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Linguistic Landscapes and Minority Languages

The Contribution of Linguistic Landscapes to Minority Language Research

The field of Linguistic Landscape (LL) studies has as its focus the representation of language (or languages) in public space. Its main object of inquiry is 'signs', that is, visible written attestations of language and how people—those who read and those who produce—interact with these signs. In this chapter, our aim is to illustrate how the study of LL can contribute to a further understanding of minority languages. Before we move onto these illustrations, we briefly wish to outline why LL studies can offer a particular lens for minority language research that can be highly illuminating.

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First, LL research can provide empirical data on the presence or absence of ‘languages’ in the public sphere, and plot both the geographical and the historical dimensions of such presence, revealing that a change in the public sphere can be due to change in a language policy regime, for instance. As such, it can inform us about the visibility of minority languages, a point that has often been mentioned as important with regard to the survival of a linguistic variety. Edwards (2010), for instance, argues that the LL is one of the “domains of necessity” for language revival. Some of the earlier LL research suggested a possible link between the visibility and the ethnolinguistic vitality of a language community (e.g. Landry and Bourhis 1997), but other voices have questioned this point of view. The LL may be more usefully regarded as a ‘carnival mirror’ (Gorter 2012) of linguistic power relations in society, magnifying the importance of some languages and linguistic varieties and minimizing others. The link between visibility and vitality should thus be investigated rather than taken for granted. For instance, one of the critical points with respect to the visibility of minority languages is their so-called tokenistic use (Van Mensel et al. 2012), when an increased presence of certain linguistic varieties in the public domain merely reflects a wish to be identified as ‘authentic’, in order to attract tourists and consumers alike (see, among others, Marten 2012; Moriarty 2012; 2015; Stroud and Mpendukana 2009).

Second, LL research discusses material traces of language policies but also of contestation of these same policies. It looks at how the LL works as “a mechanism of policy” (Shohamy 2006), how it shapes and is shaped by policy regulations and decrees (Gorter et al. 2012a), and at instances of contestation, when people resist official policies whether in favour or against minority language use. Note that such an approach to research on minority languages aligns with recent trends in, for example, language policy and planning research, which has been characterized by a pragmatic turn (Darquennes 2013), focusing more explicitly on policy *practices* and the actual implementation of policies. On a methodological level, this has led to an increased interest in ethnographic methods (Johnson and Ricento 2013), a trend that is also reflected in LL research. Examples of contestation, meanwhile, include not only the erasure of certain linguistic forms on public and private signage, but also the production of linguistic signs that run counter to official policy. As Shohamy (2015) has argued, LLs can thus play an important role in the enhancement of language policy awareness and even the fomentation of activism against such policies. As a result, LL research has been conducive to gauging people’s reactions to policy measures and, more generally, to unveil their language ideologies. For instance, pictures of signs have been used to serve as triggers in order to elicit interviewees’ positioning towards language use in their environment (Mettewie and Van Mensel *forthcoming*).

Third, LL research depicts and investigates the manifold and intricate ways in which linguistic diversity manifests itself in contemporary (often urbanized) society, a diversity that increasingly problematizes the traditional notion of minority languages as being strongly linked to ethnolinguistic identity and territoriality. Despite this, power issues continue to be negotiated in and through language, and the use of a particular language variety can still lead to considerable disempowerment in particular circumstances (Rubdy 2015). LL methodology has proven to be useful for the analysis of such power relations, and in particular it is sensitive to what happens on the micro-level, the instances of languaging ‘in place’, while acknowledging that these instances are part of a larger discourse (Moriarty 2012). LL research is therefore well suited to tackle recent concerns with respect to the status and use of minority languages in a globalized world. Indeed, one way to avoid a priori assumptions about the existence of language groups may be to look at instances of conflict and contact on display in the LL.

Finally, the interdisciplinary nature of LL research (Van Mensel et al. 2016; Gorter and Cenoz 2017) aligns well with a main tenet in minority language research, namely to take into account the multiplicity of forces that act upon the vitality and status of minority languages, including political, ideological, sociological, economic, and educational forces. If the lack of a common theoretical ground in LL research has sometimes been highlighted for criticism (see e.g. Jaworski and Thurlow 2010), the kaleidoscopic nature of LL research should in our opinion be regarded as an asset in this sense, as it leaves ground for theoretical cross-fertilization as well as the implementation of (combinations of) various types of methodology. Given the (perception of) increased fluidity of language practices related to superdiversity (Vertovec 2007), the study of language-minoritized communities in the twenty-first century may well be bolstered by such an interdisciplinary approach. As Flores, Spotti, and Garcia (2016) argue, “while language plays a crucial role in the perpetuation of social inequalities, [...] sociolinguistics cannot be expected to have all of the tools necessary to challenge inequality. Yet, it can be open to incorporating tools from other disciplines, [...], in further illuminating the role of language”. LL studies are very much part of such agendas.

Research on LLs has proliferated during the last decade, with a number of edited volumes, numerous journal articles (see, for instance, the more than 600 entries in the online LL bibliography made available by Troyer on Zotero [www.zotero.org/groups/linguistic_landscape_bibliography]), the organization of nine international LL workshops and dedicated panels at other conferences, which have contributed to the development of a community of active LL researchers, and, since 2015, a dedicated journal. A summary of general

developments in the field of LL studies is offered in publications by Backhaus (2007), Gorter (2013), Gorter and Cenoz (2017), Shohamy (2012), and Van Mensel, Vandenbroucke, and Blackwood (2016). A fair number of these studies can arguably be said to deal with issues and questions that may interest the minority language researcher, particularly if we adopt a broader interpretation in terms of (language-minoritized) communities that include all speakers of languages other than the dominant language(s) and all language practices that are being marginalized or symbolically ‘peripheralized’ (Busch 2013).

In what follows, we present a number of examples of LL studies and discuss some of them in more detail. In the first part of this chapter, we are concerned with the relation between LL and language policies, in particular with regard to the promotion, protection, and revitalization of minority languages. The second part deals with examples of conflict and contestation. A volume that specifically focuses on linguistic minorities and the LL was edited by Gorter, Marten, and Van Mensel (2012b), and some of the chapters are discussed later to exemplify possible research lines.

Minority Languages, Linguistic Landscapes, and Language Policy

General Issues

As indicated earlier, language policy is one of the major factors which influence the presence of minority languages in the LL. At the same time, the LL is frequently an arena for the negotiation of language policies between different societal actors.

Language policy in a broad sense includes all major categories of language policy and planning: status planning, corpus planning, acquisition planning, usage planning, prestige planning, and discourse planning (cf. Hornberger 2006; Darquennes 2013; Jernudd and Nekvapil 2012; Marten 2016). According to Spolsky (2004, 2009a, b, 2012), language policy consists of three parts: language management (i.e. active intervention), practices by the speech communities, and beliefs about language(s). Language policy takes place both bottom-up and top-down, that is, it encompasses policies by the state, by semi-official institutions, educational institutions of all kinds, private organizations and companies, as well as by grassroots movements and individuals (cf. Kaplan and Baldauf 1997; Jernudd and Nekvapil 2012; Marten 2016). Policies of all types and by different actors interact and collectively

shape the roles which minority languages take on in the LL. These roles are subject to negotiation and to conflict (see the section '[Minority Languages and Conflict, Contestation and Exclusion](#)').

Existing state language policies often stand in sharp contrast to the interests and needs of the speakers of minority languages. The ideology of privileging one national language is the basis of many states which, in turn, frequently implies the marginalization of minority varieties. France is an example of a country where a strong language law restricts the presence of minority languages in the official LL (Blackwood and Tufi 2015). In countries without a strong language policy tradition such as Germany, discourses on the normality of monolingualism (e.g. Gogolin 2008) may create a societal climate in which the presence of minority languages in the LL is rare or restricted to less prestigious contexts (Cindark and Ziegler 2016).

For many speakers of a minority language, important policy aims are therefore its promotion, protection, maintenance, and/or revitalization, that is, measures oriented towards safeguarding the future vitality of a variety. Within the context of the LL, these aims are closely related to the desire to increase the visibility of a variety. Such a visibility often indicates that the variety enjoys a certain degree of attention, and at the same time public presence again raises awareness. As indicated in the section '[The Contribution of Linguistic Landscapes to Minority Language Research](#)', speakers of minority languages often perceive a direct link between their language, their traditional areas of settlement, and their identity as a distinct linguistic and/or ethnic group. Visibility may therefore have effects on the attitudes of a variety's speakers and on their self-security in their struggle for the use of their language being recognized as 'normal'. Simultaneously, visibility shows the majority that another linguistic group exists in a given territory, which can ideally foster respect of its distinct language use.

The presence of a minority language in public space is frequently considered to be an important symbol that may be connected to non-linguistic symbols, thereby creating a link between the LLs and a broader Semiotic Landscape. For instance, the public recognition of a flag, which is associated with a linguistic, regional, and/or ethnic minority, is often seen as an important step towards recognition of minority rights (e.g. in the cases of the Corsican flag [Blackwood and Tufi 2015] or the Latgalian flag in Latvia [Marten and Lazdiņa 2016]). Busch (2013) analyses how even a diacritical sign such as the haček on graphemes such as *č* or *š* may turn into a symbol of the acceptance of a multilingual and multiethnic environment, such as in the case of the Slovene minority in Austria.

At the same time, the visibility of a minority language in the LL should not be reduced to tokenistic presence (cf. also section ‘[The Contribution of Linguistic Landscapes to Minority Language Research](#)’). Public signage in a minority language, in particular on government and other official signs, may lead to the majority considering policies in favour of the minority language to be sufficient: it’s visible; therefore, the language must be in a healthy state. However, the mere existence of a minority language in the LL does not in itself necessarily contribute to more respect towards its speakers’ wishes for more extensive promotion through such measures as the increased presence of the language in the educational system or its use by public authorities. This misjudgement occurred, for instance, in the case of autochthonous minority languages in Germany: North Frisian and Sorbian have a presence in government signage in the areas where they have traditionally been spoken, but signage in these languages by private institutions and individuals is rare. In both cases, the respective regional authorities have, through top-down measures such as laws and administrative orders, accommodated demands by the minorities for public visibility (which they consider as important symbols), but the effects on language maintenance and acceptance by the German-speaking majority population are limited (cf. Marten 2008). In cases where public signage is regulated by law (frequently as a result of long-term activism and compromise), minority activists often emphasize that public signage of their language is not the end of a process but rather the start of a new phase of policies (cf. e.g. the 2005 Gaelic Language Act in Scotland or Sámi policies in the Nordic countries, Puzey 2012; Marten 2009). Tokenism in the LL is often related to the commodification of a minority language in touristic contexts (cf. e.g. Hornsby 2008, on Breton, or Kallen 2009, on Irish), which may on the one hand create new contexts of contemporary use and thereby increase the value of a minority language but on the other hand may assign to it a role as a museum exhibit and thereby even further detach the language from contemporary functions and prevent important steps for survival (cf. Salo 2012).

Closely related to the implications of the presence of minority languages in the LL is their presence in the virtual LL of cyberspace (Ivkovic and Lotherington 2009). Similar implications as for the physical LL apply regarding the presence of a minority language on the websites of governments, educational institutions, private companies, and on private websites, which are indexical of the attitudes and ideologies which shape specific language policies, the popular understanding of such policies, and resistance to them.

Categories of Language Policy and the Linguistic Landscape

Status planning, that is, the decision as to which varieties are assigned which functions in society, is of utmost importance in the context of minority languages in the LL. The LL is influenced by and reflects the official and de-facto status of varieties (which may, in fact, be contradictory). Examples of how official policies influence the presence or absence of minority languages in the LL are, most prominently, laws which regulate which languages are required or allowed on public signage; in such ways, minority languages may either be systematically promoted (e.g. Catalan in Catalonia or French in Quebec which have through consistent long-term policies of promotion largely lost their character as minority languages, at least on a regional basis) or their use may be discouraged or restricted (e.g. the minority languages of France, cf. Bogatto and Hélot, 2010, on Alsatian or Blackwood and Tufi 2015 on Occitan, Corsican, and others).

Most official regulations deal primarily with those parts of the LL to which the authorities have direct access, that is, signage at schools or government buildings, on official road signs, and in similar contexts. Minority speakers and activists may react to such top-down policies ‘from below’, for example, on private message boards or in private companies. An analysis of the LL, accompanied by an analysis of how official laws, government regulations, and language policy documents contrast with demands by NGOs, can reveal conflicting ideologies and policies in a specific territory (cf. also section ‘[Minority Languages and Conflict, Contestation, and Exclusion](#)’). Language practices by the minority and majority communities can be seen as part of these policy negotiations; speakers, may, for instance, produce transgressive signs which add a minority language to the LL or which cross out a language. A famous example of a year-long battle in an increasingly violent conflict was the ‘*Ortstafelstreit*’ (“dispute of topographic signs”) regarding Slovene signs in Carinthia (Austria). Here, the monolingual nation-state ideology of the linguistic majority (German) clashed with the wish by a minority to make its variety more visible (Rasinger 2014).

Status planning is related to discourse planning. Public discourse on languages can establish the presence of a variety in the LL as normal, desired, or undesirable. The LL may trigger opposing discourses on languages (e.g. nationalist monolingual vs. multilingual; cf. Moriarty 2012; Szabó-Gilinger et al. 2012). Official policies may try to influence attitudes and ideologies through active discourse planning, either in terms of encouraging tolerance

towards minorities where multilingualism and an open society are challenged by nationalists or by questioning the presence of languages other than the main variety. At the same time, the LL contributes to discourse, as the frequent visibility of a language can serve as a strong symbol of the normality of its use.

Acquisition planning is relevant to the LL, for instance, with regard to the ability of both traditional native speakers and learners or new speakers of a minority language to read public signage in that language. In particular in educational spaces, the presence of a variety in the LL is often a direct indicator of acquisition opportunities—the regular visibility of a language may encourage acquisition (Cenoz and Gorter 2008). Here, educational policies as well as status, prestige, and acquisition planning interact (cf. the section ‘[Minority Languages and Conflict, Contestation, and Exclusion](#)’ on the role of Basque). Corpus planning may promote the use of a specific variant of a minority language. The presence of certain lexical or grammatical items in the LL may contribute to spreading one variant to the detriment of another or be indicative of efforts to resist the privileging of a certain variety.

The Presence of Minority Language Policy According to Domains of Language Use

One possible approach to understanding both the impact of and implications for language policy and planning in the case of minority languages in the LL is by conducting a domain analysis (cf. e.g. Marten 2016).

The presence of a minority language in the LL of public bodies is usually indicative of its official recognition, promotion, or at least tolerance towards it. In the educational domain, the official use of a minority language in the LL indicates its presence in educational institutions, one of the core domains of language maintenance (Edwards 2010). However, official signage or the naming of institutions in the educational field has to be distinguished from non-official signage. For instance, the name of a school in a minority language points at official support, whereas its presence inside a schoolscape indicates internal policies that promote the minoritized language. It is important to consider whether a language is publicly used only in a specific part of the school (e.g. the department where the language is taught as a separate subject, possibly only to a small number of students), if it is integrated into information on other subjects or if it features on the main school information or students’ message boards (cf. Gorter and Cenoz 2015 on LL inside schools; Brown 2012 is an example of a contested schoolscape in the Võru area of South Estonia).

The economy often acts as a good indicator of attitudes towards a language in society, since official regulations concerning private businesses are usually less strict than those regimenting state institutions. At the same time, commercial signs rank among the domains with the highest numbers of text items in the LL, a dynamic which informed the focus of many earlier (e.g. Cenoz and Gorter 2006, on Donostia-San Sebastián and Ljouwert) as well as more recent LL studies (e.g. Ben-Rafael and Ben-Rafael 2016, on Berlin) on commercial city centres. The presence or absence of a minority language in shop windows, company names, and advertisements can in certain contexts point to its economic strength and prestige. Differences between locally based, national, and international companies, meanwhile, can illuminate variations in the local, regional, and international awareness of a variety. In an effort to appeal to customers from other regions, and tourists in particular, minority languages are often prominently drawn on as a source of attractive differentiation or of an exotic flair which adds to the touristic value of a place (cf. Kallen 2009; Kelly-Holmes et al. 2011; Pietikäinen 2014; Lazdiņa 2013).

Private signage such as small-scale individual notes on message boards shows how language policies can also figure into bottom-up practices, including reactions to official regulations. The practice of naming private homes in the minority language traditionally spoken in an area can point to the link between the language, a place, and the identity of its speakers. A lack of private signage or of house names in a minority language, meanwhile, can be indicative of a lack of confidence among its speakers, a lack of prestige accorded to the language, or a tendency to avoid conflicts by the minority. Restrictions on the use of the minority language even on private signage, moreover, can indicate an extremely prohibitive language policy regime. In some cases, though, the use of a minority language in private signage can appear low in spite of official tolerance. This situation has been discussed in terms of ‘legal hypercorrection’ based on the circulation of discourses discouraging the use of the language (Marten 2012), which can result in speakers using their language to a lesser degree than theoretically possible. At the same time, if there is a considerable difference between the distribution of languages in official and private domains, such a discrepancy may suggest that official policies are not considering the wishes of the speakers.

The domains of the media, culture, art, heritage, and religion are of interest because they often represent areas in which a minority language is relatively present in the LL. For instance, explicit policies of increasing the visibility of a minority language put in place by media companies, individual shops, or cultural institutions such as theatres and museums can be drawn on as a symbolic tool for raising awareness. At the same time, the presence—or lack—of

a minority language beside the majority language at such institutions can be noteworthy, potentially pointing to the restricted use of the minority language in specific niches or to its mobilization in certain sectors as a counterbalance to language use in domains which are controlled by the state. Research in the major Sorbian town of Budyšin/Bautzen in Germany, for instance, shows that Sorbian cultural institutions and Sorbian media create a distinct Sorbian LL in generally highly German-dominant public space, effectively drawing attention to societal segregation and the lack of inclusion of the minority language and its speakers into mainstream affairs.

Finally, international and exterior language policies need to be mentioned; these categories include the promotion of a language by a state outside its borders, such as in the case of cultural institutes such as the British Council or the Goethe-Institut. The very existence of such institutions is symbolic of the presence of a country and its languages in the semiotic space. A minority language may, for example, be included in the promotion of cultural activities by a state or taken up by organizations which promote languages related to each other, for example, the cooperation between different Celtic languages such as Irish and Scottish Gaelic or networks of Finno-Ugric languages. Private initiatives and state funding can cooperate in increasing the visibility of minority languages in linguistic and semiotic spaces, for example, through short-term projects such as festivals.

Minority Languages and Conflict, Contestation, and Exclusion

Many of the language policy issues raised in the previous section are—more or less overtly—indicative of conflict, contestation, and exclusion, dynamics which are the topic of this section. A minority language group is by definition in contact with a majority language group, and conflict and contestation over language use are almost unavoidable. Nelde (1987) emphasized this in his well-known one-liner “language contact means language conflict”. Shohamy (2006) portrayed the LL as an arena of struggles over power, control, national identity, and self-expression. Or, in other words, “the public space is not neutral but rather a negotiated and contested arena” (Shohamy and Waksman 2009). Authorities often try to regulate language use on official signs (and sometimes also on unofficial signs), and thus the LL can function as a mechanism for imposing some language(s) as dominant and others as dominated

through language policies. Often such policies can be enforced, but sometimes they will be resisted.

For the display and visibility of a minority language in an LL, several leading studies were produced in areas characterized by open and strong linguistic conflict including struggles over signage, such as Israel, Canada (particularly the province of Québec), or Belgium (notably its capital Brussels). Different authors have pointed to the relevance of these three sites for LL studies (see Backhaus 2006; Shohamy 2015; Van Mensel et al. 2016). A number of investigations into the relation between minority languages and the LLs in these three language conflict zones are presented next. Some of the studies illustrate the early LL work and others show that dynamic and thought-provoking work has continued to come from those three areas over the past decades. In other urban or rural areas when minority languages are displayed on signage, language policy can similarly lead to conflict or exclusion; this is made clear with some further examples from around the world in the last subsection.

Israel: Dominant Hebrew Versus 'Minority' Arabic

From a sociolinguistic perspective, Israel is a country characterized by the revival of Hebrew and the ensuing conflicts over the use of Arabic, English, and other languages. Arabic and Hebrew are both official languages, but Arabic plays a marginal role and is treated much like a minority language, while Hebrew is a strongly supported dominant language (Spolsky and Shohamy 1999). A precursor of later LL studies was a project carried out by Rosenbaum and her colleagues (1974, 1977) that examined the spread of English in Israel. Their study included a focus on the use of Roman and Hebrew scripts on the shop signs in a busy street in Jerusalem. They reported that about one-third of the signs used Hebrew only, one-third used less Roman script (i.e. English) than Hebrew, and one-third comprised balanced bilingual signs with both scripts. They did not focus on Arabic as a minority language.

Some years after, the LL was examined again as part of a general sociolinguistic study of the languages of Jerusalem. Spolsky and Cooper (1991) demonstrated that a detailed qualitative analysis of Hebrew, Arabic, and English on just one pair of street signs could provide insights into the dominance of languages through a focus on placement (specifically, the question of which language is on top), which is related to the historical change of the rulers of the city in different eras (see also Backhaus 2007; Calvet 2006; Spolsky 2009a, b). They also included a more quantitative analysis of the characteristics of signs as part of a theory of language choice.

Starting in the late 1990s, Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, and their colleagues have carried out investigations of LLs in different cities in Israel. In reporting on their own work, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) criticize Landry and Bourhis (1997; see below) for conceiving the LL as a kind of predefined and ‘given’ context and for not looking into the dynamics or factors that influence its development. Further, they agreed with Spolsky and Cooper’s (1991) focus on change but added that only taking changing political regimes into account overlooks the many other actors involved in shaping the LL. In their analysis of the Arabic, Hebrew, and English linguistic objects that mark the public space, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) demonstrated that conflicting power relations emerge as important. Not only power but also economic interests and identity markers must be taken into consideration to explain the perception of LLs as structured, albeit at times chaotic, spaces. Trumper-Hecht (2009) conceives of the language battle between Arabic and Hebrew on signage as an instrument within a wider status struggle between the two national groups in the so-called mixed city of Upper Nazareth in Israel. In a case study of one shopping mall, she analysed the legal battle that followed the Supreme Court decision in 1999 which ordered the addition of Arabic to all public signs. The decision was not implemented in Upper Nazareth, and Trumper-Hecht (2009) presents contrasting points of view about the legal decision: a hegemonic stance among Jewish politicians and efforts to keep a low profile among the Arab community.

In another study, Shohamy and Abu Ghazaleh-Mahajneh (2012) found a huge contrast between the use of Arabic on the signs in one town, Ume El Pahem, where Arabic is vital and dynamic, and its use on signs in the University of Haifa, where Arabic is almost non-existent. Based on their findings of unequal representation, these authors challenge the concepts of minority (and majority) and conclude “in the case of Arabic in Israel, the term ‘minority’ cannot be detached from politics, context, history, struggle and the conflicts of Arab and Jews as well as the future visions of coexistence” (Shohamy and Abu Ghazaleh-Mahajneh 2012).

Canada: English Versus French as Minority Language

The struggle of the Francophone minority for the recognition of their language is well documented in Canada. French speakers are a minority in the country as a whole but a majority in the province of Quebec. Their struggle resulted in the Official Language Act (Bill 22, 1974), which made French the only official language of Quebec. This status was elaborated in the Charter of

the French Language (Bill 101 1977) and later amendments, which include provisions about the obligatory use of French on commercial signs and only allow for other languages if French is clearly predominant. In this context, some early work on the ‘*paysage linguistique*’ or the LL was carried out. Leclerc (1989), for example, provided an overview of legal regulations about language use on signs around the world, while Monnier (1989) surveyed the *paysage linguistique* in the commercial sector of Montreal.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) explicitly mention their awareness at the time that the ‘LL’ (*paysage linguistique*) was emerging as a notion in francophone publications on language planning, and they wanted to draw attention to the significance of signage for language policy and the ethnolinguistic vitality of French as a minority language. They provide some reflections about the LL as an “immediate index of the relative power and status of linguistic communities inhabiting a given territory” (Landry and Bourhis 1997). Their insights and in particular their definition of the LL were picked up in later publications. However, they themselves did not include actual language use on signs as part of their study, because they were foremost interested in the perceived vitality of French among secondary school students in Canada.

Some years later, Dagenais and her colleagues (2009) used the LLs in Montreal and Vancouver as a resource for research on the literacy practices of elementary school children and their awareness of the linguistic items in their urban environment. This study widened the focus from questions centred on the minority language French, to issues of multilingualism and language diversity. It was an example that inspired other researchers in non-minority contexts, such as Clemente and her colleagues (2012) who employed a similar strategy in a primary school in Portugal for a project called “learning to read the world, learning to read the linguistic landscape”.

Belgium: Dutch as a Minority and French as a Majority Language

Language conflict is often seen as a distinctive trait of Belgium (Janssens 2015). Standard French was historically the dominant language, with Flemish (Dutch) and Walloon (French) positioned as dominated vernaculars. Over a long period, legal arrangements were put into place, which effectively divided Belgium into officially French and Dutch monolingual territories, with a small area in the eastern part where German is an official minority language. The main exception is the capital of Brussels, which is officially bilingual. Historically it was a Flemish city, but over time French has taken a more

prominent position. Local language policy dictates strict equality in the use of Dutch and French on official signage. However, unlike in Québec, language choice on private signage is left unregulated.

In 1976, Tulp (1978) undertook a pioneering study of the Brussels LL. She focused on the distribution of Dutch and French on about 1200 large advertising billboards and found that over a quarter (27.7%) was in Dutch, with substantial differences between neighbourhoods. She concluded that the overall image of the city is predominantly French, not bilingual (Tulp 1978). She also points out that there is no code-switching between Dutch and French due to the social conflict over those two languages. Tulp's study was partially replicated in 1992 by Wenzel (1998), who then found that almost 10% of all posters were in English (only) and less than 1% were bilingual Dutch-English or French-English. She suggests that using English could be a way to “*avoid Brussels' language problems*” (Wenzel 1998). In a study carried out in 2009–10, Vandembroucke (2015) found that French remains the dominant language in Brussels, but in some locations Dutch and English have similar levels of visibility at around 20% of signage.

In recent years, one of the most heated language battles has been fought in the so-called Flemish periphery of Brussels, where some special services for the numerical minority of French speakers are in place. Janssens (2012) found that local authorities try to enforce the use of Dutch in the LL through campaigns (the soft approach) and by blurring the legal limits of federal legislation (the hard approach). In recent quantitative and qualitative work on Brussels, Vandembroucke (2015, 2016) studied the increased language diversity generated by demographic shifts and the impact of globalization in relation to the presence of English. She observes that the diversity of the population, particularly in light of the arrival of many different migrant minority groups, is “not fully or representatively reflected in the visually displayed landscapes of the city” (2015), and she concludes that different forms of globalization lead to variability in the use of English in the LL (2016).

The LL studies in Brussels point to the dynamics of the language conflict between Dutch, numerically the minority language, and French as the dominant language. The studies also demonstrate that over a period of four decades, English has spread throughout the public space. English may in quantitative terms be in a minority position, but it increasingly serves majority functions. Van Mensel, Vandembroucke, and Blackwood (2016) conclude that “in a city like Brussels it is rather difficult – if not almost impossible – to come across a street or square where there is no English to be seen in the landscape”. This implies a dramatic change from 1976, when there was hardly any English. Several other languages such as Chinese or Arabic have also become regular

features of the LL. Today the LL of Brussels can be characterized as diverse, multilingual, and an “intelligible chaos” (Ben-Rafael and Ben-Rafael 2012). In Brussels, as in almost any city around the world, due to globalization and other forces, English accompanied by a diversity of other languages have increasingly gained a remarkable presence in LLs, often at the cost of the visibility of local languages.

Van Mensel and Darquennes (2012) discussed the case of the German minority in eastern parts of Belgium, under the title “*All is quiet on the Eastern front*”. They could not anticipate that in the autumn of 2014 and spring of 2015, conflict over languages used on signs would briefly flare up. In this case, billboards placed along the main motorways coming from Germany were painted over because the word ‘*Walloon region*’ was used instead of ‘*German community*’ in combination with the word ‘*Welcome*’ in four languages.¹

The strict regulations about language use on signage in both Brussels and Montreal have led to linguistic practices that succeed in avoiding the legal limitations by using signs that can be read bilingually. Mettewie and her colleagues (2012) call those ambiguous signs “bilingual winks” (*clins d’oeil*), citing such examples as the use of *bootik* (for French *boutique* and Dutch *boetiek*) in Brussels and *chouchou* (for a shoe shop) in Montreal. The phenomenon of winks is more prominent in Montreal than Brussels, likely due to a certain extent of the differences in language policy and language policing. In Brussels, all official signage is strictly bilingual while private or commercial language choice is left unregulated, but in Montreal Law 101 imposes French as the dominant language in commercial as well as public signage. These bilingual winks can reflect local power relations or serve as expressions of identity (see also Lamarre 2014 for a more elaborate analysis of ‘winks’ in Montreal).

The Basque Country, Friesland, and Other Minority Language Communities

As was suggested earlier, the use of minority languages in the LL may be contested, suppressed, or even neglected. We made clear that language legislation and policies are often designed to protect and promote the use of minority languages in certain domains, which often include signage in public space. Cenoz and Gorter (2006) studied the LLs of a main shopping street in Donostia-San Sebastián in the Basque Country (Spain) and in Leeuwarden-Ljouwert in Friesland (the Netherlands) and then compared the use of minority languages (Basque and Frisian) alongside the state language (Spanish and Dutch) and English as an international language. One of the outcomes of

their study is that the strong language policy to promote Basque as a minority language in the Basque Country contributes substantially to its greater visibility. In contrast, the use of Frisian is much more limited because the language policy is relatively weak and does not include signage as an important issue. They argued that the LL is ‘bidirectional’ because, on the one hand, it reflects the relative power and status of the different languages. On the other hand, however, the LL can also serve to contribute to the construction of the socio-linguistic context.

Tufi (2016) presents an interesting case of a minority that achieved legal recognition, but not equality, in the LL by focusing on the visibility of Slovenian in Italy. Her study is a follow-up to a large-scale LL study in various cities and islands in Mediterranean coastal areas in Italy and France (Blackwood and Tufi 2015). That study also includes information on the minority languages Corsican, Catalan, and Occitan, as well as less well-known languages like Genoese (from Genoa), Monegasque (from Monaco), Neapolitan (from Naples), Nissart (from Nice), Sardinian (on the island of Sardinia), Sicilian (on the island of Sicily), and other migrant languages. Slovenian is a minority language in the province and the city of Trieste in an area along the Italian border with Slovenia, where it is the official majority language. The area has a history of severe conflict, including displacement, discrimination, oppression, and violence between ethnic Slavs and ethnic Italians. After World War I, the city of Trieste (Trst) became an Italian territory, and the conflict about the border only reached a conclusive legal settlement in 1954. Today the Slovenian minority is socially, economically, and culturally well organized. However, in the city of Trieste, where about 10% of the inhabitants are of Slovenian origin, the Slovenian language is hardly visible in the LL, and the local variety Triestino is almost entirely invisible. In contrast, in the surrounding province, there is a much higher number of markers of Slovenian for all kinds of uses, even though monolingual signs on their own are uncommon. Certain local social actors seek to position Slovenian as a majority language, but the relative quantities of private signs in Slovenian in Trieste fall far below the numbers for majority languages that Blackwood and Tufi (2015) found in other comparable shopping streets in other cities. Tufi (2016) concludes that “the LL articulates the awareness that Slovenian is not the dominant language in the local linguistic market”. This example illustrates not only the importance of visibility for minority languages, but also general factors that play a role in many other minority language contexts, such as long-term historical and political developments, contrasts between urban and rural areas, socio-economic organization and identity.

In another study on minority languages, Mendisu, Malinowski, and Woldemichael (2016) focused on the visibility of two local languages, Gedeo and Koorete, on public signage in two towns in Southern Ethiopia. Federal policies in the 1990s led to the recognition of some 90 regional languages in Ethiopia, which increased the use of at least a number of these languages in education, official documents, and the media. The same official recognition included a 're-profiling' of the LL and accord a presence to some minority languages not displayed before. This was already shown in a study by Lanza and Woldemariam (2009) in relation to the Tigrinya language in Mekelle, a regional capital in the north of Ethiopia. In that context, Tigrinya obtained a relatively high presence in the LL, but other minority languages in the region, such as Iron, Kunama, and Agaw, remained absent. Mendisu et al. (2016) found that Gedeo has only a minor position as it is used on less than 8% of all signs while Koorete is completely absent from the local LL. They conclude that this can "raise serious questions about possibilities for representation, rights and the meaning of 'multilingualism' in and for Ethiopia's future". These studies on Ethiopia also illustrate the unequal treatment different minority languages can receive, even within the same state.

The edited collection by Rubdy and Ben Said (2015) deals with different studies related to conflict, exclusion, and dissent. The exclusion of minority languages from the LL is the topic of studies on the Irish language in the town of Ennis (Thistlethwaite and Sebba 2015) and on Spanish in the town of Independence, Oregon, in the US (Troyer et al. 2015). Although Irish is the first official language of Ireland, in daily life it functions much as a minority language. Thistlethwaite and Sebba (2015) carried out an analysis of the signage and conducted interviews with shop owners in a small town on the West Coast of Ireland. They state that the amount of Irish on signage may seem substantial, but the number of Irish signs placed on display as a result of private initiative is very small and influenced by governmental campaigns. This is what the authors call the "passive exclusion of Irish" from the LL.

In a similar study Troyer, Cáceda, and Giménez Eguíbar (2015) discuss the use of Spanish in the LL in a small rural town in the Western US. Spanish is spoken by a minority of the population of 8500 inhabitants, of whom 35% reports Spanish as their home language. The authors used a quantitative method to establish language distribution on the signs and interviewed a limited number of business owners. They found that 11% of all public signs contained Spanish, most in combination with English and exceptionally on its own. The interviews revealed a general lack of awareness of the importance of language choice in the LL. The reasons given for the exclusion of Spanish on the signs were related to intolerance of and negative associations with Spanish on the part of Anglo-Americans, which confirms the minority position of Spanish.

Conclusions and Future Perspectives

In this chapter we argue that the study of the LL—signs in (semi-) public space and people’s interactions with those signs—can contribute greatly to research into minority languages and minority communities (see also Gorter et al. 2012b).

The kaleidoscopic nature of the LL field, in terms of both theoretical and methodological approaches, will prove to be a valuable asset for the investigation of minority languages in the future, as globalization processes of various kinds (political, social, cultural, economic) continue to impact on how people use languages and experience multilingualism. But perhaps an even more important asset of the LL field is its own ‘playground’—the material instances of language in public space—as it represents an arena in which a range of these globalization processes (or rather the traces thereof) can be observed. The omnipresence of ‘global English’, processes of urbanization, increased mobilities, the opening (and closing again) of borders, and digital connectivity are just some of the phenomena that are likely to have an impact on minority languages and their speakers around the globe. Moreover, these phenomena are all happening at the same time, and, interestingly, their linguistic traces can all—and simultaneously—be observed in the LL. One can thus argue that it is precisely the nature of the field’s object of inquiry that makes it ideally suited to tackle issues of simultaneity. Also, and related to the previous point, LL research often (but not always) starts by looking at the micro-level, that is, at the heterogeneity of languaging practices in the public space, before moving onto macro-interpretations. If research on minority languages follows recent trends in the field of language policy and planning, in which attempts are being made to combine micro- and macro-perspectives (e.g. Johnson and Ricento 2013), the LL is obviously one of the aspects that can and should be looked at.

Minority languages and communities have traditionally been defined by strong links between language, ethnolinguistic identity, territoriality, and the state. One of the consequences of globalization is that these links have become less clear, and as we discussed before, what constitutes a majority or a minority is not as easily identifiable as it was before. Many minority groups continue to adhere to an essentialist perception of their identity. Often members of minorities know well what they consider to be their ‘heartland’, even if many of them live elsewhere. The gradual erosion of what may be called a modernist view of linguistic minorities does not take away a fundamental concern with speakers who are marginalized through language. For instance, even if we can see that “the commodification of language and ethnicity as a condition of globalized marketplaces (Heller 2003, 2011) touches all language varieties

and speakers alike, the weakest are likely to suffer most from this development” (Van Mensel et al. 2016), and the discussion of tokenism we presented earlier should be understood in the same light. In a similar vein, Piller (2016) reminds us of the fact that linguistic diversity is rarely neutral but instead is most often accompanied by linguistic stratification and subordination. Therefore, as Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes (2013) argue, the complex interplay of various processes of globalization “call for examination of the different ways in which peripheralization and centralization happen, forcing us to ask how a particular kind of multilingualism in a particular kind of site becomes constructed as peripheral or as central, with what kind of consequences, driven by whom, and with effects for whom”. This is an interesting avenue for future research on minority languages and communities, and in our opinion, the study of the LL can definitely contribute to this endeavour. Those studies can also look into such matters as reactions to globalization among minority language groups in relation to the contemporary multiplicity of identities or reactions to majority policies or processes of glocalization.

LL scholarship looks at investigating ‘signs-in-place’, that is, LL scholars analyse the social and cultural placement of signs and aim to describe “the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses” (Scollon and Scollon 2003). As a result, questions of authorship, readership, and function automatically emerge. Put simply, researchers consider the ‘who?’, ‘why?’, and ‘why here?’ of the presence of particular signs in particular places, as well as the reactions that these signs trigger, questions that clearly echo Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes’s concerns mentioned earlier. As a corollary, LL studies can provide important insights with respect to the language ideologies that underlie processes of centralization and peripheralization. Not so much in the sense that the LL can to a certain extent (rightly) be considered a reflection of these ideologies but, as Moriarty (2012) illustrates, because language ideologies regarding the use of minority languages are often negotiated and performed in the LL. In contrast to synchronic studies, the LL can thus become a tool to investigate how ideologies develop over time, how they are asserted, contested, and negotiated, or, in other words, how they contribute to the construction of minority versus majority or centre versus periphery.

In sum, the study of the LL has considerable potential for research on minority languages and communities, and in the future more research in the field could be conducted along the lines outlined earlier, including foci on language policies and on contestation, conflict, and exclusion. Since the LL is clearly one of the sites where processes of minoritization take place, LL data are likely to make their way into studies that focus on issues of social and linguistic injustice in the future.

Note

1. <http://ostbelgiendirekt.be/jetzt-auch-schild-in-lichtenbusch-beschmiert-67737>, <http://www.sp-dg.be/blog/2014/11/20/servaty-willkommen-in-der-dg-belgiens-passt-besser/>

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