Semiotic Landscapes and Discourses of Place within a Portuguese-Speaking Neighborhood

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Abstract. This study examines the semiotic landscapes and the commodification of Ferry Street in Newark, New Jersey, USA. By taking a geosemiotic approach, I study commercial signs as well as symbolic signs, such as flags and cultural paraphernalia, within the Ironbound neighborhood. I also explore the spoken discourse from interviews carried out with Portuguese-speaking residents as well as English-speaking visitors to the area. The analysis focuses on the linguistic constructions and descriptions of place that function to portray the diasporic characteristics of this predominantly Portuguese speaking area. The research reveals that signs and interview talk work in tandem to construct and promote this neighborhood as a multilingual and multiethnic place.

Keywords. diasporic community; semiotic landscapes; Portuguese-speaking; marketplace; indexicality; Portuguese in New Jersey

This study is about the semiotic landscapes and the commodification of place in the Ironbound neighborhood, located in Newark, New Jersey, USA. The importance of studying place within the social sciences has been outlined by Jaworski and Thurlow. These scholars claim that “no self-respecting scholar [of sociolinguistics] these days can afford to overlook the discourse/s of place and the place/s of discourse” (2010, p. 1). The “study of place” (Tuan, 1977; Cresswell, 2004) is particularly relevant for an understanding of different cultural and linguistic codes within the distinctive contexts of residential neighborhoods. The research of place is especially significant when studying multilingual and migrant communities and how such communities organize themselves socially while attaining varying levels of “institutional completeness” (Breton, 1964).
The aim of this study is to examine the code preferences of signs and the description of place as multilingual and multiethnic within a predominantly Luso-American community. By grounding my work within a geosemiotic framework, I study place semiotics and code preference of commercial signs and images in order to understand the indexed meaning produced and achieved by code choices. I analyze monolingual and bilingual signs as well as symbolic and indexical signs, such as flags and building façades, within the Ironbound (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2003; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). My study complements previous linguistic landscape studies (Splosky & Cooper, 1991; Backhaus 2006; 2007; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006) that traditionally have focused on signs and sign authors. In addition to signs, I also examine interview discourse from Portuguese-speaking residents and English-speaking visitors to the area. The discourses, present in the Ironbound, depict cultural and linguistic differences, while contributing to the commodification of place as multicultural, authentic, and distinctive. By exploring different types of discourses, namely signs (visual) and oral discourse—or, “thinking of signage as discourse” (Kallen, 2010, p. 273)—the notion of indexicality emerges. To be specific, semiotic links are created at the interface of particular discourse forms, where social meaning is interpreted and achieved. The emphasis on indexicality has to do not only with how systems of signs are understood by individuals, but also how particular physical and material structures, such as buildings, are considered to be “indexable.” It is indeed through the language used on such structures that social meaning within the material world is created (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 111).

The linguistic constructions stemming from the interviews include indexical markers such as demonstratives and personal pronouns, spatial deictic adverbials, as well as tense and time. Within the context of spoken discourse, these indexical markers function to represent individuals’ assessment of place, which results in a significant construct of the Ironbound as a multicultural, authentic, and distinctive place. The research questions underlining this study are as follows: (a) what inferences can we make about individuals within particular neighborhoods based on existing code preferences of signs and the semiotic landscapes? (b) what linguistic features are employed in participants’ descriptions of place, and what functions do they serve in contributing to the commodification of a specific marketplace as multilingual and ethnic?
Linguistic Landscapes

Landry and Bourhis (1997) write that “The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine[d] to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban conglomeration” (p. 25). This assertion is often quoted in linguistic landscape (LL) studies, but several scholars have limited the scope of their study to a particular survey area of a neighborhood—Tokyo (Backhaus 2006, 2007), Jerusalem (Spolsky & Cooper, 1991; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006); Chinatown in Washington D.C. (Leeman & Modan, 2010); Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin (Papen, 2012).

The field of LL has been referred to by Backhaus (2007) as “a relatively young sociolinguistic subdiscipline for which few theoretical preliminaries have been developed so far” (p. 3). More recently, however, Huebner claims that LL is not a new field, but “an often overlooked source of data for the analysis of language in society including multilingualism, social stratification and positioning, and language contact and change” (2009, p. 71). Consequently, he proposes to examine LL through Hymes’s (1972) ethnography of communication perspective, as he uses the latter’s SPEAKING mnemonic to investigate the “communicative acts” of LL artifacts. Other LL researchers have expanded existing theoretical perspectives by proposing various analytical frameworks: a sociological approach (Ben-Rafael, 2009), a language ecological positioning (Hult, 2009), a sociolinguistic approach (Spolsky, 2009), and a language and economy framework (Cenoz & Gorter, 2009). Similarly, recent LL studies have begun to extend the scope of methodological procedures, including Barni’s and Bagna’s (2009) work on mapping techniques so as to georeference languages “statically;” Malinowski’s (2009) study of authorship, which includes interviews, participant observation, as well as photographic and media analysis; Edelman’s (2009) case study of proper name classification of 200 signs in shopping areas of Amsterdam; and Pavlenko’s (2010) diachronic study of LL in Kiev, which employs historical photographs from archives, postcards, and monographs.

Traditionally, LL studies take bilingual or multilingual signs as their starting point in order to gain “insights about multilingualism and language contact” (Backhaus, 2007, p. 1) within a particular place, be it a nation (Coupland, 2010; Macalister, 2010; Sloboda, 2009), cities (Shohamy et al., 2010), neighborhood (Papen, 2012), or a combination of the three. In many cases, this has been done in order to address the larger macro questions of language policy and to investigate “top down” (Ben-Rafael, 2009; Coupland, 2010) approaches to the use of language(s) in the public domain. Such use serves to index the groups of people who
reside in an area as well as the power relations prominent among the “in-group and out-group” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25) reflected in the languages of signs. Jaworski and Thurlow step beyond the boundaries of researching written signs only, and they consider “the interplay between language, visual discourse and the spatial practices and dimensions of culture, especially the textual mediation or discursive construction of place and the use of space as a semiotic resource” (2010, p. 1). They refer to “semiotic landscapes” rather than to linguistic ones. They define the notion of a semiotic landscape as “any public space with visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making” (2010, p. 2). While written discourse is indeed an essential element in the construction of a particular place, additional discursive modalities include “visual images, nonverbal communication, architecture, and the built environment” (2010, p. 2).

Extending the Scope
Some LL researchers have adopted the traditional “Backhausian framework” (Backhaus, 2006, 2007) concerning sign authors and the sign audience (Macalister, 2010; Papen, 2012), but few have actually delved further to try to understand how “passersby” as well as people who both work and reside in a particular place feel about the bilingual and multilingual presence in the area. This broader research facilitates a better understanding of the intricacies of language contact and the degrees of multilingualism. While residents or local workers are in fact the audience for these signs, it has only been very recently that LL/SL studies have taken the former’s perceptions into account. Based on the language(s) present in signs (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006), previous LL work generally made assumptions about the people who ‘belonged’ in an area or neighborhood. Leeman and Modan state that “many LL researchers seem to presuppose that the target audience of a given language consists largely of people who can read and/or understand that language” (2010, p. 183), and, as such, they adopt a contextualized interdisciplinary approach that takes into account the extralinguistic and linguistic environments in which particular signs are located.

Papen’s work on the linguistic landscapes of the Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin takes a different methodological approach as the author combines the analysis of signs and interviews with sign authors. By adopting this approach, this scholar addresses “the critique raised by other LL researchers [who argue] that without consulting sign producers, the researcher’s interpretations of signs risk being one sided” (2012, p. 61). Not consulting sign producers or authors may result in a biased interpretation of signs, but one could also argue that taking into account only sign producers’ intentions is also one-sided. Thus, both researchers’
and audiences’ interpretations of what the indexed message is does not guarantee that the sign producers intended meaning is understood, especially within bi- and multilingual communities, where the interpretation of codes may be more complex. In this study, based on the theoretical and methodological framework of Aiestaran et al. (2010), Garvin (2010), and Trumper-Hecht (2010), I claim that interview discourse concerning the description of a particular survey area by both residents and visitors (who are not sign producers) adds to a better understanding of the multilayered facets of linguistic and semiotic landscapes in general. Study participants from outside of the survey area are called upon to reflect about their “sense of place” (Agnew, 1987) as well as recall their experiences of social interaction within the area, which over time have become meaningful to them (Tuan, 1977). This requires that both visitors and residents specify locations and draw on explicit instances that are significant for the discursive construction of a place as being multilingual, multiethnic, and distinctive.

The Site, Marketplace, and Data

The Site: Newark and the Ironbound Neighborhood

Newark is located about 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) west of New York City and is the largest city in the State of New Jersey. Due to its geographical location along the Passaic River, it has been considered to be a major marketplace since being founded in the 1660s. The city of Newark has a long history of immigration related to the industrial revolution, beginning with the influx of Irish and German immigrants during the first half of the 19th century. From 1840 to 1870, the city’s population increased from 17,290 to 105,000 residents, most of whom resided in the Ironbound section. The industrial boom of the late 1800s brought to the city the production of additional manufactured goods, such as plastics, electrical goods and chemicals, and in the early half of the 19th century, banking companies and insurance agencies had also been established (Newark City Historical Data, 2002).

Employment opportunities in manufacturing attracted an increasing number of Portuguese immigrants to the United States, including to the metropolitan area of New York City. Many of these migrants had originally settled in southeastern New England in the early 19th century, attracted by the whaling and fishing industries. By the end of the 19th century, the whaling industry had declined significantly, and manufacturing became increasingly important. The Ironbound is an area where Portuguese migrants came to settle during the 1920s and 1930s. By World War II, the Ironbound, with its newly established Portuguese community, had a Luso-American population of approximately 6,000,
including first- and second-generation children (“Twentieth-Century,” 2010). In the 1960s and 1970s, the Ironbound neighborhood witnessed an influx of mainland Portuguese immigrants subsequent to Portugal’s Leftist Revolution in 1974 (Shepard, 1982).

Newark experienced an increase in its African American population in the late 1800s, and again in the first half of the 20th century as a result of the WWI and WWII manufacturing expansions. By 1960, African Americans made up 34% of the city’s population. Nearly a century later, Newark felt the consequences of segregation with the 1967 riots. At this time, the city was considered to have the highest percentage of substandard housing in the nation and the second highest crime and infant mortality rates. By the 1970s, Newark’s first African American mayor, Kenneth A. Gibson, had been elected, and the 1980s were considered to be an era of “urban renaissance,” characterized by improved residential and commercial construction. Newark continues to flourish as a result of its geographical location and is known to have one of the nation’s busiest transportation networks, because of Newark Liberty International Airport—the busiest airport within the New York metropolitan region—as well as Port Newark, which remains one of the largest ports for containerized cargo. Much of Newark’s renaissance revival within the last twenty years has been aimed at cultural and entertainment centers such as the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and the Bears and Eagles Stadium (Hartman & Lewis, 2002).

Data provided in Newark’s official website inform that in 2010, there were 277,140 inhabitants with a median household income of $35,963 (“Newark City Data,” 2012). In terms of the racial and ethnic makeup of the city, in 2009 the largest group was black alone—132,911 (47.8 percent)—and the second largest group consisted of Hispanics, 89,862 (32.3 percent), with the remaining races and ethnicities noted as follows: white alone 45,308 (16.3 percent); Asian alone 3,781 (1.4 percent); two or more races 3,925 (1.4 percent); other race alone 2,154 (0.8 percent); American Indian alone 142 (0.05 percent); and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone .03 percent) (“Newark City Data,” 2012). According to data provided by “Zip Atlas” (2012a), 6.9 percent of the total population of New Jersey is of Portuguese ancestry.

The data in “Zip Atlas” (2012b) for the Ironbound zip code (07105) show that of 41,279 residents claiming an ancestry, 13,533 (32.8 percent)—by far the largest percentage among all other groups—are of Portuguese ancestry. Since the 1840s, the Ironbound has continued to attract European immigrants such as Italians, Poles, Slavs, and Lithuanians. Vacca and Sheehan (2009) report that more than 40 diverse ethnic groups reside in the Ironbound—known as “a haven for new Americans.” This area is currently considered to be the home of
In an interview, Vince Baglivo, Director of Communications for the Ironbound Business Improvement District, stressed that most commercial properties in the Ironbound are owned by Portuguese residents (personal communication, August 2, 2012). The diversified number of organizations that exist within the Ironbound, such as restaurants, churches, social clubs, supermarkets, medical practices, and so on has resulted in an institutionally complete ethnic enclave, as in Toronto (see Teixeira et al., 2007). This ethnic enclave continues to attract Central and South American Hispanics as well as Brazilian immigrants. Baglivo speculates that it is the presence of a large ethnic Portuguese community that is drawing these newcomers to the Ironbound neighborhood. This claim coincides with Ramos-Zayas’s description of the Ironbound as “a large Portuguese area with a growing influx of Brazilian migrants” (2012, p. 2). These new immigrants to the Ironbound are not faced with traditional linguistic or cultural integration barriers since Portuguese can be used for daily social interactions and interpersonal relations, which become strengthened within the ethnic community through the process of substitution” (Breton, 1964, p. 199).

The Marketplace
In a study of language policy and linguistic landscapes of Dublin, Kallen (2010) states:

Rather than viewing the linguistic landscape as a single system, then, I propose to analyse it as a confluence of systems, observable within a single visual field but operating with a certain degree of independence between elements. What gives the landscape its discursive, and even at times chaotic, appearance is that these systems are not hierarchically nested within each other. Some are parasitic on others (e.g. certain types of graffiti or stickers placed on other signs), and some (e.g. litter…) involve little conscious planning and considerable spatial independence. (p. 42)

Kallen’s division of spatial frameworks—based on Goffman’s (1974) notion of “discourse frames”—is methodologically useful and theoretically relevant. Kallen divides the linguistic landscape of Dublin into five separate spatial frameworks or categories, which he labels as civic, marketplace, portals, wall, and detritus zone. The civic frame is comprised of state regulatory processes involved in “labeling and delimiting territory and in regulating behavior” (Kallen, 2010, p. 43). The labeling of street signs is an example of the civic frame. The second
frame—the marketplace frame—"is concerned with the buying and selling of commercial goods and services" (p. 49). It is within this frame that "the marketplace speaks with many divergent, often competing, voices which, taken together, define the world of everyday local business" (p. 49). Portals encompass physical, capital, and electronic points that provide gateways for linguistic exchanges within a given locality as well as distant locations. These include airports and train stations, banks, currency exchange offices, as well as Internet cafés. The wall is considered to be a frame in which stickers, artwork, graffiti, and temporary posters are the "prime mode of expression." Lastly, the fifth frame—the "detritus zone"—is where "the transient effects of consumption and the discarding of language-labeled commercial goods contribute to the overall effect of language use in the environment" (p. 43). In other words, the detritus zone is the place of garbage and refuse. Although Kallen (2010) sustains that such a list of spatial frameworks is "neither exhaustive nor universal," (p. 43) it is one way in which researchers can systematically categorize signs found in urban areas.

**Data**

The data for this study consist of two sets, namely semi-structured interviews and pictures taken during the fieldwork carried out in July 2011 (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Pictures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European Portuguese (EP) speakers (10)</td>
<td>Newark (279)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luso-Brazilian Portuguese speakers (LBP) (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish and Central American Spanish speakers (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3 from Ecuador and 1 from Honduras)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anglophones (20)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bilinguals (3) (1 EP &amp; English and 2 LBP &amp; English)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL = 41</td>
<td>TOTAL = 279</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The semi-structured interviews were carried out in July 2011 with 18 Portuguese and Spanish-speaking residents of the Ironbound neighborhood, 20 English-speaking visitors to the area as well three bilingual Portuguese and English-speaking visitors. The interviews were conducted in European Portuguese, Luso-Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, and English and reflected the language preferences of the interviewees. Interviews with the women were conducted at a home cleaning business, to which I had access through family ties. The English-speaking
interviews were conducted with clients, who, since they frequented the Ironbound regularly, felt comfortable in volunteering to participate in the study. I contacted individuals prior to the study to inform them of the research aims and to schedule subsequent appointments. The latter interviews were conducted at the cleaning business’s base, situated 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) west of Newark. The interviews with the English-speaking visitors took place at their homes, located in towns 10 to 20 kilometers (9 to 13 miles) from Newark. The interviews were recorded and lasted between 16 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes, producing a total of 21.5 hours of recordings and a corpus of 209,000 words. The women interviewed at the cleaning business were between 24 and 63 years of age. The English-speaking visitors consisted of 2 men and 18 women, aged 36 to 72 years. Due to the data-driven nature of this study, hypotheses were not addressed in an *a priori* fashion. Rather, several thematic categories emerged from the interview transcripts and corpus, such as: (a) code choice in the workplace and at home, (b) English language learning attempts, (c) and place descriptions of Newark, specifically the Ironbound neighborhood.

The following questions were asked during the interviews: (a) how would you describe Newark and the Ironbound neighborhood? (b) what languages do you use and hear when you are in the Ironbound? (c) do you choose to shop in Portuguese-speaking shops as opposed to English-speaking ones? (d) what are the reasons for residing in the Ironbound? (addressed to residents only) (e) do you feel at home in this area, why or why not? (addressed to residents only), (f) why do you visit the Ironbound? (addressed to visitors only), (g) does this neighborhood feel different from the community in which you reside? (h) If yes, how? (addressed to visitors only).

The 279 pictures analyzed in this study were taken during fieldwork (July 2011) carried out in the Ironbound neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey (see Table 2). Data compilation resulted from a “bottom up” methodological approach, akin to what Ben-Rafael (2009) refers to as the “chaos,” “randomness,” and “unpredictability” method. The images taken in the Ironbound were used for the analysis of code preferences of signs and to gain insight into the sociolinguistic and socio-demographic information of a multilingual and migrant area. Approximately 300 pictures were taken in this neighborhood of houses, apartment buildings, restaurant menus, shop signs, food products, and newspapers. For the purpose of this study, I concentrate on the 71 signs in the survey area and marketplace (Kallen, 2010) of Ferry Street. The primacy given to Ferry Street is justified by its history as a thoroughfare, dating back to 1765 when it became “part of the first direct route between Newark and the Hudson River” (Vacca & Sheehan, 2009, p. 2). Ferry Street, as a result,
has always been an important venue within the Ironbound. Today the western part of the street is considered to be “the commercial heart” (Vacca & Sheehan, 2009, p. 2) of the Ironbound neighborhood and is dominated by Portuguese and Hispanic influence. The geographical survey area of Ferry Street is approximately 1 kilometer (.6 miles) in length. The categorization of the data is found in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Signs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total signs analyzed</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>70</td>
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**Signs and Indexicality**

LL and SL researchers continue to address the question of what actually constitutes a sign (cf. Huebner, 2009; Macalister, 2010; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). From a traditional perspective, signs have been divided into three main categories: icons (pictures), indexes (signs pointing to meaning), and symbols (written text). It is through the use of such signs or a combination of them that meaning is interpreted and made. Regardless of what types of signs are present, Scollon and Scollon consider “that all signs achieve their meanings through properties of indexicality” (2003, p. 28). In other words, the potential meaning of signs, whether they are spoken utterances or traffic signs, points to the larger socio-cultural and political context of the material world in which the sign is produced or found.

The concept of indexicality, which dates back to the semiotic works of Charles S. Peirce (1995), has been studied by linguists and anthropologists alike (Silverstein, 1976, 1985; Hanks, 1990; Ochs, 1992). Of particular concern has been the universal validity and features of indexicality throughout world languages (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 3). According to Bucholtz and Hall, indexicality is a semiotic process “of juxtaposition, whereby one entity or event points to another” (2004, p. 378). Within the context of spoken discourse, index markers include demonstrative adjectives and pronouns (this, that, these and those), deictic adverbials (here and there), personal pronouns (I, you, we, they), as well as tense (present, continuous, past) and time adverbials (then, now). For Carter and McCarthy indexical markers or deictic words “are especially common in situations where joint actions are undertaken” (2006, p. 178) and function to denote physical, psychological and emotional closeness and distance, as well as expressing contrast and difference. Indexicality, therefore, requires a semiotic association between linguistic forms and the social meanings attached to these
forms. Similarly, when it comes to texts and symbols, social and cultural meaning is also produced and created through semiotic links.

I looked at different types of signs, code preferences of these signs, as well as their sign composition (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) in the spatial framework of the marketplace. I scrutinized official street signs, local commercial signs, handwritten signs, as well as symbolic and indexical signs, such as flags and other ethnic and cultural paraphernalia that both construct and promote the commodification of place (Leeman & Modan, 2009), in this case, the Ironbound neighborhood. I also analyzed indexical markers produced by the participants with reference to their place descriptions in Newark as multicultural, multilingual and ethnically diverse. In the analysis below, 12 pictures of various signs from Ferry Street are presented in conjunction with descriptions of this area of the Ironbound neighborhood derived from the interviews with both Portuguese-speaking residents and English-speaking visitors.

The Semiotic Landscapes of Ferry Street’s Marketplace
The sign in Figure 1 is Newark’s official city sign welcoming visitors to the Ironbound section. Apart from this flag being extremely colorful, several iconic images are presented, including a coffee cup, a lobster, a guitar, and grapes. These iconic signs index the international and ethnic cuisine and the vibrant cultural diversity in this neighborhood. In fact, many of the signs examined below reflect the array of services available within the particular marketplace of Ferry Street.

Figure 1. The welcome sign on Ferry Street
At the bottom of the flag an Internet address is provided which reads “GoIronbound.com.” When visiting this website, one learns about the various multicultural events and activities taking place, and the site endorses the neighborhood as a “business improvement district” (BID). Although the website is in English only, a click on the dining options leads to a list that includes various ethnic restaurants: 32 Portuguese, 13 Brazilian, 9 Spanish, and 5 Latin American as well as 16 bakeries (10 of which are Portuguese). The restaurant listings alone exhibit the multicultural and distinctive flare present in the Ironbound neighborhood. This scenario is also reflected in the following two extracts that depict the Ironbound as “European-like” and “foreign.” In extract 1, Linda, an English-speaking visitor, discusses her perception of the Ironbound as European:

Extract 1 “I really felt like I was in Europe”
1. Kellie: so what’s your (.) what are your impressions of the Ironbound?
2. Linda: my impression is that you could be (. ) in many places in Europe erm and it feels more
3. like that than it does [the] United States, erm=
4. Kellie:=in what ways?
5. Linda: my husband and I (.) were looking for a tile one time and we were sent to a place in
6. Newark (.) and after picking up the tile we asked about a place to eat and they sent us to
7. (name of restaurant) and we walked in and we walked into the bar (.) where most people
8. were eating lunch and not until we got all the way across the room did I realize (.) there
9. were only men in there
10. Kellie: mhm
11. Linda: other than me but they were all speaking Spanish (. ) Portuguese there was soccer on the
12. tv (. ) erm I mean I really felt like I was in Europe (. ) they were eating tripe (.) that was
13. the special of the day not too typical here

In this extract Linda describes hers and her husband’s experience in the Ironbound and compares it to Europe (lines 2 & 12). She employs the personal pronoun “you” (line 2) to index the social distance between interlocutors and to make a general statement about the European flare present within the Ironbound. Upon entering the recommended restaurant, Linda heard both Spanish and Portuguese. This specific locale had a TV showing a soccer game and, moreover, the daily special was tripe (a Portuguese dish). The languages heard and the cultural practices
of watching soccer while eating tripe mark this location as un-American and perhaps foreign (Leeman & Modan, 2010). The juxtaposition of cultures and people, as well as self and other, (Blommaert, 2005) is accomplished through Linda’s use of the personal pronouns “I” and “they,” as well as the spatial deictic adverbial marker “here” (Holt 1996, 2002; Carter & McCarthy, 2006), referring to the United States and comparing it to Europe when she claims: “I felt like I was in Europe.” In extract 2, Kathy, another English-speaking visitor, describes her experience of the Ironbound as similar to being in a foreign country:

Extract 2 “I felt like I was in a foreign country”
1. Kathy: that’s the big (.) Brazilian population around here is erm (. ) is in Newark on Ferry Street
2. down that way
3. Kellie: how would you describe it?
4. Kathy: I felt like and this was before we had been to Rio erm I felt like we were in Brazil I mean
5. I didn’t know what Brazil was going to be [like] so I felt erm (. ) I felt like I was in a
6. foreign country yeah but in a good way in a foreign country because it’s erm it’s such a
7. erm neighborhood and erm-the- the reputation of erm Mediterranean people and so by
8. whatever the word is extension? Brazilian people (. )
9. take pride in their property and erm the colors are (. ) you know bright and erm yeah

In this extract, Kathy makes use of the indexical deictic adverbial marker “here” (line 1) to refer to the United States as opposed to Brazil, to which she makes reference twice in this extract (lines 4 & 5). She constructs and compares the Ironbound neighborhood to Brazil, through her repeated usage of the personal pronoun and past tense verb construction “I felt” (lines 4 & 5) as well as her use of the inclusive “we” to refer to her and her husband’s experiences of these two places, which she regards as similar, due to the Mediterranean people and bright colors (lines 7 & 9).

The reference to Europe and the presence of an immigrant Portuguese community is also indexed on the street sign in Figure 2 with text and color. Not only is Ferry Street referred to as “Portugal Avenue,” but the colors in this particular sign, namely red, green, yellow, and white are both indexical and symbolic of the Portuguese flag. According to Kallen’s (2010) categorization, this type of sign would fall under the category of civic frame, but it is included in the analysis of marketplace signs for two reasons: first, Ferry Street is the main commercial street of
the Ironbound section; second, it is also the street and place to which the participants in this study made most reference in their descriptions of Newark and the Ironbound neighborhood as in extract 2 as well as in extract 3 below.

**Figure 2. Ferry Street also known as Portugal Avenue**

Extract 3 stems from an interview with one European Portuguese speaker, Aurora, who has lived in the United States for over 25 years. She states that upon her arrival in United States, she was taken to “Ferry Street.”

Extract 3 “I think I’m in Portugal here”
1. Aurora: Eu penso que quando eu cheguei aqui nos Estados Unidos (.) eles me levaram para Ferry
2. Street=
3. Kellie: =a[h:::
4. Aurora: [e eu disse (.) “wait wait wait a minute” (.) eu penso que aqui eu estou em Portugal”

[1. Aurora: I think when I got here to the United States (.) they took me to Ferry Street=
2. Kellie: =a[h:::
3. Aurora: [and I said (.) “wait wait wait a minute (.) I think I’m in Portugal here”]

In this extract, Aurora’s use of personal pronouns “I” and “they” (line 1) indexes closeness rather than distance as in extract 1. In extract 1, “I” and “they” indexed the social distance between self and other or American versus Europeans. In this extract, Aurora’s use of the personal pronouns index a sense of closeness between herself and her Portuguese
relatives, who took her to Ferry Street. Her use of the spatial deictic adverbial marker “here” (line 3) indexes the sociocultural space of the United States versus that of Portugal. “Here” denotes the physical and geographical distance between these two countries, and at the same time, it indexes a close emotional proximity between Ferry Street and Portugal, reflected in the goods and services provided as well as the multiculturalism and multilingualism present in the area.

Figures 3 and 4 (above) are included here to illustrate the commodification of place as well as the image of home and familiarity, to which Aurora made reference in the previous extract. The code choice and

Figure 3. English signs in an ethnic supermarket

Figure 4. A view of Ferry Street with the Brazilian, American and Portuguese flags, as well as the Brazilian shop “Oba Oba”
composition of the signs in figure 3 indicate that English is the preferred linguistic code, but it is situated below the symbolic images of the Brazilian and Portuguese flags. In discerning independent evidence of semiotic systems and code preferences within signs, Scollon and Scollon claim that empirical questions regarding code placement and code preference on signs can be “settled largely through ethnographic means” (2003, p. 122). Within the marketplace frame studied, the national flags and written English found on signs could index that a bilingual clientele shops there, and it may also attest to the ramifications of globalization. By supplying various national products available for purchase, these shops and the semiotic work owners draw on to advertise products, promote a sense of familiarity and home to immigrant residents as well as a flair of distinctiveness and authenticity to nonmigrant customers. The semiotic work represented in figure 4 also reflects a sense of pride, ethnicity, and multiculturalism. In this figure, there are a myriad of indexical and symbolic signs, which function in tandem to produce a plethora of meanings and interpretations. First, there are three large flags of Brazil, the United States and Portugal with a string of smaller Portuguese flags in the background, as well as a Brazilian shop to the right advertising Brazilian Fashion in Portuguese. The positioning of the U.S. flag in the middle of the Brazilian and Portuguese flags could be interpreted and indexed as somewhat symbolic, representing the unification of both minority groups in one place. Moreover, although the interjection “Oba Oba,” which translates into “Wow!” or “Great,” identifies it as a Brazilian shop, the colors of their advertisement resemble those of the American flag in the use of red, white and blue, rather than the Brazilian flag colors of yellow, blue and green.

Figure 5. A bilingual advertisement of the Restaurant “Iberia” with the Portuguese and Spanish flags
In line with the symbolic uses and indexical meanings of flags and color use, the advertisement in figure 5 shows two flags, namely the Portuguese and the Spanish flags. Both flags exhibit severe discoloring so as to display and support the superlative use of the actual word employed in the sign, namely oldest. The use of the superlative here could be used to indicate and reflect the ancient and authentic (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2003) connection to the Iberian Peninsula—Portugal and Spain. The Iberian Peninsula is also indicated on the sign in different colors, namely white (Portugal) and gray (Spain). Being Iberian is what unites these two countries and cultures, and this unity is depicted in the sign, as the image is placed where the two flags interlock. Furthermore, this sign, despite its use of Portuguese and English only, rather than Portuguese and Spanish or Portuguese, Spanish and English, reflects what Baglivo states about the Ironbound Business District: that while it is “Iberian,” consisting of Spanish, Galician and Portuguese immigrants, most commercial properties within the Ironbound are in fact owned by Portuguese.

Figure 6. A bilingual sign advertising the restaurant “Typical House” with three Portuguese symbols on the right

Figure 7. A bilingual Portuguese and English shop sign
Figures 6 and 7 (above) display two signs advertising in Portuguese and English. The first sign, for a typical Portuguese restaurant, includes the name “Casa Típica” on the top of the sign in Portuguese. As such, the linguistic code preference for this sign is clearly Portuguese. Such a claim is supported by the additional cultural and national symbolic images located on the right-hand side of the sign, where there is the Portuguese national flag, a ship, which indexes maritime activities and Portugal’s role in global exploration, as well as the Barcelos cockerel, which is one of the most popular Portuguese symbols—it signifies faith, luck, and justice. In figure 7, a bilingual Portuguese and English sign hangs outside a restaurant door informing potential customers that they are open. The code preference for this sign is also Portuguese, since “Aberto” [Open] lays on top of the sign, and in a larger font size than that of the smaller English translation placed at the bottom right-hand corner. The use of English and Portuguese, within figures 5 through 7, indexes the cultural and sociolinguistic audiences of such signs as predominately Portuguese speakers or English-speaking tourists visiting the area in search of ethnic and authentic cuisine.

In Figures 8 through 12, the signs and writing are in Portuguese. What is particularly striking about the Portuguese bakery depicted in figure 8 in terms of the commodification of place is not only the language used for the bakery’s name and the items which can be bought there, but the actual architecture and building façade. This analysis concurs with Thurlow and Jaworski’s (2010) claim that, when analyzing place, the architecture and built environment should also be scrutinized apart from linguistic inscriptions. The roof of this bakery is constructed
from clay roof tiles that are emblematic of traditional Portuguese architectural design. The use of clay tiles, the bakery’s name [bread of the land], and the goods it sells, such as bread with chorizo and bread baked using a firewood stove, index and symbolize the traditions of Portuguese culture.

Figure 9. A law firm advertises in European Portuguese their multilingualism

Figure 10. A handwritten Portuguese sign advertising lobster “claws” and “tails” at the local fish market

The images of figures 8 through 12 portray signs that are in Portuguese only. While Ferry Street displays a number of languages, as is indicated in Table 2, my impression as well as the participants’ remarks about the description of place, pointed to the dominance of
European Portuguese. The sign of the law firm in figure 9 (above) advertises that they are indeed multilingual, yet they do not advertise in the languages actually spoken in their law firm, such as Portuguese, Spanish, English, Italian, Polish, and Russian. Instead, they have made a deliberate choice in the code selection of this Portuguese only sign when they assert “a nossa firma fala” (our company speaks) and lists the six languages in European Portuguese.⁹

Figure 11. A handwritten Portuguese sign advertising hair extensions at a special price

Figure 12. A Portuguese jewelry shop sign

The further use of Portuguese signs in figures 8 through 12 are indicative of the type of audience these signs wish to attract. Within the context of figures 10 and 11, I agree with Macalister who makes a
distinction between the use of official and national signs, on one hand, and signs used by local businesses, on the other. He states, “signs used by a local business or an individual … would appear to offer a greater scope for innovative or idiosyncratic language use, to be closer to the language used by the community” (2010, p. 63). In fact, this is precisely what I found within the semiotic landscapes of the signs analyzed on Ferry Street, as well as with the interview participants, as revealed by the final two extracts. In extract 4, Dona Maria, a European Portuguese speaker, describes her preference for Portuguese-speaking shops in Newark:

Extract 4 “almost everybody speaks Portuguese”
1. Kellie: E aqui quando por exemplo você vai pra uma loja (.) erm (1.0) você fala Inglês ou você
2. prefere ir para uma loja que falam Português? Como é que é?
3. Dona Maria: Eu sempre vou a uma loja (.) as meninas que estão na caixa e assim falam Inglês e falam
4. Espanhol e falam Português e a gente vai mais a estas lojas que tão lá em Newark sabe
5. como é (.) quase todo mundo fala Português

[1. Kellie: and here when, for example, you go to a store (.) erm (1.0) do you speak English or do
2. you prefer to go to a store that the people speak Portuguese? how is it?
3. Dona Maria: I always go to a store (.) the girls that are there at the cashier and this way they speak
4. English and speak Spanish and speak Portuguese this way we go more to these stores
5. that are there in Newark you know how it is (.) almost everybody speaks Portuguese]

Similar to the claims made in extracts 1 and 2 regarding the multilingual diversity found in the Ironbound, Dona Maria states that there are shops, in which cashiers are trilingual and that they speak “English, Spanish and Portuguese” (line 4). Due to the linguistic situation found within the Ironbound, Dona Maria prefers to visit “these stores” (line 4) where the marketplace sites accommodate Portuguese speakers, and “almost everybody speaks Portuguese” (line 5). Dona Maria’s use of the inclusive and personal pronoun “we” as well as the demonstrative “these” (line 4) index the physical and emotional closeness she feels by residing in a Portuguese dominant neighborhood and being able to conduct her daily interactions in Portuguese. The employment of the inclusive “we” in this extract does not refer to the listener and speaker, but could index her and her husband or her and
other Portuguese-speaking migrants. Furthermore, Dona Maria’s use of the indefinite pronoun and present tense construction in “everybody speaks Portuguese” (line 5) functions to index a general state of affairs in the Ironbound as being diverse, multilingual and ethnic, albeit predominantly Portuguese.

In extract 5, Linda, an English-speaking visitor to the Ironbound section, who frequents the neighborhood regularly because of its ethnic cuisine and supermarkets, discusses her experience and perceptions of it as follows:

Extract 5 “They speak to you in Portuguese first”
1. Kellie: Have you been to Newark?
2. Linda: (1.0) I’ve been to Seabras=
3. Kellie: =Ok=
4. Linda: =where they speak to you in Portuguese first and then if that doesn’t work (.) they’ll
5. try English @@@

In this extract, Linda admits to having been to Seabras, the largest Portuguese supermarket located in the Ironbound neighborhood. Unlike the previous extracts that describe the Ironbound as multilingual, she suggests that Seabras is in fact monolingual in Portuguese only, when she claims that shop assistants address customers in “Portuguese first” (line 4). Linda’s use of the personal pronouns “they” and “you” within this extract indexes the interlocutors within a general shopping encounter in which all shop assistants address customers in Portuguese. Shop assistants switch to English only after they realize that their customers do not understand or speak Portuguese. This becomes apparent when she employs the negative construction “if that doesn’t work, they’ll try English” (line 5), implying that Portuguese-speaking shop assistants’ attempts at using English for transaction purposes may not always be successful.

**Conclusion**

In their study of Chinatown in Washington, D.C., Leeman and Modan claim that “language is a key element in the creation of themed ethnic neighborhoods” (2010, pp. 190–191) and that the status of a language becomes a “readily identifiable index of ethnicity and cultural authenticity” (2010, pp. 190–191). Furthermore, Jaworski and Thurlow assert that “imagery of place is, of course, an important resource for diasporic communities in maintaining their sense of national and ethnic identity and to express their longing and nostalgia for the ‘lost’ homeland” (2010, p. 8). In fact, the analysis of the images found on
Ferry Street, as well as the discourse produced by study participants, point toward this interpretation. The fact that individuals describe this particular marketplace as “European-like” and “foreign”—reminiscent of both Portugal and Brazil—is attributable to the degree of Portuguese spoken in the area, and the availability of national Portuguese and Brazilian goods. Together, the discourses of multilingual signs and interviewees’ talk indicate that this particular place has been imprinted to resemble a sense of cultural identity and perhaps even a sense of “home.” In Jaworski and Thurlow’s words, “immigrant languages, national flags, colors, emblems, décor and architectural detail … index these communities and allow them to claim these urban spaces as their own—to make the foreign and distant, familiar and present” (2010, p. 8).

In my analysis of the semiotic landscapes in the marketplace of the Ironbound’s Ferry Street, the languages used, products sold in supermarkets, fish markets and bakeries, as well as the national flags on display and the architectural detail—such as clay roofing tiles—are precisely the semiotic artifacts referred to by the participants in my study. Consequently, these artifacts let them feel “familiar” and comfortable as they gave them a sense of belonging (Breton, 1964). Researching the code preference and sign composition has shown that Portuguese is in fact the preferred language within this neighborhood. The use of monolingual Portuguese signs characterizes the community they identify while simultaneously pointing to the kinds of individuals and migrant groups who are the receivers, addressees, and audiences of these signs. This dynamic suggests that Portuguese entrepreneurs expect their clientele to be Portuguese-speaking as well (Teixeira et al., 2007). Furthermore, the use of both monolingual Portuguese signs, as well as bilingual Portuguese and English signs, functions to construct the Ironbound as particularly multilingual, multiethnic, and primarily Portuguese. The semiotic work being done with the various artifacts analyzed and the interviewees’ descriptions of the Ironbound promote the commodification of place as a multilingual, authentic, and distinctive place, where diversity prevails among its residents and visitors. The discourse analyzed from the interviews confirms the high use of Portuguese within this particular neighborhood in shops, supermarkets, and restaurants. The linguistic features used by individuals to describe the Ironbound and particularly Ferry Street, such as deictic adverbial markers, personal pronouns, demonstratives, and reference to the diverse ethnic immigrants, serve to mark the distinction between the Ironbound as a diasporic community in which Portuguese can be used for all communicative purposes and for any necessary social interactions. As such, the Ironbound can be classified as “institutionally complete” (Breton, 1964). The analysis of the indexical markers used by participants
exposed the contrast and differences of physical and emotional distance between groups of people, such as resident Portuguese immigrants and American visitors. This became apparent when the juxtaposition of self and other was being discursively constructed and marked by the use of personal pronouns (I, we, you, and they). The analysis of demonstratives such as “these” and “those,” as well as deictic adverbials (here and there), further indicated the divergent views and assessments of the sociocultural spaces and places individuals find themselves in, while simultaneously contributing to the marketplace of Ferry Street as multilingual and multiethnic.

In this study, it was my objective to make a contribution to the field of linguistic and semiotic landscapes studies by analyzing, in addition to signs, discourse on the description and perceptions of place. I have shown that an approach that combines a study of signs as well as residents and visitors’ perceptions and descriptions of place—in this case in the Ironbound neighborhood, and especially the marketplace of Ferry Street—grants a more in-depth understanding of specific sociolinguistic contact situations and the commodification of place as multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic. Future studies on linguistic landscapes need to envision more than language(s) ascribed to signs and explanations of sign authors. They should also analyze how individuals residing in and visiting such places perceive the neighborhood based on the latter’s experiences and impressions of a place. Moreover, semiotic artifacts, such as cultural paraphernalia and architecture, can offer researchers a better understanding of how place descriptions are constructed, understood, and interpreted as authentically multilingual and multiethnic. In sum, linguistic landscape studies should expand their methodological approach to incorporate a triangulation of data that may contribute to a greater understanding of language contact situations and the degree of multilingualism depicted in diasporic communities.

Transcription Conventions

[ = start of overlap
@@ = signals laughter
wo::rd = perceptible lengthening
(.) = pause shorter than one second
= pause lengths in seconds
? = rising intonation, often signals questions
= = latched talk
Notes

1 Geosemiotics consists of three systems that include interaction order, visual semiotics, and place semiotics. All systems are further subdivided into several categories. For the purposes of this study, I focus on place semiotics of commercial signs and code preferences. For a detailed account of this interdisciplinary field, cf. Scollon and Scollon (2003).

2 For a thorough analysis of “top down” and “bottom up” approaches in LL studies cf. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006); Backhaus (2009); Coupland (2010) and Kallen (2010).


4 See Malinowski’s (2009) study on authorship within a Korean community in Oakley, California.

5 While these numbers give us a rough idea about the ethnic diversity within this neighborhood and Newark as a whole, we are aware that such figures are not accurate since not all residents fill out the census due to their illegal status and fear of being deported.


7 Unfortunately Baglivo was not able to provide exact figures in terms of Portuguese owned businesses within the Ironbound neighborhood (personal communication, August 2, 2012).

8 Thus rather than participating in social events hosted by native community members, the immigrant participates in those organized by the ethnic community. This in turn functions to establish strong interpersonal relations among migrants and their ensuing integration into the ethnic community rather than the native one.

9 This sign is in European Portuguese since the term Polaco is used rather than the Luso-Brazilian term Polonês.

References


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