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Landscape in Language: Transdisciplinary perspectives, Culture and Language Use 4

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BOOK REVIEW

Landscape in Language: Transdisciplinary perspectives, Culture and Language Use 4, edited by David M. Mark, Andrew G. Turk, Niclas Burenhult and David Stea, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2011, xi + 449 pp. €99.00, \$149.00, ISBN 978-90-272-0286-4

The relevance of philosophical conceptions of landscape cross-culturally and the embeddedness of language in the human and natural world is the focus of the volume under review. The 21 chapters in this well composed and intelligently edited edition provide ample evidence of where certain modern priorities in anthropological linguistics lie and how contemporary authors attempt to tackle complex phenomena dealing with more intricate aspects of language in landscape and landscape in language research. Ethnophysiography, or the “linguistics of landscape” (p. 3), differs from studies of the ‘linguistic landscape’ (e.g. Shohamy & Gorter 2009) by considering landscape terms and categories, toponyms and the cultural and spiritual significance of places in relation to cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences. It was initiated in 2002 by David Mark and Andrew Turk and is defined as “the study of differences in the way languages use generic terms and proper names (toponyms) for landscape features” (p. 25). This research perspective draws all the chapters together epistemologically.

The contributions are theoretically broad ranging from the philosophical complexities of ethnophysiography and the relationship between European phenomenological approaches to landscape perception and indigenous cultural conceptions of place (e.g. Turk’s chapter on ‘Exploring philosophy of place: Potential for synergy between phenomenology and ethnophysiography’). They are also methodologically forward thinking by relating academic approaches to mapping, geographical information systems (GIS) and linguistic documentation of landscape to indigenous methods of obtaining place-knowledge (e.g. Turk and Mark’s ‘Perspectives on the ethical conduct of landscape in language research’ chapter). The perspectives put forward in this volume are not only relevant to toponymists and scholars interested in spatial relationships in landscape perception (e.g. Heyes’ ‘Between the trees and the tides: Inuit ways of discriminating space in a coastal and boreal landscape’ chapter) and the ontology of landscape in language (cf. Kuhn’s chapter), but also to those concerned more generally with multicultural readings and interpretations of environment, language and culture interaction (cf. Lynch’s ‘Navigating regional landscapes with Jicarilla personal narrative’ chapter).

There has been recent interest in toponymy and language in landscape interaction in linguistics and anthropology, especially based in approaches which consider spatial orientation and its implications for measuring linguistic and cognitive behaviour cross linguistically (e.g. Burenhult 2008). This volume contributes to these studies by putting forward an impressive breadth and depth of analysis. The

authors have attempted to deal with intricate theoretical concerns when applying a system of language and landscape to a multitude of analytical domains, e.g. the embeddedness of language in place and ‘Revitalizing place names through stories and songs’ as Paskvan’s chapter suggests. Like other books on John Benjamins’ CLU-SAL series, this volume puts forward new directions or ‘transdisciplinary perspectives’ on the reading, writing and mapping of landscape and the intersection of these perspectives with archaeology, geography and psychology. The obvious theoretical thread and nexus that is created throughout presents a similar argument to Nash’s (2011) ‘toponymic ethnography’, i.e. that a partial yet detailed description of the ethnography of a people can be observed and written through the microscope and membrane of toponymy and embedded ‘language in landscape’ and mind. Several chapters in this book (e.g. Thornton’s ‘Language and landscape among the Tlingit’ and Janz’s ‘Philosophical issues in ethnophysiology’) outline means by which esoteric knowledge about connectedness to land through language and thought can be accessed through several explicit methodological directives. Thornton’s interpretations of the ‘biospiritual forces’ of the Tlingit’s biosphere and cosmography and Louis’ ‘storied symbols’ of Hawaiian placenames advocate not only a shift in the ways insider knowledge is accessed from the outside but also the means by which a deeper reading of the spiritual and living narratives of the language of landscape can be appreciated.

Because these papers were compiled and edited based on a workshop on landscape in language, the result is presented as a multicultural and multimodal discussion on pressing matters in landscape research, cross cultural communication and discourse research. It will thus appeal to a cross-disciplinary spread of scholars. The dialogical nature of the volume as a whole emphasises the dyadic and didactic nature of talking and thinking about the places others inhabit, and the book systematically expresses something of the existential relationship between science and the (human and natural) inner and the world and self, and how these relationships can be investigated empirically. This modern, more inclusive and more complex take on the requirement of linguistic researchers in landscape research, as compared to earlier less rigorous accounts restricted only to onomastics and toponymy, which were commonly “divorced from their referential subject matter” (p. 3), is seen in Topaha’s chapter ‘Navajo landscape and its contexts’ and Duvall’s chapter ‘Land and life: Ethnoecology and ethnogeography as complementary approaches to the analyses of landscape perception’ where the authors allude to the need to consider, amongst other things, the aesthetic domain of human perceptions of landscape and its relationship to landscape through language. This approach, e.g. the role of religious beliefs relating to landscape, necessitates a deeper understanding and experience of the relationship between scientific praxis and conceptions of language and culture. These psychological, philosophical and linguistic takes on landscape research, which do not discount subjective and emotional interpretations and recollections of what the human is in terms of diachronic conceptions of space, nature and the world, also demonstrate how these concepts shift over time.

The separation of landscape, language, culture and discourse is a very Eurocentric way of dealing with the natural and cultural environment. This volume goes some way to considering some non-Eurocentric ways of perceiving the natural world and how ways of speaking and discourse are not ‘surrounded by’ but ‘take place in’ the various natural and cultural worlds based on differing cultural

perceptions attributed to particular languages and worldviews. By problematising notions of landscape, language and culture, this volume also accentuates the gap that needs to be bridged in dealing with these opposing views and mismatches between language and the world. This is possibly where other chapters could have benefited by using the discursive patterns put forward in Lynch's 'Navigating regional landscapes with Jicarilla personal narrative'. Such oral conceptualisations of the environment and cognitive mapping are also related to other cross cultural approaches to discourse analysis that have been recently presented in this journal, e.g. Scollo's (2011) description of a theoretical and methodological conversation cultural approach to discourse and its relation to Asian communication theories (e.g. Shi-xu 2004), and Prah's (2010) descriptions of African languages and their usages in multicultural landscapes.

Through trying to achieve too much and attempting to cover too much ground, this volume does at times come across as being too broad and a little open ended. The chapters are not explicitly linked and are not divided into discrete sections dedicated to specific topics. However, this is a minor criticism because the volume does develop consistently and intelligently throughout beginning with broader conceptual and philosophical issues in the philosophy of place, e.g. ethnophysiology, ethnoecology and ethnogeography, which move through specific case studies of, for example, Kari's Ahtna geographic knowledge, Jett's description of the embedded language of the Navajo landscape and the more technical approach of Sieber and Wellen's chapter dealing with 'The role of geospatial technologies for integrating landscape in language' in Quebec. The application of these case studies leads to the final chapters identifying key concerns for the cross cultural classification of landscape character, the ontology of landscape in language and the final chapter dealing with the future ethical concerns in the conduct of landscape in language research.

Herein lie the volume's strengths: its ability not only to synthesise a cogent and 'transdisciplinary perspective' but also to provide a forum of well-known and up and coming authors, which has created a volume directed at stimulating similarly open-minded discussion and further research. By expounding new ideas and theories within and under the umbrella terms of anthropological linguistics and the linguistic study of landscape, the authors' research provides ample impetus, invitation and opportunity for scholars to take such "merely exploratory" (p. 6) theoretical expositions and positions in this innovative research field into more intricate philosophical (e.g. the incorporation of phenomenology in Turk's chapter) and practical (e.g. Paskvan's 'Revitalization place names through stories and songs') realisations. Such bold theoretical steps are certainly welcomed, especially considering the degree of inroads previous studies into language, space and landscape have achieved (e.g. Bennardo 2002). This invitation and indeed this volume as a whole should prove attractive to a wide readership of academics and more technically oriented landscape practitioners. It also offers related disciplines the possibility of incorporating (multicultural) aspects of the relationship between language in landscape with discourse analysis as well as opening up the moral, aesthetic and spiritual domains of a linguistic and ecological reading and appreciation of landscape.

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