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Negotiating and Contesting Identities in Linguistic Landscapes

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BLACKWOOD, ROBERT, ELIZABETH LANZA, AND HIRUT WOLDEMARIAM, eds. *Negotiating and Contesting Identities in Linguistic Landscapes*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. 288 pp.

The first international Linguistic Landscape Workshop was held in Tel Aviv in 2008. From this conference, the widely cited *Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery* was published. Since then, books have been generated from the research presented at each international symposium. *Negotiating and Contesting Identities and Linguistic Landscapes* arises from the fourth Linguistic Landscape Workshop held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in February of 2012. This is reflected in that nearly half of the book is dedicated to studying the linguistic landscapes of the African continent. From cities in Egypt and Tunisia to those in South Africa, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, we see a breadth of languages and dialects analyzed. The editors explain that Africa provides a productive site of study due to its diversity, multilingualism, and multiculturalism, stating that the “unique and distinctive elements of the linguistic and socio-political disputes in Africa are better reflected on the LL” (xxiii). While this is the first volume mainly dedicated to linguistic landscape studies in Africa, it is most likely not the last. The sixth Linguistic Landscape Workshop in 2014 took place in Cape Town, thus we may soon see another book with a large emphasis on languages in African urban and public spaces as well.

As with Eckert’s triad of waves of variation studies, there have been three waves of linguistic landscape studies. The field began studying written language in the public space from a quantitative standpoint (xvii). Many credit Landry and Bourhis as founders of the field, even though there were some lesser-known antecedents. Then, more qualitative studies began to emerge using methodologies including interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and semiotic analyses. More recently, including at the eighth Linguistic Landscape Workshop in Liverpool in April of 2016, triangulation approaches and mixed methods have come as the third wave. This book contains predominantly qualitative studies, placing it in the second wave. Some of the volume’s studies approach quantitative analysis by using larger corpuses and descriptive statistics such as percentages of linguistic occurrences (cf. Barni and Bagna; Ben-Rafael and Ben-Rafael; Gallina; Tufi); however, no inferential statistics are employed throughout the book.

The volume's title highlights three main themes as they pertain to linguistic landscapes: identity, negotiation, and contestation. The editors understand the concept of identity as something that is performed and therefore ever-changing, as opposed to fixed (cf. Mary Bucholtz and Hall; Banwell and Stokoe). Furthermore, they conceive of identity as something that can be negotiated continuously and affirm that both the process of these negotiations and their resulting forms can be seen in the linguistic landscape. Similarly, the idea of "negotiation" references "a continuum of processes in which various degrees of power are manifested and engaged, some of which may end in contestation and revolt" (xviii). In short, these notions are not static. Divided into five sections of three chapters each, the volume spans various countries, realms of public spaces, and methodological and theoretical frameworks, which will be discussed below. The five sections are the following: (1) Political and Economic Dimensions of Identity Constructions, (2) Protest and Contestation of Identities in the Linguistic Landscape, (3) Negotiating Regional and National Identities, (4) Negotiating Collection Identities, and (5) Identity Constructions from a Comparative Perspective.

The first section looks at how identities are constructed from political and economic standpoints. Individual case studies and comparative analyses are employed to discuss ideas such as the politics of place and the shifting idea of citizenship, as well as how passersby consume and produce the linguistic landscape in a given place. The economic perspectives include analyses of the commodification of language and dynamic, consumer-oriented identities for commercial purposes, tourism, and street art. Regarding contestation, the second section of the book looks at social protests and how identities are challenged in the linguistic landscape. Sections three and four examine how identities are negotiated from a collective standpoint and from a geopolitical standpoint; that is, from regional and national points of view. While many of the chapters analyze individual case studies, the fifth section addresses the construction of identities from a comparative approach.

The diversity of this volume allows for it to serve a wide range of research interests, given that it contains an array of theories, methodological approaches, materials of analysis, and areas of study. While many of the investigations in this book were conducted in African countries, several other countries were included in the scope of

research: Germany, Italy, Moldova, Belarus, Israel, England, France, South Korea, and the United States. We see languages and their dialects analyzed as they appear in market stalls, on posters, menus, walls, and placards, in addition to commercial and official signs. Going beyond traditional approaches, the authors incorporate poetry, art exhibitions, student performances, and soundscapes into the media studied. That is, in addition to cityscapes, contributors engage with classrooms and campuses, soccer stadiums and art festivals, as well as sites of protest, both virtual and in vivo. Diverse methods such as Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon), qualitative content analysis (Mayring), macro and micro linguistic analyses, and interviews are complemented by theories of multimodality (Juffermans; Zabrodskaja and Milani; Kress), multilingualism (Gorter; Lytra; Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck), space (Pennycook; Lefebvre), and identity (Pavlenko and Blackledge; Coupland).

Leading thinkers in the field contribute to the collection, including the co-editors of the journal *Linguistic Landscapes*, Elana Shohamy and Eliezer Ben-Rafael. In their multimodal study, Shohamy and Waksman discuss social protests in Israel and how they are recontextualized in the linguistic landscape of an educational institution in Tel Aviv. Ben-Rafael and Ben-Rafael analyze “Big Commercial Names” such as “Adidas” in Berlin, showing that their presence can serve as “markers of the contemporary consumer civilization” (209). Two of the three volume editors also contribute chapters. Blackwood, along with coauthor Yigezu, examines Harari linguistic identity in the city of Harar, Ethiopia. They discover that although official policies increase the visibility of the non-dominant language, aiming to tie it to culture and identity, these measures are not reflected in the bottom-up practices of individuals and small businesses. The concluding chapter of the book is written by Lanza along with Williams. The authors show how multilingual speakers’ voices can be seen in the linguistic landscape of Bellville, South Africa and perform an especially interesting analysis of how Somali immigrants infuse the public space with their own culture.

Despite the numerous contributions of this volume to the field, there are aspects that could be enhanced. Linguistic Landscape Studies has been considered a subdivision of the field of Visual Studies. That is, it examines not only the linguistic but also the aesthetic dimensions of language, using analyses of coloration and discoloration to

understand how colors signify. For example, when the colors of a flag are used in a sign, political support or national identification can be inferred. An announcement in Los Angeles reading “se habla español” appearing in green, white, and red would not lead you to believe that Argentine Spanish is spoken in that location but rather Mexican Spanish. Colors can also provide insight into the age of a sign, introducing a temporal dimension for analysis. Similarly, gender, youth, or season of the year can be emphasized by using pastels instead of dark colors. “Children’s Clothing” displayed in pink and blue letters versus in red and black would imply a different meaning.

Colors and presentation are important for one of the central topics of this volume: identity. Given the importance of visuals in linguistic landscape research, the images included in the book are crucial, but do not appear in color, despite the assertion that “colours play a meaningful role” (170). In fact, Kress and Van Leeuwen’s semi-otic approach to analyzing social discourse in which “colour plays a role equal to language” is used (187). Furthermore, there are sixty instances of the word “colour” occurring in eleven of the fifteen chapters, thus evidencing the significance of aesthetic detail in the images. While costs of publication are always a concern, and printing in color can drive up expense, publishers of future editions and other linguistic landscape works may consider making that investment or developing a companion website to allow for fuller representation of images, since visual analyses are such a main component of the field.

Overall, *Negotiating and Contesting Identities in Linguistic Landscapes* represents an invaluable contribution, since it is the first collection of works dedicated to the concept of identity within linguistic landscapes. In addition to being of great interest to those who conduct identity research, it will be of merit for linguistic landscape scholars—particularly those who are interested in qualitative investigations—and those who study language in Africa.

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