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Digital Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis (ELLA 2.0)

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DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHIC LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS (ELLA 2.0)

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The paradigmatic impact of superdiversity not only forces us to go beyond accepted notions regarding the relation between people, identities, language, and space; it also forces to engage with the development of new methodologies. In this paper, we introduce Digital Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape analysis or ELLA 2.0) as a new methodology to study social action and space from a post-digital perspective (Cramer, 2014), that is a world where ‘the revolutionary phase of the information age has surely passed’ (Cascone, 2000: 12) and “is constituted by the naturalization of pervasive and connected computing processes and outcomes in everyday life, such that digitality is now inextricable from the way we live while forms, functions and effects are no longer perceptible’ (Albrecht, Fielitz & Thurston, 2019: 11).

The development of this new method is the result of intense collaboration over the last 8 years under the umbrella of Babylon, the Centre for the study of superdiversity (Tilburg University). This collaboration generated a constant methodological fine-tuning to study semiotic landscapes in cities as sites enabling and constraining social interaction (Blommaert, 2013; Maly, 2014, 2016; Maly, Blommaert & Ben Yakoub, 2014; Blommaert & Maly, 2016; Maly, 2016; Maly & Varis, 2016; Varis 2016; Blommaert & Maly, 2019;). This methodological development started with a commitment with a relatively recent booming research discipline within sociolinguistics - Linguistic Landscape Studies – and ended up with injecting a (digital) ethnographic approach in this methodological toolkit.

ELLA 2.0 combines three elements: (1) a disciplinary concern with small details in concrete empirical cases of momentary events in the material world, (2) a methodology that ‘*compels us to historicize these unique cases and to understand them as an interplay*’ (Blommaert, 2013) between systemic and non-systemic, local and translocal, online and offline features and (3) a focus on social action in a networked and post-digital society. This focus starts from the assumption that social facts and the geosemiotic landscape are the result of ‘*interactional co-construction*’ (Blommaert & Maly, 2019) on the online/offline nexus. The linguistic landscape, from this perspective, is an effect of social life, of collaboration, response or conflict with others offline and online. And equally important, social life in the 21st century means interaction between local and global actors on that nexus. In the remainder of this paper, we want to introduce this methodology and the type of data it yields.

ETHNOGRAPHIC LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS (ELLA)

Classic Linguistic Landscape Research drew our attention to language on public signs like advertising billboards, street names, small commercial communication, shop names, and so on (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Cenoz & Garter: 2006; Backhaus, 2007; Hélot, Barni & Bagna, 2012). The early stages of the development of LLS were dominated by a quantitative approach, in which publicly visible languages were counted and used it to map the distribution of 'languages' over a specific area (Backhaus, 2007 is an example). The major pro of this kind of LLR is that it is a very useful first diagnostic instrument. It enables researchers to detect the major features of sociolinguistic regimes rather quickly and in the case of a multilingual regime LLR is well suited to document the occurring languages (c.f.e. Saez Rivera & Castillo LLuch).

While this approach yielded useful indicative 'catalogues' of areal multilingualism, it also used a narrow and essentialist categorization of language (see Deumert, 2014 for a critique), even more, it failed to explain how the presence and distribution of languages could be connected with specific populations and communities and the relationships between them, or with the patterns of social interaction in which people engage in a particular space. Such levels of analysis require a more maturely semiotic approach, in which the signs themselves are given greater attention both individually (signs are multimodal and display important qualitative typological differences) and in combination with each other (the landscape, in other words) (see Blommaert, 2013 for a substantial critique of LLS).

Even in the light of these criticisms, the study of linguistic landscapes not only possesses high descriptive potential, but analytic potential as well. LLS can be used to make space itself a central object and concern. Not as empty space, but space as an environment in which publicly visible written languages document the presence of (linguistically and semiotically identifiable) groups of people and the social, political and economic relations between them (See Maly, 2014, 2016). However, before we can arrive there, the diagnostic instrument needs upgrading. It is at this point that ethnography comes in. Following Hymes (1996), we understand ethnography as an approach to analyse language in its wider context. It falls beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this ethnographic approach in full detail (see Briggs, 1986; Hymes, 1996; Blommaert & Dong, 2010; Blommaert, 2013 for more information), but the following points deserve emphasis:

- (1) Ethnography is more than a mere collection of methods or a complex of fieldwork techniques (doing interviews for example) (Blommaert & Dong, 2010; Blommaert, 2013; Varis, 2016). It is a total and theoretically inspired program of scientific description and interpretation. Ethnography is a paradigm. In this understanding, fieldwork amounts to more than collecting pre-existing knowledge; it is always a work of interpretation of complex social phenomena in specific, methodologically, ontologically and epistemologically grounded ways (Hymes, 1974).
- (2) As Blommaert and Dong (2010: 7–10) stress, one important consequence of the ethnographic ontology is that language (understood in its broad semiotic meaning) is seen as *'a socially loaded and assessed tool'* that enables humans to perform as social beings. Within ethnography, language is understood as the architecture of social behaviour. The description of the meanings and functions of linguistic resources is thus always an undertaking in understanding them within their contexts (see Blommaert 2005: 39–67 for an in-depth discussion).
- (3) From this ethnographic point of view, language cannot be contextless, and what is more, context is an integral part of language (Gumperz, 1982: 130–162). As a consequence, part-whole relations are central to any good ethnography. An 'interview' is thus not per se ethnographic; to make an interview ethnographic is to analyse and interpret it within its contexts (see Briggs, 1986 for a seminal discussion). This is of course true when we try to interpret signs in general. Barthes (1957: 111–116) already pointed out that the sign as 'language-object' can be affected by myth, 'meta-language' or use-in-context and as such acquire different meanings for those in the know.
- (4) It is at this point that the ethnographic epistemology enters the picture: knowledge of meaning—within an ethnographic paradigm—is processual and historical knowledge (Blommaert & Dong, 2010: 9). The ethnographer tries to find out things that belong to the implicit structures of people's lives. This is a process and it is based on a careful analysis of an archive consisting of potentially very diverse sets of data: fieldnotes, pictures, interviews, and so on (see below for further details).
- (5) Ethnography, Hymes (1996: 7) stressed, is *'open-ended, subject to self-correction during the process of inquiry itself. All this is not to say that ethnography is open-minded to the extent of being empty-minded, that ignorance and naivete are wanted. The more the ethnographer knows on entering the field, the better the result is likely to be'*. Two lessons follow from this.
 - a. First, ethnography does not start with interviews, long-term participation or observation, nor can it be limited to these. Ethnography starts long before entering

the field with the gathering of knowledge. In this pre-fieldwork phase the researcher gathers as much information as possible on the field and the larger context. The better one is prepared, the better the end result will be.

- b. Second, researchers should be prepared to reconsider their initial framework. Ethnographic research is dialectical, based on a feedback loop or an interactive-adaptive method usually referred to as ethnographic monitoring (Van der Aa & Blommaert, 2015). Self-reflection is a key-ingredient of good ethnographic work (Pink et al., 2016)

Drawing on works such as Scollon and Scollon (2003) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) we argued (Blommaert & Maly, 2016) that infusing traditional LLS with ethnography makes qualitative LLS possible, especially when we take the following points into account:

1. Public spaces are social arenas – circumscriptions on which control, discipline, belonging and membership operate and in which they are being played out. Furthermore, public space is also an instrument of power, discipline and regulation: it organizes the social dynamics deployed in that space. The public space of a market square or a highway is, in contrast to the private space of e.g. one's dining room, a shared space over which multiple people and groups will try to acquire authority and control, if not over the whole of the space, then at least over parts of it. It is an institutional object, regulated (and usually 'owned') by official authorities whose role will very often be clearest in the restrictions they impose on the use of space (prohibitions on smoking, loitering, littering, speed limits, warnings, and so on). Public spaces are normative spaces.
2. Communication in the public space, consequently, is communication in a field of power. The question thus becomes: how does space organize semiotic regimes? (cf. Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck, 2005: 198; also Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009). This question assumes that regimes can be multiple and competing but that they nevertheless function as regimes, i.e. as ordered patterns of normative conduct and expectations, authoritative patterns of conduct to which one should orient.
3. All signs can be analysed by looking at three "axes":
 - a. *Signs point towards the past*, to their origins and modes of production. Elements of material and linguistic make-up are indices of who manufactured the signs, under

which conditions they were manufactured, which resources were used and, so, available and accessible to the producers of the sign. The history of the sign, thus, leads us towards the broader sociolinguistic conditions under which the sign has been designed and deployed.

- b. *Signs point towards the future*, to their intended audiences and preferred uptake. Signs are always proleptic in the sense that they address specific addressees and audiences with specific effects in mind: a non-smoking sign is intended specifically for smokers and intends to prevent them from smoking (not from standing on their heads, for instance).
- c. *Signs also point towards the present*, through their “emplacement” (Scollon & Scollon, 2003): their location is not a random given, and neither is their “syntagmatic” position relative to other signs.

Given these three axes, we can understand the social function of public signs: signs demarcate public space, they cut it up into smaller fragments and regulate these in connection to other fragments. Signs thus always have a *semiotic scope* – the communicative relationship between producers and addressees, in which normative and regulative messages are conveyed (e.g. local authorities messaging “don’t smoke” to smokers), and a *spatial scope* (“don’t smoke here”). They are always specific in terms of meaning and function, and qualitative differences between signs are thus of utmost relevance.

4. The three axes and their functions turn LLS into an ethnographic and historical project, in which we see signs as indices of social relationships, interests and practices, deployed in a field which is replete with overlapping and intersecting norms – not just norms of language use, but norms of conduct, membership, legitimate belonging and usage; and not just the norms of a here – and now, but norms that are of different orders and operate within different historicities. The linguistic landscape has been turned into a social landscape, features of which can now be read through an analysis of the public signs.

We (see Blommaert, 2013; Blommaert & Maly 2014, 2016; Maly, Blommaert & Ben Yakoub, 2014, Maly, 2014, 2016) called this “*ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis*” (ELLA), and we used it to analyse the urban working-class neighbourhoods: Berchem in Antwerp (see Blommaert, 2013), Rabot in the city of Ghent, Belgium (Blommaert & Maly, 2014), Vorst (Ben Yakoub, 2014) and the Westerkwartier in Ostend (Maly, 2014, 2016). The point of these exercises was to demonstrate that ELLA enables us not just to identify with a very high degree of accuracy the demography of

the neighbourhood – who lives here? – but also the particular dynamic and complex features of the social fabric of a superdiverse neighbourhood.

ELLA allowed us to draft sociolinguistic stratigraphies. Globalisation comes with a layered and stratified sociolinguistic distribution of languages and signs (Blommaert, 2010: 12). Prestige variants of a language are deployed on a certain scale level, and not on others, and the same is true for any semiotic resources deployed. For instance, prestige (standard) English in combination with high-end semiotic material found in the shopping area indexes a different producer and addressee than a handwritten bit of truncated Dutch on a piece of paper on a window in a peri-urban area. Language in the real world is marked by inequality and ELLA allowed us to map this inequality.

Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis (ELLA) was thus developed as a way of addressing in a more satisfactory way the structure and significance of linguistic landscapes as an object in the study of sociolinguistic superdiversity (Blommaert & Maly, 2016). The effort was inspired by a refusal to perform ‘snapshot’ linguistic landscape analysis based on hit-and-run fieldwork and yielding a Saussurean synchrony as analytical outcome. Instead, we wanted to emphasize the dynamic, processual character of superdiverse linguistic landscapes through a combination of longitudinal fieldwork, detailed observations of changes in the landscape, and an ethnographic-theoretical framework in which landscape signs are seen as traces of (and instruments for) social action (cf. Blommaert, 2013).

ELLA, SOCIAL ACTION AND MOBILITY

One effect of the ethnographic perspective is that what could be considered as a mere detail in the traditional LLS—the presence of a particular type of commercial poster in a shop window for example—can be a very revealing and important piece of data in an ELLA approach. The digital ethnographic injection in linguistic landscape research produces a type of ‘*nano-sociolinguistics*’ (Parkin, 2013). A sociolinguistics that not only digs deep into ‘details’ but contextualizes those details in relation to that post-digital, translocal and polycentric world (Blommaert, 2010). It was this approach, that enabled us to perform a fine-grained analysis of societal interaction constructing geosemiotic landscape. And it was the data gathered during that fieldwork that directed attention not only to the presence of ‘ethnicities’, but also to the presence of hipster-semiotics. Research in Ostend and Ghent showed that hipster-semiotics and infrastructures were more and more present in the neighbourhoods we engaged with. From fixie bike shops and

barista's, to foodie restaurants and authenticity discourse used to sell lofts: it all popped up in the data and it led to a search to define and study hipsters as micro-populations (Maly & Varis, 2015). This search also led to incorporating 'digital ethnography' in our study of semiotic landscapes (Maly, 2017) and it forced us to inject a complex notion of 'social action' into LLS.

The aspect of social action in a post-digital reality remains, an underdeveloped aspect of Linguistic Landscape Studies (LLS) and urban studies in general. And here, too, the Saussurean synchrony can be identified as an underlying sociological imagination in much work. Social action, it seems, is regularly located within a geographical circumscription – a market, a street, a neighbourhood, a town – which is seen as the locus of action of a sedentary community (Blommaert, 2013; Hall, 2014; Hiebert, Rath & Vertovec, 2015, Peterson, 2017; Maly, 2016; Albeda et al., 2017;). LL signs are routinely interpreted as reflecting, in some way, the linguistic repertoires of those who live sedentary lives in the area where the signs have been emplaced. This, then, enables LL researchers to make statements about the demographic composition of such areas of emplacement, projected into statements about the sociolinguistic structures in that area.

The concept of social action, thus interpreted, remains superficial and deserves and demands far more attention. The question that needs to be raised is: who is involved in social action in such areas? And what is the locus of such actions? Linguistic landscapes in superdiverse areas often offer clues that significantly complicate the assumptions about sedentary populations mentioned above. ELLA not only allowed us to capture mobility and complexity, but also to generalize and connect local action with transnational actors. Below are two pictures in two different settings. The first picture was taken in the 19th century belt around Ghent (see Maly, Blommaert & Ben Yakoub, 2014 and Blommaert & Maly, 2016) and the second picture was taken in the inner-city district of Oud-Berchem, Antwerp (Belgium) in the summer of 2018.



IMAGE 1- ELSTUK VAN SPOTTED IN GHENT 2013 – © ICO MALY

Image 1, shows a white van from the company (ELSTUK) which is registered in Kielce, Poland and has branches in Belgium. The bilingual nature of the van points to a company operating on a transnational scale. According to their website (accessed in March 2013), the company works in Poland as well as in Belgian cities like Ghent, Knokke and Beernem. The first time we registered the van they were working in a new apartment building for some weeks in August and September 2013. Then the van disappeared, to reappear again 6 months later in February 2014 for some weeks. From 2015 onwards, several companies vans and cars would be visible in Ghent.



IMAGE 2: ANTWERPSE ALGEMENE DAKWERKEN VAN SPOTTED IN BERCHEM, ANTWERP © JAN BLOMMAERT

In image 2, we see a similar van with a Dutch-language inscription “Antwerpse Algemene Dakwerken” (“Antwerp General Roofing Works”), again with a Polish license plate locating the van in the area of Poznan. While the inscription suggests locality – a reference to Antwerp on a van enplaced in Antwerp – the license plate suggests translocality. Thus, building work performed in Antwerp and Ghent appears to be connected to actions performed in Poznan and Kielce – recruiting a workforce, manufacturing bespoke materials, warehousing heavy equipment and so forth. The use of Dutch, the Belgian mobile numbers in combination with the Polish number plates and websites are all indexes of the transnational set-up of these companies. Their presence in the local landscapes points to higher scales, namely the creation of a transnational labour market that was created by EU-regulation. The vans thus function as indexes of transnational life and supra-national decision-making organs changing not only the local landscape, but also the actors in that landscape.

In an era of transnational mobility and supra-national organisation, such things are evident, but they raise the fundamental questions outlined above. Such questions are becoming even more pressing and compelling as soon as we adjust our baseline sociological assumptions and accept that contemporary social life is not only played out in an ‘offline’ physical arena of co-present

participants encountering each other in public space (the focus of Goffman 1963), but also as we indicated in online spaces crosscutting the offline ones in complex ways (cf. Blommaert 2018). We live our lives in an online-offline nexus. This simple observation renders us aware of the fact that social actions can be organized, set up, “staffed” and distributed in online as well as offline spaces; and it helps us realize that much of what we observe in the way of social action in ‘superdiverse’ (offline, geographical) areas has, at least, been conditioned and perhaps even made possible by online infrastructures, in terms both of actors and of topography and meaning-making processes.

SOCIAL ACTION IN THE POST-DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

Before moving on towards the concrete analysis, we need to clarify the focus on action. The view of action we put forward is deeply influenced by an older tradition of action-centred sociology, of which Goffman (1961, 1963), Cicourel (1973), Blumer (1969) Strauss (1993) and Garfinkel (1967, 2002) can be seen as co-architects (see Blommaert, Lu & Li, 2019 for a discussion). A number of principles characterize this tradition.

- (1) The first and most important principle has already been mentioned above, namely that of *interactional co-construction of social facts* – the assumption that whatever we do in social life is done in collaboration, response or conflict with others. In fact, the people mentioned above argue that one can only talk of social action when it is interaction (e.g. Strauss, 1993: 21), and for Blumer (1969: 7) “*a society consists of individuals interacting with one another*”.
- (2) *Interaction*, in turn, is “*making sense*” of social order in concrete situations – this is the second principle. For the scholars mentioned, social order and social structure does not exist in an abstract sense but is enacted constantly by people in contextualized, situated moments of interaction. In Garfinkel’s famous words (1967: 9), in each such moment we perform and co-construct social order “*for another first time*”. The social is concrete, ongoing and evolving, in other words.
- (3) The third principle is derived straight from Mead and can be summarized as follows: “*we see ourselves through the way in which others see and define us*” (Blumer, 1969: 13). Somewhat more precisely, “*organisms in interaction are observing each other’s ongoing activity, with each using portions of the developing action of the other as pivots for the redirection of his or her own action*” (Blumer, 2004: 18). This is the essence of Mead’s understanding of the Self: it is greatly influenced by anticipated responses from the others, and adjusted accordingly. *The Self* can thus never be an essence, a fixed

characteristic, an a priori attribute of people: it is *a situationally co-constructed performance ratified by others*. Of course, Goffman's work has greatly contributed to this insight.

- (4) Fourth, we engage in this *interactional* monitoring and anticipating of the others' responses *on the basis of an assumption of recognizability*. When we experience something as meaningful, as something that "makes sense" to us, by recognizing it as something specific (cf. Garfinkel, 1967: 9), a token of a type of meaningful acts which we can ratify as such. These types of acts can be called "genres" (Blommaert, 2018: 51); Garfinkel called them "formats" (2002: 245), and Goffman (1974) theorized them as "frames".
- (5) Fifth, all of the preceding has a major implication for how we see the Self, how we theorize it and address it in research. Rawls' (2002: 60) comment on Garfinkel nicely captures it, and the point can be extended to almost all the work in the tradition addressed here. Individual subjectivity, she writes, "*which had originally been thought of as belonging to the actor, [was relocated] in the regularities of social practices. (...) [A] population is constituted not by a set of individuals with something in common but by a set of practices common to particular situations or events*".

The latter point is of crucial importance here. It emphasizes that actions generate those who are involved in them, or to quote Rawls again, we see "*situations that provide for the appearances of individuals*" (2002: 46), and not vice versa. Identities and social space, individuals and the collective, are effects of social actions and not their ontological and methodological point of departure. They constitute, as it were, the "personnel" of social actions, and in a post-digital society identifying this "personnel" is the challenge: who is actually and concretely involved in social action as actor? Who actually contributes to the actual form and structure of social actions? To these questions we can now turn, and we shall use ELLA as our tool.

(IN)VISIBLE LINES

The method we employ in ELLA is very simple: we observe everything we notice in the way of publicly displayed language material. But we do not stop at the level of language – even if that language is, evidently, an important clue for locating e.g. diasporic audiences – but we look at what is actually contained in the signs: from images, logo's, colours and letter types to furniture and architecture. And one feature of a great number of publicly displayed signs nowadays is online information: references to websites, social media accounts and so forth. This banal fact already directs us again towards a highly relevant insight: that "public" as a feature of sign emplacement

now has at least two dimensions: the local public emplacement of signs – the concrete place where signs are put and shown to potential audiences – as well as a translocal, online public sphere with which the local signs are profoundly connected. This insight, again forces us out of the local area and out of the customary modes of LL fieldwork: we have to move from the street to the computer, and we follow the online information displayed in the signs.

When we follow the leads from locally emplaced signs towards the online sphere they point towards, we begin to see vastly more. This move from offline to online and back, we consider to be of major importance for ELLA, for it directs us towards a far more precise view of actors and topography of action and it gives a more complete perspective on how meaning is created through social action. As we already stated in the introduction, the meaning of a place, a neighbourhood or city is not only constructed offline, but also online on social media, on Google reviews and websites (see for instance Zukin, Lindeman & Hurson, 2017). This of course, immediately raises the question about the ‘actors’. The actions performed in specific offline places are dispersed and operate locally as well as translocally and through time. The “personnel” of locally performed actions, thus, is far broader and more diverse than what an exclusively offline LL analysis would show.

In many cases, the linguistic landscape itself points the direction by mentioning website and social media-addresses, but in the post-digital society these lines can also be ‘assumed’ by the producers or the addressees of the signs – and thus completely invisible in the linguistic landscape. A good example is the relatively new ‘Bar Oswald’ in the 19th century belt around Ghent. The bar is located on the inner ring around the historical city centre in a neighbourhood called ‘De Muide’ in-between two other neighbourhoods of that 19th century belt around Ghent: Dok Noord and The Rabot – the city’s poorest neighbourhood and a layered ‘superdiverse’ neighbourhood (see Maly, Blommaert & Ben Yakoub, 2014; Blommaert & Maly, 2016). The bar and party room opened its doors in 2017 and it was an immediate statement in the semiotic landscape.



IMAGE 3: BAR OSWALD -MUIDE, GHENT – 2019 © ICO MALY

The overall design of bar Oswald makes it pop in this rather visually deprived offline landscape. The emplacement of the bar – on the ring, next to a canal in the poor 19th century belt – makes that not that many people would walk past this place without noticing it. This same emplacement, also makes advertising their online existence on the façade rather redundant as most people would only drive by the place in a car or on a bike and thus not be able to actually read the tag. The façade of the bar does address these car-driving and bicycle riding audience. The white and black stripes not only give the place a vintage, cool feel, they make sure that the building stands out and is noticed by the traffic passing. The logo of the bar is not only big and thus readable from a distance, it is professionally designed and crafted. Its Art Deco styling subscribes to a very specific genre or formats that is recognized by people in the know as hip. It thus constructs the ‘hipness’ and ‘authenticity’ of the bar.

The emplacement of that sign stirs the curiosity of people recognizing the ‘coolness’ of the style. Or put it differently, the semiotics of the bar could be seen as having a high ‘google-ability’ to it.

The fact that there is no visible line to the online landscape on that façade, of course doesn't mean that there is no online dimension, on the contrary. In a post-digital world, an online presence is normal. Googleability is, just like a Facebook or Instagram-account is assumed to exist. From the moment one enters 'Oswald' (and not even Bar Oswald) in Google (when you are surfing in Ghent even with fully cleared browsing history), one sees how the meaning of Bar Oswald is not solely constructed 'offline' in the 19th century belt, but also online.

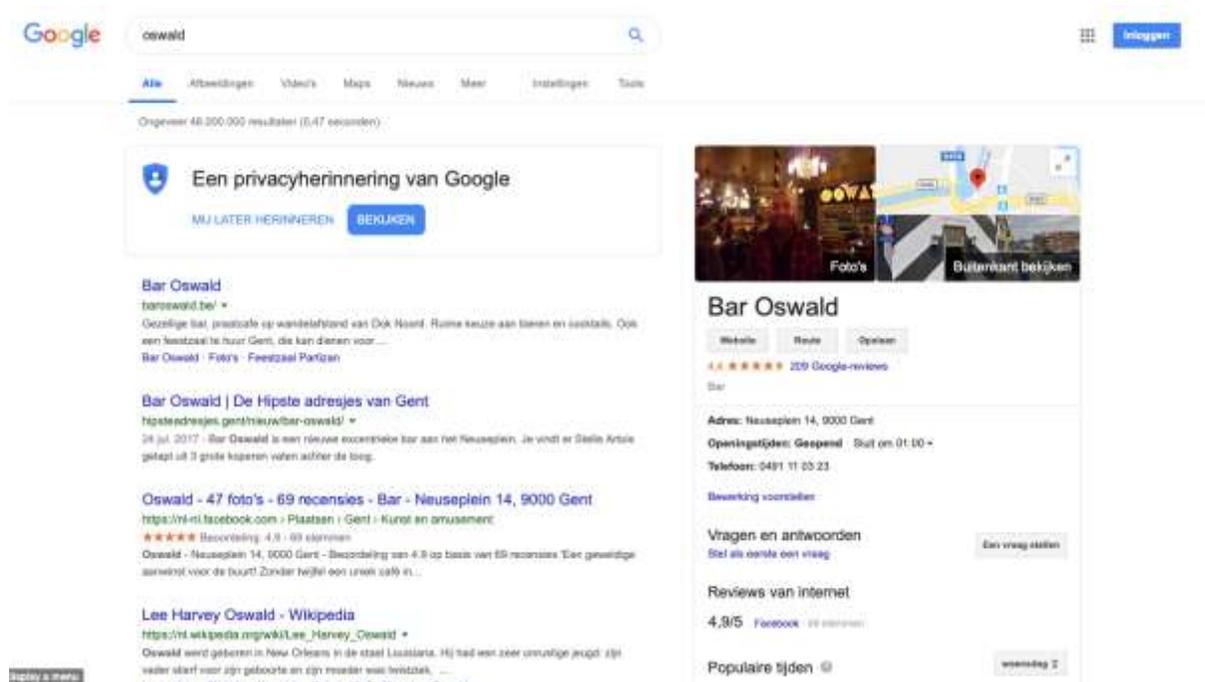


IMAGE 4 - SCREENSHOT GOOGLE SEARCH BAR OSWALD-2019

The first three links, just like the Google business highlight, all refer to 'Bar Oswald' and not for instance to Lee Harvey Oswald or Restaurant Oswald in California (as in DuckDuckGo). The first hit directs us to the well-made website of Bar Oswald with a homepage directing visitors to their Facebook and Instagram account, a picture page and a contact page. The pictures on the site, and the overall feel, contribute to the 'pureed out' and vintage feel that the owners want to establish (the nostalgic eighties parties and party's in roaring twenties style are testimonies). The bar is presented in a toned-down voice as '*Cosy bar, a chat café on walking distance from Dok Noord, Ghent Muide. Broad range of beers and cocktails.*' (Oswald, 2019). In interviews with mainstream media, the owner state that they see Oswald as a place '*like home*', an old type of bar that never closes (Tollenaere, 2017).

The second Google result directs people to a 'blog-review'-site called: 'The hippest addresses of Ghent'¹. The site presents small reviews of hip Ghentian bars, restaurants, shops and much more and welcomes around 15 à 20k individual visitors a month. Even though, there is no real review of Bar Oswald – just a short (advertisement) description accompanied with some pictures of the interior on the site - the mentioning alone contributes to the perception of Bar Oswald as a cool, hip and an '*eccentric place*' with art & beer and special loos.

The first thing that Google wants us to notice, are not the search engine results, but the Business Profile Google made for Bar Oswald (and that its owners have potentially tweaked for uptake as the Business profile has been claimed). The profile looks very up to date with dozens of pictures, movies and maybe more importantly: 209 reviews awarding the place with 4,4 stars. How 'Oswald' is conceived, is not only done 'locally', but also online (Zukin, Lindeman & Hurson, 2017). 209 people construct 'Bar Oswald' as a '*great*', '*authentic*' and '*well-designed bar outside the city centre*', with '*great beers*', '*non-average*'-lemonades, '*a cool atmosphere*' and '*spectacular*' '*must-see*' loos'. Let us look at one (emblematic) review in detail:

'Cosy hidden gem old-Belgian bar at the edge of town in the port district. Feels like your walking straight into a Felix Van Groeningen movie. Nice place to meet up with someone on a dark and rainy Wednesday evening.'

This review is a good example of what Van Nuenen (2016) calls scripts, that is '*interface performances and interactions through computational frameworks from which social relations arise*' (Van Nuenen, 2016: 15). This notion implies that within computational ecologies, users interact with interfaces – in this case the interface of Google Reviews – and register to certain '*identity templates, formats or ideal types*'. Google Reviews' interface is based on gamification, and 'local guides' are not only giving reviews, they are hoping to move their way up to become top guides. The reviewer of this review is a level 5 reviewer with a score of 711. Providing reviews as a 'local guide', and talking about places foster identity work in relation to that place and the platform that is used. In this case, the reviewer is presenting himself as romantic, loving the good life and in the know of cosy and special places. Scripts are thus matters of performance, in this case the performance of 'a local guide' in the know of what is cool in Ghent.

¹ <http://hipsteadresjes.gent/nieuw/bar-oswald/>

This performance also contributes to the meaning of Bar Oswald – it discursively constructs this place as a ‘gem’, ‘in the port district’, ‘at the edge of town’, with a typical Genthian flavour just like in a ‘Felix Van Groeningen movie’. Such language is at least partially triggered by the interface and tourist review formats that are mobilized in such socio-technical contexts. The reviewer taps into typical tourist reviews describing Ghent as ‘hidden gems’(see for instance The Guardian (Brunton, 2009). The choice of the reviewer – living in Ghent and speaking Dutch – in interaction with the Google Review interface – to use English show that (s)he doesn’t only want to address ‘locals’ but also potential tourists from abroad. This is not exceptional, as 16 from the 59 written Google Reviews of Bar Oswald are in English even though most of the users (but not all) are Dutch speaking people. If we zoom in on the language itself, it is interesting to note how the reviewer not only adopts classic tourist writing jargon – hidden gem, port district – but also how (s)he construct ‘authenticity’– old Belgian bar (even though it just opened), ‘a Felix Van Groeningen’ -feel (Van Groeningen is a famous Ghentian movie-director who made films about Ghentian party scene). This ‘authenticity’ discourse is, next to a specific style, as we shall see later, a crucial ingredient of hipsterism.

Interestingly, several written reviews mention the location of the bar ‘as outside’ the centre Ghent, and ‘a bit far’, but worthwhile. These reviews not only contribute to the construction of meaning of Bar Oswald to a broader audience or the discursive construction of the centre and the margins of Ghent, they also draw in people from different neighbourhoods, cities and countries. If we look at who is an actor in the meaning making process of Bar Oswald, we encounter people living in Belgian cities like Bruges, Antwerp, and people living outside Belgium, in Wales (but working in Ghent) and tourists from Bulgaria, Slovenia, Malesia (but studying in Brussels), and Massachusetts in the US. This online construction of the meaning of Bar Oswald is also encouraged by the owners. Inside the bar, you can see a poster with chalkboard -look to inform the audience to ask for the Wi-Fi-code and inform them about the website URL, the Facebook and Instagram-account of the Bar. This small example shows the complexity of meaning making in the 21st century. It also illustrates the importance of ‘the unexpected’, or in other words what is expected to be local is all of the sudden global and superdiverse. And crucially, it shows the importance of the online in the construction of the offline landscape.

DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS (ELLA 2.0)

We thus find ourselves in an ELLA 2.0, an ethnography starting from linguistic landscapes and taking us to the online and offline structure of social actions in neighbourhoods. In a classic

linguistic landscape research or in sociological and statistical approach to superdiversity, this bar would have a high chance to be understood as a 'local' Ghentian place in a superdiverse neighbourhood. When we use superdiversity as 'a heuristic tool ('a lense') or a working hypothesis ('a perspective') impelling and guiding us to better understand the global condition of interconnectivity' (Arnaut, et al., 2017: 6) we tend to see a lot more. Superdiversity is then not in first instance about measuring and labelling, but as the changing of *'the available horizons of meaning, both in places and spaces that can be labelled as 'very diverse' as well as in those that are seen not to be so from this perspective'* (Varis, 2017).

This small example indicates that if we want to use linguistic landscape studies to actually grasp how meaning is constructed in a 'superdiverse' landscape, it will have to be injected with digital ethnography. Whenever we do that, we see that we should *'expect the unexpected'* (Pennycook, 2012). Bar Oswald when looked at from an offline perspective, had all the semiotics of a 'local', offline hip Ghentian place. From the moment we explored the online landscape, we saw that 'Bar Oswald' was constructed as a far more diverse place with people living in different neighbourhoods, cities and countries contributing to the 'total linguistic' fact (Silverstein, 1985: 220). The total linguistic fact was always defined as an unstable mutual interaction of signs by people in context and thus dialectical in nature. In post-digital societies however, another dimension is added: meaning today is also constructed through digital practices, and thus not only in offline interaction online, but also in interaction with humans, but also with interfaces, algorithms and social bots. Digital media (from Google to social media) are infrastructures that not only enable or constrain certain practices of meaning making, they themselves should be understood as active mediators in the construction of that total fact. Digital media (partially) shape the performance of social acts (Van Dijck, 2013: 29) and as such they are an inherent part of 'meaning making'.

The infusion of digital technologies in our understanding of the landscape, of course, means that we should upgrade our ethnographic approach. Digitalization forces everyone who studies discourse (online) to rethink the *'definitions of terms such as text, context, interaction and power'* (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015: 5). Digitalization comes with *'new types of issues related to contextualisation that ethnographers of digital culture and communication need to address'* (Varis, 2016). *The technological properties of the online world (persistence, searchability, replicability, scalability, algorithmically constructed reality) shape online interactions* (boyd, 2014) and should thus be considered in the understanding of the processes of meaning making on the online/offline nexus. How a place is discursively constructed online in reviews (Zukin, Lindeman & Hurson, 2017)

or pops up in a game like Pokemon (Zuboff, 2019), has considerable offline effects: it is, if we like it or not, an inherent part of social life in a post-digital world. Liking, retweeting, sharing and editing are now not only enabling but also shaping communication (Maly, 2018b,c & e), offline social action (Blommaert & Maly, 2019), and affective attachment (Papacharissi, 2015). People's interaction with interfaces (and algorithms) potentially script their online and offline practices – taking pictures from barista coffees, gourmet hamburgers or fancy cocktails- before drinking and eating so that 'good life pictures' can be posted as 'stories' and posts on Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat using hashtags, and tagging friends and infrastructures and liking posts and reviews. All those practices in the offline/online nexus together create meaning. Media and technology are themselves mediators in this meaning making process and an important context and should thus be studied as such (Varis & Hou, in press).

It is this complex dialectical interaction shaped by digital and non-digital practices in shared and non-shared TimeSpace that creates the meaning of a place. City-scapes cannot be grasped from a merely synchronic perspective. A diachronic perspective, understanding the landscape as a multi-layered historically and socially constructed space on the online/offline nexus, is thus necessary. The meaning of place is constantly evolving as it not only shapes new offline and online practices that interact with the previously established meanings, these new processes of meaning production in turn also create new meanings and identities. It is this process of continuous re-constructing of the meaning of the linguistic landscape that is our research target here. Space, as in the words of Springer, is understood as '*a relational assemblage*'. With this re-theorization Springer (2011: 90) wants '*to open up the supposed fixity, separation, and immutability of place to instead recognize it as always co-constituted by, mediated through, and integrated within the wider experiences of space*'. The linguistic landscape it thus best understood as part of a (online/offline) network of texts, mediated practices, artefacts, experiences and semiotics.

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