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UNDERSTANDING MULTILINGUALISM OF/IN GLOBALIZED PUBLIC SEMIOSCAPES: A COURSE PROPOSAL

ABSTRACT

Our proposal for an academic course concerns geocultural globalization and the associated flows of ideas, meanings, values and semiotic resources, including languages, which are manifested in particular configurations of (peri-)urban linguistic landscapes. Within the course students are engaged in tracing synchronies and diachronies of social processes underlying linguistic landscapes of their own lived environments. As the main theoretical-methodological approaches the course integrates linguistic landscape studies, geosemiotics, sociolinguistics of multilingualism, sociolinguistics of globalization, and English as a lingua franca. The aims of the course are to enable students to understand the semiotic processes within the semioscapes of public spaces with which they interact on a daily basis and, ultimately, to contribute to the development of critically thinking and emancipated students.

Keywords: geocultural globalization, linguistic landscape analysis, multilingualism, pragmatics, walking ethnography

ABSTRAKT

ZROZUMIENIE WIELOJĘZYCZNOŚCI W ZGLOBALIZOWANYCH PUBLICZNYCH KRAJOBRAZACH JĘZYKOWYCH: PROPOZYCJA KURSU

Artykuł prezentuje propozycję kursu akademickiego dotyczącego globalizacji geokulturowej i związanych z nią przepływów idei, znaczeń, wartości i zasobów semiotycznych, w tym języków, które przejawiają się w określonych konfiguracjach (około)miejskich krajobrazów językowych. W ramach kursu studenci są angażowani w śledzenie synchronii

i diachronii procesów społecznych, leżących u podstaw krajobrazów językowych ich własnych środowisk. Podejście teoretyczno-metodologiczne pozwala na integrację studiów nad krajobrazem językowym, geosemiotyki, socjolingwistyki wielojęzyczności, socjolingwistyki globalizacji i języka angielskiego jako *lingua franca*. Celem kursu jest umożliwienie studentom zrozumienia procesów semiotycznych zachodzących w krajobrazach językowych (z którymi codziennie wchodzą w interakcje), a w konsekwencji przyczynienie się do rozwoju krytycznie myślących i samodzielnych studentów.

Słowa kluczowe: globalizacja geokulturowa, analiza krajobrazu językowego, wielojęzyczność, pragmatyka, etnografia spacerowa

1. Introduction

When moving across the world's semiotic landscapes, people perceive them as snapshots of layered synchronicities, although in fact they are the results of underlying socio-political, cultural, ideological and linguistic processes. Visual landscapes of contemporary urban and/or peri-urban (hinterland) spaces are marked by the operation of geocultural globalization, which manifests itself in the flows of circulating ideas, meanings and values carried by semiotic resources. Although concrete patterns of their configurations are always unique, the world's public places resemble one another as being the "same". Apart from their visual resemblance caused by globally circulating commercial images (logos, trade-marks, products), some of the most ubiquitous resources are traceable to named languages whose presence and configurations yield particular regimes of multilingualism, in which English occupies a prominent place. Linguistic landscapes (LL) thus represent contemporary, dynamically evolving and highly accessible sources of analytical data for language researchers, which is demonstrated by the emergence of LL studies and their establishment as an autonomous branch of sociolinguistics. LLs can be seen as ready-made test tubes for the observation of semiotic processes in action within courses of sociolinguistics and English language teaching by offering a wealth of authentic illustrative material.

The objective of this paper is to present an outline of a sociolinguistics course which offers an interpretative lens to approach LL data as a specific semiotic layer of students' lived environment. By observing their synchronic patterns, students are invited to do their in-depth study by revealing the underlying intrinsically diachronic semiotic processes. The theoretical-methodological foundations of this integrative course combine ethnographic LL studies, geosemiotics, sociolinguistics of globalization and multilingualism, and English as a lingua franca.

2. Theoretical-methodological approaches

In the paper, we first sketch out the research fields (Section 2), which we integrate in our proposal for an academic course (Section 3). Next, we present an example of students' research done within the currently taught format of the course (Section 4). In the Conclusion we point out the pedagogical potential of LL studies. In the Conclusion we point out the pedagogical potential of LL studies.

2.1. LL studies and geosemiotics

Both approaches study semiotic landscapes from different yet overlapping perspectives. LL was placed onto the map of sociolinguistics by Landry and Bourhis[1], who defined it as a study of the "visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or a region"[2]. Their widely quoted list of items, i.e., "public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings"[3] set the classic agenda for LL research. This over time has widened its scope to also include multi-modal objects such as posters, stickers, banners, neon lights, electronic displays, touch screens, etc. Accordingly, the range of theories and methods used has also been broadened. When launching the journal *Linguistic Landscape*, Shohamy and Ben-Rafael formulated as the goal of LL studies "to describe and identify systematic patterns of the presence and absence of languages in public spaces and to understand the motives, pressures, ideologies, reactions and decision making of people regarding the creation of LL in its varied forms"[4]. After the initial period of mostly quantitative investigations, a shift towards qualitatively oriented research has taken place, viz. towards a "more mature semiotic approach in which signs themselves are given greater attention both individually […] and in combination with each other"[5]. In their summary of the current state of LL research, Gorter and Cenoz[6]

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[1] R. Landry, R.Y. Bourhis, *Linguistic Landscape and its Ethnolinguistic Vitality: An Empirical Study*, "Journal of Language and Social Psychology" 1997, 16 (1), pp. 23–49.

[2] Ibidem, p. 23.

[3] Ibidem, p. 25.

[4] E. Shohamy, E. Ben-Rafael, *Introduction: Linguistic Landscape, a New Journal,* "Linguistic Landscape" 2015, 1 (1/2), p. 1.

[5] J. Blommaert, I. Maly, *Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis and Social Change: A Case Study*, "Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies" 2014, 100, p. 3, [online], https://pure.uvt.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/30402167/TPCS_100_Blommaert_Maly.pdf [retrieved: 08.08.2024].

[6] D. Gorter, J. Cenoz, *A Panorama of Linguistic Landscape Studies*, Bristol, Jackson 2024, p. 12.

characterize it as a "prospering field" which is innovative in several ways: it adopts a broad view of the presence of languages in a great variety of signs; it goes beyond the signs and investigates the processes of their production, i.e., their planning, production, placement and reception; it studies how languages displayed in LL "reflect language demographics, functions of use, power dynamics, ideologies, histories and policies"; and finally, it identifies the influences which control the content of signage "with the aim of confirming or contesting existing language practices and hierarchies of prestige".

Geosemiotics, as a study of "the ways in which the placement of discourse in the material world produces meanings that derive directly from that placement"[7], overlaps with LL in that it focuses on languages being used "in" certain types of discourses rather than being read-off from individual signs. The conceptual toolbox of geosemiotics includes the notions of the indexicality of signs, visual semiotics, place semiotics, interaction order and types of discourses, and enables researchers to capture semiotic processes within "semiotic aggregates".

2.2. Sociolinguistics of mobility and globalization

In the classic conceptualization of sociolinguistics, the relationship between people's mobility and language, which caused public spaces to be "complex multilingual assemblages"[8], was recognized as an important correlate of sociolinguistic phenomena[9], although in a static sense in which mobility forms a context of language processes. More recently, a more dynamic understanding of this relationship appeared[10] which "looks at linguistic phenomena from within [the] social, cultural, political and historical context of which they are part"[11]. In a qualitative, ethnography-informed sociolinguistics, mobility of people is understood as involving "the mobility of linguistic and sociolinguistic resources [in which] 'sedentary' patterns of language use are complemented by 'trans-local' forms of language use […] the combination of both often accounts for unexpected sociolinguistic effects"[12]. The

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[7]   R. Scollon, S.W. Scollon, *Discourses in Place. Language in the Material World*, London–New York 2003, p. 22.

[8]   D. Gorter, J. Cenoz, *A Panorama…*, p. 14.

[9]   W. Labov, *The Effect of Social Mobility on Linguistic Behavior*, "Sociological Inquiry" 1966, 36 (2), pp. 186–203.

[10] J. Blommaert, J. Dong, *Language and Movement in Space*, [in:] *The Handbook of Language and Globalization,* N. Coupland (ed.), Malden, MA 2010, pp. 366–385.

[11] J. Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization,* Cambridge 2010, p. 3.

[12] J. Blommaert, J. Dong, *Language and Movement…*, p. 367.

key concepts are scalarity, orders of indexicality, indexical orders and polycentricity. Scalarity means that sociolinguistic processes take place in both horizontally and vertically stratified space at local, trans-local and global scale levels. Physical space is constructed as "social, cultural, political, historical, ideological Time-Space"[13]. Scales are indexically interconnected – acts of communication occurring at a lower scale-level point to meanings, norms and expectations located at a higher scale-level in the form of 'centres' of authority. Indexicality involves, first, indexical orders which emerge when social meanings are created in repeated situations in which they stabilize into recurring practices, and second, orders of indexicality, viz. functioning of indexical orders within stratified semiotic regimes and yielding different patterns of the distribution of authority and power. Mobility of people is thus mobility across different orders of indexicality in which people orientate to different centres of authority, which makes "every environment […] almost by definition polycentric"[14]. Finally, within the sociolinguistics of globalization it is not the entirety of languages which are distributed across horizontal spaces, but rather mobile semiotic resources which are deployed vertically on particular scale-levels.

2.3. Multilingualism and globalization

Our approach to multilingualism departs from its classic understanding as a sum of conventionally defined languages within a territory which presupposes the existence of language as a bounded entity. It rather employs the understanding of globalization in which "semiotic resources" circulate in the world and which include "accents, language varieties, registers, genres, modalities, […] ways of using language in particular communicative settings"[15]. This understanding makes multilingualism a continuum rather than a sum of discrete entities which is the world's norm (cf. the social approach to multilingualism[16]).

Related to Blommaert's[17] scalarity is de Swaan's[18] theory of the global language system which presents a hierarchy of the world's languages: a) peripheral/minority languages which are typically spoken and have not been standardized, they may be under the threat of extinction because of the pressure to use; b) cen-

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[13] H. Lefebvre, *Key Writings,* New York 2003; J. Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization,* Cambridge 2010, p. 34.

[14] J. Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics…*, p. 40.

[15] Ibidem, p. 102.

[16] J.J. Weber, K. Horner, *Introducing Multilingualism*, London–New York 2012.

[17] J. Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics…*

[18] A. de Swaan, *Words of the World: the Global Language System,* Cambridge 2001.

tral languages, which are standardized and are used as official languages in given territories, c) supercentral languages which are used as the world's lingua francas, and, d) hypercentral languages, currently served only by English.

The scalarity of social processes forms the core of Wallerstein's[19] World-System Analysis within which acts of communication occur in a socially constructed TimeSpace: those at a lower scale-level immediately point to meanings (norms, expectations) located at a higher scale-level. Moving across scale-levels thus involves invocation of social order, which can also be used as a means of control.

2.4. English as a lingua franca

The massive global spread of English has initiated many attempts to conceptualize it. The proliferation of denotative labels (*global, international, literate, general, world* and *lingua* franca) are explained by Erling[20] as a "response to postcolonial ambiguity about the spread of English and a desire to shape a new ideology for English language teaching (ELT) which more accurately reflects the global nature of the language and its diverse uses and users". We focus here only on *English as a lingua franca* (ELF), which approaches "English" as a language of choice between speakers of post-colonial (expanding circle) Englishes who have different first languages. Since they do not form stable communities, the emergence of its homogeneous varieties in a traditional sense is ruled out. However, the fact that these speakers transfer the features of their first languages into their use of English in similar ways has led to the proposal of the notion of *similect*[21]. ELF research focuses on the description of ELF features that enable ELF speakers to communicate (un)successfully and includes Jenkins'[22] *lingua franca core* and Seidlhofer's[23] list of ELF lexico-grammatical features. Pragmatic researchers study ELF speakers' effort to accommodate each other; in fact, Mollin suggests that "what unifies lingua franca speech is communication strategies rather than the result of any structural convergence"[24]. The ELF position resonates with Cana-

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[19] I. Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, Durham NC 2004.

[20] E.J. Erling, *The Many Names of English*, "English Today" 2005, 21 (1), pp. 40–44.

[21] A. Mauranen, *Exploring ELF: Academic English Shaped by Non-Native Speakers*, Cambridge 2012.

[22] J. Jenkins, *The Phonology of English as an International Language: New Models, New Norms, New Goals, Oxford 2000.*

[23] B. Seidlhofer, *Research Perspectives on Teaching English as a Lingua Franca*, "Annual Review of Applied Linguistics" 2004, 24, pp. 209–239.

[24] S. Mollin, *English as a Lingua Franca: A New Variety in the New Expanding Circle?*, "Nordic Journal of English Studies" 2006, 5 (2), p. 45.

garajah's[25] understanding of "English" in globalization as "constantly brought into being in each context of communication"[26]; as a product of a local social action, *Lingua Franca English* has not been distributed from a 'centre' but "has always been local"[27].

Apart from these approaches, the course benefits from also including language ideologies, i.e., people's systems of beliefs about language, attitudes, norms and values to which they orientate, and interpersonal pragmatics, which studies how different actors in LL manage the fulfillment of their illocutionary and social goals in a socially appropriate, i.e., acceptable way.

3. Course objectives and learning outcomes

The objective of the course is to study, analyse and interpret multilingualism in the LL of students' lived environment with the following learning outcomes:
  a) students will have acquired the ability to find, process and use information in the field of multilingualism and LL research and relate it to other fields of study (sociolinguistics, geosemiotics, pragmalinguistics). They will understand the key concepts, methods, tools and procedures of collection and analysis of LL data;
  b) students will be able to identify the semiotic, sociolinguistic and pragmalinguistic aspects of LL signage, describe them and explain their functioning. By applying methods and procedures in solving new tasks identified in their own LL they will be in a position to contribute to the development of the field;
  c) students will be able to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in the analysis of data from their own communicative practices. They will be able to design a project in which they analyze and interpret multilingual regimes of LL based on their own choice. At the end of the course, they will present the project for critical discussion. They will be able to use the knowledge and skills in critical evaluations of the use of semiotic resources in different LLs of the contemporary globalized world.

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[25] S. Canagarajah, *The Ecology of Global English*, "International Multilingual Research Journal" 2007, 1 (2), p. 91; A. Pennycook, *Language as a Local Practice,* London–New York 2010, p. 85.

[26] S. Canagarajah, *The Ecology…*, pp. 89–100.

[27] A. Pennycook, *Language…*, p. 84.

3.1. Course design and methodology

The course is nested within that transdisciplinary area of contemporary social sciences which uses concepts, models, theories, methods and procedures established in them. The course has a parallel theoretical and empirical component: it begins with initial data collection, continues with its detailed multi-aspect study, analysis and interpretation, and ends with a student's own project preparation and its presentation.

3.2. Proposed course timeline

Week 1   ▸ **Topic: Field trip 1, introduction, initial data collection**
Activities: students get instructions on the goals and learning outcomes; students take a walk in a designated area of the city and as pedestrians/observers take photographs of "linguistic signs"; they build a corpus of raw LL data following the principles established within the overall LL approach

Week 2–9   ▸ **Topic: In-class study of the data corpus**
Activities
  – students build the theoretical-methodological framework for the analysis of the dataset by studying LL literature (outlined in section 2) and identifying relevant themes
  – students apply the theories on the corpus by
    • sorting the data into categories using the method of content analysis within a combined quantitative and qualitative research framework
    • identifying themes to focus on in an in-depth study
    • analysing the data – finding the recurrent patterns
    • interpreting the data – finding causes for these patterns

The analysis focuses on selected aspects of LL signage:
    • quantitative analysis – the number of signs in their categories
    • qualitative/ethnographic analysis – social meanings of signs
    • semiotic processes:
      - signs and participants – authors/producers, receivers/addresses
      - signs and other signs in semiotic aggregates (interdiscursive dialogicality)
        ◦ direction of flow of signs:
          » top down/official or bottom up/non-official
        ◦ type of semiotic space:
          » frontstage/public vs. backstage/private
          » exhibit/display, passage, special use, secure, other

- type of discourse:
  - » regulatory, infrastructural, commercial, transgressive
- emplacement of signs:
  - » decontextualized, situated/exophoric, transgressive, denied
- systems of the structure of individual signs:
  - » text vector, indexicality, construction, code preference (including multi-lingualism)
- manifestation of language ideologies
- inscription – fonts/letter form, materiality, layering, state changes
- presence of "English"
  - » type of semiotic space, type of discourse/domain
  - » indexical/instructional/operational vs. symbolic
  - » normativity/variety – native, non-native, Standard English, ELF

Week 10   ▸ **Topic: Field trip 2 – refining the corpus**
Activities: Students take a field trip to the same LL and collect data focusing on particular types of data given by the theme they have selected; from the corpus they build a sample for a focused analysis.

Week 11–12   ▸ **Topic: In-class study, analysis and interpretation of the sample of data**
Activities: Students describe, analyse and interpret data from the refined corpus. They approach producers and receivers of signage and explore their reactions to it.

Week 13   ▸ **Topic: Project preparation and presentation**
Activities: Students present their projects for group discussion; format: poster.

In principle, the course follows the "triadic approach" of learning activities by students who are engaged in three activities: "I observe", by obtaining signs during field trips and categorizing them; "I think", by reflecting (as observers) and analysing signs using the given approaches; and "what they think", by accessing the reactions of the actors (producers and receivers) of the signage[28].

The overall evaluation of students' performance combines assessment of a) their participatory attendance, which includes their engagement in the discussion of research articles; b) their participation in the group research project; c) presentation of results in the form of a poster.

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[28] D. Malinowski, *Opening Spaces of Learning in the Linguistic Landscape*, "Linguistic Landscape" 2015, 1 (1), pp. 95–113.

4. Students' analysis of banal cosmopolitanism (a seminar project)

Within the currently taught format of the course, students[29] were involved in a project within which they studied the LL of *Hlavná ulica*, the main street of the city of Prešov, Slovakia, within which they focused on the presence of "banal cosmopolitanism"[30]. From the collection of raw photographic data they assembled a sample of 26 photographs which they used to illustrate the presence of "globalese". As a specific register, globalese indexes spaces as "global", and which includes various semiotic resources, such as combinations of new letterforms, punctuation marks, diacritics and tittles (see a slide from students' presentation in Fig. 1) which create "novel, foreignized, visual-linguistic forms increasingly detached from their 'original' ethno-national languages"[31]. They summarized the results of their analysis by stating that banal cosmopolitanism in Prešov's main street is primarily of a commercial nature and mainly utilizes the semiotic resources attributable to several named languages, most notably English. They interpreted this as the result of the connotative meanings associated with these respective languages on the part of actors of the LL, such as commercialism, globalization, capitalism, modernity (English), authority, tradition, religion, law, medicine (Latin), passion, creativity, beauty (Italian), elegance, sophistication, romance, luxury (French), and quality, functionality, reliability and efficiency (German). On the quantitative side, they state that the most widespread mark of banal cosmopolitanism is the mixing of English and Slovak semiotic resources in signs (35%), followed by mixing the resources of Slovak and other foreign languages (19%), and English-only signs (19%). They contextualize their research within the LL studies by referring to Gorter and Cenoz's[32] claim that the "central shopping streets around the world start to become more similar due to the presence of many global brand names and the use of English slogans, chunks and words. In that sense local shops and their signs give more local identity and flavor to neighborhoods". In fact, by identifying the

[30] A. Jaworski, *Globalese: A New Visual-Linguistic Register*, "Social Semiotics" 2015, 25 (2), pp. 217–235.

[31] A. Jaworski, *Globalese…*, p. 217.

[32] D. Gorter, J. Cenoz, *Translanguaging and Linguistic Landscapes,* "Linguistic Landscape" 2015, 1 (1/2), p. 70.

unique patterns of the merging of the global and the local (cf. translocalization[33]) students have contributed to one of the lines of LL research.
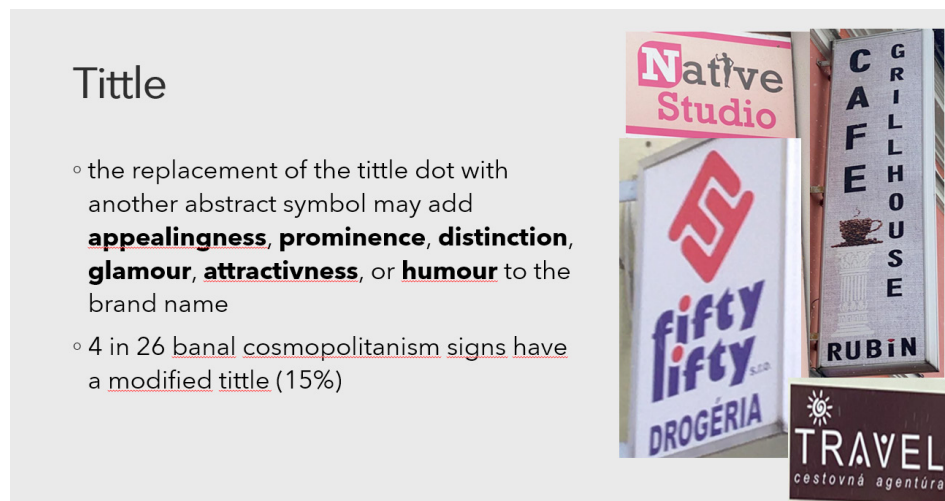

Figure 1. Tittle within "banal cosmopolitanism" in Prešov's *Hlavná ulica*

5. Conclusion – potential of LL studies for language pedagogy

Ever since LL studies established themselves on the map of transdisciplinary social scientific research their enormous pedagogical potential has been utilized in two ways: as a pedagogical tool in language teaching and learning, and as a study of the "schoolscape", i.e., signage displayed in school settings[34]. First, as an innovative research area it offers itself for academic purposes by being integrated into curricula within sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and second language acquisition with the assumption that, as a source of authentic contextualized language input, it fosters multilingual and pragmatic competence, and (multimodal) literacy skills[35]. Resulting from this incorporation is the rise in the number of seminar papers and projects, and master's and doctoral theses written

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[33] J. Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics…*

[34] D. Gorter, J. Cenoz, *A Panorama…*

[35] J. Cenoz, D. Gorter, *Linguistic Landscape as an Additional Source of Input in Second Language Acquisition,* "International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching" 2008, 46 (3), pp. 257–276.

on the subjects from the field. The results of students' original projects presented in the present paper document the potential for students to learn about the social environment with which they interact on a daily basis. Outside their classrooms, students are exposed to the multilingual content the world's globalized LLs and are engaged in acts of informal learning which is unplanned and unintended (incidental learning[36]). The data they encounter may be brought to their classrooms and become content for formal learning. Apart from learning languages, students can learn a lot about the socio-political, historical and ideological issues forming the background for the presence of languages, including the functioning of English on the world's sociolinguistic scales, its variability, centres of its normativity, but also the power and inequality which it engenders. It appears that the large potential of LL input for language teaching, facilitated by the accessible and ubiqitous technology and the possibilities of storing and sharing it, will continue to be one of the leading innovations in language pedagogy. The proposed outline of the course in the present paper is intended to be a contribution to further the development of this trend.

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[36] D. Gorter, J. Cenoz, K. van der Worp, *The Linguistic Landscape as a Resource for Language Learning and Raising Language Awareness,* "Journal of Spanish Language Teaching" 2021, 8 (2), pp. 161–181.

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