

# 1. Introduction

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This book contributes to the multidisciplinary research field of linguistic landscape, henceforth LL, a field attracting increasing interest across countries as well as in various scientific disciplines such as linguistics, human geography and semiotics. It is a vibrant and steadily expanding research field, which is reflected in the many anthologies covering different topics and methodological approaches (e.g. Shohamy & Gorter 2009; Shohamy, Ben-Rafael & Barni 2010; Rubdy & Ben Said 2015; Blackwood, Lanza & Woldemariam 2016; Shohamy, Pütz & Mundt 2018). Previous LL research of special interest in this book includes but is not limited to the study of multilingualism and minority languages (e.g. Cenoz & Gorter 2006; Gorter 2006; Gorter, Marten & Mensel 2012; Hélot, Barni, Janssen & Bagna 2012), the omnipresence of English (e.g. Laitinen 2014; Lanza & Woldemariam 2014), and visibility of languages and ethnolinguistic vitality (e.g. Landry & Bourhis 1997; Barni & Bagna 2010; Vandenbroucke 2015), as well as papers offering theoretical and methodological reflections on LL research (e.g. Scollon & Scollon 2003; Spolsky 2009; Jaworski & Thurlow 2010; Barni & Bagna 2015; Blackwood 2015; Cresswell 2015; Gorter & Cenoz 2020).

LL is a relatively young research field that during the last decades has developed into an established field known by most linguists in the 2020s. Some studies in the 1970s and 1980s are often mentioned as early contributions to the field of linguistic landscape studies, but Landry & Bourhi's study from 1997 has however often been noted as a turning point, where after the field started growing exponentially. Today, in the early 2020s, LL is an established field that since 2015 has its own leading journal, *Linguistic Landscape: An international journal*, many sources describing its evolution and topical focal points (most recently Gorter & Cenoz 2023) and an extensive online bibliography (Troyer 2023) documenting its continuous expansion and growth. LL is a multidisciplinary field attracting not only linguists but also researchers in geography, sociology, economics and urban research, for example. Also within linguistics, which is the scope of the current volume, it informs research on a broad spectrum including sociolinguistics, language policy, multilingualism, contact linguistics, onomastics, language and gender studies, educational linguistics, and many other kinds of applied linguistics.

LL research nowadays incorporates a broad range of semiotic spaces, including but not restricted to buildings, tattoos, sounds and virtual spaces. Our prime focus

in this book is on physical urban spaces and their LLs but we approach these urban spaces through both physical and virtual data. Urban LLs include various publicly displayed signs ranging from official road signs, for example, to unofficial signs such as those authored by businesses or private individuals (e.g. Landry & Bourhis 1997; Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). Further, urban LLs also include unauthorised signs, such as graffiti on a park bench, placed in the public sphere without permission, or so-called transgressive signs (Scollon & Scollon 2003; Pennycook 2009). Unlike official signs authored by national or local authorities, LLs created by citizens are not as constricted by legislation and other regulations, nor do they necessarily adhere to linguistic policies or politically correct discourses.

More specifically, this book concerns urban LLs in different cities in northern and southern Europe (Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Italy), and how they differ among urban areas with diverse profiles of linguistic and socioeconomic demographics, for example, or how they evolve as the city develops or in times of crisis. The common thread linking the chapters in this book is a mutual interest in sociolinguistic variation in the LLs of urban spaces. The authors approach this shared overarching interest by addressing a variety of questions, of which the following are central in all chapters:

- *How do different processes of the LLs create and reflect specific profiles and identities of urban districts?* This question is addressed by the chapters in this volume from different perspectives: in Chapter 2 from the point of view of the model reader, in Chapter 3 studying five urban centres in a multilingual Nordic region, in Chapter 4 with focus on names and place branding, in Chapter 5 through an analysis of activist discourses, in Chapter 6 from both a citizen and a researcher perspective, in Chapter 7 departing from commercial LLs of migration, in Chapter 8 exploring COVID-19 signscapes in two capital regions of the Nordic countries and in Chapter 9 by proposing a multifaceted methodological combination for the exploration of sociolinguistic variation in urban LLs.
- *What roles do different languages and discourses play in urban LLs?* The chapters discuss both highly monolingual (e.g. Chapter 2) and highly multilingual (e.g. Chapter 7) urban areas and touch upon a variety of central discourses highlighted in the urban districts in focus, such as commerciality (Chapter 3, Chapter 4, Chapter 6, Chapter 7, Chapter 8), societal activism (Chapter 5), responsibility and solidarity (Chapter 7, Chapter 8). The universally present English language is included in the LLs of all the studied research sites but besides this common trait, the chapters discuss urban LLs with a diversity of languages and (im)balances between them. Chapter 3 further discusses the challenges of labelling signs of the urban LLs according to clearly demarcated categories of named languages.
- *How do urban LLs evolve in relation to the global and local society in which they are emplaced?* Both locally anchored and global societal changes in the LLs are explored in the chapters, including those related to urban planning and development processes (Chapter 2, Chapter 4), societal discourses (Chapter 5), tourism and migration (Chapter 6, Chapter 7), language contact (Chapter 3, Chapter 6) and the recent global COVID-19 pandemic (Chapter 6, Chapter 7, Chapter 8).
- *Which theoretical concepts and methodological procedures have the potential to deepen understanding of sociolinguistic variation in urban LLs?* The chapters

included in this volume offer sophisticated and novel ways of approaching urban LLs from different perspectives that are adapted to the specific aims and contexts of each study. This includes both different ways of doing survey area selection and defining the unit of analysis as well as a variety of conceptual frameworks and methodological tools. Further, the studies presented in this volume give concrete examples on how research adapts to societal changes by developing new methods for survey area selection or data collection during the pandemic, for example (see Chapter 2, Chapter 6, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8).

A shared point of departure for all chapters is the sociolinguistic premise that variation in language use is not random. On the contrary, linguistic variation has both linguistic and social connotations. How LLs reflect and create sociolinguistic, societal and urban dynamics and how these relations can be scientifically explored is thus the main concern throughout the book.

### *1.1 Sociolinguistic Variation in Complex and Changing Urban Contexts*

The departure point of this book is an interest in language in society and how language and discourse vary in relation to factors such as the geographical and temporal emplacement of signs in physical urban spaces. This approach links the study of urban LLs to a sociolinguistic interest in language variation related to regional or social indexes (i.e. dialects and sociolects). The main conceptual framework on which this study of variation in urban LLs is based is thus the societal rather than the individual level. We focus on LLs in specific European cities and investigate questions such as the profiles of different urban districts in terms of linguistic diversity, societal discourses or urban identity, for example. An interest in urban variation does not necessarily exclude sensitivity to individual and situational variation, however, which is highlighted in studies focusing on readers of signs in specific areas, or departing from citizen perspectives on urban mapping, or including analyses of language use both on social media platforms and on physical signs in urban LLs.

LL studies have been criticised at times for the haphazard selection of survey areas (see e.g. Blackwood 2015). Nowadays, therefore, there is increasing awareness of the need for the deliberate selection of a survey area as well as for inspiring examples of how this is done in practice (see e.g. Soukup 2020). As the chapters in this book illustrate, it can be done in a multitude of carefully considered ways, from handpicking urban areas of specific interest to allowing tools from human geography to guide the selection, dictated by the specific research questions posed at the LL. In terms of concrete possibilities, however, survey areas vary considerably from one study to another. For example, different countries and municipalities have different ways of categorising and registering their populations according to basic sociolinguistic parameters such as first language or ethnolinguistic origin. This complexity underpins most LL studies and gives the study of each local context its specific set of given background data, although there is seldom time or space to reflect in detail on the biases this is bound to create.

The need for and the relevance of measurable and exact parameters when choosing specific survey areas further varies depending on the focus and methodological basis

of the study, and in this respect the chapters of this book offer a range of equally valid but inherently different approaches. Comparative mappings of different urban profiles need a solid base on which to quantify language use and multilingualism, whereas ongoing processes and the constantly evolving shapes of urbanity might be better grasped through ethnographic approaches (as Blommaert & Maly 2016 argue, for example) and an emphasis on qualitative rather than quantitative analysis. As shown by many studies in this volume, mixing quantitative and qualitative approaches can offer further nuances to these analyses.

## 1.2 *Global Processes in Situated Localities*

Globalisation refers to the increasing interconnectedness and synchronisation in different parts of the world and among the people in it in fields such as culture, economics and politics (see e.g. Coupland 2013). It is a seemingly ever-accelerating process with a global reach to which only the most privileged societies and individuals have primary access, and the means to exploit it (e.g. Blommaert 2010; Mufwene 2013). In linguistics contexts, in turn, globalisation is often discussed in terms of how a dominant culture or language spreads globally and hence intrudes on other more locally restricted cultures and languages, the main focus naturally being on the spread of English (for critical perspectives and overviews, see e.g. Pennycook 1994; Mufwene 2013; Sharifian 2016). The scientific discussion on globalisation and language nevertheless developed from an initial perspective on the global spread of English as a strictly homogenising and subduing process to a closer examination of the heterogeneous ways in which local communities adapt to global processes and forces and make them their own (see e.g. Robertson 2012; Mufwene 2013).

Examples of current global processes affecting and evolving in dialogue with local urban LLs around the world include migration, gentrification and segregation. Another recent case in point that arose suddenly is the COVID-19 pandemic, which illustrates the rapidity of global spread due to high-speed transport systems, as well as how local societies adapt to and address this joint threat within their specific cultural, economic and political frameworks (for topical papers, see Lou, Malinowski & Peck 2022). Indeed, the course of the pandemic and different responses to it, from lockdowns in Italy to a more recommendations based strategy in Sweden left different kinds of marks on LLs and highlighted how public signs can reflect and be used in order to influence societal phenomena. This impact the pandemic has had on LL research as well as societies in large is visible in several of the chapters in this book. Overall, the current book thus offers insights into how different kinds of global processes are reflected in and adapt to the local LLs of northern and southern Europe, and hence into how the glocalisation of globalisation is transmitted in a selection of urban LLs.

The analyses of global processes in local urban LLs presented in the chapters of this book depart from the significance of emplacement (Scollon & Scollon 2003), meaning where the LLs and their individual signs are situated. In this sense, one should consider both temporal emplacement, such as during the different phases of the pandemic, as well as emplacement in a certain part of the world (e.g. Europe, Scandinavia, or Stockholm) or specific localities within larger urban contexts, such as different city districts. The point is not to establish a clear dichotomy between global

processes and their local implications, or between patterns in the LLs of southern and northern Europe, or even between Finland and Sweden. The overarching aim is rather to enhance understanding of the intertwined and multifaceted connections between globality and locality by zooming in and out on the different levels of globalisation and glocalisation.

### 1.3 Inclusion and Exclusion

Although the signs of urban LLs are publicly displayed, not everyone has a voice in this public discursive arena, hence access as an author tends to be restricted to specific official and private actors. LLs frequently split into two main strata based on the authors: a formal level including so-called *top-down signs* authored by authorities, and an informal level including so-called *bottom-up signs* authored by private actors (see e.g. Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). However, this is not a simple official-private dichotomy: the signs rather reflect a complex network of semiotic spaces (public and private) and discourses (e.g. regulatory, infrastructural, commercial and transgressive) on which the urban LL is built (see Scollon & Scollon 2003; Kallen 2010). Let us briefly summarise some broad categories of signs within the LL to shed light on how this is expressed as sociolinguistic variation.

Top-down signs adhere to official rules and recommendations concerning choice of language, for example, and hence usually reflect official language and other policies of the state, the municipality or some other authority. The authors of bottom-up signs, in turn, obviously have to adhere to certain regulations concerning where a sign can be displayed, and so on, but in many cases they have more freedom in matters such as language choice. They thus have more options in terms of reflecting their own perspectives on the signs, of which many are commercial, adjusting the messages to the surrounding society and locally important minority groups, or specifically targeting customers and thereby fulfilling their intended (commercial) functions. Urban LLs also contain signs that in their very existence protest against regulations covering publicly displayed signage. In that they are displayed in a public urban space without permission, these transgressive signs break the rules of the urban LL.

All these different signs in combination contribute to how the ‘sense of a place’ (see Cresswell 2015) is created and experienced. The LL of a city or an urban district reflects the intended occupants of the public space, as well as the functions and activities that characterise it. Which ingroups and outgroups are created in the LL? Which inhabitants of the city are included in the urban LL by having their languages publicly displayed, for example, and on the contrary, which languages are made publicly invisible and hence restricted to private domains (see Löfdahl et al. 2022)? Do the inhabitants of a city centre dominated by hotel, restaurant and other tourist signs in universal English, in which supermarket signs in the local language are sparse, feel as included and welcome as visiting tourists in this public urban space? How does the discursive atmosphere change if the central station abounds with hate-filled messages telling immigrants to go home, or if it is dominated by signs signalling the opposite, explicitly welcoming migrants and their families?

It is not only the LL of a city or district overall, but also single signs that might, in one way or another, include some readers and exclude others. Inclusion or exclusion

may be signalled on many levels, such as by addressing specific persons (e.g. *dear customer*) or in the extreme case of hate messages explicitly excluding specific groups from the urban collective. The choice of language is a form of inclusion or exclusion that is integrated into all signs, however, although the language is not always the main channel of communication, or as easily definable as one might think. A monolingual sign includes all readers of the specific language and excludes all others; a non-verbal sign containing only a masked face, on the other hand, potentially addresses readers of any language and in any age group. Multilingual signs might be polyphonic, perhaps including some languages merely as symbolic of identity or internationality, for example, or they might be homophonic, giving all information in parallel in more than one language and thus including readers of all the selected languages (for categories of signs regarding kinds of multilingualism, see e.g. Reh 2004; Backhaus 2007). The choice of language on signs in urban spaces is also a question of accessibility, as shown in studies on how easy it is for someone who does not know the local language(s) or English to become oriented in a city (Hellén 2019).

#### 1.4 Methodological Diversity and the Challenges of Comparison

The field of LL is notoriously multidisciplinary, multi-conceptual and multimethodological. It is a research field that attracts scientists from various fields employing a broad range of data sets, methodological tools and conceptual lenses. This is underscored in the all-embracing presentation in the leading journal in the field, namely *Linguistic Landscape. An international journal* (2022), referring to its interest in ‘multiple forms of ‘languages’ and an openness to ‘all research methodologies’. This declared open approach is further illustrated in the multifaceted phenomena covered by the articles published in the journal, including but not limited to different kinds of linguistic signs, tattoos (Peck & Stroud 2015), smells (Pennycook & Otsuji 2015) and monuments (Huebner & Phoocharoensil 2017).

The multifaceted nature of and the open-mindedness in the field of LL studies are also reflected in this book, which comprises linguistic studies that are united by a joint interest in sociolinguistic variation in urban LLs but depart from various conceptual frameworks such as ‘the model reader’, ‘affective regime’ and ‘legitimation’. Methodological and theoretical reflections are core issues in all chapters. These include measured procedures for survey area selection and data collection as well as defining the unit of analysis and choosing adequate analytical approaches and conceptual tools. The studies use various methodologies, representing quantitative and qualitative as well as inductive and deductive approaches, and various data sets such as the documentation of visual and virtual signs, focus-group discussions, interviews, census data and language use in both physical and virtual surroundings. The variety within the book thus reflects the nature of this particular research field and develops it with novel approaches. Further, the studies presented in this volume highlight and exemplify the importance of designing each study carefully in accordance with its specific goals and research questions.

Each study reported in this book is intended primarily to speak for itself underneath the umbrella of a specific joint research interest, although there are numerous junction points between the chapters. All in all, the studies pave the way for

comparative reflection and future comparative projects, but do not per se offer a basis on which to draw direct comparative conclusions. Conducting clear-cut comparative studies of LLs in different urban contexts is a complex and challenging endeavour, not least because different locations are embedded in specific societal settings that vary in aspects such as language policy and regulations covering signs in public places.

### *1.5 Perspectives on Sociolinguistic Variation in Urban Linguistic Landscapes*

The present book consists of this introduction and eight chapters, each of which explores sociolinguistic variation and societal discourses in the LLs of four different countries and a diversity of urban contexts, namely Copenhagen, Florence, Helsinki, Jokkmokk, Kramfors, Milan, Pajala, Sorsele, Stockholm and Umeå. The selection of urban areas offers a geographical range from northern to southern Europe and includes both smaller towns and bigger cities, as well as central and peripheral districts within them. This variety offers a multifaceted empirical basis for the theoretical and methodological reflections on how sociolinguistic variation in different kinds of urban LLs can be explored. Many LL studies focus on high-density districts with a lot of signs and a lot of potential multilingualism, whereas several chapters in this book represent a more holistic view on urban space, including new development areas as well as peripheral and even rural parts of the city. Thereby, they broaden current views of what is normally studied within research on the LL as a collective urban space. The chapters offer new insights into the LLs of the cities in focus, and in combination they create a basis for comparative reflection as well as conceptual development in future studies.

The second chapter starts the journey through the urban LLs of a selection of European cities with an endeavour to apply Umberto Eco's concept of the model reader to LL studies. It explores language use and the intended audience of signs in Stockholm's nature reserves, with a focus on the addressees. Simultaneously, it offers insights into an urban sphere that has not attracted much attention in previous studies of urban LLs. The case study, which is based on data collected from the fringes of Sweden's capital city, opens up stimulating paths for the further study of both the sociolinguistic variation in urban LLs and the (perceived) use of different urban spaces.

The third chapter highlights the linguistic creativity found in the LL of five urban centres in Northern Sweden, with a particular focus on hybrid word forms discussed from the perspective of language contact. These hybrids most commonly appear on commercial signs and draw on both global and local sources, although at times resulting in a mixture that only makes sense to local readers. The chapter illustrates the challenges faced by many field researchers engaged in the detailed linguistic coding of items in urban LLs.

The fourth chapter analyses the LLs of two developing districts of Copenhagen in Denmark. The chapter focuses on the visibility of signs and takes a holistically qualitative approach to how the LL contributes to the identity of a place. It is a question of zooming in on the sense of place and a place's identity as experienced during a stroll around the districts, while also considering urban onomastics. The chapter highlights the changing and evolving urbanity, ending with a discussion about

the processes and actors behind the conscious branding and identity construction of new urban areas.

The fifth chapter explores underground activist layers of the LLs in urban districts of the Finnish capital, Helsinki, from a discourse analytic and sociolinguistic perspective. The study combines an interest in the discursive and linguistic properties of societal stance taking in the transgressive layers of urban LLs in an attempt to map the profiles of activist LLs in different urban districts. The results reveal tendencies that hold across different districts, as well as differences related to linguistic and socioeconomic variation in urban space.

The focus in the sixth chapter is on the characteristics and the identity of different districts of Florence and their LLs, with a special interest in multilingualism, the global COVID-19 crisis and the urban process of touristification. The analysis is based on citizens' perceptions of the urban districts and their LLs, as well as on the researchers' documentation of signs in selected districts. The findings reveal how the LL of an urban district reflect its identity, and how global processes materialise in the local urban space.

The seventh chapter explores the constantly evolving LLs of the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of the commercial LL of migration in Milan. The analysis is based on multifaceted data including both offline and online signscapes, and the results show how the LL becomes sensitive to the different phases of the pandemic. Through the notion of affective regimes and taking an ethnographic approach focusing on Spanish-speaking communities from Latin American countries, the authors illustrate how the commercial LLs of Milan's migratory communities emphasised responsibility and solidarity during the crisis caused by the pandemic.

How the critical stages of the pandemic were reflected in urban LLs is also in focus in the eighth chapter, which presents a study of crisis communication through unofficial signs in Helsinki and Stockholm. The discussion is about how different rules and recommendations were communicated and legitimised on unofficial signs in the signscapes of both Finland and Sweden. Based on a combination of sociosemiotics, discourse analysis and translation studies, the study gives insights into the role of unofficial signage in the dissemination of crisis communication, and how moral evaluation, rationalisation and authorisation are used as legitimisation strategies in transmitting official COVID-19 regulations among the unofficial layers of urban LLs.

The book concludes with a chapter that draws insights from sociolinguistics, digital humanities and human geography in suggesting a multidisciplinary and methodologically sophisticated approach to the linguistic diversity of urban LLs. The methodological mixture the authors propose departs from both virtual and physical LL data as well as census data, and it combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. Paying special attention to the level of linguistic diversity and based on a case study from Helsinki, Finland, the authors propose a systematic procedure for the selection of focus areas and of the in-depth study or urban LLs.

The combined picture the chapters in this book present enhances understanding of the challenges and opportunities included in the study of sociolinguistic variation in urban LLs, and hence contribute to the theoretical and methodological development of the field. In that the chapters take different approaches to the study of sociolinguistic variation in LLs, the book is also useful in providing methodological guidance in the field.



### *1.6 An Overview for Scholars*

The book has the dual objective of addressing scholars and researchers involved in urban sociolinguistics and offering insights to those wishing to approach the subject from an LL perspective. It also offers interesting suggestions to people involved in language planning and policy reflection, as well as for those who intend to engage in urban redevelopment planning. Consequently, the book will be of use to Master's students, scholars and researchers representing different disciplines.

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