Multilingual Landscapes in Telecollaboration: A Spanish-American Exchange

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Abstract In this chapter we aim to explore the role that the linguistic landscape (LL) can play in intercultural telecollaborative exchanges. Although research in the field of LL has gained worldwide interest over the last decade and some studies have analyzed its potential for foreign language learning (Cenoz J, Gorter D, Int Rev Appl Linguist Lang Teach 46(3):267–287, 2008; Gorter D, Cenoz J, Knowledge about language and linguistic landscape. In: Hornberger N (ed), Encyclopedia of language and education. Springer Science, Berlin, pp. 1–13, 2007; Dagenais D et al, Linguistic landscape and language awareness. In: Shohamy E, Gorter D (eds), Linguistic landscape: expanding the scenery. Routledge, New York, pp. 253–269, 2009; Gorter D, Ann Rev Appl Linguist 33:190–212, 2013; Malinowski D et al, Language teaching in the linguistic landscape: mobilizing pedagogy in public space. Springer, Berlin, 2020; Niedt G, Seals C (eds) Linguistic landscapes beyond the language classroom. Bloomsbury Academic, New York, 2020; Krompák E et al (eds) Linguistic landscapes and educational spaces. Multilingual Matters, Bristol, 2021; Solmaz O, Przymus S (eds) Linguistic landscapes in English language teaching: a pedagogical guidebook. Available from https://www.llineltproject.com/, 2021), works that analyze its impact for language and culture awareness in telecollaboration are still scarce (Vinagre M, Engaging with difference: integrating the linguistic landscape in virtual exchange. System 105:102750. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2022.102750,2022).

In order to explore these issues, we organized an exchange between undergraduate students of English at Autónoma University in Madrid (UAM) and undergraduate students of Spanish at Columbia University. Over the course of two and a half months the students worked together and discussed a series of topics relating to each other's and their own cultures. As a final task they were required to take photos of shops, posters, announcements, and walls in their respective cities that showed how English was

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used in Madrid and how Spanish was used in New York. Findings suggest that attending to the LL as an activity within a telecollaborative exchange provides an ideal opportunity for learning about language diversity from an intercultural perspective. The project also provided evidence of its potential for the creation of a dialogic third space in which participants negotiated their cultural identities.

Keywords Diversity · Intercultural competence · Telecollaboration · Third space · Virtual exchange

1   Introduction

In this chapter we aim to explore the role that the linguistic landscape (LL) can play in intercultural telecollaborative exchanges. In such exchanges, as defined by Belz (2004, p. 1), "internationally-dispersed learners in parallel language classes use Internet communication tools such as email or synchronous chat in order to support social interaction, dialogue, debate, and intercultural exchange with expert speakers of the respective language under study". Although research in the field of LL has gained worldwide interest over the last decade (Barni & Bagna, 2010; Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Malinowski, 2015; Shohamy et al., 2010; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009), and some studies have analyzed its potential for foreign language learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008; Gorter & Cenoz, 2007; Dagenais et al., 2009; Gorter, 2013; Malinowski et al., 2020; Niedt & Seals, 2020; Krompák et al., 2021; Solmaz & Przymus, 2021), studies that analyze its impact for language and culture awareness in telecollaboration are still scarce (Vinagre, 2022).

The main focus in the LL is the use of language in its written form in the public space (Gorter, 2006). Other authors refer to the "linguistic items found in the public space" (Shohamy, 2006, p. 110), or the *Word on the street* (Foust & Fuggle, 2011, original emphasis). Another metaphor that can be applied usefully to the study of the LL is the notion of cities as texts (Mondada, 2000). From this perspective, cities are dense and feature signs that must be deciphered by the citizens who participate in the dynamic, literary display of the metropolis. According to Colletta et al. (1990), readers may decipher what the texts intend to communicate, interpret the rapport between the writer and intended reader, and consider the social and cultural repercussions of the messages. Landry and Bourhis (1997), in one of the most widely quoted definitions of LL in the literature, refer to "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs" (p. 23). They elaborate on this concept as follows:

> 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. (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25)

Although nowadays the variety of signs is much wider, this definition still captures the essence of LL, which is multimodal (it combines visual, written and audible data), whilst it can also incorporate the use of multiple languages. In this study, we were interested in exploring students' perceptions of cultural issues and identity associated with the presence of the foreign language in their respective cities (English in Madrid and Spanish in New York). The presence or absence of languages "sends direct and indirect messages with regard to the centrality versus the marginality of certain languages in society" (Shohamy, 2006, p. 110). At the same time, "the signs can be a display of identity by certain language groups and the use of several languages in the linguistic landscape can contribute to its linguistic diversity" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008, p. 268). Together with these aspects, LL can also add information about "societal multilingualism by focusing on language choices, hierarchies of languages, contact-phenomena, regulations, and aspects of literacy" (Gorter, 2013, p. 191). Because of the LL's multimodal and multilingual nature, this study follows Burwell and Lenters (2015) in approaching the LL from "a pedagogy of multiliteracies by encouraging the critical study of multimodality and linguistic diversity in context" (p. 201).

2 Linguistic Landscapes and Telecollaboration: Multiliteracies in the FL Classroom

Research on LL has focused not only on the social construction of spaces, but also on how public texts connect to socio-cultural, political, and economic contexts. From an educational perspective, as students move around their cities, interact with others and read the signs, they attribute meaning to the public texts they find (Dagenais et al., 2009). In this process, students can develop a range of literacy practices, i.e., multiliteracies, since they read multimodal texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) that take many different forms and serve a variety of purposes (Vinagre, 2021). In a similar manner, research on telecollaboration (Guth & Helm, 2012) has claimed that this mode of learning can foster the development of multiliteracies when students, who are in different locations and socio-cultural contexts, engage in tasks and project work using multimodal online environments. In both contexts, the concept of multiliteracies expands the traditional language-based view of literacy to include many linguistic and cultural differences in society (on multiliteracies in LL-based pedagogy, see also Jiménez-Caicedo, "Uncovering Spanish Harlem: Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Projects in an Advanced Content-based Spanish Course" and Bever & Azaz, "An educational Perspective on Community Languages in Linguistic Landscapes: Russian and Arabic", this volume). Elaborating on the importance of this concept in education, Cope and Kalantzis (2000) suggest that it is necessary to

> [...] extend the idea and scope of literacy pedagogy to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised societies; to account for the

multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of texts that circulate [...and to] account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies (p. 9)

According to these authors, it becomes essential to move beyond the conventional view of literacy as a simple matter of the ability to read and write, and to consider the multiple systems of meaning or multiliteracies, since negotiating the linguistic and cultural differences in our society is central to people's everyday lives. With this in mind, our mission as teachers should be to provide students with the necessary abilities to open up equal opportunities and access their chosen paths in society (The New London Group, 1996). In this respect, the use of a multiliteracies approach in the classroom can facilitate students' access to the evolving language of work and power, and foster the critical engagement necessary for them to participate fully in public life. This multiliteracies approach is related to multimodality since many modes, technologies, and communication channels are encouraged to be used in different forms of expression. According to Marchetti and Cullen (2015), these modes, which include text, audio, and image, can be creatively combined to produce meaning and encourage learning in the classroom, and the appropriate selection of modes can satisfy all learning styles and cognitive differences. Moreover, through the integration of technology, "multimodality provides resources that challenge traditional forms of communication and even language itself" (Marchetti & Cullen, 2015, p. 40). However, multimodality and multiliteracies should not become conflated; while multimodality refers to the semiotic resources that we use to communicate, whether through text, audio or image, a multiliteracies approach entails interacting with these resources. Through re-presentation and recontextualization of meaning, learners can transform themselves. In this process, learners create new resources and modes, including linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, and audio, thus the notion of multiliteracies. Linguistic modes include orthography, vocabulary, syntax, cohesion, and coherence, as well as rhetorical patterns, genre, style, and cultural models (Kern, 2000). In the LL, production and interpretation of meaning involves access to, choosing from, and interacting with these resources in a sociocultural context (Reinhardt, 2021). Therefore, introducing students to the LL within a multiliteracies approach has the potential of "not only accomplishing multiliteracies' aim of responding to global communicative diversity, but also realizing the more intimate and local benefits of a place-based pedagogy that introduce[s] learners to the complex political nature of … the places they call home" (Gruenewald, 2005, p. 264).

The idea that places can shape the meaning potential of a text or visual element seems to be the common belief underlying the discussion outlined above. However, as some authors have suggested (Malinowski, 2014), a spatialized view of literacy practices does not take a specific context for granted, but "highlights the multiplicities, contingencies, ideologies, and thus, the productive role of context itself" (p. 68). In connection with this idea, some researchers have emphasized the importance of developing a third-space approach to literacy education (Bhabha, 1994; Kramsch, 1993; Moje et al., 2004; Malinowski, 2015), one that, from a socially critical perspective, portrays the tensions between a monocultural conception of

literacy and sociocultural diversity. As Kostogriz (2004) suggests, "by emphasizing the recognition of ever-growing diversity of sociocultural and textual practices, multiplicity of text forms and multimodality of meaning-making practices… literacy [is conceived] in multicultural conditions" (p. 3). As this author mentions, this *thirdness* is essential when having to define the principles of literacy pedagogy that would enable students to understand and negotiate differences, their connectedness and meanings in a dialogue in which different awarenesses and discourses are present. This third space is characterized by (a) not being a fixed space but rather a fluid dialogic space which is constantly constructed and reconstructed by participants who actively engage in dialogue and negotiate identities, not only through self-expression but also through mindful listening and the co-construction of meanings; (b) being influenced at times by national/local/ethnic cultures but not determined by them; (c) presenting differences that are not hidden or minimized but acknowledged and valued; (d) being situated with its own culture and processes, which may be influenced by communication technologies but not created by or located in them; (e) having an attribution of power that is not fixed, but rather "may change as the context evolves in response to the positioning of participants" (Hewling, 2009, p. 123); f) being both an individual and a collective space: without the group it cannot exist, but it is not experienced by all members of a group in the same way; and g) being a place where answers are not found but, rather, questions are raised (Schneider & von der Emde, 2006) and which is "problematic and problematizing […], risky and as prone to chaos, or even heightened conflict, as to producing new understandings" (Burbules, 2006, p. 114).

3   Telecollaboration and the Third Space

One of the ways in which this third-space approach to literacy pedagogy can be implemented in the foreign language classroom is telecollaboration. This activity refers to the application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations with the aim of developing their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work (Vinagre, 2016). In these projects, students engage in social interaction, dialogue, debate, and intercultural exchange with native speakers of the language they are studying, thus becoming an activity where "theory hits the street" (Belz, 2004, p. 1). The implementation of telecollaborative exchanges provides a unique opportunity for the creation of a third space from which students can explore and see the world through someone else's eyes (Furstenberg et al., 2001) and understand the relativity of their own linguistically-mediated signs. In this in-between space of culture, participants go through the process of negotiating and transforming their own identities. Here, "the fixed identities of the traditional social order do not hold sway" (Doran, 2004, p. 96) and hybrid identities need to be developed and affirmed whilst "the importance of the interrelationship between the new emergent cultural identities, literacy practices and learning [is emphasized] in order to foster a dialogue between differences in schools and beyond" (Kostogriz, 2004, p. 3).

In this environment, the participants feel secure enough to fully engage in sustained dialogue, "a process of multiple and progressive interactions through which participants have an opportunity to develop relationships and deepen their understanding of each other" (Coogan et al., 2009, p. 12). Participants' feelings of security and trust are largely due to their telecollaborative teachers supporting those with technical or linguistic difficulties, facilitating and mediating dialogue and supervising task completion (Vinagre et al., 2020), and many report "feeling free to express themselves openly and being comfortable with disagreements in the group appreciating different opinions (Helm, 2013, p. 42). In this process, culture is negotiated and participants can become intercultural communicators through their efforts to understand and interact with speakers from other cultures. Although negotiation should not be taken for granted since it has been known for some students to hold even more firmly to stereotypes and beliefs (O'Dowd, 2003), participation in initiatives such as this provide students with opportunities to engage with diversity and negotiate difference in ways that would be impossible in traditional learning settings and exclusively within the physical walls of the classroom.

In order to explore these issues and to document students' contact with the foreign language in their own cities, we organized an intercultural collaborative exchange between undergraduate students of English at Autónoma University in Madrid (UAM) and undergraduate students of Spanish at Columbia University. Over the course of two and a half months the students worked in pairs and discussed by email a series of topics relating to each other's and their own cultures. As a final task they were required to take photos of shops, billboards, posters, announcements, and walls in their respective cities that showed how English was used in Madrid and how Spanish was used in New York. The research aims of the LL project were to discover (a) how students perceived the use of the foreign language in the LL of their respective cities and (b) to describe their impressions regarding language representation, language speakers, and language awareness within this context.

4 Method

4.1 Description of Project: Context and Participants

The UAM participants in this project were fourth-year undergraduate students who enrolled in an optional course titled *Information and Communication Technologies* (ICT) offered in the B.As. in English Studies and Modern Languages. The course aimed to foster a critical stance towards the academic literature underlying computer-supported collaborative learning and to involve participants in exploring different ICT tools and their possible applications in EFL teaching and learning contexts to help them move from theory to classroom practice. In order to provide participants with hands-on-experience of virtual collaboration, we organized an intercultural exchange with students from Columbia University.

At UAM, teachers and students met twice a week and tasks were carried out mostly online, working in small groups inside and outside the classroom. The level of experience regarding the use of the technology was very similar among participants and they had no previous experience of online collaborative learning, although some were familiar with the use of some ICT tools (blogs, Skype) and most of them used social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter).

The Columbia students were undergraduates from all concentrations who were taking an *Intermediate I* or *II Spanish* course (depending on the semester of implementation). As regards their competence in the foreign language, the Spanish students' level of English ranged between B2 and C2, whereas the American students' level was B1, all according to the European Framework of Reference for Languages.

At the beginning of the project, all students were given a written form with which they were asked for their consent to use the data gathered from the project for research purposes.

4.2 Activities and Data Collection Instruments

Over the course of two and a half months the students worked in pairs to discuss a series of topics related to each other's and their own cultures by email (see Table 1). Following tandem principles (Vinagre, 2007), the messages were written half in English and half in Spanish.

Once they finished the discussion of these cultural topics, participants were asked to carry out a final task according to the following guidelines (Table 2).

This final task provided students with an opportunity for multimodal analysis through digital media. Nowadays, educators can take advantage of students' access to mobile technology to incorporate this method of documentation into their literacy pedagogy. As explained in the guidelines (see Table 2), as part of their final task the students had to take photos of how the foreign language was used in their respective cities and upload them onto *Cityscape,*[1] where they also had to tag them by adding the location and a short description. Then they were asked to hold a discussion via Skype and write a joint essay with their partners in which they compared the photos from Madrid and New York and critically analyzed *who* created the signs and *for whom* the signs in the photos were intended in each city and the reasons *why* they were located where they found them. Answers to these questions were discussed in class prior to discussion with the partner and, although no specialized readings were recommended, students in Madrid were familiar with the LL since they explore this concept in a compulsory course offered in their BAs. As regards students in New York, no explicit instruction on the LL was offered except for in-class clarification of questions posed by the students regarding the project.

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[1] Cityscape was an open-source geolocation platform developed and maintained by Columbia's Language Resource Center that allowed students to upload photos to a map and tag their location, thus creating a visual landscape of specific urban areas.

Table 1 List of topics for discussion

Week	Topic
1	Write an **introductory message** telling your partner about yourself and your interests. You may have common interests you want to discuss or you may want to ask your partner about several aspects of Spain/New York and Spanish/American culture you would like to know more about. The following list contains activities and topics which -you should note- are only suggestions for what you might want to talk about with your e-mail partner.
2	<u>Getting to know each other</u> (**at least TWO e-mails per person**): Where does your partner live? In what type of house? With whom? What would be a typical day in your partner's life? What does your partner usually do during the weekends or in his/her spare time?
3 and 4	<u>Discuss stereotypical beliefs about both countries: Spain and the USA (i.e. stereotypes)</u>. **At least FOUR e-mails per person:** to find out what the real situation is in both countries. What do you think they are like? (traditions, way of life, etc.). In your opinion, what are Spanish and American people like? What aspects do you have in common with your partner and in what do you differ, and to what extent is all this because of your different nationalities and cultures?
5	<u>Your country's history</u>. **At least TWO e-mails per person** to tell your partner some historical facts or events related to your country so that s/he can better understand where you come from.
6	<u>Plans for the future.</u> You are at University now, but do you know what you would like to do when you graduate? Where would you like to live or work? Will you live with your family? **At least TWO e-mails per person** to talk about future professional or personal plans.
7	<u>Colloquial expressions in English and Spanish.</u> **At least TWO e-mails per person** to help your partner learn colloquial and useful expressions in English; s/he will do the same to help you with Spanish slang. **At least TWO e-mails per person** to talk about one or more topics you decide to discuss together (*negotiation!*).
8	<u>Feast days and celebrations</u>: **At least TWO e- mails per person** to talk about those feast days that are exclusive to your culture: *The Three Wise Men*, *Thanksgiving, Halloween, Bank Holiday* (*puente*) in December, etc. Why do you celebrate them and why are they important or interesting from a cultural point of view?
9	<u>Free topic:</u> **At least TWO e-mails per person** to discuss one or more topics of your choice, perhaps something you are interested in, about your partner's culture (*negotiation!*). Or use this week to catch up on your work or to ask your partner about topics or ideas that may have come up during the exchange and that you would like to know more about. Say goodbye, **finish the exchange** and decide whether you would like to continue the exchange outside of class.

After the final task was completed, the authors and a research assistant tagged the photos and, following Silverman (2006), qualitatively analyzed them according to sign type, language, purpose, and intended audience, looking specifically for connections and patterns across the data. Keeping the research objectives in mind, namely, (a) to document how students perceived the use of the foreign language in the LL of their respective cities and (b) to describe their impressions regarding language representation, language speakers, and language awareness within this context, the photos were classified into categories (i.e. billboards, storefronts, product descriptions, traffic signs, flyers, posters, graffiti, political announcements,

Table 2 Final task for the virtual exchange

| Final task: Discussion and essay (Cityscape & Skype) | Students from both universities will map their target language in their own city so that their partners may have an informed understanding of the presence of their native language in their partner's city: Spanish in New York and English in Madrid. You need to upload photos and images that show how the foreign language is used in your city onto Columbia University's website *Cityscape*: *Mapping the Multilingual Urban Landscape*. By doing this, you shall create a visual representation of the presence of English/Spanish in your urban environment. You have to tag the photos by adding a short description and the location. Then you need to ensure that you are able to analyze and/or critically think of *why*, *who*, *for whom* those signs are intended and why they are located where you found them. This will give you an insight on whom the 'language consumers' are where the signs are located and why certain information is in the foreign (and not the local) language. At the same time, your partner will get to know your city in a much more hands-on manner and your native culture within a multicultural and multilinguistic world. |
| | Arrange to meet your American/Spanish partner via Skype. You need to discuss what you have discovered about both cities and cultures after analyzing the photos and elaborate on its significance in a joint essay that should be written in collaboration with your partner half in English and half in Spanish. The discussion in Skype should also follow this 50/50 principle. |

commercial signs, community/religious signs, and public art) that could explain all the photos in the data set. These categories are the result of our own analysis and are not meant to be exhaustive, since other interpretations and meanings are also possible.

After the photos were tagged and classified, the essays written by the students were collected and analyzed qualitatively. All students' names have been changed to ensure anonymity, and their excerpts have been left in their original form without corrections.[2]

5   Results and Discussion

Over the course of two weeks, the Spanish students took 273 digital photos of fixed signs, more specifically, billboards (6), storefronts (143), product descriptions (9), traffic signs (1), flyers (6), posters (22), graffiti (5), political announcements (8), commercial signs (38), community/religious signs (31), and public art (4). Although they were asked to take monolingual photos in the foreign language, they also took many of bilingual signs. Thus, a total of 212 photos were monolingual (English), 56 were bilingual (English-Spanish), and 5 were multilingual with more than two languages in various combinations. The American students took 116 photos of fixed signs, more specifically, storefronts (22), product descriptions (7), flyers (4), posters (5), graffiti (4), political announcements (3), commercial signs (20), community/

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[2] Partial data from this project has been analyzed in another study.

religious signs (46), and public art (5). Like their counterparts, although they were asked to take monolingual photos in the foreign language, they took many of bilingual signs. Out of 116 photos, 64 photos were monolingual (Spanish), 48 bilingual (Spanish-English), and 4 were multilingual with combinations of more than two languages. Most of the photos taken by the Spanish students (237) were private signs while 36 were public signs. In the case of the American students, the result was the opposite with 62 private signs versus 54 public signs. While these numbers cannot be interpreted in absolute terms, they are indicative of some observable differences in the LL of these two cities that were noticed and discussed by the students as we shall see below.

Having to take these photos of the LL of their respective cities helped students to look at familiar places with the "eyes of a curious stranger", as Sara from Madrid mentions in her essay:

> Linguistic landscapes is a concept of which I had already heard about, read in some texts dealing with intercultural communication and even studied theoretically. However, I had never had such a hands-on-manner experience as I've had in this exchange. It was a complete field work meant to be shared by means of new technologies with people living thousands of kilometers away. Taking photos as raw material for the project, being this the basic requirement, was really revealing as it made me see my own city, which I knew already very well, with the eyes of a curious stranger, or a researcher who has stopped enjoying the city for a while to start analyzing it, looking for evidence of something which is very evident in a multicultural and touristic city such as Madrid but that very often passes us by without realizing (i.e. English language traces in messages, panels, instructions, etc)

As can be seen in this excerpt, for the students in Madrid, who were already familiar with the theory behind LL, this project was a way of putting something that they had learned in class into practice. As Sara noticed, the LL project also allowed them to take on the role of the researcher who collects data by taking photographs and analyzes them while looking for answers to the questions *why*, *who* created the signs and *for whom* they are intended. This process allowed speakers who are used to the landscape and its particularities to continue to acquire new insights from their environments. Thus, interacting with the semiotic resources in their own LL had a demonstrable impact not only upon the sense the students had of themselves but also of the sociocultural dimension of their own city (Gruenewald, 2005; for additional studies of students as researchers in the LL, see chapters by Jiménez-Caicedo, "Uncovering Spanish Harlem: Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Projects in an Advanced Content-based Spanish Course" and Sekerina & Brooks, "Multilingual Linguistic Landscapes of New York City as a Pedagogical Tool in a Psychology Classroom", this volume).

Referring to the purpose and intended audience of the signs photographed by her and her partner, Natalia from Madrid writes how "most of the signs I saw related to the use of English in Madrid were restaurants of fast-food or markets specialized in American products importation. On the other hand, my partner Rachel found posters written in Spanish mainly related to medical and social issues, probably addressed to the Latin-American population." The students remarked not only on salient differences related to the type of sign, purpose, and location, but also on the relation of the signs to social, political, economic, and cultural realities. As Rocío from Madrid mentions,

> I did not upload any of my photos of restaurants of junk food, but I saw that many of my classmates did and there were a lot. I think that even though the Mediterranean diet has the fame of being very healthy and good, nowadays we have notably mixed it with the American diet. In my opinion, this is something related to the Internet […]. This could sound ridiculous, but when we find a restaurant or cafe where we can buy 'dunkins' or muffins' or cookies' we become practically regular customers (at least young people). The proof is that we have almost replaced the Spanish words for these things with the American name.

Thus, issues related to healthy living, age, and the use of English words in the Spanish language were discussed in this student's essay. She also mentions how unaware she and her fellow citizens are of the ways in which American culture impacts Spaniards' lifestyles ("we accept these trends as if we were a kind of extension of America") and discusses its effects on personal identity. Examples like this one suggest that understanding and interpreting the meanings behind the signs is perhaps more important than the textual content, focusing on the semiotic landscape more than on the purely linguistic one (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). Moving through the LL in this way can help expand the traditional language-based view of literacy to include not only linguistic but also socio-cultural references in society.

In their discussion the students also mentioned how most of the photos showed that English is used in slogans and storefronts in Madrid for advertising and marketing reasons in order to attract customers (see Fig. 1).

In Madrid, the use of English is perceived by the students as "more fashionable and upmarket." In the words of Elena (a student from Madrid), companies use English because:

> In our current global society English has become a world language at least to the extent that it is understood and spoken in every country. It is, therefore, very useful for companies if they want to be able to compete on an international level. We have seen that a lot of our classmates' pictures and even ours are pictures of language schools like 'The Green Monkey'. In our opinion, this last fact illustrates the importance that English is gaining in Spain and it reflects the growing interest of our society in learning and being fluent and competent in the global language.

Fig. 1 Storefronts in Madrid

In the students' excerpts above, we can see that, as English becomes increasingly globalized, it also acquires new, local meanings as people in those contexts take it up, learn it, and begin to use it for their own (global or local) purposes. Elaborating on this, Ana from Madrid wrote the following:

> When we think about the English language, ideas related to modernity, technological progress, business, science, innovation, fashion, the New York stock exchange, Obama, Hollywood, globalisation, etc. rapidly cross our minds. Once these mental associations are formed in the collective imaginary, every time we come across a sign written in English, we subconsciously think of those.

As can be observed, the students' perception regarding the use of English in Madrid's LL is that it is a language associated with prestige, fashion, modernity, technical efficiency, and innovation and is meant to address Spaniards, expats, and foreigners[3] alike. When comparing these signs to those in New York, Marta and Cassandra, from Madrid and New York, respectively, write: "However, most of the signs in Spanish found in New York are not aimed at addressing everyone like in Madrid but have a more specific target audience" (Fig. 2). That is, the use of English in Madrid is perceived by the students as being intended mostly for cross-cultural purposes, whereas the use of Spanish in New York is perceived as being intended for intracultural consumption (i.e. day-to-day informational and transactional purposes). These comments show how the impressions these signs create rely not only

Fig. 2 Signs in New York. Do not feed or leave food for the birds, they attract contagious bugs and animals. Do it for your community, cooperate; Would you like to earn some money for what you are doing now for free by looking after and helping a relative, friend, or neighbour who are eligible by a Medicaid program?. We are hiring now and we offer the best pay. Do not wait any longer, call us (Translation into English by the authors)

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[3] The student establishes the distinction between expats (expatriots) to refer to people from other countries who reside permanently in Spain and are, therefore, familiar with many aspects of Spanish culture, and foreigners (people from other countries who are visiting and tend to be ignorant of such aspects).

on how well we understand the discourses they represent, but also on how they are meant to be read (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) and how we choose to interpret them. With this perception also comes the recognition that it is impossible to read a sign in the landscape without being aware of our own subjectivity in relation to it. In this regard, the LL becomes a tool that exposes the stances of members of the community, raising the awareness of visitors with respect to its residents.

Another student, Emma from New York, justifies the above-mentioned claim by discussing the location of these pictures:

> Many of these pictures have been taken in Spanish Harlem and Washington Heights. In these two areas there are large communities of immigrants from Spanish speaking countries. This fact is reflected everywhere, in the instructions to use the subway, in the hospitals, storefronts, and commercial signs. Many of these are in 'Spanglish' because they aim to integrate the Hispanic community and the audience is primarily the Spanish speakers.

This comment suggests that although finding an individual sign may not have a lasting impact on the viewer, over time, given enough signs, a geodiscursive identity begins to form that the individual may embody while in that landscape. The students have also noticed the differing faces of globalization and had to come to terms with the fact that the purpose behind the choice of language in the signs they compared was fundamentally different in both cities. In their own words: "the use of English in the signs in Madrid is more fashionable and the use of Spanish in the signs in New York more pragmatic". Analyzing these differences more in depth, Ellen from New York mentions:

> I have realized that Spanish in New York is considered an inferior language. I listen to people speak Spanish in companies, in my lessons, in the streets every day and yet most people favor English. In some situations, it'd be easier for me to speak Spanish especially when I know the other person speaks the language but we use English instead. It wouldn't be acceptable to speak Spanish and this is not because I'm not fluent but rather because I don't want the other person to think that I'm insulting or degrading them by assuming they can't speak English. If this were the case, they would be considered inferior or less intelligent because English is necessary.

Having to critically analyze *why*, *who* created the signs and *for whom* the signs in the photos were intended in each city helped students notice and discuss issues concerning language status, power, and social representation. In this case, the social representation that this student had associated with the use of Spanish in New York was contested and she had to face divergent or contradictory notions that she did not have previously. In this context, representations became dynamic, since they had to be "reshaped through the confrontation of differences and negotiation of new meanings" (Dagenais et al., 2009, p.255).

Other issues also explored by the students were those of cultural and subversive identities. Enrique from Madrid and William from New York decided to compare the graffiti they photographed in the two cities (Figs. 3 and 4), and asked themselves the following questions: "Why would the artist chose [sic] to use the foreign language?" and "Would an American street artist have the same reasons to use Spanish in New York as the Spanish street artist who uses English in one of his works in Madrid?"

Fig. 3 Graffiti in Madrid

Fig. 4 Graffiti in New York. The text in capital letters in the righthand picture reads 'The true revolutionary is guided by the greatest feelings of love-Che' (Translation into English by the authors)

After discussing these questions via Skype, they wrote the following in their joint essay:

> A graffiti artist uses English in Madrid as an act of rebellion, whereas a graffiti artist in NYC chooses to write in Spanish as a way to reinforce their cultural identity/background. The variable factors in this equation are the native tongue of the country where the graffiti is found in, as well as the status of the language in which the graffiti is written in the country where it is found.

The students suggest that in the graffiti found in NYC "there is a clear connotation of cultural pride and what LaWare (1998) calls 'community activism.'" By comparison, they interpret the graffiti found in Madrid as a form of social protest or to represent non-mainstream social identities. In the students' own words, [it is] "an act of rebellion without a political/cultural/racial or otherwise agenda motivating the artist; the choice of English simply broke away from the native tongue of the country to further violate the social norm".

In this example, the polysemy of the landscape meant that, where some observers may see merely a wall of graffiti, others learned the social structure of a particular local street culture. Judging by the comments above, it seems that while striving to critically interpret the linguistic, political, and social significance of multilingual signs in their situated spaces, students take on the active role of "conceptualizers, making the tacit explicit" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 185). As they do so, they also begin to develop ways of thinking and talking about the language. Carmen from Madrid writes:

> While walking the streets of Madrid, I have often found myself wondering why the English language is so present in this city and, after reflecting on it, I have come to the conclusion that behind every instance there is always a motivation lying underneath. Different languages are utilised in different contexts to accomplish different objectives. Languages are indeed powerful instruments of persuasion: they can make people feel angry, miserable, or excited. As speakers are aware of the effect languages have on human beings, they dexterously exploit this potentiality in pursuance of various ends. At this point, it is relevant to introduce Myers-Scotton's markedness theory (1983: 115–136), which suggests that in each conversational encounter, there is an expected, unmarked language choice and an unexpected, marked language choice for each participant. An unmarked language is one that listeners expect to hear in a particular communicative situation, a language that does not create surprise among the listeners (e.g. two girls speaking Spanish in Atocha station). On the contrary, a marked language is one that is never expected and, therefore, calls the attention of the listeners who will start delving upon the reasons that might have led the speaker to utilise the marked language (e.g. a politician speaking English in a political rally).

This development of "languages for talking about language" (Luke, 2000, p. 459) and of socio-pragmatic awareness for "global coherence relations" (The New London Group, 1996, p. 83), both key components of multiliteracies, were spontaneous effects of having participated in the project, since they were not explicitly taught or encouraged by the facilitators. This finding would suggest that the integration of the LL in telecollaboration offers real opportunities to enhance "the logic of multiliteracies […] which recognises that meaning making is an active, transformative process, and a pedagogy based on that recognition is more likely to open up viable life courses for a world of change and diversity" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 10). This observation also raises the question of the need (or not, as the case may be) and roles of 'instruction' in multiliteracies pedagogy. For Cope and Kalantzis (2009), literacy teaching is not about skills, but is aimed at creating an 'active designer of meaning' who is open to differences and capable of negotiating the differences between one community and another. As we have seen from the analysis of the students' excerpts, developing these 'active designers of meaning' can be encouraged through projects that ask students not only to consider language in context, but also to analyze language within their own and others' cultural contexts, "allowing them to draw on insights, experiences and knowledge" (Burwell & Lenters, 2015, p.216). In this process, students develop a "symbiotic relationship" as a way of simultaneously "being in the world and making sense of it" (Vasudevan & Reilly, 2013, p. 458).

Trying to make meanings in their own LL, but also in their partners', also facilitated the development of a third space where students looked at their partner's reality but also at their own from an outsider's perspective. This *thirdness* is "mediation, habit, interpretation, representation, communication, signs" (van Lier, 2002, p. 150) and according to Kramsch (2009) it "stress[es] process, variation and style over product, place and stable community membership" (p. 248). In this safe environment, the students feel secure enough to fully engage in sustained dialogue and they can become intercultural communicators through their efforts to understand and interact with speakers from other cultures. This aspect is mentioned in Maria's (a student from Madrid) essay:

> In an intercultural exchange, it is extremely important to acquire informed knowledge of the other culture: not knowing about the other dehumanises him or her. […] In the process of getting to know the other's culture, it is indispensable to rethink both our own culture and our linguistic ideology. To put it differently, we need to question stereotypes in order to subsequently subvert them. Stereotypes, generalisations and ethnocentrism lead to uneasy situations, conflicts and misunderstandings. It is also very important to be empathetic and caring about the other's issues. The following might serve as an example: I was scared after the terrorist attack in Paris and Karen was immensely supportive. These gestures bring people together, no matter the distance, the language or the cultural differences between them. Having an open-minded attitude towards other ways of living also helps. To sum up, the attitudes that need to be promoted in an intercultural conversation are curiosity, desire to learn about other cultures, open-mindedness and empathy.

As can be seen in the excerpts above, through intercultural LL projects such as this one, students can become aware of the importance of this third space, one that, as María writes, "allows us to rethink both our own culture and our linguistic ideology, to question stereotypes in order to subsequently subvert them, to develop curiosity, open-mindedness and a desire to learn about other cultures, and to be empathetic and caring towards the other".

6   Conclusions

This study suggests that attending to the LL as an activity within a telecollaborative exchange provides an ideal opportunity for learning about language diversity from an intercultural perspective. In this context, the students take on the role of researchers by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data in an attempt to understand not only their own LL but also that of their partners. As mentioned by other authors (Burwell & Lenters, 2015), the study of linguistic landscapes seems to fit especially well with a pedagogy of multiliteracies which "grows out of a recognition of the very sorts of global shifts – in language, culture, media, technology and finance – that shape our semiotic environments" (p. 219). In connection with this, the integration of the LL project into the telecollaborative exchange added an extra dimension by allowing the students to explore beyond their local realities into more global realities. Having to critically compare and analyze the LL, not only of their own

cities but of their partners', encouraged students to discuss themes about language status, power, social representation, and (cultural) identity, which forced them to reconcile their own knowledge and experience with those of their partners. In this process, students became active participants as they move through, decode and make meaning of their multimodal and multicultural environments.

The telecollaborative LL project also provided evidence of its potential for the creation of an (intercultural) dialogic third space that led participants to question "the cultural stereotyping which usually involves the polarization of essentialized cultural identities and practices" and instead encouraged "radical cultural creativity" (Kostogriz, 2004, p. 10). In this safe environment, students can develop the knowledge, attitudes, and abilities that they need to become effective intercultural communicators.

7 Next Steps

In future telecollaborative exchanges, following findings from Vinagre (2021, 2022), we intend to structure the process differently in order to ensure critical reflection and a deeper level of engagement with difference by all participants. First, we shall adopt the 'Progressive Exchange Model' (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016) which entails participants undertaking three interrelated tasks that move from information exchange to comparing and analyzing cultural practices and finally working on a collaborative product. The first task, carried out asynchronously, shall engage students in information exchange of specific cultural topics. This task will also incorporate an 'ice-breaker' activity in order to facilitate dyads' becoming mutually acquainted before working together. In the second task the students will meet virtually in order to contrast and compare the information of those cultural topics that they have focused on in the first task. Finally, in the third task, the students will participate in the LL project. In order to prepare them, they will start by exploring cultural identity issues, taking the TED talk by Taiye Selasi, 'Don't ask me where I'm from, ask me where I'm a local' (Selasi, 2014) as the base for their discussion. The video, together with questions for reflection, will be provided in the face-to-face lesson and a brief introduction to the concept of linguistic landscape will also be facilitated. During the project, in addition to taking, tagging, and uploading photos of how the foreign language is used in the LL of their respective cities, the students will be asked to categorize the photos by analyzing official lettering (top-down) as well as commercial or private signs and posters (bottom-up) following taxonomies such as those by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006). Classifications such as this should provide students with a clearer picture of the differences in the use of the foreign language, as well as bringing to the fore issues of power, majority versus minorities, discrimination, identity, community markers and interest in benefits attached to language uses. Finally, questions for reflection will be provided in order to help students prepare for their joint essays and self-reflection videos with the purpose of facilitating engagement with difference at deeper levels.

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