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This is a contribution from Linguistic Landscape 6:2
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Defining the position of ‘community’ in the study of linguistic landscapes

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This special issue explores how multilingual (and semiotic) landscapes relate to constructions of community. With the present introduction we aim to embed theoretical notions of ‘community’ into the study of Linguistic Landscapes (henceforth LL). We first discuss how the notion of ‘community’ has been applied in previous LL research, and then introduce some relevant theoretical notions of ‘community’, which, in the final part, we seek to position in relation to an agenda for the study of LL.

1. LL and ‘community’

Despite the absence of agreement, within and across disciplines, on how to define and understand ‘community’, the relevance and usefulness of the notion and its relation to ‘language’ have been emphasised repeatedly, particularly with regard to increasingly multilingual (urban and rural) societies (Blokland, 2017; Blommaert, 2017; Rampton, 2006; Lanza & Svendsen, 2007; Coupland, 2003; Block 2006; Li Wei, 1994). Early LL research tended to use the notion of ‘community’ without explicit theorising or questioning of the concept, taking as a basis the traditional understanding of ‘community’ as referring to shared language. Accordingly, it was assumed that the public display of signs documents the presence in a certain place of (linguistically identifiable) groups of people (cf. Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Backhaus, 2007; Barni & Bagna, 2009; Hult, 2014). In their landmark study, Landry & Bourhis (1997) indicate a correlation between ‘community’ and ‘language’, with language marking a community’s space:

The most basic informational function of the linguistic landscape is that it serves as a distinct marker of the geographical territory inhabited by a given language community, [...] inform[ing] in-group and out-group members of the linguistic characteristics, territorial limits, and language boundaries of the region where they have entered. (1997: 25)

Landry & Bourhis further argue that the LL also serves to “delineate the territorial limits of the language group it harbors relative to the other linguistic communities inhabiting adjoining territories” (1997: 25). They suggest that writing in the LL can be seen as a symbolic marker, indicating the relations between communities and their relative power and status.

Studies that explore LL in linguistically diverse settings have used the term ‘community’ to refer to immigrant groups and their language practices on signage for communication and identity negotiations, viewing signs as an emblematic expression of group belonging (Barni & Bagna, 2009). Addressing notions of ‘place’ and ‘space’, multilingual signage has been described as a means for bottom-up actors to mark ownership of place and express and negotiate understandings of community identity and boundaries across space (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009; Leeman & Modan, 2009; Jaworski, 2014; Gaiser & Matras, 2016). Peck, Stroud & Williams (2019) shift attention to *people* in place (rather than focusing on place itself), and how *placedness* is managed and negotiated together with others. Accordingly, “linguistic landscapes provide the resources and important reference points whereby people make *sense* of themselves and their relatedness to others in place” (2019: 2, emphasis in the original).

With growing awareness of the complexities of language practices, LL research has increasingly questioned traditional understandings of ‘community’ as mapped onto a single language. Huebner (2006), in his analysis of Bangkok’s LL, finds instances of code-mixing on the levels of script, lexicon, and syntax and shows how the fuzziness of language boundaries “calls into question the boundaries of a speech community” (2006: 50). Studying language practices in superdiverse settings, Blommaert (2013) and Blommaert & Maly (2014) propose an ethnographic approach to LL: “Ethnographic Linguistic Landscapes Analysis” (see also Blommaert & Huang, 2010). This approach aims to acknowledge the complex rather than straightforward relationships between language use and social groups.

Blommaert (2013) analyses signage and its social meanings by looking at three ‘axes’: First, signs point towards the *past* in that they indicate users’ origins and modes of production. A sign’s materiality and language use offer an indication of who may have produced the sign, under what conditions, and which resources were accessible to the sign producer. Second, signs point towards the *future*, i.e. their intended readers and groups of readers, and preferred uptake (Blommaert & Maly, 2014: 4; cf. Blommaert, 2013). Third, signs point towards the *present*, through their “emplacement” (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). Blommaert & Maly (2014: 4) point out that a focus on these three axes helps to understand the “social functions” of signs as they demarcate space as well as readers. Accordingly, signs have a *semiotic* scope – “the communicative relationship between producers and addressees, in which normative and regulative messages are conveyed” – as well as a *spatial* scope (2014: 4). LL can index social relationships, interests, and practices, and express

and negotiate overlapping and intersecting norms. Such norms, as Blommaert and Maly suggest, are norms of language use, but also norms of conduct, membership, and legitimate belonging (2014: 4).

Blommaert (2013) and Blommaert & Maly (2014) emphasise the changing nature of 'communities' in superdiverse neighbourhoods, where LL signs and their emplacement may indicate newly emergent communities. However, while critical of the notion of 'community' as a stable entity, the authors still use the term 'community' with reference to immigrant groups, emphasising the potential of LL research to learn more about "the different communities" living in the survey area (2014: 3). Thus, while Blommaert & Maly (2014) challenge notions of group identities as pre-defined, they also describe written language use as a means to index and experience group membership. Blommaert & Huang (2010) suggest:

when we walk through a street, our identities can and do change every few steps – from someone who is included in a communication network to someone who is excluded from it and back; and through this, from someone who belongs to a particular network or community, to someone who doesn't belong, and back.

(2010: 12)

Collins & Slembrouck (2007) understand LL as "complex indexes of source, addressee, and community" (2007: 335) and emphasise the multi-layered resources and sets of rules and attitudes that shape (written) language practices within 'communities'. They point out that an understanding of LL in the contemporary world requires a focus on the "dynamics of globalized locality, rather than the fictions of community" (2007: 353).

Blackwood, Lanza & Woldemariam's (2016) edited volume *Negotiating and Contesting Identities in Linguistic Landscapes* collects a number of papers that discuss the heterogeneity of identity constructions and negotiations in the LL. One strand in LL research has focused on lesser-used languages, whose written presence has typically been described in terms of two main functions: to flag recognition of group identity and community vitality, and language commodification to target specific customer audiences (Agnihotri & McCormick, 2010; Coupland & Garrett, 2010). Blackwood (2018) investigates the written use of Guadeloupean Creole in the LL of the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe as an expression of collective identity. He uses the term 'community' to describe speakers of Guadeloupean Creole as "constituting a territorially defined language community" (2018: 108), but at the same time points to the dynamically changing, negotiated, and symbolic character of 'community'. Blackwood (2018) suggests that the recent and increasing presence of written Creole in the LL contributes to emerging collective community identities, forging a new sense of place, people, and belonging (2018: 118). He argues: "Questions of (linguistic) identity and a sense of belonging in the twenty-first century are bound up with the value attributed to languages

within a community's repertoire, especially multilingual groups such as Guadeloupeans" (2018: 108). He goes on to suggest that written identification with Creole "can be a defining characteristic of resistance, group legitimization, and alternative or compound identities" (Blackwood, 2018: 108).

Woldemariam & Lanza (2015) show how written language in the LL can serve to construct an "imagined community" and "imagined space" in the diaspora setting. Focusing on written language use on signs in the "Ethiopian transnational community" of Washington DC, they explore how the LL serves as a "strategy among a diaspora community not only to maintain a transnational identity but also to construct a unique identity in the recipient society" (2015: 173). This imaginary community identity is described as being built on the narrative or myth of the old homeland, while including a unique African identity in a new homeland with other Africans as well as African Americans. The semiotic landscape is seen as a way to "construct the Ethiopian immigrants' strong sense of a symbolic link to the homeland, in many cases involving the creation of an imagined community – one that perpetuates the image of Ethiopia at the time of the diaspora's initial exodus" (2015: 186f.)

Gaiser & Matras (2016) critique the way in which the notion of 'community' in LL is taken for granted, while addressing the mapping of complex language repertoire elements to space. The permeability of language boundaries and residents' holistic appreciation of their complex language repertoires find their expression in fluid uses of language and language combinations on signs in the LL, which in turn express as well as invite practices that transcend traditional community boundaries. Social relations and practices are expressed and defined through language clustering and spatial demarcation, on the one hand, but also through networking across space – across what may be perceived as 'community boundaries' – and the reaching out to other communities (2016: 6, 103).

From the above it is apparent that there is agreement that the notion of 'language community' as a bounded entity does not reflect the reality of complex language practices. Still, authors continue to rely on the notion of community as a (fuzzy) category to imply a pre-defined sense of belonging of people and place, which is expressed in the LL. Given the importance of that relation between language practice, identity and belonging, space and place, there is a need to explore theoretical notions of 'community', independent of language and LL, and to draw on those to enrich our conceptualisation of 'community' as a relevant dimension and reference point when discussing LL. We will attempt to do this first by reviewing notions of speech community as practice communities (Section 2), then by discussing some concepts of community that are independent of language (Section 3), and then by returning to the implications that such notions may have for the study of LL and for the present collection (Section 4).

2. From speech community to community of practice

As Li Wei (1994: 50f.) points out, the terms 'community' and 'speech community' have traditionally been used to refer to a rather homogeneous, "cohesive and self-conscious social group" of speakers that share language knowledge and norms. A 'community' was thought of as an identifiable group of people who share language structures as well as communicative practices, in a shared space:

For a long time, linguists considered a speech community to be an objective entity that could be empirically identified as a body of people who interacted regularly, who had attitudes and/or rules of language use in common, and it would be the largest social unit that the study of a given language variety could seek to generalize about. (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011: 6)

Studies of speech communities, so defined, were typically based on language use patterns of individual speakers taken as representative members of a group, and their language practices were studied as attributable to a more or less socially coherent body. Fishman (1971), for example, understands a speech community as a subtype of community "all of whose members share at least a single speech variety and the norms for its appropriate use" (1971: 28). Labov's (1972, 1989) variationist approach allows for heterogeneity within a speech community, while emphasising the regularity of correlations between linguistic structure and extra-linguistic attributes or factors that act within it.

Outside the variationist paradigm, criticism that social processes and cultural factors have been neglected in linguistic analysis has prompted a new understanding of 'community' whereby the shared rules that underlie language use as well as variation were understood as acquired through practice. The notion of 'community' is central in what is often seen as 'traditional' ethnographic approaches: As Hymes (1972) argues, "[t]he natural unit for sociolinguistic taxonomy [...] is not the language but the speech community" (1972: 43). In this sense, 'community' is understood as a social rather than linguistic entity, and as such it can be studied in its own right.

The notion 'Community of Practice' (CofP), introduced in the early 1990s, is based on a critique of abstract models and late modernist attempts to avoid essentialist categorisations (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999; Eckert, 2006). The shift from 'speech' to 'practice' reflects the idea that communities undergo constant construction and re-construction, and places the research focus on situated activity, mutual engagement in an endeavour, and the multi-modality of meaning making. CofPs are understood as communities of varying duration that are loosely defined on the basis of social relationships, with a focus on co-participation in locally embedded practice. This perspective assumes

multiple memberships and an interaction of multiple identities in social practice. CofPs are oriented to shared situated experience, but there is still some emphasis on defining core features of social groups and repetitive affirmation of social ties through regular joint practical activities. This suggests that, to a certain extent, ‘communities’ can be defined on the basis of a number of pre-selected features.

With increasing acknowledgment of complex and dynamic population structures, there has been a shift in focus towards disorder, mobility, and unpredictability rather than internally constructed membership as in CofP approaches (cf. Rampton, 2010; Arnaut et al., 2016; Van der Aa & Blommaert, 2015; Lanza & Svendsen, 2007; Mintchev & Moore, 2016). Heller (2009) recognises the power of language for the construction of unity, yet emphasises that ‘community’ is, in fact, an extremely heterogeneous body of individuals (see also Li Wei, 1994). Some studies call for a re-thinking of the very notions of ‘language’ and ‘community’, arguing that the reality of everyday social practices transcends and breaks down boundaries between such traditional categories of difference (Silverstein, 1998; Pennycook, 2010; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Cadier, 2013: 2). It is argued that *change* has become a “normal part of our existence” (Phillimore, 2013: 4). In such a reality, both social structures and the linguistic repertoires of individuals and collectives must be understood as dynamically emergent in situated interaction rather than as fixed. Kroon, Dong Jie & Blommaert (2015) discuss the implications of globalisation and show how it calls into question some common and fundamental sociolinguistic assumptions:

the nature of language and meaning in all its forms, the nature of communities using and sharing linguistic and communicative resources, the effect of space and time on human meaning-making and identity construction are among the theoretical and methodological victims of globalization.

(Kroon et al., 2015: 1; see also Rampton, 2006)

Blommaert & Backus (2013: 22) point out that “super-diversity compels us to abandon the presumption of stability of communities” and replace these with a more fluid and dynamic understanding of networks that may transcend social and geographical space. With a focus on urban space and diverse neighbourhoods, Block (2006) and Mac Giolla Chríost (2007) emphasise the fuzziness of the boundaries between and within what is typically perceived as ‘communities’. Pennycook & Otsuji (2015) similarly argue that complex language practices that transcend traditional community boundaries have become an everyday phenomenon rather than the exception, and propose a more dynamic notion of ‘community’ to capture emerging collectives based on situated interaction. Block (2006) points out that “there is no mosaic of fixed languages for migrants; rather, shifting and changing language affiliations, expertises and practices mean that the multilingualism of a city [...] is in constant flux” (2006: 203). These positions align themselves with a

growing interest in how individuals avail themselves of the full range of linguistic resources at their disposal in a way that responds to subtle changes in participant constellation and message structure, leading theorists to replace traditional notions of 'code-switching' as a way of explicitly transcending boundaries by notions of 'heteroglossia' or 'translanguaging' (Li Wei, 2018; García & Li Wei, 2014), capturing the dynamics of wholesale repertoire management (see already Matras 2009).

Lanza & Svendsen (2007: 279) explicitly shift attention away from place-based 'communities', arguing that "social relations are no longer territorially restricted" in times of globalisation. Other studies, too, emphasise translocal communication networks among 'diasporic communities' that emerge as a result of globalisation processes (Appadurai, 1996; Coupland, 2003: 426). Notions of transnational spaces (Faist, 2000) and transnational communities (Glick Schiller et al., 1994; Vertovec, 1999) have been suggested to replace the traditional idea of immigrant communities that move from one national space into another (Block, 2006: 15).

3. Ethnographic and sociological approaches to community

The concept of 'community' in social sciences is often traced to the work of Tönnies (2001 [1887]), where it was captured by the German term *Gemeinschaft*, contrasting with *Gesellschaft*, variably translated as 'society', 'civil society', or 'association'. According to Tönnies, community is a relationship that is defined by a balance between unity and diversity, a bond shaped by a sense of shared background and destiny, as manifested in "real organic life". Society, by contrast, is a mechanical construction played out primarily in the public sphere. Community remains a sense of unity among people even when they become separated, as it is a relationship that is seen as 'given'. Nevertheless, proximity plays a role, as sharing place can develop into sharing 'spirit'. The neighbourhood and village are therefore typical examples of community, while the town is a community interwoven through economic activities, art, and the symbolism of shared buildings, as well as political management. Community is thus seen by analogy to the household, with its shared sense of ancestry, mutual dependency, and some sense of authority, but requires a limit on the extent of inequalities, which would otherwise undermine the essence of unity that underlies it. By contrast, society or civil society is a network of links in which individuals seek advantage and value for themselves rather than a collective, and interaction is based on interest in commodities and the commercialisation and monetisation of exchange. Whereas community revolves around a sense of shared place, society is based on outwards communication routes. This distinction implies that different societal groups belong to separate categories: Tönnies associates the farmer and townsman with community, as a sense of shared descent and values, and a binding sentiment based on consensus

and mutual possession, whereas the business class is associated with civic society, an opportunity-based form of association. Language plays a role in Tönnies's theory. It is seen as the "true organ of mutual understanding" (2001 [1887]: 19), and a symbol of the sense of kinship links and the bond between mother and child in particular, as use of a shared language is said to "bring people's hearts together" (2001 [1887]: 21). Language therefore belongs, according to Tönnies, to the external or objective properties that link people together as a community and enable them to form voluntary bonds of a more internal or subjective nature.

Benedict Anderson's (1983) influential work on 'imagined communities' deals precisely with the question of how language can become a socially constructed frame that brings together strangers to adopt a shared sense of belonging as a unified nation. Anderson attributes a key part in the emergence of nationalist discourses to linguistic practices and specifically to the emergence of literary versions of vernacular languages. As late medieval European elites began using their idioms in correspondence, they removed the traditional association between script and global religious ideology that was represented by Latin (as well as Old Church Slavonic and Greek). The invention of print enabled the spread of scripted vernaculars to wider regions and the emergence of codified varieties that became widely understood by users of related dialects, giving rise to 'territorial' languages. These were then imposed top-down as part of the ideological edifice of emerging nation states, from the nineteenth century onwards. In Anderson's narrative, functionality and convenience of communication thus precede the symbolic, unifying effect of language codification. At the same time, 'territorialisation' of language plays a key role both in language standardisation and in the process of nation building, which it serves. Nations are thus imagined political communities in which citizens entertain the notion of shared destiny based on sharing printed resources in the same language.

Despite the emphasis in 'de-constructivist' approaches on the fluidity of categories and the fuzziness of boundaries, Brubaker (2002: 165) notes that ethnic groups continue to be viewed as entities and still serve as a common-sense category in everyday talk, in policy analysis, and in media reports as well as in academic writing. Brubaker joins the viewpoint that groups based on ethnicity, race, or nationhood are not real or substantial entities, and calls for a critical stance towards the ways in which we use categories (2002, 2013). Groups, he suggests, should not figure as the unit of analysis, but as the object of analysis. Brubaker (2002: 167) proposes viewing ethnicity, race, and nation "in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful and disaggregated terms" rather than in terms of substantial groups or entities. Communities and groups are seen as 'events', mutually interacting with and oriented towards other groups. He takes as a basic analytical category not 'the group' as an entity, but *groupness* as a "contextually fluctuating conceptual variable"

(2002: 167f.), that is, as an *event* or something that 'happens'. Brubaker discusses the difference between pre-defined 'categories of analysis' and 'categories of practice'. Following Bourdieu (1990), Brubaker & Cooper (2000) define 'categories of practice' as "categories of everyday social experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors, as distinguished from the experience-distant categories used by social analysts" (2000:4). Discussing the notion of diaspora, for example, Brubaker (2005) suggests: "We should think of diaspora in the first instance as a category of practice, and only then ask whether, and how, it can fruitfully be used as a category of analysis" (2005: 12).

Bridget Anderson (2013) argues that the nation state employs a concept of shared common ideals and exemplary patterns of behaviour expressed through ethnicity, religion, culture, or language, in order to frame citizenship as a sense of belonging. She refers to this concept as "community of value" and argues that it underlies a distinction made between citizens in regard to their value to the state as an imagined community: Good Citizens are those who are regarded as sharing community values, and who are of value to the community, while those who are deemed not to belong are seen as Failed Citizens. Community is seen in this context as an imposed utilitarian instrument of neo-liberal governance. In effect, the 'community of value' is an exclusion zone, used to provide the discourse of justifying immigration controls.

In a recent overview of discussions of the concept of 'community' in social science, Bessant (2018) outlines how mass society has come to be seen as triggering an erosion of the sense of community, as large-scale bureaucratic structures constrain local autonomy, community solidarity, and collective identity, and lead to a decline in meaningful and durable relationships. The need to re-position the concept of community in light of such developments gives rise to postmodernist notions that emphasise dynamic networks of cooperative relationships, multiplicity, flexibility, dynamism, and uncertainty. Bessant draws attention to the socio-symbolic value of community as a mental image or cognitive construction that is part of human consciousness, and in that sense community as a mode of social representation. Community is thus a construct, a symbol, and a representation. While constructionist approaches regard community as a relational construction that is continuously shaped by ongoing processes of social representation and iterative social relations, the concept is becoming open to new forms of social organisation and the building of interest groups and networks such as online communities. The relational sociologist perspective frames community in terms of transactions among individuals, habituated interactions, and networks of ties. The methodological challenge is to identify the basic units or elements that are the antecedents or components of such social relations.

In the context of such discussions, Blokland (2017) sets out to present a typology of possible notions of ‘community’ in urban settings. She defines community as a form of practice, and the urban setting as lending that practice particular characteristics, as cities stand out through size, density, and heterogeneity of encounters. Community is thus a pattern of encounters, engagement, and social ties that are arranged on a continuum of relational settings and belongings. Social ties can consist of instrumental transactions or interdependencies, or, conversely, of sociable attachments or bonds. These can be public or private, anonymous or intimate, fluid or durable, giving in sum the public familiarity or the ability to connect that is characteristic of urban spaces. Blokland thereby challenges notions of ‘community’ as exclusively durable social entities or as mapped onto a singular spatial connection such as a given place or neighbourhood, or even measured on the basis of frequency and intensity of local ties. Instead, she emphasises the role of agency in social identification in the relational setting of the city; she understands community as a performative entity, formed and maintained through cultural practice which in turn produces shared symbols and narratives of history and experiences (2017: 162). Community is, in that respect, an imagined sense of identity created and performed through a complex network of social identification.

Returning to Brubaker’s (2013) critique of the ‘group’ as a unit of analysis, we would like to emphasise the importance of distinguishing between an analysis of discourses pertaining to community, and the analytical use of the notion of community itself. Blokland (2017) points out that the transition from rural and tight-knit urban industrial working class configurations has been regarded as a loss of ‘community’ values. Current policy discourses serve to suggest in effect a compensatory restoration of community in a neo-liberal context, by using the notion of ‘community’ to justify the transfer of responsibilities from the state to residents. We can relate this to Manchester as an example setting. Here, local government speaks of a plurality of ‘communities’, emphasizing the diversity of the city’s population while at the same time encouraging self-organisation and self-support among groups that identify as sharing background, values, and interests (though not necessarily place). Public services, by contrast, will use the term ‘community’ to designate the sum of those whom they serve and who are not directly involved in the planning of policy and provisions but are affected by them. The University of Manchester, for example, holds an annual ‘Community Festival’, which aims at showcasing university activities to local residents who are not otherwise involved in the institution. At the same time, with reference to ethnic communities or those based on geographical or cultural background, ‘community’ implies a certain threshold of either distinctiveness or ‘otherness’ brought about by perception or else by a visible institutionalisation and public presence. There is thus frequent discussion of the ‘South Asian Community’, ‘Sikh Community’, ‘Pakistani Community’, ‘Polish community’, and ‘LGBT community’; but we are unaware of

references to a ‘Scottish community’ or ‘French community’, and while public discourse recognises concepts such as ‘British Asians’ and ‘British Muslims’, it seems to lack references to ‘British French’ or ‘British Europeans’.

4. Implications for the study of LL, and the present collection

Blommaert & Rampton (2016: 26) echo Brubaker’s (2013) argument about the need for a more careful use of categories, and for maintaining a distinction between unit and object of analysis. Recognising that notions like ‘native speaker’, ‘mother tongue’ and ‘ethnolinguistic group’ have considerable ideological force and as such should feature as objects of analysis, they argue that they should have no place in the “sociolinguistic toolkit” itself. Instead, researchers should address the various ways in which particular group identification trajectories are developed and how linguistic signs are used to perform group belonging at different times.

Accordingly, we call for an abandonment – if not permanent then at least in the form of a temporary critical reflection, as the objective of the present collection of contributions – of the notion of ‘community’ as part of the toolkit of concepts that are intended to capture a pre-defined unit of analysis. We would like to frame our studies of LL in the terms used by Blokland (2017), breaking away from an understanding of community as either a spatial concept or a fixed set of social relations and emphasising instead the role of agency in social identification, whereby ‘community’ is understood as an experience of practices and a performative entity, formed and maintained through cultural practice, or “a set of public doings” (2017: 15).

The LL may be seen as providing public stages for such performances, where language choice and patterns of language use may serve to single out particular groups of readers, express or negotiate certain identities, and create and strengthen social ties. Moreover, in a multilingual setting in which power relations between languages are unequal, the LL itself constitutes such performance. In dense, heterogeneous environments, the LL is the quintessential expression of ‘public familiarity’: rather than mark out the presence of a fixed community, it is one of several forms of practice that is constitutive as well as symbolic of the identity performance and belonging narrative that make up ‘community’ in the first place. As such, it might be regarded precisely as one of the antecedents or building elements that create community as a narrative of belonging.

We propose to analyse LL within the typology grid that Blokland (2017) introduces for encounters, engagement, and social ties. This begins by approaching LL as dynamic *practice*. LL items – signs, public notices, and so on – can symbolise experience and narratives. They can direct orientation among actors and symbol-

ise engagements that are durable and repetitive and revolve around shared purposes, or they can help manage encounters that are unplanned or unintended. They can indicate actions that are sociable and based on an affinity or affection such as a sense of shared values; or they can represent relations that are purely transactional by nature, instrumental, or calculated, and where encounters are designed for a purpose or gain. They can represent a range of interdependencies, where agents are involved in different degrees of interpersonal interaction either as individuals or as institutions. They can index different kinds of bonds, whether loose-knit or constituting an identifiable collective, and they can have a variety of social reference points to indicate attachments, such as shared rituals or regular practices, shared emotions and values or other configurations such as institutional affiliation.

Gaiser & Matras (2016) have shown how language use on LL signs may serve to express a sense of inclusiveness or exclusiveness, bringing together Blokland's (2017) dimensions of transaction and affective bonds. For example, among Orthodox Jews in Greater Manchester's Upper Broughton district, family name plaques in Hebrew on the doors of private terrace homes convey a sense of belonging by indexing a narrative of a shared background. They are public and permanent, and, since they identify the home owners, ostensibly there to serve fluid encounters of a transactional and instrumental nature with unfamiliar individuals; yet appearing exclusively in Hebrew script, they in fact perform an emotional bond with those who participate in similar rituals and religious institutions, and their spatial clustering amounts to a collective projection of shared cultural belonging onto a shared place. By contrast, illustrated Welcome notes in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English that address returning family members and are displayed on the doors of private homes facing the street are non-permanent fixtures but anchored in a habitual practice that is similarly inward-looking in that it explicitly targets members of the household, but also there to perform to neighbours and passers-by who share values and rituals (see also Matras, Gaiser & Reershemius 2018). Both types of signs, despite differences in content, material, multi-modal composition, relationship to addressees, and positioning, share certain elements of interpersonal engagement and affective performance of belonging.

An example of a different kind is provided by the use of an Urdu transliteration of the English word 'mortgage' on a poster, otherwise in English, that advertises private lending services (Gaiser & Matras, 2016: 98–99). This is a typical transactional encounter of an unfamiliar, instrumental, and fluid nature, characterised as such both by its content and its material assembly (printed poster fixed to walls and doorways). Yet as we learned by interviewing the sign owner (author, producer, or sender), the purpose of the insertion of 'mortgage' in Urdu script was to evoke asso-

ciations of a cultural bond and shared background in order to establish a basis of trust for a transaction that takes place in the fringe of mainstream services.

These practices could, in a traditional framework, be seen as the self-assertive public display of community identity amidst a landscape that is dominated by monolingual English communication, both verbal and written; or alternatively, they can be seen as practices that actually establish a sense of community among participants, as they index a variety of engagements, encounters, and transactions in respect of shared experiences and narratives, and in that way perform both real and imagined networks, social ties, and orientation patterns.

More can be said, for instance, about patterns of engagement, encounters, and transactions that are represented on so-called 'top-down' signs in Manchester. In Gaiser and Matras (2016: 124) we proposed a typology of engagements where different agents (public service agencies) interact with a variety of target audiences for different purposes, through various kinds of communicative events, and using different kinds of material prompts (LL items). These are all instances of 'public familiarity' that are typical of the dense and heterogeneous, super-diverse urban setting, where institutional agents deem certain kinds of communicative transactions (often advisory or regulatory) to have the potential of being more effective if they link the 'communal' in the sense of scripted or institutionalised expectations on behaviour, with the 'community' sense of belonging as evoked by the use of minority languages. In this way, the multilingual city works toward the creation of a 'diverse community' by performing multiplicity while promoting the adherence to a uniform set of rules.

Returning to the point made above about the intentions of the sender or sign author, producer, or owner, we wish to position our methodology also in respect of the actors and participants who are involved in the LL. Our unit of analysis, as described above, consists of LL items. We regard these as communicative events, and as such they are, just like verbal communicative events, part of an interaction that involves transfer of information, emotional bonding, or a prompt for action between a sender and an addressee. The goal of our analysis is to interpret the actions of the sender as they appear on the LL item. As with the analysis of verbal communicative interaction, we rely on setting and context as well as form (both linguistic and material), illocution and apparent communicative objective. The addressee dimension, in the sense of the intended effect of the message on the addressee, is essential to the study of LL just as it is to the analysis of speech events. Assessing the intended effect on a target addressee is not the same, however, as eliciting the subjective reaction of a random, potential addressee to an LL item. Whereas the analysis of conversation or even narration by necessity takes into consideration turn-taking and the way in which hearer sided participation has an immediate impact on the speaker's organisation of turns (but not necessar-

ily the explicit critical reflection on the part of the hearer on what had been said, in hindsight), with LL such turn-taking is in most cases metaphorical, in that the addressee's reaction to the written prompt is not necessarily instantaneous. The profile of participants who engage in encounters or transactions around the LL item (either in its physical proximity, or prompted by it, or both), and the relationship between the choice of language on a sign and the soundscapes that are recorded at the same setting, are useful observations that can enrich our assessment of the way in which an LL item serves its goal, and its positioning within a web of practices that perform social ties and belonging. Questioning individuals about their subjective perception of signs is just one of many possible observation techniques through which to interpret such positioning, but not one that we would advocate as necessarily outranking other methods.

This brings us, finally, to the choice of observation methods and settings that make up the group of contributions to this volume. Firstly, they feature a continuum in relation to the dimensions of size, density, homogeneity, and familiarity potential that is indicative of the degree of 'urban-ness' of locations and therefore a measure of the potential complexity of identity performance in relational settings: one of the studies focuses on a rural community in northwest Germany (Krummhoern, Ostfriesland) that has become the target of tourism, commercial as well as recreational re-settlement, and some degree of immigration, while undergoing a historical process of language shift. Another is set in a city (Nicosia) that is politically partitioned between two nations with separate everyday and national languages. A third describes an urban conglomeration (the Ruhr District) in which multiple languages are present. The fourth draws on data from two cities: one of those (Jerusalem) carries the historical memory of political partition and remains so to some extent in terms of the public presence of separate majority languages, while the majority language in one of its sectors (Hebrew) is historically also an immigrant language, and is accompanied by other immigrant languages regarded as secondary, including some that are more recent, while multiple minority languages have a century old presence in both sectors of the city. The other (Manchester, UK) has an undisputed majority language but is the scene of multiple immigrant languages. Alongside size, density, and heterogeneity, we thus also have a sample of different case studies in regard to the sectorial division of place and ethnicity and the role played by a colonial language (English), and the history of settlement of various population groups or language diasporas in pre-colonial and post-colonial times as well as the globalisation era.

Through the prism of a practice-based understanding of community as action and performance, and the different forms of interaction of multiple dimensions in the four case studies, we seek to address the following questions, all in relation to the choice of language on the LL in settings that are multilingual:

In what way can community figure as an object of analysis rather than unit of analysis when examining the LL? In what way does the LL create, as well as represent, a collaborative network of actors and participants? How does the LL perform shared belonging to place, and to what extent is it designed to prompt addressees to participate in a practice that is expressively communal (whether rural, sectorial, diasporic, or other)? How does LL frame demarcations and opposition to others, and how does it aim to facilitate access or participation in shared routines? In what sense does the LL create trust and familiarity, and how does it align with practices that are transactional or affective, fluid or durable, private/intimate or public/instrumental, as the case may be? And in what sense does LL constitute a practice that "builds community" in that it produces and performs shared history and a sense of belonging?

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