*Dimensions of Sociolinguistic Landscapes in Europe: Materials and Methodological Solutuions*

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*Dimensions of Sociolinguistic Landscapes in Europe* presents some of the latest research in the field of Linguistic Landscape (LL) carried out in contemporary European spaces. The volume collates ten chapters with several approaches to analysing textual material and other discursive modalities, such as images and nonverbal communication. In their comprehensive introduction, the editors stress the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to studying the LL, which, as the following chapters show, yield more detailed and useful results when used complementarily. Additionally, the volume echoes the mounting interest in ethnographic assessments of LL data, which is becoming an important aspect of understanding the chaotic and complex meanings on display in the world around us. The volume focusses on three themes: places of concentrated globalization and mobility; online spaces; and former Eastern bloc countries.

The chapters open with Peukert’s inventive approach to the LL, in which he draws correlations between language distribution and the social function(s) of a variety of spaces. These are structured broadly (commercial vs. non-commercial) and more specifically (shops, hotels, wellness, education, community, etc.), which allows for a useful separation of signifier language and signified content. Peukert produces several interesting infographics, in particular a scatterplot of languages vs. functions on which trend clusters are clearly visible (39). The concluding claim that spatial function might provide a ‘shortcut’ (47) for selecting survey areas is perhaps a little rash, and the methodology actively discounts the possibility (inevitability, even) that language choice might be both signifier *and* the signified. This is arguably the case on signs where the choice of language is an essential part of the intended message.

Chapters two and three, by Koll-Stobbe and Stjernholm, consider the discourses of shop names. The former tackles hairdresser ‘ideofiers’ in London, Lancaster (UK), Greifswald, and Kiel (Germany); the latter considers various shop names in two socially and economically stratified districts in Oslo (Norway). As has been argued elsewhere, the premise is that English names indicate a desired association with global consumer culture. Koll-Stobbe’s claim (56) that ‘grassroots English’ names are ‘only valuable as local shop names’, therefore, is an interesting one. Whilst Stjernholm recognizes the challenging nature of classifying the languages of hybrid and multi-referencing names (87), it is arguably just as problematic that such texts are removed from the dataset. It is also regretful that Koll-Stobbe repeatedly asks direct questions, which are ignored in the analysis and conclusion. Both chapters provide some interesting observations, but both also demonstrate the ever-present need (indicated in the introduction) to support the conclusions of qualitative analysis with the precision of quantitative data.

Laitinen’s chapter continues with global vs. local English, concluding that English does not just indicate modernity in a general sense, but deeper interpretations of linguistic globalization in specific situated contexts. Through detailed analyses of signs photographed in several small towns and villages in Finland, the chapter contributes to the growing scholarship on so-called ‘rural’ LLs. Laitinen argues that, in remote settings, English is accentuated more as a foreign rather than a global/local hybrid language, which has interesting implications for the processes of readership inclusion/exclusion, sincerity of connotations, and the stereotyping/genuine use of local Finnish varieties.

Halonen’s chapter adds to the growing scholarship concerning virtual and online dimensions of the LL. It begins with a discussion of the term ‘Siisdaa’, a Finnish-English hybrid common amongst adolescents on Finnish social networking websites. Whilst scientifically speaking a ‘netnography’ based on Google searches and public collaboration websites like The Urban Dictionary must be approached with caution, several interesting observations are made. The author indeed acknowledges a certain ambiguity to conducting such research, since without assessing participants directly it is difficult to presume their intentions. Inevitably, multiple researchers often reach different conclusions about the same sign. Halonen’s impression of the English ‘ugh’, for example, is that it indicates a forceful close to the conversation (136). This is based somewhat anecdotally on ‘a Native American chief ending his speech’; whereas other interpretations might also include elements of frustration, disgust, or detachment.

The next two contributions deal with borders: Marx and Nekula with the semiotic construction of national identities in an organization on the German/Czech border; and Laihonen with the LLs of two historically Hungarian towns in south-western Slovakia. The former explores a border space that is merged linguistically, socially, and economically, with the aim of determining if and how far this transforms various predetermined German/Czech asymmetries. The semiotic makeup of the business site (a walk-on map, large flags, written displays, text documents) suggests that the management wishes to reverse these external differences, and prompts the thought-provoking claim that a border cannot be crossed unless it is ostensibly marked (175). Laihonen analyses language distribution in a more traditional way, primarily according to agency (state, municipal, international, commercial, religious, civic, and private). The author claims that quantitative LL methods are ‘meeting their limits’ (195), though this conclusion is possibly only reached because his process is rather general, and occasionally impressionistic. Scholarship in this volume and elsewhere indicates a promising future for quantitative approaches; and Laihonen demonstrates effectively the worth of supporting them with ethnographic examinations of sign authors.

Returning to the rural LL, Muth’s contribution deals with Transnistria, a self-declared republic in the Romania-Ukraine borderlands. Following a rich overview of the linguistic-political situation in the former Soviet territory, the author provides several illustrative examples of how it is played out in the LL. Muth’s qualitative selection is discriminate and determined by personal understanding and experiences in the area. It is important, therefore, that he emphasizes that this provides a general assessment of the ‘characteristics’ (207) present in a given area, rather than a breakdown of general trends. Such an approach is of course not problematic when the conclusions recognize this particular limitation. The data are collected from two towns and three villages in Transnistria, and the comparison of language use in the LL with demographic data is equally useful. The LL suggests that this is an area where Russian is actively promoted over local Romanian varieties, which Muth argues reverses the trend in former Soviet territories. Clearly, this offers significant opportunities for further investigation.

Bever provides the most theoretical contribution to the volume, discussing various interpretations of multimodal discourses in the LL. Examples are drawn from various parts of Ukraine, which like Transnistria underwent a process of nation-building following the dissolution of the USSR. This is arguably still an active concern, and the additional afterword, both poignant and interesting, confirms the importance of the LL in contemporary political, social, and cultural studies. Bever is careful to point out the flaws in relying on census data to indicate language status, and the discussion of bivalency in the LL will be useful for scholars tackling related concepts. It is perhaps regrettable that so much room is reserved for theoretical summary, much of which will be unnecessary for many readers. This includes Landry and Bourhis’ seminal but over-quoted description of the LL (appearing also in Perotto’s chapter and cited elsewhere *ad nauseam*). It is a shame that the editors apparently overlook this repetition, as such inessentials arguably detract from the focus of the chapter as described by the title.

The closing chapter sees Perotto examine aspects of the Moscow LL, with particular focus on the use of Italian. She identifies several fields of function: antiquity, architecture and design, stereotypes, and popular culture. The selected examples are illustrative of some of the conclusions drawn about the status of Italian in Moscow, but only as far as Muth’s notion of ‘characteristic’. For instance, one example of a coffee shop sign arguably highlights a specific accessing of coffee culture, not necessarily ‘the food sector’ (269), which is a rather creative conclusion. One must be wary of using examples from the LL simply to support pre-assumed judgements about what one might expect to find — especially given the claims (in this book and elsewhere) that the LL encourages the deconstruction of assumptions in favour of scientific and more objective analyses.

This is an informative and coherent volume, which offers a number of important contributions to the study of signs in public spaces, particularly in terms of methodology. There are rare weak points, such as the unsubstantiated assumption that *coiffeur* caters to ‘middle class elderly ladies or affluent younger ladies’ (66), and the recurrent glossing of the term ‘culture’ which figures 35 times in the index without explicit definition in the main body. The principal strength of this book is its confident and germane demonstration that the LL can reveal both potential intentions behind and possible interpretations of signs. The editors make it clear that the LL is not a byword for determining any kind of singular linguistic reality; rather, as Marx and Nekula observe, it shows how something *could be*, not how it *is* (164). Keeping this firmly in mind, this volume will be useful for scholars and students participating in the growing excitement in this rapidly expanding field.

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