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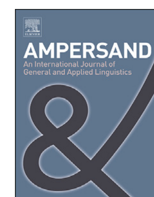

The changing face of dixie: Spanish in the linguistic landscape of an emergent immigrant community in the New South

Rebecca Roeder*, Bryan C. Walden

Department of English, Fretwell 275, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223, USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- The functional distribution of Spanish and English on signage in a nascent Latino area of a Southern U.S. city is examined.
- A frame analytic approach is used to analyze the civic, commercial, and community orientations evident in the signage.
- Quantitative distributional results ground the qualitative findings.
- Findings reflect cultural heterogeneity and translocal orientation.

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1. Introduction

This study presents synchronic observations about the functional distribution of Spanish and English in the *linguistic landscape* (LL) of an emergent Latino-oriented commercial node in the urban South, with the goal of highlighting the practical and indexical roles of Spanish on this signage within a local and national context of English hegemony despite cultural pluralism. In describing the term *linguistic landscape*, Landry and Bourhis (1997:25) state "The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration". Recent research has expanded the scope of publicly visible writing to include "written texts on movable objects" [44] such as newspapers, t-shirts, books, and even tattoos [41], as well as detritus such as garbage [7,27]. The rapid growth of this field during the 21st century has informed research on a wide range of topics including second language acquisition (e.g., [34]), sociology (e.g., [3,4]), ethnography of communication (e.g., [24,49,50]), language attitudes (e.g., [14]), language policy (e.g., [35]), language ecology (e.g., [25,26]), and multilingual rhetoric within the context of a culture of tourism (e.g., [8,23,31]). Theoretical questions such as the interwoven topics of mobility, complexity and unpredictability—as captured under the label *super-diversity* by scholars such as [54] and [6,7]—have been addressed in a range of international contexts (e.g., [48]). Also of note is [21] which, although focused primarily on minority languages in Europe, is relevant to the current study because Spanish functions in many ways as a minority language in the United States. Research on the impact of immigration on the LL of new immigrant neighborhoods in the United States has received little attention thus far, however.

Previous LL research on multilingual communities in the United States has largely focused on well-established minority neighborhoods.[1] This work includes investigations of public displays of language in Chinatown in Washington, D.C. [31,32]; perceptual dialectology research on Anglo and Hispanic accents in English as correlated with perceived LL in Santa Ynez, California, near Los Angeles [14]; and several studies that focus on Spanish in the LL of long-standing Hispanic neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. [55], Los Angeles [9,11], Los Angeles and Miami-Dade County [15–17], San Antonio [26], and the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago [33]. In contrast with this previous work, the current study takes as its focus three strip malls in a relatively new immigrant neighborhood in Charlotte, North Carolina, a city that has experienced a recent rate of growth in its Hispanic population that is among the most rapid in the United States. U.S. census data [52,53] reported that individuals of Spanish Origin (categorized as Mexican, Puerto Rican,

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: rroeder@uncc.edu (R. Roeder), cwalden962@gmail.com (B.C. Walden).

[1] With respect to other LL research on emergent Latino neighborhoods in the United States, [39] provides a critical analysis of media exaggeration in a neighborhood of Pittsburgh with a very small but growing Latino population.

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Cuban, and Other Spanish) comprised less than 1% of the population in Charlotte-Gastonia in 1980, whereas by 2010 this number was approaching the national average of 16%. This work adds a sociolinguistic perspective to the broader urban landscape observations made by the architect and urban designer José [18] about ways in which the Latino presence in Charlotte is both newly visible (to locals not used to a Latino presence) and still largely invisible (in comparison to well-established Hispanic neighborhoods in cities such as Los Angeles). In addition, several aspects of this developing LL—its decontextualized, non-local quality, as well as the commonalities it shares with other new immigrant areas as described by [6]—allow us to situate our observations in a larger context of new multilingual spaces in the U.S. and across the world.

In his analysis of "emergent sites of Latino urbanity in Charlotte" [18], Gámez documents the development of new spaces in the city that are "… openings in the urban fabric for new social realms to be enacted and for new hybridized forms of American urbanism to take shape …" (276) and "… nodes in an emergent urban landscape of contestation, resistance, and dialog that extend the spaces from which migrants travel into new settings" (277). He notes that public signage is one important way in which physical objects anchor perceptual space in the forging of new urban environments.

Gámez's analysis reflects the perspective that in new immigrant communities, new identities emerge from but are not defined by a diasporic blend of past and present. This concept of the hybrid and transnational yet original nature of new immigrant communities corresponds to the geo-social concept of the *third space* as interpreted by the cultural theorist Homi [5] in reference to the experiences of colonized and/or migratory populations in India and elsewhere. For Bhabha, the third space is the contrast with other cultures through which one's own culture is defined. He writes, "… it is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture," (1994:38). The current study's observations shed light on the linguistic resources used by one nascent Latino community that is in the process of carving its presence visually into the Charlotte LL.

2. Conceptual frames

We adopt the model of conceptual frames of discourse and indexicality [19] as a useful metric for categorizing the layers of symbolic and functional information that a given sign encodes. Frame analysis was developed by Goffman as a discourse analysis method geared towards understanding interaction in speech communication but is also used in the social sciences as a way to understand how individuals, groups, and societies organize, perceive, and communicate more generally. A frame is a schema of interpretation or a conceptual reference point that influences and shapes thought and interpretation. Several previous LL studies have taken a frame analytic approach (e.g., [12,13,33]). We follow [43] adaptation of the analytical model proposed by [27] and focus on the following three frames, each of which is discussed further in the results section: the civic frame; the commercial frame; and the community frame, which is sub-divided into Nationalist and Latino affiliations. Following this previous work, the focus of interpretation is less grounded in immediate geography than in conceptual and perceptual space. Therefore, we consider each sign based on the proposed frames rather than comparing individual malls or store types. The frames are not intended to be a comprehensive set of categories through which the signs in the corpus might reference meaning. Rather, they facilitate our discussion of visibility in public spaces by describing socio-cultural contexts encoded in the language as it is used on the signage.

In their innovative research on the LL of Pilsen, a long-established, well demarcated, and vibrant Hispanic (largely Mexican) neighborhood in the heart of Chicago, [33] propose four frames (migrant, familial, established, alternative) by which to measure what they refer to as *authentication*. Due to differences in demographics and location, as well as the relatively short history and fragmented distribution of Charlotte's Latino population, several of the frames of authentication they propose do not yet apply to the area targeted for the current research or are not relevant for other reasons. The *migrant* and *familial* frames (which index reference to a new migrant population and nostalgia for an authentic Mexican heritage, respectively) could be applied to our dataset, although the percentage of the population that is Mexican is higher in Pilsen than in the demographic of the current study and so this frame is not as homogenous in Charlotte as they describe in Pilsen. However, these frames could not then be contrasted with the *established* and *alternative* frames. The established frame indexes signs that offer services to Mexican-born U.S. citizens and the institutions and services that represent being an authentic and established member of the Pilsen neighborhood. As will be discussed in more detail below, most residents of the area under investigation in the current study are relatively new to Charlotte, many are not U.S citizens, and the neighborhood itself is not well-established. Finally, the alternative frame comprises signs that cater to a young and cool hipster identity who frequent social spaces such as coffee shops and art galleries. Much of the signage that falls into this category is in English but can be categorized as existing in the LL of Pilsen because of its geographical location. No such spaces are apparent in or near the strip malls examined in the current study, the area is hard to get to without a car, and it cannot be said to be a cohesive neighborhood in the sense allowed for by Chicago's urban landscape and popular perceptions. Chicago is a city of neighborhoods, and Pilsen in particular has existed as such for over forty years and is easily accessible from downtown Chicago by both subway and bus.

In contrast, Charlotte's migrant population is still in the process of claiming and repurposing older urban commercial spaces in a somewhat scattered fashion [18], especially in the part of the city targeted for the present study. Therefore, instead of shades of authenticity and degrees of permanence, we focus on the nuanced ways in which the Latino population in this area is becoming visible. [45] notes that a complete analysis of a sign must include consideration of "the context in which the reading of the text will take place", and the civic, commercial, and community frames outlined here allow for the description of emergent multilingualism and identity expression in a dominant cultural context of hegemonic monolingualism, "an ideology that legitimates only texts that conform to the norms of a single (usually named and standardised) language" [45].

The reasoning behind the creation of each sign is beyond the scope of the current research, as are the perceptions of individuals who interact with this LL on a regular basis. The proposed frames operationalize classification of the signs according to observable objective measures such as government policy (civic frame), location and practical function (commercial frame) and reference to country of origin (community frame) and are thus not dependent on understanding the logic behind the choice of language.

3. Cultural and demographic context

North Carolina is one of the eleven states that comprised the pre-Civil War Confederacy in the American South and which are still commonly referred to as the South or Dixie. As observed in perceptual dialectology work by [42], the South remains the most salient region in the country for many Americans. This region has a unique cultural and historic heritage and continues to be unified politically on the national level, with a few specific exceptions. The

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