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Editorial: ideology and commemoration in the urban space

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Abstract: In this editorial, we outline the theoretical framework underpinning the contributions to this volume, providing a succinct overview of the development of linguistic landscape research and pointing to the unexplored areas of overlap with its neighbouring disciplines, including critical toponymy, collective memory studies, language planning and policy and critical discourse studies. In doing so, we position the articles in this special issue with respect to current themes in research on the ideological struggles over the semiotic landscape.

Keywords: collective memory; commemoration; critical toponymy; ideology; language planning policy; linguistic landscape; street renaming

1 Introduction

Whereas public commemorative practices are a ubiquitous feature of the linguistic landscape, it is political events – such as most recently those connected with the #BlackLivesMatter movement – that bring into sharp focus the political volatility of urban toponymy. This special issue explores the processes and patterns behind ongoing changes in denotational choices regarding streets, bridges and public buildings. In particular, the contributions to this volume investigate commemorative (re-)naming, the inscription and erasure of values, historical figures and events into urban textuality.

To date, research on toponymic changes has been conducted in vastly different fields with little cross-pollination. Linguistic Landscape studies have documented and analysed the distribution of languages, voices and messages in public textuality. Critical toponymy has traditionally explored “power relations, public memory [and] identity formation” in commemorative renaming (Azaryahu 2012: 388), especially following ideological shifts in recent history. Discourse analysts have investigated media representation of commemorative and ideological debates, while researchers on collective memory examined commemorative practices with little focus on naming practices. While calls to transgress disciplinary boundaries have long been voiced, the last decade in particular has seen an amplification of appeals for a rapprochement between research traditions (in linguistic landscape studies see Amos and Soukup 2020, Buchstaller and Alvanides 2018, in critical geography see Azaryahu 2011, Rose-Redwood et al. 2010 in collective memory studies Kaltenberg-Kwiatkowska 2011). As a result of disparate research foci and differences in data collection and analysis, however, integrated interdisciplinary studies remain sparse. This special issue brings together researchers from linguistic landscape (LL) research and its neighbouring disciplines (critical discourse studies, language policy and collective memory) to reflect upon the processes and patterns behind commemorative (re-)naming. In doing so, we aim to present a wide range of methodological approaches that invite a comparative perspective on practices of commemorative street renaming and methods for exploring such changes in public textuality.

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The contributions to this volume investigate how public semiotic processes affecting streets, public buildings and a bridge can testify to ideological struggles over the symbolic control of the cityscape, linking commemorative naming with relevant changes in state ideologies, in particular with the contemporary nationalist tendencies as inscribed in the cityscape. The case studies gathered here explore a wealth of contexts in both European (Luxembourg, Poland, Wales) and non-European (India, Malaysia, Namibia) locations with the over-arching goal to explore the manifold ways in which the city as text contributes to the construction of a shared group (national, ethnic or regional) identity as well as to particular communities' socio-ideological identification with the place they inhabit. The integrated perspective afforded by collecting these studies into one volume allows us to understand how different socio-political and administrative contexts impact on and (re)shape the commemorative cityscape.

This editorial sets the scene for the individual analyses in the articles of this collection. We briefly explore the contribution of different academic fields of inquiry for the exploration of the commemorative linguistic landscape. This allows us to situate the contributions to this volume within these epistemological traditions, pointing out their impact on the study of commemorative renaming.

2 Framing the issue: main avenues in linguistic landscape research

Research into **Linguistic Landscape** (LL) first developed within the sociology of language, more specifically within the fields of multilingualism and language policy. Early foundational studies, such as Rosenbaum et al. (1977) in Jerusalem, Tulp (1978) in Brussels, and Monnier (1989) in Montreal mapped the representation of languages on different kinds of signs in urban space. In 1997, Landry and Bourhis' seminal paper provided the much-cited definition of the linguistic landscape:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 25)

The major focus of these early LL studies was the visibility of different languages in linguistically diverse urban settings as well as the public use and distribution of linguistic codes in different, often multilingual societies (Van Mensel et al. 2016: 424). Operationalized in this way, the LL was considered an indicator of the respective ethnolinguistic vitality of ethnolinguistic groups juggling for space in a contested linguistic landscape (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 45). From the beginning, therefore, research on the LL explored the hegemony of certain languages at the cost of the visibility of minority linguistic systems, in particular with respect to the impact of such competition on the use and inscription of languages in public textuality. Non-surprisingly, research on the LL was often conducted in political settings and communities where long-term language contact had led to the contestation of, or even to social and/or political conflicts over, aspects of public textuality (Van Mensel et al. 2016). In the present volume, Rubdy on the case of New Delhi and Mumbai, and Tan and Purschke on the case of Kuala Lumpur and Windhoek, continue this strand of research while connecting it to innovative approaches within the field of LL.

Since these early days, the field has developed relatively rapidly into a vibrant research area, with seminal contributions "expanding the scenery" (Shohamy and Gorter 2009) to include semiotic resources beyond the textual. "Since looking more closely at [the process of creating] 'signs-in-place' (rather than mapping their distribution) inevitably leads to questions about the authorship" (Van Mensel et al. 2016: 427), this new strand of LL studies started to explore the politics of sign production, transcending the initial private vs. government (Landry and Bourhis 1997) or top down versus bottom-up dichotomy (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). At the same time, LL as a research paradigm began to analyse "the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses" (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 2), which provided a fertile ground for explorations into the readership, the emplacement and the materiality of signs in urban space. Concomitantly with this conceptual broadening,

the empirical focus expanded, with the object of research now “regarded as a conglomerate of traces of human social activity, thus providing us with an empirical barometer to map and interpret both short- and long-term change in language and society” (Van Mensel et al. 2016: 427). This attention to semiotic turnover in the cityscape as a measure of political/ideological changes is germane to all contributions in this volume.

The fact that language users in many communicative situations rely on multiple languages at the same time to convey meaning has pushed the boundaries of the field to explore the LLs of the super-diverse, post-modern urbanity in global space. Pervasive hybridity, whereby code-mixing, translanguaging and playful code play call into question the “static, mono-normative and artefactualized concept of language” as a clearly delineated and fixed system (Blommaert et al. 2012: 2) has pushed researchers to focus on the ways in which communities engage in multilingual and multimodal repertoires in order to do emplaced and at the same time often multi-local identity work (see e.g. Mettewie et al. 2012; Otsuji and Pennycook 2010). The field of LL research has thus evolved to capture the fact that the language(s) that we see being used in public spaces are fluid, multimodal and flexible linguistic resources without delineated boundaries (Van Mensel et al. 2016: 432). This strand of research has recently been broadened to include other semiotic resources (such as smell-scapes see Pennycook and Otsuji 2015), and – since the ‘affective turn’ in the humanities and social sciences (Clough 2008) – studies have started to explore affective responses to, and interactions with symbolic practices in the LL (Wee 2016; Wee and Goh 2019).

But while the textual materiality of the LL was expanded relatively soon into the analysis of broader semiotic systems (Scollon and Scollon 2003), the expansion from urban metropolitan to more peripheral and rural areas took longer, with studies that considered areas beyond the explicitly urban starting to appear in the 2010s (e.g., Kotze and du Plessis 2010; Pietikäinen et al. 2011). Another expansion was the analysis of indoor spaces, including labs, educational environments and shopping malls (Alomush and Al-Naimat 2020; Edelmann and Gorter 2010; Hanauer 2010; Tupas 2015).

Even later came the mobilization of linguistic landscape studies (Moriarty 2014). Research on the LL moved away from static, permanent signage to consider the non-permanent, more temporary effects of material products, such as consumer goods (Blackwood and Tufi 2012), T-shirts (Coupland 2010) and postcards (Jaworski 2010). Explicitly mobile textualities that are considered in this strand of research are bodily modifications such as tattoos (Peck and Stroud 2015) and personal choices in clothing and accessories (Sawall 2020). These studies also focus on ephemeral artifacts that can be found in the public space such as the momentary semiotic impact of protests (Seals 2015; Shiri 2015; Messekher 2015) where tags, placards and banners express non-transient messages via transitory means. Some of these signs can become more permanent contributors to the gestalt semiotics of the urban landscape, such as stickers, banners or posters left in the aftermath of a demonstration or indeed graffiti, the archetypal subversive sign. As detailed in Buchstaller (this volume), LL research has explored the power of such seditious strategies as a way to counteract the top down messages of government-sanctioned official street signs (see also Rubdy 2015 for Mumbai; Buchstaller and Alvanides 2018 for the Marshall Islands). This strand of analysis thus conceptualizes semiotic resources and whole linguistic systems as commodities that can be re-contextualized (Stroud and Mpendukana 2009) to suit a variety of needs situated at various scales (Hagen 2011).

The expansion of the field to include both urban superdiverse and globalized as well as peripheral areas has resulted in a breaking apart of assumptions about a “straightforward and direct correlation between a language’s visibility in public space and its vitality, between its communicative currency and an active presence, as originally put forward by Landry and Bourhis (1997)” (Van Mensel et al. 2016: 430). Indeed, spatiality, i.e. the understanding “that the physical location of signage in the material world adds to the sign’s meaning and interpretation, thus considering ‘space’ as an active factor in semiotic processes” (Van Mensel et al. 2016: 437) has become an important cornerstone of recent LL research. But while the ways in which language contact and language conflict are being indexed, performed and contested in spatiality have long been a focus of LL, little of this work has engaged with the large and extremely fruitful literature on critical toponomy (see e.g. the papers in Rose Redwood et al. 2010, 2018).

3 Critical toponymy

Critical toponymy explores “power relations, public memory [and] identity formation” in commemorative renaming (Azaryahu 2012: 388). Having emerged within social geography, critical toponymy focuses on the power relations behind naming practices, which are seen as an exercise of hegemonic control over the cultural landscape (Pinchevski and Torgovnik 2002). Vuolteenaho and Berg (2016: 4) note that “... cartography, statistical record-keeping and the associated gathering of national toponymies have increasingly become ‘the business of the state’ (Harley 1992: 224) as various ... nation-states consolidated their authority and eased their governance through archives and registers of people, places and things (Nash 1999: 457).” This drive for modernization and homogenization of naming practices and orthographies often resulted in an erasure of earlier oral heteroglossia, and in toponymic silencing, which reified the status quo and manifested the symbolic ownership of the landscape. Critical toponymy research is thus situated at the intersection of social and cultural theories that aim to “understand the always-already power laden character of naming places” (Vuolteenaho and Berg 2016: 2; see also Azaryahu 2011). Exploring the social actors and stakeholders interested in the street renaming processes is meticulously examined in this volume by Purschke and Buchstaller. Purschke in particular proposes to analyse administrative action, public participation and the ideological marking of the urban space. He illustrates three different strategies of street naming in Luxembourg: (1) top-down administrative procedures employed in the development of a new neighbourhood; (2) bottom-up participatory street naming in the small local authority of Winrange; and (3) an imposition of street names by an external power, i.e. the Nazi administration during World War II. Buchstaller (this volume) offers a broad overview of the procedures employed by local authorities and regional governments in street naming, which vary with respect to how much citizen participation is expected or allowed in the process. Notably, her article provides numerous examples of cooperation between the authorities and citizens as well as examples of subversive action by minorities who have so far been underrepresented in the urban space. The contribution of these two texts rests on their focus on the multiple agents and processes that lie behind changes in the city textuality rather than on the contested product of these changes.

4 Ideology and commemoration in the linguistic landscape

To explore the processes via which ideology and commemoration are inscribed in the urban space, it is important to establish how these concepts are used within Linguistic Landscape research. Researchers in the political and social sciences tend to differ with respect to their understanding of **ideology** and its role in street renaming practices. For K. Palonen (2018: 26) any choice of street name gives “the act of naming a political dimension: names could always be different and they are subject to potential conflicts, often of actual controversy”, hence the act of naming is axiomatically political. This perspective places K. Palonen’s views close to Mannheim’s concept of *Weltanschauung*, which emphasizes that socio-cultural life is by definition ideological (Freedon 2003: 14). Along the same lines, Vuolteenaho and Puzey (2018: 93) stress that “[w]hile ‘official’ street naming is by definition a prerogative of nominated authorities ... naming practices simultaneously mirror often covert cultural strategies to win popular consent for the prevailing political order”. Fabiszak et al. (to appear) build on this research by distinguishing between the ideological potential of the street name as encoded in its semantics and the ideological nature of the process of street naming. Hence, when the *Platz der Jungen Pioniere* (‘square of the young pioneers’) in Annaberg-Buchholz, a small Eastern German town, was changed to *Ahornplatz* (‘Maple Square’) in 1991, the process was ideological, as it erased the commemoration of a communist youth organization, but the resulting name was not ideological and will be read as unmarked by the future inhabitants and visitors to the city. Fabiszak et al. (to appear) emphasize that the ideological potential of street names is scalar in nature, so that *Stalin Street* will always be seen as strongly ideologically marked, while a street commemorating a local teacher will have a smaller ideological impact, even though it contributes to the construction of the local sense of identity and belonging to the place. A scalar interpretation

of the ideological nature of the naming process as well as the analysis of the semantics of street names requires researchers to contextualize their studies within collective memory (see also below). This is done by Listewnik (this volume) who explores political and media discourses surrounding the proposed name change of a bridge to commemorate the Prince of Wales. Situating the contrasting positionalities in colonial and postcolonial ideologies, power and national identity, the author shows that attempts to manipulate the cultural and linguistic landscape reveal political and social tensions within Welsh society more generally and within historical expressions of identity more specifically. Rubdy (this volume) refers to Irvine and Gal's (2000) semiotic processes of ideological reasoning to discuss the street renaming in Mumbai and New Delhi from 1947 until today. Her analysis explores the erasure of Mughal rulers (1526–1857) from the public space in the context of the rise of Hindu nationalism as part of the Saffron Revolution. In this way, their contribution to the cultural development of India is being obliterated in the new regime's perspective on history. By adding a historical perspective to the analysis of public textuality, these two chapters contribute to the nascent subfield of diachronic research on the LL (Pavlenko and Mullen 2015: 117).

Indeed, while much LL research explicitly acknowledges the historical forces that have brought about the “social order” (Blommaert 2013: 51) of the geosemiotic landscape, very little of this work has explicitly engaged with historical data which would allow the analysis of the signs in the LL over time (but see e.g. Pavlenko 2010; Spalding 2013). Surprisingly, even less work has actively connected with memory studies and critical discourse analytic research. **Collective memory studies** originate from Durkheim's sociological research on the role of commemorative rituals and their contribution to the construction of belonging within a given community as well as Freud's approach to treating trauma in patients experiencing loss. The latter has been expanded from the psychological/individual experience to a social/community-oriented perspective. Collective memory finds expression in commemorative practices which can be manifested through tangible (monuments, museums, street names) and intangible (anniversary ceremonies, speeches, re-enactments) forms (Napiórkowski 2014). All types of commemoration aim at constructing a sense of continuity of the group identity through a shared historical narrative (Zerubavel 2003), which is often shaped by top-down historical politics with the aim to legitimize the centralized hegemonic image of the past and present. A 2016 volume of *Linguistic Landscape: An International Journal* (volume 2 issue 3) is dedicated to the intertwining of public memory and LL. Train (2016) for example, offers an analysis of the memorization and counter-memorization of Junipero Serra (an 18thC Franciscan monk) in California. Lou (2016) shows how a neon restaurant sign has acquired monumental status after being removed from its original location and recontextualized as a museum exhibit. Woldemariam (2016) analyses the meaning and names of monuments dedicated to the remembering of the Ethiopian anti-fascist struggle during the Italian occupation (1935–1941). Our collection focuses the scope of research on commemoration in the LL by honing in on the (re)naming of streets, public institutions and services and a bridge. In doing so we follow the call by Järlehed (2017) to concentrate on the social semiotic analysis of particular sign genres. Our contributions thus focus on two types of commemorative practices. One is the imposition of a hegemonic narrative on the urban landscape despite the voices of protest from below (Fabiszak and Rubdy on Poznań and New Delhi; Rubdy on Mumbai and New Delhi; Purschke on Luxembourg under Nazi occupation). The other constitutes the reclaiming of public space by hitherto discriminated groups in post-colonial situations (Tan and Purschke on Kuala Lumpur and Windhoek; Listewnik on Wales; as well as Buchstaller's focus on subversive and participatory practices to encode minority perspectives in city textuality).

5 Language planning and policy, and critical discourse studies in the analysis of linguistic landscape

Linguistic landscape research has seen ample overlap with the literature on **language planning and policy (LPP)** as discussed by Shohamy (2006: 112–122). Kasanga (2015), for example, analyses public signs giving directions, prohibition, warning about danger and informing about safety precautions in the linguistic

landscape of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bahrain and Singapore. In these multilingual societies, the hierarchy of languages and code choice may lead to the linguistic exclusion of large numbers of the population. Kasanga (2015: 139) calls for changes in linguistic planning and policy that would lead to the inclusion of a number of languages or of universal iconographic information in this type of signs. Similarly, Tan and Ben Said (2015) indicate that the emergency signs in Japan favour English as the language of communication with foreign-born inhabitants, which disregards the needs of the growing Chinese and Korean migrant populations. They call for a revision of the Japanese information dissemination system. In their study of two small towns in Southern Ethiopia, Mendisu et al. (2017: 126) show the discrepancy between “the formulation and implementation of Ethiopia’s federalist language policy”. They conclude that “the limited visibility of Gedeo in Dilla and the total silence of Koorete in Amarro-Keele ... raise serious questions about possibilities for representation, rights and the meaning of ‘multilingualism’ in and for Ethiopia’s future” (Mendisu et al. 2017: 128). In contrast, Yigezu and Blackwood (2017) report on the successful language policy of the Harari National Regional Government in Ethiopia, who with support of the UN, have successfully made Harari visible. Despite the continuous dominance of English and Amharic on the signs in the public sphere, the increasing presence of the Harari language testifies to the ethnic diversity of the area and strengthens the construction of Harari identity. Tan and Purschke (this volume) focus on the construction of national identity and the ideological consolidation of urban scape in the postcolonial linguistic landscape of Malaysia and Namibia. They stress how language choice on the street signs in Kuala Lumpur reinforces the LPP guidelines affirming the status of Malay as the national language. Windhoek, on the other hand, illustrates the way in which renaming processes can be recruited to augment the narratives of liberation from colonial oppression. Their reflection on data scarcity and the discussion on the advantages and limitations of different data collecting procedures is an important contribution to the field.

One of the methodologies that allows the systematic scrutiny of the relations between power, society and language is **Critical Discourse Studies**. As “[d]iscourse is shaped by relations of power, and invested with ideologies” (Fairclough 1992/2014: 8), it is the role of discourse analysts to deconstruct how power and discrimination are “inscribed in and mediated through the linguistic system” (Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard 1996: vi). Reisigl and Wodak (2009) and Reisigl (2017) have developed the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), which offers a clear analytic procedure for the study of mass media language. The DHA requires a careful analytical method that is based on four layers of context: (1) the linguistic co-text, (2) the interdiscursive and intertextual links between the analysed text and other texts and discourses, (3) the context of the situation, i.e. institutional frames of text producers and recipients, and (4) the socio-political, cultural and historical context, in which the text is situated, and to which it refers. Fabiszak and Rubdy (this volume) employ the DHA as a method of analysis for comparable sets of LL data. Investigating media debates about street renaming practices in Poznań and New Delhi, they explore the way in which authorities’ decisions to rename one street can go beyond memory politics and interdiscursively link with the controversy over the independence of the judiciary in the case of Poland and social justice in the case of India. This focus on media analysis and the interdiscursivity of street name changes offers a novel approach within LL.

6 Conclusion

Epistemologically, our collection draws on a wealth of different approaches to explore commemorative naming practices in public textuality. The integration of linguistic landscape research with critical toponymy, collective memory, language planning and policy and critical discourse studies provides linguists with a larger methodological toolkit to tackle complex commemorative scenarios. The expanded vantage point which such interdisciplinary research affords suggests that the exploration of points of convergence of LL with its neighbouring disciplines, many of which have not yet been fully explored, is a fruitful endeavour.

By showcasing cutting-edge research which integrates these disciplines, this collection aims to provide a go-to volume for LL research on commemorative (re)naming. We exemplify the usefulness of work at the juncture between LL research and its allied disciplines with one particular object of research: street (building

and bridge) names, which, while focal in critical toponymy, are under-researched in LL studies. Street names in particular have traditionally been considered the paramount of stability and defined as a permanent record in urban toponymy (Goffman 1981; Rose-Redwood 2011). But quite apart from their mundane orientational function as spatial signposts or postal markers, such names are also “carriers of the collective memory of our city, of its past and its destiny” (Moszberger et al. 2002: 5). They

generate a supply of symbolic capital The spatial distribution of names and the individuals or events that they commemorate, when set within the context of other aspects of the built environment ... serve as sensitive indicators of the links between politics and the cultural landscape. And so debates over naming can be read as symbolic representations of much larger power struggles between competing interest groups. In their ability to transmit meaning, street names are integral to the iconography of landscape (Whelan 2011:8).

Renaming of toponymy for commemorative purposes is thus “a lot more than simply changing a word on a map or a street sign. [Since] place names are an important element of a country’s cultural landscape, changing them is often seen as a re-writing of history” (Ahmad 2018), an act that has been called “toponymic cleansing” by Azaryahu (2011:29).

Non-surprisingly, therefore, changes in public semiotics tend to be a hotly debated issue. The most contested reported cases are when official renaming “privilege[s] one of the many available readings of a place’s history and identity helping to accentuate political, social and historic divisions within a community” (Ahmad 2018). The present volume showcases analyses of a wealth of European and non-European locations, which allow us to understand how different socio-political and administrative contexts shape the commemorative cityscape. Together, the chapters contained in this collection provide a fresh approach to research on ideological power struggles between various stakeholders over the symbolic appropriation of the semiotic fabric of the city. They also illustrate the wealth of methodological vantage points which LL research can engage with to explore the “battle for representation” in the urban streetscape (Trumper-Hecht 2009:238) as well as the strategies via which they attempt to yield influence on representational semiotics.

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