

МОВА І МІСТО

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DEGREES OF VISIBILITY OF IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF GENOA AND CAGLIARI*

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The article focuses on linguistic landscape in multilingual urban environment. Surveys carried out in Italian cities of Genoa and Cagliari aim at collecting data on complex modes of communication that take place within multinational and multilingual communities. Verbal and non-verbal signs were analyzed to define a wide range of functions they perform both in individual and group identification. The characteristics and the histories of immigrant groups account for a set of variables which determine the level of interaction between space and actors as well as degree of visibility of the immigrant languages.

Key words: linguistic landscape, multilingual community, verbal and non-verbal signs, individual and group identification.

1. Introduction

The Linguistic Landscape (LL) has been the object of a number of investigations conducted in multilingual urban environments. Researchers have highlighted how the LL can contribute to an understanding of language contact, of language maintenance and revitalization and of the globalization of English. As summarized in Gorter (2006), the LL can in turn be a reflection of power relations between different social groups, an arena to negotiate individual or group identity and a manifestation of the level of importance attached to one or more 'foreign' or exotic languages. In practical terms, the LL consists of all instances of written text present in the public spaces that surround us (advertisements, commercial signs, government notices, road signs etc.). Recent studies have been conducted in countries as diverse as Uganda (Reh 2004), Israel (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006), the Netherlands and the Basque Country (Genoz and Gorter 2006), Thailand (Huebner 2006) and Japan (Backhaus 2007). In Italy, the LL approach – as outlined above – constitutes one of the modes of collection and analysis of written signs in the public space that the *Osservatorio linguistico permanente* of the University of Siena has employed within a wider project concerning immigrant languages in Italy (see for example Vedovelli 2004 and Bagna and Barni 2006).

The surveys carried out in Genoa and Cagliari are part of a collaborative project which aims to compare the LL of Italian and French coastal cities. From this perspective, immigrant languages constitute one part of the observable LL, and the wider scope of the research includes the presence and the role of national languages, of heritage languages and

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of English as global language. It is understood that the visibility of the languages in question is one of the possible indicators of the dynamics at play and that it accounts for part of the complex modes of communication that take place within a multilingual context.

Partly following Backhaus (2007), the methodology consisted in selecting stretches of streets and recording all signs, i. e. 'any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame' (Backhaus 2007: 66). Survey areas were selected in a number of the *quartieri* that make up each city's urban configuration, whilst purely residential areas were excluded because of the virtual absence of written signs that characterizes them. In Italian cities, however, commercial areas are often also residential, and therefore they are an interesting mix of public and private space where signs perform different functions. Given the different sizes of the two cities, with the population of Genoa being nearly four times that of Cagliari, 20 surveys were carried out in Genoa itself, whilst for Cagliari 10 were carried out in the city and 10 in Cagliari's metropolitan area, including centres such as Quartu, Assemini and Selargius.

2. Genoa and Cagliari as multiethnic realities

Both regional capitals, Genoa and Cagliari have attracted relatively high numbers of immigrants. Another similarity is the fact that immigrant groups have, at least initially, tended to live in those areas of the city centre which are most accessible, both geographically and economically.

Like other port cities, Genoa and Cagliari have traditionally witnessed continuous movements of peoples who have preferred (or have been forced) to live in the heart of the city, the elected place for commercial and other transactions. In the intricate networks of passages and alleyways people blend in with the landscape and this transient mass of humanity continues to be overlooked by modern administrations in their attempts at urban regeneration. Although degraded central areas have recently become dotted with fashionable restaurants, boutiques and artistic venues and some of the accommodation has been renovated and occupied by a youngish trendy crowd, a walk in the *carrugi* in Genoa or in the Marina quarter in Cagliari gives a fairly accurate idea of the general state of buildings, apartments and essential services. This in turn brings the rents down and makes accommodation affordable for a high number of new immigrants.

Exemplary in this respect is Via Prè in Genoa, which has been a metaphor of isolation and marginalization for a long time. Excluded from the perimeter of the city proper in the twelfth century, when the construction of a set of city walls relegated it to the role of sub-urban area, it became famous for its prostitutes, a sort of Ligurian *suburra* (Marcenaro 2004: 34–37). Similarly to Via Prè in Genoa, Via Baylle is located in the historic quarter of Marina, immediately behind the port of Cagliari. Traditionally inhabited by fishermen and merchants, in the past communities from different parts of Italy have settled in this area, attracted by commercial opportunities with the locals. Currently shop fronts reveal the presence of immigrant communities, and names such as Ramiz, Minar [*sic*], Al Anni and Al Amin are dotted around among signs reminding the passer-by that they can buy traditional Sardinian souvenirs and try Sardinian food in restaurants as well.

Immigration to Cagliari and Genoa, however, presents different features with respect to the origin of the main immigrant groups, their presence in the wider regional context and, importantly, the size of the groups. As in any work that discussed aspects of immigration in Italy, it is important to bear in mind that accurate immigrant figures are difficult to obtain. The main sources of information are Istat, the Italian Institute of Statistics, and the Ministry of the Interior. Besides these, *Caritas*, a Catholic organization, has established a reputation for providing reliable information about immigration figures and analy-

ses. Individual city councils can also provide their own figures, but this does not happen systematically. Finally, official statistics do not take illegal immigrants into account. Selected works which offer detailed information about immigration to Genoa and Cagliari can be found in the bibliography to this article (Ambrosini et al. 2007; Zurru 2007a,b). For the purposes of this work, some statistical information is included in Table 1.

Table 1

Total and immigrant population in Genoa and Cagliari, their provinces and their regions as of 1/1/08 (figures extracted from www.demo.istat.it)

Total population	Immigrant population	Total population	Immigrant population
Liguria 1,609,882	90,881(5.6%)	Sardinia 1,665,617	25,106 (1.5%)
Genoa (province) 883,778	47,887 (5.4%)	Cagliari (province) 557,679	8,668 (1.5%)
Genoa (commune) 610,887	37,160 (6%)	Cagliari (commune) 158,041	3,656 (2.3%)

Although the number of immigrants in Sardinia has increased steadily from 1980s, it is much lower than that of Liguria or indeed of other regions of Italy. As can be seen from Table 1, for example, immigrants represent 1.5% of the local population in Sardinia against 5.6% in Liguria. The national average has been estimated at 6.7% (according to *Caritas*) or 5.8% (according to Istat). In addition, whilst 143 nationalities are represented in the province of Genoa alone (Erminio 2007), the same number is represented in the whole of Sardinia (Zurru 2007b). Unlike in other regions of Italy, there are foreign residents in the vast majority of Sardinian towns (in 345 out of 377). This feature is due to the local job market, because there are relatively few opportunities, which are scattered across the whole island, and also due to the main occupations of some of the largest immigrant groups (itinerant selling) (Zurru 2007b). As a result, it is generally difficult for immigrant communities to become more established and therefore visible.

Although 143 nationalities are represented in the province of Genoa, the largest three groups constitute more than half the number of immigrants. In addition, although the historic centre has traditionally attracted the great majority of immigrants, in more recent times they have moved to other areas of the city (Erminio 2007), as sign that some of the immigrants have improved their economic situation, that they are staying long term and that they are better integrated.

The top ten national groups represented in the province of Genoa are as follows (Istat 01/01/08):

Ecuador 31.3%	China 2.8%
Albania 12.7%	Senegal 2.3%
Morocco 8.7%	Sri Lanka 2.4%
Romania 5.5%	Ukraine 2.4 %
Peru 5%	Tunisia 1.6 %

Different factors explain the high number of Ecuadorians in Liguria, and in Genoa in particular. Sizeable groups of Genoese people left for Ecuador in the course of the twentieth century and it is estimated that there are about 3,000 people of Genoese descent living in Ecuador. They live mainly in Guayaquil, the main commercial city on the Pacific coast, and Guayaquil is the city where the majority of Ecuadorians living in Genoa come from. The degree of familiarity between the two cultures resulting from past contacts, however, should not be overestimated. The Ecuadorian exodus was due to the crisis that hit the coun-

try in the 1990s, when large numbers of Ecuadorians left for the United States, Spain and Italy. For Ecuadorians it was relatively easy to Italy because until 2003 a visa was not required. A majority of women went to stay in Italy, responding to a high demand for domestic work. The creation of a support network made it easier for subsequent fellow nationals go and stay in Genoa. Religious and linguistic affinities represented a strong advantage. Ecuadorians seem to be very active in the network of support associations and organizations made available to their community, and not just as users of services but as organizers and managers (Chiari 2005).

Immigrants in Sardinia come from 143 countries (Zurru 2007a), with African countries accounting for the relative majority of immigrants (25%). The top ten national groups in the province of Cagliari are as follows (Istat 1/1/2008):

China 10.6%	Germany 5%
Senegal 10.5%	Tunisia 4%
Morocco 10.1%	Pakistan 2.6%
Philippines 9%	Bosnia 2.5%
Ukraine 6.5%	France 2.2%

The Chinese have recently become the largest immigrant group in Cagliari (2007) and now outnumber Senegalese community. Initially involved in the catering sector (the first Chinese restaurant opened in Cagliari in 1987), the Chinese community has increasingly opted for the commercial sector. There is a majority of small, family-run business due to the efficient family network that operates as the main support of the business owner (Atzori 2007). The Chinese have appropriated niches of the local economy where there is little competition. Compared to the Spanish-speaking communities in Genoa, there are no external traces of associations and organization. In fact, associations do exist, but many Chinese tend not to participate because they are perceived to be an extension of the power hierarchies regulating all aspects of life in China. In addition, the Chinese seem to dedicate very little time to leisure activities. The family, including the extended family, is the main focus of communication in Chinese.

The Senegalese and the Moroccans, second and third groups in terms of size, are again widespread in the regional territory. Moroccan families have settled in the smaller centres of the province, whilst the Senegalese are more mobile and tend to live in cities. The great majority of the latter are men and the socio-religious network acts as a strong element of unity within the group (Zurru 2007b: 66–67).

3. Immigrant languages in the LLs of Genoa and Cagliari

As can be easily imagined, the vast majority of written signs in both cities are in Italian (or with Italian) followed by signs in English (or with English). Although virtually insignificant in terms of percentage value, signs written in or including immigrant languages are visible, they are meaningful and it is possible to draw comparisons between Genoa and Cagliari as far as their contribution to the respective LL is concerned.

Monolingual signs (cf. Table 2) can be expected to be used for internal communication (from community members to community members). Language choice is dictated by a rule that says ‘prefer to write a sign in a language which can be read by people you expect to read it’ (Spolsky 2008). All signs are ‘bottom-up’, in the sense that they are produced by autonomous actors such as shop owners, companies or other private entities. They contrast with ‘top-down signs’, i.e. those issued by state institutions or bodies endowed with authority (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 16–19), which were, of course, totally absent from the surveyed areas. All languages in these signs are used for what I have labeled ‘commercial’ or ‘informational’ purposes. In addition to advertising products, in fact, they also advertise and offer services (Figure 1 – Romanian),

work (a notice in Chinese written by somebody seeking work, as was explained by the shop-keeper, was taken down as I was looking at it) and entertainment (Figure 2 – Spanish). Among the ‘transgressive’ signs there are those which can be re-classified as commercial (as in the Romanian example of Figure 1, where the sign appeared in an illicit space and it was superimposed onto a Spanish graffiti), or they are proper graffiti.

Table 2

Monolingual signs in immigrant languages in Genoa, taking into account the largest groups

	Commercial	Informational	Institutional	Transgressive	Total
MONOLINGUAL					
Albanian	2				2
Arabic	1			1	2
Chinese	2				2
Romanian	2			1	3
Spanish	2	3		8	13
					22

Represented in multilingual signs (cf. Table 3) we find, amongst others, Chinese, Arabic, Wolof and Spanish (Figure 3). In the last example it is interesting to note that, although Spanish appears under Italian, it carries a heavier semantic load which it is intended for Spanish speakers only. In addition, the fact that Italian is the preferred code in this notice (it appears at the top) reveals information about the status which a particular language enjoys in a given context (Scollon and Scollon 2003). The notice refers to local regulations and shows compliance with the Italian law. The first part of the notice can be viewed as recognition of authority and of the language that expresses it. Instead of simply duplicating information in the second language, the part in Spanish complements it with additional information intended for Spanish speakers only.

Table 3

Multilingual signs including immigrant languages in Genoa. Languages present in the following combinations

1	Commercial	Informational	Institutional	Transgressive	Total
2	3	4	5	6	
MULTILINGUAL					
(with) Albanian					0
Ch/It	3				3
It/Ch	6	1			7
Eng/Ar/It	1				1
Eng/It/Ar	2				2
It/Ar/Bengali		1			1
It/Arabic	6				6
Sp/Fr/Wolof		2			2
(with) Romanian					0
Spanish/It/Eng	2				2
Spanish/It	3	3		1	7
It/Spanish	1	1			2
Eng/It/Spanish	2				2
Eng/Spanish				1	1
It/Eng/Spanish	1				1
					37

No monolingual signs were recorded in the surveyed areas of Cagliari and its environs.

Table 4

Multilingual signs including immigrant languages in Cagliari.

	Commercial	Informational	Institutional	Transgressive	Total
MULTILINGUAL					1
Ar/E/I	1				6
Ar/It	6				1
I/Ch/E	1				1
I/Hindi	1				5
It/Ch	5				14

The relatively limited opportunities for business development and diversification together with the small size of the immigrant communities is reflected in the form of low visibility of the immigrant languages in the LL of Cagliari. This situation looks very different from that of the Esquilino area of Rome, for example. There, Chinese people run the majority of shops and Chinese is the most visible language and the main language of social communication, as can be gathered from the high number of monolingual signs in Chinese (Bagna and Barni 2006: 25–30). The fact that small communities are present in small urban environments and that they are spread thinly over the regional territory does not seem to provide the context for the linguistic manifestation of different identities. The urban landscape, however, bears the symbols of the Chinese community in the regular display of the lantern which appears outside every single Chinese shop in Cagliari and in the towns of its metropolitan area, and that often replaces any other linguistic or cultural connotation of the business. Apart from the occasional shop sign in Italian and Chinese, every single Chinese shop that I came across displayed one or more lanterns outside. The extensive and mostly exclusive use of lanterns as a symbolic, non-verbal, system of meaning (i.e. an icon to all effects) calls for the inclusion in the LL of non-verbal items that contribute to the construction and the interpretation of the public space.

A Cagliari, in particolare, la eterogeneità di immigrati impedisce la formazione di spazi urbani connotati dalla presenza di una sola comunità etnica che magari in quello spazio concentra sia residenza che attività economiche. Al contrario la diversità delle origini si sviluppa sulla base di una molteplicità di luoghi che diventano spazi di riferimento piuttosto che spazi di appartenenza (Baldussi 2007: 265).

In the multilingual signs in Cagliari, and with the exception of Chinese, the ‘Arabic’ and ‘Hindi’ that appear in Table 4 were not actual Arabic and Hindi scripts. The domestication of an unfamiliar script, however, does not reduce the distance between a sign in an unknown language and its viewer. Moreover, these signs are of specific nature, they are an attempt to create ‘spaces of belonging’, to use the previous quote. The Arab-sounding names and the word ‘Tajamehal’ (*sic*) in the shop signs in the Marina area of Cagliari stand out in the local LL just as Arabic or Hindi script would, with the difference that they are readable for the local public. The use of proper names can be interpreted as an initial attempt to negotiate portions of ‘place’ in the ‘non-place’, to use the definitions by Marc Augé (Augé 1995). The symbolic value of these kinds of proper names is particularly loaded in a LL which is overwhelmingly Italian and where the act of naming itself acquires a primary identity dimension. The symbolic coding of the public space becomes a way to negotiate or a request for inclusion and recognition in the local geography.

4. Conclusion

Immigrant languages are more prominent in Genoa than in Cagliari. Monolingual signs in Spanish are the most diversified: they reflect a greater presence of Spanish speaking communities, a higher degree of organizational activity and stronger self-awareness. They are present in monolingual as well as multilingual signs. They perform a wider range of functions. The LL of Genoa is an arena in which to negotiate individual or group identity. It is also a reflection of a number of languages in competition, or of an eco-system where smaller actors (in terms of group size) are gaining visibility and asserting their value in the linguistic market (Bourdieu 1991). The Chinese community in Genoa makes up only 2.8% of the immigrant population, but the signs including Chinese are more numerous than the signs including Chinese in Cagliari, where the Chinese community is the largest and accounts for 10.6% of the immigrant population. To mention another example, traces in Wolof are visible in Genoa, where the Senegalese represent 2.3% of the immigrant population, whilst they are absent in Cagliari, where the Senegalese were the largest immigrant community until 2007.

As regards graffiti, the simple act of its production is transgressive in itself. This can be transgressive on several levels, of course, depending on content, function, intended readership, etc. Graffiti is evidence of social unrest and therefore contributes to the construction of the social space seen as a dynamic environment and not just as a backdrop against which signs can be read. Works of graffiti 'are about identity, they are statements of place, belonging, group membership, and style' (Pennycook 2008: 309). This is also true of the graffiti in immigrant languages that appeared in the surveyed areas in Genoa. I would like to suggest, however, that given the extensive use that Italians themselves make of graffiti, it is further evidence of the confident use of the public space on the part of some immigrant groups, and of their languages competing in the public arena. It is not by chance, in fact, that the graffiti produced in immigrant languages in Genoa shares usable surfaces with graffiti in Italian. In Cagliari, on the other hand, conspicuous sections of some areas are covered in graffiti, but no immigrant language was represented.

To conclude, the characteristics and the histories of both immigrant groups and of the regions where they live and work account for a set of variables which will determine the level of interaction between space and actors and the degree of visibility of the immigrant languages. Seen as a dynamic reality, the LL both indexes the power of individual languages and contributes to the construction of linguistic identities in a given spatial context. The fact that in Genoa the majority of signs with or representing immigrant languages were communicative and that in Cagliari they were symbolic reflects two different stages in the construction of the immigrant groups' linguistic identities.

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**СТУПІНЬ ВИДИМОСТІ ІМІГРАНТСЬКИХ ГРОМАД У
ЛІНГВІСТИЧНОМУ ЛАНДШАФТІ МІСТ ГЕНУЯ ТА КАЛЬЯРІ**
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Стаття розкриває питання лінгвістичного ландшафту в багатомовному міському середовищі. Дослідження, проведені у містах Генуя та Кальярі (Італія), систематизували дані про складні форми спілкування в багатонаціональних та багатомовних громадах. Проаналізовано вербальні та невербальні знаки для визначення широкого спектра функцій, які вони виконують в індивідуальній та груповій ідентифікації. Характерні риси та історії іммігрантських груп визначають чинники, що впливають на рівень взаємодії між місцем та особистістю, а також на ступені видимості мов іммігрантів.

Ключові слова: лінгвістичний ландшафт, багатомовна громада, вербальні та невербальні знаки, індивідуальна та групова ідентифікація.

**СТЕПЕНЬ ВИДИМОСТИ ИММИГРАНТСКИХ ОБЩИН В
ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКОМ ЛАНДШАФТЕ ГОРОДОВ ГЕНУЯ И КАЛЬЯРИ**

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Статья раскрывает вопрос лингвистического ландшафта в многоязыковой городской среде. Исследования, проведенные в городах Генуя и Кальяри (Италия), систематизировали данные о сложных формах общения в многонациональных и многоязыковых обществах. Проанализированы вербальные и невербальные знаки для определения широкого спектра функций, которые они выполняют в индивидуальной и групповой идентификации. Характерные черты и истории иммигрантских групп определяют факторы, влияющие на уровень взаимодействия между местом и личностью, а также на степени видимости языков иммигрантов.

Ключевые слова: лингвистический ландшафт, многоязыковое общество, вербальные и невербальные знаки, индивидуальная и групповая идентификация.

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