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# Localizing the Transdisciplinary in Practice: A Teaching Account of a Prototype Undergraduate Seminar on Linguistic Landscape

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Building upon paradigms of language and languaging practices as *local* phenomena (Canagarajah, 2013; Pennycook, 2010; Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013), this paper narrates a teacher's experience in an undergraduate seminar in applied language studies as an exploration in transdisciplinarity-as-localization. Taught by the author in 2012-2013, the seminar was intended as an introduction to the politics of societal multilingualism as visible in the linguistic landscape of public texts. As such, it relied upon its own geographic and institutional locality, as well as the diverse conceptual moorings and methodologies of linguistic landscape research (e.g., Blommaert, 2013; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009; Trumper-Hecht, 2010) in order to lead students in interpreting the significance of East Asian languages in the San Francisco Bay Area. However, as the paper endeavors to show, the course's own curriculum—and with it, the locus of teacherly authority—was forced to *de-localize* as the implementation of curricular ideals in practice revealed heterogeneous and expansive orders of meaning.

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## INTRODUCTION

Perhaps ironically, the multiple dimensions and complex layerings of language as both used and learned may be easier to see the closer one gets. Drawing from examples of language practice as diverse as hip-hop performance, newspaper articles, and graffiti art, Pennycook (2010) has argued that language must be understood not as an abstract system, but rather as a *local* phenomenon, arising first from the utterances of speakers in tangible places, at particular historical and ideological moments. As the Douglas Fir Group (2016) has recently posited, a transdisciplinary approach to second language acquisition should “begin with the social-local worlds of L2 learners and then pose the full range of relevant questions—from the neurobiological and cognitive micro levels to the macro levels of the sociocultural, educational, ideological, and socioemotional” (p. 20). This assertion echoes Larsen-Freeman and Freeman's (2008) earlier position that “there is no grand theory or primary discipline to anchor” foreign language teaching today (p. 150); rather, “the intense localness of the various practices of subject-language teaching has defined language knowledge in increasing local and contextual terms” (p. 149). *Localization*, then, may be one productive lens through which to observe how knowledge both in and of language (in the senses both of language-in-use and language-as-subject of teaching and learning) “transcends subject matter and curricular boundaries” (van Lier, 2004, p. 20) as it is constituted in individuals' situated practice.

Perhaps as well, few sites of language use would present themselves as so obviously suited to explore the *local* ecological, relativistic, multidimensional, and symbolic potentials of

language teaching and learning (see Introduction, this issue) as the ‘linguistic landscape’ of visible language in public space (Backhaus, 2007; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). Not existing in name until at least 1997, linguistic landscape (hereafter termed “LL” when referred to as an area of study, and “linguistic landscape” as a geographic/semiotic field of meaning-making activity) emerged from within sociolinguistics and language policy approximately ten years later, with research into questions of ethnolinguistic vitality, language contact and change, social protest, tourism, and other domains of language use in public life (see Gorter, 2013 for a recent overview). Within this context, a number of studies have arisen attesting to the value of the linguistic landscape for language and literacy learning (e.g., Cenoz & Gorter, 2008; Dagenais, Moore, Sabatier, Lamarre, & Armand, 2009; Rowland, 2012; Sayer, 2009). Such research variously chronicles language learners’ interactions with the visible languages of public spaces at the level of linguistic forms, cultural and pragmatic messages, and potential for facilitating critical political awareness (e.g., Rowland, 2012). For the most part, the linguistic landscape is seen as a site of contextualized, authentic language use, as Sayer (2009) argues: “[F]rom an educational perspective, involving students in a LL project decentralises the practice of language learning and ensures language learner interaction with a variety of highly contextualised, authentic texts in the public arena” (p. 495).

The present paper builds on this and the author’s own work (Malinowski, 2010, 2015) exploring the potential of the linguistic landscape as both resource for and site of language learning and teaching—an attempt to capitalize upon language as a medium through which the “perspectival heterogeneity of locality” (Pennycook, 2010, p. 4; cf. Blackledge & Creese, 2014) is revealed. However, in proposing that the local—or rather, *localization*, viewed through the design and teaching of a single place-based seminar—might be one paradigm for conceiving of transdisciplinarity, this study also foregrounds a number of other, practical ‘localizations’—pedagogical motivations, decisions, dilemmas, and contingencies of (teacher, researcher, student) subject positioning and curricular adaptation that might inhere in the opening of any language classroom to the heteroglossic linguistic landscape. Following Lin (2004) and other critically self-reflexive narrative accounts of teaching-and-research practice (see, especially, Norton & Toohey, 2004; also Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014), the study presents an analytical narrative of an undergraduate seminar on LL that the author—I—taught three years ago. In the first section, I present my motivations and designs for this “freshman and sophomore discovery course” as originally conceived: conceptual moorings and methodologies of LL research that I strove to adapt and apply to the seminar classroom in the university’s department of East Asian languages, and plans for on-site exercises and projects that would, I had hoped, allow students to explore the politics of multilingual expression in public space through first-hand documentation and interpretation. In the second section, I illustrate my own attempts at localization-in-practice by recounting instances of what actually happened (or, one view of what happened) as students applied their thematic orientations and methodological introductions from the classroom to the social and semiotic heterogeneity of the neighborhoods they visited. Drawing upon a number of student blog reflections, retrospective interviews, and teacher journal entries, I argue that putting the curriculum into practice between classroom and city in effect forced it, and my own teacherly authority with it, to *delocalize*—that is, to remain open to the entry and interventions of other participants and other disciplinary knowledge that could adequately respond to the “discovery” promised in the course syllabus. To this point, in the final, concluding section, I offer three practical areas for consideration in adapting language course

curricula in and for the linguistic landscape. In so doing, I suggest that educators' situated responses between classroom and community may serve as exemplars of localizing the transdisciplinary in practice.

## **PREPARING THE CURRICULUM: ON DESIGNING A 'LOCALLY MEANINGFUL' UNDERGRADUATE SEMINAR IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE**

### **Course Rationale, Setting, and Participants**

The undergraduate seminar “Reading the Multilingual City: Chinese, Korean, and Japanese in Bay Area Linguistic Landscapes,” taught at UC Berkeley in the 2012-2013 academic year, began as much as a design experiment—“How would one teach an applied language studies course not just *about* the linguistic landscape, but *in* it?”—as a teaching imperative. At a general level, as a postdoctoral researcher in a university language center, I recognized an imperative articulated by professional organizations such as the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (2012) and the Modern Language Association (2007), to address an imbalance between teaching and scholarly activity in departments and programs charged with second language teaching in U.S. higher educational settings. Meanwhile, three recent or time-bound initiatives on the UC Berkeley campus had created conditions that, in my estimation, made linguistic landscape an appropriate venue for experimentation in ways to “change and expand” L2 course curricula into “nontraditional fields” in resonance with a “thrust toward interdisciplinary work and the study of new technological advances” on university campuses (Association of Departments of Foreign Languages, 2012). The first such initiative was UC Berkeley’s launch in 2009 of an undergraduate minor in applied language studies, which was charged with “[providing] students additional expertise as they prepare for professional careers in education, law, business or medicine or for graduate study in the interdisciplinary field of Second Language Acquisition/Applied Linguistics.”<sup>1</sup> The university’s language center had played a foundational role in the creation of this minor degree program, with its founding and current directors serving as designers of the degree program as well as instructors of the minor’s required course, Introduction to Applied Language Studies. The second motivating condition was the also-recent creation of UC Berkeley’s Freshman and Sophomore Seminars series, an initiative designed to give students typically enrolled in large lecture-style courses the ability to join a faculty member and “explore a scholarly topic of mutual interest together, following an often spontaneous flow of dialogue and interchange in the spirit of learning for its own sake.”<sup>2</sup> The third condition, dovetailing with the second, was the coincidental focus of the annual “On The Same Page” campus-wide reading initiative on *Fiat Lux*, the 1967 photo essay project of Ansel Adams.<sup>3</sup> Instructors who were teaching Freshman and Sophomore Seminars were encouraged to incorporate questions of the histories and identities of the University of California system and its surrounding communities, and to do so in modalities that would, like Adams’ work, foreground the visual.

The time and place thus seemed right for a course on linguistic landscape that would take

<sup>1</sup> Described online here: <http://als.ugis.berkeley.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://fss.berkeley.edu>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://onthesamepage.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/fiat.pdf>

place not just in the classroom, but also within the visible and audible texts of public space. There was interest in hosting a survey course from within UC Berkeley's Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, where I had studied over a decade before as an undergraduate, and where I had taught some years later as a PhD student. However, offering the course to a general student population under the auspices of the Freshman and Sophomore Seminar Series dictated that "Reading the Multilingual City: Chinese, Korean, and Japanese in Bay Area Linguistic Landscapes" (hereafter *Reading the Multilingual City*) be predominantly English-medium, and not an L2 course in a single language. I consulted with colleagues in the language center and in the department in order to design a prototype, for-credit course that would lead students in an open-ended exploration of "the power of visible languages in the Bay Area," asking "how meanings that are written into and read from bilingual signs relate to controversial issues of societal multilingualism, in the U.S. and beyond," while at the same time (hopefully) leading lower-division students toward an interest both in language studies and applied linguistics.<sup>4</sup> The experimental course would focus as its 'material' upon the presence in the Berkeley and San Francisco areas of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese—languages spoken by 6.5% , 2.5%, and 1% of the California state population, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

East Asian Languages 39A, *Reading the Multilingual City*, was offered twice during the 2012-2013 academic year. In both semesters, the seminar was attended by approximately 10 students, the large majority of whom were considering the possibility of majoring, minoring, or just studying an East Asian language. Upon entering the course, over half reported coming from families where a variety of Chinese or Korean was spoken at home; all expressed an interest in learning more about the presence of the three languages in the Bay Area and other regions of California. As well, students were conscious of the presence of Chinatowns in San Francisco and Oakland, a Japantown in Oakland, and other 'ethnic districts' that reflect the complex pasts of settlement and control of urban spaces in the western U.S., and that have continued to find their way into debates about ethnic diversity, representation, and exclusion in U.S. society (see, for instance, Leeman & Modan, 2010 and Lou, 2010 on the case of Washington D.C.'s Chinatown).

## Course Design

Motivated by methodological moves among LL researchers to "[add] a third dimension to linguistic landscape studies" by accounting for the direct experience of "walkers" in the LL (e.g., Trumper-Hecht, 2010, p. 236; see below), I designed the class as a series of 3-week units centering around field trips to nearby neighborhoods where Chinese, Korean, and Japanese languages were visible. My hope was that a repeating modular cycle of background reading, data collection and analysis in the field, and classroom report-back and reflection would allow students to make productive comparisons across themes and languages. At a general level, the topics addressed in each three-week unit drew from popular issues in the LL literature, such as the fate of linguistic minorities in multilingual societies (as in Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Hasan Amara, & Trumper-Hecht, 2006; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Spolsky

<sup>4</sup> The course syllabus remains online at <http://ucblinguisticlandscape.edublogs.org/syllabus/>

<sup>5</sup> Modern Language Association data for 2010, [www.mla.org/map\\_data](http://www.mla.org/map_data); here I combine the total numbers for spoken languages listed as "Chinese," "Mandarin," and "Cantonese" in consideration of multiple reporting and the similarities between the languages as written.

& Cooper, 1991) and the commodification and consumption of language (e.g., Kallen, 2010; Leeman & Modan, 2009). A course overview is presented in Figure 1.

Unit	Weeks	Field Trip	Language focus	Topics
1	1-3	Dwinelle Hall, UC Berkeley	English	The politics of cultural representation in the linguistic landscape
2	4-6	Solano Avenue, North Berkeley	Chinese	Reading identities, histories, and voices in the Berkeley linguistic landscape
3	7-9	Temescal District, North Oakland	Korean	The role of linguistic landscape in marking and making 'ethnic towns'
4	10-12	Japantown, San Francisco	Japanese	Movements of people and mobility of cultural markers
5	13-15	n/a	All	Chinese, Japanese, and Korean in the ecology of Berkeley's visible and invisible languages

Figure 1. EALANG 39A schedule and topics

As can be seen in Figure 2 (below), each three-week unit centered around a field trip for which students would prepare in the first week: they were to begin each unit with a short selection of readings from fields such as applied linguistics, Asian American studies and cultural geography, and they also read a number of texts from the literature on linguistic landscape. In terms of the latter, Scollon and Scollon's (2003) *Discourses in place: Language in the material world*, with its "PRACTICE" sections, assignments, and reflection questions, served as an invaluable resource; Taylor and Taylor's (1995) *Writing and literacy in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese*, in conjunction with guest lessons by East Asian Languages faculty members, were to serve as practical orientations to the writing systems of the three focal languages. After the field trip, in the third week of each unit, students would report back on their experience in the field, engaging in debates or giving short group presentations on lessons learned in accordance with the unit's thematic concern.

Week	Activities
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce new topic, geographic scale/site, and focal language of the unit</li> <li>• Linguistic landscape and methodological sample issue</li> <li>• Mini-language lesson from East Asian Languages and Cultures faculty</li> <li>• Prepare for site visit (field trip)</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site visit with directed activity</li> <li>• Blog response</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group reflection and analysis of site visit experience</li> <li>• Student presentations and work toward final project</li> </ul>

Figure 2. EALANG 39A 3-week unit cycles

Each field trip brought students successively further from their UC Berkeley classroom for progressively more deeply layered forms of investigation (see Figure 1). Unit 1 had them recording discourses of gender, disability, and language inside the very campus building where class was held (an activity inspired by LL studies documenting the ideologically-charged landscapes of the familiar, as in Milani, 2013); for Unit 2, on ‘authenticity’ in the Chinese linguistic landscape, the class took a short bus trip to a neighborhood where they collected samples of shop signs and then carried out a group interview with a long-time restaurant owner; in Unit 3, students participated in a scavenger hunt and conducted surveys in a neighborhood where the naming of a ‘Koreatown’ continued to be debated (the general site of research in Malinowski, 2009); and, in Unit 4, the class took a longer field trip to San Francisco’s Japantown, where students used visible clues on shop signs and street signs as “tips of icebergs” (Shohamy & Waksman, 2009, p. 328) to questions of history and change in the neighborhood linguistic landscape, explored through interviews and other means of their own devising. The course concluded with a session of student presentations based on thematic topics chosen before their Unit 4 field trip, as well as final reflections and course evaluations.

By designing regular transitions in learning spaces between classroom and community, and translating a number of LL concepts and methodologies to activity design in an applied language studies classroom—two senses in which I imagine transdisciplinarity as localization in this article—I thought I had laid the foundation for students to gain an appreciation of some of the ways in which “language practices are local, are linked to local perspectives, insights and worldviews” (Pennycook, 2010, p. 5). To a certain extent, this must have happened but, as my experiences during the actual teaching of *Reading the Multilingual City* suggested, seeing in language something of its multiple, relativistic, and historically-rooted meanings would require much more.

## **PUTTING THE CURRICULUM INTO PRACTICE: DILEMMAS IN THE FIELD**

As a teacher/researcher concerned that my students in *Reading the Multilingual City* benefit from direct observational and interpretive activities in the linguistic landscape, I had striven to apply to this undergraduate survey course something of the methodological diversification currently underway in LL research, from quantitative to qualitative approaches, and most recently to a “phenomenological, post-humanist orientation” in which “emphasis is on understanding the human-sign interface, thus exploring the different and very complex ways in which individuals perceive and engage with public signage in their everyday lives” (Zabrodskaia & Milani, 2014, p. 2). As alluded to in the previous section (“Course design”), I had drawn particular inspiration from LL studies such as Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), Leeman and Modan (e.g., 2009), Papen (2012), Shohamy (2006), and, particularly, Trumper-Hecht (2010) for their invocation of the triadic categorization scheme employed by the Marxist sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991) in order to understand the complex ways in which social space is made and contested in “perceived,” “lived,” and “conceived” spaces (e.g., Trumper-Hecht, 2010, p. 237). In my class, as in Trumper-Hecht’s critique of prevailing LL research practices, I had particularly wanted students not to let their knowledge about questions such as the cultural authenticity of local ‘ethnic restaurants’ start and finish in their own “perceived spaces”—that is, in the meanings that they derived from their own direct observations, readings, and listenings in the presence of Chinese, Korean,

and Japanese signs and speech in local places. Students would also need to recognize the places they visited as heterogeneous, subjectively laden, and often unmarked “lived spaces” or, as Trumper-Hecht summarized, “the ‘experiential’ dimension of the LL as it is presented by ‘inhabitants’” (p. 237).

In the following two sections, then, I narrate some of my attempts at applying this lesson on the need for knowledge in both “perceived” and “lived” spaces to learning activities in *Reading the Multilingual City*. Although I draw illustrative examples from student data collected during and after the Spring 2013 term—approximately 50 public blog posts by the 8 students in the seminar and 5 email responses to a 2014 survey on student perceptions of the impact of the course—the primary voice reflected here is my own, as I have drawn from approximately 40 pages of handwritten teacher’s journal entries in the crafting of this paper.

### Exercises in Observation of Language Close By

As Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) point out in their introduction to *Semiotic landscapes*, the very act of seeing the linguistic landscape—that is, seeing that there is such a thing as ‘a linguistic landscape,’ then naturalizing that vision and cultivating the ability to say things about it—is a culturally learned act, premised upon relations of power between the viewer, who has the power to represent, and the viewed (the ‘landscape’). Such a perspective has allowed researchers in linguistic and semiotic landscapes to propose, discuss, and reify particular conventions for identifying and interpreting objects of analysis (e.g., bilingual signs, genres and collections of signs, ‘instances’ of language use, etc.), leading to typologies such as ‘top-down’ (government, or ‘official’ signage) versus ‘bottom-up’ (privately commissioned or produced signage), ‘symbolic’ versus ‘informational,’ and other distinctions that belie various theoretical and analytical intentions—a textbook example of what anthropologist Charles Goodwin (1994) has described as “professional vision,” or the socially and historically situated practices of coding, highlighting, and producing analytic texts through which “nature is transformed into culture” (p. 606).

In *Reading the Multilingual City*, I attempted to give students practice in seeing and reflecting upon such distinctions by assigning sections of Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) and Scollon and Scollon (2003), introducing a few basic concepts from semiotics (e.g., *signifier-signified; index-icon-symbol*), and practicing their application in classroom exercises. Students were then asked to employ these terms in their field activities and reflective blog assignments throughout the course, often with the help of observation rubrics such as that which appears as Appendix 1. And, inasmuch as students’ blog responses are an indication, they did begin to employ the language of this professional vision in interpreting what they saw. In the second unit of the course (weeks 4–6), in which the class had taken up questions of ethnic identity and authenticity in the linguistic landscape, for instance, “John” wrote about how visitors might judge businesses in San Francisco’s Chinatown:

Drawing on the readings earlier, especially in terms of index and symbol, one can observe how a multitude of visuals in these oriental-style places infer to the visitors. The many signs and small billboards across Chinatown can be seen as a form of indices that tell the people what they exactly are; whether they are restaurants, shops, or other services. Meanwhile, the significant architecture like the Oriental rooftops and decorations seem to be symbols that imply this place known as Chinatown. Drawing



from such comparisons through the picture below, I can separate the symbolic components of the place from the indexical components and identify how a typical person perceives the place when he/she first walks into Chinatown.

While John's language visibly demonstrates an effort to display knowledge of the particular conceptual terminology at stake, other students' writings took a more applied approach to the 'indexical versus symbolic' discussion. "Andrew," too, blogged about his trip to San Francisco's Chinatown, and discussed the role of language in realizing dual identities of place, as both historically rooted community and tourist destination:

I think it's obvious as to why there are Chinese characters everywhere, being Chinatown and all. However, I feel that some of them, like the characters on the "Grant" street sign for example, may just be for show or decorations. I think this has to do with being a huge tourist-y spot, so those who don't know Chinese, most likely like many tourists, think that those characters actually do mean what the English words say in Chinese and therefore making it seem even more authentic.

This, and numerous other episodes from the course, suggested to me that situated *practices of looking*—observation, categorization, and interpretation of the use of two or more written languages in public places, based upon criteria introduced in readings and class activities—had the potential to become powerful tools for cultivating language awareness (cf. the "English literacy walking tour" of Chern & Dooley, 2014, and the student-led research projects of Chesnut, Lee, & Schulte, 2013). And yet, in my estimation, a "critical reflexive awareness" (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014) that might have students call into question their own language use, ideological positionings, and even the implications of their own physical presence in local neighborhoods remained elusive: there was, for instance, unfortunately no occasion in *Reading the Multilingual City* in which John's (and others') assumptions about the term 'Oriental' in his own writing were opened for discussion. Nor did an opportunity arise for Andrew and his classmates to debate publicly the 'symbolic versus indexical' meanings latent in their own representational choices, such as Andrew's own choice of 'linguistic landscape' background images for his blog (Figure 3). For many students, with just six hours of field trip time over the course of a semester, merely taking pictures with one's "linguistic landscape goggles on" (as one student put it) as an avenue into discussing language and identity was a significant step.

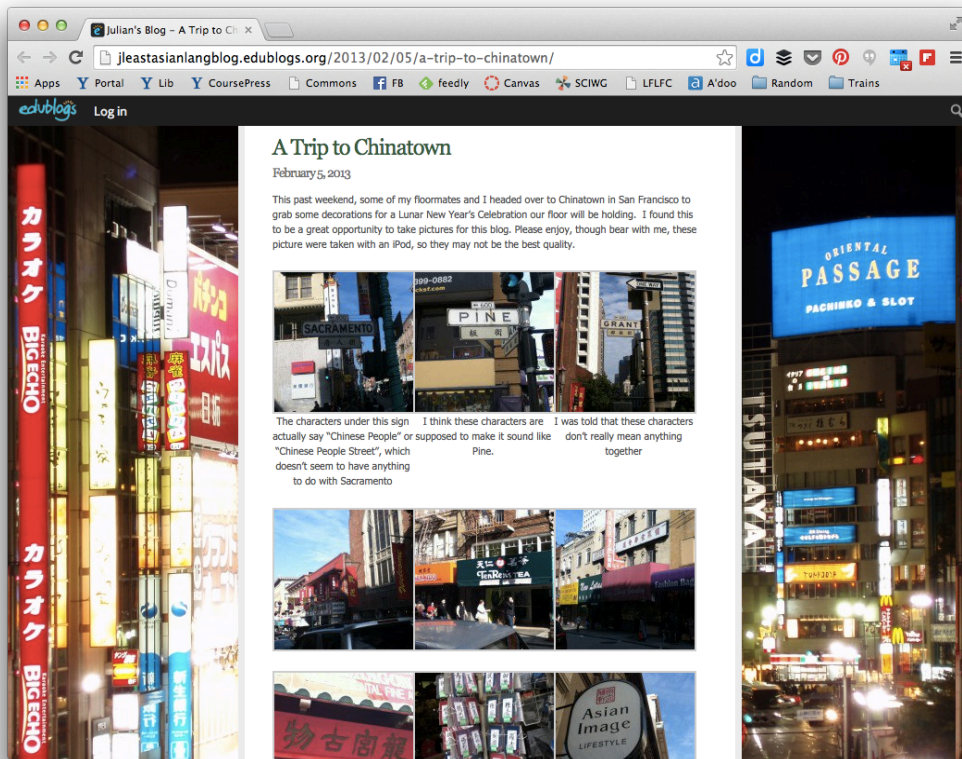


Figure 3. Andrew's blog post, "A Trip to Chinatown," set against a background image of signs at night in a Japanese city.

### Approaching *Lived Spaces* Outside the Language Classroom

Motivated by LL scholarship employing participant observation, open-ended interviews, walking tours, journaling, collaborative map-making and other ethnographic methods (e.g., Collins & Slembrouck, 2007; Garvin, 2010; Leeman & Modan, 2009; Lou, 2010; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009), I had hoped to bring students of *Reading the Multilingual City* into contact with Trumper-Hecht's (2010) "'experiential' dimension of the LL as it is presented by 'inhabitants'" (p. 237). After introducing a number of principles of qualitative research in the first unit, on succeeding field trips I asked the students to take field notes, set up and conduct face-to-face interviews, and use other modes of data collection that would inform their final presentations, to be given on a culturally significant topic of their choice. Guided worksheets throughout the course attempted to scaffold students' efforts in doing this ambitious (for a 2-unit course, meeting just two hours per week) work. In the Unit 2 field trip to North Berkeley, for instance, students were *also* required to investigate the connotations and histories of shop names by entering businesses of interest and, with permission, asking interpretive questions of the shop owners or employees (see Appendix 2).

Such efforts met with mixed results, partly for simple logistical reasons: on every field trip, the students had to leave campus to meet at a bus stop, wait for the bus, ride for 10-15 minutes, orient themselves to the neighborhood, conduct a field work assignment, and then

return to campus, all within the 2-hour period of the class. There was also a constant risk of cultural, geographic, and racial overgeneralization and stereotyping as students navigated significant demographic differences in the campus area (for instance, the students frequently misread Chinese/English transliterations in signs according to mainland Chinese Mandarin standards without recognition of California's Cantonese roots; on this issue see Leung & Wu, 2012).

However, after students were able to engage in discussions with neighborhood residents, shop employees, and passersby, they did reflect on unexpected lessons about others' lived experience in the linguistic landscape. In the second month of the semester, I had arranged with the owner of the first northern Chinese restaurant in a North Berkeley commercial district to visit and discuss the restaurant's history. To the students' and my surprise, we learned upon conversing with him, the business bore two names: King Tsin in Roman characters, and 厚德福 (Hou Te Fu) in Chinese. In response to the students' questions, the owner informed us that his father had apprenticed at "Beijing's original Hou Te Fu" before leaving China in the political turmoil of the 1940s. One of the students later wrote on her blog that "Learning so much about the restaurant's past created a more personal connection, as we heard about how his father first started the business and his siblings worked every day." Another, proficient in spoken Mandarin, reflected on her discovery that "the English name, King Tsin, comes from an unexpected source. I thought that the 'King' referred to the monarchy meaning it has, but actually it came from Beijing's pronunciation: Pe-king. Tsin is a derived sound from the place Ten Tsin, which is a landmark in China."<sup>6</sup>

With respect to the general goal of the Freshman and Sophomore Seminars at UC Berkeley to foster "an often spontaneous flow of dialogue and interchange in the spirit of learning for its own sake," observations such as these students' may be deemed a success. "Learning" through dialogue and interchange on neighborhood field trips also seemed to have taken place in the experience of Andrew who, on the class's final field trip to San Francisco's Japantown six weeks later, conducted a short interview at a paper and craft store. Afterward, he noted on his blog that "This is one of only THREE family-run businesses in J-town that are still running today," indicating with the capital "THREE" not only his perception of the paucity of the number of 'Japanese-owned' businesses in Japantown, but the fact that he had discovered this from his interview. He wrote:

S. talked to me about how years ago, during the late 60s and 70s, many Japanese and Japanese-Americans were working here. As generations passed and some stores were passed on, some shops began disappearing. This was due to many of the younger generation, she explains. Many moved away for schooling and work, seemingly uninterested in running their family businesses. Most of Japanese people living and working around this area are seniors.

Andrew was certainly motivated in his investigations into language: he made trips to other neighborhoods on his own time and posted pictures and interpretive text on his blog. A year later, he indicated in his survey response that the course had been a part of his decision to declare linguistics as his undergraduate major. However, at the time of the course itself, his

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<sup>6</sup> Published in a local online newspaper in the article "What's in a name?: Reading Berkeley's bilingual signs" Available online at <http://www.berkeleyside.com/2013/04/17/whats-in-a-name-reading-berkeleys-bilingual-signs/>

writings did not indicate further consideration of the historical or political circumstances of his findings, including the forcible removal and internment of over 100,000 Japanese Americans—the vast majority in San Francisco’s Japantown (Ng, 2002)—at the hands of the U.S. government during World War II. Andrew’s later remark on his blog post that “[n]owadays, people from all kinds of cultures, not just Japanese, come to Japantown [...] these groups fuel the stores of Japantown and keep the area running beautifully” left me feeling that, as an instructor, I could have done more.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: TRANSDISCIPLINARY LOCALIZATIONS IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

Through the preceding narrative of the experimental undergraduate seminar, *Reading the Multilingual City: Chinese, Japanese, and Korean in Bay Area Linguistic Landscapes*, I have pointed toward three types of pedagogically-oriented ‘localization,’ which together speak to the notion of transdisciplinarity as it is articulated in this collection of articles—that is, as “in-betweenness; to operate ‘in-between’ institutional and everyday ‘real’ life spaces in order to reframe ideas, meanings, languages, language use or pedagogical practices, ideas, etc.” (see Introduction). The three localizations are:

1. Conducting a course in applied language studies both inside and outside the classroom, so as to make the real-world (material, situated, unique) discourses-in-place of the linguistic landscape the primary course text;
2. Applying conceptual orientations and methodological techniques of LL research to curricular design and teaching in an applied language studies classroom;
3. Allowing students’ discovery of the “unpredictable, multidimensional, and multiple ways” (Introduction) in which meaning is made in the linguistic landscape to drive inquiry and learning in a recursive fashion.

In this article, I have given relatively ample space to illustrating the first two localizations through my narration of the course motivations and design, while the third, relying more on the documentation of learning processes and outcomes, remains more of an undemonstrated ideal. In part, this imbalance was due to the human and institutional conditions of the course: in a one-time, experimental, and small-scale course setting, its teacher felt relatively unable and ill at ease to construct a deeper research apparatus around it. It is my hope that, despite this gap, this narrative of design considerations and implementation in a predominantly English-medium seminar is still of use for other, L2 class contexts, as one movement in a collective “spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 165).

In part, however, difficulties in relating *what* students learned must be attributed to my own (personal and structural) inability to deliver on the course’s open mandate to support student inquiry into cultural, historical, and social questions that touched on fields (with sample readings) as varied as applied linguistics, ethnic studies, human and cultural geography, and visual culture studies. Here, Trumper-Hecht’s (2010) reframing of Lefebvre’s triadic model of the production of social space through the rubric of *perceived space*, *lived space*, and *conceived space* gives me a fresh lens from which to critique my own class: while I tried to help students in *Reading the Multilingual City* cultivate tools for “professional vision”

(Goodwin, 1994) in their observation and interpretation of discourse in multilingual signage (with activities in *perceived spaces*, as illustrated in Appendix 1), and then introduce them to methods for conducting interviews, participant observation, journaling, and other qualitative research techniques (oriented toward *lived spaces*, as illustrated in the activity of Appendix 2), I did not (or could not) adequately support opportunities for them to engage meaningfully with texts, sites, and people embodying rooted disciplinary or institutional knowledge (or, “the representations held and promoted by policy makers” in the short gloss of *conceived spaces* by Trumper-Hecht, 2010, p. 237). My disappointment concerning the student Andrew’s lack of further reflection in his blog about the historical conditions and sociopolitical ramifications of the disappearance of the ethnic Japanese population from San Francisco’s Japantown was a ready example of this.

In this sense, teaching language in the linguistic landscape—or teaching about language, as in *Reading the Multilingual City*—may be vulnerable to a danger as great as the opportunity for transdisciplinary learning that it brings: the difficulty in isolating and mobilizing a single area (or collection of areas) of ‘content’ around which to build a curriculum. In this sense, the ‘localization’ of a language curriculum in the linguistic landscape might bear resemblance to the notion of locality produced through hybridized third spaces, as articulated by Rubdy and Alsagoff (2014; cf. Bhabha, 1994). Foregrounding processes of local reinscription while still acknowledging the presence of abstracted global “forms,” they write, “[G]lobal cultural forms are not free-floating but are always reinscribed in new time-space contexts, relocated and relocalized in specific cultural environments” (Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2014, p. 7). One challenge for language instructors, then, might be to welcome the hybridization of their own curricula, classrooms, and teaching practice through the entry of outside disciplinary knowledge as well as local geographic (neighborhood, town, city) expertise, while remaining at the center of the unpredictable directions their courses might take (à la Pennycook’s reminder that “doing things locally cannot rest on a pre-given account of what is local; rather, local practices construct locality” (2010, p. 7)). To conclude, then, I offer three ‘contingent findings’ from this teaching narrative of *Reading the Multilingual City*.

### **Contingent Finding 1: Find Meaningful Points of Intersection between the Language Curriculum, Geographically Relevant Content Areas, and Areas of Student Interest**

While *Reading the Multilingual City* did sample texts as varied as biological anthropologist Terrence Deacon’s (1997) *The symbolic species* and Asian American historian Ronald Takaki’s (1989) *Strangers from a different shore* as they pertained to histories and cultures of East Asian language use in the San Francisco Bay Area, I quickly found introducing students to a number of academic fields and approaches (as I understood my responsibility as part of UC Berkeley’s Freshman and Sophomore Seminar series) to be daunting. A turning point in the class was an emerging strand of discussion and student interest in questions of *authenticity*—practically stated, how members of the student population, based partly on linguistic background and affiliation, judged businesses displaying signs with Chinese, Korean, or Japanese script in local neighborhoods as being ‘real’ or ‘legit.’ This concern then prompted students in particular directions on their individual research projects, and helped me, the instructor, to bring more directed readings and interpretive tools to the table in successive weeks.

Of course, L2 instructors (especially in the first years of instruction) are often in a much more difficult position with respect to the integration of ‘content’ and ‘language’ within curricular structures and lesson plans that are often overly full, tightly scripted, and difficult to change. However, to the extent that the cultural issues, themes, narratives, and identities presented in texts and lesson plans of the language classroom can be found reflected or contrasted in the discourses of the local linguistic landscape, local signs and their histories can valuably be read, interpreted, translated, and otherwise applied to the lessons at hand (see, e.g., Burwell & Lenters, 2015).

### **Contingent Finding 2: Explore Points of Intersection between Classroom and Community Languages—and Not Just the Target Language and English**

The fact that *Reading the Multilingual City* introduced all three of the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese languages was a weakness from the perspective of my desire to encourage students’ basic literacy skills in a new language, but it may have also become a strength. This was mainly because, as students conducted neighborhood visits and interacted with community members who narrated the different histories and geographies of these languages in the Bay Area, they became more aware of the ways in which locally emplaced texts “[bear] the traces of worldwide migration flows and their specific demographic, social, and cultural dynamics” (Blommaert & Rampton, 2015, p. 23). This was especially the case considering the varied language backgrounds and linguistic expectations of the students themselves. As “Letitia,” a native speaker of Spanish, wrote upon discovering that a Japanese sushi restaurant in Berkeley displayed only one word, “sushi,” (寿司) in Japanese script, “I wonder, what does the sign say about the people that go there? If I saw a sign that just said burrito in Spanish, like ‘El Burrito’ or something, it wouldn’t seem like an authentic place; but, it probably would to someone who wasn’t literate in Spanish.”

For many years, methods of bilingual instruction and strategies for making use of students’ native language in foreign/second classrooms have been topics of debate, to say nothing of bilingual/immersion instruction (for a discussion of both together, see Cummins, 2007). However, with ever more heterogeneous student populations, diverse and rapidly changing linguistic makeup of school environments, and the porousness of the very idea of ‘a language,’ L2 instructors are faced with more difficult choices about if and how to include non-‘target’ varieties in their classrooms (see, for instance, Cenoz and Gorter’s (2011) special issue of the *Modern Language Journal*, “Toward a Multilingual Approach in the Study of Multilingualism in School Contexts”). The linguistic landscape, perhaps more than other domains of multilingual language use, makes such heterogeneity hard to avoid, as signs written in different languages are seen as close to one another, either through their physical emplacement or by virtue of the paths of motion of their viewer. In fact, this proximity may be utilized as an advantage, an opportunity to bring different language classes together for in-person or online dialogue, exercises in collaborative interpretation, or other projects (see, e.g., Haddad, 2012). It may also allow individual L2 students and classes to contribute to larger-scale documentation, archival, or translation projects in multilingual campus

communities (or more broadly) that allow for cross-lingual comparisons, readings, and analyses to be made.<sup>7</sup>

### Contingent Finding 3. Develop Partnerships—Both on and off Campus

A final point is about the importance of sustained partnerships with individuals and groups who can help extend the reach of the classroom across disciplines, across languages, and off campus, in the neighborhoods or regions where linguistic landscape projects are to take place. Indeed, to a large degree, I recognize that *Reading the Multilingual City* owed its very creation to a favorable institutional environment for pedagogical and research experimentation in applied language studies, replete with opportunities for peer critique and guidance. Here the university's language center, with its support for research fellowships by faculty and graduate student instructors, played a central role. Also important were exchanges with colleagues in the Education school, campus offices for classroom-community engaged scholarship, the university's wide-ranging seminar program for first- and second-year undergraduates, and the department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, from which lecturers in the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese languages came in three successive units to introduce their language's writing system to the class. Perhaps even more significant for their direct involvement in student learning processes were the local shop owners and employees who gave their time in successive semesters to serve as partners in dialogue with the students.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, teaching in the multilingual linguistic landscape—similar in some respects to study abroad but in demographic contexts and with social consequences that are much closer to home—would seem to require an opening of the classroom to multiple forms of partnership and participation.

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<sup>7</sup> Two examples I have personal experience with are the Cityscape mapping project of Columbia University's Language Resource Center (<http://cityscape.lrc.columbia.edu/>) and the Translate New Haven urban visualization project of the Yale University Center for Language Study (<http://cls.yale.edu/translate-new-haven>).

<sup>8</sup> Of course, assuring fairness and reciprocity in such campus-community relationships requires consideration and cannot be taken for granted; external monitoring and advice, shared governance over projects and terms of participation, and joint appraisals of outcomes are among the issues deserving negotiation, according to Bringle and Hatcher (2002).

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## APPENDIX 1

### Observation Rubric for Unit 2 Field Trip to North Berkeley

Group members: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part I. Surveying the linguistic landscape of Solano Ave.

"A sign was considered to be any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame. The underlying definition is rather broad, including anything from handwritten stickers to huge commercial billboards" (Backhaus 2006, p. 55).

Survey the presence of English and other languages on **at least two blocks** of Solano Avenue using the chart below. Note which areas on the street you are working in, and if your data covers both sides of the street by circling one or both "North side" and "South side". Fill in columns A.-D. for each sign, and column E. as necessary. Try to photograph as many signs as possible; be SURE to photograph any signs you identify as containing more than one language.

Data from Solano Ave. between Street names \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
 or, between street # \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (( North side / South side ))

<b>A. Entity observed</b> (business name, etc.)	<b>B. Sign recorded</b> (photograph & write the content, in all languages)	<b>C. Languages on sign</b> (e.g., Eng, Sp, Ch)	<b>D. Prominence of languages</b> (for multilingual signs only: circle the prominent language in column "C" and indicate here whether it's the left/right position "L/R", top/down position "T/D", or size "S" that you're judging)	<b>E. Symbolic or Indexical?</b> Do you read the words on the sign, the choice of languages, the prominence of languages, and any other features (font, colors, material, symbols, etc.) as indexing the linguistic and cultural identities of the sign's assumed writers and audience, or symbolizing other identities?

## APPENDIX 2

### Interview Protocol for Unit 2 Field Trip to North Berkeley

Group members: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part II. What's behind the names?

Choose **at least four** of the businesses on the opposite side of the street from where you did your Part I observations, or others that you identify on Solano Ave., and find answers to the questions below. If a few don't apply, that's fine; feel free to add your own too.

In order to find answers to these questions, you should first introduce yourselves as students of our class at UC Berkeley, mention that you're writing a short article on the cultures and languages visible in Berkeley neighborhoods, and mention you'd like to learn about the business. As you and your partner(s) interview, have one person focus more on asking questions, and one person focus more on taking notes on the interview sheets (end of this packet). If you're interested in taking pictures inside the establishment, you **must** ask for permission first.

Please also be ready to give your contact information, and try to obtain a business card from any business you visit.

1. What does the names of the business mean?
2. Do these names come from another language?
3. If not, does the business have a name in another language too?
4. Are the names different or the same? Do they mean different things in different languages, or have different nuances?
5. How did the business owners (or other people) decide upon the name?
6. Were there any other possibilities in consideration?
7. Why did they decide upon this one?
8. What impression do the owners want to give off with the name?
9. After months/years of experience, do they have the sense that these names have given off the impression they intended? Have there ever been any interesting or funny incidents?
10. \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_

(Addresses can be found on Solano Ave. Directory)

Ajanta Distinctive Indian Cuisine	China Village	Kathmandu Restaurant
Andronico's Market	Cugini Ristorante	King Tsin Restaurant
Bangkok Jam	Everest Café	Kirin
Bowl'd Korean Rice Bar	Gordo Taqueria	La Bedaine
Bua Lang Thai Cuisine	House of Curries	Lao Thai Kitchen
Cactus Taqueria	Iscream!	Little Star Pizza
Casa Oaxaca	Jodie's Restaurant and Barbeque	Liu's Kitchen
		Miyuki Japanese