

# LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

Expanding the Scenery

*Edited by  
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## INTRODUCTION

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It is the attention to language in the environment, words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces, that is the center of attention in this rapidly growing area referred to as *linguistic landscape* (LL). While language is used by people, spoken and heard, it is also represented and displayed; at times for functional reasons, at others for symbolic purposes. Language in spaces and places is calling for the attention of researchers and scholars who attempt to study and interpret its meaning, messages, purposes and contexts. Such language, that can be found everywhere, is closely related to people as they are the ones producing it and who choose the ways to represent and display it in diverse spaces. People are the ones who hang the signs, display posters, design advertisements, write instructions and create websites. It is also people who read, attend, decipher and interpret these language displays, or at times, choose to overlook, ignore or erase them.

LL touches various fields and attracts scholars from a variety of different and tangent disciplines: from linguistics to geography, education, sociology, politics, environmental studies, semiotics, communication, architecture, urban planning, literacy, applied linguists, and economics; they are interested in understanding the deeper meanings and messages conveyed in language in places and spaces. LL items (whatever ways they are defined) offer rich and stimulating texts on multiple levels—single words with deep meanings and shared knowledge, colorful images, sounds and moving objects and infinite creative representations. These displays shape the ecology in local, global and transnational contexts and in multiple languages. The fast emerging virtual spaces, the internet and cyber spaces introduce a whole new dimension of these displays, open to all everywhere and anywhere, without the need to physically be present, whatever “physical presence” means in the current era. Technology is therefore playing a major role in the growing attention to representations in public spaces given the variety of facilities for documentation feasible nowadays with digital cameras and devices, widely available and accessible.

Within this widespread availability and attention to language in the various spaces, many questions arise: What is LL really? Does it refer to language

only or to additional things which are present around us: images, sounds, buildings, clothes or even people? Can these even be separated from one another? What is public and what is private, in this day and age? How are signs, and people, and languages connected? What role does LL play in policy-making and what effects does it have on *de facto* language practices? What kind of reality does LL create and shape? What motivates people to display language? How do people value LL? What messages are being delivered to passers-by? Which types of language(s) are being created in the public space? How do images and all other representations interact? How different is the spoken/heard language than the "represented" variety? How do readers and passers-by interpret LL? What are the applications of LL to education, to learning, to societies? What role should people take about the language displayed in public spaces? How can LL be interpreted within existing theories or perhaps create new ones of linguistic ecology, and space? And finally, what does the study of LL in its many perspectives add to our understanding of language, society and people? Once the box of language in spaces has opened, endless opportunities for its use are available as infinite ways of "seeing" come forth.

These types of questions are being addressed in emerging research, publications, a growing number of journal articles, several colloquia held in conferences as well as a conference held in Tel Aviv devoted exclusively to LL, where many of the chapters of this book were presented. Thus, new energy has been introduced into the domain of LL since the seminal work of Landry and Bourhis (1997) who drew our attention to language in the public space as a major indication of language attitudes and where the term "Linguistic Landscape" was used. They showed us how LL is a most important indicator capable of providing relevant information about societies, vitality and the inter-relationship of groups, especially in linguistic contested regions. Spolsky and Cooper (1991) drew our attention to language in the Old city of Jerusalem where LL items were used within sociolinguistic and historical dimensions for studying communities and neighborhoods. Whether the study of LL as a separate domain offers a new and unique area of study and a different way of understanding phenomena is still an open and challenging question. As of now it offers a new object of attention, observation, analyses and interpretation with a special focus on the ecology and its linguistic manifestations.

For those working in this area, the language that can be found in cities, indoor markets and outdoor shopping centers, shops, schools, offices of government and big corporations, moving buses, campuses, beaches and the cyber space are important data that need to be studied; it is the absence of languages in some of these places that is of further interest especially in areas which are politically and socially contested. Researchers in this domain assume that language in the environment is not arbitrary and random in the same way that researchers in language learning do not view the phenomenon

as random; rather there is a goal to understand the system, the messages it delivers or could deliver, about societies, people, the economy, policy, class, identities, multilingualism, multimodalities, forms of representation and additional phenomena.

In the earlier work in LL, we noted that the public space offered new and exciting ideas, it showed us that examining language in public space provides different information about multilingualism, it showed us that it often defies formal and explicit policies, that new words are continuously being invented in public spaces, hybrids and fusions of local and global varieties and constantly create new ones to communicate with passers-by. We learned that while "officiality" can affect language practices, the public space has its own rules and regulations, which are often unique as they tend to defy declared policies. We realized that the choice of languages is motivated by stereotypes of readers, of what policy-makers think of them as they construct people as *lingua persona*. We started looking at "bottom-up" and "top-down", those which are posted by private people, i.e. shop keepers versus those introduced by governments and big corporations. We discovered new ways of manipulating language as different patterns emerged and interact. By observing the language in space, especially in the cyber space we discovered that a linguistic revolution is taking place, one that includes "talking back" to set linguistic procedures allowing mixtures of languages, new linguistic rules, new spellings, new syntax, inventions of words combined with additional representations, those of sounds and images, and all displayed publicly.

Ample theories have been developed on language use by people, how they acquire it, what type of language emerges but not very much attention has been given to the effect of language displayed in public texts as sources for language learning. At the same time, it is very clear that little children start noticing signs in the public space at a very early age. Immigrants or tourists coming to new places are drawn to signs as the primary encounters with new cultures in new places, trying to make sense of places, what they mean and which messages they convey. They try to connect these to signs, to the languages they are familiar with and thus interpret new environments. For many the public space is their first encounter with a new place. Ideologues and politicians tend to see the public space as the arena to exercise influence and deliver messages and corporations see the public space as a domain for marketing and advertising with huge financial interests at stake. LL therefore offers a rich domain of "real life", authentic language in very dynamic and energetic uses.

This is in essence the main focus of this very book. It put its emphasis on "expanding the scenery" of LL beyond the initial writings, of introducing broader and more diverse views of LL, raising ample questions, providing some answers and initial hypotheses based on actual research and data. It observes LL from broad theoretical and methodological perspectives to help

us understand the phenomena in the context of multiple theories and in various locations in a dynamic and changing world. It provides us with new and advanced methodologic approaches to better document and understand the public space; it contextualizes the public space within issues of identity and language policy of nations, political and social conflicts. It posits that LL is a broader concept than documentation of signs; it incorporates multimodal theories to include also sounds, images, and graffiti. It claims that LL is not a neutral phenomenon but needs to be contextualized in a contested sphere of the "free" space that "belongs to all"; it thus carries with it major responsibilities as to its meanings, shapes and forms. Finally, it argues that LL has a major role to take in activism in the domains of education and critical thinking. The authors of this volume attempt to address many of these issues, to uncover and discover expanded dimensions of LL, in terms of theory, research, documentation, and applications; from issues of history, personal and group identities to domains of language policy and education; some authors are critical of current definitions of LL and wish to broaden its definitions incorporating multi-modalities and apply LL to education, learning, critical thinking and political activism. This book therefore is an attempt to take LL further, to gain a deeper understanding by examining its relationships to and connections with a variety of tangent fields, in a number of ways.

In more specific terms, each of the chapters puts forward the following points:

In **Part I** the first set of chapters introduce LL within multiple *Theoretical Perspectives*. It includes six chapters with different theoretical approaches to the study of the LL, be it historical, sociological, economic, ecological or more focally sociolinguistic.

The opening chapter by Coulmas informs us about the functions that written words displayed publicly conveyed in an historical perspective. He shows that linguistic landscaping is as old as writing. The beginning of writing, he argues, coincided with urbanization, which is the origin of the public sphere, a concept he relates to the work of Habermas. He looks at five famous ancient inscriptions. The oldest inscription is the Codex Hammurabi from Babylon; the others are the Rosetta Stone, the Behistun trilingual inscription, the Menetekel-parsin, the calligraphy on the Taj Mahal and the obelisks from Egypt. All these landmarks are related to issues of readership and are a defining feature of city life.

Spolsky starts out, in his contribution, with a critical summary of earlier studies of public signage, thus clarifying some conceptual issues as he discusses the problem of the state of literacy in the various languages, which can explain why a language is written (or not) in the LL. He goes on to examine the problem of agency: the process by which signs are produced. He continues to propose a theory of language choice for the study of signs that fits with his own theory of language management.

The sociological approach taken by Ben-Rafael comes from applying existing theories to LL. For him, language facts are "social facts" which can be related to general social phenomena. Similar to Coulmas he focuses on the concept of public sphere. LL constitutes the decorum of the public space, together with the architecture and the passers-by. The formation of the LL is a structuration process based on different sociological principles: the presentation of self as introduced by Goffman; the good reasons perspective involving calculation of alternatives as theorized by Boudon; the principle of collective identity, and finally, the perspective of power relations as presented by Bourdieu, along with Lefebvre's view of LL as a décor of spaces.

Cenoz and Gorter bring an economic perspective to LL. They point out how the LL can be connected to theories of linguistic diversity and to the economy of language research as an emerging field. They propose the use of the Contingent Valuation Method, a procedure that has been applied previously in the study of environmental economics. Applying this method to LL research and theory can determine its economic value by focusing on non-market values. Their attempt is an approximation that can be further developed and changed as it is applied to other areas in the study of multilingualism and language diversity.

Huebner, in his chapter, contextualizes LL within theories of sociolinguistics as manifested by the SPEAKING model of Hymes in order to discuss the problem of the unit of analysis of a sign in terms of "genre," a concept that is also used later by Hanauer. He then focuses on the immediate context of a sign, the authors of the sign and the passers-by as well as "place." Huebner concludes that LL research has to pay attention to the linguistic forms in their context because of the motivations and reactions of those who are affected by them.

In his contribution, Hult contextualizes LL within the theory of the ecology of language. This is another theoretical approach, of which he discusses the core principles. Aspects of multilingualism are mapped through individual language choices in their social environment. LL analysis and nexus analysis (as proposed by Scollon and Scollon) can be used in conjunction to serve ecological research about multilingualism. He illustrates the use of these methodologies by applying them to data collected in a larger study on multilingualism and language policy in the city of Malmö in Sweden.

These chapters are clearly just a beginning of an attempt of a number of scholars to explore and relate LL to a variety of theories. Given that it falls in the midst of a number of disciplines it therefore calls for multiple theories.

In **Part II** different *Methodological Issues* are addressed. The field of LL is expanded further by examining the diverse methodologies researchers in the field use both to collect as well as to analyze LL data.

Malinowski, in his contribution, introduces theories and methods of multimodality as appropriate for this type of research when he examines the