

# The transformation of urban space

## Agency and constraints in a peripheral district in the post-industrial city of Madrid\*

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This paper draws attention to the ways in which spatial configurations operate as constitutive dimensions of sociolinguistic phenomena and vice versa; that is, the way in which communicative practices frame daily life and the broader urban reality. The paper presents an approach which integrates the study of Linguistic Landscapes, the dynamics of deterritorialisation/reterritorialisation, proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and Bourdieu's concept of social field. The paper shows that whilst there are possibilities of agency in urban space transformation, such opportunities are restricted by social agents' positioning in the different social fields (e.g. tourism vs. local commerce), and by their positioning in relation to the social processes of assimilation, integration, segregation or marginalization.

**Keywords:** linguistic landscapes, discursive production of space, deterritorialisation/reterritorialisation, social field, intercultural relationships, agency, constraints, indexicality

### 1. Introduction

In spite of the interest that increasing multilingualism, hybridisation and creolisation in linguistic practices have aroused in the fields of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, it is only recently that new research threads have emerged to explore how these linguistic practices are enclosed and framed within space. Work in the relatively new areas of the 'sociolinguistics of mobility' (Blommaert et al. 2005) and 'linguistic landscapes' (henceforth, LL) (Shohamy & Gorter 2009; Jaworski &

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Thurlow 2010) have shown how the urban space is established and represented in linguistic practices and how, at the same time, space frames the ways in which language is used. As part of this trend, in this paper we focus on cities as the prime object of research, drawing attention to the ways in which spatial configurations operate as constitutive dimensions of sociolinguistic phenomena and vice versa; that is, the way in which communicative practices both frame and are framed by daily life and the broader urban reality (Lefebvre 1968, 1991). Following this approach, we seek to transcend the vision of space as a container of communicative practices and to conceptualise it as a social construction. From this perspective, places and contexts are no longer studied as mere backdrops against which language is developed, but are considered as active generators of new practices. At the same time, the social construction of space sheds light upon the construction of new cultural, political and historical meanings and conceptualisations (Pennycook 2010: 61–62; Pennycook & Otsuji 2015).

Applying this spatial approach we explore the construction of the urban space of a district of Madrid, Usera, and analyse the extent to which the distribution and visibilisation patterns of linguistic practices depend on the power balance within social fields (Bourdieu 1993) and on the subsequent conditions of participation and transformation of different population groups in these fields. As we discuss in this paper, the power of social agents — in this case individuals and delocalised groups — to introduce their languages in local exchanges and to make them visible depends on their position in a particular social field, e.g. the field of commerce. A spatial approach, drawing on Linguistic Landscapes (LL) can offer a picture of emerging inter-group relations and of the ways in which institutions, the host population and the migrant population respond to the specific situation of cultural and linguistic diversity.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 focuses on some of the key questions posed by a research project on ‘Multilingual Madrid’, insights from which constituted the basis for the research we present in this paper. Section 3 explores how linguistic and semiotic resources are managed by social agents in different social fields. Section 4 reviews the linguistic landscape of a small area in the Usera district to analyse its most significant features. Finally, Section 5 discusses the results obtained and evaluates the analytic frame proposed, signalling its relevance to applied linguistics and the study of language and communication.

## 2. Understanding the discursive construction of urban spaces: A critical approach

Our approach to LL research stems from a prospective pilot study on urban landscapes in Madrid entitled “Madrid Multilingüe: Lenguas pa’la citi”<sup>1</sup> (“Multilingual Madrid: languages for the city”, henceforth MM; see Martín Rojo, Molina and Díaz de Frutos 2011), carried out in 2010 in collaboration with students of the Autónoma University of Madrid, and in which we studied various districts of the city. Just at the time we were collecting material to study the linguistic landscape of Madrid, the main square of Madrid, Puerta del Sol, was taken over by the so-called 15M movement (see Martín Rojo and de Frutos 2015 for overview). Therefore, over the course of those days, the protest camp at Puerta del Sol was quickly incorporated into the landscape from which we were gathering data and contributed in a decisive way to the shaping of our approach, particularly the attention to ‘field’, that we present in this paper.

The following sections focus on some of the key questions posed by the MM project which then informed the research we conducted in the Madrid neighbourhood of Usera, the main focus of this paper: how and by what means do linguistic practices transform urban spaces? (Section 2.1); how is this transformation mediated by the position of social agents in different social fields and economic activities (tourism vs. local commerce)? (Section 2.2); how is transformation mediated by positioning in relation to the social processes of inclusion and exclusion? (Section 2.3); and in the particular case of migration, how is transformation mediated by the processes of assimilation, integration, segregation or marginalisation (Berry 1990; Berry & Sam 1997) of the diasporic communities?

### 2.1 Deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. Agency in the discursive production of space

From an unexpected and exceptional event — the occupation of the main Square, Puerta del Sol of Madrid — we learnt how social spaces and their traditional organisation and uses can be transformed by the communicative practices of protestors. The taking over of this neural centre opened the space to different forms of inhabiting urban spaces, and can be also seen as a movement of social inclusion in which a significant part of the wider population was represented and even took control of the square. In order to study how social actors build and transform urban spaces, we looked to the concepts of *deterritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation*. Different

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1. This title reproduced a graffiti that was part of our corpus in which colloquial Spanish (pa’ instead of “para”) is mixed with English spelled in a Spanish way, e.g., citi.

authors have assigned different meanings to these terms but we consider the one proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 507) particularly insightful because they foreground the role of agency in the construction of spaces, a key focus of our research. However, at different points in our analysis we also refer to other meanings attributed to these two terms in anthropology and postcolonial studies (García Canclini 1990; Appadurai 1990; Ortiz 1998, among others).

Deleuze and Guattari define deterritorialisation as the movement by which the territory is abandoned. It is the “escape route” operation (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 320), in other words, a sort of opening up to a different agency, which is brought about by reterritorialisation. Continuing with the same authors, “the deterritorialisation process constitutes and extends the territory itself” (op, cit, 372). It is a process whereby what has been done is undone. This undoing takes place through occupation and inhabiting strategies, but also through resignifying the space through the discourses generated therein.

It was precisely the Puerta del Sol encampment, which took place in Madrid in 2011, after the revolutionary movements often referred to as the ‘Arab Spring’ and before the Occupy Wall Street movement, that allowed us to understand these dynamics. In Sol Square, as in other encampments in different part of the world during this and the following years, signage and interactions are not only indicators of broader ideological and political processes, but a form of appropriating or reterritorialising core spaces in the city in order to build an *agora* (the general assembly), a meeting point, a place for discussion and decision making aimed at increased participation and intervention in the governance of the community. Thus, through linguistic practices, these urban spaces are built (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Under the tents (1)



Figure 2. Under the tents (2)

We understand these spatial and communication practices as a form of “de-territorialisation”, by means of which protestors take the control and order away from a land or place (territory) that is already established. And, simultaneously, as reterritorialisation, by which protestors replace the traditional organisation and uses of the space with their own beliefs and rituals (see for both concepts, Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

In this sense, the camp was organised like a parallel city (see Figure 3). The camp was permanently under construction with tarpaulins, megaphones, sound systems, chairs, beds, computers and solar panels. Many services that exist off-camp(us) were also replicated inside (a library and several archives, a day-care



Figure 3. Sol-utopía

centre, a kitchen, an information and communication service), while others were particular to the goals and interests of the encampment (for instance, a legal committee and even a 'respect committee' with 'respect officers' trained to aid in conflict resolution). Each and every one of these services were governed by the principles and the ideology of the movement.

One of the key resources for the transformation of the square was the individualised, and sometimes improvised production of banners with any material at hand. In some cases the production was serial, but many were individual, which, rather than reproducing the slogans of organisations, gave voice to the opinions and creativity of whoever produced them (see also Martín Rojo, 2014; Martín Rojo & Díaz de Frutos 2015). By creating this new linguistic landscape, the occupants challenged and democratised public and institutional spaces. The new design of space foreshadowed the kind of society that was being proposed (see this design of the square captured in the map of Sol-city utopia in Figure 3; Graeber 2009). This transformation took place as much in the camp at Sol as in the other occupied places around the world: the Egyptian revolutionaries with Tahrir Square in Cairo, the Occupy movement with Wall Street and Zuccotti Park in New York. In all these places, discontented people converged in social movements. In fact, the names of these areas, parks, squares and *plazas* became metonymies for the political, economic, and social struggles taking place in them (Martín Rojo 2014).

One of the conclusions drawn from our observation of the occupation of Puerta del Sol is that similar processes of production of space through linguistic practices occur in other historical moments and in other urban spaces. In order to grasp this transformation, we looked at the transformation of urban areas which had ceased to be monolingual and inhabited by a local population, and were becoming spaces of cohabitation of residents from different places and who speak different languages. To explore this phenomenon, we chose the district of Usera, on the outskirts of Madrid, an area in constant transformation, which was in the past a traditional destination for migrants from other parts of Spain and is now one of the districts with the largest population of people from different parts of China.

As in the case of the square, neighbourhoods are "lived spaces" experienced by city dwellers, and they are also representational spaces (Lefebvre 1991: 39), where commercial signs and non-commercial notices are symbolic manifestations of this space, but also powerful mechanisms in their production. It is precisely in this lived space where the shape of different fields of activities, within a specific sociolinguistic order, and where different ideologies and acculturation attitudes are projected. The reterritorialisation of a neighbourhood like Usera does not involve the production of an alternative space as in the Puerta del Sol; neither does it lead to an 'autogestion' of this space (Lefebvre 2009: 135). However, it does involve



transforming a local space, practically monolingual in local Spanish, into a multilingual space, open to the participation and activities of the migrant communities.

## 2.2 Global city and world capitalism. Agency and field constraints

The second observation from the MM project is related to the opposition between homogeneity vs. heterogeneity in a period of globalisation. Our pilot research showed that there are no monolingual areas in Madrid, although neither are there any districts in which the local variety of Castilian (which is also a key reference for normative standard in Spain) is not predominant. In these areas, besides Spanish varieties from the South and the North of the peninsula and from Latin America, other languages are represented. The variety of Chinese which appears in our data is usually practised as Mandarin in speaking and as ‘Modern Standard Chinese’ in writing, in fact written with simplified characters (that is, these messages are directed to a Continental Chinese audience).<sup>2</sup> A similar case applies to Arabic, given that the variety most widely spoken in Madrid is *Darija*, the Moroccan variety, which is only written in very specific contexts (familiar communication, Arab Spring movements, etc.), and so the written variety we found in landscaping is ‘Standard Modern Arabic’.

The plurality of language varieties shows how increasing mobility and globalization has produced a dislocation of languages. As Appadurai says imagination “is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order” (Appadurai 1990: 31). Appadurai combines the suffix “-scape-” with appropriate prefixes — ethno-, media-, techno-, finance- and ideo — for examining the “new global cultural economy” which is, he argues “a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models” (op. cit. 1990: 32). These various “-scapes” suggest an alternative spatial rendering of the present, one that is not “fixed” as a typical landscape might be, but which is of various, disjunctive sizes, amorphous, and flowing.

The rendering of the space in Usera is, as discussed below, affected by moving groups and persons who constitute a new landscape. Thus, not only has the

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2. In the Madrid region, Mandarin is the oral variety which is most spoken, beside other varieties, particularly from the Zhejiang province. Among the group of Zhejiang languages, we might highlight a variety used in Quintian, a city in the vicinity of Wenzhou, spoken by about 80% of the Chinese immigrants who live in the region of Madrid and which is not understood by residents in other areas of the same province. In any case, all these languages do not appear in written form. To refer to the written form of Mandarin, with simplified characters, we use the term ‘Modern Standard Chinese’. In our corpus we couldn’t find Chinese written with traditional characters, which is used outside continental China, such as in Taiwan and in Hong Kong.

neighbourhood become increasingly diverse, but also the transformation of this area has taken place through the mobilisation of different resources (languages, calligraphies, flags, etc.) by the new and traditional inhabitants in the relations they have built.

We have to bear in mind that the main source of the economy in Madrid is tourism. This economic activity has produced a deregulation of the signage in the city. Languages of the habitual tourists are allowed and have been introduced in signs, adverts, directions and so on. And by extension, migrant languages are also displayed in the streets of Madrid. However the visibility of these languages in urban landscapes is not homogeneous and does not only depend on the demographic map of the area. One of the aims of this paper is thus to explore other decisive elements in this configuration, and in particular, to analyse the impact of the fields (Bourdieu 1993) of activity and their logic and regulations. The transformation of the urban space brings an economic transformation, as we discuss below in relation to Usera. The global city is a new articulating centre of worldwide capitalism (Ortiz 1998).

The production of social spaces in our cities, such as places for economic activity, cohabitation and interrelation is similar to the one we examined in relation to the taking over of Sol Square. The nature of such production seems to depend on inhabitants' agency and on the forces opposed to it. With regard to this action, a distinction has been established between ascending and descending forces (*top-down* and *bottom-up*) (see Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara & Trumper-Hecht 2006: 10). For Ben-Rafael et al., the former forces reflect a certain commitment to the dominant culture, while the latter reflect freer individual or collective strategies, when individual and collective actors put into circulation signs that produce urban spaces. The transformation of urban space depends on the balance of forces and the positions of the social agents. But it also depends on the possibilities of impacting the urban space. Our first investigation of the LL of Madrid had shown us that the balance between ascending and descending forces seems to vary, depending on the different fields of activity. Thus, the ways in which the local Castilian variety coexists in Madrid with other languages in the areas dedicated to tourism or international/transnational commerce on the one hand, and in the multilingual, multicultural districts with a high proportion of migrant population on the other hand do not seem directly comparable. Adopting Bourdieu's perspective (1993), a "field" is a social space of action and influence where specialised social relations meet, and within which these relations are defined by the possession or production of a specific form of capital, characteristic of that field.<sup>3</sup> Within a

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3. Each field is — to a greater or lesser extent — autonomous; the dominant or dominated [or subordinate] position of each participant within the field depends on the specific rules set within it.



social field, non-economic capital, as well as social relations, languages or semiotic resources, can be transformed into economic capital, even though they are not totally reducible to this concept.

Society, according to Bourdieu, is split up into spheres of action or fields. Each participant in the field has a position and a set of rules (termed 'Doxa' by Bourdieu) to adhere to, which according to Bourdieu are generally conformed to. The position of each particular agent in the field is a result of interaction between the specific rules of the field, the individual's habitus (their past performance, skills, education, social class and upbringing all asserting influence), and the agent's capital (social, economic and cultural). When the habitus of an individual matches the social field everything runs smoothly and instinctually (e.g. running a successful business). For example, within the field of commerce in a traditional area in Madrid, if a migrant newcomer opens a shop without speaking the local language, s/he would be out of her/his familiar social field and the habitus would not match, and s/he would face access restriction to distributors and clients. However, if participants decide they want to change the rules, a struggle ensues and this is when another capital has to be mobilised to regain equilibrium, bringing to bear other languages and other semiotic resources such as calligraphy, national emblems, etc. In each case, the cultural capital being used will determine the course of action needed. It is precisely in relation to this use that the valuation of the language, and the position of the participants (and their economic and symbolic resources) makes a key difference. As we discuss in Section 4, in relation to actual linguistic uses, the position of the Chinese residents in Usera is different from the one held by the Latin American population. Thus, by studying signs, small notices, and posters, as indices of linguistic processes mediated by linguistic and sociocultural ideologies and policies, we aim to identify different fields of urban activity, together with the conditions which determine who the legitimated agents of transformation of urban spaces are, who the targeted producers and consumers of signs are, and, finally, which linguistic varieties can be used to transform urban public spaces.

### 2.3 Inclusion and exclusion

The third issue observed in our previous MM research was that although the languages of immigration — especially written varieties, such as Standard Modern Chinese and Standard Modern Arabic — are clearly visible in some areas of Madrid, such as Lavapiés and Usera, there do not appear to be any linguistic ghettos in the city. In this context, the local Castilian variety of Spanish is clearly predominant throughout the city, although in areas where there is a greater presence of migrant groups, the coexistence of different languages with Spanish varieties is

apparent. While there is no rigid linguistic separation, the languages and scripts observed in the urban landscape occasionally draw frontiers and symbolic lines, generating areas where ethnic differences are indexed and used as a significant resource. For instance, the businesses of the so-called “Little Caribbean quarter” in Madrid display a host of flags and other national and cultural symbols, although this does not go so far as to constitute an “island” of this Latin-American population within the city (see Patiño-Santos 2015, for similar remarks in Barcelona LLs). The complexity and diversity of the LL observed suggest that a different frame of analysis is needed, going beyond the simple distribution of Spanish and migrant languages, and which pays attention to other indices of ethnicity, and interethnic relationships.

Madrid, and the traditional neighbourhood of Usera, illustrate how cultural subjects and objects from distant locations in space and time are reterritorialised in its streets and activities. Paradoxically, deterritorialisation also includes reterritorialised manifestations, which García Canclini defines as “certain relative, partial territorial relocalisations of old and new symbolic productions” (1990, p. 288 authors’ translation). For deterritorialised individuals, the periphery, both of the house and the neighbourhood, and the periphery in which they are located, appear as a homogeneous space with diffuse boundaries. As Hiernaux and Lidón (2004) state, these spaces are experienced as homogeneous by diasporic individuals, because of their lack of emotional attachment and past experiences in the place. It is a space which is lacking a homogeneous emotional identity link. So these subjects we call “deterritorialised” are just there, they do not belong to the place and probably they do not want to belong there. The relocalisation of cultural and semiotic resources not only allows entrance to and participation in a social field, but also opportunities to negotiate new identities in the diaspora.

However, not all communities show the same tendency to leave their mark on the space. Some succumb to the assimilatory pressure, whereas others move away, either creating spaces of their own or inserting their reality into the local reality. This movement of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of subjects and linguistic resources (in the sense given by Appadurai, García Canclini, and Ortiz) becomes part of the framework of intercultural relations between the different groups and individuals. The exhibition of signs in the public space grants them saliency and also reveals diverse positions in intercultural processes, held not only by the host society but also by groups and individuals of migrant origin. Acculturation positions are grounded in the evocative power of linguistic and semiotic elements, which in LL may index cultural multiplicity, the degree of multilingualism, or identity patterns, such as intercultural versus national or ethnic identities (see Curtin 2013 for a similar account of cosmopolitanism).

### 3. From the centre to the periphery of a post-industrial city

In our previous study of Madrid LL, we identified several activity fields characteristic of a post-industrial city, including tourism, public services and commerce. Each of these fields generates a market with its own values and rules, where products with high symbolic value, such as “authentic” tourist experiences, “sophisticated”, “quality” services and “specialized” “brand” commerce are interchanged. Moreover, each type of product is produced for a “preferred” group of people, legitimate and authorised addressees whose attention is specifically sought for that special market or activity. For instance, the tourist street signs near the Botanical Garden (Figure 4), featuring the Japanese language, build a specific vision of Japanese speakers as tourists. The fact that the City Hall does not include Japanese in any services or institutions outside the tourism sector leads us to believe that the local administration does not expect Japanese speakers to live in the city, but to be in transit. In other words, they are legitimated merely as “visitors”, within the market generated by tourist activity. As they are not included in interchanges among community members (health services, local shops, etc.), their legitimacy as addressees is not projected outside the tourist sector and has no permanent nature. This does not imply that other populations will not access these signs, but it will be apparent that they are not the preferred addressees in the field of tourist activity (see also Kress this issue).

In each activity sector or field, in Bourdieu’s terms, certain linguistic resources rather than others will be mobilised and valued, and these will be produced for and addressed to those considered “legitimate” participants in each field. However, fields are not separate compartments, and the logic within each sector is permeated by regulations at a more general level. In our case, the rules to be complied with by the signs located in each activity area are defined by the corresponding regulators of urban activity. In Madrid, permission to display any sign or poster (that is, to legally contribute to the LL) is granted to any legal business on payment of the corresponding taxes. In a tourist-oriented city like this, with a wide range of leisure and catering establishments, many places and businesses are named in languages other than Spanish. Thus, terms such as *Trattoria*, *Boutique*, *Spa*, *Disco-Pub* and *Sushi* are associated with values considered to represent economic, cultural, gastronomic or fashion prestige, and are also addressed to the millions of tourists who visit the city. Many businesses take advantage of the liberalisation of the linguistic market to display signs in standard Arabic and Chinese or other languages, even when their actual activity may not belong to the field of tourism.

In the peripheral districts, tourist-based activities are less important, and the service sector is dedicated mainly to commerce as a daily activity for residents. Therefore, the different linguistic varieties habitually displayed are not addressed



**Figure 4.** Tourist information sign in Madrid

to tourists, but to local populations of foreign origin, including migrant peoples, speaking different varieties of Spanish or different languages. Within the sphere of commercial activity, these signs are produced and directed at people who live and coexist in the area, and with them new spaces of exchange and conviviality are produced. Therefore, the languages and signs visible in the LL allow us to grasp how groups and individuals produce these spaces.

#### **4. The district of Usera**

The area selected for the study reported in this paper was limited to focus on a specific, small zone. It was a small area near Usera underground station, bounded by the parallel main roads Amparo Usera and Marcelo Usera, and the two side streets Nicolás Sánchez and Nicolás Usera, perpendicular to the former (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Plan of the study area

For some years, the market in Amparo Usera has been a traditional meeting point for people of Latin American origin (mainly Bolivian and Ecuadorian), resulting in the appearance of a large number of businesses owned by members of these communities. In contrast, Marcelo Usera is the main commercial thoroughfare in the area, specialising in traditional shops that are predominantly monolingual Castilian, although other languages are occasionally present. Additionally, the Chinese community is expanding significantly here and opening diverse new businesses and establishments.<sup>4</sup>

In this commercial area, shop managers, as legitimate producers of urban signs and signals, address symbols to consumers from different origins, and thus incorporate diverse linguistic varieties. However, as we already mentioned, the power of transformation of social agents is limited by the logic of the commerce field. The fact that the various immigrant communities are present in the commercial sector and granted access to business ownership has a clear impact on the visibility gained by their language varieties, for instance, Chinese in shops.

4. Unlike earlier waves of Chinese immigrants in other countries, over 80% of the Chinese in Spain come from Zhejiang's Qingtian County, with smaller numbers from Guangdong and Fujian. Others have come from Hong Kong, Macau, and Chinese communities of Southeast Asia (especially Vietnam and Philippines), Latin America, and Europe (Gómez 2005).

Moreover, depending on the social prestige and economic resources possessed by each group, its members are more or less likely to be viewed as desired customers and legitimate participants in the commercial activity.

Inhabitants of this multilingual community produce a specific landscape of its own, in contrast to the dominant landscape in other city areas, where terms are borrowed only from prestigious languages, particularly European languages such as French, Italian, and English, without this suggesting any actual coexistence with speakers of these languages in the area. Advertisements and signs are multimodal, and this led us to analyse the symbolic value of the discourse as a whole: on the one hand there are linguistic components, that is, the languages used with their relative prominence, specific lexical elements, proper names, scripts and so on, and on the other hand, there are other semiotic resources, more subtle components such as colours, emblems or icons with an important connotative and identifying capacity. In order to study the dynamics of reterritorialisation, we focused on the private initiative signs configuring urban space from the *bottom-up* perspective (Ben-Raphael, Shohamy, Amara & Trumper-Hecht 2006). Therefore, we distinguished two levels of private actions impacting on the LL: on the one hand, companies and small shops displaying posters or signs for commercial purposes (long or short term) and complying with the rules and regulations for this activity, and on the other hand, people who express themselves or communicate by means of non-commercial notes, posters or graffiti. These latter productions are non-regulated, expressed outside the legitimated channels and build overlapping meanings with different symbolic values.

## 5. Walking around the streets of Usera

Usera is a traditional residential area in Madrid. It is located outside the M-30 ring road, which separates the city centre from the periphery, and therefore has little attraction for tourists. Its main economic activities are commerce and services. It is precisely the commercial activity that generates most of the elements which configure the LL of Usera. The only condition imposed on sign producers is to own or manage a commercial establishment. Their authority derives from the field, in which they occupy an important place, and not from the language they speak or other cultural or identifying traits. When selecting the language or languages to be displayed, producers respond to how each field functions, the kind of people who constitute their customers and the demands they present. At the same time, the actions of sign producers also affect the organisation of the activity of the field (Hank 2005).



The conditions which define legitimate consumers for establishments in Usera are apparent in the discourse emerging from the posters and signs exhibited on shop fronts. We may assume passers-by will be more likely to enter an establishment if it is decorated according to their expectations; that is, according to what their language community considers “normal”. Therefore, local Castilian speaking customers will expect a neutral signage perhaps including certain specifically local Castilian elements, typical of Usera as a traditional district (far removed from the exoticism of the tourist areas), in accordance with their role as legitimate consumers. These consumers might think twice before entering an establishment decorated with abundant signs (linguistic or graphic) characteristic of a different group or community, as they might not feel accepted as legitimate customers of that specific discourse or of the product or activity represented. Let us now “walk” around the study area, with this framework in mind.

In Marcelo Usera, the main street in the district, most of the establishments have a Spanish manager or owner. Figures 6 and 7 show the clear predominance of written standard Castilian here, spotted with signs including languages of prestige notably English and French (*teachers, boutique, import, export, express*). However, Modern Standard Chinese is also present in the form of simplified Chinese characters, and this provides a strong iconic value: on the one hand, showing that the establishment is dedicated to foreign affairs, although this message is subordinated to the Spanish text, in size, colour and/or typography; moreover, it is presented as



Figure 6. Marcelo Usera, near the crossroads with Nicolás Usera, from different viewpoints (see Figure 7)



Figure 7. Marcelo Usera, near the crossroads with Nicolás Usera, from different view-points (see Figure 6).

*pinyin*, i.e., transliterated to the Latin alphabet (*Linong*). Closer observation reveals the subtle, almost imperceptible presence of the Quechua small blue sign (*Inti*) with a strong identity value on the left side of Figure 6, whose import seems to be limited to the members of a specific community, and remains generally unnoticed by the members of other groups.

These elements alone would not be enough to infer the existence of a migrant community, but a second short walk along this street reveals the images in Figures 8 and 9.

The inclusion of Modern Standard Chinese text in the chemist's shop by its owners (Figure 8) breaks down the traditional monolingualism with which these establishments address their customers. With the exception of English in city centre chemists, aimed at tourists, languages other than local Castilian are rarely encountered. In this case, we find a different strategy, in which the predominance of Castilian Spanish in the commercial sector is not reproduced. Thus, the existence of customers speaking languages other than Castilian Spanish is made visible, which not only indexes a non-assimilation position but also indicates the integration of the migrant population as legitimated customers and consumers. Here, the law of supply and demand is bound up with attitudes toward cultural diversity and brings a new linguistic rationale into the field, a trend which is confirmed by the illustration in Figure 9 (see for a similar approach Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). This law firm is run by Spanish managers and competes with another such firm



Figure 8. Chemist's in Marcelo Usera

on the opposite side of the street (see Figure 7). In this case, there is an interesting linguistic combination: even though the firm is a local one, the text elements in its signs are completely bilingual and reproduced in the same size. Finally, the English-language touch in the name, *Asian Consulting*, represents an added valued, and as in many cases of use of English in business in Madrid seems to be a touch of distinction (Bourdieu 1984), which suggests technical, commercial and entrepreneurial prestige.

While the use of simplified Chinese characters in Figures 7 and 8 shows that, in businesses managed by people of Spanish origin, this language is employed as a means of addressing local residents, the gigantic advertisement for mobile phones (Figure 10) illustrates the incorporation of Mandarin, together with English, as a language of commercial and technological prestige. In this case, the modern standard Chinese variety not only indexes an integrating position, but also marks distinction, due to the increasing commercial and economic power of this community and its industry, made apparent both in the size and quality of this permanent banner and in the importance of the company being advertised. In this case, the consideration of Mandarin as an important language within the economic and industrial activity does not imply, in principle, the existence of a community from Mainland China in the area, in the same way that the presence of English names in signs does not imply coexistence with English-speaking communities. In contrast, the occurrences of graphics and signs in simplified Chinese characters that we observed in the previous figures index a habitual, non-elitist form of interculturalism





Figure 9. Legal firm in Marcelo Usera

(see Martín Rojo 2003), reflecting the incorporation of this community not only as customers but also as merchants.

From the main commercial street, Marcelo Usera, we continue toward the Usera underground station, located in Amparo Usera (parallel to Marcelo Usera), where most of the establishments are managed by people of migrant origin, mainly Bolivian, Peruvian and Ecuadorian, and to a lesser extent Colombian. In this street, of less urban importance although with considerable commercial activity due to the proximity of the underground station and the market, the presence of



Figure 10. General view of Marcelo Usera

identity elements of these Latin American communities is very noticeable (Figures 11 and 12).

The linguistic difference in this and similar signs is marked by differences in orthography, in particular, in Latin American signs the distinction between the voiceless interdental fricative sound /θ/ from the alveolar fricative sound /s/, which has acquired a cultural value representative of local speakers, is not marked and the letter “z” for de sound /θ/ does not appear. As is the case for the majority of Spanish speakers in the world, for migrants coming from Latin America, the phonological opposition between /s/ (a voiceless, alveolar, fricative) and /θ/ (a



Figure 11. Internet and phone centre in Amparo Usera, opposite Usera underground station



Figure 12. Establishments in Amparo Urua, beside the underground station

voiceless, interdental, fricative) does not exist, this distinction only being made in central and northern varieties of Spanish in Spain. Although, in many signs, the normative spelling which reflects the phonological opposition is adopted, it's not difficult to find inconsistencies in the use of these letters. (It should be borne in mind that, in the case of Spanish, there is a universal spelling norm, used both in Spain and in Latin America, based on the pronunciation norms pertaining to standard Castilian). Other semiotic elements such as flags, geographical/national references (Bolivia), pictures of emblematic buildings and characteristic landscapes are also used to mark Latino ethnicities. In these establishments, although we find ethnicising elements which mark them as Bolivian, Peruvian, etc., the fact that the Spanish language is common to these and other Latin American communities designates the commercial space as one that is shared amongst the Latin American communities, and to a certain extent, with the host population. Therefore, it is not clear whether the local establishments' position toward the diverse Latin American populations is one of recognition and legitimation, similar to that shown by establishments that include Modern Standard Chinese as a language variety within the field of commerce, or whether the strategy of the host population regarding these citizens is one of assimilation. It seems clear that other semiotic, non-linguistic elements could have been chosen by local owners to welcome Latin American customers (flags, pictures or maps, reference to Latino cultural creations) and to index a position of interculturalism toward minorities of Latin American origin, but this has not been observed in this context. Be that as it may, in the field of activity



in this area there exists a hierarchy of social actors, and this hierarchy is reinforced and transposed in the semiotic universe, and different values are assigned to the semiotic and linguistic elements observed (Agha 2004; Bourdieu 1991, p. 55).

Continuing our advance toward the underground station, the adjacent urban fixtures (mail box and telephone call boxes) function for neighbours as improvised bulletin boards, illustrating the communicative strategies used by residents and the networks they create.

In the images in Figures 13a, 13b and 14, the elements used for interpersonal communication unmistakably indicate the presence of several communities in the area, from China and Latin America. The telephone boxes are used as supports for notices in Spanish, addressed to residents of Latin American origin and who are seeking to share a flat or room with people from a similar origin, although no



Figure 13a. Telephone call box used as a communication board in Amparo Usera.

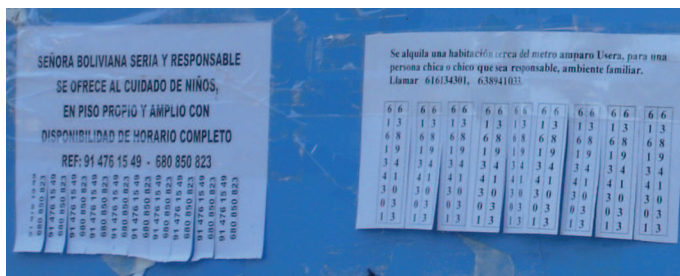


Figure 13b. Detail of the advertisements in Figure 13a.



Figure 14. Mail box as communication board for Chinese speakers in Amparo Usera, with the telephone call boxes of Figure 13 behind.

ethnicing elements (flags or other national symbols, orthography) are present apart from a mention of the advertiser's nationality, and this could be interpreted as an effort to widen the scope of possible addressees. Near these signs, and beside Usera underground station, the Chinese community has covered the mail box with notices for the same purpose, although in this case, while surprisingly similar as regards information display and graphics, the notices are in Chinese simplified characters only.

From the perspective of *bottom-up* analysis, these signs are especially relevant, as they index a field of activity other than that of commerce, namely exchanges and lodging-seeking from an inter-personal, non-professional perspective. In this case, the producers are not companies, but individuals, and their notices are periodically eliminated by the city cleaning service, as the pictures show. At the same time, the consumers of this type of activity are also local residents. Therefore, through these notices inhabitants unmistakably appropriate the space

and transform it into a multi-ethnic and multilingual district. Thus, Mandarin appears not just as a language of commerce and prestige within the economy sector, but also as a community language in the area and in the city.

Continuing our walk, through the streets of Nicolás Usera and Nicolás Sánchez, which link Amparo Usera and Marcelo Usera, we find a transitional landscape between the internationalised commercial context of Marcelo Usera and the one generated by the different migrant groups in Amparo Usera. Here, the shops incorporating linguistic and/or semiotic elements referring to the diverse Chinese and/or Latin American communities address a very generic public; they clearly index the preferred group of interest, but without imposing restrictive conditions. The texts in Figures 15 and 16 are mostly bilingual and present ethnic or identity elements in a muted way that is almost imperceptible for the non-initiated. Thus, it does not seem unlikely that people from Spanish, Peruvian or Ecuadorian origin would require the services of these establishments.

However, the fact that these streets are narrower, less important and less visible from the commercial standpoint fosters the progressive ethnicisation of some establishments and signs, as well as the growth of informal noticeboards for



Figures 15 and 16. Signs in Chinese characters and Bolivian establishments with muted identity-marked elements

communication among individuals. In Figure 17, the total absence of the Spanish language and the Chinese-only text are not the only striking elements: there are other non verbal elements, such as the coloured shop window, full of products and icons with high symbolic value for the Chinese community. This establishment expresses, very graphically, who its preferred or legitimate customers are. Spanish speakers (from Spain or elsewhere) would probably not feel totally legitimated or preferred as potential customers.

The establishment shown in Figure 18, again in Marcelo Usera, presents a written message (“uñas” means *nails*) in Spanish, but the visibility of this language is minimal because of its location and colour, and the resulting effect can hardly be termed bilingual. The text in Spanish does not seem to be the business name (*nails*), and is rather a generic description of the type of activity, for those who might find the visual elements unclear. On the other hand, the dominant semiotic message is explicitly Chinese. At first glance, it seems clear who would constitute the type of legitimate consumer for this business. However, care should be taken before coming to conclusions regarding the actual audience, as passers-by could interpret this type of service as something exotic and new, which might in fact be attractive to local consumers. In any case, concerning the LL in Madrid, the degree of ethnicisation and the generation of symbolic values are very clear, and Modern Standard Chinese is again presented as a significant language in the domains of culture (calligraphy, etc.) and technology (telephones, computers, etc.).



Figure 17. Business message addressed to Chinese inhabitants in Nicolás Usera





Figure 18. Establishment showing explicit Chinese aesthetics in Marcelo Usura

Although the area described is not large enough for us to generalise, the LL observed seems to reflect another parallel process to be researched further: the increasing presence of the Chinese community in contrast to a decreasing presence of business and signs associated with the diverse Latin American communities. Thus, Figure 19 shows a former internet and phone centre that we had observed



Figure 19. Former internet and phone centre, advertised by a real estate business specialising in the Chinese market

in our previous visits to the area giving normal service to the diverse groups in need of cheap international phone calls to American destinations, but now being advertised to the Chinese community by businesses specialised in the Asian market (Figure 19). In this case, a real estate company (the one shown in Figure 14) is offering to the Chinese market premises that were probably vacated by a Bolivian or Peruvian concern.

Chinese scripts show how this community is extending to occupy spaces tacitly “assigned” to the Spanish-speaking communities. Figure 20 shows an area of Nicolás Usera which is usually covered with posters announcing typical Latino events. The elements indexing social and ethnic identities in these cases are subtle and probably evidence the existence of an assimilation strategy with the host



Figure 20. Advertisement for Bolivian fiesta, together with a private notice selling a flat for Chinese people



Spanish culture, because even though there are elements with an important connotative value, the linguistic expression, which is more evident, has been written following the Castilian standard. For instance, the use of the imperative and the familiar form of address, so characteristic of the local Castilian variety and so scarce in the Latin American varieties, where the distance in politeness is much greater, are especially relevant. Nevertheless, the colours of the Bolivian flag, the musician's dressing style and other small details such as the Internet address at the bottom of the poster ([www.interbolivia.com](http://www.interbolivia.com)) clarify any possible doubt regarding the preferred addressee of the message. Another interesting detail is the Anglophone touch in the name of the club (*Miss Bodas* with double 's' instead of *Mis Bodas*, which is the Spanish for *My Weddings*), could be a verbal joke, which is a common feature of bilingual signage (see for example Lamarre's (2012) concept of the 'bilingual wink') and which might perhaps be also trying to add prestige. The Chinese notice, over the centre of the poster, implies an implicit transgression of territories which we had never seen before, an isolated event which, when in conjunction with other small signs, might be indicative of current dynamics within the neighbourhood, where the Chinese community is progressively assuming a more preponderant status.

## 6. Discussion

The data gathered and our subsequent analysis confirm that LL are an important source of information about social processes, in this case, how different communities transform urban spaces in order to live together within an urban environment and how, by this action on the space, deterritorialised individuals and groups build linguistic and cultural heterogeneous spaces and participate in economic activities. Our observation of the occupation of urban spaces by social movements in 2011 contributed to a deep understanding of the processes of production of space through linguistic practices and the recognition that these occur in other historical moments and in other urban spaces, leading to our study of Usera, an urban area in transformation; an area which has ceased to be monolingual and inhabited by a local population, and is becoming a space of cohabitation of residents from different places and who speak different languages. In contrast to the revolutionary occupation of the space during the Puerta del Sol, the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation processes in Usera neighbourhood do not entail a full or complete transformation of urban space. In both cases, nevertheless, the transformation of space through linguistic practices shapes social interventions, including interventions in capitalist economies: in the case of Sol, during the encampment transactions involving money were suspended; in the case of Usera, its transformation

into a heterogeneous district is related to the participation of migrants' communities in the social field of commerce. Thus, in both cases, as Lefebvre states social groups (protesters and/or new inhabitants in urban areas), refuse to accept passively their conditions of existence, of life, or of survival, and try to master them. Lefebvre calls this highly diversified practice 'autogestion' (Lefebvre 2009: 135), which concerns businesses as well as territorial units, cities, and regions, and implies the strengthening of all associative ties, that is, of civil society.

Within Bourdieu's framework, the fact that Modern Standard Chinese plays a significant role in the transformation of the city seems to respond to the type of commercial activity conducted within the area, and in particular to the role that the Chinese community plays within the commercial activity, rather than to the number of people belonging to it. However, the possibilities of becoming agents of space transformation are restricted by the specific logic of the fields of activity where these symbols are located, in this case, the field of commerce. The position social agents have in this field and the different values assigned to their linguistic resources in this specific market explain these limitations. Thus, for instance, in Madrid, Modern Standard Chinese, written with simplified characters, is not assigned equal worth in commercial and in tourism-related activities.

Different forces overlap in the streets of Usera in Madrid, related to population distribution and economic activity. Chinese and Latino communities have gradually gained a space within the traditional population of this district and consequently they have transformed these urban spaces. In the first place, Spanish is the language of the majority and is also the preferred one, as we had expected; in addition, English or other European languages are used by establishments to bring value and prestige, especially in technological products. Secondly, Chinese speakers from continental China make their language visible, due to its actual visibility as a script, its reputation as an international language, but also due to the position their speakers have as business owners in this area.

Nevertheless, Bourdieu's framework does not explain some key aspects of the data found. Globalisation and increasing mobility is weakening the ties between culture and place indicating that certain cultural aspects tend to transcend specific territorial boundaries in a world that consists of things fundamentally in motion. Thus, for example, Chinese scripts are present in the main commercial streets in a highly visible and explicit form, both in shops run by local as well as by migrant owners. Furthermore, this presence is prominent not only in this commercial aspect, but also within interpersonal communication (*bottom-up*), revealing how the community of Chinese origin has successfully created a space in which it can retain to a certain extent its original culture and which coexists with native-Spanish residents and other Spanish-speaking communities. This reterritorialisation is more evident in secondary streets where monolingual signs are prevalent, without

transforming the area into a ghetto because Chinese varieties coexist with the population and languages of the different communities within the area. Chinese characters are much more visible than those of any other minority community in this area. Even though Chinese characters have strong iconic power that multiplies its symbolic value, we observed diverse strategies of approach toward the host community. Thus, a few establishments display signs that are only in Roman script, although with typically Chinese names (*Linong, Yigu's Peluqueros* — i.e., *Yigu Hairdresser's*) but most businesses adopt a bilingual strategy and place both languages at the same level, avoiding additional or excessive identity-marking elements and thus indexing a position of interculturalism. A small number of establishments, located mainly in smaller, secondary streets, display signs only in Chinese. And it is clear that some local residents (speakers of Castilian) and businesses are using Chinese characters in their own business, signalling an intention to bridge linguistic gaps but also to legitimate the presence of neighbours with a different culture, language and identity. As soon as the members of the Chinese community are ratified as addressees of the commercial and service activities run by local members of the community, a certain level of recognition is assigned to linguistic and cultural differences. Languages and scripts are displayed under conditions of relative equality on posters and notices, with no restrictions imposed by the local administration.

On the other hand, with respect to the Latin American communities, it seems clear that the previous colonial experience, the current social position of these communities within the business sector and the labour market, and the application of processes and ideologies promoting linguistic standardisation do not contribute to valuing their varieties of Spanish or their visibility. The symbols indexing the different Latino identities (Bolivian, Peruvian, Colombian, Ecuadorian) are produced by and for each community, and are aimed at maintaining cultural differences and identities despite the assimilatory pressure exerted by Spanish society. Local producers of LL elements within this traditional district may be following a strategy of assimilation with the Latin American communities, as they do not seem to be making much effort to foster inclusion, and do not display specific identity-marking elements addressed at them.

Taking into account the overlapping of these circuits of symbolic exchange within the area being studied, we conclude that, although, reterritorialisation attempts have transformed the district, the language hierarchy has not been reversed. Standard Castilian constitutes the basic variety, together with European languages and Mandarin which index commercial, cultural or technological value. Latin American varieties of Spanish remain invisible at the linguistic level, and are reduced to other semiotic elements such as typography and orthography, or in other cases to minor lexical elements or proper names, as a consequence of

their weak position in the field of commercial activity and the low value assigned to their linguistic varieties as symbolic capital, in contrast to the standard local variety. By transforming linguistic capital into symbolic capital, their value is constrained to the interpersonal field, where they are used by Latin American migrants to maintain their identities and to avoid being engulfed by the majority Spanish culture. As we have seen, daily inter-community relationships generate an activity market of their own, differentiated from the commercial and tourist-oriented markets, which neither responds to the law of supply and demand nor is regulated by public administrations.

This paper has focused on cities as contact zones (Pratt 1991), drawing attention to the ways in which spatial configurations operate as constitutive dimensions of sociolinguistic phenomena and vice versa that is, the way in which communicative practices frame and are framed by social processes and the broader urban reality. Adopting this approach can clearly contribute to a deep understanding of the role of language and communication in social life, and of how the possibilities to transform the places where we live are constrained by the networks of relationships established in our urban areas and in different fields of activities.

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