



LSLP Micro-Paper 70: City as Literacy

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Defining the Term

The concept of City as Literacy explores more deeply the relationship between urban spaces and literacy practices. Drawing from [literacy](#) and [ethnographic](#) studies between the 1960s and 1980s, we propose a concept that begins by reformulating how we see the city. We argue that the city (in its condition of nonhuman) redefines the traditional concepts of reading and writing providing new forms of communication and interpretation of the daily interactions with its surroundings.

In this sense, City as Literacy acknowledges that the city not only hosts but also creates new ways to play with texts. To do so, the city itself provides different ways for conveying messages mediated by languages. It also combines conventional text formats with nontraditional forms of texts, such as billboards, flyers, graffiti, tattoos, clothing, or advertisements, among others. The presence of these multiple forms of texts bring together various linguistic and semiotic resources, thus offering new forms of communication that mix multimodality and [indexicality](#) as possibilities for language interplay.

The idea of City as Literacy relies on a number of addition several concepts to operate as a multilinear, [multidimensional](#) framework: [multimodality](#), [geosemiotics](#), [polylinguaging](#), [translinguaging](#), [metrolingualism](#), and [superdiversity](#). All these concepts come together to help us explore how different [languages coexist](#) as part of the city's ecosystem.

Connecting it to LSLP

City as Literacy is the leading concept that drives our Community Literacies in Second Language Contexts research line. This line of inquiry has been inquiring and characterizing how languages operate in Medellín and how people are taking part of its dynamics, therefore, this concept becomes foundational for our research.

Being the first concept we developed, it also provided the blueprint for other LSLP concepts such as [Language-as-Victory](#), [Polyangulation](#), or [Multimodal Critical Consciousness](#), to name a few.

This concept has morphed since its first iteration back in 2014, becoming more elaborate to respond to the ongoing evolution of our community literacies research. Russian scholars have replicated our framework for their studies on language interactions in Russian cities. Our current work with the framework is still expanding it, as we explore the potential of exploring both the sights and [sounds](#) in [second languages](#) in Medellín.

Expanding Second Language Research

The field of Second Language Studies is just beginning to realize the full potential of looking at our cities as language learning sites. Ideas such as ours and the related field of Linguistic Landscaping show the potential of not confining language learning to our classrooms.

We also believe that a concept such as City as Literacy provides the necessary data to support language policies, from the premise that today's cities do not need to become bilingual, but that they are already bilingual, where language is sometimes hiding in plain sight. Our idea of City as Literacy, coupled with ongoing efforts to promote community-based language pedagogies, for example, opens possibilities for realistic and meaningful engagement with second language in our communities.

References

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