

Uncovering Spanish Harlem: Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Projects in an Advanced Content-Based Spanish Course



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Abstract Linguistic and cultural diversity are hallmarks of postmodern globalized societies. In New York city, for example, the massive influx of immigrants from the Caribbean, especially Puerto Ricans after 1917, altered the linguistic and cultural landscape of an urban center already known for its large concentration of foreign settlers. This chapter reports on a case study of an advanced Spanish course application of the *linguistic landscape* (LL) as a site for learning. Drawing on a literacy-oriented approach to Foreign Language (FL) education as a framework for integrating LL into an advanced foreign language curriculum, It focuses on the critical role L2 students' agency plays in making sense of LL as 'lived spaces' (e.g., Malinowski) in New York's El Barrio (Spanish Harlem). Specifically, the chapter demonstrates students' use of ethnographic tools for interpreting meanings and functions of multimodal cityscapes as situated signs-in-space, in order to understand the social, cultural and political complexity of these immigrant communities in the city. After describing the course design, the chapter provides concrete examples of students' ethnographic linguistic landscapes projects, followed by a discussion on the importance of implementing LL as a way to contextualize advanced language and literacy practices.

Keywords Spatialized L2 learning · City as expanded classroom · Language in public spaces · L2 students' agency · Semiotic landscapes · Lived spaces · Ethnographic LL projects · Spanish Harlem

... *signs in public space document complexity -they are visual items that tell the story of the space in which they can be found, and clarify its structure* (Blommaert, 2013, p. 16).

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1 Introduction

It is 11:35 am on a Thursday morning. Today is only our second class of the fall semester and the whole group and I are already standing at one of New York city's street corners. It is the corner of East 104th Street and 5th Avenue in the Upper East side of Manhattan. Above the large glass wall of the building's entrance a sign in large capital letters reads in English: "A MUSEUM IS A SCHOOL: THE ARTIST LEARNS HOW TO COMMUNICATE. THE PUBLIC LEARNS HOW TO MAKE CONNECTIONS;" while through the glass panels another sign in a larger orange font over a light gray background in the back of the lobby says in Spanish: EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO (Figs. 1 and 2).¹

I briefly introduce students to the museum as well as to the Boys & Girls Harbor – the first Latin music conservatory housed in the basement of the same building located in El Barrio (Spanish Harlem), the most significant neighborhood for Latin music in New York City. After a few minutes, we continue our group walk on 104th street towards Lexington Avenue. Enticed by the sign from the entrance to El Museo, we start making connections with the cultural and linguistic landscape of Spanish



Fig. 1 Main entrance to El Museo del Barrio in Spanish Harlem, located in the corner of East 104th Street and 5th Avenue in the Upper East side of Manhattan

¹Founded in 1969 by artist and educator Raphael Montañez Ortiz and a coalition of local parents, educators, artists, and activists fueled by the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement, El Museo's Permanent Collection (...) spans more than 800 years of Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino art (El Museo).



Fig. 2 Lobby of the Museum with *El Museo del Barrio* sign in Spanish



Fig. 3 'Bottom-up' LL with unofficial Spanish plaques attached to a playground fences on East 104 street between Madison and Park Avenues

Harlem, home of a large Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Mexican diaspora over the last century (see Fig. 3). This class session embodied the connection between the advanced-level Spanish course I was teaching that semester and the language-and-culture-laden physical environment in which the course was taking place, namely, New York City.

This chapter reports on a case study² of advanced language teaching in the linguistic landscape of New York City's El Barrio (please see chapters by Vinagre & Llopes-García “[Multilingual Landscapes in Telecollaboration: A Spanish-American Exchange](#)”, this volume, and Sekerina & Brooks “[Multilingual Linguistic Landscapes of New York City as a Pedagogical Tool in a Psychology Classroom](#)”, this volume, for other projects in New York City). First, I present a conceptualization of what foreign language learning entails at the advanced levels from a socio-cultural perspective, namely, a literacy-oriented approach to foreign language (FL) education (New London Group, 1996; Kern, 2000, 2002, 2004; Byrnes, 2000, 2001, 2002; Maxim, 2004; Swaffar, 2004), along with Michael Halliday's (1993) premise about the three fundamental aspects of a second language learning process: learning the language, learning about the language, and learning through the language. Second, I describe the curricular design of the advanced course, “*Salsa: popular music and Afro-Latin-American cultural history*,” in terms of the selection of thematic and linguistic content and the pedagogical tools used, which include the book *La Salsa en discusión: Música popular e historia cultural* by Colombian anthropologist Alejandro Ulloa Sanmiguel (2009), one of the leading experts in the field, and its companion hypermedia *Salsabarricultura* (2014). Third, I present and analyze examples of the ethnographic linguistic landscape projects and the students' learning practices based on the texts they produced, and the perspectives on their own knowledge about the language and/of the Latino/a/x³ culture throughout the course. Finally, I discuss some implications for the curricular development of advanced courses from a sociocultural perspective, all framed within the use of linguistic landscapes (LL) as a site for language learning.

2 Background on Advanced Language Learning and Multiliteracies

2.1 Advanced Language Learning

Swaffar's (2004) definition of advanced learners as “...those whose language competencies enable them to enroll in non-sequenced, topic courses that a department designates as advanced or upper division” (p. 20) was retained for the purpose of

²I draw on Yin's (2003) case study definition as an empirical investigation of a phenomenon [the advanced Spanish course in the LL] within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence.

³I borrow Haslip-Viera's (2017, p. 42) definition of the terms “Latina/o” and “Hispanic,” which are used interchangeably in this chapter except in direct quotes of other authors' work, to refer to all persons living in the United States whose origins can be traced to Spain and the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Included in this category are all US immigrants who have come from these countries and their descendants who live in the United States, whether they are Spanish speaking or not. For an explanation about the term Latinx, see Ramirez, T. L. & Blay, Z. (Oct 17, 2017).

this article. As argued by Byrnes and Maxim (2004), such courses engage students in language use in a range of public settings and discursive genres associated with advanced capacities for accomplishing civic, political, economic, and communicative needs and for researching and creating their own language-based cultural products. They also expose students to contextualized learning that goes beyond foreign language “sentence-level comprehension and production” (Byrnes & Maxim, 2004, p. 189), by reading and discussing for the first time longer more complex texts in different genres within a literacy-oriented approach to FL pedagogy (Swaffar, 2004). In the case of the advanced-level Spanish course discussed in this chapter, the course also goes beyond the confined space of the classroom to pedagogically utilize the language and multimodal texts readily available on the streets and public places of the city—the linguistic landscape or cityscape—as the organic extension of the FL classroom.

2.2 *Multiliteracies and Advanced Language Abilities in the Linguistic Landscape*

Recognizing the inseparability of language and culture, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2006) stresses the importance of seeing language use as embedded in the diverse social activities in people’s lives around the world (p. 316). Similarly, the multiliteracies pedagogical framework introduced by the New London Group in 1996 has been expanded both theoretically and practically in language education in the last two decades (Kern, 2000, 2004; Kumagai et al., 2016). For instance, drawing on the work of the New London Group, Kern (2004) states that:

...[Foreign language] literacy, then, is more than reading and writing as skills or patterns of thinking. It is about relationships between readers, writers, texts, culture and language learning. It is about the variable cognitive and social practices of taking and making textual meaning that provide students access to new communities outside the classroom, across geographical and historical boundaries. It involves an awareness of how acts of reading, writing, and conversation *create* and *shape* meanings, not merely transfer them from one individual or group to another (p. 3).

Kalantzis and Cope (2012) further delve into the pedagogical implications of written, visual, audio, spatial, tactile, gestural, and oral meaning-making systems introduced by the multiliteracies framework of the New London Group (1996). These authors argue that such diverse forms of meaning-making need to be seen as a dynamic process of transformation by students rather than a process of reproduction, which allows students to become agents interpreting, analyzing, and creating multimodal texts in their learning processes (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). In providing students with agency in their own learning, Kalantzis, Cope, and The Learning by Design Group (2005) put forward a pedagogical framework called Learning by Design, consisting of four knowledge processes (meaning making actions) that students can bring to different learning contexts in order to understand multimodal

resources and to express their own understanding by creating with their new knowledge. The following are the four knowledge processes:

1. *Experiencing the Known* (students draw on personal and prior knowledge to learning situations) *and the New* (students' immersion in new learning situations).
2. *Conceptualizing by Naming* (students group elements into categories and define terms) *and with Theory* (students put together concepts and make generalizations).
3. *Analyzing Functionally* (students analyze the functions and purposes of information) *and Critically* (students evaluate their own and others' intentions and points of view.)
4. *Applying Appropriately* (students use knowledge in a typical situation) *and Creatively* (students make innovative uses of knowledge in a new situation).

Expanding on the multiliteracies approach to education (e.g., Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; New London Group, 1996), Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) argue for the need to acknowledge the increasing presence of cultural and linguistic diversity thoughtfully assembled in semiotic fragments of language and cultural artifacts in everyday contexts of communicative activity; as well as their importance in developing intercultural and symbolic competence along advanced or high-level foreign language proficiency.

Similarly, and within the field of Linguistic Landscapes (LL), Malinowski (2015) states that language that is visible and audible in public spaces can become pedagogical objects, "... available to the learner as input, demonstrating the contextualized pragmatics of speech acts, and provoking the learner to sociopolitical awareness and action" (p. 96. See also Cenoz and Gorter, 2008). Reflecting these expanded approaches to literacy development, Barni and Bagna (2015) emphasize that over the last two decades the field of LL has indeed developed from Landry and Bourhis' (1997) seminal study and their highly adopted initial definition of linguistic landscape, and argue that "the term 'linguistic' is now no longer just confined to verbal and written languages, but embraces the complexity of semiotic spaces as well as people as authors, actors, and users, all of which is part of LL analysis" (p. 7). That is, LL nowadays goes well beyond documenting signs and includes sounds, images, graffiti, and is increasingly taking a multimodal approach to its analysis of the public space (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). Therefore, within such development and openness of the LL field, the multiliteracies approach to language learning is becoming accepted as a relevant complementary approach "for learning from the semiotically rich [multimodal], spatially embedded texts of the LL" (Malinowski, 2015, p. 98). More importantly, these visible, audible, and multimodal cultural artifacts – which I call here *multimodal cityscapes*- that are spatially embedded (glocalized in public spaces) need to be studied ethnographically (Blommaert, 2013).

Finally, with regards to the application of the multiliteracies framework to studies in linguistic landscapes, Lozano et al. (2020) argue that while the New London Group's (1996) and the Learning by Design group's frameworks have resulted in significant theoretical and practical investigation of multiliteracies in language

education, these frameworks have to date not been applied to language learners' work in linguistic landscapes. Thus, their recent work and the work presented in this chapter may contribute to this rather new line of LL explorations.

2.3 *Advanced Language Learning in the Conceived, Perceived and Lived Spaces of the Linguistic Landscape*

Malinowski (2015) encourages language teachers and researchers to consider links between theory, methods, and pedagogy-as-practice in the linguistic landscape. In doing so, he introduces a pedagogical framework drawing on recent studies, especially Trumper-Hecht's (2010) proposal of using Lefebvre's (1991) triadic model of conceived spaces, perceived spaces and lived spaces to investigate local perceptions in multilingual places (p. 97). The following is a synthesis of Malinowski's pedagogical model.

2.3.1 Conceived Spaces

Malinowski explains that the ideologically-loaded *conceived spaces* include from the course syllabus, readings, and materials to national language policies and neighborhood development plans that reveal official and influential intentions through sign-reading and sign-making practices (Malinowski, 2015, p. 106). In the focal advanced content-based course of this chapter, which intended to study the development of the linguistic landscape of Spanish Harlem and the social practices of its people in relation to the evolution of Latin popular music in New York city, students read selected historical, anthropological and sociological texts on the topics studied. In their LL projects they also use local census data, maps, and other official documents, which, as Malinowski (2015) writes, "can be used to frame, substantiate, evaluate or critique knowledge gained from learning activities in the perceived and lived spaces of the linguistic landscape" (Ibid: p. 106).

2.3.2 Perceived Spaces

According to Malinowski (2015) most studies on linguistic landscape have focused on the *perceived spaces*, which Trumper-Hecht refers to "the 'physical' dimension of the LL, that is, the actual distribution of languages on signs that can be observed and documented by camera" (Trumper-Hecht, 2010, p. 237). While the focus of some LL studies on the perceived spaces as a mere act of counting and classifying signs has been criticized (see Jaworski & Yeung, 2010), other studies have taken a more critical reading of signs in space analyzing the meaning and intentions of such signs as "top-down" (coming from official institutions or the government) or as

“bottom-up (emerging ‘unofficially’ from the local communities) (See Ben-Rafael et al., 2010; Cenoz & Gorter, 2008). In the LL projects presented here, students carry-out several first-hand observations of Spanish Harlem by collecting and analyzing images of signs, symbols, public art, etc. as an entry point to their ethnographic investigations.

2.3.3 Lived Spaces

Malinowski (2015) describes *lived spaces* as the invisible, yet symbolically active everywhere “...subjective experience, imaginings and even desire of the inhabitants of a place” (p. 108). In this sense, he joins other authors, who have made lived spaces a major line of investigation of recent LL studies, in calling for the implementation of ethnographic methods in LL research as a way to better understand the subjective meanings made by participants in the linguistic landscape as these meanings change across time and space (see also Blommaert, 2013; Malinowski, 2009; Lou, 2010, 2016). In the LL projects in Spanish Harlem described here, students expanded their initial observations and ideas originated by their experiences in the perceived and conceived spaces through ethnographic interviews with local participants and residents in the community.

In concluding this presentation of Malinowski’s triadic pedagogical model of conceived, perceived and lived spaces and echoing Trumper-Hecht (2010), Malinowski argues that “...these disparate spaces can only be understood together, in relation to one another, if they are to be of any help [in linguistic landscape studies]” (Ibid: p. 109). Keeping this in mind, I now turn to the present the educational context and the pedagogical design of the focal course of this chapter.

3 Design and Conceptualization of the Advanced Content-Based Spanish Course ‘Salsa: Popular Music and Afrolatinoamericanaribeño⁴ Cultural Histories’

In the Spanish Department at Columbia University, the 3300 level consists of several thematically based advanced Spanish courses offered in the third year of undergraduate studies. The narrative presented in this chapter draws from several

⁴The term *Afrolatinoamericanaribeño* adopted in the title of my course was coined by the Colombian anthropologist Alejandro Ulloa in 1998 to refer to: *Afro*, for the ancestral roots brought by the blacks enslaved from their African continent: music, drums, dances, languages, polytheism, ritual practices, all as an integral part of a cultural system and a worldview different from the Christian, patriarchal and androcentric Western civilization. *Latino*, for the musical, linguistic, and religious traditions mainly from Spain, France and Portugal, incorporated (or imposed) in the New World. *American*, for being this continent where the process took place as a whole. And *Caribbean* because it was in that warm natural kitchen that is the Caribbean where all

iterations of the course, spanning from 2010 to 2019, in which more than 130 students have participated (due to its highly experiential and face-to-face learning component, it was not offered in 2020 or 2021, but will be offered again in fall 2022). The course focuses on salsa as a phenomenon of popular music and its intrinsic relationships with the Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American cultural histories, right in the middle of the socio-cultural context where salsa music emerged—New York’s El Barrio—in the second half of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s (Ulloa, 2009). This theme serves as an organizing principle for the work carried out, both inside and outside of the classroom, which consists of studying and analyzing with a historical-anthropological lens the cultural practices of the Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean diaspora that contributed to the development of this music in the multicultural complex that is ‘The Big Apple.’

In addition to reading and analyzing specialized literature on the development of Latin popular music in New York, participating in guided visits and attending live cultural performances, the course has as a fundamental component the completion of an ethnographic linguistic landscape project in El Barrio, where students carry out their own research throughout the semester (see a detailed description of the LL project below). Likewise, the course is designed as a space for students to strengthen their speaking abilities through presentations, class discussions, and interviews with native speakers, as well as their academic reading and writing in Spanish by analyzing and producing their own texts in the different genres studied, all of this within the linguistic landscapes course project.

3.1 Pedagogical Approach

Methodologically, this course draws on sociocultural perspectives on foreign language learning, which conceive L2 literacy as a process of negotiation of a multiplicity of multimodal semiotic discourses and signs that circulate in social contexts; especially those of great cultural and linguistic diversity such as large urban centers in the world today (New London Group, 1996; Kern, 2000, 2004). It also draws on the multiliteracies perspective (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, 2015) and more specifically on a literacy-based approach to advanced language learning responding to the students’ need to make use of an expanding repertoire of academic literacy practices (see Byrnes & Maxim, 2004; Kern, 2000, 2002, 2004; Swaffar, 2004; Maxim, 2004). For instance, discussing reading and writing in second and foreign language programs, Kern (2000) writes that:

[...] academic language must foster literacy, not only in terms of basic reading and writing skills, but also in terms of a broader discourse competence that involves the ability to interpret and critically evaluate a wide variety of written, oral [and multimodal] texts (p. 2).

the rhythmic mixtures and melodic flavors that preceded and led to salsa music were seasoned and slowly simmered, and later spread to New York through its immigrants (Ulloa, 2009, p. 273).

Additionally, within these sociocultural perspectives, throughout the course we take Halliday's (1980) postulate on the existence of the three fundamental and simultaneous aspects in the process of learning a language: learning the language, learning about the language, and learning through the language. That is, in this course students continue to learn advanced grammatical concepts and expand their vocabulary in Spanish while learning about popular culture and Latin American and Caribbean cultural history through this language. Students also acquire advanced concepts about the Spanish language at a discursive level. For example, they focus on how a given text is structured both at the level of the clause or phrase, and at the discursive level to achieve specific communicative goals in different social contexts by reading and analyzing narrative, expository, and argumentative genres in class. Furthermore, following Matthiessen's (2006) recommendation from Systemic Functional Linguistics that "a central goal for advanced language learners is to increase their registerial repertoire" (p. 49), we work on the detailed analysis of the macro (discourse) and micro (clause) characteristics of these texts' registers. Specifically, students are guided to pay particular attention and learn to identify how texts present information about a topic (the field), how they establish relationships between reader(s) and author(s) (the tenor), and how such texts are organized by their authors (the mode) to achieve their communicative purposes through the registers employed in such texts. Finally, throughout the semester students work on developing their academic writing in Spanish by applying their new metalinguistic knowledge (e.g., lexico-grammar, generic moves, thematic development, etc.) in producing their own texts in the different registers studied in the course.

3.2 *Materials and Text Selection*

A typical problem in the design of advanced language courses is selecting the texts to include in the course curriculum while considering the length of each text. Specialized literature on a particular subject is often presented in extended texts consisting of hundreds of pages. This is a fundamental issue if one takes into account that before the third year in our department (as in most foreign language departments in the United States) students typically work on very short readings included in their initial and intermediate level language textbooks (Lozano et al., 2020), and two or three complementary readings during the semester (e.g., short stories and essays of only a few pages long). In other words, the level of Spanish with which students arrive at these courses and their previous reading and textual analysis experiences are rather limited.

For this course, that problem was tackled by selecting relatively short texts to assign as weekly or bi-weekly readings (15–25 pages per week), mostly taken from the book *La salsa en discusión: Música popular e historia cultural* (Ulloa, 2009). The main reason for the selection of this book was the fact that its author utilizes multiple genres such as chronicles, personal narratives, song lyrics, expository and argumentative texts to present historical, anthropological, and sociological

information on the topics. Though students find the readings challenging for their academic and specialized language, they also find them very interesting and engaging, particularly for how Ulloa Sanmiguel establishes an academically rigorous, in-depth discussion with authors of other important works on different perspectives about the origin and evolution of Latin music, through a detailed review and careful analysis of them within the chapters of his book.

Additionally, as a sort of companion to this book, throughout the course we use the hypermedia *Salsabarricoltura* (Ulloa et al., 2014), which is a public interactive online portal, whose project is also lead by Ulloa Sanmiguel (for an exhaustive presentation of the hypermedia project see Ulloa et al., 2018). The hypermedia documents the history of El Barrio in relation to the development of salsa and other Afro-Latin-American popular music. It depicts musicians, composers, and other celebrities related to the salsa cultural movement from key geographical locations (New York, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Colombia, Curacao) through photographs, videos, interviews, and other texts (e.g., chronicles, essays, etc.). In a sense, the hypermedia *Salsabarricoltura* may be considered as a ‘virtual linguistic landscape’ in itself, which has a traceable sociocultural context. It portrays multimodal text, signage and landmarks in relationship with the localized social practices of the people (cf. Blommaert, 2013, p. 50). In the next section, I introduce the literacy practices students participated in throughout the course and present examples of the students’ LL projects.

4 Literacy and Language Learning Practices in El Barrio’s Multimodal Cityscape

The course’s literacy and learning practices included students’ engagement with “primary and secondary discourses” (Gee, 1998). Gee argues that primary discourses are those that we acquire through everyday interactions at home and in our local community, while secondary discourses are those learned in schools as we learn to negotiate, for example, the language of the different academic disciplines. Students engaged in the production of written personal reflections on different course activities in a course blog, in-class oral presentations and discussions based on their own selected topics, participation in whole group guided tours and individual visits to El Barrio, attendance at cultural events as well as in an academic forum with Ulloa Sanmiguel about the content of his books or with specific questions based on the students’ ethnographic LL projects in El Barrio and, finally, the completion of a multimodal research report on their LL projects.

In alignment with a literacy-oriented approach to advanced language learning, the course begins with an introduction to the main concepts of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) during the first three weeks of the semester, including definitions of genre, register (field, tenor and mode) and the presentation of the oral-written continuum for the analysis of the different discursive registers used in the different texts assigned as readings (e.g., testimonies, chronicles, personal narratives, recounts, argumentative and expository texts). The following five weeks, the

course focuses on detailed reading, analysis, oral presentations, and discussions of the main points presented in chapter five of the book *La Salsa en discusión*. This chapter provides a comprehensive historical, anthropological, and sociological exposition about the immigration process and the experiences of Latino/a/x and Caribbean immigrants to New York City and their cultural contributions to the musical development from the pre-salsa (1930–1960) to the salsa times (1960–2000).

Next, taking advantage of the fact that the course takes place a few blocks from New York's Spanish Harlem (El Barrio), we complemented the work done in class with the first two visits to this historic neighborhood in which students walk, observe, smell, hear, touch, and feel; in other words, they experienced everyday life in this Latino/a/x community. For instance, the first visit--narrated in the opening of this chapter--occurred during the second class. After this visit, students were asked to write a subjective personal recount about their first contact with this neighborhood's multimodal cityscape.

Perhaps the most intriguing of these visits was a guided tour given by Aurora Flores during the fall of 2012. Aurora is a long-time resident of El Barrio, a journalist, writer, community activist, and musician in her own band "*Zon del Barrio*." We spent over three hours walking the streets of this immigrant community, listening to historical information about music celebrities and important community members, events and anecdotes (content most of which students were already familiar with based on the in-class work) directly from a first-hand witness about the evolution of the salsa movement since the 70s; Aurora herself was an active participant in the industry at that time as the first female music correspondent for *Billboard Magazine* (A. Flores, personal communication).

Our guided walk with Aurora started at the corner of 110th Street and 5th Avenue, right where The Park Palace nightclub once stood—an important landmark in the history of Latin music and of the Puerto Rican community during the first decades of the twentieth century. Now the building houses a Christian church. As we continued our journey, Aurora told us, among many other things, about the origin of the small gardens found throughout El Barrio, which used to be dumpsters, but the local residents turned them into beautiful community gardens. Then, she made a sort of premonition when she said "*I believe that in two or three years all these things are not going to be here...*" Indeed, it caused much surprise among us when a few minutes later we experienced how the Puerto Rican community is being stripped of its history day after day through so-called "gentrification." That Saturday, October 27th, was precisely the last day of Mr. Jorge Vargas' ("Don Jorge") helping his clientele in "*Justo Botánica*"⁵ on 134 East 104th Street (see Fig. 4). The students and I witnessed first-hand how the words we had heard from Aurora minutes before became true.

⁵A botánica (less commonly known as a *hierbería* or *botica*) is a retail store that sells folk and alternative medicine, religious candles and statuary, amulets, oils, incense, perfumes, scented sprays and other products regarded as magical or thought to have special properties. These stores are common in many Latin American countries and Latino/a/x communities of the diaspora (Wikipedia.org)



Fig. 4 Old and New LL on 134 East 104th Street due to gentrification in El Barrio

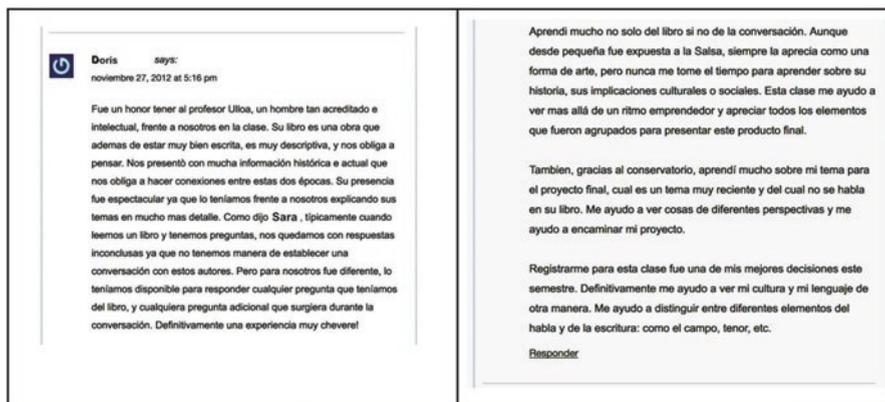


Fig. 5 Screenshot of Doris’ personal reflection about the forum in the course blog (In this chapter, students and informants’ names are pseudonyms to protect their privacy. When referring to public individuals from the community their original names are used)

That day, the emblematic *botánica* founded in 1930 by Mr. Jorge Vargas’ father was being shut down after more than eight decades serving the local Latino/a/x community (a Mexican restaurant and a barber shop also were closed in the same building). We witnessed how ‘old LL disappears’ (Shohamy et al., 2010). When asked why he was moving, Don Jorge responded that he could not keep up with the continuous increases in the rent, due to the gentrification process that this historic neighborhood is increasingly facing, as one of “New York’s Next Hot Neighborhoods” (The New York Times, 2016). Resigned to his apparent fate imposed by the pressures of capitalism in the city, Don Jorge ended his response by adding: “*That’s just the way it is ...*” After the guided tour with Aurora Flores, students once again wrote their personal reflections about it on the course blog (Fig. 5).

Towards the end of the semester, we had an in-class academic forum with Ulloa Sanmiguel, who had come to New York to conduct interviews for the Hypermedia

Salsabarricoltura. Since students had already done some fieldwork in El Barrio, contrasting their own perception with what is presented in his book and the Hypermedia, they had the opportunity to write questions that were shared with the author before the in-class forum. Students asked for clarifications on some of the content from the readings, or about their topics for further focusing their ethnographic LL projects. After the forum, they shared their reflections about it in the course blog. The positive outcome of the in-class forum as a pedagogical activity for advanced language learning is summarized in the following vignette taken from one of the students' reflections about it written in the course blog (Fig. 5 and its translation below).

Doris, a second-generation Latina student, began her reflection talking about the quality and the academic demands of Ulloa Sanmiguel's book. She also described the forum as a "'spectacular' experience, because very rarely in a course you have a way to establish a conversation with the authors [of the texts they read in class]" (Doris, reflection in the blog, November 27, 2012). It is worth noticing how Doris also reflects on the content of the course in relation to her own Latina identity and culture, and on learning about her own language, when she says:

Although from a young age I was exposed to salsa music, I always appreciated it as an art form, but I never took the time to learn about its history, its cultural or social implications. [...] Enrolling in this class was one of my best decisions this semester. It definitely helped me [see] my culture and my language in another way (Doris, November 27 of 2012 (Author's translation)).

However, the discussion in the forum with Ulloa Sanmiguel transcended our face-to-face oral interaction and extended to the written mode of communication through the course blog. After reading the students' reflections in it, the same author commented extensively on what the in-class forum meant to him:

I also learned a lot talking with you. Your smart questions required me to think, read, re-read, write and search other sources of information to organize the answers they deserved. (...) I am happy to have contributed modestly to your education (...) and for having presented you with a new horizon on some of the culture, which affirms us as citizens of the world. (Ulloa Sanmiguel's comment on course blog, December 15, 2012 – Author's translation).

Several other students also mentioned that meeting and having a direct dialogue with the author of the main bibliographical references in our course was the best way to end the semester. Indeed, they benefited from participating in these advanced language literacy practices. Next, I present a detailed description of the course's LL project.

4.1 The Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Project in El Barrio

The question driving the academic literacy practices around the ethnographic linguistic landscape project in *El Barrio* is: How could the city of New York 'as a text' (Dagenais et al., 2009, p. 255) be an integral part of this advanced language course?

With that question in mind, this ethnographic LL project was initially conceived following Ulloa Sanmiguel's (2009) anthropological view when he writes that salsa music, as any phenomenon of human creation, is linked to a time (the time period and sociocultural context) and to the concrete and experiential space where it was born. That physical space is *El Barrio*, including the South Bronx and the "Loisaida", (lower East side of Manhattan), with:

its streets, corners, meeting points at the subway entrances and exits, theaters, social clubs, and dance halls where both Latino immigrants and US-born Latinos converged and where their everyday traces and stories of social experience crossed. A practiced space converted into place by those who inhabited it and represented it with their traits and crafts (Ulloa, 2009, pp. 152–53, my translation).

Therefore, and as a sort of response to Malinowski's (2015) call for more "informed, intentional and direct pedagogical intervention for learning in the LL" (p. 99), through this ethnographic LL project students were expected to: (1) explore New York's El Barrio of today experiencing it as a 'conceived, perceived and a lived spaced' by walking through its streets, visiting places of interest and interacting with its people in their daily lives as spatiotemporal referents to Latin popular music and other Latino/a/x cultural practices; (2) continue advancing their linguistic and cultural competence (e.g., academic reading and writing, oral practice in and outside of the classroom), through the investigation and analysis of specific topics that they selected based on the students' different areas of study and their own personal interests. In order to achieve these two goals, the following specific tasks and requirements were established for the ethnographic LL project:

- Fieldwork and data collection observing, interacting with local residents, and documenting how daily life is in El Barrio today. Students made at least six visits to this neighborhood, wrote field notes, made audio or video recordings when possible, and took pictures of the LL.
- Reading and writing tasks in the different genres studied in class as scaffolded work for a final multimodal report of their ethnographic LL projects. These genres included, first, a subjective and detailed personal recount about El Barrio and its people done after the first group visit. Second, an objective expository description of El Barrio, changing the subjective register of the first description and including factual, historical, and demographic information supported with reputable and verifiable sources. Third, a preliminary research report in which students combined and expanded on the experiences and information from their first two writing tasks. For this task students were asked to combine narrative, expository, and argumentative registers in order to present their data, as well as their ongoing analysis and working interpretations of the 'conceived, perceived and lived space' of Spanish Harlem in relation to their specific ethnographic LL topics. It is important to mention that students received written feedback on each of these three writing tasks and the sum of their corrected versions became a major part of a multimodal final report of their ethnographic LL project.
- An oral academic presentation of the results of their ethnographic LL inquiry, using data samples and vignettes to explain what patterns they found in it and

presenting their interpretation of them. Students also discussed what they learned from *El Barrio* today, in relation to the content of the course.

- A final multimodal research report of their ethnographic LL project on a course wiki page. For this report students could use any of their academic writing work throughout the course, including their reflections on the blog, extracts of field notes, along with multimodal materials collected in their field work (photographs, videos, songs, online texts, etc.). Here they were asked to use their voice as ‘language-learners-as-ethnographers,’ (Malinowski, 2015), not only to inform the data and observed facts and behaviors, but also to interpret and even discuss with existing literature their arguments and findings on their LL topic.

4.2 The Wiki Project Multimodal Research Report

Drawing on qualitative methods, I use content analysis of the students’ final multimodal research report of their ethnographic LL projects. I analyze and describe their project reports in connection with students’ literacy and language learning practices in the course presenting data samples from multiple sources in the analysis (e.g., vignettes from students’ texts and ethnographic interviews, LL images, screenshots of their projects, etc.).

Building on the multiple pedagogical activities and tasks throughout the semester, and as explained in Sect. 4.1 above, students put together a wiki page with a final multimodal research report of their ethnographic LL project. Students chose their own topics, which included, for example, *Santería and salsa in El Barrio*; *The role of women in the male-dominated world of Salsa music*; *The coexistence and tensions of different ethnic groups in El Barrio*; *The cultural symbols in public art of El Barrio*; *Salsa music presence in other forms of popular culture today*, among others.

5 Analysis of Students’ Learning in the LL of New York’s El Barrio

In the interest of space, I present two examples of students’ LL projects that were selected because they are representative of the type of students’ advanced learning experiences in the LL of New York’s El Barrio in my advanced-level Spanish course. Namely, the projects draw on previous and developing students’ linguistic abilities beyond the classroom through research, critical reading and text analysis, academic writing, oral practice with native speakers and interviews, and even translation from English into Spanish of some of the interview data.

5.1 Example 1: ‘ARTE EN EL BARRIO: Símbolos Culturales’ (Art in El Barrio: Cultural Symbols)

Jian and Christopher’s (pseudonyms) LL project focused on uncovering some of the localized meanings of public art in El Barrio. Their multimodal report begins with a colorful title in capitals *ARTE EN EL BARRIO* (Art in El Barrio) and the subtitle “*Símbolos Culturales*” (*Cultural Symbols*) in orange, followed by a clear introduction of the topic summarizing what they learned, and explaining how they later decided to approach their ethnographic project by focusing on one specific artist: Manny Vega.

Under the first heading following the introduction, they present the types of art that can be found in the LL of El Barrio, broadly stating that it contains cultural symbols and messages about politics, music, and all sorts of aspects of past and present life in this neighborhood. They wrote a simile between art and salsa music of the 70s: “*El arte, como la música y la salsa de los 1970s es una forma de expresar y sincronizar nuestras vidas con un desahogo creativo*” [Art, like salsa music of 1970s is a way to express oneself and create unity through a creative solace (students’ LL project wiki page. Author’s translation).

Next, Jian and Christopher’s multimodal LL project report displays samples of public art including contrasting images of large murals around this neighborhood, each with a brief description and caption. The image on Fig. 6 below shows the ‘Spirit of East Harlem’ mural, one of the most famous murals in El Barrio.



Fig. 6 The Spirit of Harlem mural (1973)

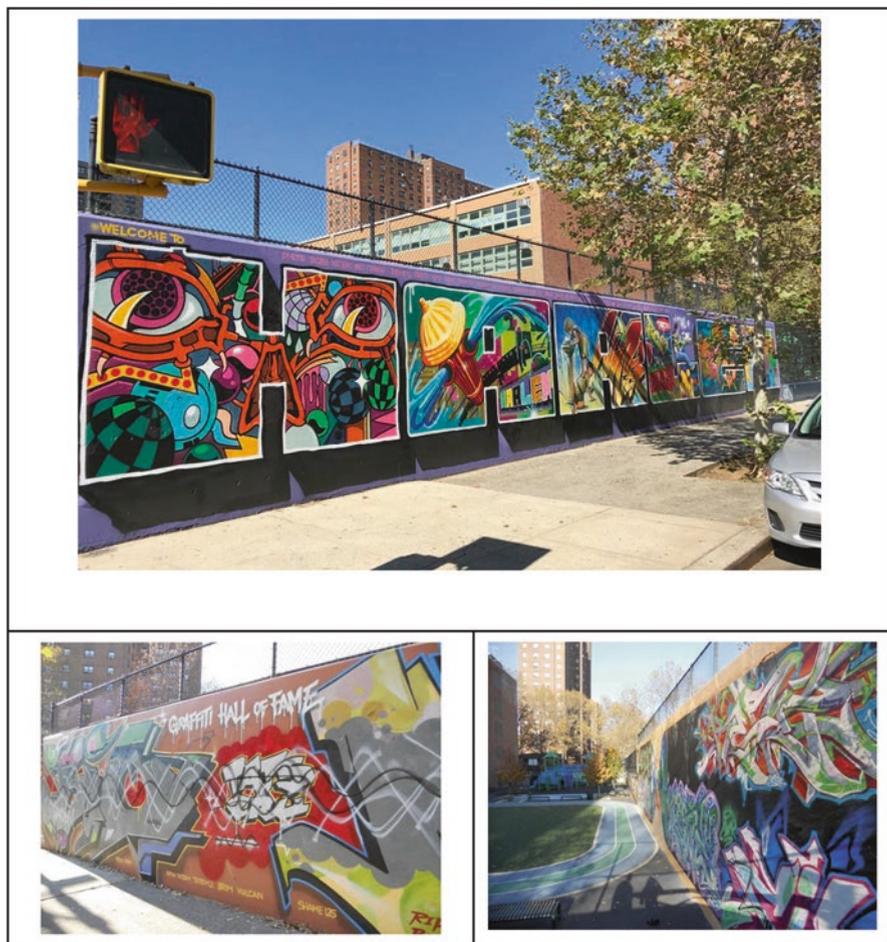


Fig. 7 Images of the inside and the outside wall of the Graffiti Hall of Fame

The ‘Spirit of East Harlem’ mural covers a four-story apartment building on Lexington Avenue and 104th Street. Artist Hank Prussing alongside his then apprentice Manny Vega worked for 5 years on this project starting in 1973 and it became the first public mural in the neighborhood (El Museo).

The next three images displayed on Fig. 7 above captured the inside and outside concrete walls of The Graffiti Hall of Fame⁶ located on the corner of 106th street and Park Avenue.

⁶The Graffiti Hall of Fame was established by Harlem community leader Ray “Sting Ray” Rodriguez as a place where graffiti artists could develop their craft in a safe space. Since its origin, the concrete walls of the Jackie Robinson Educational Complex’s school yard have attracted some of the best street artists in the world for almost 40 years (Afinelyne, 2019)

Next, a second heading with bright green font reads “El Mural de Pedro Pietri.” Here, Jian and Christopher explain how their LL project was sparked during the course’s first group visit to El Barrio during the second class meeting in early September 2012. Using most of Jian’s subjective personal recount written after that visit (see LL project tasks described in Sect. 4.1), they narrate one of the experiences from the first group visit, when we stopped in front of Pedro Pietri’s mural by artist James de la Vega, located across the street from the Spirit of Harlem mural, and I handed out a copy of ‘*Puerto Rican Obituary*’ (2004), one of Pietri’s most influential poems about the Puerto Rican immigrant struggle in New York City, and asked for a volunteer to read it aloud.

Written in a poetic style, the students’ text in their multimodal report combines elements of the students’ expository writing by adding key biographical information about Pietri. Interestingly, it also establishes a direct connection between the image of the mural and the words of the poem becoming the voice of El Barrio, a place whose surface does not reveal its secrets. It eloquently states how public art tells us the history of El Barrio: “*El arte en que las pinceladas imperfectas y un poco marchitas nos cuentan de las sombras dolorosas, y las vidas del pasado del Barrio. Nos cuenta su historia*” (The art in which the imperfect and slightly withered brushstrokes tell us of the painful shadows, and of the past lives of El Barrio. Art tells us its history). Then, exemplifying how LL in the form of public art refers to political and cultural symbols in El Barrio, images of murals of Pedro Pietri and famous ‘Queen of salsa music’ Celia Cruz are shown in their LL project report (see Fig. 8).

After carefully presenting the ‘perceived space’ documented through their ethnographic immersion in the field, Jian and Christopher became intrigued by the figures of vibrant colors on the corners and under the windows of several buildings in the area, particularly by what looked like the artist Manny Vega’s signature. This



Fig. 8 Images of Pedro Pietri and Celia Cruz Murals by James de la Vega

curiosity expanded Jian and Christopher's LL project to investigate beyond the 'conceived and perceived spaces' to the 'lived space' of El Barrio's local actors to encompass more specific ethnographic research questions: Who is this artist behind the most vibrant murals and mosaics in El Barrio? What are the cultural symbols and their significance in his artwork?

Consequently, Jian and Christopher contacted Manny Vega via e-mail and on the morning of December 3, 2012, the doors of Vega's artistic world opened for them. As requested by the artist, the students brought him a bag of donuts in exchange for an interview. Notable is the fact that because Vega requested that the interview be conducted in English, Jian and Christopher's advanced literacy practices for their LL project required them to translate from English into Spanish the main points of the interview, which they quote in the forms of vignettes in their final report. The rest of their LL project's multimodal report focused on their unique experience with the artist.

Jian and Christopher included several images of the 'perceived space' including Vega's public art visible around El Barrio, as well as summaries of what they learnt in dialogue with this important actor in the 'lived space' of the linguistic landscape (Fig. 9). They also embedded segments of the original recorded interview in English as evidence of their ethnographic work. For example, they found out about how Vega started as an artist and how he developed from a storyteller through art to becoming a cultural referent of this community. Furthermore, Jian and Christopher's ethnographic questions and their pristine interest in Vega's work motivated the artist



Fig. 9 Jian and Christopher's LL project displaying Artist Manny Vega's work

to drive them from his studio to one of the corners of El Barrio for him to walk them through the imagery of one of his mosaics. For instance, the artist explained the meaning of the reclining blue Buddha whose legs are intersected by the Nigerian deity Elegba as a representation of how people make their decisions in the intersections of life based on chance.

This mosaic also reminds Vega of his childhood experiences growing up in El Barrio where even traditional Catholic people used to rub for luck the belly of their Buddha's figures at home (Fig. 10). While in front of Rivera's actual mosaic, he gave Jian and Christopher a mini-lesson about how religious syncretism developed as a result of colonization and slavery in the Americas and the Caribbean. Most importantly, he spoke about how his murals relate to the people as 'the spirits and temples of the community,' but syncretize beyond religion with life today in New York, by having Elegba ride a skateboard decorated with games of chance (e.g., dominoes), as a new form of cultural syncretism ('*Los murales son un recordatorio: Nos hicimos perezosos para ir a la iglesia, entonces le digo a la gente, sea la iglesia. Sea el templo.*' – Extracted from a vignette in students' report).

Indeed, it is through these rich ethnographic interactions with Manny Vega, as a "conceived space" actor of the LL, that Jian and Christopher transcended the limits of the 'perceived' space of noticing vibrant colored figures on the walls at the beginning of their project and moved to a more grounded understanding of the complex and purposeful references to different belief systems and cultural artifacts, and their localized meaning in the everyday life of El Barrio—that is, the 'lived space'. They conclude their LL project by stating: "*Art in El Barrio transcends its time, culture, voices and history. (...) it contains the secrets, stories, and the spirit of El Barrio from yesterday and today.*"



Fig. 10 Manny Vega's mosaic of the reclining blue Buddha and Elegba in El Barrio

5.2 Example 2: ‘LA COEXISTENCIA DE LOS PUERTORRIQUEÑOS Y LOS MEXICANOS EN EL BARRIO’ (the Coexistence of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in El Barrio)

The second example of students’ ethnographic LL work focused on two different Spanish speaking ethnic groups in El Barrio: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Through the ‘perceived’ space of its linguistic landscape, Doris and Lucy sought to uncover these groups’ sensed rivalry that originated with the increased presence of Mexican immigrants in this community, mentioned by El Barrio’s historian Aurora Flores during a class tour. They also wanted to challenge the general historical notion of El Barrio as a rather homogenous Puerto Rican neighborhood presented in most of the literature read in our course, as well as its stereotypical view portrayed in the media as poor and marginalized.

They began their LL project report by quoting one of their Puerto Ricans interviewees, Henry Calderón, who stated that “*El Barrio is a neighborhood of change, of immigrants. It has always been like that,*” (author’s translation), then they continued with a condensed introduction of their general findings along with contrasting pictures of Puerto Rican and Mexican stores and activities in the linguistic landscape (Fig. 11).

Doris and Lucy developed a set of questions based on their multiple visits to the site, starting from the guided tour with Aurora Flores. Next, to access the “lived space,” they conducted a series of ten ethnographic interviews with residents of El



Fig. 11 Doris and Lucy’s LL project with Mexican and Puerto Rican LL in El Barrio

Barrio. Then, they critically compared and analyzed each of their informants' impressions and attitudes in relation to official demographic data (the 'conceived' space) and the 'perceived' space that they found during their field work (e.g., information about educational opportunities; contrasting and unifying signs and murals, etc.). In a sense, and without knowing about it, their small LL project resembles Trumper-Hecht's (2010) study in Israel. In their LL multimodal report Doris and Lucy included a list of the salient themes of each interviewee's responses below the original sound recordings of their interviews in Spanish. Next, Doris and Lucy displayed summaries of what they learned from the conceived space of institutional data about El Barrio. They divided their findings into two subcategories: political power, and education and employment. Regarding political power, they found that based on the Hispanic Pew Center data (the 'conceived' space), the majority of Mexicans living in El Barrio are undocumented residents and therefore do not have voting rights, as opposed to Puerto Ricans, who have been citizens since 1917. In terms of education, they found that more than 60% of Mexicans over 25 years of age do not have a high school diploma, which limits their employment opportunities to working in the service sector (e.g., construction, restaurants, cleaning and maintenance).

With a broader understanding of the 'conceived' space in the LL, then Doris and Lucy conducted a comparative analysis of the impressions and attitudes of Mexicans towards Puerto Ricans and vice versa within the 'lived' space of El Barrio, as expressed in their ethnographic interviews with local residents. They concluded that (even though their small study is not generalizable) the initial animosity of ten or fifteen years ago has toned down and both ethnic groups have been learning to coexist together. Most of the interviewed residents agreed on the fact that as immigrants they not only share the same language but also have the same basic needs: to live, work and support their families with an overall sense of Hispanic unity.

Finally, after summarizing their findings, Doris and Lucy compellingly illustrated their conclusion around a developing sense of coexistence among Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in El Barrio by displaying an image of the Soldaderas mural (2011), by Puerto Rican artist Yasmin Hernandez, located inside "Tin" Flores Community Garden on Lexington Avenue and East 104 street (Fig. 12).

Moreover, Doris and Lucy restated their findings in the caption of the mural's image: "*Mural of two great artists, Mexican Frida Kahlo and Puerto Rican Julia de Burgos holding hands, a great representation of two blending cultures coexisting together.*" (Student's LL project report, author's translation).

6 Discussion

The ethnographic projects presented in this chapter align with Malinowski's (2015) proposed pedagogical approach to literacy and language learning in the linguistic landscape. Students moved back-and-forth from the 'conceived' to the 'perceived' and the 'lived' spaces of local actors and their everyday practices, in order to answer



Mural de dos grandes artistas, Frida Kahlo y Julia de Burgos, una gran representación de dos culturas mezclándose y conviviendo juntas, agarradas de la mano. SOLDADERAS. Mural (2011) por artista Yasmin Hernandez, en el Jardín Modesto "Tin" Flores de Hope Community., Lexington Avenue en la calle E. 104.

Fig. 12 Mural of Frida Kahlo and Julia de Burgos holding hands

their ethnographic research questions and advance their understanding of the social constructedness of language and culture in local spaces in and through the linguistic landscape. As Blommaert (2013) writes:

Signs lead us to practices, and practices lead us to people: individuals and groups who live in a given area in a particular configuration, with a particular degree of regulation and order, and with different forms of social and cultural organization in relation to each other. This sequence, signs, practice, people, is the true analytic potential of linguistic landscaping (p. 50).

With regards to promoting students' advanced language abilities, the analysis of students' ethnographic LL projects on the everyday life of El Barrio show how they fundamentally supported their advanced language literacy practices in this Spanish course. The projects incorporated previous and developing students' linguistic abilities inside and outside the classroom (critical reading, text analysis, academic writing, oral practice, translation from English into Spanish, etc.). Moreover, when evaluating these LL projects, the focus was on paying attention to the deployment of an increased repertoire of technical vocabulary and sophisticated grammar usage reflective of their new understanding of the discursive features of different academic genres in the students' written production. As Kern (2000) suggests, foreign language literacy must go beyond basic reading and writing skills towards fostering broader discourse competences, involving the ability to critically evaluate a wide range of oral, written and multimodal texts. Students in this course engaged in critical readings and discussions of technical and specialized texts in different discursive genres, (e.g. testimonies, chronicles, personal narratives, recounts, argumentative and expository texts). At the same time, they learned how to use the concept of

register when producing their own texts in some of those genres: first, a subjective personal recount about El Barrio; second, an objective expository description of the same neighborhood, in which students changed the tenor and mode of their subjective personal recount adding more technical language with factual information; and third, an expository and argumentative text for their final LL report. In this way students increased their registerial repertoire which is considered a central goal for advanced language learners (Matthiessen, 2006).

Furthermore, throughout this course students were able to develop their speaking abilities through daily-class discussions, oral presentations of specialized topics, and participation in real communicative situations outside the classroom when interacting with and interviewing community members (most of whom are native Spanish speakers) for their ethnographic LL projects. As expressed by students in the anonymous end-of-semester course evaluations: *“We [students] had to use Spanish outside the classroom for the projects and it was a very good experience “and in addition“ [...] it consolidated everything we learned in the semester.”* Another student wrote *“[...] the LL project was excellent because we could choose the things we wanted to see and analyze. And with El Barrio so close [to our university], in conjunction with the theme of the course, there is no more suitable project for the course.”* Remarkably, Jian and Christopher’s advanced literacy practices required them to translate from English into Spanish the interview with a local artist who requested to be interviewed in English. They translated and quoted some of the artist’s responses in their multimodal LL report. Indeed, all students were able to successfully condense the content of their previous written assignments and combine them with diverse elements collected in the fieldwork (e.g., texts, images, sound recordings) into their final multimodal research report of their ethnographic linguistic landscape project.

7 Conclusion

This chapter presented a case study of the design and implementation of an advanced content-based Spanish course that used the linguistic landscape as a site for introducing and exemplifying concrete literacy and language learning activities. It demonstrated the outcomes of such practices, through the analysis and discussion of the actual texts and products created by the students as well as their own perspectives about their language and culture learning experiences.

As shown in this chapter, a pedagogically sound implementation of the LL into the course as proposed by Malinowski’s model does entail turning the city into the organic extension of the classroom by inhabiting its spaces, participating in its events, and including the voices of its actors. These types of academic experiences contributed to creating a unique learning environment for both the students and the instructor. Additionally, through the ethnographic LL projects students had opportunities to critically engage with all sorts of texts (written, oral, visual, audio-visual). As Kern (2004) writes, such texts “... give students the chance to make connections

between grammar, discourse, and meaning, between language and content, between language and culture, and between another culture and their own” (p. 13). Furthermore, the examples of LL projects discussed in this case study also demonstrated the critical role of foreign language students’ agency in making sense of and understanding of LL manifestations in large urban centers. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) argue that students’ agency needs to be recognized in the quest for “a more productive, relevant, innovative, creative and even perhaps emancipatory, pedagogy” (p. 175).

In sum, these ethnographic LL projects in New York’s El Barrio may be considered concrete examples of one application of Malinowski’s (2015) pedagogical approach using the model of perceived, conceived, and lived spaces for designing learning tasks in the linguistic landscape. As Malinowski (2015) further concluded:

as the subjective experience, imaginings, and even desire of the inhabitants of a place, [“conceived, perceived” and] ‘lived space’ may also be one way to characterize the object of what has become a major line of inquiry in linguistic landscape studies of late (p. 108).

Indeed, the case study presented in this chapter might be seen as one example of applied ‘pedagogy-as-practice’ (Malinowski, *ibid.*, p. 109) in the development of advanced literacy and language learning in the linguistic landscape of the multi-modal cityscape.

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