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Discourse and the linguistic landscape

Philip Seargeant and Korina Giaxoglou

Abstract

Research into the way that linguistic and other semiotic signs are displayed in public space has opened up a productive field for social language analysis over the last few years. Often focused on the policy implications – at both institutional and grass-roots level – of public signage, linguistic landscape research has, from the very beginning, engaged with issues of politics and ideology and thus, indirectly, discourse. In recent years it has also begun to theorise the ways in which semiotic artefacts and practices generate meaning by interacting in explicitly dialogical ways. To date however, theorising that is directed specifically at the relationship between linguistic landscape studies and discourse studies has been slight. This chapter explores the nature of this relationship by focusing on select case studies which exemplify the way that acts of linguistic and semiotic display in the public arena operate as key sites for social organisation and for political regulation and contestation. These short case studies also examine how meaning is generated through complex layering of contexts, the interplay between multiple signs, the narrative potential of landscapes and the dialogic possibilities presented by social media which allow local meanings to be up-scaled and reconfigured, thus pulling site-specific semiotic events into much broader discourses.

1. Introduction: defining the linguistic landscape

1.1 Discursive roundabouts

Over a three day period in March 2018, traffic signs in the small town of Didcot in the south of England became the focus for a developing news story that mixed together themes of vandalism, creative expression and the regulative responsibilities of the local authority. An unknown party had altered the road signs at some of the town's major roundabouts so that alongside signs to places such as Wallingford, Sutton Courtenay and the local power station there were suddenly directions to Narnia, Gotham City and Neverland (*BBC News*, 2018a). When the news media managed to track down the mysterious prankster, he explained that his motivation was to change perceptions of the place, which had recently been branded 'the most normal town' in England (*BBC News*, 2018b). For the local council, however, although they admitted it was vaguely amusing, this was nevertheless a case of vandalism and a potential risk to drivers, as it could easily distract them as they approached the affected roundabouts. By the third day of the media saga the signs were removed and a sense of normality restored (*BBC News*, 2018c).

This small incident combines together a number of elements illustrating key facets of the relationship between discourse and the linguistic landscape. Road signs of various different types have been one of the chief focal points of linguistic landscape research since its emergence as a field of study within sociolinguistics. In the case outlined above, road signs are operating, albeit for a very condensed period of time, as a site for the expression of competing discourses about the cultural identity of the town. They function primarily as an artefact that is part of a particular regulatory discourse about behavioural expectations in the public space – that is to say, they direct the way road-users are required to conduct themselves when driving. In this way they map a social representation of the town onto the geography of the physical space. The intervention by the unknown prankster (who turned out to be a local artist) uses the grounded 'reality' of this

everyday regulatory discourse as a context in which to offer an alternative imagining of the town, linking it, by means of a few place names from well-known fantasy literature, with an imaginary universe far removed from the mundanity of local urban planning regulations.

Public signs have both a spatial and a semiotic scope. They are used to demarcate and map out areas of human geography, and in so doing address a range of different sized audiences. As Blommaert notes (2018, p. 85) “the semiotic scope of the road sign is wider than that of the ‘apartment for rent’ sign, and is in this sense more *public* – it addresses more potential interlocutors and excludes fewer”. As the above example shows, it is the wide semiotic scope of the road sign that makes it possible to turn it into a public forum whereby a local artist can inscribe an alternative imagining of the town’s cultural identity. This intervention addresses not only drivers passing-by, but also the media and a wider public who may never come near these roundabouts. Without over-writing the existing place names, the intervention re-writes Didcot on the map and claims a different relationship to the place.

Research into the way that linguistic and other semiotic signs are displayed in public space, and the meaning-making work they do in terms both of identity and regulation, has opened up a productive field for sociolinguistic analysis (see section below for an overview). This has often centred around the policy implications of public signage, and as such this research has, from the very beginning, engaged with issues of politics, ideology and thus discourse. Yet despite this focus, theorising that is directed specifically at the relationship between linguistic landscape research and discourse studies has been slight, at least in terms of addressing the subject in explicit terms.

In this chapter we explore the relevance of discourse studies to linguistic landscape research by examining the various ways in which acts of linguistic and semiotic display in the public arena operate as key sites for the creation and negotiation of meaning. We look, more specifically, at how meaning is generated

through the complex layering of contexts, the interplay between multiple signs, the dialogic possibilities presented by social media which allow local meanings to be up-scaled and reconfigured, and the narrative potential of linguistic landscapes, all of which, we suggest, pull site-specific semiotic events into much broader discourses.

Our aim is to make explicit the different levels of intersection between linguistic landscape research and discourse studies. In the remainder of this introduction we review the development of linguistic landscape research and outline the issues it seeks to address. In the following section we draw up a system of categorisation for the various types of relationship between discourse studies and linguistic landscape research, before going on to discuss and illustrate these in Section 3.

1.2 Linguistic landscape research: a brief overview

In their study of the attitudes of French-speaking Canadian high school students towards the multilingual signs in Quebec, Landry and Bourhis (1997) explicitly defined the concept of *linguistic landscapes* for the first time, and showed how signs in public space act as either a symbol or index for the different language community identities in the city. The research area which grew from their study has typically examined patterns of signage in urban environments as a way of mapping the concrete manifestation of the linguistic diversity of an area in terms of the way that different languages are publicly inscribed in various artefacts (see, for example, the collection edited by Shohamy and Gorter [2009] for an early conceptualisation of the range and aims of the field).

Given that the linguistic landscape has a higher degree of permanence than spoken language it has also been possible to discern historical patterns in the language use of the communities which have successively inhabited particular parts of town, and in this way examine the influence of dynamic migration patterns on the linguistic profile of an area. Researchers have investigated a variety of ways in which the organisation of visually-displayed language in public

places indicates and relates to social patterns of language use, showing how this is predominantly either the result of top-down language planning initiatives – regulations laid out by city councils, for example (Shohamy, 2006) – or of more *ad hoc* bottom-up practices carried out by local communities who lack regulative authority over the public space. Examples of the latter include hand-written signs placed in shop windows (Blommaert, 2013) and graffiti (Pennycook, 2009). In many instances they can, of course, be a dialogue between top-down and bottom-up practices, as in the example of Didcot’s roundabout signs. In context of this sort, the material nature of the sign often acts as a key index of the difference in status, with top-down signs having a more permanent and crafted physical nature (being ‘professionally’ produced), and bottom-up signs tending more to the ephemeral or ‘home-made’.

Even though linguistic landscape research has traditionally focused on “the use of language in its written form in the public sphere” (Gorter, 2006, p. 2) it also includes all types of semiotic display in the public arena. Jaworski and Thurlow introduced the alternative term *semiotic landscapes* in order to acknowledge this (2010), while Blommaert has drawn attention to processes of semiotisation that turn physical space into social, cultural and political space (2013, p. 14). It appears, however, that due to the fact that *linguistic landscape* is the more established term, its meaning has been broadened to include all forms of public texts irrespective of their discursive modality and type of semiotic display (see Pütz and Mundt, 2018). This is thus how we will be using it in this chapter.

Blackwood (2018, p. 221) notes that what he calls ‘Ante-lettram linguistic landscape research’, i.e. research conducted before linguistic landscape research emerged as a distinct field, focused primarily on multilingualism. While this continues as an important focus, the research scope has broadened considerably since then, reflecting theoretical developments in sociolinguistics, such as the recognition of the importance of the body and embodiment in the production and interpretation of meaning (Bucholtz and Hall, 2008) and the paradigmatic shift in multilingualism from stability to mobility which has brought to the fore a concern

with the relevance of superdiversity and translanguaging for the analysis of people's actual communicative practices. These developments have led to the emergence of new areas of study, new questions, and new methods for investigating them.

A major impetus to the opening up of the field was Shohamy and Waksman (2009) who led the drive to expand the field's focus beyond signage to a range of semiotic artefacts, such as monuments and moving vehicles. Over the last decade this expansion of scope is attested in analyses both of *core* texts, i.e. place-names, road signs and public notices and *peripheral* texts, including T-shirts (Coupland 2010), product labels, tickets, banknotes and flyers (Sebba, 2010), as well as non-stationary signs, for example mobile train graffiti (Karlander, 2018). In addition to the visible and material manifestations of languages, linguistic landscape research now also covers the study of various forms of *-scapes* including, for example, the study of "soundscapes" (Scavaglieri et al., 2013), body tattoos making up "skinscapes" (Peck and Stroud, 2015), and ethnographies of urban "smellscapes" (Pennycook and Otsuji, 2015) (for an overview see Gorter, 2018). This expansion of the field has been accompanied by a concern with how the linguistic landscape is produced, consumed, and commodified and how it is invested with meaning by those who experience it (see for example Lou's sociolinguistic ethnography of Chinatown in Washington, 2016).

In terms of methods, the unit of analysis in linguistic landscape research is indeterminate and based on procedural decisions which depend on the scope and breadth of the study (Androutsopoulos, 2014, p. 85). The tendency of early studies for contrastive counting and categorizing of linguistic tokens in a designated survey area that were then used to quantify the extent to which different languages are used in the environment, gauging examples of dominance and marginalisation of minority languages, has given way to qualitative accounts of *signs in context*. Irrespective of the type of data collection and sample size, linguistic landscape studies involve some form of fieldwork, including photographs, (walking) interviews and observations. More recently, the blending

of collaborative ethnographies with creative arts activities has also been used as a method, aimed at encouraging young people to become ethnographers of their own communities (Bradley et al. 2017).

In terms of the concerns of the current chapter, developments in the field have also entailed a shift from the examination of how public signs reflect language hierarchies to how signs work as communicative acts within their context, and what this indicates about the complex and changing sociolinguistic profile of a particular area (Blommaert and Maly, 2014). This shift to the consideration of context in the interpretation of signs is most notably articulated in Scollon and Scollon's (2013) approach to the study of linguistic landscapes, known as *geosemiotics*, at the interface between semiotics and the physical world.

This concern with 'signs-in-place' and their contextualisation is one area where discourse studies becomes particularly relevant. Another such area is work around how physical space is constructed as social, cultural, and political space, or as "a space that offers, enables, triggers, invites, prescribes, proscribes, polices or enforces certain patterns of social behaviour; a space that is never no-man's-land, but always *somebody's* space; a *historical* space, therefore, full of codes, expectations, norms and traditions; and a space of *power* controlled by, as well as controlling, people" (Blommaert, 2013, p. 3).

Interestingly, it is rare to find extensive discussions of the different ways linguistic landscapes research relates to discourse studies; in most cases, discourse is taken for granted, either as a heuristic, an analytic concept, or as a method. In the next section we will provide some working definitions of discourse before moving on to map out the different elements of the relationship between discourse and linguistic landscape research, thus providing a list of theoretical assumptions for study within the area.

2. Discourse and linguistic landscapes

While at the most basic level discourse is often defined as “language in use” (Jaworksi and Coupland, 1999, p. 7), it can also have a more specific meaning, referring to the way that text works within (or indeed, as) context (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos, 2004) or, more broadly, as a general mode of semiosis (i.e. meaningful symbolic behaviour) which reflects, shapes and maintains the ideologies which constitute a culture (Blommaert, 2005, p. 2). In this chapter we understand discourse as social practice of meaning-making in linguistic and other modes, which is at the centre of human activity and experience, also as an analytical heuristic that can be used to address a range of questions (Johnstone, 2018, p. 8). While discourse is a mode of semiosis, the linguistic landscape then constitutes a modality for articulating, regimenting, prescribing and proscribing, reinforcing or contesting socio-symbolic behaviour. In this respect, the relationship between the two is double-edged: discourse(s) shapes and is shaped by the linguistic landscape(s). We can therefore explore this relationship in the way it is manifest in the nature, display and interactions of specific semiotic artefacts in context.

Signs can exist in different modes, or combinations thereof. As Blommaert (2018) notes, the different modalities in which signs are created need to be seen as affordances which have a cultural, social, political and historical (normative) dimension. Signs, thus, have a semiotic scope but also a spatial one: they operate in specific, identified spaces, and demarcate such spaces. They can divide a space into micro-spaces where particular rules and codes operate in relation to specific audiences (for example, a “no-smoking” sign being placed near entrances to or exits from a public building). This demarcating effect also defines identities by selecting possible addressees and making them potentially legitimate – or illegitimate – users of the demarcated space. Such categorisations are also social and political categories in the sense that they set the dynamics of power in public space through claims of entitlement to its use. Instances where such claims are contested can reveal wider social and political conflicts, as in the example Blommaert gives of police being instructed by shopping mall management to

remove groups of young immigrants, homeless people, and skaters who gather in shopping malls after closing time, i.e. after the time when displays of ‘shopping behaviour’ are sanctioned (2018, p. 85).

Signs draw their social meaning from their material placement and discourse(s), as Scollon and Scollon note (2003, p. 2), foregrounding the centrality of *context* in the study of semiotic artefacts in public space (see Blommaert, this volume; Moore and Roth Gordon, this volume). Indeed, a primary purpose of linguistic landscape artefacts – by which we mean any socially and culturally meaningful signage in the public arena – is that they contribute to, while taking their meaning from, the notion of ‘public’ space – that is, space which is structured around ideas of communal identity and shared values and codes. In this way the very context of the public space is itself a discourse. Artefacts within the linguistic landscape are thus instruments which manifest the regulatory, historical, and normative discourses creating the ideological structures for the creation and maintenance of social order. This is only one type of dynamic in the relationship between linguistic landscapes and discourse; below we categorise the range of different relationships which link the two.

1. Linguistic landscape artefacts enact discourses

As noted above, the very idea of the linguistic landscape is, in fact, founded on a specific discourse: the complex of beliefs and regulations about what constitutes public space in society. Signs can regulate communal behaviour in ways which would be neither expected nor appropriate in private space. Specific signs within the linguistic landscape are, then, artefacts of, and ways of articulating and maintaining, particular ideologies which structure behaviour within society. In directing behaviour they are a means of managing aspects of social organisation which, from issues such as traffic regulation to the display of official languages, create the social matrices and indexical orders in which we live. Linguistic landscape artefacts can also enact hierarchies about social identity, for example, in terms of the dominance of certain languages – and

thus language communities – above others, and contribute to the way this is discursively constructed through practice.

2. *Discourses assign meaning to linguistic landscape artefacts*

The obverse of the above relationship is that, just as linguistic landscape artefacts enact discourses, they also rely on these discourses for their meaning. In other words, signs are indices of particular discourses; in order to be able to interpret them, a familiarity with related discourses is needed, and this emerges in and through routine practices. A road sign, for example, is meaningful within the wider context of the social and legal contract which regulates driver behaviour on public roads. Borrowing the example again from Scollon and Scollon (2003), a ‘STOP’ sign being transported on the back of a lorry does not have the same legal or social meaning as one positioned by the side of a junction. We know this because any speech act is reliant on both text and context. Context here is not merely a physical location, but also a regulatory discourse.

3. *Linguistic landscape artefacts become symbolic sites around which conflicting discourses are played out*

As we saw with the Didcot roundabout example, bottom-up interventions around top-down signs can be a means of challenging a mainstream discourse by altering the message of the sign. In instances such as this, two or more discourses come into direct conflict, with the modified sign becoming a symbolic touchstone for social debate.

4. *Linguistic landscape artefacts mobilise further discursive articulation or contestation*

In the case of inventions of the sort described in the Didcot example, the modified artefact often then triggers further debate or discussion in public

forums such as the news media. Such discussions can be in the form of a moral panic or public outcry (at least in the way these are framed in the media), in which two conflicting discourses are pitted against each other. As we shall see in the next section, this generation of discussion and debate can be either purposeful or the result of evolving ideologies in society. In recent years social media has played a major role in this mediating of the local and global, and pulling site-specific meanings into broader discourses.

5. *Linguistic landscape artefacts that are in conversation with each other can create meaning that extends beyond the level of the individual sign*

As Blommaert notes the “meanings and effects of signs... are specific to the space in which they are emplaced and to the addressees they select” (2018, p. 86). Most surveys of the embedded ideologies in the linguistic landscape focus on the semiotic work being done by individual signs (or a collection of such signs). There are, however, also instances where meaning is created not just by the context in which an artefact is placed, but by its juxtaposition with other artefacts, and the discourse that this then creates as these ‘converse’ with one another.

6. *Linguistic landscapes afford narrative potential*

Another important aspect of the relationship between linguistic landscapes and discourse that is worth noting here is narrative potential. Linguistic landscape research has paid little attention so far to the narrative potential of landscapes, despite the recognition that place narratives in particular are intricately connected with others’ lives and others’ stories in what Massey calls *spatial times*, i.e. the contemporaneous existence of others in space as “a simultaneity of stories so far” (2005, p. 9).

In addition to landscapes in the broad sense, public signs also have important narrative potential. As Blommaert notes (2013, p. 16) “signs in public space

document complexity – they are visual items that tell the story of the space in which they can be found, and clarify its structure”. There is, therefore, much scope for further clarifying how signs and other artefacts create spaces invested with affective meanings through narrative. There are particularly fruitful connections between linguistic landscape and *small story* research (Georgakopoulou, 2015a), whereby explorations of narrative landscapes do not only encompass the life-stories associated with place-making, but also those fragmented ephemeral moments of engagement-in-place with key events, past or present, which show a narrative orientation to the world (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 116; De Fina and Georgakopoulou this volume). As the examples in Section 3.6 below show, it is important to look at how public spaces and semiotic artefacts can be used to demarcate *places of affect*, whereby specific narratives along with participant positions of alignment or disalignment to discourses in circulation about key events come to be created and disseminated in specific critical incidents.

There is, inevitably, some overlap or slippage between the various categories described above with the cases discussed sometimes co-existing in the same landscape or artefact. In the following section we take each in turn and discuss them in further detail illustrating them through select examples.

3. Discussion of case studies

3.1 Linguistic landscape artefacts enact social discourses

The ways in which the linguistic landscape enacts discourses is, perhaps, the most salient form of relationship between the two. We noted above how signs help create the notion of public space – how road signs, for instance, operate as specific tokens relating to a legally-mandated set of rules for behaviour within the public space. Much work in the area has also explored how the use of different languages on public signage, especially in environments with politically contested histories, are manifestations of official policies that relate particular languages to

community identity. For example, Tufi (2013) has looked at the ways in which the Slovenian-speaking community in Trieste, despite having achieved equality in terms of the legal status of their language, is still marginalised in the way that Slovenian is not accorded the same status in relation to Italian signage around the city. In this way, she argues, “public use of the Slovenian language [becomes] central to the performance of a material border” (p. 391). Or to put it another way, the distribution of signs becomes a material enactment of a discourse of unequal power relations between the majority and minority language communities.

Another example of the way that signs enact social discourses can be seen in the design of pedestrian signs on traffic lights. Not only do these form part of the general regulatory discourse of public space as described above, they also encode particular cultural stereotypes about gender in their iconography in the way that the default figure is seemingly male. In recent years traffic lights have been targeted for their role in the maintenance and reinforcement of dominant ideologies about cultural gender identity, with campaigns aimed at altering the type of imagery used (*ITV News*, 2017). In 2017 in Melbourne, Australia, for instance, male figures on some traffic lights were replaced with female ones by campaigners as a way of promoting gender equality and mobilising the public through the routine act of crossing the street.

3.2 & 3.3 Discourses assign meaning to linguistic landscape artefacts; and linguistic landscape artefacts become symbolic sites around which conflicting discourses are played out

When violent protests by white supremacist groups broke out in the city of Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 they were initially sparked by a dispute over the fate of a public monument. A statue of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee was due to be removed from its place in the centre of Emancipation Park. For many people this, along with other Confederate statues, was a symbol of the United States’ racist past. In other words, the meaning of these statues as semiotic artefacts in the public space is inextricably tied up with the history related to their

subjects, and the discourse of the cultural and political identity of modern-day America. The controversies over these statues was pointedly political – even if some commentators at the time attempted to argue that their meaning should first and foremost be an aesthetic one. Donald Trump (2017) himself, for example, tweeted against the calls for having them removed by lamenting “the beauty that is being taken out of our cities, towns and parks [which] will be greatly missed and never able to be comparably replaced!” But the fact that disputes over a statue led to violent street clashes, and an extended public conversation about how to deal with historical injustice, indicates the ways that semiotic artefacts draw their meaning from broader cultural discourses, and can become sites for the production and contestation of these discourses.

3.4 Linguistic landscape artefacts mobilise further discursive articulation or contestation

An example of the way that linguistic landscape artefacts can act as a prompt for the contestation of discourses can be seen in the controversy that broke out following a decision by the Manchester Art Gallery to temporarily remove from display the painting *Hylas and the Nymphs* by John William Waterhouse. This was the result of an intervention by the artist Sonia Boyce, who was working with the art gallery on a project exploring the intersection between cultural identity and curating practices. As Boyce is quoted in *The Guardian* as saying, “Taking the picture down had been about starting a discussion, not provoking a media storm” (Higgins, 2018).

The media storm it did provoke was structured around a conflict between two notable contemporary discourses – or what are referred to in the popular media as culture wars: those of freedom of expression and of gender identity politics. Boyce’s project was a means of exploring the practices involved in decisions about how the work in the galleries is selected, displayed and presented, who gets to decide what gets to be seen and what does not, and the ideas of cultural value that this creates in society. In her conversations with those working at the gallery,

the topic of the representation of gender frequently came up: “There seemed to be two roles played by women: femmes fatales, driving men to their deaths, or figures of beauty in quiet contemplation, but without being active agents” (Higgins, 2018). The painting in question depicts a scene from the story of Hylas, a servant of Heracles, who was abducted by female water nymphs; in the composition he is partially clothed while they are naked. The topic has been used repeatedly as a subject in Western art, and is often seen as a metaphor for predatory female sexuality. As an editorial in *The Guardian* (2018) wrote, removing the painting from view “may have been a clumsy gesture – but it stimulated an important debate”, i.e., an intervention within the linguistic landscape became a prompt for a wide-ranging discussion about discourses of cultural representation, as well as regulation of social behaviour.

As this example illustrates, linguistic landscapes and the media (both old and new) are inter-constituted, and discourse circulation is thus a transmedia process. A case aptly illustrating inter-connections between traditional media, social media and linguistic landscapes is the reactions to the terrorist attacks at the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris in 2015. The attacks took place around 11:30am (local time) on January 7, and journalists immediately started covering the events in live reports appearing on television, radio, news blogs, and Twitter. At 12:52 pm (local time) French designer, Joachim Roncin, posted via his Twitter account a logo using the masthead of the magazine featuring the words *Je Suis Charlie*. Seven minutes later, the logo was retweeted by Twitter user, Thierry Puget, who further added the hashtag *#JeSuisCharlie*. This has since been used more than five million times on Twitter alone (Morrison, 2015). The hashtag was recontextualised in media reports as a way of encoding public sentiment around the event, and it also became the topic of many media articles. During the day of the attack, both the logo and hashtag migrated from Twitter onto the streets of cities in France via personalised placards held up by demonstrators. Images of people holding these placards were then shared on social media, accompanied by messages re-using the hashtag as a meta-discursive marker, tagging the message as part of a developing backchannel to people’s rallies on the ground that

remediated the experience of ‘being-there’. The hashtag inscribed a stance of solidarity and defiance into re-tellings of the shared story about the attack, which circulated around the (Western) world (see Giaxoglou, 2018), serving as a resource for what Georgakopoulou (2016) has termed *narrative stance-taking*, i.e. taking up the position of a teller in the here-and-now. This transmedia circulation of the hashtag attests to what Sergeant and Monaghan (2018) describe as a “close choreography between traditional and new forms of communications technology”. The slogan also became part of the physical landscape, featuring as a sticker and graffiti on the monument of the Place de la République, as well as on street walls all over cities across Europe.

The articulation of the slogan in these different modalities afforded a wide-ranging and extensive semiotic scope for the slogan, so that it very rapidly turned into a cultural meme, i.e. a shared cultural reference as well as a public sign of solidarity and alignment bonding affective publics at a global scale (Papacharissi, 2014). The scope of the expression *jesuis* widened to an extent that, over subsequent months, it acquired a more general meaning associated with mourning, solidarity or (dis)alignment. It was then used in the wake of other terror attacks as in the case of *Je Suis Ankara* referring to the bomb attacks in Ankara in October 2015, or the case of *Je suis Orlando* in 2016 expressing solidarity with the victims of the terrorist attack in the gay nightclub ‘Pulse’ in Orlando, Florida. The expression *jesuis* has, thus, turned into an emblem of social identity (De Cock and Pizarro Pedraza, 2018, p. 209) which also explains its use to reject particular social identities, as in the case of the slogan *Je ne suis pas Charlie*, marking some distance from Charlie Hebdo’s humour seen by some as offensive or reacting to what many people saw as an empty expression reducing really complex issues (*The Week*, 2015).

This pragmatic and semiotic extension of the expression attests to moments of heightened interconnectivity between traditional media, social media and landscapes through which local events are up-scaled to global events, creating super-spectacles that unfold across modalities, platforms, and contexts. Despite

their seemingly ephemeral nature, transmedial discourse assemblages are organised around particular narratives, which invite audiences to participate as more or less distant witnesses to key events, and align or disalign themselves to circulating stances to these. Importantly, these also contribute to shaping the direction of discourses about particular events and issues by sedimenting specific narrative positions, hence increasing the visibility of certain voices in physical and (social) media landscapes. This example therefore points to the need to look at social media as part of a wider media and communication ecology in which social media overlap and interconnect with traditional broadcast and print media, as well as physical spaces of gathering (Kavada, 2018).

3.5 Linguistic landscape artefacts that are in conversation with each other can create meaning that extends beyond the level of the individual sign

The way that slogans such as *Je suis Charlie* get reworked for different events, resulting in examples such as *Je ne suis pas Charlie* or *Je suis Ankara* and *Je suis Orlando*, illustrate how certain texts within the linguistic landscape are dialogically motivated by others. There are also ways in which semiotic artefacts can be in direct ‘conversation’ with each other however, creating discursive meaning that is generated by the juxtaposition of, rather than the individual placement of, these artefacts. A good example of this sort of ‘conversation’ is that between the multiple statues that have appeared in the Wall Street area of New York. In May 2017 an artist named Alex Gardega added a small statue of a urinating dog to a site in the Bowling Green area of the neighbourhood which already boasted two different examples of public art. In doing so he was adding to a conversation about gender that had been played out in the public sphere by means of the placement and juxtaposition of statues, and the media discourse that was prompted by this. Gardega’s statue of a dog was urinating up against the statue known as the *Fearless Girl* which depicts a young girl adopting a defiant pose with her hands on her hips. This in turn had been installed in juxtaposition to another statue, that of the *Charging Bull*.

Each of these statues has fuelled a debate about cultural identity – a debate which is primarily based on the interpretation of the symbolism of the different statues, as well as their provenance and placement, which generates a contested discourse of gender politics as these relate to the social context of 21st century western feminism. The meaning of the statues is, thus, being generated not simply by what they depict (and what this might symbolise) but by their emplacement in relation to the surrounding statues.

To recap, the history which forms part of the discursive context for this, the statue of the *Charging Bull* was initially installed without official permission outside the New York Stock Exchange at the end of 1989. The intention, according to its artist Arturo Di Modica, was to symbolise “the strength and power of the American people” following the stock market crash in 1987. Almost thirty years later, in March 2017, the *Fearless Girl* was erected directly opposite the *Charging Bull*. It was created for International Women’s Day by Kristen Visbal, and sponsored by the investment firm State Street Global Advisors. Their stated aim was to draw attention to the gender gap on the boards of large US corporations, as well as to promote their Gender Diversity Index fund, which offers investment to companies who are committed to gender diversity. From an advertising perspective it appears to have been extremely effective and has apparently helped produce a 347% increase in the size of the Gender Diversity Index fund (Thakker, 2017).

The final statue in the conversation is the small dog urinating up against the leg of the *Fearless Girl*. According to the artist responsible, it is meant to draw attention to the fact that the *Fearless Girl* should in fact be seen predominantly as a publicity stunt rather than an act of feminism, and that it also belittles Di Modica’s *Charging Bull* (Fugallo and Jaeger, 2017). Both these issues had been voiced prior to the appearance of the urinating dog: when the *Fearless Girl* was first erected, the sculptor of the *Charging Bull* complained that it violated his artistic copyright because it fundamentally changed the dynamic of his work (*The Guardian*, 2017). For many, including New York mayor Bill de Blasio, this

response was seen as evidence of a deep-rooted sexism in society, rather than being an issue about artistic integrity.

Debates about these various interpretations have played out predominantly in the media. An article in the *New York Times*, for example, noted that the firm behind the *Fearless Girl* itself had a very poor record in terms of promoting women to senior management positions (Bellafante, 2017). In *Rolling Stone* the journalist Helena Fitzgerald was concerned that despite the surface message of empowerment that the statue gave, underpinning this was the idea that the goal for women, as for men, is simply to make more money, which in fact addresses none of the numerous systemic inequalities in society (Fitzgerald, 2017).

Yet at the same time, the symbolism of the urination in Gardega's statue creates a very transparent message. Writing in *Harpers Bazaar* Jennifer Wright argues that Gardega has inadvertently created a perfect metaphor for the sort of experiences that ambitious women endure on a day-to-day basis. Whatever success they achieve in their careers, nevertheless "some remarkably mediocre man is going to come along and insure you get pissed on" (Wright, 2017).

As we have seen, one of the contentious issues about the *Fearless Girl* has been that it takes its meaning from its position in front of the *Charging Bull* – and in doing this alters the meaning of the *Charging Bull* itself. This is an interesting case of recontextualisation as contextualisation which does not involve de-contextualisation. Typically recontextualisation is a transformational process in the circulation of texts which involves the decontextualisation of a stretch of discourse (or an image) from one social context and recentering in another, resulting in a change in meaning (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). In this case, the emplacement of additional statues in a public space re-signifies the context as well as the artefacts without them having otherwise been moved or transformed in any other way. But in re-signifying the context in this way, a new context of interpretation of each artefact is created, extending and contesting the semiotic scope of the artefacts that populate it and opening up a debate about issues

ranging from capitalism and patriarchy, to the influence that commercial companies versus civic bodies should have over public space.

3.6 Linguistic landscapes as narrative landscapes

The semiotic scope of linguistic landscapes – and the artefacts within it – can also be extended and subject to resignification through different narratives and stances made available to publics. The final set of examples discussed below attests to this narrative potential of the linguistic landscape. The examples illustrate the negotiation and sedimentation of narrative stances and positions, the creation of identities and the regulation of affective behaviour and reactions as manifest in memorial-*scapes* and the discourses related to them.

In the last few years memorial practices in the linguistic landscape have started to attract a fair amount of scholarly attention, focusing on the physical and cultural materialities of *gravescapes* (Morris, 2006), their examination as sites of queer rhetorical action (Dunn, 2016), or as manifestations of broader cultural shifts, indexing, for instance, shifts from collective Muslimhood to personalised memoryscapes in the case of Danish-Muslim cemeteries (Nielsen, 2018). Other work is looking at memorial-*scapes* as sites of and for *acts of unforgetting* tied up with discursive tensions around memory-making, as in the case of Hillsborough memorials in Liverpool (Monaghan, 2018).

Acts of unforgetting seem to have become an integral part of everyday landscapes as the public reacts to terror attacks, local tragedies, or even the death of celebrities. These acts involve narrative practices embedded in other social practices and discourses relating to the politics of memory and often issues of justice.

An example of this is the way that, following the attack in London Bridge on 16 June 2017, a vigil was organised and an impromptu memorial set up on the site. This accumulated flowers and handwritten tributes, many of which took the form

of Post-It notes of different colours placed one on top of another (*BBC*, 2017). This wall of tributes read as a single message of solidarity and love, with key phrases such as “Together We Stand”, “Prayers for London”, “Stay Strong”, and simply “Love” attracting the attention of passers-by. The use of Post-It notes here is very different from a Post-It note left on a door saying ‘John, I’ll be back in five minutes’ which acts as a small-scale ‘private’ interaction carried out in a public space (Blommaert, 2018, p. 85). Instead, Post-It notes are used, here, with a much wider semiotic scope, while still drawing on the association with ‘private’ moments of connection. Memorial Post-It messages thus select intimate publics, blending the private and public, the individual and the collective, and the local and global. The accumulation of these messages on a wall in the corner of London Bridge transformed an everyday busy street into a micro-space for passers-by to participate in an event of public mourning, either by adding their own tribute, stopping to read the messages in silence, taking pictures and remediating the act of unforgetting via social media or commenting further in other contexts on the emerging story about the attack. This can be seen as an example of how signs can act as instruments for moving from one scale to another, including a move from the identity of mourner to the identity of ‘Londoner’, legitimising a much wider group of people to participate in the memorial event.

In this case memorialisation involves the demarcation of public space and its reconfiguration as a semi-ritual space for unforgetting, whereby narratives about the event and its main participants are interwoven through tributes contributed by family members, friends, and members of the public. These acts of unforgetting, thus, create affective spaces which demand public attention and invite members of the public to take up participant positions as spectators or witnesses to what becomes a shared narrative about the event.

Impromptu memorials such as this are increasingly gaining official recognition, as evident in the announcement in March 2018 of the creation of an official memorial for the victims of the four recent attacks in London. In this memorial, offline and online modes of remembrance combine in a digital book of hope at

City Hall, the use of the hashtag *#LondonUnited* on social media, and messages projected on to a map of the capital on to the Houses of Parliament, London Bridge, Finsbury Park Mosque and Parsons Green Tube station on the anniversaries of the attacks.

Such sites should not be seen as neutral spaces for individual and collective narrativisation of mourning, however, but also as sites of discursive tension about grievable lives (Butler, 2004) and issues of social inequality (starkly illustrated by the tragic Grenfell Tower fire; see Snow, 2017). Memorial-scapes raise important questions about the politics of mourning and also about story entitlement: whose stories make it into the sphere of public mourning in the form of physical, media, and social media memorials, what (or who) are they about, and who has the right to tell them? They offer a key example of narrative landscapes as “a place of affect” (Jaworksi and Thurlow, 2010) and furnish opportunities for extending linguistic landscape research into the examination of how media and public discourses interconnect, affording and distributing particular stances on events and up-scaling them from local to global levels. This line of research calls for transmedia methods for data collection and analysis as a supplement to existing ethnographic approaches.

4. Conclusion

Scholars are still in some disagreement about the scope that linguistic landscape research should take and the methods appropriate to its study. Among the discussions around this, Blommaert has called for a social or materialist semiotic approach to the study of the meanings and effects of signs in actual social life, adopting an ethnographic perspective (2018, p. 86). As a contribution to discussions of this nature, the present chapter has sought to clarify some of the interconnections between linguistic landscapes and discourse as a step towards opening up the scope of this type research and analysing the ways in which the linguistic landscape is semiotised.

More specifically, we have called attention to the many ways in which linguistic landscapes and the artefacts that constitute them enact and mobilise discourses (and vice versa), noting how linguistic landscapes can become symbolic sites around which discourses are pitted against each other and negotiated. Such negotiations make available different participant positions of alignment or disalignment to particular stances. We have foregrounded linguistic landscapes as sites for creative practices of meaning-making where regulatory (normative) discourses can be contested, extended, or subverted. We have approached semiotic signs as emplaced discourse complexes, which are part of broader communication and (social) media ecologies. And finally, we have called attention to linguistic landscapes as “places of affect” (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010) by pointing to the narrative potential of landscapes for demarcating affective micro-spaces, which attract public attention and create opportunities for participation to specific kinds of events and their storying.

Our suggested categories of the interface between discourse and linguistic landscape research have important methodological implications. They call for the inclusion of data collection decisions that allow a more systematic consideration of (re)contextualisation and narrativization processes, moving beyond the individual sign, or groups of signs in a delimited survey area, to tracking the emergence and change of signs’ meanings in place, by analysing incidents and discourses around critical moments or events (see Georgakopoulou, 2014). Applying this method for data collection and analysis can bring together aspects of signs’ emplacement and uptake across physical, media and social media environment.

Given the issues outlined above there is great scope for linguistic landscape research to revisit its connections to the disciplines of geography and sociology, where the landscape is studied in relation to socio-political formations (Sassen, 2016) as well as its connections to developments in discourse studies, including, for example, critical discourse analysis, small story research and social media

communication studies. In systematically merging theories and analytical frameworks from discourse studies with the aims and approaches that constitute linguistic landscape research, this area of study will continue to flourish as an important window on the complex relationships between language, culture and society.

5. Related topics

- O'Halloran & Wignell, Multimodality.
- Sidnell, Discourse and Materiality.
- Blommaert, Smits & Yacoubi, Multi-scalar contexts – Views of context (beyond the micro-macro). (Moore and Roth Gordon also on contexts)
- De Fina & Georgakopoulou (Narrative)

6. Further Reading

Blommaert, J. (2013) *Ethnography, Superdiversity and Linguistic Landscapes: Chronicles of Complexity*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

A case study of the linguistic landscape of Antwerp, Belgium, exploring the way that multilingual signs chronicle the complex histories of a place.

Scollon, R. and Scollon, S. B. K. (2003) *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World*. London: Routledge.

A classic text exploring the ways in which the meaning of public texts is dependent on a rich understanding of the social and physical context in which they exist.

Shohamy, E. and Gorter, D. (eds) (2009) *Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery*. London: Routledge.

This is one of the earliest collections of work on linguistic landscape research, which gives a good overview of the scope of the field.

Jaworski, A. & C. Thurlow (Eds.), *Semiotic landscapes*. London: Continuum.

This is another important collection about linguistic landscapes, with a focus on language and visual discourse, and on spatial practices.

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