of cosmopolitanism emerging from this study is transgressive
cosmopolitanism, such as that in Taipei’s dynamic graffscape. This label draws
somewhat on Scollon and Scollon’s (2003) transgressive semiotics and more so
on Pennycook’s (2009, 2010) writings on graffiti in the cityscape. According to
Scollon and Scollon (2003), a transgressive semiotics has less to do with the con-
tent of a sign than it has to do with the placement (in the wrong place) and/or
authorisation of the sign (authorised or prohibited). Yet this conceptualisation
does not fully capture the phenomenon of transgressive cosmopolitanism which
in certain instances may be authorized and in the right place (e.g., sanctioned
graffiti) and yet nevertheless involves a sense of transgression or breaking some
perceived rules, social norms, or “preferred semiotics of the city” (cf. Pennycook
2010: 56).

In keeping with Conquergood’s (1997) discussion of “counterliteracy” in Chi-
cago gang graffiti, we could also label this type as counter-cosmopolitanism. As
Conquergood argued, Chicago gang graffiti sparks a moral outrage and efforts at
repression because, as a counterliteracy, it “challenges, mimics, and carnivalizes
the ‘textual power’ . . . that underwrites private ownership of property and the
regulation, control, and policing of public space” (1997: 354–355). Therefore,
these practices challenge assumptions about “who has access to public literacy, who controls the space, who can sanction public images and lettering, who gets to decide on what a city looks like” (Pennycook 2010: 58).

In Taipei, a vibrant graffiti scene has emerged in the past ten years along with the enthusiastic incorporation of global hip hop into East Asian youth culture. Once completely illegal, graffiti is now sanctioned in a few designated areas of the city, such as on certain retaining walls by the river and on fences around construction sites. The municipal government has also sponsored a graffiti contest in Ximending, a popular shopping district frequented by working and middle class youth. However, much graffiti in Taipei is not sanctioned and is interpreted as genuinely transgressive (unauthorised, in the wrong place, and/or challenging authority); this is captured in one style writer’s sticker posted on a lamp pole that displays his/her tag and the comment, “Fuck ARMY!” (Figure 11a). Moreover, the image, colour and script of style writing is intentionally not accessible to viewers outside of this subculture community. This impenetrability of style, identity and textual meaning is another factor in the re-imagining or reinterpreting of public space (Pennycook 2010) that in effect claims alternative spaces of belonging in the cityscape.

Furthermore, graffiti writing is a local practice that is not in opposition to, but rather is part of, global graffscapes (Pennycook 2010). In Taipei, we do see localised practices of hip-hop style writing such as in one person’s tag 光 (guāng; ‘light, ray, bright’), a Chinese character written in a style similar to bubble letters (Figure 11b). And while much graffiti in Taipei uses Roman letters, there is also

Figs. 11a: Graffiti that is transgressive (not sanctioned) in content and location (on left).
Fig. 11b: A local “bubble letter” hip-hop styling of a Chinese character is featured in this tag 光 [guāng, meaning ‘light, ray, bright’] (on right).
the incorporation of local cultural images such as face masks or dragons or architectural styles (Figure 9). There also tends to be a distinctive “East Asian cuteness” in some graffiti with personal tags featuring cute rabbits or bears or cats or other stylised figures.

Reaching beyond the local, graffiti as an East Asian regional practice is evidenced through “guest appearances” of Taipei street artists in Beijing as well as in the Wall Lords Asia graffiti jams. The graffiti scene in Taipei is also part of a greater global community, a point underscored via the transcultural adoption of style writing and frequent visits by graffiti artists from around the world. The interconnectedness of transgressive cosmopolitanism at the (trans)local, regional and global levels is thus another example of “recursive cosmopolitization” (cf. Levy 2010).

Graffiti in Taipei can index a form of non-elite, transgressive cosmopolitanism which contrasts with the elite, distinctive cosmopolitanism of the Hermès clientele and, to a degree, with the quotidian cosmopolitanism of more middle-class products/places of consumption. However, in Taipei today, there are several ways in which one might question just how transgressive graffiti practices are. For example, with its bright colours and cute figures, and the lack of association with gang culture, some graffiti is a welcome change to the rather drab concrete stretches of many walls or the worn roll-up metal doors covering shop entrances. Additionally, graffiti has been incorporated into art exhibits (indoors or outdoors), commissioned for decorating public structures, and featured in advertising. Such incorporation calls into question the degree to which transgressive cosmopolitanism is truly resistant to elite or capitalist cosmopolitanism.

Thus, we see varying degrees of transgressivity in the placement, form and interpretation of graffiti. We might then conceptualize a cline of transgressive cosmopolitanism ranging from resistant/transgressive to sanctioned/legitimized to co-opted/fully incorporated (the latter label invoking Gramsci’s notion of hegemony). This brings us once again to Nederveen Pieterse’s concern that capitalist cosmopolitanism (corporate and consumer) is predominant. Yes, considering situated cosmopolitanisms in our research can encourage us to conceptualize a multi-centric, critical, cosmopolitanism that avoids a monocultural, Westcentrist view. But as researchers who frequently investigate LLs in spaces of consumption, we might raise the question of whether there can be an effective politics of cultural cosmopolitanism that does not, in the end, serve hegemonic interests and reinforce current structures of power? Or is the LL primarily a feature for constructing differing spaces of consumption in a “consumer city” that is “no more or less than a venue for consumption experiences; experiences that tie us to the capitalist priorities that underpin our social norms” (Miles 2010: 7)?
5 Concluding comments: identity, place and cosmopolitanism in LL research

“Space can be filled with all kinds of social, cultural, epistemic, and affective attributes. It then becomes ‘place’, a particular space on which senses of belonging, property rights, and authority can be projected” (Blommaert 2005: 222). One important way in which people construct differing senses of space and belonging involves the visual display of language in the public landscape. Thus a diachronic ethnographic study of a locale’s LL, especially during times of change or contestation, can serve as a window into the production of both place and identity – highlighting that, in any one instance, the LL’s role in the process of place making is highly situated historically, culturally, politically and economically, as well as geographically.

While specifically situated, a locale’s LL is also the product of semiotic practices that are in many instances drawing from and contributing to a complex range of cosmopolitanisms – cosmopolitanisms which themselves involve tensions between the universal and the particular, as these come together at the intersection of the global, national, regional and (trans)local. These semiotic practices are productive in a number of ways. Most obviously, orthographic scripts and images are used in the production of signage and other displays in the LL. These practices also produce varying indexical readings for different onlookers/consumers. They also contribute to a sense of place as they position individuals in relations of belonging (or not). Additionally, these practices contribute to a cosmopolitan consciousness of global connectedness.

However, we should not presume an entirely consensual understanding of a locale’s LL. Real cosmopolitanisms are often polemical. There are also contestations over the presence of particular languages and/or scripts in the LL and tensions regarding what identities and senses of place these semiotic resources construct. Thus, semiotic practices in the LL also produce contestation and resistance. Therefore, more than just a labelling of some presupposed space, it is clear that LL practices are important in processes of identification and differentiation by which people both define, and are defined by, a particular place (Crang 1998).

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Semiotic landscapes and mobile narrations of place: performing the local

Abstract: In this article, we explore some of the practices and mechanisms behind the multiple constructions of place and its meanings, focusing specifically on the diverse ways in which signage is read and incorporated into personal narratives of place. We employ a methodology of narrated walking that allows insights into how our informants actively construct the significance of local place as they navigate and move through space, and that also illustrates how signage discourses are enacted, performed, disputed and elaborated in local performativities of place. The article concludes by drawing out some implications for research on semiotic landscapes generally, and offers some suggestions on what such an approach to semiotic landscapes might contribute to a politics of local civility by taking into consideration how signage mediates local interpersonal relationships, the situated social dynamics of multivocality and, ultimately, the contesting lives of multiple publics.

Keywords: semiotic landscapes, transmodality, multivocality, mobile performance

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1 Introduction

In this article, we argue that central to a theorization of semiotic (linguistic) landscapes and how to research them is an understanding of the situated social dynamics of multivocality in local places, manifest in the contesting lives of multiple publics – multilingual, multicultural and multiracial. Hall (2009) has suggestively argued that rather than a setting to be navigated, local place is that through which, and with which, lives take shape, and that biographies of place and life are intimately interwoven (Hall 2009: 581); local life “takes place, not just in place but with it” (Hall 2009: 579). Despite global mobility, flow and flux, (Hall 2009), place, emplacement and locality remain important in many different
ways, and in fact, mobility is a crucial factor defining of place and locality (Hall 2009: 575).

However, local places are fraught and contested constructions, complex and multilayered, and any physical space will host many different micropublics living together in “proximities of difference” (Mac Giolla Chriost 2007). Places themselves are “mobile”, they change and shift shape over time as new building constructions, transport systems, and patterns of migration alter the physical, cultural and linguistic landscape of a site.

The complexity of place is reflected in the complexities of linguistic or semiotic landscapes; Kallen recognises that linguistic landscapes are complex “confluences of systems, observable within a single visual field, but operating with a certain degree of independence” (2010: 42), and Stroud and Mpendukana (2009) distinguish materially and semiotically distinct spaces in the South African township of Khayelitsha, among others “spaces of implosion”, sites where many different composition principles in signage can be found. Much recent work has explored diversities in the semiotic production and reading of space and place (e.g. Malinowski 2009; Scollon and Scollon 2003; on authoritative spaces), but few studies have looked at this diversity from the perspective of the prosaic, everyday ordinariness of place making (see also Milani, this issue).

In this article, we explore what the complex dynamics of place-making mean for our understanding of semiotic landscapes. We look at some of the practices and mechanisms behind the multiple constructions of place and its meanings, noting that the making of place is a fraught practice involving the investment of social and affective capital of individuals tied to, identifying themselves with or moving through a particular locale. We show how signage and the material semiotic landscape play an important role in organizing place, and how place in turn determines the reading of signage, and argue specifically for the idea that a central aspect of place-making is in fact the way affect and movement through space is organized, narrated and interactively accomplished by means of – direct or indirect – engagement with situated material semiotic artefacts. We recognise that this requires a methodological shift towards a performative approach to the study of semiotic landscapes, and a conceptual reorientation towards semiotic landscapes as transmodal and corporeal constructs. Thus we move beyond a straightforward representational account of landscapes and embrace a non-representational (Thrift 2007) perspective on place that emphasises the importance of bodily practices and the negotiation of affect and emotion in place making, and thus how “visual space is a result of human actions, and in turn, has an impact on human actions” (Pietikäinen et al. 2011: 277). This allows us to capture the emerging and processual nature of semiotic landscapes as the sediments of contended interpretation and interaction (see also Milani, this issue).
The place in focus for our study is the township of Manenberg, originally a predominantly Kaaps speaking township, located approximately fifteen kilometres east of the Cape Town central business district. Like many South African townships, Manenberg is increasingly multilingual due to movements of local populations and an influx of migrants with distinct languages from beyond the country’s borders (especially Nigeria and Somalia). English is now a predominant feature of the landscape, and so is increasingly, isiXhosa, spoken in Tambo village, the new, expanding “suburb” of Manenberg.

In what follows, we first give an overview of some powerful and dominant discourses on Manenberg as a place, and in Section 3 move into exploring how these dominant discourses are narrated and enacted in Manenberg residents’ personal navigation through the township, illustrating how place is lived, practiced and talked about on a day-by-day basis. In conjunction with this, we introduce some theoretical and methodological constructs with which to approach how semiotic landscapes are referenced in these macro-discourses of place, and pay special attention to how semiotic artefacts in the landscape are incorporated into, function as a point of reference for, or are embellished in, place narrations. By way of a concluding discussion (Section 4), we speculate on how the construal and enactment of local semiotic landscapes engage with, and speak back to, macro-discourses, briefly discussing what implications this approach may hold for further research and policy.

2 Manenberg: spatialisations and place making

Manenberg, as any urban space, can be characterised in terms of different, at times competing, macro-discourses of spatialisation (Osborne and Rose 2004). In standard authoritative narratives, it is (re)presented as a geographically marginal space, historically created out of the forced removals of black and coloured families during apartheid, characterised in contemporary time as plagued by poor urban planning, lack of municipal services, and as crime ridden. Both informally and in formal, expert discourses, Manenberg has the reputation of being a gang saturated area, one of the worst such areas in Cape Town. Given this profile, it is not surprising that Manenberg is conceived of in terms of a moral architecture

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1 Eleven official languages are recognised in South Africa. In the Western Cape Province, where Cape Town is the provincial capital, Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa are designated official languages. Kaaps is a regionally characteristic variety of Afrikaans, spoken predominantly among speakers racially classified as “Coloured” during the apartheid years.
of “zones” that demarcate problem areas. In this regard, authorities initially divided the township into three such zones (Williams 2010), although the NGO “Proudly Manenberg” subsequently added two more zones, bringing the number to five, a move primarily motivated by the distinct nature of gang activity in each zone. Boeta, who heads up the Safety Sector in Proudly Manenberg, provides the following breakdown:

Zone 1 . . . it’s from Sherwood Park . . . right down till, the Downs Road . . . zone 2 . . . it’s from the circle [in the Downs Road] . . . right down to, er, the Bads[baths] . . . the swimming bath . . . zone 3 is from the Downs Rd, here by the 7’s they call it the 7’s right down to Turfhall Rd . . . the new Turfhall Rd there . . . zone 4, goes right down to Klipfontein Rd . . . from Turfhall to Klipfontein Rd that is zone 4, it’s all in this side . . . zone 5, Tambo Village right up till, till the Junction . . . from the police station to the Junction. zone 4, that is down that side . . . that is the Dixie Boys, Americans, and, the . . . Junky Funkies.

Crouch (2003) talks about “spacing” to refer to the performativity of place making, and Mondada (2011) stresses “the importance of social action for the making of space”, and the need to highlight “the details of the embodied production of

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2 It bears pointing out that there are also alternative emerging discourses of aspiration, hope and development – albeit still marginal – of residents “greening” their areas and organising themselves into political interest groups that actively lobby for improved service delivery.
these voices in and on space as well as of the controversial nature of plural versions of space” (Mondada 2011: 291). Macro-discourses of spatialisation about Manenberg are realised in the embodied and interactionally negotiated everyday narratives of crime, security, freedom of movement, aspiration, and futurity that residents of Manenberg tell. They are above all evident in how residents move around in local place, and negotiate its dangers and its opportunities. Movement and interaction with people and objects in space renders place making fundamentally a practical achievement. Thus, a praxeological approach to space-making (e.g. Mondada 2011) that views place as a socially accomplished and embodied practice, and that takes cognizance of the importance of mobility in local place making (e.g. Urry 2007) captures well the transient and emerging nature of places such as Manenberg.

Viewing semiotic or (linguistic) landscapes as part of transmodal repertoires of practices and “technologies” of perceiving, living and narrating everyday “place” has implications for how to approach their study. Because we need to know not just how signage is read, but how it is embodied, enacted, re-narrated and performed, merely representing what there is does not capture what is imagined to be, nor how what there is is transformed and transmuted and “read” in alternative ways in situated interactions. The approach we employ here, namely a material ethnography of language (Stroud and Mpendukana 2009, 2010) focuses on the interaction of signs and bodies, how people interact with others, and how signs interact (dialogically) with each other (Scollon and Scollon 2003; Stroud and Mpendukana 2009), highlighting both a praxeological construal of local place and an understanding of locality in terms of mobility.

A variety of methodologies have been employed to capture the mobile and praxeological constitution of place (cf. for example, Sheller and Urry 2006; Watts and Urry 2008). One such methodology is walking. In one sense, “walking is constitutive of place itself”, (Lee 2004: 1), comprising “an active mode of perceiving the urban environment assisted by all the senses (multisensorial) (aural, olfactory, visual, touch)”. Walking generates “circumambulatory knowing” (we know things in space by walking around them, positioning in relation to our bodies and other objects), and thus acquire a kinaesthetic experience which allows walkers to build up “a strong feeling for space and spatial qualities” (Tuan 1977: 12, cited in Wunderlich [2008: 129]). Walking as an epistemological and methodological tool, and the procedure of narrated walking in particular, allows the ethnographer-linguist to monitor the enactment of discourses of place as they evolve over time and across landscapes through the perspectives and affectual stances of narrating walkers (cf. Trumper-Hecht 2010). There are various approaches to walking as a methodology, such as photovoice methodology (Wang and Burri 1997) and the “go-along walking interview” (Carpiano 2009). The
methodology employed in this study is a version of this latter methodology, the so-called “commented walks” (Winkler 2002), that involves the production of narratives and accompanying reflections when walking in a place. Informants were asked to guide the interviewer around the different zones, and to characterise them each in turn, from the point of view of what one “ought to know” about a particular zone. The rationale given was that the interviewer needed to get a good grasp of the Manenberg zones in conjunction with a project on childhood literacy and parental mobility. The interviewer actively prompted the narrator to expand his/her narrative at particular points, for example, by asking specifically about the significance of an abundance of signage/graffiti in a particular zone, or what the explanation was for different types of signage in different zones.

In what follows, we explore how salient social discourses such as those of aspiration, crime, and service delivery (zone 1), and unemployment and xenophobia (zone 2) are performed in the interactional making of local place. Our focus is particularly on how semiotic artefacts figure and are used in these narrative performances in spatial practice, as residents make place, and, experience space, as lived space (Lefebvre 1991).

3 Walking in Manenberg

Walking is not a “singular” phenomenon, but one of “infinite multiplicities” (Morris 2004); how one walks depends on what local economic, social and cultural spaces one traverses and how one navigates them. An important aspect of the design of public spaces is the macro-sociopolitical and demographic descriptions of Manenberg we noted in Section 1. These are manifest in how residents organise their pathways and trajectories in and around Manenberg, as well as echoed in the ways in which local residents (and even outsiders) narrate their different experiences of the different neighbourhoods. They are also apparent in readings of public, semiotic landscapes.

Generally, walking in Manenberg is a fraught affair, especially for those who are not familiar with the township. Gary, one of our walkers, warns that:

3 Even though this specific study took place over a few weeks (February to June), the researchers had been working in Manenberg at various intervals since 2009, during which time many residents had volunteered stories about their daily life in Manenberg. The present study was a first attempt to obtain a more systematic understanding of how retellings served as ways of navigating place on a daily basis.
If they [the gangsters] know oh ok we see you every day going to the shop whatever going to work, they won’t bother so much, but even in daytime if they notice this guy don’t stay here, they’ll even ask you who you looking for oh no we’ll show you where . . . round the corner they’ll rob you.

Walkers’ sensibilities, such as comfort and fear are key resources (Duff 2010: 892) with which they navigate their trajectories around Manenberg, resources that illustrate precisely the importance of non-representational and praxeological understandings of space. Residents are attentive to where it is possible to walk, alone or in company, and aware of where one can find safe spaces, and at what time of the day. They know what streets are accessible to different individuals, and what streets are “owned” by gangs and thereby out of bounds to the general public. They are perceptive to the ways in which the rhythmicity of the township space, the time of day and activity, determine different possibilities for mobility, and are emphatic about the importance of social networks and the visible presence and active engagement of others for the creation and sustainability of a liveable environment.

3.1 Zone 1

Zone 1 is located on the borders of Manenberg and stretches from Landsdowne Rd to Turfhall Road. It provides the main point of access into Manenberg, and hosts a collection of taxi and bus stations, as it serves as a junction for many roads and much mobility of people and goods going into and out of Manenberg. The majority of the buildings are service establishments (shops, restaurants and churches) and government offices (housing office and community centres). Most of the visible semiotic artefacts here comprise (private, local) business signage (Figures 2 and 3), and municipal signage (Figure 4).

The signage on the commercial establishments are typically made out of local materials (hardboards) or written on vibracrete\(^4\) or brick walls. Typically again, the standard red and white tuck shop/café board comprises the bulk of the industrially manufactured signage in Manenberg. This is sponsored by Coca Cola, and carries the name of the café and a stylised visual depiction of the Coca Cola emblem. There are few high-end billboards in this zone, primarily the municipal signage in Figure 4. With the exception of one local commercial signage, all text is written in Standard English with conventional punctuation and orthography, in non-elaborated, block text, with little in the way of embellishment to

\(^4\) Concrete slabs used to construct fences or buildings – see vibracrete fence in Figure 3.
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distinguish one sign from the other. Surprisingly, even the local government signage (Figure 4) is in English only, even though it is customary in public, municipal signage, to provide the message in all three official languages of the Western Cape Province, Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa. Again, with the exception of the municipal signage, placement of signs is on an individual item basis with few examples of aggregated, or clusters of, signage.

This zone, on the edges of Manenberg, typically links the outer world with the inner environs of the township. As is the case for many such transit zones, border-
lands or liminal spaces, zone 1 serves as a façade – almost a display board profiling the community for outsiders – and serves as a portal through which to enter and access the neighbourhood and its semiotic spaces. As a portal and place of transit, zone 1 lacks obvious deep social texture. Rather, it is a publicly accessible zone that permits many different types of walking or physical presence – from loitering through strolling to discursive walking or urban roaming (Rendell 2003; cf. Wunderlich 2008).

In this regard, the composition of the signage is closely in step with the characteristics of the zone, and its placement is thus far from arbitrary, but determined by the local urban ecology of zone 1. Ferrell and Weide (2010) have proposed the idea of “spot theory” to account for why, for example, graffiti artists choose particular urban spaces to exercise their craft. Stroud and Mpendukana (2009) suggest that particular types of spaces predispose to particular types of signage, characterised by different levels of material investment, modes of production, and authoring conventions. This reflects the affordances created by different forms of mobility, and by how gaze is deployed in different urban spaces, for how “reading” is accomplished. Thus, recognizing that the parameters of the local urban ecology are reflected in the design and placement of signage suggests that signs bear an important relation to how people read place, move around in it, traverse it, embed forms of interaction into it, and talk about it, that is, signage comprises an important part of a praxeological and mobile construal of place.

In zone 1, the entrances and exits, or portals, of Manenberg provide interactional moments where people meet briefly and coincidentally as strangers in pursuit of other social roles of longer duration. Interactionally, regimes typically
revolve around negotiating corridors and conditions of movement, finding locations or locating buildings. Buildings and their social functions are predominantly municipal and administrative, where, for example, literacy events and practices (such as CVs, IDs and drivers’ licenses) comprise circulating markets of symbolic capital. Another characteristic of zone 1 as a portal is its function as a façade – an imaginative representation of the community for outsiders. Not surprisingly, the signage in this zone reflects and helps structure such transitory and mobile practices. One way in which the materiality of place is reflected in signage is through the notion of genre. A genre sets up a particular set of expectations as to type of topic/content, form of register, attitudinal stance, and interactional roles that are appropriate to a given occasion (Blommaert 2008; Bauman and Briggs 1992), and orientates interlocutors to the production of an appropriate local semiotic. Genres manifest (parts of) discourses or discourse frames; just as the genre of a medical examination, with its interactional routines, content questions related to the body and particular register instantiates a particular discourse of the body or (specialist) regime of knowledge about illness, so can different genres of signage be seen as concrete unfoldings of particular discourses.5 Genre is thus a useful construct with which to capture how semiotic artefacts such as signs interact with, sometimes determine, and otherwise reflect perceptions of place, and the position of bodies and bodily practices such as walking (Stroud and Mpendukana 2009, 2010; Pietikäinen et al. 2011). In zone 1, the bulk of the signage is either deictic, serving to point the way to particular locations in the township, or representational or interpellating, naming buildings or locations, or “bringing them into existence”, that is a form of branding.

A nice example of deictic signage guiding the walker around the township is the internet café sign at the entrance to Manenberg. The predominance of internet café signage offers channels for treating the flow of material resources for mobility of these literacy types; it connects two different types of portal, the local and non-local, joining the busy main road circumventing Manenberg and the information highways of electronic traffic.

What the particular genres of signage instantiate in zone 1 is a discourse of aspiration and futurity, mobility and change, a commonplace discourse among residents of Manenberg (cf. Salo 2004).6

5 Cf. also Kallen (2010) who distinguishes between a variety of (non-exhaustive) discourse frames, namely, what he calls, “the Civic frame, the Marketplace, Portals, the Wall and the Detrius zone, which can be defined by the functions of discourse entered into by interlocutors and by the language choices and forms of expression available to these interlocutors” (2010: 43).

6 And quite coincidentally manifested in the “Good Hope” signage.
This reading of place emerging from the local signage is also apparent in how individual narratives accompanying walking in zone 1 are structured, as walking is a semiotically informed practice, organized and transmitted through different forms of social authority (Morris 2004: 686). The construction of zone 1 as a place of transit and aspiration, and captured as such in predominant forms of signage, is refigured in narrative as weak social networks and fragile social control, instantiating the anonymity and depersonalization of the transit space, and repeated in forms of walking and interpersonal engagement. Manenberg is represented in the walker’s narratives as a mobile place of fleeting social encounters, and accompanying dangers. Interestingly, the unfolding of the narrative is structured according to a trajectory of locations and places, again illustrating the type of signage genre (deictic and interpellational) found in this zone. For example, Greg, one of our talking walkers, touches in his narrative of zone 1 on the theme of Manenberg as a transit zone and a portal. He embeds these themes in a narrative about the attendant dangers of walking particular (named) streets – indicating how the temporal (and also gendered [Salo 2004: 281]) rhythmicity of the area plays an important role for when walking is safe or dangerous. At specific times of the day, street corners, crossings, bridges and culverts are said to be particularly dangerous. Greg remarks on how the “outsiders” (non-Manenberg residents) who pass through zone 1 using public transport risk becoming victims of crime:

G: the African people who, come by taxi, get off here, they rob the people on that, er little bridge over there. . . .

unfortunately some of them (black Africans) works, at shops that close 6 o’clock 7 o’clock so, there are still taxis available that time, and this is where the taxis drop them at night,

The theme of “aspiration” and civic development is taken up in utterances such as the following:

Here, on this field, I don’t know who organises it but I-I know just every every Saturday and Sunday they organise like six-a-sides, here which-which, is rather nice . . . you-you do get, er people in the community who organises teams, try er you know make it a better place but,

The down side of high aspirations is lack of service delivery, which is something that Greg touches on at length in his narrative of Manenberg:

G: on the other side er the Gugulethu side you find there’s every morning you s-find a police van standing there

R: Ah
We note then for zone 1 how discourse themes of “transit”, “aspiration” and “mobility” that also feature as content themes in the available local signage reappear and are incorporated into narrations of place that refer to failed service delivery (lack of policing), weak social networks, and frequent reference to the “outsider”, the “passer-by” (it is difficult to walk in zone 1 if you are not known locally; those not known are assaulted at points of transit). These discourse themes are narratively mapped onto zone 1 through accounts of happenings in places and locations, reference to which is also a characteristic feature of the signage genre in this buffet zone. These discourses occur in zone 1 only – as we shall see, there is no mention of outsiders, of crime or lack of social cohesion in the narrations in the other zones, and the coordinates of location appear to play a lesser role in narrative orientation.

3.2 Zone 2

The western border of zone 2 is Vygekraal road, with the section beyond that known as Primrose Park. It is on the main thoroughfare (Manenberg Rd) that the three zones are linked. Predominant forms of signage are everyday local shop signage advertising a variety of household services and goods that one would normally expect in a domestic context, such as local grocery (spaza) shops, barber’s salons (containers), and cafés. Signage is frequently commissioned painting that mimics the sponsored signage of the café and more established spaza shops. There is a recognisable container genre that makes reference to religious proverbs or names with religious overtones typically associated with barbers or hairdressers. As with zone 1, there is little in the way of aggregate signage, and most text is in English, with only the odd example in Afrikaans. Characteristic of this zone is a neatly ordered, geometrically laid out, and neatly spaced signage with identically angled lettering. The bulk of the signage here is factory produced and sponsored, with no personal embellishment.

In contradistinction to zone 1, zone 2 is a lived-in space. The domestic and commercial nature of zone 2 is reflected in the interpersonal relationships people

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7 One of the few examples of Afrikaans signage here is the Filadelphia tabernacle.
enter into with each other, as well as being visible in forms of bodily comport-
ment (for example, of leisure, where clusters of residents gather on street corners) 
and forms of walking (e.g. strolling). People raise families here, sleep, eat and get 
through their day. Children play in the street outside the houses, and residents, 
who know their neighbours intimately, form networks of sociality and mutual 
assistance. Zone 2 is a *personalised* space (neither really private, nor public), and 
in contrast to zone 1, those who live there monitor closely who is in the zone, or

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**Fig. 5:** Zone 2, Manenberg Avenue not far from the car, researcher aggressively challenged by resident

**Fig. 6:** Zone 2, Manenberg Avenue, on foot not far from car
moving through it, keep their ear to the ground and a close eye on what they con-
sider to be acceptable behaviours.

The material nature of zone 2 is also reflected in type and genres of signage. The signage is mainly found in direct conjunction with food and service outlets. Predominantly, signage genre is one of “personalisation”, (Stroud and Mpendu-
kana, 2010) where the identity of the service provider figures prominently (Fig-
ures 5, 6 and 7: “Wayda’s fuit and veg.”, “My fruit and veg.”, “Bismillah Barber
Shop”), and is the only variable element in an otherwise fixed, and standardised
form. Grocery products and hair dressing services make up the most common
products advertised, representing discourse themes such as (commercial) care of
the body, (alimentary and grooming). From the point of view of interaction, the
signage predisposes to routinised service encounters, which, in small places such
as this, nevertheless acquire an intimate, biographical dimension when the shop
owner becomes familiar with customers’ daily consumption patterns and credit
needs.

The signage genre in zone 2 articulates with higher order discourses revolv-
ing around care, motherhood, providing for, neighbourliness and coping. In her
extensive ethnography of Manenberg, Salo (2004) has carefully described how
these discourses permeate networks of sociability and local intimacy.

She argues for instance that “many adult women in their roles as mothers,
and unemployed young men in their roles as gangsters or Ouens . . . became the
moral police of personhood and the defenders of their communities as a means to
redefine and recuperate a positive sense of identity” (Salo 2004: 11). She shows

Fig. 7: Zone 2, Manenberg Avenue not far from the car, researcher aggressively challenged by
resident
Performing the local

how, as a result of the historic gendering of household formation, housing and welfare access (Salo 2004: 153), spaces such as the local housing offices came to be defined as feminine spaces. Adult women thus became the custodians of (bureaucratic) cultural knowledge. In order to gain access to the inner circle of women who hold this knowledge, strict adherence to “the key values of the moral economy through which personhood of women as moeders [mothers] is recognised” (Salo 2004: 160) is required. Young women who wish to be regarded as ordentlik or respectable, and thus eligible for such access, were required “to exercise control over [their] sexuality by [adhering] to a predictable daily routine, [assisting with] household chores . . . [dressing modestly, and] . . . restrict[ing] their movements on the street to daytime hours only” (Salo 2004: 281) (thus contributing to the temporal gendering of space). These young women also rely on older women to assist them to gain employment (mainly at clothing factories) “through the local system of introduction, ingebring [bringing in]” (Salo 2004: 178). Salo also asserts that the practice of “communal mothering [enables] women as mothers [to] share the responsibility of identifying and making persons such as the tough men or the good daughters in this community” (Salo 2004: 161).

These themes reoccur in everyday narratives about zone 2. Interestingly enough, they are deployed in conjunction with talk about signage to speak to issues of (un)employment and coping, neighbourliness and how each household contributes in different ways to keeping small shops afloat (by, for example, offering their labour free). Intimacy and security in social networks, and in association with this, the role of strangers and outsiders as when foreigners (najis) do business differently, is also a common narrative trope that incorporates reference to local signage. As our walker takes us around the local streets in zone 2, he makes frequent reference to the local signage to weave a set of narrative themes around unemployment, social networks of assistance and indigenous versus foreign practices of shop-keeping. In the following excerpt, the narrator recounts problems of unemployment in Manenberg:

G: That’s you-you-you put up a Coke sign if you got a tuck shop
R: Oh, so there’s a tuck shop, upstairs?
G: upstairs ja . . . These are all . . . government courts but, there are people got to make a living if you can’t find a job, or what people do is you, if you lose your job you take that little that you get from your previous employer, and you just go and buy some chips and whatever and . . . up a tuck shop,

Reference to the signage is drawn into the narrative about place almost as a metaphor for the individual entrepreneurship of residents, an index of necessity, as Greg makes explicit how “out of place” the commercial signage is, as “these are all . . . government courts” (that is, council housing estates).
Discourses of care, intimacy, neighbourliness and coping are also manifest in conjunction with how Greg talks about the presence of foreign traders in Manenberg, the so-called Najis, and the opportunities this provides the residents. Again, reference to signage, more specifically, the design details of the signage is the organizing trope for this discourse. These stall-keepers are said to design their signage differently by listing products, and by providing more personalization and embellishment on their shop signage, that is, we find here a “racial” categorisation of different styles of signage:

Thus, in zone 2, where the predominant signage genres are personalised commercial, and discourses are about care, domesticity, and coping, signage serves as a resource to organize narrations about different “publics” and social relationships centred around commercial networks; between, for example, those who have tuck shops and their neighbours/employees who do not, as well as being used to talk to the different commercial and social practices of the foreign shopkeepers, the unemployment and poverty of the population in general. As in zone 1, participants orientate to particular situated features of the material and embodied environment to produce narrative versions (Mondada 2011: 291) of place. However, in this case, rather than place being structured in terms of named locations, nav-

8 Najis is Arabic for ‘impure/ritually unclean’. Blood, urine and excrement are najis. This term is often used as a generic term to refer to all foreign Africans (thought to be a play on “Nigerians”), and can be construed to be a highly derogative term when referring to foreign African stallholders/shopkeepers in the townships.
Performing the local

Migration in zone 2 is in terms of puddles and pools of unemployment, clusters of local or non-local businesses – all structured around types of available signage in different places.

4 Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we attended to the various ways “in which . . . relations to urban space are organized by the urban trajectories, maps and itineraries that arise from [participants’] differential relations to a range of economic, social and cultural associations and forms of life” (Bennett 1998: 180–181). We explored different spaces in Manenberg with respect to how movement and narratives of movement, agency, confidence and safety were organised, and how local signage was referenced in these transmodal, praxeological and mobile performances. Incorporating an awareness of signage as an explicit part of the walking narrative methodology enabled an understanding of how linguistic landscapes contribute to the constitution of place as a discursive, contested and multimodal/transmodal construction.

Our study focused on the various ways in which signage is read and its themes reflected in and incorporated into personal narratives of place as residents move through township space. We illustrated some of the ways that the placing and design of the signage works conjunctively with locally situated embodied narratives of macro-social discourses to give meaning and significance to local place and situated movement. We were able to show how social discourses and associated processes of place making are reproduced, organised by, and projected onto aggregates of semiotic artefacts and people’s interactions with them. This essentially involved our subjects engaging with macro-discourses of place in their narrations, and in their trajectories through the township, as well as through the interactional regimes they participated in. Thus, the macro-discourses of spatialisation found expression in how and where residents walk in Manenberg, in the way they interacted with others, and in how they were incorporated – almost as tools of navigation – into the narratives of the walkers as they traversed different zones. The multiple discourses and representations of place, read and construed from the perspective of local affect, informed how signage discourses were built into the everyday narratives of place of our walkers. In this, signage occasionally provided a semiotic framing for what was spoken about, and for how interpersonal relationships and local interaction orders were structured, and how they served as a commentary on the forms of mobility afforded by different zones. The semiotic landscape thus functioned as a “material canvas” (Nayak 2010) for these locally enacted and narrated discourses, a backdrop and a point
of reference that focuses and makes specific the organising trope of the particular places.

What, then, of the possible implications of this study for research on semiotic (linguistic) landscapes? Authors have pointed to the relationship between perception, representation and technologies of documentation (cf. Barni and Bagna 2009), and how habits of looking and listening shape the technology of data gathering and its analysis (cf. Shohamy and Gorter 2009; Shohamy et al. 2010). Here, we suggest that there are benefits in moving away from a purely representational stance on landscapes to one that pays more attention to the prosaics and contingencies in the building of the local environment, and the local epistemologies inherent in affectful ways of navigating local place. The prosaics of place mean that semiotic landscapes need to be read not just in terms of the composition and design features of the artefact (visual semiotics), nor in terms of where they are placed (geosemiotics), but against an understanding of how these parameters contribute to how physical spaces are constituted as embodied and lived, and contested as places of personal and local significance.

Sheller and Urry (2006), referring to the new mobilities paradigm, alert us to how “all the world seems to be on the move”, and that we need to replace sedentary social science “that treats as normal stability, meaning and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change and placelessness” (2006: 208) with a more fluid approach to place. Urban environments such as cities and townships are “as much spaces of flows as they are spaces of place” (Yeoh 2006: 150), and much daily movement is movement in a locality that is ultimately defining of the local (Hall 2009). Semiotic landscapes thus become a source of insight into a sociolinguistics of mobility rather than linguistic localisation, and a resource for not only the study of the social circulations of meaning in society (e.g. Stroud and Mpendukana 2009, 2010), but for its embodied circulation. We see this as a post-representational (Nayak 2010) challenge to the panoramic and “distant” research gaze found in much research on semiotic landscapes (Hall 2009: 576).

Research on linguistic landscape has traditionally found ready applications in the fields of language policy (e.g. Shohamy and Gorter 2009; Shohamy et al. 2010). We suggest that a praxeological and mobile stance on signage may guide rethinking across a broader spectrum of critical applied linguistic and sociolinguistic concern than what is customary in linguistic landscape research. We can begin to discern how signage may be part of an approach to urban design and urban semiotics dedicated to creating conditions of local neighbourhood engagement and new emotional geographies of place in the service of a revitalised “politics of civility”. Sociologists and geographers concerned with social and urban policy have argued that:
If policies for multicultural living are to have any meaning, they need to connect much more closely with the sensory aspects of affect, event and encounter. This entails more open understandings of people’s ‘sense of place’ and how this registers with ideas of nation, region, home or locality as geographically located and emotionally experienced. (Nayak 2010: 2389)

It is at the level of the local that groups and individuals will encounter each other, engage around mutual concerns of consensus or contention, and move towards solutions to possible intractable conditions of co-existence and “harmony”. Amin, for example, emphasizes how abstract rights and obligations are realized in “the everyday lived experiences and local negotiations of difference on microcultures of place” through “distinctive individual and interpersonal experiences” (Amin 2002: 967). However, while acknowledging the importance of the local for “the micropolitics of everyday social contact and encounter” we also need to recognize that spaces comprise and support multiple publics, and that “groups do not occupy a common sense of place”. Feeling out of place is one of the key obstacles to any sense of belonging, agency and participation (Phillips et al. 2007: 228, quoted in Nayak [2010: 2372]). The implication here is that places are potentially sites of explosive difference, disagreement and contention, where distinct positions of interest will confront and collide, and where consensus may be an “accident of engagement” (Nayak 2010) rather than a predetermined outcome of deliberation. The localness of place and its situational dynamics is thus central to a variety of processes at the level of the nation and its politics. Given the ubiquity of signage, and the way it is referenced in narratives of place, the centrality of semiotic landscapes as objects of contention, resistance, displays of power and historicity, linguistic landscapes have an important part to play in policies for citizenship (Rios 2008).

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Tommaso M. Milani
Sexed signs – queering the scenery

Abstract: The main argument of this article is that Linguistic Landscape (LL) scholarship has largely ignored – erased even – gender and sexuality, two important axes of power along which public spaces are structured, understood, negotiated and contested. In order to partly redress this academic oversight, this article investigates a small data set of banal sexed signs, mundane semiotic aggregates, which, precisely because of their fleeting and unassuming character, can easily be ignored, but nonetheless “(in)form our understandings and experiences of [gender,] sexuality and subjectivity” (Sullivan 2003: 190). In doing so, the article also argues for the importance of incorporating queer theory into the analytical apparatus of Linguistic Landscape research, because it provides us with a valuable theoretical lens through which to unveil the operations of power in relation to gender and sexuality (and other social categories) in public space.

Keywords: gender, linguistic landscapes, place, queer theory, sexuality, space

1 Opening the scene

Most commonly known under the somewhat controversial umbrella term of “Linguistic Landscape” (LL),¹ the study of language in public space² has gained
considerable momentum within the broader scholarship of the sociology of language over the last ten years or so. As Zabrodskaja and Milani outline in their introduction to this special issue, the linguistic study of public signage has developed into a vibrant field in its own right which analyzes disparate sets of data through a variety of diverse theoretical tools and methodologies.

Whether taking quantitative or qualitative approaches, it is my contention that this body of research has largely ignored – erased even – the gendered and sexualized nature of public space (see however Goffman [1977], an important precursor to theorizing the gendering of public spaces; see Leap [2005]; Stroud and Mpendukana [2009]; Piller [2010]; Curtin [this issue], for notable exceptions; see also Jones [2009] and King [2012] for important contributions to the study of gender, sexuality and place in virtual environments). Related to this, what should also be flagged up is the absence of feminist epistemologies from the Linguistic Landscape field as a whole (see Piller [2010] for an exception). This neglect is particularly remarkable considering that the related field of cultural geography has produced a burgeoning feminist literature on space/place, gender and sexuality over the last thirty years (e.g., Massey 1994; Bell and Valentine 1995; Oswin 2008; Johnston and Longhurst 2010; Tucker 2009).

Why is this the case? A most obvious answer can be found in the disciplinary origin of Linguistic Landscape as a radical offshoot of research on language attitudes (Landry and Bourhis 1997) and language policy (Shohamy 2006), two strands of sociolinguistic inquiry which have traditionally been less concerned with gender and sexuality than with other forms of social categorization such as ethnic and national identity (see however Bengoechea’s [2011] work for a notable exception). Read from a language policy viewpoint, it is rather unsurprising that scholars analyzing the built environment have focused nearly exclusively on the multilingual aspect of signage, a semiotics that is often quite straightforwardly tied to ethnic tensions in the nation-state but does not lend itself equally easily to reflections on gender and sexuality. Such oversight, however, is not innocent, as it has inadvertently contributed to shaping the directions of Linguistic Landscape inquiry, thus failing to account for some important facets in which public spaces are structured, understood, negotiated and contested.

**distinction between these two categories is fuzzy and unstable. What will emerge in the article is not only that “public” spaces only acquire meaning through “private”, “affective” stances, but also that the meaning of what is (visible from the) “outside” (say, a shop sign or a T-shirt in a shop window) depends on what is “inside” (a retail space).**

3 I espouse a broad definition of feminism in linguistic research as a critical standpoint which openly aims to unpack gender and sexuality “with respect to regimes of power and speakers’ agency in relation to these” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 486).
As the title suggests, this article is programmatic in nature in that it is built on the assumption that gender and sexuality should be brought onto the map of Linguistic Landscape research to a larger degree than has been done thus far. This academic imperative is particularly pressing if we agree that a linguistic landscape is a “public space that reflects social processes of articulation of power” (Lefebvre 1970). As a vast body of feminist scholarship has illustrated (see Cameron and Kulick [2003] and Bucholtz and Hall [2004] for overviews), sex – both in the sense of male-female difference and as a synonym of erotic and reproductive practices – is not simply a “natural” aspect of one’s life, but is a deeply social construct as well as a crucial “vector of oppression” (Rubin 1984) in both private and public settings.

In highlighting the need to pay more concerted attention to gender and sexuality in public space, I also argue for the importance of employing a particular type of feminist approach – a queer4 theoretical lens – through which to read “public texts” (Sebba 2010). As will become clearer in the following sections, queer theory provides us with an important analytical toolkit to unpack the operations of power in relation to gender and sexuality (and other social categories) without falling into too easy conflations between “processes” (a man’s/woman’s desire for another man/woman), on the one hand, and “identities” (“gay”/“lesbian”/“heterosexual”), on the other.

More specifically, queer theory will be employed in this article in order to deconstruct a small sample of what I call banal sexed signs. This is a term which brings together Baker’s (2008) notion of “sexed texts” with Billig’s (1995) conceptualization of “banal nationalism”. “Sexed texts” is a useful notion which captures the textual manifestations of the intersection between gender and sexuality. Unlike Baker (2008), however, I employ “sign” rather than “text” in order to strategically capitalize on the semantic ambiguity of this term. In a broader sense, the word “sign” surpasses the purely linguistic to encompass the complex social semiotic guises in which gender and sexuality can be encoded. At the same time, “sign” also carries a narrower, more material meaning of “an inscribed surface displayed in a public space to convey a message” (Backhaus 2007: 4–5). As will be shown in the examples below, it is this semiotic/material relationship that is crucial for understanding the gendered and sexualized nature of linguistic landscapes.

Banal nationalism captures one of the most elusive forms of ideology, namely the subtle daily reminders of national belonging that go undetected such as a

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4 There is no agreement among scholars about the relationship between “queer” and “feminist” thinking. Some are adamant in highlighting the divisions between the two (e.g. queer theorists are in favour of prostitution and sadomasochist (S/M) sex whereas feminists aren’t). Cognizant of the differences, others prefer instead to emphasize the (radical) feminist heritage of queer theory (see Cameron and Kulick [2003] and Bucholtz and Hall [2004] for detailed discussions).
“flag hanging unnoticed on the public building” (Billig 1995: 8). By the same token, banal sexed signs are those mundane semiotic aggregates, which, precisely because of their fleeting and unassuming character, can easily be ignored, but nonetheless “(in)form our understandings and experiences of [gender,] sexuality and subjectivity” (Sullivan 2003: 190; see also Thurlow and Jaworski [2011] for a similar appropriation of Billig’s term, albeit in a discussion of globalization).

I have been intentionally selective in choosing a small, fairly motley assemblage of “signs” which I have encountered in recent travels (2010–2012). In justifying the choice of this dataset, I do not stake any claims of representativeness or generalizability. Rather, in line with Pennycook’s (2012) rationale underpinning the usage of personal data in the study of language and mobility, my own experiences vis-à-vis certain textual artifacts should serve as “an incitement to reflect” (Pennycook 2012: 35), a stimulus to “to think otherwise” (Pennycook 2012: 34; Hoy 2004), or, as I would suggest, to think queerly (Fryer 2012; see also Livia and Hall 1997; Motschenbacher 2011; Nelson 2012), thus bringing the potential to open up new avenues of Linguistic Landscape investigation.

This methodological tactic is underpinned by the belief shared by ethnographers and other qualitative researchers that “descriptions and explanations . . . involve selective viewing and interpreting that are based on one particular way of seeing the world” (Haglund 2005: 30). As such, “researchers cannot be neutral, objective or detached from the knowledge they are generating” (Haglund 2005: 30). Recognizing the partiality of knowledge, however, is by no means tantamount to overlooking the importance of academic rigour – an exercise that, according to poststructuralism, ethnography and other strands of qualitative inquiry, requires the researcher to be self-reflective, “rather than to employ amnesia and poor arithmetic whilst claiming academic neutrality” (Heugh 2003: 39).

It is in this self-reflective spirit that I want to first provide a sketch of my own ideological trajectory, followed by an outline of the queer theoretical and political assumptions that inform the analysis of three very diverse examples of banal sexed texts: a newsstand at Dulles Airport in the US, two T-shirts in a shop window in Stockholm, Sweden, and a coffee-shop in Johannesburg, South Africa.

2 The “I” on the scene

Mobility, homosexuality and queer thinking are perhaps the most apt key words to describe my adult life trajectory. As an Italian national who, after leaving my country of birth at the age of twenty-five, has resided in five other sociopolitical contexts and visited many others, I have constantly experienced a strong sense of being “out of place” (Said 1999; Pennycook 2012). This is a form of bodily and in-
tellectual restlessness, which not only manifests itself as a “sense of never quite feeling at home, never quite knowing what those long-term insiders are talking about” (Pennycook 2012: 29); it also takes the form of a more radical project of enduringly going against the grain (Stroud 2001) and breaking the rules of the game (Bourdieu 1991), thus “constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others” (Said 1994: 4). As Pennycook (2012) points out, it is the constant encounter with the “Other” that fuels the desire to always question givens and opens up the “possibility of thinking otherwise, of seeing other possibilities” (Pennycook 2012: 47) than one’s own.

More specifically relevant to this article, I have taken as a given since childhood that my erotic and emotional desires and fantasies are directed towards men, rather than women. Therefore, my post-pubertal, open self-identification as a gay man was a fairly uncontroversial statement of the obvious. Whereas my openly gay identity made me sensitive and subject to homophobic comments and innuendos, I was less aware of – and at times even contributed to – the (re)production of gender inequalities and sexist behavior.

Subsequently, however, encounters with a few politically radical activists in Sweden, together with a concomitant reading of feminist and queer theorists Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick, opened up for me a completely new understanding of the ways in which gender and sexuality are deeply intertwined and performed in daily life. Through work informed by queer theory, I began to recognize that homosexual men can be complicit in the reproduction of the patriarchal order; it is also through queer theory that I started to see the distinction between sexual processes and practices, on the one hand, and sexual identities, on the other. In other words, I began to appreciate that a man’s desire for and sexual activities with another man do not necessarily make him gay. This is because the conflation between processes and practices (desiring and/or having sex with a person of the same gender) and identity (calling oneself gay) is not as naturally self-evident as I had previously assumed, but is the historical debris of a particular sexual worldview which originated with the “birth of the homosexual” in 19th century Western thought (Foucault 1976).

Because of the strong impact that queer theory has had on the ways in which I currently perceive representations, objects and bodies – including my own body in space – I will now move on to present an overview of this heuristic framework.

3 Thinking queerly

Originally employed as a synonym of homosexual or as a homophobic slur, the term “queer” underwent a three-fold process of re-signification, re-appropriation
and politicization in the United States during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period characterized by dissatisfaction on the part of many American non-heterosexuals with the kind of identity politics that had underpinned the “gay liberation” movement. The main critique raised from a queer standpoint was that gay liberation in the United States was an exclusionary political movement characterized by a racialized (= white), gendered (= male), and social class (= middle-class) bias which ultimately policed and excluded other forms of non-heterosexual identification. However, dissatisfaction with the sexual identity politics that underpinned gay liberation was only one component in the emergence and success of the word “queer”. The other component was the HIV/AIDS outbreak, which not only galvanized non-heterosexuals in an unprecedented way but also helped them to start questioning the homo/hetero dichotomy (Jagose 1996).

It is in this historical landscape of political and social activism that “queer” was incorporated into the realm of academia and was joined to the more “respectable” word “theory” (Kulick 2005). Like any other theoretical framework developed in so-called “post-” or “late-” conditions (i.e. post-structuralism, post-modernism, late-modernity, etc.), queer theory is not a consistent, coherent and all-encompassing conceptual apparatus. In other words, there is no such a thing as a queer theory in the singular. Rather, queer theory consists of many, very different, and at times apparently incoherent approaches. As Halperin puts it, “[q]ueer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without essence” (Halperin 1995: 61–62). But if all we have is a name, then we might ask ourselves: what is it that makes a specific academic inquiry queer? What kind of “added value” does a queer lens offer that other approaches don’t?

Sullivan suggests that “it may be more productive to think of queer as a verb (a set of actions), rather than as a noun (an identity, or even a nameable positionality formed in and through the practice of particular actions)” (2003: 50; see also Livia and Hall 1997). As such, queer can be thought of as a verb that problematizes “normative consolidations of sex, gender and sexuality – and that, consequently, is critical of all those versions of identity, community and politics that are believed to evolve ‘naturally’ from such consolidations” (Jagose 1996: 99; emphasis added). Underpinning the sceptical view of gender/sexual identity which is a key feature of queer approaches are the assumptions that (1) gender and sexuality have been “casually entangled in knots that must be undone” (Butler 1998: 225–226), and (2) “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (Butler 1991: 13–14).
Several remarks can be made on the basis of Jagose’s and Butler’s statements. Firstly, despite acknowledging that sex, gender and sexuality are separate categories, queer theory highlights that these constructs have been socially entwined in such a way that they have developed a “unique relationship” (Sauntson 2008: 274) with each other. Hence, a queer stance tries to draw attention not only to how biological sex (the dichotomy between males and females on the basis of organs of reproduction) is mapped onto gender (the opposition between men and women, masculinity and femininity) and how these dyads are in turn the foundations on which heterosexuality rests (cf. Butler 1999 [1990]: 194). Rather, it also seeks to highlight how some of the ties between sex, gender and sexuality are socially (re)produced as “normal” and “desirable” (typically, the attraction between two allegedly opposite and complementary sexes/genders that underpins heterosexuality) whilst others are devalued as “deviant” and “unwanted” (usually, same-sex desire).

Secondly, queer theorists emphasize that an understanding of the social construction of normality versus deviance cannot be limited to unearthing the social conditions that enable and uphold heteronormativity (cf. Motschenbacher 2011), that is, “those structures, institutions, relations and actions that promote and produce heterosexuality as natural, self-evident, desirable, privileged and necessary” (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 55). Instead, it is more productive to think of queer as a more antagonistic form of dissent, which “rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favour of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal” (M. Warner 1993: xxvi). According to such a view, a queer perspective should also shed light on the ways in which certain forms of same-sex desire can themselves become normalized and legitimized over time (for example, monogamous, committed homosexual relationships) whilst others are (re)cast into the domain of abjection (cf. Bourdieu 1998) (for example, S/M and uncommitted, multi-partnered relationships). Finally, because of their sceptical stance towards all versions of identity, queer approaches are not co-extensive with LGBTIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex asexual) studies, although there are of course synergies and intersections between the two. Scholarship influenced by queer theory is likely to be as concerned with casting a critical gaze on heterosexuality as it is with scrutinizing homosexuality and examining the complex intersections between the two (cf. Cameron and Kulick 2003: 149). Most crucially, thinking queerly is ultimately about “cruising utopias” (Munoz 2009), longing for a world beyond identity categories, something which might never happen but is nonetheless worth striving for because it “propels us onward” (Munoz 2009: 1).

Quite predictably, queer theory has not been without its critics. Speaking from the “borderland” position of a “new mestiza”, Anzaldúa has pointed out
that queer theory has not been as “inclusive” as it originally promised. Instead, it has been largely the precinct of white, middle-class, homosexual academics, something which has led to “mak[ing] abstractions about us colored queers”, and “limit[ing] the ways in which we think about queer” (Anzaldua 1991: 251). Whilst this bias certainly characterized earlier work, race has increasingly been brought into the queer analytical spotlight (Puar 2002; Sullivan 2003; Elder 2005; Oswin 2008; Fryer 2012). For example, in my own research on an online community for men who are looking for other men in South Africa (Milani 2013), I have illustrated that, nearly twenty years into democracy, race still seems to be a key element structuring same-sex desire in post-apartheid South Africa. What counts as “normal sex” has a clear racial layering in that it implies erotic practices between individuals of the same race. This in turn reproduces, rather than challenges, the deeply ingrained process of intimate self-regulation (Foucault 1988) which was forged through the apartheid ideology of racial segregation. If erotic desires are the ultimate litmus test through which to gauge the degree of social transformation in a democratic South Africa, the results of this study testify to an embodiment of the status quo rather than of social change. This is particularly surprising considering that the “average member” of this online community is a male in his late twenties, someone who has lived nearly his entire adult life after apartheid.

Another critical point has been voiced by supporters of liberal LGBTIA politics regarding queer theories’ scepticism about identity categories. Queer theory, so the argument goes, is an elitist enterprise led by a bunch of privileged academics, who, having gained rights thanks to identity politics, can now comfortably turn their backs on it and downplay or even deny the importance of sexual identities for people in “real” life. From this, it follows that queer theory does not contribute to – or even threatens – the ongoing political emancipation of sexual minorities. The problem embedded in such an argument is that queer theorists do not deny that “homosexuals exist; just as there is no doubt that women ‘really’ exist, or that men do. If anything, these identity categories are only too real” (D. Warner 2004: 324; emphasis in original). Instead, queer theorists raise a cautionary warning against a too optimistic reliance on sexual identities as the catalyst for social change. And this is neither an indicator of snobbish political apathy nor a token of “post-rights” ingratitude. The point that queer theorists want to make is that politics based on sexual identities can, in the best of cases, lead only to a temporary re-calibration of power inequalities, but will ultimately leave the homo/heterosexual binary intact and unchallenged (Yep 2003: 47). In order to achieve the radical project of deep social transformation of the status quo, queer approaches promote a questioning of the seemingly “normal” and widely accepted nature of the homo/heterosexual divide itself, therefore destabilizing the very truth of that normality.
4 Querying gender norm(ality)

The first example which I want to analyze is a newsstand that I encountered in February 2011 at Dulles Airport, outside Washington DC in the US. What I thought would be an hour long wait before boarding the plane turned out to be a much longer stopover spent wandering around the outlets, restaurants and coffee-shop in the airport’s duty-free area, idly attracted by the colourful allure of consumerist displays, one of which is the newsstand represented in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Based on a media ethnography of spaces of consumption in London, Iqani (2012) describes the newsstand as “a multimodal space in which . . . its riot of words, colours and images reference and merge into one another as they jostle in juxtaposition to catch the eye of the consumer” (2012: 75). This vivid sketch resonates well with my own perception of the newsstand in the rather unassuming retail space at Dulles Airport. At first glance, there wasn’t anything unique which would make this newsstand different from the many other similar displays of news offerings and “lifestyle” publications in supermarkets, airports and other commercial outlets around the world. One could even go as far as to suggest

Fig. 1: Men on the newsstand
that these magazines and their material layout are quintessential examples of banal sexed signs, which appear so “normal” that they could have been overlooked. Yet, as mentioned earlier, from a queer theoretical standpoint, “normality” is no less exempt than “deviance” from critical deconstruction, in fact quite the contrary.

What seemed “normal” was the gendered division that marked the spatial organization of the magazines on the newsstand: periodicals dedicated to a primarily female audience were positioned on a large shelf on the long left-side wall of the shop. Perpendicular to this, magazines aimed at a male readership were located on a much narrower wall facing the shop entrance. Of course, such spatial distribution could be said to be a reflection of the gendered logic underpinning the economy of “lifestyle magazine” production: women buy Cosmo, men buy FHM. It could be added that this layout might have been dictated by the interplay between the respective amount of men’s vs. women’s magazines and the material (i.e. architectural) constraints of that specific retail space. Put simply, there are more women’s lifestyle magazines than men’s; hence the former need to be placed on the largest available wall.
Either way, what is important is the semiotic effect of this spatial arrangement. If read through the lens of Butler’s (1999) theory of gender performativity, the newsstand at Dulles Airport is not reducible to a passive reflection of a pre-existing sociological division along gender lines. Rather, it is itself performatively bringing a particular gendered order into being. Two interrelated ideological processes are revealed in such a performative act: (1) the “interpellation” (Althusser 1971) of separate gendered readers/viewers into visual and material consumption; and (2) the activation of deep-seated normative beliefs about the roles of the two genders.

To begin with, the most obvious semiotic device through which interpellation operates is the “demand gazes” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996) of the myriad of faces on the magazine covers. Inspired by Foucault (1980, 1988), Iqani (2012: Ch. 7) observes that front pages are not just a display of an ideal to be voyeuristically contemplated, but are also a powerful activator of an inner moral imperative: “thou shalt be like that” (cf. Berger 1972). Magazine covers therefore work as “paper mirrors” which “metaphorically reflect ideal selves to the viewer and provide the raw material for a reconstruction of self in the image of the face on the cover” (Iqani 2012: 155). As such, they are perhaps the most potent manifestation of the stealthy operations of modern power – not a loud, external, coercive reprimand, but an insidious internal whisper of self-monitoring and regulation (see in particular Iqani [2012: Ch. 7]; see also Thurlow and Jaworski [2006] for a discussion of how business travel spaces are gendered, privilege is “normalized” and frequent flyer programmes market aspirational identities).

Quite predictably, the women on these covers are young-looking, beautiful, slim and mostly white (see also Machin and van Leeuwen’s [2007] extensive research on Cosmopolitan). By the same token, their male counterparts are also young and only slightly less pale, but they are larger, rugged and muscular. This is an expected pattern of bodily representation. It confirms and reproduces the racially short-sighted, ageist (nearly gerontophobic) and fat-obsessed character of contemporary consumer culture (Coupland 2009; Gill 2009); it also re-enacts an ideology present cross-culturally which views the two genders as complementary opposites: women are petite and need security; men are strong and need to protect (see Goffman [1976] for a ground-breaking analysis of the visual enactments of such gender stereotypes).

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5 Of the thirty-five (partly) visible female models in pictures 1 and 2, thirty-one are white and only four are black.

6 Of the eleven visible male models in Figures 1 and 2, seven are white, three black and one Latino.
The activation and (re)production of a deep-rooted ideology of gender difference is further sustained by the position of so-called special interest magazines. Note in particular how Popular Mechanics, Popular Science and Scientific American are placed directly under Men's Journal, whereas Bon Appetit, Fine Gardening and Furniture are situated near Woman's Health. Such a choice is neither random nor innocuous because it subtly re-enacts a well-spread cliché in “Western” contexts that “hard” science and technical abilities are (and should remain) the prerogative of men whereas more “soft” skills such as cooking, gardening and interior design (should) belong to the female jurisdiction.

Overall, the psychedelic ensemble of gazes, poses, faces and bodies on the magazines’ front pages at Dulles airport produced a silent cacophony of incitements: “look at me”, “be like me”, and “buy me”. Most notably, these interpellations did not “hail” me qua passenger alone, but as a specifically gendered one. (Hetero)sexuality was not absent from this vortex of “synthetic” (Fairclough 2001) calls. On the one hand, it could be said that the heterosexual norm was momentarily disrupted by the direct gaze of the half-naked body-builder of Men’s Health or the scantily dressed model of Bazaar who, from their paper podia, dispense captivating looks to everyone irrespective of the gender and sexual identification of the viewer. Put differently, no matter what the target audience of a magazine might be, the “economic (and perhaps almost ideological) exploitation of erotisation” (Foucault 1980: 57) on its front page astutely capitalizes on both the homosexual and heterosexual “pornographic imagination” (Iqani 2012: 120) of the potential viewers. On the other hand, the heteronormative order was securely restored as soon as I, bored by the long wait, thumbed through the patently heterosexual content of the advice columns in those very magazines that had offered me a queer hope of ambiguous desire.

5 Heteronormativity and its (dis)orientations

That gender and sexuality are subtly intertwined with each other emerged partly from the concluding section of analysis of the newsstand at Dulles airport. Leaving aside for a moment the erotic ambiguity of the gazes on front pages, media scholars have convincingly demonstrated that lifestyle magazines are deeply heteronormative in that they are built on and reproduce the belief that the world is exclusively and inevitably heterosexual (Gill 2009; Benwell 2002). However, heteronormativity is an insidious ideology that not only imbues the glossy, perhaps far-removed, pages of lifestyle magazines, but also pervades nearly every domain of daily life (Kitzinger 2005), including a shop window in a European capital.
The photograph in Figure 3 was taken in October 2011 outside a small retail store in one of the most crowded streets in central Stockholm, Sweden. For contextual purposes, it should be added that this shop is located on the main pedestrian thoroughfare that connects the commercial areas surrounding the Stockholm subway hub of T-Centralen with the tourist-crowded island of the Old Town (Gamla Stan). Similar to the case of the newsstand above, one could contend that there is nothing unusual in displaying two T-shirts with affective statements for Swedes on a shop window in the streets of Stockholm. It could be argued that this is but another local manifestation – imitation even – of a more global trend, which originated with the now historic “I love NY” logo created to promote tourism in the Big Apple in the late 1970s.

The seemingly “banal” aspect of these sexed signs lies in the fact that the larger, loose-fitting, “men’s cut” T-shirt carries a love declaration for women; conversely, the smaller, more tight-fitting, “women’s cut” garment openly reveals affection for men. As queer theorists have reiterated, “a performance of heterosexuality must always be in some sense a performance of gender, because heterosexuality requires gender differentiation” (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 72). What is important to highlight is how gender difference is encoded in the materiality of the T-shirt (its shape), which in turn is embodied in the very name of the cut. This gender opposition is reinforced typographically through the different sizes of the

Fig. 3: Heteronormative?
typeface, which stand as a mimetic normative reminder that men are bigger than women.

In this context, it is also relevant to note the different graphic fill effects of the two hearts: plain red vs. the Swedish flag. With regard to the former, the red heart on the women’s cut T-shirt is perhaps unsurprising in view of the well-spread stereotype in Western societies that women are the ultimate repository of emotions. Similarly, the symbol of the Swedish flag on the men’s cut T-shirt is no less unexpected considering the deep masculinist character of any nationalist project (Yuval-Davis 1997; Nagel 1998). This nationalist semiosis, however, takes a less serious twist when the T-shirt is worn by its most plausible buyer – a tourist – something which can be inferred by the linguistic choice of English. In this case, the Swedish heart could be read as a symbol of a paradoxical act of national identification. After all, the tourist is not performatively turned into a Swede by the very act of wearing the T-shirt. Instead, the heart can be read as a multimodal manifestation of the fetish for an “authentic” souvenir (see Bucholtz 2003; Coupland 2003; Jaworski [2007] for discussions of the problematization of authenticity in sociolinguistic research).

Tourists aside, the two T-shirts are a material/semiotic micro-cosmos of a broader gender order in which men and women are seen as opposite but complementary extremes of a dyad. This, in turn, is a form of social differentiation which, according to radical feminism, is the pre-requisite for heterosexuality to preserve its normative and incontestable status (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 46). From this perspective, then, one could conclude that the arrangement in the shop window was a material/semiotic materialization of a clearly heteronormative ideology: men desire women, and women desire men.

The following discussion, however, presents two problems inherent in this interpretation. Firstly, it focuses exclusively on the domain of representation, thus failing to account for actual consumer behaviour, a set of practices which do not necessarily reproduce and might even contest the gendered and sexual norm encoded in the T-shirts. Secondly, it relies exclusively on one particular bodily orientation (Ahmed 2006). In saying this, I draw upon a basic phenomenological insight that the ways in which our consciousness is directed towards material objects cannot be divorced from the positions which our bodies inhabit in space. As Merleau-Ponty has pointed out, the body is not “merely an object in the world . . . it is our point of view in the world” (1964: 5). And, because of its intrinsic bounded-ness, the body brings with it a specific “horizon” (Ihde 1990), a limit that “gives objects their contours and even allows such objects to be reached. . . . The bodily horizon shows the “line” that bodies can reach toward, what is reachable, by also marking what they cannot reach” (Ahmed 2006: 552).
In this specific case, I was attracted to the T-shirts and not, say, the ice-cream freezer, because their text tickled my queer theoretical interest in issues of gender and sexuality. However, my perception of the T-shirts was constrained by my bodily position outside the store. Not only did my body determine what I was oriented to, but the shop window also acted as a horizon which “marks the edge of what can be reached by the body” (Ahmed 2006: 552). It was only once I entered the shop and started browsing through the actual stock inside the store that I was disoriented by a very different scenario; “men’s cut” versions of “I love Swedish boys” and tight-fitting T-shirts featuring “I love Swedish girls” were also hanging on the stand, albeit not markedly visibly. To use Doty’s (1993) term, this discovery brought about a “moment of queerness”, one of those instants that “destabilise[s] heteronormativity, and the meanings and identities it engenders, by bringing to light all that is disavowed by, and yet integral to, heteronormative logic” (Sullivan 2003: 191).

It could be argued that the non-heteronormative T-shirts found inside the shop were material tokens of consumerist recognition of a lesbian or gay identity.
(Figure 4). As has been pointed out earlier, however, queer theory warns us against confusing “sexual identity” with “sexual desires”. What’s noteworthy about the T-shirts under investigation is the absence of overt sexual identity labels (“gay”, “lesbian”, “heterosexual”) which would fix their referents into stable subject positions. Instead, these T-shirts invoked a more dynamic affective process, articulated through a multimodal combination of a linguistic and a visual element: the pronoun “I” and the visual icon of the verb “to love”. Instability is fuelled here by the many concomitant, different referents that the pronoun “I” may take, coupled with the semantic ambiguity inherent in a love declaration. To overtly state one’s desire or affection for someone of the same gender does not necessarily rule out attraction to someone of the other gender, and vice versa.

In sum, shifting the “horizons” of perception allowed for a more complex interpretation of the T-shirts. Phenomenologically, what had started as a critical orientation to a fixed heteronormative order ended in a pleasantly queer sense of disorientation.

6 Utopian dreams, identity falls

In line with current developments in research on the semiotics of public space (see in particular Stroud and Jegels, this issue), I would argue that a queer investigation of public signage cannot be limited to a critical multimodal analysis of objects in public space such as the newsstand at Dulles Airport, nor should it limit itself to unearthing a researcher’s own experiential understanding of particular material objects like the T-shirts in Stockholm. Instead, it should also entail a sensitivity to the experiences of those people who have created, pass through or live in those spaces, and thus make sense of them on a daily basis. Such an approach is particularly apt to unearth grassroots understandings of the relationships between space, politics, identity and desire with regard to gender and sexuality.

To this end, I now move on to an examination of a coffee-shop which opened two years ago in the main commercial street in Melville, a suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa where I live. In a local travel writer’s words, “a bit rough on the edges, . . . Melville lays claim to some of Jozi’s most enthralling places” (Gardner 2010: 51). Consisting of three major commercial thoroughfares (Main Road, 7th Street and 4th Avenue), this suburb can be described as an historical “urban village” where second-hand shops and niche establishments trading design, furniture and clothing jostle with restaurants, coffee-shops and late-night bars.

Against the backdrop of this urban landscape, the opening of another recreational business might sound fairly trivial. Since its inception, however, Love &
Revolution has had an overt social and political purpose, which is summarized nicely on the homepage of its website:

(1) Love and Revolution is a space where change happens. It is a space where like minded and not so like minded people come to share, to argue, to agree, to debate, to eat while debating, to read, to open up their minds but most importantly, to respect.

(www.loveandrevolution.co.za no longer active)

This description is strongly reminiscent of Habermas’ (1989) characterization of the political role played by 18th century salons, coffee-shops and voluntary organizations in fostering the rational-critical debate that is a pre-requisite for modern democracy to develop. Obviously, such a political drive is also encoded in the “revolutionary” designation of this shop’s name. What is meant by “revolution”, however, became clear to me only once I interviewed Ishtar, one of the business’s founders, a 26 year-old, self-identified “female-bodied”, South African Indian lesbian, who declared that revolution is a “day-to day thing”, and went on to elaborate as follows:

(2) I needed to get away from this whole Struggle mentality, the fact that if you are not struggling, that if your life isn’t miserable, you are not fighting hard enough. And I’m like, that’s bullshit, like, why can’t I love my job and work in civil society and have a personal life and not be an alcoholic?

So I decided to take a two year break, and opened Love and Revolution and trying and do activism on a smaller scale, create a space where people feel safe in and talk about their things, and create a network where people can help each other out, and have each other’s backs, and have a safe space where people can come to and, like, share [giggles], just share, just talk, because sometimes that’s what people need, they just need to talk.

Drawing on her personal experience as an activist within NGOs against gender violence, Ishtar raises one of the many dilemmas experienced in politically active, young, post-apartheid South Africa, namely the clash between (1) the survival of an old frame of reference (i.e. the “Struggle”, the fight for democracy) in defining what counts as a meaningful political act; and (2) a new socio-political context where the priorities of political engagement have shifted markedly, and where young people are increasingly buying – quite literally – into a depoliticized system of consumerist aspiration (see also Stroud and Mpendukana 2009). Without falling into political apathy, Ishtar nonetheless rejects the “Struggle” grand-
narrative of political activism (see also Dlamini 2010) and instead proposes a more localized type of social intervention through a consumerist channel, one which relies less on confrontation than on respectful “conviviality” (Gilroy 2004; Stroud and Jegels, this issue) as a springboard for political action. Or, as Ishtar herself would say, “there cannot be revolution without love, and love itself can be an act of revolution”.

Read together, the website description and Ishtar’s narrative reveal an interesting intersection of consumerism, affect and rationality, of feeling and debating in the politicization of a public space. In this sense, the creation of Love & Revolution is an empirical testimony to Stroud and Jegels’s more theoretical reflections on the ways in which material/semiotic spaces may “create conditions of local neighbourhood engagement and new emotional geographies of place for a revitalized ‘politics of civility’” (Stroud and Jegels, this issue), or it is at least an attempt at such.

However, rational and affective debate is regulated by a particular discursive regime within the premises of Love & Revolution, as emerged quite clearly when

Fig. 5: Inside Love & Revolution
I first entered this space and was met by a large sign facing the entrance (see Figure 5).

Evidently, this is a warning sign that polices this specific space, cautioning against any discursive manifestations of –isms (ageism, sexism, etc.). The message encoded in the sign is that everyone, irrespective of their self-identification and views – those “like minded and not so like minded people” – is welcome in this space provided that they watch what they say. Yet, Foucault (1976) and Butler (1997) have observed that any act of prohibition, whether it comes from oppressive centres or from liberal or libertarian margins, is bound to create an impasse, for it generates those very categories that it seeks to repress (see also Milani and Jonsson [2011] for an empirical example in a school context). What is particularly remarkable is how gender and sexuality are not overtly invoked in the representation of Love & Revolution on the home page; nor are they mobilized on the windows of this coffee-shop through iconic visual references to the feminist movement or the LGBTIA community. In other words, from the outside, Love & Revolution could qualify as another “banal sexed sign” which can easily go unnoticed. But gender and sexuality are indeed brought into being inside the coffee-shop through the warnings “no sexists” and “no homophobes”.

The gridlock created by trying to make identity categories less salient as a defining factor of a particular space, on the one hand, and yet falling back onto them, on the other, emerged even more strongly in the interview with Ishtar after I asked her whether she thought of Love & Revolution in terms of a “gay and lesbian” space.

(3) People assume that it is a gay and lesbian place purely because it was run by two lesbians but, I don’t know. I shy away from that definition purely because if you look at things that are defined as gay and lesbian spaces, if you look at first Friday, the lesbian party, that happens once a month, I would not want to be associated with them. They are [giggle], there’s a horrible music, a whole bunch of only white lesbians that hang out at a big bar and/or try and fuck each other [giggle].

. . .

I try and stay away from using one thing to base my identity on, so I don’t really introduce myself going: hi I’m Ishtar, I’m lesbian. I like many things, I listen to different types of music, I read, I, like, there are so many other things that define me that it annoys me when I go into these, like, what I call gay and lesbian spaces, and that is how . . . you are identified basically on who you are fucking, who you are gonna fuck, and that is the core of your identity, and I’m like, I am so many more things than that.
Clearly, Ishtar does not dismiss the category of “lesbian” altogether. Rather, through a de-essentializing discursive move, she highlights how the Self is not reducible to a single axis of categorization (“lesbian”), but instead consists of multiple co-existing layerings. Notably, Ishtar emphasizes practices – encoded linguistically through the verbs “like”, “listen to”, “read” – as fundamental for expressing her sense of self. Yet at the same time, she rejects facile equations between one’s sexual activities and one’s identity. This, in turn, is the basis on which she questions the process through which people commonly transfer her choice of sexual identification onto Love & Revolution. Taken together, these discursive moves allow Ishtar to downplay the relevance of sexual practices and identities as the only defining factor of herself and the space that she has created.

Of course, it is a truism that discursive moves of self-presentation always entail more or less overt acts of positioning of the “Other” (Davies and Harré 1990). In the case of the narrative above, descriptions of one’s space come with a strategic positioning of the “Other” space. Having refused a sexual identity label as a defining factor of Love & Revolution, Ishtar proceeds to offer her view on what she considers “gay and lesbian” spaces, one in which sexual identity is overlaid with race and sexual promiscuity. What is particularly interesting is how Ishtar relies on an “intersectional” move through which a sexual identity category triggers a racial category in the description of space. In this way, homosexual spaces become essentially synonymous with whiteness.

To conclude, Love & Revolution promised in many ways to be a “queer space” which aimed at creating localized forms of political engagement by fostering a respectful, “convivial” debate and trying to transcend reductionist homo/hetero oppositions. Such an undertaking was indeed satisfied through the many events organized there, including a “Sex Toy Workshop” which gathered a sexually and gender diverse audience. Queerness manifested also in the general atmosphere of radical “open-mindedness” which I experienced during my afternoon visits in search of an “alternative” space in an otherwise conventional strip of suburban “restaurants and . . . late-night bars, each trying to emulate the other” (Gardner 2010: 51).

As Duggan (1992) points out, queer enterprises “carry with them the promise of new meanings, new ways of thinking and acting politically – a promise sometimes realized, sometimes not” (1992: 149). It is this sense of insecurity that makes them queer. The examples above illustrate that treading around identity binaries is a slippery journey fraught with inevitable falls; it is a utopian dream which can be striven for, but realized only in short-lived moments, and thus can never be fully accomplished (see also Milani 2012). Moreover, and this is perhaps the most uncertain part of the story, Love & Revolution was sold, and the new owners relocated it into the premises of a Yoga Studio at the lower end of the same
street. In 2012, at the time of writing of this article, it was unclear whether this space would uphold its political potential or whether radical (sexual) politics would be domesticated in the interests of the economy of a burgeoning New Age sensibility. In 2013, *Love & Revolution* no longer exists; it has been replaced by an organic food restaurant. Perhaps a new *Love & Revolution* will appear in Melville in the very near future; it may also be the case that the new organic food restaurant will gather constituencies that are conscious about the politics of sexuality in South Africa. This uncertainty, however, is after all the very spirit of what counts as “queer”.

7 Instead of closing the scene

Whether with the help of a queer theoretical lens or any other feminist approach (see Mullany and Mills 2012), the main argument of this article is that gender and sexuality should be paid serious attention by Linguistic Landscape scholars, not least because of the political loading of these social categories. If Linguistic Landscape research is true to its radical roots of developing innovative approaches to language-political issues and aims to continue contributing to the understanding of the ways in which language is imbricated in the (re)production of power in public settings, I find it difficult to see how this radical enterprise can be realized without looking at the banal sexed signs which surround us.

I am reluctant to bring this article to a close by indicating the directions in which the study of banal sexed signs should head. This hesitation is intentional because “uncertainty” is what has cropped up repeatedly in many queer theoretical writings (Butler 1993; Jagose 1996; O’Rourke 2011) – a form of insecurity, I should add, that is not viewed as negative, but rather as the *sine qua non* for queer theory to uphold its radical potential and not be domesticated. That being said, one glaring candidate of analysis was touched upon in this article but deserves more serious investigation, namely the body, its historicity and materiality in space. Perhaps a semiotics of bodyscapes (see, e.g., Peck and Stroud, ms) is precisely what lies on the horizon of Linguistic Landscape research, allowing us to interrogate the fuzzy boundaries between “private” and “public” (cf. Gal 2002).

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