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LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE AND
LANGUAGE AWARENESS

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**Toward an Educational Perspective on the
Linguistic Landscape**

While the study of the linguistic landscape (LL) is emerging in various domains of inquiry (Gorter 2006; Spolsky, this volume) such as ecology, literacy research, sociocultural studies, urban sociology, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and linguistic anthropology (Shohamy and Waksman, this volume), it has heretofore not drawn much attention in the field of education. This is somewhat paradoxical since the study of linguistic landscape traces its roots to research conducted with youth and work on literacy, both areas of primary interest in education. Foundational work cited in studies of the LL (e.g., in Cenoz and Gorter 2006) was conducted in psycholinguistic research on adolescents' responses to signs in their environment (Landry and Bourhis 1997) and in studies of readers' interactions with print in contexts of diversity (Scollon and Scollon 2003). While much recent work has concentrated on documenting what print appears in particular geographic locations and on articulating an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, relatively few studies of the linguistic landscape have continued to examine interactions with text in different languages among young readers and writers.

Our own work takes up Scollon and Scollon's (2003) exploration of actors' interactions with print and Landry and Bourhis's (1997) line of research with youth who have contact with more than one language. It also draws also on a rich field of inquiry on environmental print established in French urban sociolinguistics (Bulot 1998; Calvet 1994; Lucci et al. 1998). Adopting an educational perspective, we focus on elementary school children to document their literacy practices in activities examining multilingualism and language diversity in their communities. Our interest in young children is two-fold: on one hand, we seek to understand how they see and respond to what is represented in the print/visual environment of their communities as they construct their own representations of the LL. On the other hand, we





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refer to Gorter's (2006) description of the etymology of the term landscape that includes notions of land as territory and constructs of geography as space to document how young children move through the multilingual landscape and read its multimodal texts.

We attend to children's negotiation of their identities as they interact with diverse forms of mono/bi/multilingual script in their communities. In this chapter, we focus on the linguistic landscape as a heuristic for describing the contexts in which children become literate citizens and for raising their critical awareness about power issues related to language.

Children and the Linguistic Landscape

Scollon and Scollon (2003) as well as Mondada (2000) have emphasized how social actors not only respond to the LL but also shape it through textual discourse in particular spaces. As Ben-Rafael (this volume) and Trumper-Hecht (this volume) remind us, social actors also construct their own identities in interaction with the collective identities represented in the linguistic landscape (see also Bulot 1998). In our work, we emphasize how young children are social actors who have their own take on the places they live and construct their identities accordingly.

Children as Social Actors in Multilingual Cities

Curtin (this volume) examines how the LL both reflects peoples' local, regional, national and transnational identities and serves as site/object of identity construction. In our prior research (Lamarre and Dagenais 2003) we found that adolescents adopted a transnational frame of reference to construct their identities as multilinguals in relation to local, national and international language markets (Bourdieu 2001; Zarate 1998). In our current work (Dagenais et al. in press)¹, we turn our attention to younger children to explore how their identities are shaped in interaction with diverse languages of print in the LL. This landscape provides them with information about the population of their neighborhood, it signals what languages are prominent and valued in public and private spaces and indexes the social positioning of people who identify with particular languages.

Drawing on Norton's (2000) articulation of the relationship between identity and language learning, we investigate how children imagine the languages of their neighborhoods and construct their identities in relation to them. Wenger (1998: 173) argued that imagination plays a central role in learning as a socially situated process that entails "creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience." We suggest that documenting the imagined communities (Anderson 1983/1991) of neighborhoods as seen by children can provide much information on their understanding of the city that would





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be helpful to language educators and researchers. As we examine their interpretation of the linguistic landscape, we also consider what this implies for students of diverse backgrounds who may—or may not—see their family languages represented in public and private space. We wonder how this affects the way they discursively position themselves and are positioned by others in social interactions.

To address these issues, we turn to Francophone scholarship in European sociolinguistics (Moore 2001; Beacco 2004) and Canadian research in education (Dagenais 2001) that have developed the construct of social representations (*les représentations sociales*), as first proposed in French social psychology to articulate how groups discursively attribute meaning to their common experiences (Doise 1988; Jodelet 1989; Moscovici 1961/1976)². Social representations may be relatively homogenous and shared by all, or they may be heterogeneous and contested when they include divergent or contradictory notions that are more or less shared by group members. In the latter case, individuals may strategically align themselves with particular representations to signal allegiance or opposition to them. Representations are also dynamic since they can be reshaped through the confrontation of differences and negotiation of new meanings. Thus, we suppose that constructing representations of the linguistic landscape involves a process of interpretation and discursive negotiation. As well, we posit that individuals make sense of their print environment depending on where they are situated socially and they strategically affiliate with particular representations according to their own experiences and interests.

In this regard, Lucci et al. (1998) suggested that texts found in cities have various meanings and overlapping functions. Graphic images and imaged script often appear in mixed media that mirror the diversified social activities of citizens. Like the variations created by looking in a mirror from different angles, the interpretations attributed to visual/textual information in the linguistic landscape are also multiple and differ according to the perspectives of those who observe them. Children's gazes differ from those of adults who, at the very least, move cities at another height and perhaps in a more pre-occupied state, with less direct attention to their senses than is the case in childhood. Thus, we draw on the metaphor of a mirror to survey how the linguistic landscape is reflected—and reshaped—through the gaze of children.

Cities as Texts

Another metaphor that can be applied usefully to the study of the LL in metropolitan areas is the notion of cities as texts (Mondada 2000). Viewed in this light, cities are dense with signs that must be deciphered, read and interpreted by citizens who participate in the consumption of the moving, literary spectacle of the metropolis. Calvet (1994) signaled that the texts of cities are not equally accessible to all; they are relatively cryptic and readers





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must be culturally and linguistically informed to decipher their meanings. The texts of cities define and delimit who their readers are since they address particular audiences.

As children begin to move around their communities, interact with others and learn to read the signs that surround them, they attribute meaning to the public/authoritative discourses of their cities. They appropriate these discourses, transforming them to make them their own—a process Bakhtin (1981) referred to as the construction of internally persuasive discourses. Navigating their cities, children develop literacy practices that enable them to engage with messages communicated between the readers and writers of their communities. They read the multimodal texts (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; Malinowski, this volume, Shohamy and Waksman, this volume) that take many different forms and serve various functions, engaging with them in different capacities and at different levels. According to Colletta et al. (1990), readers may decipher the textual communication of a message, they may interpret the rapport between the writer(s) and intended reader(s) and they may consider the psychosocial and cultural repercussions of the message.

Drawing children's attention to layered readings of texts in different languages of the linguistic landscape thus entails developing critical literacy so that they learn to listen to the multiple voices in their communities (Barton et al. 2000; Comber and Simpson 2001; Gutiérrez and Rogoff 2003). Critical literacy activities bring to the fore a reading of texts that makes more explicit to young readers the tensions between unity and discord in society and helps them situate the sociohistorical contexts of written communication. Children are encouraged to ask: What are the interests of the writers and readers of texts? What is at stake for them in producing and decoding texts? Who has power to determine what languages appear in texts?

Critical literacy activities that encourage children to interrogate texts in terms of issues of power and privilege are typically adopted in teaching approaches that have come to be known collectively as critical pedagogies (Norton and Toohey 2004). They emerge from a scholarly tradition that draws on Apple (1979), Bourdieu (1977), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Freire (1970), Giroux (1983) and others whose work on power differences in social relationships shaped critical theory in education. As Norton and Toohey (2004) suggested, language educators who adopt the perspective of critical pedagogies focus on language as a means of pursuing equity. Earlier, Pennycook (1999) proposed that a critical stance in education involves connecting language to broader political contexts and ethical concerns with issues of inequality, oppression, and compassion.

Linguistic Landscape as Heuristic for Learning

In our research with children, data on the LL serves as a research tool to stimulate children's observations of texts, multilingualism and language





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diversity. Documenting their discourse on these topics provides a means of accessing children's representations. Since the LL highlights relationships of power between dominant and subordinate groups (Ben-Rafael, this volume) and struggles between official and non-official language communities over visibility in public space (Trumper-Hecht, this volume), it also provides a pedagogical tool to draw children's attention to the non-neutral nature of written communication.

In a Canadian context, activities on this topic might involve interrogating the relationship between texts in the environment, the interactions of social actors from diverse communities, and the status of official languages such as English and French, languages of First Nations people and languages brought to cities through immigration. This draws students' attention to the fact that the texts most visible in their particular environment do not necessarily reflect the local language practices. For example, in various areas of the country, French and English have *de facto* minority status but they maintain visibility because of their *de jure* status as official languages and the collective national imagination (Anderson 1983, 1991) of Canada as a bilingual country.

As well, in cities such as Vancouver, attending to the way Aboriginal languages and cultures are referred to in local signage and murals may enable children to critically interrogate folkloric or romanticized images of these communities. Their portrayal in the linguistic landscape sometimes reinforces an imagined national identity based on liberal multiculturalism (Kubota 2004). The latter is associated with social cohesion in the government's policy discourse, but as Kubota and others have argued, it also eclipses how linguistic genocide, racism and elitism have marked the local history and the relationships between linguistic groups in this land.

Touraine (1997) argued that schools must avoid universalist perspectives on language and education that fail to account for the complex social realities marking students' everyday lives. Thus, an educational approach to the linguistic landscape based on critical pedagogies would aim to move beyond the tokenism of liberal multicultural education and universalist assumptions by problematizing how graphic and visual representations of diverse communities are discursive constructs. In this respect, this type of pedagogical work on the linguistic landscape also adopts an ecological perspective (Hornberger 2003; Van Lier 2002) by accounting for the complex relationships between all languages in the environment.

Pennycook (this volume) considers language in signs of the linguistic landscape as a form of style in multilingual urban settings of global transcultural flows. The notion of language as style is quite relevant to a critical reading of commercial signs in Vancouver or Montreal. It could serve to make more explicit how some languages, such as French or English, are not necessarily used to conform to policy on official languages or for the purposes of communicating with readers. Rather, words in a particular language





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can be used simply to display style and signal an association with what is hip, exotic or even urbane in the context of globalization.

Awareness of the Linguistic Landscape

In our ongoing work, we seek to understand whether attention to the LL can contextualize language awareness activities at school. Based on Hawkins' (1984, 1992) work in England, and a re-adaptation of them in Europe (Candelier 2003; Perregaux et al. 2003), these activities aim at having students explore several languages in class to develop an appreciation of linguistic diversity. Students participate in discussions about multilingualism, manipulate texts, listen to audio recordings and watch video clips in a range of languages, many of which they have not previously learned. They examine patterns that are different or shared among languages and attribute meaning to new languages by drawing on the languages they know. One objective of language awareness is to highlight the social functions of language. Activities include observing how languages are valued or devalued in their communities and examining stereotypic representations of speakers of diverse languages. Anchoring language awareness activities in children's experience of the local LL makes them more meaningful. This grounded approach serves as a springboard for exploring language diversity in other areas of the globe and adopting a comparative perspective on language contact and literacy practices.

Research on Language Awareness

To date, language awareness has been studied most extensively in Europe. Longitudinal research has revealed that language awareness allows educators to expand beyond school languages, recognize minority languages and raise awareness of language diversity (Candelier 2003). This research has also shown that students who participate in this approach develop more positive representations of diverse languages and their speakers (Sabatier 2004).

Our prior research revealed that educational practice in Vancouver and Montreal focused primarily on official languages, so that other languages received only scant attention (Dagenais et al. in press). Lamarre (1999, 2001) has argued that Quebec's language curriculum and intercultural education policy are silent on issues of linguistic diversity and tensions between language groups—including French and English communities. Since our work is situated in French language educational contexts, we turned to studies of language awareness activities designed for instruction in French. They are known collectively as *Eveil aux langues* through large-scale projects such as Eole (Perregaux et al. 2003) and Eulang (Candelier 2003). Several recent applications draw as well on advances in research on multilingualism (Cenoz and Genesee 1998; Coste 2002; Martin-Jones and Jones 2000) and





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developments in critical pedagogies (Fairclough 1992; Norton and Toohey 2004).

Fairclough (1992) proposed a critical approach to language awareness. He suggested that it might help students interrogate social inequalities and work toward greater equity. Critical language awareness activities have been taken up in various contexts, including some Canadian English language classrooms with students of Aboriginal ancestries (e.g., Bilash and Tulasiewicz 1995).

Our Study

Our project is based on a prior case study of language awareness activities in Montreal, Quebec, and Vancouver, British Columbia. As we reported elsewhere (Dagenais et al. in press; Maraillet and Armand 2006), students who participated in these activities recognized that their collective language repertoire extended beyond official languages.

Objectives

The general aim of our (2005–2008) longitudinal study (Dagenais et al. in press) is to document elementary school students' contacts with a variety of languages in their communities. We also describe how they co-construct representations of languages, language speakers and language learning in language awareness activities. As well, we investigate how aspects of the LL can serve both as research and pedagogical tools in these activities.

Context

The presence of speakers of other languages has become even more important in and around Canadian urban centers over the years. According to the most recent census figures, between 2001 and 2006, Canada has undergone a greater population growth than any other G8 country due mainly to immigration (Statistics Canada 2007a). Since 2001, an average of about 240,000 newcomers has arrived in Canada each year, for a total of some 1.2 million immigrants in five years. Roughly two-thirds of Canada's population growth now comes from net international migration (Statistics Canada 2007b). The population shift in Canada has led to an increasing number of children in schools who also speak languages other than French or English. Although Statistics Canada has not yet released the data on language gathered in the 2006 census, according to the previous census (2001), 13.9 percent of children between ages 5–14 living in the Montreal metropolitan area and 29.5 percent of children in the same age range living in the Vancouver metropolitan area had a mother tongue other than English or French.





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Participants

This study is based on an action-research project aimed at changing pedagogical practice. Students and teachers from two schools in Montreal and Vancouver collaborate with researchers to develop classroom language awareness activities that attend to the linguistic landscape. The project is in its second year at the time of writing and the participating students, who are in grade 5, are between 10 and 11 years of age.

The Vancouver students have been enrolled in a French Immersion program since kindergarten where they receive instruction in French and English. The school is part of a large suburban school district in which 40 percent of the student population speaks a language other than English at home. However, only 7.5 percent of students in the school are designated as learners of English as a second language. While most students speak English at home, some speak a language other than French or English and a few were born abroad. In Montreal, the school is part of one of the largest French school districts in which 44 percent of students speak a language other than French and English. In this school alone, which is located in one of the most multicultural neighborhoods of Montreal (Meintel et al. 1997), this group represents 80 percent of the population. The students are all of immigrant ancestry, though their years of residence in the country vary from recent arrivals to those who were born in Quebec. It is noteworthy that all the Vancouver students in this project are bilingual and some are multilingual and many of the Montreal students are bilingual or multilingual. Thus, it is likely that all these students might be more aware of linguistic diversity than their monolingual peers.

Exploring the Linguistic Landscape

In the first year of the project, researchers gathered data related to the LL of the neighborhood around each school in consultation with the participating teachers. For the second and third years of the study, they are working more intensively with teachers and children are collecting their own data on the LL in language awareness activities.

Documenting the Linguistic Landscape for Educational Purposes

Data on the LL was gathered according to its pedagogical relevance to language awareness activities. The researchers took digital photos of fixed signs in a targeted zone around the participating schools. Since the neighborhoods and the signage in the two cities were quite different, data collection strategies varied for each site. Nevertheless, the schools were considered to be the central point for data collection. Moving away from this centre, two zones were defined for gathering photographic data.





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In Vancouver, the zones were defined as follows: Zone 1 was a quadrangle formed by four streets surrounding the school and zone 2 was comprised of a larger quadrangle of streets roughly 1 km away from the school. Since the school was situated in a residential suburb, there were very few signs in zone 1 except for street signs and text on objects such as mailboxes. Zone 2 included the three commercial streets closest to the school that were most frequented by students and their families, according to the participating teachers. As well, since the project focuses on multilingualism and language diversity, the Vancouver researchers did not photograph monolingual signs in English. Instead, they took photos of monolingual signs in other languages, as well as bilingual and multilingual signs. More specifically, they photographed store-fronts, signs on public service agencies and other types of personal signage. A total of 132 photographs were taken in zones 1 and 2, including one electoral/political sign; seven personal/home made signs; 105 commercial signs; 13 official signs and six community/religious signs. Among these, 34 signs were unilingual and written in a language other than English (17 in French and 17 in a non-official language), a further 89 signs were bilingual (40 in French/English and 49 English/non-official language) and a total of nine signs were multilingual with more than two languages in various combinations.

In Montreal, zone 1 included two residential streets; the street where the school was located and an intersecting street nearby with numerous community and religious organizations. This latter street included several warehouses bordering a train track. Zone 2 was comprised of a quadrangle of commercial streets covering about a square kilometer. In both zones, all types of signs were photographed including those on religious and community buildings, businesses, government services, and street signs. Small handmade signs and electoral signs on poles and buildings were also included. In zone 2, signs were photographed on only one side of each of the four streets to limit the corpus. The multitude of signs on products in storefronts was not photographed. In all, 221 photographs were taken of public, commercial, personal, community/religious and electoral/political signs. Of these, 139 signs were unilingual, with 108 in French, 27 in English and four in a non-official language. A further 66 signs were bilingual, of which 51 were in French and English, 11 were in French and a non-official language, and four were in English and a non-official language. A total of 16 signs were multilingual, drawing on more than two languages in various combinations. The photographic data are discussed below in terms of their relationship to the language awareness activities implemented in each site.

Constructing Activities on the Linguistic Landscape

During the second and third years of the project, students will observe and gather data themselves on the LL and they will examine the photos taken by





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the researchers in Year 1. A focal group of students (12 per class) will be observed and videotaped as they engage in language awareness activities over a period of 4 months during grade 5 and again the next year. They will be interviewed in focus groups before and after the implementation phase each year. Their teachers will be interviewed on students' responses and the institutional structures that support or impede the exploration of language diversity. Parents of the focal children will be interviewed on their child's language contacts and their responses to the activities.

Although many language awareness activities were previously developed, adapted and implemented in these two schools in prior studies (see www.elodil.com for a sample of activities developed for Montreal), in this project the teams sought to develop an approach focused more specifically on the local linguistic landscape. Although the activities took different forms in each city according to negotiated researcher and teacher orientations, it was agreed at the outset that children in both cities would exchange information (letters, posters, photographs and videos) on their respective neighborhoods. At the time of writing, the fieldwork phase in both cities had just begun and the first few language awareness activities implemented. What follows is a description of initial analyses of observational notes and videotapes recorded during the first activities of Year 2.

As indicated above, reading the multilingual city implies relying on a visual geosemiotic system anchored in a multi-sensory interpretation of signs (Lucci 1998; Scollon and Scollon 2003). We focus on children as researchers, readers and interpreters of symbolic meaning in their solitary or group movements around the city. They respond acutely to olfactory, tactile and auditory literacy cues in the city—such as signs on bakeries or garbage cans, etc. As they walk the streets of the city, children navigate through three dimensions of the linguistic landscape that include the geographical, the sociological and the linguistic aspects of the geosemiotic system. These dimensions can be conceptualized in terms of horizontal and vertical axes. The horizontal axis includes the physical, visual locations of signs in the material world such as store signs, posters, newspapers, graffiti, as well as their visual characteristics such as color, composition and their temporal characteristics, that is, whether they are permanent or ephemeral. The horizontal axis serves an informational function; it documents the physical location of language, of “discourses in place” (Scollon and Scollon 2003), providing clues needed to decode, read and observe the city. The vertical axis corresponds to the symbolic function of language in which meanings of signs are interpreted in terms of power relations, language status, cultural affiliations and identity negotiations. These two axes intersect at a central node, the social actor, and in this case, the child who is mobile, in motion and dynamic.

A language awareness activity implemented in Montreal aptly illustrates this point. Students were asked to describe their neighborhood in their own





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terms to let their representations emerge and document whether or not they had anything to say about languages in their community. They had received a letter from the students in Vancouver and as they discussed it, they talked about the geographic location of Vancouver, its climate and the languages spoken in schools of that city. The teacher then asked students how they would like to respond to this letter. Students opted to create a mural with their drawings of the important places in their neighborhood and collate a photo album with short texts they would write. They discussed what places could be represented in the mural and as homework, they drew a picture of their favorite place in the neighborhood.

The next day, students discussed their drawings in groups, responding to the following questions: (1) What do we see in the drawings of your favorite places? (2) Do you recognize the places drawn by your team-mates? (3) What languages would you expect to hear in these places? (4) What languages can we hear in your neighborhood? In their drawings, none represented the small businesses or multilingual signs in the neighborhood that the researchers had photographed. Instead, the children represented locations that were meaningful to them, such as the school, the plaza where they shopped with their families, the park where they played baseball, the indoor sports centre and the local intercultural library where they borrowed books, watched movies and played computer games.

When questioned about their drawings, the children spoke about the various languages they heard in their neighborhood and they referred to the diversity of the local population. Yet, this linguistic diversity was not represented in their drawings in any way. Perhaps this is not surprising, since most of the sites they chose to illustrate related to public services where the language on signs is in French only due to language legislation.

The following week, the students took photographs of their neighborhood in groups using a disposable camera (see Color Figure 16.1). The teams determined what to photograph and took pictures of the places they had represented in their drawings. The photographs were later developed and distributed to students. Working in the same teams, they looked at the photos, reflected on the languages they observed in their pictures and stated whether anything appeared different from what was illustrated in their drawings. Since there were few photographs of businesses in the students' corpus, pictures taken by researchers were also shown to elicit a discussion of the languages and scripts in the neighborhood. Students were able to identify a variety of languages and scripts in the LL after consulting with peers who were familiar with those languages. When asked what this revealed about their neighborhood, students talked about Montreal as a multicultural and international city. One student talked about Braille in elevators, on traffic lights, on the cameras that they used to take photographs. Others brought up the language of animals and some debated the status of Jamaican English as a language.





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The lack of importance children attributed to language diversity and its expression in the local LL is revealing and sheds light on the way these youngsters experience their city. In fact, it appears that they engage with it physically in terms of the activities in which they participate. They chose to represent the locations they frequent with friends and family. The LL, for all of its richness in this particular neighborhood, was relegated to the background of their gaze and came to their attention only through direct pedagogical intervention. For these children, who have few opportunities to visit other cities or even other parts of Montreal, their experience is embedded in their neighborhood, a part of the city where almost everyone is immigrant. While they might not have been quick to describe the language diversity in the print of their environment, or grant it much importance in their drawings or photographs, this does not mean that they were not aware of it and were not able to formulate what this diversity means to them. In fact, as Color Figure 16.2 taken during the initial outing illustrates, a few children did point to a sign in a shopping plaza that featured a reference to foreign languages with flags.

When directly asked, they were able to speak to language diversity quite well. One wonders if these children, whose lives are fully immersed in the multilingual context, think it is so commonplace that there is no need to describe this aspect of their neighborhood. In another study, Dagenais and Berron (2001) found that children in highly multicultural neighborhoods considered multilingualism to be banal.

Linguistic Landscape as Pedagogical Framework

An example of an activity in Vancouver illustrates how drawing attention to the LL provided a framework to ground language awareness activities. In keeping with what was done in Montreal, an outing was planned as the first language awareness activity in Year 2. In the morning, students were organized in groups and given disposable cameras. They were also given hand-drawn maps of the neighborhood around the school. This activity served as a follow-up to a mapping lesson in social studies. Each group had a different trajectory to follow in zone 2 around the school with instructions to take pictures of signs with different languages. The maps led different groups to move in opposite directions along some of the same commercial streets, including one with the most signs in the area. It is interesting to note that although some describe the neighborhood as more homogenous than the larger suburb, a closer look at the local LL reveals the presence of diversity and language contact. In fact, the LL mirrors the various patterns of mobility and the overlapping history of settlement in this community.

Students followed their maps as they moved through the neighborhood and took pictures of signage along the way. For example, they photographed a mailbox next to the school featuring text in both official languages. As the





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Color Figure 16.3 indicates, the children also noticed writing in non-official aspects of the linguistic landscape such as litter.

The photographs were developed and distributed to the students in the afternoon. They were asked to group the pictures in whatever categories deemed appropriate. Afterward, the teacher asked them to describe their categories. The discussion aimed specifically at shifting their attention from a horizontal axis for interpreting language (taking pictures of the material world of signage) to a vertical one (considering the symbolic meaning communicated in these signs). Drawing on Scollon and Scollon (2003), the LL served as a pedagogical tool to develop critical literacy by engaging children in three levels of analysis of textual and visual media. That is, they considered the geographical location, sociological importance and linguistic function of media in the landscape. As they used maps to move around their neighborhood, the children examined the horizontal plane of the local LL by attending to topographical information. Moreover, having them photograph the *in vitro* language of the landscape was intended to draw their attention to language norms and indications of the human geography of their neighborhood. As students moved through the streets in the vertical space of the LL, the objective was to draw their attention to *in vivo* language and the way citizens use it to mark their territory in the urban space (Calvet 1994). As their gaze shifted from the horizontal space of the maps, where legitimate language practices were represented and they moved around the vertical space, the children observed writing that appeared in legitimate and illegitimate spheres of activity (Billiez 1998; Pennycook, this volume), such as texts on signs, walls and in litter. As illustrated in Color Figure 16.4, a mural that captured the children's attention, their perception of the city and the way they situate themselves in it are shaped by the contact of communities in the linguistic landscape—and the way they are represented.

Thus, in the activity following the outing, learners reflect in greater depth on the human geography and history of this place. This aimed at raising their awareness of the distributed network of authorship in multilingual cities (Malinowski, this volume) by attending to the relationship between groups of readers and writers who belong to diverse language communities. In the follow-up activities planned for these schools, later activities, the focus will be on developing their critical awareness of the way the linguistic landscape indexes a selection and hierarchical representation of languages in their environment (Calvet 1994). For example, in Vancouver, where Aboriginal languages have been marginalized and ostracized, new romanticized depictions on urban murals in the community reveal an effort to recognize the presence of First Nations people. Yet, they are often depicted as a homogeneous entity in the collective imaginary, which ignores the distinct linguistic and cultural traits of Native groups.





Conclusions

Though still in its initial stages, this study suggests that attending to the LL in language awareness activities provides a promising avenue for teaching about language diversity and literacy practices from a critical perspective. It will be interesting to explore in the future whether such activities are relevant for children living in more homogenous linguistic neighborhoods in rural areas. Clearly, pedagogical approaches related to diversity must expand beyond the typical focus on religion, culture and ethnicity explored in liberal multiculturalism or intercultural education. Language issues are sometimes eclipsed in Canadian classrooms because they have been the subject of historical tensions between communities, but there is an urgent need to address them as the country grows rapidly and becomes ever more multilingual. By examining how languages are in contact in the linguistic landscape—and in competition, children may develop a new understanding of the dynamics in their communities.

In our study, children are ever-changing actors, whose reading of the city may be below awareness and deeply embedded in their own experiences, for as Scollon and Scollon (2003: 15) argued, “. . . although it is strongly debated just how much agency (active, rational, conscious intention) any social actor might have in any situation, the position we take is that in most cases our actions are only vaguely purposive and conscious, and almost always they are multiple and complex.” Approaching the LL through critical pedagogy enables us to capture and transform awareness of cities in children’s eyes. Following Bertucci’s (2005) call for pedagogy based on students’ experiences, such activities take into account their out-of-school lives, their own values and perceptions. They reveal the dynamic interaction between children, language and territory. As well, in drawing attention to the ways children walk through the urban landscape, such activities signal how signs become texts that mirror the perception and agency of its young readers. This understanding of the relationship between young readers and texts in the landscape raises three questions: (1) What constitutes texts according to children? (2) What knowledge and skills do they need needed to read them? (3) What meanings do they attribute to the multilingual landscape through their peregrination(s) as traveling citizens? (Lucci et al. 1998).

Notes

- 1 This study entitled: “Éveil aux langues et à la diversité linguistique chez des élèves du primaire dans deux métropoles canadiennes” is funded by a standard grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada 2005–2008.
- 2 For a historical discussion of social representation as a sociological construct, see Billiez and Millet (2001).





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