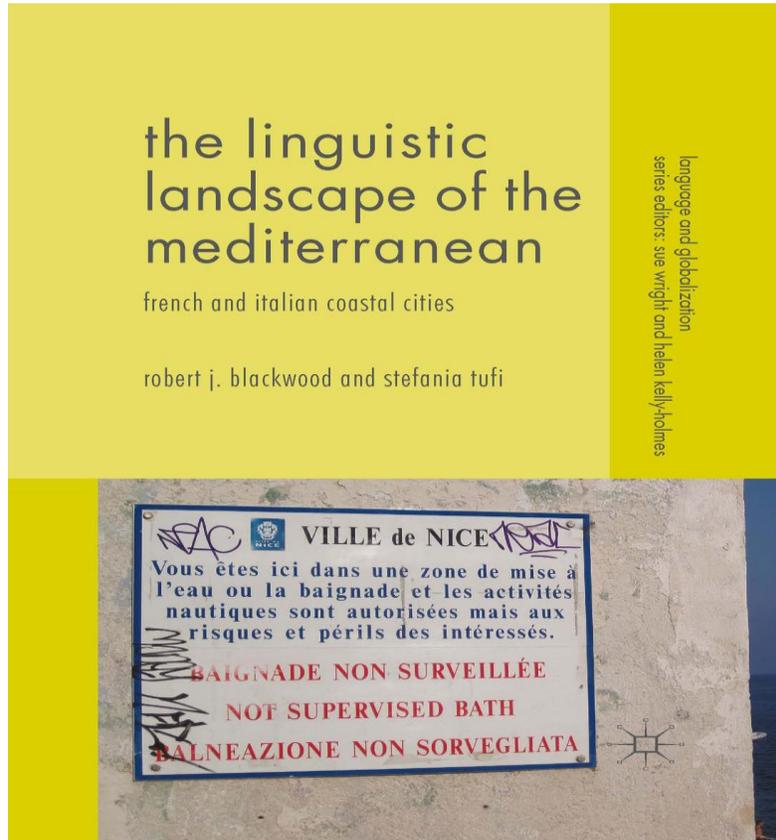


## Book Review

### The Linguistic Landscape of the Mediterranean French and Italian Coastal Cities



**Authors:** Robert J. Blackwood and Stefania Tufi

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**Reviewer:** Mohammad Abdullah Al Matarneh

The manuscript entitled 'The Linguistic Landscape of the Mediterranean: French and Italian Coastal Cities' authored by Robert J. Blackwood and Stefania Tufi (2015) has covered the linguistic landscape of a significant geographical space, the LL of French and Italian Mediterranean cities, characterized by 'conflicting but fluid discourses of tradition and modernity, centrality and peripherality, inclusion and exclusion, and linguistic fixity and non-normativity' (p. 2), claiming that commercial signs were used in the Roman times oftener in images rather than in

written formats due to the high levels of illiteracy among merchants . This book presents the languages prevalent in these linguistic landscapes (e.g. Italian, French, Latin, and English), but local varieties were uncommon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The book offers historical and sociolinguistic backgrounds to the survey cities, which significantly contributes to the contextualisation of the data presented and the discussion of important sociolinguistic issues.

In the introductory part, the authors present the following: ‘The city as space, place, and symbol’, ‘origins of public signage’, LL studies and our contribution, Naming languages Terms used in the course of this book, methodology, and organization of the book. This helps to contextualise the linguistic landscapes in both France and Italy and consequently provides theoretical frameworks for the following chapters.

The first chapter entitled ‘Sketching the Contexts: Italy and France’ presents a synopsis of language change and language management in Italy and France in an attempt to define the reasons as well as agencies behind moulding public spaces in French and Italian cities in the Mediterranean, highlighting the organisational frameworks, characterising each city, that date back to the middle ages. This is clearly evident in northern and central Italy characterised by polycentric structures vis a vis French cities characterised by ‘primacy organization’ (p.18), i.e. governed by the capital city of France, Paris (Salone, 2005). ‘Italian polycentrism is arguably most evident in language matters’. Various dialects, often characterised by a low prestigious status in consequence of extralinguistic factors, but showing high levels of vitality in urban areas, that originated from Latin coexist with Italian, which explains why Italy is conceived as a linguistically diverse country. It seems that language policy in Italy tolerates multilingual written practices in the visual domain, as displayed in the incorporation of ‘intercultural education into educational practices in Italy’ even though some local administrations have recently tended to remove the writings of immigrant languages from public spaces (p. 20-280).

On the other hand, France is characterised by ‘linguistic centrism’ (p.28), a consequence of ‘centuries of the cumulative concentration of institutions, individuals, and power in the capital city’ (p.29). Therefore, France is a typical example of states whose language policy is controlled and governed by one central government, i.e. the government intervenes in guiding and managing language use in educational and public spaces, which is recently, particularly after the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reflected in the disappearance of many languages in the linguistic landscape of French cities. The French language is largely visible in public spaces by virtue of its legal protection, whilst migrant languages (e.g. Arabic and Berber), despite that fact that there are a large number of migrant groups such as Arabs and Berbers, are chiefly marginalised for having no official status (p. 38).

The second chapter examines the linguistic landscapes of the Ligurian Sea. The chapter reveals that cultural structures in French and Italian cities near the borders demonstrate ‘a denationalized process of meaning-making through language in the LL’, employing the LL as a tool to examine if there exists ‘the cross-border language use in the public space’ and if meanings displayed by the type of linguistic diversity are ‘mirrored on both sides of the frontier’ (p. 43). After providing a socio-historical background on the city of Nice, LL surveys were carried out to record the languages present according to percentages: French (the most dominant), Dutch, English, German, Italian, Latin, Nissart, Russian, and Spanish. As far as the LL of Monaco is

concerned, it is characterised by multilingualism, despite Monegasque, the regional language, is sometimes seen in the visual written domain. After providing sociohistorical and linguistic backgrounds on Genoa, the LL surveys conducted reveal that Genoese is only visible on signs displaying place names and local products for reasons related to tourism.

The third chapter entitled ‘Peripherality in the Border Areas: Trieste and Northern Catalonia’ concentrates on the linguistic landscapes of the Gulfs of Trieste (to the east) and of Lion (to the west) with a concentration on two languages in the LL of Italian (Slovenian and Triestino) and French cities (Catalan and Castilian Spanish). Triestino is closely associated with ‘internal peripherality’ representing a sense of ‘localized culture’ and asserting ‘alterity with respect to Slovenian’. Having examined the material culture very carefully and thoroughly, it may reflect the changing language ideologies in border areas, pointing to patterns in commodification and meaning-making; this is clearly evident in the employment of multilingual writing to carry out a sense of double identity, significantly not through Castilian Spanish but authentically through the Catalan language.

The fourth chapter entitled ‘Insularity in the Linguistic Landscapes of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica’, as the title suggests, presents ‘centres of power and modalities of regionalism’ implemented in these three areas encapsulating ‘elements of tension and contradictions deriving from different models’ (p. 147). With reference to the signs featuring it, Sardinian is found to be an index of ethnic identity, whilst insularity, but not peripherality, explains why Corsican is seen in the visual written domain.

The fifth chapter ‘Social Representations of Marseilles and Naples’ Linguistic Landscapes’ presents an overview of social representation theory (i.e. models and applications) and provides representations of Marseilles and Naples with a discussion of the data gleaned from the survey locations. Having recorded signs in 20 survey locations, Provençal and Occitan are not visible in the linguistic landscape in Marseilles, but two mini-case-studies show the presence of Occitan, as exemplified by the sign on the Occitan Cultural Centre vis a vs the wide use of the French language outside the association. Arabic is sometimes visible in the linguistic landscape; Neapolitan in the LL is also visible as wells as migrant languages.

The sixth chapter entitled ‘Cosmopolitan Linguistic Landscapes of the Mediterranean’, which first traces back the origin of ‘cosmopolitanism’ (p.175), examines the visibility of English in the LL of the Mediterranean cities from a cosmopolitan perspective. The findings suggest that English loanwords have recently infiltrated into the new mass media resources and English is currently increasingly used and ‘indiscriminate’ (p. 182). In addition, the Italian population appears to be no longer worried about the growing use of English words and expressions in Italian social settings, including the linguistic landscape; it is mainly intended for symbolising cosmopolitan identities with the attainment of various functions, forming part of ‘a communicational landscape where it is employed as a semiotic modality and as a mainstream resource’. On the other hand, the use of English words and expressions in French is one of the popular issues in the present Anglophone world (p. 185). Although the visibility of the English language is conceived as minimal, it is commoner than other foreign languages in the French LL (p. 196).

Finally, Blackwood and Tufi end up with ‘Conclusions: The Transformative Power of Emplaced Language’, symbolically and metaphorically characterizing urban spaces in a way that the chapter covers up the main components of the study. In national linguistic landscapes, it is no longer a surprise to find the French and Italian languages dominate the survey cities respectively. Comparatively, the linguistic landscapes of Italian cities have displayed a wider range of languages than the French ones do; this is because of the strict rules applied by the French authorities as opposed to the more tolerant language policies guiding the Italian authorities. In Italy, for example, the linguistic rights of national minorities are recognised, which is reflected in the visibility of their languages in the linguistic landscape. For instance, this is evident in the written dominant use of Slovenian in the province of Trieste. What is more, dialects such as Genoese and Neapolitan are merely thought of as a marker of local culture (p. 209). By contrast, the linguistic data gleaned from the French Mediterranean survey locations indicate the strong marginalisation of migrant groups. As far as the visibility and presence of English in the survey areas are concerned, English is more visible in the Italian than French Mediterranean cities.

This book provides the student researchers, linguistic landscapers, and sociolinguists with important knowledge both in theory and practice on a wide range of sociolinguistic issues (e.g. language policies in Italy and France, linguistic centrism, multilingualism, migrant speech communities, and English and cosmopolitanism). Like other manuscripts that comprehensively cover up several cities in the same country (e.g. Alomoush, 2015), it gives a full account of a variety of French and Italian coastal cities with a discussion of a wide range of migrant languages on the one hand and English and Cosmopolitanism on the other hand, in addition to the French and Italian languages. The semiotics of the cover page (I mean here the non-capitalisation of ‘the linguistic landscape of the Mediterranean, French and Italian coastal cities, Robert j. blackwood and stefania tufi) may suggest that Blackwood and Tufi aim to attract the attention of the reader. However, this may be a hint at the disparities between the linguistic data collected from the survey cities, particularly in France, visually indicating the ‘extreme erasure’ of migrant groups, and the vitality of migrant languages in urban Mediterranean spaces.

To conclude, this manuscript is a valuable addition to the already existing literature on theoretical and empirical linguistic landscape studies through the provision of a range of models or frameworks (e.g. ‘superdiversity’ and ‘polylinguaging’) to analyses and discuss the quantitative results provided in the relevant chapters. What is more, it seems that both Blackwood and Tufi are fully aware of the disparities between the invisibility of particular languages (e.g. minority languages, as in the case of Arabic in French coastal cities) and the vitality of the speakers before conducting the project.

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