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Introduction to Special Issue

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Over the past two decades, Linguistic Landscape (LL) scholarship has developed into a vibrant, interdisciplinary field that spans analysis of all multimodal meaning-making, power dynamics, and identity creation in society to show all of these can be leveraged for teaching and learning in schools (Gorter & Cenoz, 2025; Przymus & Solmaz, 2025). The field has evolved from an initial focus on public signage to include schoolscapes, digital landscapes, semiotic landscapes, soundscapes, fictional landscapes, and any meaning-making interaction with our physical, virtual, and imaginary surroundings (Brown, 2012; Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy & Gorter, 2008; Solmaz, 2025). LL research has consistently shown the dynamic relationships among language, space, power, and identity as well as the ability to adapt with changing events and evolving educational, social, and political needs.

However, despite this significant growth as a field, a consistent geographical imbalance remains in LL scholarship, as most of the foundational and highly cited work has centered urban spaces in the “Global North,” leaving the “Global South” again underrepresented in the literature. This geographical imbalance often shapes unquestioned paradigms of research, thought, and value, via what contexts are prioritized, which theoretical frameworks gain prominence, what is considered “central” versus “peripheral” scholarship, and so on. The purpose of this special issue is not simply to expand coverage of LL research but also to re-center perspective, to change/shift epistemic/conceptual (re)positioning within LL research, to prioritize contexts that are often viewed as supplementary, and in doing so, to cast an even greater magnifying lens on the intersection of LL and bilingualism.

On Naming, Positioning, and the Politics of “Global South”

Our decision to employ the term “Global South” in this special issue was both intentional and carefully considered. “Global South” does not serve as a geographic marker nor a developmental index. We utilize this term to indicate historically unequal distributions of epistemic authority, academic visibility, access to publishing opportunities, and citation power. In addition, we adopt it to refer to areas whose multilingual realities have long been developed and theorized locally yet their contributions may not be located centrally in the dominant academic circles.

The necessity of such re-positioning is not theoretical. It emerges from lived moments within international academic collaborations where questions of inclusion, voice, and epistemic positioning are negotiated in subtle yet revealing ways. Academic collaborations internationally sometimes frame inclusion beyond “the West” as simply an extension of coverage (i.e., an expansion of coverage to provide a needed diversification of perspective) rather than recognizing co-equal locations of collaboration. Similarly, when self-critical approaches are used as part of a reflexive practice in academic settings, they are often interpreted as having originated from Western academic traditions and in doing so create a discursively bounded area of who is viewed as the normative subject of scholarly virtue. While such interpretations are not usually motivated by ill intent, they clearly demonstrate how quickly epistemological hierarchies become normalized through the everyday language of academia.

On the other hand, the label “Global South” has also been met with resistance due to the perception that the term implies under-development or inferiority. This resistance represents the continued presence of developmental hierarchies that are embedded in global academic constructs. The term can sometimes be misinterpreted as a scalar judgment (i.e., under-developed vs. developed) rather than as a structural-relational category.

Ultimately, there exists a larger question regarding to what degree academic communities internalize external hierarchies of knowledge production. When contexts are added to representatively expand the scope of the academic community, are those contexts conceptualized as intellectually generative sites or as supplemental add-ons to an existing intellectual center?

In this special issue, “Global South” serves as neither additive nor symbolic inclusion. Instead, it signifies an intentional centering of sociolinguistic contexts where multilingualism is historically sedimented, politically negotiated and structurally embedded. These contexts are not peripheral to Linguistic Landscape scholarship; they are foundational to re-conceptualizing how language, power and space are theoretically understood. By devoting the entirety of our special issue to these contexts, we move beyond tokenistic expansion to establish an epistemically different positioning.

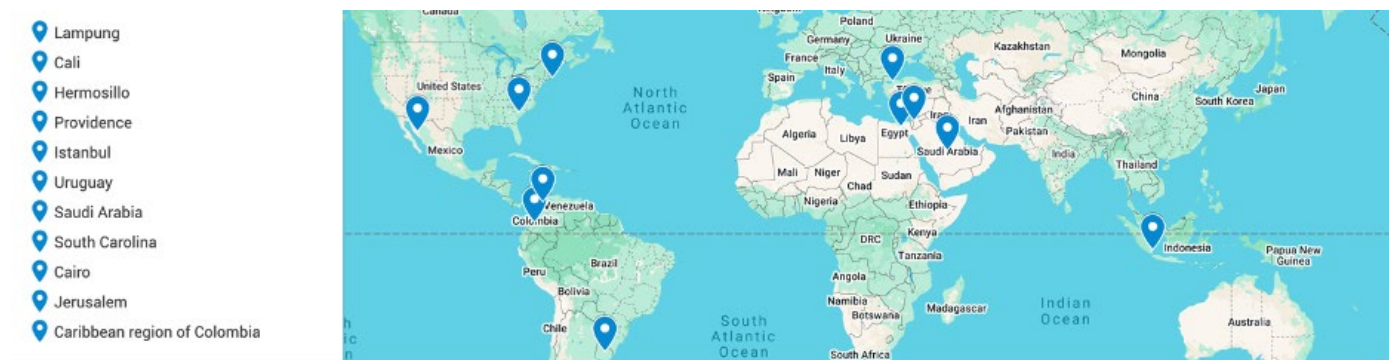
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Contributions to This Special Issue

This special issue is made up of seven research articles and cover art that together represent a range of places that include Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Mexico, Egypt, Türkiye, Israel, USA, Uruguay, and Colombia and provide evidence for the diversity and intellectual vitality of research in LL in and across the Global South (Image 1). The works included here also take a step beyond traditional signage-based analysis and include examples of sacred pilgrimage infrastructure, ritual soundscapes, indigenous languages being made visible, the music of Beyonce, translanguaging in borderlands, and pedagogy in both physical and virtual learning environments. At the same time as they vary in terms of place, site, or context, commonalities can be observed: a critical interrogation of the hierarchy of language; a distinction between symbolic visibility and lived multilingualism; an extension of the domain of LL from visual/symbolic to multisensory/multimodal; and continued interest in translation, ritual, identity, and power.

Image 1

Special Issue Sites of Linguistic Landscape and Soundscape Analyses



First, Aljohani, Elyas, Solmaz, Bhatt, and Adnan expand the LL inquiry into the audio domain by investigating the Adhan (the call to prayer) in major Islamic cities. They conceptualize the Adhan as a bilingual soundscape and share the concept of *liturgical bilingualism*, featuring the sustained ritual auditory exposure of Arabic in diverse multilingual environments. By combining soundscape theory with social semiotics, they show how Global South contexts have the ability to transform multisensory understandings of language, space, and power by expanding LL beyond the visual.

Putra and colleagues investigate the visibility and vitality of the Indigenous Lampung language in Indonesia using a large corpus of public signage and interviews. The authors challenge the widespread assumption that increased visibility of languages corresponds to higher levels of ethnolinguistic vitality. By establishing a distinction between symbolic representation and functional language use, they reveal the structural barriers that shape Indigenous language maintenance and highlight the need to reconsider Northern models of visibility in light of multilingual realities of the Global South.

Przymus and colleagues explore the role of translanguaging practices in the LLs of Sonora, México and Rhode Island, U.S.A. While previous studies have mapped multilingualism in LLs, the authors move beyond this descriptive focus and examine translanguaging as a semiotic strategy of identification, recognition, and survivance. By examining translanguaging practices in borderland and diasporic contexts, they break down rigid Global North-South binary oppositions and demonstrate how border spaces may be intellectually productive places to think about language ideologies, migration, and educational policy.

Balseiro, Frade-Pandolfi, and Mántaras illustrate the potential of LL for pedagogy in Uruguayan English as a foreign language (EFL) and teacher education contexts. Specifically, they conduct LL-based interventions in two different types of Uruguayan public spaces (a bilingual border region and an urban coastal area), demonstrating that students and pre-service teachers use these interventions to critically interrogate language hierarchies and visibility in their respective local public spaces. These studies represent examples of how classrooms in the Global South are sites of convergence of sociolinguistic inquiry and pedagogical transformation.

Sánchez et al. reposition the lived experience of students as multimodal landscapes within a transnational Colombia-U.S. virtual exchange. Specifically, through collaborative action research, students created digital representations of their communities that disrupt the dominant language hierarchies and promoted a more dialogic and relational understanding of bilingualism.

Additionally, the study demonstrates how global collaboration can counteract deficit narratives and foster epistemic agency in educational spaces of the Global South.

Aldhahri and Shoaib explore bilingual street signage at three sacred pilgrimage sites (i.e. Arafat, Mina, and Muzdalifah) in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. Using a translation-oriented LL approach, they demonstrate how signage (which serve millions of pilgrims) layers meaning in an attempt to convey a specific translation strategy which balances accessibility, ritual exactitude, and religious identity. In doing so, they create sacred space as a theoretically generative site for advancing the fields of LL and multilingualism.

Fernández Benavides and Castillo Palacios use LL to integrate Rhythm and Blues (R&B) into EFL classroom practice in Colombia's National Bilingualism Project. In particular, they conceptualize the music of Beyonce as part of students' soundscapes to illustrate how multimodal engagement promotes critical thinking on issues such as race, gender, identity, and national positionality. By engaging with LL in classroom soundscapes, the authors illustrate how educational contexts in the Global South produce locally based and critically positioned approaches to intercultural language education.

Finally, the front cover art is the creative work of Andres Rivero([@rivero.art](https://www.instagram.com/rivero.art)), an Uruguayan artist, writer, poet, and musician. Author of the recently published book of poems *Mormasiento*, Rivero's work explores borderland identity and the Portuñol language. His cover art visually accompanies the rich stories of language contact, identity development, and the fluid nature of language, identity, education, reality, and the human condition—all represented in this special issue.

Concluding Thoughts

Ibn Khaldun, a Muslim historian, philosopher, and writer, is often attributed to the quote “geography is destiny... and one cannot run away from it. It could be a curse or a blessing. It all depends on what one makes of it. We bring our own blessings and carry our own curses” (circa 1377; see also Ozoral, 2024). The authors and artists who have contributed to this special issue place geography at the center when analyzing their linguistic, sound, and overall semiotic landscapes that encompass their quotidian experiences, yet they do not let geography determine their destinies in a connected, multilingual world. One could read this special issue and have many words (bilingualism, creativity, resistance, respect, etc.) and feelings (pride, honor, sacredness, etc.) arise to the forefront of their thoughts. However one word, although not found in any of the work, continues to drive the researchers, teachers, community activists, artists, students, family members, religious leaders, etc., behind these actions: hope. Hope for a day when all voices, all identities, and all ways of being are valued and honored.

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