

from diverse traditions, are religious texts and textualized accounts of a rather small class of magical spells and ordeals, leaving it to the reader to test his argument ethnographically against a wider range of what falls into the rubric of ritual.

In Chapter Three Yelle considers underlying ideologies of language regarding arbitrariness and ambiguity, on the one hand, and the possibilities for natural (or divine) language or projects for the perfectibility of human language. He argues that all such projects are powerful rhetorics, whether religious or scientific, discussing in particular the pursuit of gesture as a more natural semiotic system of signs than language and tracing the history of its study from Quintilian's "chironomy" (first century C.E.) to John Bulwer's "chirologia" (1644) and comparing these to Hindu Tantric *mudras* (gestures accompanying mantras). He concludes: "most claims for a natural language of gesture resolve, upon further scrutiny, into conventional systems of purely cultural significance" (p. 91). But at the same time, being too fixated on the arbitrariness of the sign can inhibit our understanding of "the rhetoric of culture," including the possibility that some combinations of poetics and metapragmatics may obscure their own rhetorical function (noting that this contradicts the Jakobsonian premise that the poetic function draws attention to message) (p. 67).

Chapters Four and Five, together, trace out the history of our particular, modern semiotic recognition of the arbitrariness of the sign as a problem, and will likely be of greatest general interest. Yelle considers the contributions not only of Baconian scientific rationalism but also various projects of iconoclasm, literalism, and the rise of print culture in Protestantism. Rather than accepting a temporalized "Great Divide" between modern and premodern (p. 96), he suggests an ongoing "ebb and flow between a position of semiotic naiveté and one of semiotic critique" (p. 97) and traces how secular and scientific ideological projects arose out of Protestant literalism, arguing that the secular depends on the religious. As he summarizes it: "What we are talking about is instead a sequestering, segregation, or compartmentalization of the figurative, one that amounted to a demotion of its value" (p. 96). Thus, modernity's self-definition as an "opposition to false verbal images can only be a beginning" for a "deeper historical inquiry into the nature and genealogy of the secular" (p. 112). Chapter Five considers widespread theories that print literacy was to blame for the disenchantment of the word. Yelle argues that the "literacy hypothesis" is too absolute in contrasting orality and the printed word and disregards the prime performative function of poetics, concluding that the rise of print literacy may at best have played a role in heightening semiotic recognition of poetics as persuasive, thereby contributing to iconoclastic polemics.

Finally, in Chapter Six Yelle critiques the shortcomings of Mary Douglas's brand of structuralist analysis, which one senses is still in vogue among some religion scholars. Considering a range of interpretations of the dietary laws of Leviticus and similar divine pre- and proscriptions, Yelle offers an account of how the sign as singularity (miracle, portent, omen) was rejected alongside a concomitant rise of awareness in its arbitrariness and placement in a system of natural order. He concludes that Douglas engages in a "conflation of the Holy with the structuralist theory of the sign" (p. 141) and suggests that dietary laws may have been "simply the elevation of what is 'normal' to a legal 'norm' and thus a 'naturalizing of the arbitrary'" (p. 153). Moreover, taking a pragmatic rather than semantic view, "the very indeterminacy of meaning of these laws is part of their function; that their semantic content is subordinated to their pragmatic function in providing a bright white line; and that our unwillingness to perceive this has been conditioned by a modern revolt against the idea of arbitrary rules" (p. 154). In sum, this groundbreaking interdisciplinary work provides a compelling argument for the tools of our trade by someone firmly situated in a different discipline.

Ethnography, Superdiversity, and Linguistic Landscapes: Chronicles of Complexity. Jan Blommaert. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. xiv + 125pp.

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Jan Blommaert's compact but lucid study of his own neighborhood in Antwerp, Belgium provides an excellent bridge between the study of linguistic landscapes, an increasingly popular field within sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropological theory and method. In the

book, he forcefully asserts the primacy of ethnography as a way to understand how linguistic presences in the built environment such as the multilingual signs, posters, and facades that dot his neighborhood, not only construct a sense of spatiality and produce social hierarchies, but also serve as a lens to historically chart the transformation in the organization of diversity in rapidly globalizing urban environments.

In the first chapter, Blommaert introduces the key terms of his book: ethnography, superdiversity, and linguistic landscapes. He suggests that the move to linguistic landscapes is a welcome development in sociolinguistics, for it expands the “range of sociolinguistic description from . . . (groups of) speakers to *spaces*, the physical spaces in which speakers dwell and in which they pick up and leave . . . linguistic deposits” (p. 1). Linguistic landscape studies, he suggests, allow sociolinguists to quickly and easily conduct an initial diagnostic of a particular area through the use of digital camera technology, while also bringing questions of literacy, materiality, and importantly, in Blommaert’s view, history, to a field still concerned primarily with synchronic analysis.

Second, Blommaert introduces two concomitant terms: “superdiversity” and “complexity.” Superdiversity, which Blommaert has written on elsewhere (“Language and superdiversity,” J. Blommaert and B. Rampton, *Diversities* 2011:13:2,1–22), is “diversity within diversity” (p. 4), or a transformation in the organization of diversity within globalizing environments brought about by rapid increases in mobility, instabilities inherent in the new economic order, and technologies like the Internet. This new “order of superdiversity” (p. 111) brings with it, Blommaert posits, an inherent layer of complexity that sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropologists should take into account. This complexity can be seen in terms of the multiple “scale systems” at which any and all linguistic tokens operate within superdiverse environments (what he also calls “polycentricity”), increased mobility, and varying degrees of historicity “folded into one ‘synchronic’ set of meanings” (p. 12).

For Blommaert, linguistic landscapes offer a particularly compelling way of ethnographically accounting for the complexity of superdiverse sociolinguistic environments, even more so than field notes and interviews (p. 16). Blommaert has been documenting the changing signscape of his neighborhood since 2007, offering a visually and materially grounded archive showing the transformation in social relations between participants (which can be identified by Blommaert through the relation a particular sign has to its surroundings), changing power dynamics within the neighborhood, and a longitudinal outline of an always emergent, complex social and linguistic system. These landscapes form what Blommaert terms the “infrastructures of superdiversity” (p. 17).

The next two chapters in the book, “Historical Bodies and Historical Space” and “Semiotic and Spatial Scope” are a further look into the way that an ethnographic approach to linguistic landscapes provide a framework for understanding history, space, and processes of linguistic and material semiosis. Chapter 2 is an homage to Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wong-Scollon, whose work on the intersection of the social and material in relation to discourse (*Nexus Analysis: Discourse and the Emerging Internet*, Routledge 2004) and “geosemiotics” or discourse within the material environments (*Discourses in Place: Language and the Material World*, Routledge 2003) is identified by Blommaert as a predecessor to his own study. Blommaert here argues that any synchronic object must be understood as including both the experiences of social actors, and what the Scollons call “emplacements,” or the ways in which discourses are situated in relation to normative expectations of material space. Blommaert takes the quotidian example of a zebra (pedestrian) crossing in his neighborhood as an example of the way semiotically constituted space and bodies interact and are regulated in a historically constituted “order.” Chapter 3 extends these observations, illustrating how signs offer multiple modalities and affordances such that the visual and linguistic material in any particular token appeal to different audiences, demarcate different interpretative locations, and organize interpretation based on graphic repertoires. As an example, Blommaert analyzes a handwritten advertisement in a mixture of traditional and simplified Chinese in his Antwerp neighborhood. In arguing for the primacy of modality over code, Blommaert convincingly undermines approaches to linguistic landscapes that have relied on quantitative documentation of distinct codes to analyze multilingualism.

The next section of the book consists of the ethnographic investigation of Blommaert’s own neighborhood of Berchem in Antwerp. Blommaert has been living in this neighborhood in the southeast of Antwerp for two decades, and over time the neighborhood has transformed into a “superdiverse” locality, with migrant communities starting to settle there as early as the 1970s. Regular surveys of the landscape showed a maximum of 24 languages existing on signs and storefronts in clear stratification, with Dutch as the predominant language, while Turkish,

the second most predominant, appearing most often in a bilingual pattern. Other languages, such as Arabic, Polish, and Spanish follow at some distance. Blommaert writes that the stratification of languages on signs and storefronts, as well as location, shape, and visual elements reveal the several forms of organization operating in the neighborhood. Turkish signs, for instance, appear in a variety of forms throughout the neighborhood, signifying the community's lasting presence and access to capital. Polish signs on the other hand, addressed mostly to migrant laboring men, primarily concern temporary activities, such as advertisements for phones, cyber-café, or remittances, indicating that Polish speakers/readers occupy a more marginal position, both socially and spatially.

Chapter 5 is perhaps the most interesting chapter of the book, foregrounding transformations in class relations in the Berchem neighborhood. In this section, Blommaert describes how linguistic "code" is not isomorphic with "speaker" and that changing code patterns on signs also signify changing class mobility within migrant communities. For instance, Blommaert observes how, as more working-class migrants move in from other areas, and more established Turkish migrants begin to have greater access to capital, displays of Turkish on Turkish-owned businesses starts to diminish and the use of Dutch starts to increase. However, the type of Dutch employed also reveals variation. Blommaert identifies, for example, a nonstandard, locally inflected orthographic variety of Dutch used in small businesses owned by Turks, Albanians, Indians, and others in Berchem, that he calls "ecumenical Dutch." The transition from "ecumenical" to "standard" Dutch suggests a trajectory of class mobility over time, while also revealing the fallacy of starting any sociolinguistic analysis of the landscape with a unified conception of "code."

Chapter 6 takes the reader into the churches of Berchem, an increasingly important part of the linguistic landscape in the neighborhood. Churches, according to Blommaert, are part of an important infrastructure that situates Berchem migrant populations within wider institutional networks. Unlike other signs in the neighborhood, churches feature predominantly English, Spanish, or Portuguese texts and signs, revealing their importance to migrants from South America and Africa. Yet these signs do not specifically display connections to home countries, but rather, promote ethnically inflected aspirations for integrating into European-wide and global networks. Increasing reliance on church services (as opposed to the state) also testifies to the neoliberalization of Belgium's economy.

The conclusion is dedicated again to the notion of "superdiversity." While it is unclear how the concept of "superdiversity" differs from other linguistic anthropological conceptualizations of how diversity is organized (equally complex, as we know, in rural, non-Western settings as in globalized Antwerp), Blommaert's insistence on ethnographically interrogating complexity as a polycentric and multi-scalar "stochastic system" (p. 115) that dialogically undergoes constant change and transformation is important. In addition, having lived in the neighborhood for a number of years, much of the ethnographic insight in the book comes from Blommaert's own position as a native ethnographer. The analysis, however, could have been further sharpened with other methods such as interviews, metapragmatic elicitation from residents and store owners, or transcription, all of which are notably absent. Nonetheless, this book is a succinct and illuminating theoretical and methodological treatise that will prove invaluable to any future linguistic anthropological study of linguistic landscapes, the organization of diversity, and globalization.

Linguistic Relativities: Language Diversity and Modern Thought. *John Leavitt.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. pp. x + 278pp.

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In this stimulating new intellectual history, John Leavitt surveys the many philosophical debates surrounding the age-old principle of linguistic relativity, which has been a major topic of discussion in Western thought since the time of the Enlightenment. As the author notes at the outset, the concept of linguistic relativity is rooted in the recognition of diversity, with many competing proposals regarding the implications for human thought, perception, and interaction. While most linguists have encountered the works of Wilhelm von Humboldt, many of us