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Mobility and Language in Place: A Linguistic Landscape of Language Commodification

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“To produce space,’ these are surprising words: the production of space, in concept and in reality, has only recently appeared, mainly, in the explosion of the historical city, the general urbanization of society, the problems of spatial organization, and so forth. Today, the analysis of production shows that we have passed from the production of things in space to the production of space itself.” Lefebvre (2009: 186)

Language and place have long been said to have primordial ties. While such an atavistic association is no longer as widely held, an urban landscape can still be said to be both palimpsest of past and present influences, trends and constraints, and at the same time a site of transformation, agency and power. The processes through which landscape is concretized and transformed are inherently tied to and located within language. Street signs, business signs, fliers and newspapers collectively display words brought into the built environment for a purpose, and which are consumed with a purpose, yet are always contingent on the surroundings in which they are placed. As Wong and Scollon Wong (2003: 2) note, “all of the signs and symbols take a major part of their meaning from how and where they are placed—at that street corner, at that time in the history of the world. Each of them indexes a larger discourse whether of public transport regulation or underground drug trafficking.”

It is the nature of emplacement, and the construction of meaning of language in place which has become the area of inquiry in the study of linguistic landscapes. A linguistic landscape, commonly consisting of “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings” (Landry and Bourhis 1997), has been alternately taken by scholars to represent ethnolinguistic vitality, symbolic power, language ideology, and various combinations of these. In all such studies, publicly displayed language is understood to be more than unidirectional communication

to passers-by. It is understood to be constrained by available languages that are subject to legal and social restrictions; it is understood to make claims and demonstrate agency or power; it is understood to be constructed. In this way, signs do not act in empty or neutral space; rather there is an intricate relationship between a sign, its producers, its anticipated consumers and its actual consumers. As Lefebvre (2009: 212) has noted, “social and political space today is both real and operational, both a given and an instrument, a necessity and a virtuality. It is produced, a product, but also producer and reproducer (in the maintenance of relations of domination).”

Such a complex interplay of action, reaction, production and reproduction can be seen in any landscape, and demands therefore to be regarded not as object of study, but as process, similar to those of human interaction that require historical and contextual analysis. As authors have begun to show, the production of landscape can arrive in conjunction with the production of language, wherein language is incorporated into marketing decisions conceptualized as added-value and positive distinction. Such a global trend characteristic of late capitalism (Duchêne and Heller 2012) finds language objectified as economic distinction, allowing for emphasis to be placed on production rather than linguistic rights (Da Silva and Heller 2008). The dynamics of commodification, the logics behind them and the intentions of authorship call for an examination of the ideological construction of landscape in an age of late capitalism.

In this paper, I argue that linguistic landscape methodology can be usefully applied in the study of language commodification, in efforts to better understand the spaces wherein language becomes commodifiable. However, I also seek to critically revisit the practice of linguistic landscapes as a methodology, tracing its historical and academic development, and its current theoretical aims and practical modalities. In this vein, I seek to argue that the ideological construction of the landscape is not limited to permanent signage, but rather must include what Sebba (2011) calls, ‘discourses in transit,’ or transitory, mobile texts within the linguistic landscape that may better track the shifting, changing and changeable nature of language in

place. I will solidify the aforementioned arguments in the analysis of a linguistic landscape case study conducted in Strasbourg, France—where language is difficult to measure, define and document—in order to understand what observing language commodification on the ground through signage, both permanent and temporary, can bring to the study of language in place.

Vitality, Power, and/or Ideology: Linguistic Landscapes

The concept of linguistic landscapes and their quantitative and qualitative analysis was first conceptualized by authors Landry and Bourhis (1997) in their seminal work on ethnolinguistic vitality and signage in Canada. Landry and Bourhis (1997) have been largely credited as being the first authors to link the signs and other writing in the public sphere with speakers' conceptions of the landscape, and speakers' constructions of the landscape. Using the concept of 'linguistic landscape,' their work has sought to understand ethnolinguistic vitality in Canada, where French and English have variously been in contact and conflict for years. In their study, the authors describe the LL as consisting of two main functions. The first, the informational function, was understood to be the LL's capacity to "serve as a distinctive marker of the geographical territory inhabited by a given language community," (ibid: 25) while the symbolic function is understood to denote the symbolic power or dominance held by one linguistic community over another.

Occurring at a time when language planning, linguistic rights, and political representation were paramount in academic and popular discourse, this study and its underlying implications can now be understood to fit into this larger trend. The practical and theoretical goals of this work must also be historicized within the study of linguistic rights and representation. Canada has historically seen struggles for minority language rights, in and outside of Quebec, and the emplacement of language on public signage became an important facet of this ongoing struggle. Much of their theoretical analysis equally emerges from such cases as that in Belgium, where a struggle for minority linguistic rights has also been characterized by debates about signs and

representation in the public sphere. This equally bespeaks their argument's situated nature in the struggle for linguistic rights through the modality of signs and particularly government signs. In later cases, the linguistic landscape is called upon to speak to questions not emerging from such highly politicized signage debates. These situations must be equally taken in context, for example a situation wherein migrant languages are seen to 'threaten' autochthonous languages will most likely manifest differently in the linguistic landscape.

In response to the call of Landry and Bourhis for more attention to the language, signage, and their creation in the places we inhabit, authors have sought to document and interpret language in place through this particular methodology of linguistic landscapes. While Landry and Bourhis sought to ask questions of ethnolinguistic vitality, other authors have looked at symbolic power, the language ideologies of a particular landscape, and have asked more recently questions of authorship and intentionality. Linguistic Landscape analysis has been decidedly interdisciplinary, and thus has ranged from studies that are highly quantitative to, more recently, ethnographically-grounded. Cenoz and Gorter (2006), in their contribution to a special issue on the subject of linguistic landscapes, describe the linguistic landscape in the context of minority languages as a seemingly dialectical relationship in which the LL is "both a reflection of and a formative influence on language as it operates in the social world."

Further extending our understanding of the discursive construction of the LL, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006: 9-10) understand it to be a site in which identities are constructed and promoted, and in which language is used to achieve these ends. As they note, "We mean here a *gestalt* made of physical objects—shops, post offices, kiosks etc—associated with colours, degrees of saliency, specific locations and above all, written words that make up their markers. These objects, indeed are all topped with linguistic elements indicative of what they stand for". The goal in their study of the LL in multilingual Jerusalem, was to determine how social actors create and use elements of the LL. Recognizing differential agency available to social actors,

these same authors delineated between signs coming from what they termed the ‘top-down’ (or government signs, street names, etc.) and the ‘bottom-up’ (private business signs), a distinction made by Landry and Bourhis as ‘private’ and ‘public.’ Backhaus (2006) found that language diversity in ‘bottom-up’ signage tended to be more diverse, purportedly with the intent of asserting solidarity with multilingual communities.

These foundational studies of linguistic landscapes, of which the above are only a few, also engage critically with what the LL does, what can constitute the LL, and where to find the LL. While Huebner (2006) took samples from 15 neighborhoods in central and suburban Bangkok, Backhaus (2006) limited his analysis to multilingual signs on 28 different streets in Tokyo within the central city. Bogatto and Hélot (2009) restrict their analysis to one quarter of Strasbourg but observe all permanent signage, whereas Cenoz and Gorter (2006) observed all publicly displayed texts on popular shopping streets looking particularly for minority language use.

Choices of place sampling also necessitate choices of sign sampling, wherein decisions must be made over what signage is most important to the study, whether fixed storefront signs are to take precedence over more mobile or transitory texts. While some (Gorter 2006, Backhaus 2006) have argued that mobile texts are inconvenient, others (Sebba 2011, Kallen 2011, and the current paper) argue that such texts provide the researcher with an important perspective on the LL. In addition to the problem of sampling, comes the one of coding. The aforementioned ‘top-down’/‘bottom-up’ being often used, there’s additionally those of ‘public’ and ‘private,’ ‘official’ and ‘non-official,’ ‘commercial’ and ‘governmental.’ Recently, Kallen (2011: 42) has argued to consider more than just one linguistic landscape in the same physical location. As he notes, “Rather than viewing the linguistic landscape as a single system...I propose to analyze it as a confluence of systems, observable within a single visual field but operating with a certain degree of independence between elements”. These various systems, therefore, while existing in

the same environment, are not competing for the same semiotic space—as he notes, the state does not operate restaurants, and a private business owner doesn't create street signs (ibid).

Such discussions have continued into more recent writing. Authors Jaworski and Coupland (2011) attempt to redefine the field as one of 'semiotic landscapes,' moving past quantitative analysis, emphasizing ethnographic engagement and contextual, sociohistorical analyses. These authors also emphasize the importance of situating the study of linguistic landscapes within the study of *landscape*, which has previously been the territory of cultural geographers. To take linguistic landscapes as semiotic constructions recognizes and takes account of inherent processes of spatialization and place-making. As they note, "If we agree, along with most contemporary geographers, to treat space as a discursive as well as physical formation, it then follows that the emplacement, or entextualization, of linguistic signs is indeed a metadiscursive, and of necessity, an ideological act (2011: 12).

This explanation of the linguistic landscape, as ideologically constructed, moves our inquiries away from understanding the LL as a representation of language *use*, or a demonstration of language power and dominance, but rather to how, as Coupland (2011) asks, ideologies are entextualized in the landscape? We move from questions of whether a language is or is not dominant in the LL to questions of how a language is constructed as such. Questions that emerge from such a shift are necessarily more qualitative in their methodological scope, and nuanced in their theoretical aims.

In his attempting a cohesive theory for LL research, Bernard Spolsky (2008: 30) points to several inherent and remaining problems, particularly that of determining agency. He specifically takes issue with past delineations of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' as being *post-hoc* guesses as best (ibid). He further elaborates a definition of the LL by pointing to an understanding of 'public linguistic space' as what Fishman (1972) called a distinct domain, wherein 'the main participants are sign-owners and the sign-makers they employ and expected

readers; an additional significant participant is a government (or activist group) which attempts to control the contents, form and language of public signs” (in Spolsky 2008: 33). While Spolsky calls into question the problem of agency in the LL literature, and attempts to avoid the ‘top-down’ ‘bottom-up’ binary, he stops short of analyzing the ways in which people achieve agency, where it is denied them, and where we can find agency in the LL. These are questions taken into account by Malinowski (2008), as he notes that “authorship’ is not a notion that has been directly addressed in this new sociolinguistics subfield that has treated the language on signs as an independent variable mediating social relations” (Malinowski 2008: 108). In order to bring a new understanding of agency to the study of LL, Malinowski attempts to analyze authorship in the LL in the manner of a speech act, as conceived of by Austin (1962, 1979) and Bourdieu (1991). Malinowski, using Austin’s and later Bourdieu’s conceptions of speech acts, analyzes signs in the LL as ‘mutually constituted by individual intention *and* social convention” (2008: 116). Interestingly, what Malinowski finds in his ethnographic analysis of such ‘speech acts,’ specifically in a Korean neighborhood in Oakland, California, is that social actors, or ‘linguistic landscape authors,’ are not always aware of all the meanings their signs can give rise to. As he notes, ‘seemingly intentional meanings can in fact remain hidden to the writers of signs, arising instead from larger historical processes that have become sedimented into practices of literacy and technologies of design” (Malinowski 2008: 124).

Malinowski’s analysis underscores the importance of ethnography and contextualization in the study of linguistic landscape. Questions of agency and ideology are also taken into account in Coupland’s (2011: 79) study of the Welsh linguistic landscape, where he approaches the LL with the understanding that “some dominant characteristics of the Welsh linguistic landscape in fact point to an *aspirational* political ideology of ‘true bilingualism’, rather than to any objective realities of bilingual usage in Wales”. Again, instead of approaching the LL as a representation of language practice the LL is taken as a site in which ideologies are at the forefront of purported

language practice. The author's analysis of the LL in Wales includes such varying and mobile texts as t-shirts, websites and activist-produced texts promoting Welsh language. Importantly, Coupland asserts, "we need to see *all* linguistic landscaping as generated 'from above'," as all linguistic text in the visible environment can be said to be ideologically mediated (2011: 97).

My own analysis of linguistic landscapes in Alsace will be situated within the understanding of LL as ideologically constituted and therefore revealing of such ideologies. Furthermore, I seek to study the commodified instances of language present in the linguistic landscape, particularly in tourist spheres, where one can expect the landscape to be constructed primarily with the consuming tourist in mind (Kallen 2008). That public displays of language can reveal language ideologies when vitality is not present is evident in cases of minority languages. In the case of a language which may be declared moribund, or even dead, the LL may reveal a strong attachment to the language that remains symbolically important yet communicatively/referentially obsolete. In other cases, a language continually stigmatized in accordance to negative language ideologies as backwards, rural, or uneducated, may be co-opted in the landscape for commercial ends, giving it symbolic power that some may not consider power at all, but kitsch, or tourist trash. What can the LL tell us in these cases? This is where my particular analysis falls: at the intersection of a two dominant languages and what Grillo (1989) has called 'an ideology of contempt' for a declining dialect, and a commercial representation of said declining dialect destined for international and domestic tourists.

Jeffrey Kallen's (2008) study of the Dublin linguistic landscape allows the landscape to be thought of as mutually constructed by the sign-makers themselves as by those the sign is intended for—in his study, tourists. In France, public signs have been historically as well as more recently constrained by law, often making access to agency in the creation of the linguistic landscape difficult (Blackwood 2009). The Toubon law, which regulates the amount and size of languages other than French in public signage, also requires that all other languages be translated

into French. Indeed, Blackwood (2009:292) notes: “the Toubon law of 1994 was presented as providing protection for French in public life, including work and employment, education, research, the media and advertising (Adamson 2007) requiring the use, primarily, of French in these domains...”. In the context of these restrictions, past and present, Bogatto and Hélot (2009) establish that the Strasbourg LL exhibits many languages, primarily French (as is mandated), English, and to a significantly lesser extent, German. Alsatian featured in the LL observed by Bogatto and Hélot, although they found it to be very seldom, often distinguishing the sort of establishment the sign represented—*Bierstub* or *Winstub* for a beer or wine café were the most common of these. Underanalyzed here is the significance that Alsatian language may have in distinguishing a restaurant or café from a similar establishment. Demarking a café as a ‘*Winstub*’ linguistically ties it to the Alsatian region, and may serve to enhance the restaurant’s authenticity.

Languages and their iconic link to cultural authenticity has been observed elsewhere in the LL. As Leeman and Modan (2009) discuss in their observations of the Chinatown LL in Washington D.C., languages may be instrumentalized in order to profitably qualify an establishment as authentically Chinese, while the neither owners nor the business is ethnically Chinese. A place therefore, especially a commodified place, may be thought of as different, more authentic, more traditional, or more local by way of the language in which it is presented—an often recognized fact used profitably by marketers. As Sebba (2011) notes in the context of the Isle of Man, Manx, usually thought of as a dead language, often appears in the LL as an emblem of the local, authentic, and traditional identity, and the frequency with which Manx appears is not representative of the use of the language itself. Sebba (2011) goes on to argue that, in order to understand more clearly what is ideology and what is vitality, a closer inspection of what he calls ‘discourses in transit,’ or mobile, transitory, ephemeral texts in the LL must be invoked in analysis. Here, I make the argument that an analysis of the mobile texts in the LL is indeed vital, however this paper argues that mobile texts, which are also ideologically mediated (Coupland

2011), and thus not necessarily indicative of vitality, may be a useful way of studying commodification in the landscape, particularly when language takes material form in commodity.

Language in the Market: Language Commodification

To examine language commodification in the linguistic landscape, it becomes most necessary to discuss the landscape in terms of recognizing ideologies that construct and allow for the emplacement of languages on signs, but first, a discussion of the dynamics of commodification is required. Scholars of globalization and modernity have long theorized the heightened movement of people, commodities, and ideologies characteristic of the current moment (e.g. Appadurai 1996.) Sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have recently begun to engage with this line of research, calling for the study of language to reflect the deterritorialization of language and the fracture of the relationship between language practice and variation with place (Heller 1999, Blommaert 2011). Questions of mobility in the age of increased border fluency, flows of capital in the age of post-nationalism, flows of discourse in the age of the internet, and the valuation of language in the age of late-capitalism have been at the forefront.

Whereas in the past language was discursively treated and academically theorized as linked with ethnicity, place, and identity, language is often treated today as skill, choice, or added-value. Da Silva and Heller (2009) address this shift in their study of the state's transformation from *protector* to *producer*, or from the provider of rights to the facilitator of production, in which the relationship of the state to the citizen is reconfigured in accordance to economic viability. Heller (2011) and Duchêne and Heller (2012) likewise note the conditions of post-nationalism and late-capitalism that allow for language to be mobilized in the global economy. Specifically Duchêne and Heller (2012: 8,9) cite five conditions which allow for the discursive shift described above: 1) *the saturation of markets*, in which a product or service loses

its novelty after time and has reached all possible consumers, 2) *expansion*, where the hunt for new markets and consumers is constant, 3) *distinction*, in which symbolic value can distinguish products and increase market value, 4) *tertiarization*, involving the development of the tertiary sector incited by the growth of global networks of production which necessitate their management; and finally, 5) *flexibilization* involves the cultivation of flexible workers who are able to shift sites and modes of work. These integrated and inseparable conditions create the opportunity and even the necessity to understand language as inherently related to the economy, as market practices can lend language directly to its use in the job market and tourism.

Language as commodity tends to be discussed in two ways: how language is commodified as skill in the job market and how language is commodified as a cultural object. The former vein of research, which has stimulated a great deal of discussion (Heller 2003; Budach, Roy and Heller 2003; Duchene 2009; Doloreux, Rangdrol and Dionne 2010; Cowie 2010), is progressively yielding an understanding of what linguistic performances are economically valued, how such performances are managed, and the effects of these practices of remuneration for linguistic activity have on communities (notably on minority language communities.)

A further consequence of the resignification of language is the creation of an environment wherein minority language communities, often only rendered recognizable through historical political processes, now strive for economic viability instead of rights. Indeed, rather than receive recognition on a political plane, communities often seek recognition from the free market, often through processes of cultural branding or identity incorporation (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). Language as cultural product has been explored in relation to branding and marketing, both especially evident in tourism. The commodification of culture and language has been addressed by scholars in a vast body of work speaking to their complexity in the modern political and economic context. John and Jean Comaroff (2009) have written on the increasing

incorporation of ethnicities as businesses; they also investigate how cultural products can be turned into commodity particularly in tourism. Other scholars have investigated the intricate connections between history, culture, ethnicity, race, in relation to the market (Davila 2001, Yúdice 2003, Halter 2000).

Marketing and tourism have indeed been noted as instances in which language has been profitably used as an index of authenticity, tradition, identity, local production, and *terroir* (Pujolar 2006, Moïse McLaughin Roy and White 2006, Kelly-Holmes 2000, 2010). However, a problematic aspect of the link between culture, identity and the market that consistently emerges is the question of *authenticity*. Scholars have dealt in varying ways with this question, some noting that authenticity is necessarily sacrificed for the universalizing and standardizing constraints of the market (Boniface and Fowler 1993, Chanock 2000); while others have indicated that authenticity may in fact emerge from tourism, in which cultural practices and tourism may be thought of as mutually constitutive (Xie 2003, Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). As one author notes, it is actually tourism that demands authenticity, and that “by requiring a staging process adapted to its own needs, interests, knowledge and language, in fact it makes such a resolution impossible” (Pujolar 2006: 24). The construction of authenticity becomes paramount in the discussion of language and commodification, where standardization is perhaps harder to achieve without contestation.

In Heller’s (2011: 147) ethnographic account, a francophone minority attempts to create a tourist attraction based on their distinction as a minority language community. Language-based products were integral in their endeavor, and, as she notes: “the marketing of culture evokes complicated emotional responses; not everyone is comfortable selling oneself as a living piece of folklore. Branding authenticity sometimes involves shaping authentic objects in ways that begin to feel, well, inauthentic”. Other authors who have addressed the complexities of language in tourism have variously noted the inherent questions of heritage and identity (MacDonald 1997;

Coupland et al. 2005), and questions of the affective personal dimension of selling culture and language (Bunten 2008). Steeped in debates over *whose* heritage and *which* language is most representative or most valuable fundamentally marks the debate in terms reminiscent of language standardization or codification debates (Jaffe 1999a). As languages that are objects of commodification in tourism are most typically minority languages, they may simultaneously be the objects of conflicting discourses of preservation vs. commodification (Heller and Boutet 2006).

Relevant to the discussion of linguistic landscapes, scholars have also noted that often language in tourism, marketing and consumerism is subject to processes of objectification and subsequent circulation. The discussion of languages and their corresponding material gains, goods, objects, and markets is not new (Bourdieu 1991, Irvine 1989, Gal 1989), and continues to be theorized in new contexts and new modalities (Cavanaugh 2005, Agha 2011). Recently however, scholars have begun to note the material manifestations of language that correspond to semiotic constructions, undergo valuation processes, and are subject to commodification (Shandler 2004, 2006, Shankar 2006, Keane 2003, Johnstone 2009, Jaffe 1999b). These examples of what Cavanaugh and Shankar (2012) call ‘language materiality,’ describe the complex co-construction of objects and discourses. The interplay between language and objects is often mediated by processes of objectification (Keane 2003,) which Cavanaugh and Shankar (2012: 356) define as “a process by which nonobjects are given object-like qualities, involving the externalization and materialization of meaning and value.” Objectifications have been observed as taking on qualities of a material object itself, circulating and attributing value to their owners; in contrast, authors have also looked at material manifestations of language practices, as in the form of t-shirts (Johnstone 2009) and greeting cards (Jaffe 1999b). In his discussion of Yiddish as post-vernacular, Shandler (2006: 22) claims that its use on coffee mugs, refrigerator magnets, and the like is entirely in line with Yiddish’s status as *post-vernacular*, or, “unlike

vernacular language use, in the postvernacular mode the language's secondary, symbolic level of meaning is always privileged over its primary level." The question of referentiality in language commodification and language objectification becomes paramount here. While language is found to, in many cases, be instrumental in indexing authenticity, it need not be the language itself which referentially communicates its authenticity. Rather, its semiotic content iconically conveys value associated with a language in a context of commodification.

That language communicates more than its referential content has long been a subject of inquiry in the study of language. For my purposes, it becomes useful to acknowledge the instrumental use of language's non-referentiality in marketing and other contexts of commodification. The instrumentalisation of particular language ideologies makes this possible; French as chic, Chinese as exotic, Spanish as spicy, all become tools available to enhance product marketing. Blommaert (2011: 32), recognizing the emblematic function of French, also states that its appearance in Tokyo is not coincidental but a product of globalization: "Semiotic mobility has all sorts of effects on the signs that are involved in such mobility. Such processes need to be understood because they are at the heart of globalization as a sociolinguistic phenomenon. In the context of globalization, linguistic resources change value, function, ownership and so on, because they can be inserted into patterns of mobility". If, as Blommaert notes, linguistic resources change value when inserted into patterns of mobility in the context of globalization, it has everything to do with language's association to economic value. Language can lend distinctive added-value, crucial for creating and attending to niche markets. In this sense, language and its emblematic distinctiveness can be seen in the creation of brands. As Manning (2010:40) notes, "the traditional doctrine of inherent distinctiveness relates to a specifically linguistic aspect of brand, namely that 'suggestive, arbitrary, or fanciful words' are more singular and distinctive than terms generically descriptive or referential or in common usage. Thus trademarks are protected to the extent that they lack a descriptive or referential

relationship to properties or qualities of the product”. In this sense, referentiality in brand creation is framed as *disadvantageous* to the life of the brand. In fact, words that don’t directly reference the product are more ‘protected.’ This may extend to the use of language on products, enhancing value instead of explaining it—its semiotic value indirectly indexing values associated with the language, but not communicated therein. The semiotic use of language extends clearly into the field of the linguistic landscape. In their examination of the linguistic landscape of Washington D.C.’s Chinatown, Leeman and Modan (2009) identified frequent uses of Chinese characters that were not intended for the diminishing ethnic Chinese population, but rather were situated in spaces of commodification to enhance the businesses’ outward appearance. As they note, “Chinese writing has become less and less a means of communication and social interaction, and more and more a symbolic design element, an ornament in the commodified landscape” (ibid: 359).

For my particular analysis of linguistic landscapes in Strasbourg, France, the ‘commodified landscapes’ I observe are in fact those designated for tourists who visit the city. Constructed with the tourist gaze in mind (Urry 1990; Kallen 2008), tourist landscapes become sites where commodification meets national narrative and ‘foreign’ is constructed just as much as the ‘familiar.’ As Cartier and Lew (2005:5) note in their discussion of *touristed* landscapes, tourism and seduction is as much about legibility of the landscape as illegibility; “Seduction’s psychological orientation also asks us to consider contradictions of tourist imagining, anticipation, and memory, which suggest its tensions and illegibility”. The balance of legibility and illegibility is one which marks the linguistic landscape of Strasbourg, as the tourist is expected to desire to feel ‘abroad,’ but is also expected to have a need for the familiar. Yet the construction of what is ‘familiar,’ what is ‘different,’ what constitutes ‘abroad,’ are often subject to residual ideologies of stigmatization of minority languages which can complicate efforts at commodification.

Within the linguistic landscape of Strasbourg I seek to utilize these understandings of language as commodified, objectified, emblemized in a non-referential quality, to explore the ideological construction of the landscape. Furthermore, I argue that in the current age of globalization in which the circulation of discourses is matched by the circulation of commodities (which can often take the same form,) mobile texts, including ephemera, transitory texts, often garbage, as well as the Internet, can speak to processes of commodification in the spatial construction of the tourist sphere. To reiterate, to speak about discourses of commodification and their processes of circulation, it becomes necessary to look beyond permanent signage to items that may in fact be commodities—objectified forms of language—to understand how language circulates, and perhaps identify new arenas of commodification.

In the case study below, I wish to make a case for the analysis of the ephemera of daily life that surrounds the individual, or in this case, the tourist, on a temporary and transitory way. Authors have regarded the ways in which places and spaces of commodification can engage language, often in a non-referential way, to attract consumer or tourist business and index authenticity. However, as much as permanent signage can often show the rapidly changing nature of perceptions of language in place, as I will show in this particular case study, even more telling may be the materials, commodities and advertisements constructed for short-term consumption.

Case Study: Language in Place in Alsatian Spheres of Tourism

The Construction of Language ideologies in Alsace

Language in Alsace has historically been diverse and contested. Various subject to the nation-building regimes of both France and Germany, language, and the signs on which they are inscribed have been inherently political from the 17th century to the present. Alsatian dialect, a Germanic language, has also been historically stigmatized. Early in the French incorporation of the region, the language of Alsace was considered that of the enemy. According to Kraus (2008:

80), a document prepared for the Welfare Committee in 1794 stated that federalism and superstition spoke Breton, emigration and hatred of the revolution spoke German, the counter-revolution, Italian, and fanaticism, Basque. Sharing lexical and phonological features with German language, the language of Alsace was most often characterized as a spoken variety whose written form was German (Bothorel-Witz 1997). Naming the Alsatian variety and defining it in relation to what eventually came to be known as *Hochdeutsch* or high-German has, however, been an inherently political process invoked in education policy, and other areas of governance (Bothorel-Witz 1997, Gillig 2012).

At the time of the French loss of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany following the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, France mourned the loss, and Germany set about *Germanizing* the region. Under German control, Alsace maintained a great deal of autonomy, and was able to maintain its regional identity and language. During this time Alsace enjoyed a great deal of cultural production, including literature in Alsatian and German, theater and poetry. Many Alsatians were drafted to fight in WWI which largely took place on Alsatian soil; as with many of these wars that politically determined Alsatian identity, those who fought in them were not the only ones affected—being the constant ‘battlefield of Europe’ (Hoffet 1951: 59) took its toll on the population as well.

Following Germany’s defeat after WWI, Alsace was ceded to France in the Treaty of Versailles in 1918. At this point, campaigns to influence nationality and language commenced in earnest. Ad campaigns were distributed, touting *c’est chic de parler français!* [It’s *chic* to speak French!] (Hoffet 1951). On a political level, the independence allowed under German rule was not to be tolerated under the French Republic, which had become increasingly centralized since 1870 and had also instituted strict policies of *laïcité*, or separation of church and state. *Ecoles maternelles* [pre-schools] were instituted throughout Alsace in order to increase the ‘assimilation’ of the region into French language and culture (Finck *et al.* 1977). The persistence

of German language and Alsatian dialect was tolerated although not esteemed by the French government, who reduced the number of years students would learn German in school (Bothorel-Witz 1997). Due to the various regulatory measures instituted by the French government during this time, the region underwent what has been called the *crise d'autonomisme* [autonomist crisis], in which there were calls for Alsace's independence. Such claims for independence led many to welcome the Nazi regime's influence and eventual annexation of Alsace in 1940. However, when Alsace did once again become German at the start of WWII, it became clear that autonomy was not on the agenda. During Nazi occupation of Alsace, a thorough attempt at re-Germanification of the region took place. Speaking French and even Alsatian was punishable by fine and sometimes force, individuals were not allowed to wear the French beret, and French surnames, grave markers in cemeteries, street signs and statue plaques were all changed to German.

When French liberation came in 1945, Alsatians were by and large welcoming of their past contender. In the French post-war environment, however, the suspicion and accusation of collaborating with the German forces was a serious offence—one which was often applied to Alsace and its inhabitants. As Alsace had been German and continued to speak a Germanic language, the region itself began to take on a reputation as '*collabo*.' Alsatian speakers began to limit their speech to private environments, and many families decided not to pass on the language to their children. The French government took extreme measures to once again re-Frenchify the region, and the German language was banned from being taught in schools until 1952 (Gardner-Chloros 1991). Today Alsatian is the second-most spoken regional language in France, after l'Occitan, claiming 545,000 adults who speak the dialect, or 39% of the Alsatian population in 2002. These statistics, compiled by the INSEE, also note that one out of every four Alsatian children learn the dialect from their parents today, as compared to nine out of ten at the start of the twentieth century (INSEE 2002).

The product of historical development, Alsatian dialect (as so called in contemporary Alsace) has evolved within and alongside European language ideologies and has been subject to evaluation therein. Like other borderland minority languages, Alsatian is often constructed as caught between two hegemonic standard languages, and the ‘trauma’ which Alsace and its inhabitants have suffered (Hoffet 1951) continues to be the subject of debates, books and songs. Indeed, especially the nation-building nature of the signage is recognized as a contributor to the national ambiguity the region has felt, to which a recent ‘Dictionnaire historique’ of street names in Strasbourg attests:

Les noms de rues ne relèvent pas, en effet, de la simple utilité postale; ils sont porteurs de la mémoire collective de notre ville, de son passé et de son destin. Qu’ils nous rappellent des activités aujourd’hui disparues, qu’ils commémorent des événements importants de notre histoire ou rendent hommage à des personnalités d’exception, les noms des rue et des places sont chargés de signification. [Street names do not simply disclose a postal use; they are carriers of the collective memory of our city, of its past and its destiny. Whether they remind us of activities since disappeared, whether they commemorate important events in our history or pay homage to exceptional people, street and square names are fraught with significance.] (Moszberger, Rieger, Daul 2002: 5).

Importantly, the dictionary demonstrates the stark shifts of language the region underwent over the course of 200 years. One street which is in the linguistic landscape tourist walk this article discusses changed from *Rue du Maroquin* in 1786, to *Rue Guillaume Tell* in 1793 (during the French Revolution), to *Rue de la Vertu* in 1794, to *Korduangasse* in 1871, to *Rue du Maroquin* in 1918, to *Korduanegasse* in 1940, and again to *Rue du Maroquin* in 1945 (ibid: 60). More recently, Strasbourg has also made efforts to note the Alsatian translations of street names on street signs. In this particular case, the Alsatian name of the street, *Kurwegass*, is noted in smaller font beneath the French street name; *Kurwegass* corresponds most closely to the name and spelling of the street in the year 1351 *Kurwengasse*.

The similarity of Alsatian and German is evident in the above case: the current Alsatian toponyme *Kurwegass* and the previous German street name *Korduanegasse*. Such linguistic

proximity is evident elsewhere in the landscape and is often problematically viewed by marketers and advertisers, who understand the value in language as adding to the *distinctiveness* of their product. The misrecognition of Alsatian as German is most often attributed to French tourists. Whereas German tourists (the most frequent tourist group after French tourists,) are expected to recognize the difference between the two linguistic forms, they are also expected to find the similarity in the two forms amusing. French tourists, however, are feared to misunderstand the local dialect by marketers. This creates a context where Alsatian is limited to certain commodified spaces, and German to others.

Landscapes of Commodification in Strasbourg

In Alsace, expecting to find a context of commodification and tourism, I chose to document a linguistic landscape that a tourist might be reasonably expected to walk—a route laid out in a 10 cent map available for purchase at the local tourist office of Strasbourg, located adjacent to the cathedral. The tourist walk I seek to describe could be said to consist of two areas of Strasbourg that were extensively produced for tourists, as well as their connecting arteries of larger, commercial streets frequented by many if not most residents of Strasbourg. The two aforementioned tourist areas, the historic city center surrounding the cathedral, and an area of the city called ‘La Petite France,’ should be understood in this tourist walk to be represented here—although not exhaustively examined. Rather this analysis consists of a circuit through tourist areas and their connective routes in Strasbourg; I resisted the temptation to wander down side streets, change the route that I took each day, or explore each nook of these neighborhoods. In this sense the study is not necessarily a representative sample, and I make no claims to that effect. This study does give a sense of where to look for spaces of commodification, and how discourses of commodification are acting on language in the tourist landscape of a city characterized by contested multilingualism.

The area of the cathedral, the historic city center is, during the Christmas season, the site of the famous Christmas markets, ‘marchés de Noël’ in French or ‘Christkindmärik’ in Alsatian. It is a particularly old area of the city, with the foundations of the cathedral and its surrounding buildings dating to the 14th century; it was named a World Heritage Site in 1988. Today, it is filled with souvenir shops, restaurants, mini-tourist buses, tour groups and, being right on the river, is also near the ‘bateau mouche,’ the tour boat of Strasbourg. The second area popular with tourists, ‘La Petite France,’ had its origins in 16th century German Alsace, when the first French explorers came to the area, bringing with them an epidemic of syphilis. The area was, at that time, the filthiest part of the city where the invalid French were quarantined, hence the name—Little France. It is today one of the most well-maintained areas of the city, featuring many original structures and extremely high rents. The Ill river connects these two sites, but the route a tourist might take to go from one place to the other is filled with clothing stores, fast-food chains, supermarkets, sushi restaurants and other businesses one would expect to find in any large urban area. The area between the two explicitly touristed sites is one of commerce but also of anticipated tourism. In addition to heritage or cultural tourism, the connecting route between the historic city center and La Petite France also draws lucrative shopping tourism.

This study approaches the linguistic landscape for documentation by way of ‘units of analysis,’ as others have before me (Bogatto and Hélot 2009). Instead of counting each individual sign as originating from a different author with different intentions, this approach allows for a similar understanding of authorship inherent in signs that reference one particular establishment. To document the use, frequency and emplacement of language in the Strasbourg linguistic landscape, I began the study with three questions:

- 1) Does the establishment (business, museum, restaurant, building) have signage in more than one language?
- 2) What languages appear?
- 3) In what order do languages appear?

With the above questions I attempt to ascertain whether or not an establishment (composed of a various number of signs,) had multilingual signage, as well as what languages were featured or prioritized. Following the assessment of the above questions, I photographed each establishment and its various signs for later analysis.

The analysis of linguistic landscapes is inherently based on the standard language ideology from which academics strive to depart. To determine if a sign counts as French, German, or Alsatian may appear straightforward, yet a strict categorization may fail to take into account occurrences of code mixing or switching, and may reduce languages to their iconic epitome. The quantitative analysis of LL, the counting of language in the public sphere, also presents difficulties in the presence of emblematic uses of language, questions of logos, and questions of weighting. If, as in so many examples of linguistic landscape, a storefront presents signage translating its name into Alsatian, but lacking any menus, schedules, or information in Alsatian, should it count similarly in the linguistic landscape analysis? Only after I had begun the documentation process did I realize the difficulties and limitations such an undertaking entails. Signs would come and go, languages would dance across temporary lunch menus, nearly escaping my gaze and then disappear an hour later, or languages would appear significantly in a place difficult to document, like the side of a bus. Furthermore, each unit of analysis was not receiving equal attention by tourists and other passers-by. A tourist would be more likely to attend to a sign advertising a guided tour of the cathedral or a lunch special than to a sign advertising a construction company that is renovating a building. It soon became evident that a quantitative analysis of what languages appeared in the Alsatian LLs would not adequately

interrogate the underlying ideologies that contribute to their emplacement and their meanings in those spaces. To this end, I supply the quantitative analyses gained through the meticulous work of documenting the LL, but with what will hopefully be a more full and nuanced account of where the signs are found, how they are constructed to be meaningful, and what intentions might be behind such signs. Particularly, I seek to supply a qualitative analysis of significant mobile and immobile signage present in the tourist sphere, in order to speak to the complexity of the environment we seek to explain through such measures.

French was present on all signage, and in all took precedence over the accompanying languages. In a total of 329 units of analysis in the tourist route in Strasbourg, a total of 70 (21%) were recorded as multilingual. Of these 70 signs, and within this rather vague characterization of ‘multilingual,’ the occurrence of signage containing German was roughly 41%, while English was observed on 37% of multilingual signs, in most cases following the German translation of the French original. German was found to be present as either a second listed language (26) or a third listed language (3) a total of 29 times. In light of the long history of either nationally enforced affiliation or aversion to Germany, such a small number is indeed surprising, but is echoed by findings of other studies (Bogatto and Hélot 2009). When isolating the analysis to the two previously discussed tourist areas of the historic city center and La Petite France, the percentage of signs that are multilingual rises to 50%, demonstrating an expected increase in non-French-speaking populations in those spaces. While I hope that these numbers demonstrate the multilingual nature of Strasbourg’s tourist landscape, my intent remains to determine the extent to which the Alsatian language appears in that space.

Of the 70 signs deemed multilingual by the previously noted analysis, 52% of these contain some Alsatian. A large majority of these signs in the Strasbourg LL are street signs, that have only recently been changed to include the Alsatian original name. While the French street name always occupies the top position of the sign, perceptibly the more powerful of the two (c.f.

Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003), emplacement of Alsatian toponyms on such street signs emanating from the local government is hardly the norm across Alsace (see **Figure 1**), and reflects the cultural sensibilities of certain local politicians. While I was often told that there were more bilingual French-Alsatian street signs in tourist areas, which led locals to imagine that the whole effort had been a ploy for tourist dollars, I cannot speak to that in the current paper. Rather, I will specifically address the signage surrounding businesses and restaurants in this (which many refer to as ‘bottom-up’), in order to better understand Alsatian in the LL in contexts of commodification. In these spaces of commodification (thereby eliminating street signs from current analysis,) the percentage of Alsatian in the observed linguistic landscape falls to 3% in the total landscape, or 16% of the multilingual signage found.



(Figure 1)

Such a low number of signage in Alsatian demonstrates several realities in the ideological construction of the landscape of Strasbourg. While such numbers may attest to the low linguistic vitality of Alsatian in the urban center of Strasbourg, it may equally attest to the dialect’s relatively low symbolic power granted in the landscape. However, without deeper historical, contextual and ethnographic analysis, the numbers fail to convey sites of change in the landscape, sites of power, and intentionality of given signs. In my analysis below I seek to

demonstrate that, while there remain stigmatizing stereotypes attached to the Alsatian language that restrict its use in the public sphere, sites of commodification are engendering a re-valuing of Alsatian language for its ties to authenticity and local production. Furthermore, the sites of commodification are particularly evident in, and circulated through, non-permanent signage or loci. These include, but are hardly limited to, examples found in commodities such as postcards available on the tourist route, fliers for cultural or folklore festivals circulated in the tourist route, as well as sites on the internet meant to seduce the tourist and essentially begin their journey in Alsace online.

Alsatian has long been associated with food and particular types of restaurants in Alsace. Thus, these establishments in particular (*winstubs*, *bierstubs*—both glossed as cafes or bars, and *flammekueche*—a traditional dish of Alsace) appear often in the linguistic landscape, and often are used as the sole instance of Alsatian in an establishment. Indeed, in **Figure 2** we see such an example of a *Winstub*, on which is inscribed in gothic style letters ‘*Au Vieux Strasbourg: Winstub Bierstub.*’ While the restaurant name translates to ‘In Old Strasbourg, Café/Bar,’ the name and its emplacement imply much more. Located in the historic city center, this restaurant’s old façade, name in gothic script, and Alsatian emblematic usages imply tradition and authenticity in their product. Yet, the permanent restaurant name is where the use of the language to index these values ends. The menus and other signs in front of the restaurant are translated from French into German and English. There is therefore no Alsatian speaking public expected to read these signs.



(Figure 2)

The dialect's frequent attachment to restaurants and food continues in La Petite France, at a restaurant aptly named 'La Petite Alsace.' In **Figure 3**, the restaurant can be seen to offer a translation of the name in Alsatian 's'Klane Elsass.' This particular example offers a consideration of the semiotic visual organization of the languages. The French restaurant name is larger and to the right of the entry to the restaurant. In large painted, gothic letters, it is also framed by decorative design. Importantly, it also faces the direction in which, as the streets are arranged, people are the most likely to approach the restaurant. The Alsatian translation however, is smaller font, and is located above the door. While in similar gothic font to the French script, it is encased on three sides by French translations of its meaning. Again, this sign is not meant for its referential content, but rather the local flavor it provides to the establishment.



(Figure 3)

Figure 4 shows a similar example, featuring a famous structure in ‘La Petite France’ called the Tannery or *la Maison des Tanneurs*. The Alsatian name of the structure *Gerwerstüb* is here emplaced to say as much about its heritage as it is to deliver its name. While this particular photo captured some transient graffiti that was removed even weeks later, the gothic script, fanciful lettering, and artful design use language to designate this building authentic.



(Figure 4)

In none of the aforementioned examples are there other examples of Alsatian language, besides the permanent signage in the front of the restaurant or business. The settings are rife with Alsatian cultural icons, such as the stork, a particular quilt pattern characteristic of the region, and wood carvings typical of the Black Forest region in Germany, however the language is absent. In the restaurants which habitually display only Alsatian words which had been so diluted of their content as to be recognizable iconically to French tourists were displayed to such a public. All of the examples utilizing words such as *winstub* or *bierstub* were located in the two tourist areas of the historic city center and La Petite France.

What the analysis of permanent signage in the linguistic landscape of Strasbourg fails to capture is indeed one of the primary features in language commodification, that of circulation. The stigma attached to speaking Alsatian dialect extends to both the spoken use of the dialect as well as its written manifestations. Certain forms have become commonplace such as *Winstub*, *Bierstub*, and Alsatian toponyms are expected elements of city street signs. However, in the analysis of less permanent signage, which travels, has mobility and perhaps even agency signs can perhaps demonstrate the inscription of processes of commodification on language in place.

The following examples support this methodological nuance in the assessment of linguistic landscapes, particularly in the search of commodification. The non-fixedness of language in place, avoided by many because of its inconvenience, does create a difficult undertaking for the researcher. However, in this particular study it will be assumed that the touring person will take note of more than mere permanent signage in the environment; furthermore, differential access to agency in the creation of signage in the linguistic landscape could also benefit from an analysis of impermanent signage, as those groups or individuals may also seek to mark their environment according to identity, marketing, or other claims. In **Figure 6** below, a postcard purchased in the historic city center is shown. This postcard is one of a new line created by Parisian artist who has created similar lines for several other regions in France

(DNA 8/7/12). As might be expected, the reception of these postcards in Alsace has been both reticent and eager, with the younger generations finding them funny, while many older members of the community find them trivializing and offensive. The postcard features a popular dish, a 'choucroute' of Alsace, comprised traditionally of sauerkraut, potatoes, and various meats. There are several birthday candles in the 'choucroute' with the inscription underneath touting 'Glécklickagebùrtstag!' or 'Happy Birthday!' in Alsatian. The script is not in gothic, decorative script, but is rather playful and bold. It is translated into French on the side, and where the creator of the card may be listed at the top right of the card, it reads 'Au plat!, 'L'Elsàss, la fraie.'

The use of Alsatian here is not necessarily indexing the region's authenticity or various traditions. Rather, the use of Alsatian in conjunction with a 'birthday choucroute' leads to an exaggeration of the local culture, which includes use of the local language. Without the image which pictures a ridiculous birthday ritual which any French person would be able to associate to the traditional Alsatian dish, the message itself, 'Happy Birthday!' could be serious. The fact that it is translated into French on the side of the card indicate the expectation that the language and the birthday iconography may not be enough to understand the card. Lastly, the 'signature' in the upper right hand corner is significant. 'Au plat,' in French can be roughly glossed as 'fried,' often as 'fried egg'; however phonetically, this phrase corresponds to 'hopla' in Alsatian meaning 'come on!,' or 'let's go!' This is a word featured heavily during Christmas markets and other festivals to index Alsatian culture. The last element of the card, 'L'Elsàss, la fraie,' is often what incites offense among older members of the Strasbourg community. Elsàss, is the Alsatian word for Alsace, a word which, unsurprisingly has been constructed as political in the past and remains so for some, especially in relation to unsuccessful struggles for autonomy in the past. 'La fraie,' corresponds to the French 'la vraie,' but as the Alsatian accent when speaking French is often found to treat 'v's as 'f's, this phrase indexes an Alsatian person with a heavy accent

speaking French. Alsatians continue to be the subject of derision and mockery because of their accent when speaking French. Indeed, it pervades the Alsatian consciousness so much, one interlocutor told me how shocked they are everytime they travel elsewhere in France and older generations are able to speak perfect French.



(Figure 6)

In this postcard, therefore, is recognition of Alsatian stereotypes, such as poor French, heavy food, and pervasive practice of the dialect. Interestingly, however, this card does require some knowledge of these stereotypes in order to recognize the humor therein, which anticipates that the consumer of such cards will be either French-speakers who are familiar with Alsatian stereotypes, or indeed, Alsatians themselves.

Figure 7 indicates the extent to which Alsatian is involved in the seduction of tourists to the region itself. The picture shows the website of the regional tourist bureau, responsible for designing campaigns, public relations, and advertising in nations around the world. Interestingly, in my own interactions with an executive in this organization, I was assured that Alsatian was never used in marketing initiatives, particularly in their organization. As he claimed, the dialect

could, in fact, acquire negative associations through the course of marketing. He mentions, “it doesn’t surprise anyone what we find in Bretagne sometimes [advertising using the local language variety], but it must be a medium of communication a medium of exchange, the dialect. If it becomes something that people can’t pronounce, can’t understand, all of a sudden it takes a hostile character, because it’s a factor of closing in on one’s self.”

Thus, the language, if it isn’t used in an emblematic way, may become threatening or at the very least inconvenient for the visitor or tourist. All the same, there recently appeared an online ‘*guide de conversation*’ on the organization’s website, offering French tourists the opportunity to scroll over each of the 16 available terms, some translated into both ‘haut-rhinois’ and ‘bas-rhinois’ dialect, and discover their meanings. It invites the tourist to incorporate the language into their tour of the region, while simultaneously inviting the tourist to savor the *Flammeküeche*, and stop by all of the *Winstubs* and *Bierstubs*. The implication of language in the construction of the commodified tourist sphere, therefore begins before the tourist arrives in Alsace. It begins in the nascent, cyberspatial stages of the journey, inviting the tourist to share in the local language practices of the region, particularly through consumption.



(Figure 7)

Finally, **Figure 8** further demonstrates the mobility of signs that may be inscribed with both language commodification measures as well as the ideologically constructed nature of the linguistic landscape. On the aforementioned urban artery that connects the two most popular tourist spots in Strasbourg lies Place Kléber. Place Kléber has historically been the site where Alsace's national contestation was most performed. During the Nazi annexation of Alsace, the statue of Jean-Baptiste Kléber was removed, as the General, who had fought under Napoleon, was felt to signify the region's *Frenchness*. Upon Nazi defeat and *re-francisation* of Strasbourg, the statue was restored to its original place. The square itself is a significant symbol of the city, and is often the site of the city's festivals. The *Brasserie Storig* claims significant real-estate in the Place Kléber, and receives a very high volume of tourists, visitors, and locals on a daily basis. Indeed, it was only when I was seeking respite from a long day of documenting signs that I was served a coffee on the coaster depicted in **Figure 8**. It was to my surprise that this restaurant, which, I had previously noted, displays their name in Alsatian—and untranslated—also displayed other texts in the local language which are also untranslated. While the brewery's name *Brasserie Storig*, or Stork Brewery, is decipherable by the frequent display of the semiotic cue to regional authenticity—the stork, the name itself is all the same unusual for utilizing a word in Alsatian not typically seen in the landscape.



(Figure 8)

The coasters, however, delivered to each customer with their artisan beer, coffee, or soft drink, display the Alsatian words ‘*Gebröit en Schelige, E pläsier fer àlli,*’ are not easily deciphered. Translating to ‘Brewed in Schiltigheim [a nearby city], a pleasure for all,’ the coaster is at no point translated into French, risking what the tourism executive called the ‘hostile character’ of the language. In an interview with the proprietor of the brewery, Monsieur Jean, he described his interest in advertising his business in Alsatian in both the restaurant’s name and on the coasters as emerging from the current international trend toward favoring local products, ingredients and businesses. As he states, “*On a un intérêt tout doucement, à se reëntéresser à s’appropriier tous notre alimentation tout notre production, et tous ces produits là, qui vont euh qui vont aller dans dans un mieux être et qui plait à l’heure actuelle.*” [We are starting to take an interest, slowly, in re-involving ourselves and taking back all of our food and its production, and all the products that that will go into a better life, and that are popular at the moment.] For this business owner and sign producer, the Alsatian language ties directly with the idea of *terroir* which has become more and more useful in the marketing to niche markets. Artisan olive oil

(Meneley 2007), salami (Cavanaugh 2007) and other products tied to their cultures (and languages) of production are increasingly being sold along with the culture they come from.

Monsieur Jean proceeds to say, it is his dream to be a 100% local brewery, using Alsatian hops, Alsatian water, Alsatian labor, and Alsatian language. The picture he paints of the beer industry is one of hegemonic, centralized power, as he says he witnessed the takeover of numerous small breweries by Anheuser-Busch or Heineken. Interestingly, therefore, his use of the Alsatian language are far from surface-level tourist seductions based in authenticity and tradition.

Furthermore, his use of the Alsatian language is indeed a claim of identity; interestingly, however, it is not his own identity he is making claims for. Born and raised in Bretagne, he compares the regional identity of Alsace to that of Bretagne, and finds that Alsatians are frustratingly timid in their assertions of identity through marketing. He says,

“C’est une de mes petite vexations personnels, si vous voulez de de voir que les alsaciens ne sont pas aussi euh, ils ne sont pas aussi branch-branché ou dirigé sur un échelle locale comme sont les Bretons ou les Corses, je trouve que...l’identité alsacienne est très forte uh? Mais elle n’est elle l’est un tout petit peu moins si vous voulez dirigé uh vers un achat uh alsacien et tous ça. Les les Bretons ils ont, comme en quoi uh et les Corses aussi sont beaucoup plus euh, dès qu’un produit est Corse ils achètent Corse, uh en Bretagne vous dites que c’est Breton les gens ils achètent tout suite.” [It’s one thing that bothers me, if you like, to to see that Alsatians aren’t, they aren’t as connected or directed towards a local scale like Bretons are or the Corse are, and I think...the Alsatian identity is really strong uh? But it isn’t it isn’t as much, if you like, directed um, towards an Alsatian purchase and all that. Bretons have the interest, and Corsicans also are very uh, as soon as a product is Corsican they buy Corsican, um, in Brittany if you say that its Breton the people buy it right away.]

In this trend, therefore, of buying local, there is also the trend of selling local and marketing local, which is something that, according to this business owner, Alsace has failed to do. As he says later, *“Ils ont encore ce coté euh ils n’osent pas affirmer leur identité. Ils sont encore un peu humilié.”* [They still have this side uh, they don’t dare affirm their identity. They are still humiliated.] Here Monsieur Jean is referring to Alsace’s role in World War II, when the French post-war environment often pitted French ‘of the interior,’ or the local way of saying anyone

who isn't Alsatian, against Alsace and Germany. The region's annexation often made being Alsatian tantamount to being collaborator, and the language had a featuring role in such a linguistic association.

In this trend to which the coaster is clearly speaking, of buying local, selling local, and marketing local, Alsatian is held as also purely local. It is ideologically constructed as authentic, traditional, and bucolic, not polluted or corporate. Here, too, despite the fact that there are no given translations, and the coaster features words less frequently found in the LL, the coaster is meant to provoke the reader. Referentiality is not assumed, rather, it is preferred that the message be beyond comprehension, thereby requiring the visitor or consumer to ask, or assume what it says. As a younger interlocutor claimed, upon seeing the coaster, "*C'est pas un plaisir pour tous, parce que personne peut le comprendre.*" [It's not a pleasure for all, because no one can understand it.] Indeed, referentiality and even comprehension is not sought here, but rather avoided by the sign producer.

Discussion: Mobility and Commodification and the Landscape

If an uncritical analysis of permanent signage in the linguistic landscape of Strasbourg demonstrates some multilingualism as well as a frequent occurrence of Alsatian dialect, it is sharply contrasted by ethnographic and contextual analysis which lend a more nuanced understanding of where the dialect appears, and what it is meant to convey. In contexts of language commodification, it is clear that Alsatian can be mobilized as a clear marker of authenticity, tradition and locale, particularly when constructed for a tourist gaze. Such semiotic cues as gothic script, traditional restaurant names, and available translations of Alsatian to the visual consumer make the connection to authenticity accessible, while not being incomprehensible or 'threatening.' At least, this is an ideological aim instrumentalized by marketers, advertisers and sign creators in presenting the dialect in such arenas where 'authentic experience' is highly valued. Restricting the analysis to permanent signage may, however,

restrict our understandings of the constructed environment to the intended texts of business owners, the stylistic intents of sign creators, and the modalities in which passers-by encounter signs. Mobile texts, transitory signs such as postcards, 'zines', soda bottles, advertisements on the sides of buses, and coasters can also constitute elements of our built environment. More important still, such elements of the landscape may even be arenas that bespeak current discourses of commodification, and sites of change in the commodification of language.

The commodification of language in the public visual sphere continues to constitute an area of research that can contribute to our understandings of how relationships to language are reconfigured to reflect market logics. However, the discursive tie between language, place and identity has by no means been eclipsed by discourses of profit and economic added-value. Rather, as Duchêne and Heller (2012:3) note, the discourses of 'pride' and 'profit' continue to interact in complex ways. In my conversations with Monsieur Jean this complex interaction is exemplified, as he uses his brewery as a place to inscribe identity claims in the environment through the use of Alsatian language. He recognizes the ideological tie that Alsatian language has to the region, and seeks to profit by marketing that indexical connection. However, his intentions are further complicated by his sympathy for the Alsatian language and identity. Having been raised in Bretagne, he is only too familiar with the struggles regional languages have historically faced in France, from shaming in schools to erasure from political discourse. His signage is therefore inherently based in a discourse of pride; not pride that has originated from this particular terroir, but one that has circulated throughout the French state, that has been historically constructed to pit regional identities in France against the universal French identity, and that has mapped such a distinction onto language practice. That a man from Bretagne feels enough affinity with the plight of the Alsatian dialect speaker is a product of such historical processes. Important to recognize for this argument however, is the potentiality that not everyone is buying what Monsieur Jean is selling.

If the dialect can index authenticity for tourists, it can equally index regionalism, particularism, and a rejection of French Republican universality. Indeed, in the recent production of the Brand Alsace, the dialect, after receiving a great deal of attention in the research and development phase, was purposely left out of the final ‘*code de marque*.’ The dialect was found to index tradition, not modernity and innovation, regionalism, not international commerce, and was found to be often confused with German. Interestingly, the director of research on the brand also compared the creation of the Alsace brand to the creation of the Bretagne brand, highlighting the question of language:

“euh et qu'il y a quelques mots de Breton, on les comprend pas mais on sait que ça fait parti de l'identité c'est presque comme un un comment ça s'appelle, un dépaysement, enfin il y a quelque chose de cette ordre là, qui figu-qui amuse. Et tout le monde que Bretagne ça se dit Breizh b-r-e-i-z-h...voilà. Par contre l'Allemagne- le le le la question de la confusion avec l'Allemand fait que pour l'Alsace c'est pas aussi euh c'est pas un vecteur aussi facile vers l'exterieur.”
 [there are a lot of words of Breton, we don't understand them but we know that they are a part of the identity it's almost like a a how do you say, a *dépaysement*, anyway it's something like that, that is amusing. And everyone knows that Bretagne it's said Breizh B-R-E-I-Z-H...voilà. On the other hand Germany, the the question of confusion with German makes it so that for Alsace it's not uh, it's not as easy a vector to the outside.]

In addition to regional differences, the question of scales is equally invoked here; to market Alsatian language to Alsations is not the same as to market Alsatian language to France, nor at an international scale. The negotiations which necessarily implicate language also necessarily implicate the historical ideological construction of the dialect in opposition to both French language and German language. The Alsatian case described in this paper demonstrates complexities for the study of linguistic landscape, complicating the categorization of language in the landscape, and indexing social processes which invoke two world wars and 200 years of linguistic oppression. While this analysis of the Strasbourg linguistic landscape is far from complete, nor is it finished, it can speak to the utility of the study of linguistic landscapes in a more nuanced investigation of language commodification. The present study is also intended to

elaborate on past iterations of linguistic landscape studies. The inclusion of transitory mobile texts in the study of linguistic landscape can offer a unique perspective not of the vitality of a given language, but rather of the ideological construction and emplacement of language in place. To track discourses of commodification, it becomes inherently useful to also track objects in motion.

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