

What's left when a language recedes?
Belonging and place-making in the linguistic landscape of Hancock, Michigan

Kathryn Remlinger and Kayleigh Karinen

When we look around us, the landscape offers us a certain perspective from wherever we stand. This perspective is shaped by the meanings that we draw from the images, sounds, languages, colors, and architecture that surround us. Linguistic and semiotic features are central to these meanings, and together they create a landscape that reflects the history, people, and everyday ways of being and doing that make a place recognizable and identifiable (Shohamy & Gorter 2009). This study examines how meanings related to Finnishness are created through and with language and images in the linguistic landscape in Hancock, Michigan, a small town in Michigan's Upper Peninsula (UP) known as the "Finnish American Nesting Place". Centering on Benedict Anderson's (1983/2003) concept of "imagined communities," this study aims to demonstrate how discursive strategies in public spaces index belonging and place-making. The social correlates that underpin this reimagining affect ways of understanding larger sociocultural meanings about identity, place, and language use (Cornips & de Rooij 2015, Bloomart 2013; Leeman & Modan 2009). The study aims to answer three main questions: 1) How is Finnishness discursively indexed in the linguistic landscape of the Finnish American Nesting Place? 2) How are the related meanings represented as something recognizable and valued? 3) What are the ideological effects of these discursive practices and related meanings? Preliminary analysis demonstrates that both linguistic and semiotic practices are abundant at the center of Finnish American Nesting Place. For example, we find menus with Finnish labels for meals and food items such as *pannukakku* and *nisu*; a monument commemorating a local historical figure in Finnish and English, street name signs in Finnish and English; coffee mugs labeled with *sisu* and *kahvi*, stickers cursing *saantana perkele*, Finnish flags, and the Finnish national colors blue and white coloring houses and shop signs. As we move away from the center into the periphery, we find fewer linguistic demonstrations of cultural identity than in Hancock, the heart of the Finnish American Nesting Place, and instead Finnishness is more often represented semiotically, for example, with the Finnish flag and national colors. What is pervasive throughout the landscape both at the center and in the periphery are Finnish surnames on shop signs and street names. In addition, direct and indirect indexes reflect a history of language and culture contact resulting in language transfer and borrowings. For example, locally, *juusto* (a kind of baked raw-milk cheese) is known as *juustoa*, where the *-a* particle suffix has fossilized. Likewise, some semiotic indexes, such as the Finnish lion, have shifted meanings over time in Finland to be appropriated by white nationalists, whereas in the UP, the image correlates with an ideal Finland and sense of Finnishness. The ideological effects of Finnishness in the linguistic landscape reinforce values of Finnish identity and language, while simultaneously erasing (Gal and Irvine 2000) languages and identities of other residents past and present: Italian, German, Irish, Cornish, Hungarian, Slovenian, Croatian, Chinese, the indigenous Ojibwe, among others. In short, the collective discursive practices function ideologically to affect belonging and place-making.

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