
Visual representations of multilingualism at border areas: meaningful examples of non-exclusive identities from San Diego/Tijuana and Gorizia/Nova Gorica

Giustina Selvelli*¹

¹University of Nova Gorica – Slovénie

Résumé

In my presentation, I will focus on the complex semiotics of border areas by taking into account the so-called "linguistic landscapes" of two particular territories representative of the so-called North/South and West/East divide: the US/Mexico border, with the cities of San Diego and Tijuana, and the Italian/Slovene one, with the cities of Gorizia and Nova Gorica.

The aim is to illustrate the variety of representational dynamics and semiotic strategies manifest in the visual use of different languages in these settings characterized by high levels of mobility, diversity and interconnectedness, underlining the potential role of public writing in giving voice to a more inclusive narrative on these places' identity.

For this purpose, I will concentrate on the one hand on the relevance of official policies of multilingual signage in the public sphere (such as street signs, inscriptions on public buildings) and their limits, while on the other I will highlight the different forms of agency embedded in the initiatives of ethnic minorities and migrant communities to include their languages in spontaneous forms of street art, graffiti, and others.

Finally, I will point out that only through a combination of both forms of public writing, official and spontaneous ones, a non-exclusivist ground of resistance to the assimilation dynamics of the nation state can be affirmed.

In will base my observations on a sociolinguistic approach that incorporates "ecological" and "relational" principles, which studies languages in their environment conceived not only as the material setting, but also as the social, ideological, cultural contextual factors that enable or disable forms of multilingualism.

The data present have been gathered during multiple on-site visits and (auto)ethnographic experiences in both areas in the course of the last 30 years.

Mots-Clés: Semiotics of borders, Multilingualism, Public Writing, US/Mexican Border, Italian/Slovenian Border

*Intervenant