

Conflict, Exclusion and Dissent in the Linguistic Landscape

Eds. Rani Rubdy and Selim Ben Said

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In the current era of globalisation, political tensions and increasingly multicultural communities, the concept of multilingualism and the process of transmission and interpretation of cultures and languages have become the core of public debates in many regions across the world. The volume *Conflict, Exclusion and Dissent in the Linguistic Landscape*, edited by Rani Rubdy and Selim Ben Said, seeks to present the broadening scope of linguistic landscape research with a view to raise ‘both interesting and daunting questions for traditional approaches in sociolinguistics, multilingualism and language policy’ (p. 3).

In the introduction, Rubdy sets out the aims of the book, the primary of which is to ‘[tackle] not only how linguistic landscape represents discursive and semiotic signage [...], but also crucially, acts as a site of identity construction and representation’ (p. 1). The book features thirteen articles by various scholars whose research into linguistic landscapes offers a wide scope of theoretical perspectives and methodologies as employed in diverse contexts extending beyond European and Western regions, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, India, Bahrain, DR Congo, Algeria, or Tunisia. While the volume includes a range of definitions of linguistic landscape as addressed by many scholars, Rubdy emphasizes that its focus is on ‘the role of the linguistic landscape as a place of affect wherein displays of words and images often manifest the tensions between the hegemony and dominance of global capitalism and the grassroots reactions of local communities [...]’ (p. 2).

Part 1 of the volume comprises studies examining linguistic landscapes as sites of conflict and exclusion and the relationship between languages and their speakers. Importantly, in this book exclusion is defined as ‘[relating] to an engagement with broader socio-historical, economic, political and ideological issues that go beyond language dimensions’ (p. 1). Several case studies in this section consider the extent to which semiotic signage reveals tensions between the official governmental language policies and local

practices among speakers within a particular region. For example, Thistlethwaite and Sebba (Chapter 2) highlight the passive exclusion of the Irish language among the local population in the town of Ennis in the Republic of Ireland masked by the public perception of the Irish language revival. Exploring inequalities between the major and minor languages, Troyer, Cáceda, and Giménez Eguíbar (Chapter 3) focus on the conspicuous lack of visibility of the Spanish language in the linguistic landscape of a small American town with one-third Latino/Hispanic residents. In the times of mass tourism and skilled labour migration, the study of Tan and Ben Said (Chapter 7) investigates linguistic exclusion of non-Japanese speakers with regards to emergency signs and information vital to people's survival in the event of an earthquake or tsunami, particularly in high-risk areas. While these selected case studies focus mostly on the semiotic aspects of linguistic landscapes, the following chapters expand the notion by raising questions of individuals responding to and shaping the landscape, including 'cyberlandscape' (Wee's study of the R-word campaign, Chapter 9). Placing an individual and their interpretation of the 'immediate visible textual environment' (p. 181) at the centre of his study, Ruanni Tupas (Chapter 8) presents linguistic landscapes as areas of human active participation rather than mere representations of languages in public spaces. He provides the reader with an intriguing analysis of 'ideologized, interiorized landscaping' resulting from the individual's interaction with the textual space. Tupas' exploration of inclusion and exclusion in an unequal learning space is underpinned by the premise that 'there is more to LL [linguistic landscape] than what we see around us' (p. 173).

Dissent and protest are the focus of the studies in Part 2 of the volume where linguistic landscape becomes a site of mass demonstrations or gatherings to protest against injustices and where signs are conceptualised as 'a form of political activism indexing contestation and dissent in situations of social and ideological conflict' (p. 3). Essays in this section include case studies investigating such symbolic socio-political events as the Occupy Wall Street protest and the Arab Spring movements or the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai Terror Attacks. Significantly, most of them present linguistic landscape as transient and temporary rather than stable and permanent, the idea of which was first introduced in David Hanauer's 2012 study of transitory linguistic landscape (p. 260). As evidenced through the case studies, politically motivated ephemeral linguistic landscapes in protest movements often have an unprecedented impact on the larger context they are situated in. David Hanauer's (Chapter 10) analysis of the Occupy Baltimore movement includes a focus on the participation and interaction with the public as reflecting the movement's overall aim of inclusivity. Both Seals' study of the Occupy movement and Shiri's study of the Tunisian

Revolution probe the dialogic aspects of protest demonstrations and their role in increasing the impact of both movements and empowering protesters, highlighting the links and interactions between linguistic landscape, identity and power. Last but not least, Rubdy's profound analysis (Chapter 14) of the Bada Kabrastan graffiti created following the Mumbai terrorist attacks shows that people are able to find hope and build resilience by expressing their personal interpretations of the trauma and inexplicable violence through contemplative images.

Drawing from both the traditional and most recent theories of linguistic landscape, the book offers an accessible and readable inquiry into distinct contexts where languages are at the heart of conflict, ex-/inclusion, and dissent. What is particularly significant in this volume is the presentation of linguistic landscape as not merely semiotic, but as an area of human participation and co-production offering new perspectives on what may constitute linguistic landscapes. The book could have offered a few more studies on individual interactions with the visual and textual environment, such as Tupas' thought-provoking examination of interiorized landscaping. At the same time, the reader is provided with illuminating case studies from a diverse range of regions, some of which have been conflict-torn and/or underrepresented in linguistic landscape research, as stated in the introduction to the volume. In these respects, the book successfully achieves the aims set out by editors Rani Rubdy and Selim Ben Said and brings into focus the modern paradox of 'explicit and implicit forms of language exclusion' disguised as 'linguistic diversity' (p. 3) in an age of global unrest.