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Ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis and social change: A case study

by

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Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis and social change: A case study

Jan Blommaert and Ico Maly

Introduction

Whenever the composition of a neighborhood changes, the place *sounds and looks differently.* We realize that it has changed because we hear and read different languages than the ones we expected or were used to. Language, in that sense, is the most immediate and direct identifier of people and the most immediately sensitive indicator of social change. And disciplined attention to language can help identify the nature and direction of such processes of change, sometimes years before such changes show up in official statistics.

Over the past decade, a new branch of sociolinguistics called Linguistic Landscape Studies (LLS) has emerged, as an attempt to produce accurate and detailed inventories of urban multilingualism. LLS investigate the presence of publicly visible bits of written language: billboards, road and safety signs, shop signs, graffiti and all sorts of other inscriptions in the public space, both professionally produced and grassroots. The locus where such landscapes are being documented is usually the late-modern, globalized city: a densely multilingual environment in which publicly visible written language documents the presence of a wide variety of (linguistically identifiable) groups of people (e.g. Landry & Bourhis 1997; Gorter 2006; Backhaus 2007; Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Barni 2008; Barni & Bagna 2008; Barni & Extra 2008; Shohamy & Gorter 2009; Pan Lin 2009; Coupland & Garrett 2010; Jaworski 2010; Blommaert 2013). Excursions into less urban and more peri-urban or rural spaces are rare, even though they occur and yield stimulating results (e.g. Wang, 2014; Wang et al. 2013; Juffermans 2010).

LLS offer considerable potential, to wit:

> -One, LLS can act as a first-line sociolinguistic *diagnostic* of particular areas. It offers the fieldworker a relatively user-friendly toolkit for detecting the major features of sociolinguistic regimes in an area: monolingual or

multilingual? And in the case of the latter, which languages are there? From such a quick and user-friendly diagnosis, one can move towards more profound investigations into the sociolinguistic regime, and feed those back to the diagnosis.

-Two, given this diagnostic value, LLS will at the very least protect researchers from major errors – as when an area identified as the research target proves not to offer the multilingualism one had expected to meet there, on the basis of an exploration of published sources or less reliable travelers' accounts. Thus, LLS can be used as an excellent tool for explorative fieldwork and will enhance the realism of research proposals. The potential is thus also practical.

-Three, and more fundamentally, LLS compel sociolinguists to pay more attention to *literacy*, the different forms and shapes of literacy displayed in public spaces. This is blissful, for traditional sociolinguistics can thereby shed some of its historical bias towards spoken language and incorporate crucial sociolinguistic views developed in (the at present rather parallel universe of) literacy studies (Lillis 2013). The specific place of literacy in sociolinguistic economies has traditionally been downplayed in mainstream studies. The unfortunate consequence of this is that important sociolinguistic features that can only, or most persuasively, be read off literacy artifacts have not been incorporated as elements of the sociolinguistic system.

-Finally, LLS compel us towards *historicizing* sociolinguistic analysis, at least when certain conditions are met. LLS can detect and interpret social change and transformation on several scale-levels, from the very rapid and immediate to the very slow and gradual ones, all gathered in a "synchronic" space. A detailed and nuanced LLS can thus describe the layered, multifiliar and nonlinear nature of sociolinguistic phenomena – in other words: it opens the way to a sociolinguistics of *complexity* (see Blommaert 2013: 6-18).

In what follows, we shall apply the tools of LLS to a particular space, the Rabot neighborhood in Ghent, Belgium. We shall use these tools in a particular way, however, and before engaging with the neighborhood we will briefly sketch our own approach to LLS.

Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis

The early stages of the development of LLS were dominated by a quantitative approach, in which publicly visible languages were counted and mapped as to distribution over a specific area (Backhaus 2007 is an example). While this approach yielded useful indicative 'catalogues' of areal multilingualism, it failed to explain how the presence and distribution of languages could be connected with specific populations and communities and the relationships between them, or with the patterns of social interaction in which people engage in the particular space. Such levels of analysis require a more maturely semiotic approach, in which the signs themselves are given greater attention both individually (signs are multimodal and display important qualitative typological differences) and in combination with each other (the *landscape,* in other words).

Drawing on works such as Scollon & Scollon (2003) and Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) *qualitative* LLS are possible, especially when we take the following points into account.

1. Public spaces are social arenas – circumscriptions on which control, discipline, belonging and membership operate and in which they are being played out. Furthermore, public space is also an *instrument* of power, discipline and regulation: it organizes the social dynamics deployed in that space. The public space of a market square or a highway is, in contrast to the private space of e.g. one's dining room, a shared space over which multiple people and groups will try to acquire authority and control, if not over the whole of the space, then at least over parts of it. It is an institutional object, regulated (and usually 'owned') by official authorities whose role will very often be clearest in the restrictions they impose on the use of space (prohibitions on smoking, loitering, littering, speed limits, warnings, and so on). Public spaces are *normative* spaces.

2. Communication in the public space, consequently, is communication in a field of power. The question thus becomes: how does space organize semiotic regimes? (cf. Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck 2005:198; also Stroud & Mpendukana 2009). This question assumes that regimes can be multiple and competing but that they

nevertheless function as regimes, i.e. as ordered patterns of normative conduct and expectations, authoritative patterns of conduct to which one should orient.

3. All signs can be analyzed by looking at three "axes":

> (i) Signs point towards the *past*, to their origins and modes of production. Elements of material and linguistic make-up are indices of who manufactured the signs, under which conditions they were manufactured, which resources were used and, so, available and accessible to the producers of the sign. The history of the sign, thus, leads us towards the broader sociolinguistic conditions under which the sign has been designed and deployed.
>
> (ii) Signs point towards the *future*, to their intended audiences and preferred uptake. Signs are always *proleptic* in the sense that they address specific addressees and audiences with specific effects in mind: a nonsmoking sign is intended specifically for smokers and intends to prevent them from smoking (not from standing on their heads, for instance).
>
> (iii) Signs also point towards the *present*, through their "emplacement" (Scollon & Scollon 2003): their location is not a random given, and neither is their "syntagmatic" position relative to other signs.

Given these three axes, we can understand the social function of public signs: signs *demarcate* public space, they cut it up into smaller fragments and regulate these in connection to other fragments. Signs thus always have a *semiotic* scope – the communicative relationship between producers and addresses, in which normative and regulative messages are conveyed (e.g. local authorities messaging "don't smoke" to smokers), and a *spatial* scope ("don't smoke *here"*). They are always *specific* in terms of meaning and function, and qualitative differences between signs are thus of utmost relevance.

4. The three axes and their functions turn LLS into an *ethnographic* and *historical* project, in which we see signs as indices of social relationships, interests and practices, deployed in a field which is replete with overlapping and intersecting norms – not just norms of *language* use, but norms of conduct, membership, legitimate belonging and usage; and not just the norms of a here-and-now, but norms that are of different orders and operate within different historicities. The linguistic landscape has

been turned into a social landscape, features of which can now be read through an analysis of the public signs.

We can call this "ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis" (ELLA), and we shall now use it on a specific case: the urban working-class neighborhood known as Rabot in the city of Ghent, Belgium. Following a research template developed in Jan Blommaert's (2013) study of the Antwerp inner-city area of Oud-Berchem, extensive fieldwork was conducted in Rabot by Ico Maly in 2013 and early 2014. The point of the exercise is to demonstrate that ELLA enables us not just to identify with a very high degree of accuracy the demography of the neighborhood – who lives here? – but also the particular dynamic and complex features of the social fabric of a superdiverse neighborhood.

Introducing the field

The central target of our research is Wondelgemstraat, the central shopping street of the Rabot neighborhood in the 19th century belt around the historic city of Ghent. The road connects the historic center of Ghent with a more recent suburban district. The street and its neighborhood, located along a canal and equipped at the time with a railway station, were methodically laid out in the second half of the 19th century in the context of the industrial revolution, revolving around the textile industry in Ghent. Several major industrial plants were built, and the neighborhood rapidly developed into a densely populated and predominantly working-class neighborhood with some presence of company executives and a flourishing commerce in Wondelgemstraat.

Though the Rabot neighborhood was part of the (semi-)periphery of Ghent, for its inhabitants at the end of the nineteenth and in the first half of the twentieth century, it became a center in its own. And within the neighborhood different centers attracted different workers and classes. Parts of the neighborhood had a very poor reputation, partly based on the physical layout of the area (small and poorly equipped houses) and on political grounds: a local pub was the hotbed of communism (Van den Abeele 2010: 37). But Socialists, Catholics and liberals also had their infrastructure in the neighborhood. The Catholic workers' movement was organized around the neogothic Saint Joseph church, and organized youth clubs, Christian unions for men and

women, cooperative stores, a theatre association, a party hall, a library and even a local Catholic newspaper. In 1877 the Liberals established their workers' association in the neighborhood. This resulted a few years later in the establishment of a local chapter of the Liberal party and a liberal infrastructure including a pension fund, a football club, a gymnastics club, theatre shows, singing nights, concerts and many more. The Socialists were also prominently visible in this industrialized neighborhood. Socialist workers could watch movies in the movie theatre Vooruit (De Wilde 2007: 80). There was a socialist pharmacy, a grocery shop and a large party hall where the socialists organized fairs, shows and lectures. They also issued a monthly magazine.

Until well into the 20th century, Rabot stayed mainly a ("native" Flemish) working-class neighborhood where the Socialist, Catholic and Liberal "pillars" were quite prominent. After the Second World the textile industry experienced its last major, but short, revival. Most of the textile factories of the Rabot neighborhood survived the war without much war damage and could restart production soon after the war. From the 1950s its technological edge started to dwindle and the industry found itself in heavy weather. The companies had to increasingly compete on a global scale and the technological progress of the other countries required a further 'rationalization' of production: the raise of productivity and lowering of wages. From the 1960s the textile industry tried to recruit immigrant workers from countries with which Belgium had bilateral agreements. As a result 196 immigrant workers were employed in 1962 in the local textile industry (De Wilde 2007). In the early stages these workers migrated from Italy and Spain, later from Algeria and Tunisia. From 1963 also Turkish guest-workers arrived (Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht & Vandeputte 2012). Within the next decennia this latest group became the dominant immigrant community in the neighborhood. Their migration was a consequence of the industrialization of agriculture in Turkey as part of the Marshall Plan, which rendered many young Turks unemployed (De Wilde 2007 provides a detailed discussion).

These first Turkish migrants in Ghent had a fairly 'homogeneous' profile. The vast majority were men between 25 and 40 years old, coming from previously rural areas like Emirdag, Piribeyli and Posof. They spoke Turkish, were often poorly educated and mostly professed a non-orthodox Islam. These labor migrants initially intended to

return to their countries of birth after a few years; the de-industrialization of the neighborhood, however, ensured that the majority stayed and started families there. The presence of these workers ended up in chain migration of family and friends of these pioneers.

This migration profoundly changed Rabot. In 1973, 843 foreign nationals lived in the Rabot neighborhood, which represented 6.67 % of the total number of migrants in Ghent at that time. Native Belgian workers, often retired, started leaving the neighborhood and immigrants became house owners. As a result of this changing demography and the decline of the textile industry, the flourishing (largely "native" Flemish) commercial middle class gradually disappeared from the Wondelgemstraat, to be replaced by "ethnic" (largely Turkish) commerce. The three ideological and social "pillars" also lost their basis in the neighborhood and were replaced by Islamic mosques. Today, nearly 50 % of the population in the neighborhood has foreign roots, which is the highest percentage in Ghent.

Who lives here?

Now that Rabot has been identified, let us turn to our first issue: the demographic composition of the area.

In the perception of many citizens of Ghent, the Wondelgemstraat, is a "Turkish" street on the one hand, and a decaying neighborhood on the other hand. Crime, dirty streets, dense traffic and young male migrants "hanging around" are the emblematic features of this image, which is shared by politicians, intellectuals, citizens of Ghent and of the suburbs beyond the neighborhood. Even Turkish residents of neighboring cities see Wondelgemstraat as "marginal", often pointing to the rural and "backward" roots of its Turkish inhabitants (Emirdag) as an explanation. Today Rabot is the most densely populated district in Ghent with 9465 people per square kilometer,[1] and Wondelgemstraat with 14761 people per square kilometer (2007 figures, Sumresearch

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[1] http://gent.buurtmonitor.be/quickstep/qsreport.aspx?report=wijkmon_z_t&geolevel=wijk&geoitem=7

2008).[2] Rabot also has the highest unemployment rate of the city and the lowest average income (SID 2012).[3] Rabot is superdiverse, densely populated and poor.[4]

The street and its neighborhood, however, are no longer just "Turkish". If we look at the origins of the (officially registered) people, we see that the district has 22.4% residents with Turkish roots, and this percentage is declining. From 2007, the year of Bulgaria's membership of the European Union, the number of Bulgarian migrants steeply rose from 112 in 2006 to 285 in 2007. In 2012 more than 800 people or 10,4% of the residents of the Rabot were Bulgarian migrants. Turks and Bulgarians together with the native Belgians form the three dominant "ethnic" groups in the district.

Diversity, however, does not end there, and this is where ELLA comes in handy. If we look at the visible languages in the neighborhood, we notice a reflection of the demographics in the dominance of Dutch, Turkish and Bulgarian. In the summer of 2013, 11 visible languages could be found in the Wondelgemstraat: Dutch, Turkish, English, Polish, French, Spanish, Chinese, Slovak, Arabic, Italian and Bulgarian. Some of these languages, like Dutch and Turkish are not only common, they are also consistently present over time. Although Turkish is still quite dominant in the neighborhood, it is important to note that *Dutch* operates as the cross-group lingua franca in the neighborhood (a feature also noted elsewhere, see Blommaert 2013, 2014). Customers whose backgrounds are unknown are addressed in Dutch, and Dutch dominates the public space. It serves as the dominant language for top-down communication (monolingual streets-signs, posters, public maps, …) and for bottom-up communication. Most of the 'ethnic' shops are multilingual. Concretely, this means that beside Turkish or Bulgarian, we see translations in (sometimes truncated) Dutch. In terms of frequency, Turkish is the second language in the neighborhood and is prominently visible on shop windows, posters, menus and cars. Several places are monolingually Turkish, like coffee houses and some shops, but in most cases Turkish is accompanied with Dutch and in some cases also with English. Thus, Dutch and Turkish are stable and persistent languages in the neighborhood; and while Bulgarian

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[2] Sumresearch, (2008). Een kwantitatieve analyse van de bevolking in Gent:
http://www.kenniscentrumvlaamsesteden.be/beleidsdomeinen/wonen/Documents/Woonstudie%20van%20de%20stad%20Gent/01%20Kwantitatieve%20analyse%20bevolking.pdf
[3]http://www.gent.be/docs/Departement%20bevolking%20en%20Welzijn/Integratiedienst/Beleidsplannen/Onderzoek%20en%20cijfers_ECD_2012-2014.pdf
[4] http://www.nieuwsblad.be/article/detail.aspx?articleid=DMF20121012_024

is on the rise in the neighborhood, it is almost always accompanied with Dutch. Besides these three dominant languages we see a highly diverse kaleidoscope of smaller languages.

This kaleidoscope is dynamic, and what is found today is not necessarily what will be found in the next days, weeks or months. For example, we counted 11 languages in August 2013, while in February 2014, 16 languages were present. Besides the languages we already mentioned above, we also came across Nepalese, Hindi, Romanian, German, Farsi and Thai; while Polish had vanished. Let us dig a little bit deeper in the "disappearance" of Polish and underscore a methodological point.

The Polish sign observed in August 2013 was seen on the back of a van with a Polish license plate (Figure 1). On the back we see a professionally lettered Polish name of the company: ELSTUK. Next to the company name we see the activity of the company announced in Polish (left) and Dutch (right), namely plastering. Note that both languages are visibly equal and written in the same font and size. At the bottom we see the website with Polish extension posted together with two mobile phone numbers: a Polish and a Belgian number. On the company website we read that ELSTUK operates on an international scale: the company works for the multinational KNAUF and has projects in Poland, but also in several locations in Belgium. Classic Linguistic Landscape research would probably not see this as a significant item since the sign is not "permanent". The Polish van, however, was present in the neighborhood for several months, after which it disappeared, probably together with its (Polish) driver and passengers – the Polish "population" of Wondelgemstraat. It is attention to such non-permanent, temporary or even accidental signs that defines our ethnographic Linguistic Landscaping approach and generates sensitivity to rapid and unpredictable social and cultural change.

Figure 1: Polish van in Wondelgemstraat. © Ico Maly 2013.

Rapid social and cultural change defines the superdiverse neighborhood and its permanent demographic turnover: many people move in, but as many move out of the neighborhood or change location within the neighborhood itself. We shall see more examples of this below. These rapid changes may seem chaotic, but they are patterned and ordered: the different migration waves translate in a layered and stratified district where some layers are relatively stable across time and others change rapidly.

A layered and stratified population

The different populations do not just live together; the neighborhood is stratified. On the basis of the frequency and specific forms of emplacement of signs in the area, we see the following "layers" in Wondelgemstraat:

1. The basis of the neighborhood is made up of the **home owners and shopkeepers** largely consisting of native Belgians and immigrants with Turkish roots. The natives are a diverse group made out of old working class people and lower middle-class shopkeepers, and a more recently arrived community of younger people, notably students and recent graduates. The people with Turkish roots purchased their houses and shops in the 1980s and 1990s; some of these older migrants have left Rabot to resettle in the 20th

century suburban districts beyond Rabot. Their homes were changed into rental accommodation for new migrants, often of dubious quality but generating substantial cash incomes. The influx of new superdiverse migrants results in new forms of exploitation and in the rise of a Turkish middle (and suburban) class.

2. Since the early years of 21st century, new immigrants arrived in the neighborhood as a result of the further **unification process of Europe**. In an early stage, Albanian people arrived together with substantial numbers of Roma. The influx of large numbers of Bulgarian immigrants since 2007 has been noted above, and while most 21st century migrants use the neighborhood as a temporary station in complex migration trajectories, the Bulgarian immigrants are resident in the neighborhood. Some of these Bulgarian migrants speak at least some Turkish. That does not entail that the relationship between Turkish people and the people with Bulgarian roots is optimal and friendly; it merely means that there is a medium of communication between Bulgarian migrants, Turkish shopkeepers and Turkish employers. And here again we see that the different layers are characterized by inequality: they are stratified. Bulgarians, especially those whose legal status is obscure, get exploited as high-yield tenants and as cheap labor force.

3. Besides these three dominant groups, we find **recent (often temporary) migrants** from various parts of Europe together with migrants from Africa, Asia and the Middle East: French, Moroccans, Nigerians, Pakistanis, Ghanaians, Slovaks, Poles, Spaniards and Russians all live together in this small neighborhood. Many of these migrant groups are either statistically insignificant or invisible (if they are clandestine immigrants), yet they color the district and have started to define its linguistic landscape. Apart from their native languages, which have started to appear in the neighborhood, this superdiverse and highly volatile layer of the population is also responsible for the rise of *English* in Rabot. Migrants from Ghana, Togo, Nigeria and Pakistan, for example, are potential new tenants and customers and they are addressed in English.

It is in this third layer that we find fast changes, notably with respect to the presence of Latin American migrants (see below), Polish and Slovakian people. We have seen that the Polish labor migrants stay for some weeks or months in the neighborhood. Their presence does not translate in an enduring infrastructure of shops or bars, but we see their vans in the street and we also observe that night shops adjust their supplies to include Polish beer and phone cards offering cheap rates for calls to Poland.

4. A fourth layer consists of the **users of the district** often coming from the outskirts of the city. In this layer we can distinguish two major categories. One group exists out of effective users of the neighborhood, such as customers of the many "ethnic" restaurants and snack bars and the (cheap) groceries there; visitors of one of the many places of worship or students of the local schools. The other group of uses Wondelgemstraat merely as a transit street to and from work in central Ghent.

A flexible and dynamic infrastructure

We now know who populates the area; so let us turn to our second analytical target. We can use ELLA to get an accurate picture of the dynamics and the complexity that characterizes superdiverse environments. The clue we shall use for this is the infrastructure of the neighborhood: the enormous range of inscribed and semiotized material facilities in the area. We shall see how the dynamic and stratified demographic composition of the neighborhood is reflected in its infrastructure: new population configurations in the neighborhood generate new infrastructural demands, and the outcome is a complex array of different but connected facilities, which can be described as follows.

We have seen earlier that Wondelgemstraat was historically a flourishing shopping street, catering for the traditional working-class and bourgeois textile workers in the area. The decline of the textile industry, together with the immigration of sizeable numbers of Turkish migrants, caused a shift in the shopping infrastructure: discontinued "native" businesses were (cheaply) purchased and replaced by new shops and bars owned by Turkish migrants and their descendants. This evolution

caused a shift in the semiotic landscape, with the emergent visibility of the Turkish language and Turkish symbols (like the Turkish flag and the evil eye) in the streets. It also caused a shift in the public (i.e. "native") perception of the street and its infrastructure: the new shops are "cheap", and this change is perceived as a decline in status. A classic image of the decline, from a native middle class perspective, is this vegetable shop, where an older Dutch sign is still visible behind the overlay of Turkish signs.

Figure 2: An image of "decline". © Ico Maly 2013

The image of decline, however, fails to capture the intense dynamic and layering that goes on in the local infrastructure. There are clear signs of "upgrading" of more traditional small-scale Turkish businesses, reflecting greater affluence in the community and a rising demand for more diversified commodities in the neighborhood: a full-blown Turkish-owned supermarket opened its doors, together with fancy hair saloons and upmarket lunch restaurants. In addition, the construction of a regional Court of Law in the neighborhood and the presence of a University Professional College, attract new users to the neighborhood. Every day 2000 students arrive in the Rabot, while the new courthouse attracts around 1700 people on a daily

basis.[5] The presence of these new users of the neighborhood is promptly reflected in infrastructural changes. Several new lunch restaurants target the (largely middle-class) students, visitors of the courthouse, and new middle class residents. The Turkish kebab restaurant Göreme at the beginning of the Wondelgemstraat also tries to cash in by explicitly focusing on the student population (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Göreme restaurant. © Ico Maly 2013.

The window of the restaurant is revealing. We can distinguish four different languages: Turkish (the name of the restaurant), Dutch, French and English. The general description of the place uses three languages: Dutch ("student eethuis") which carries an "acccent" (a more preferred term is "studenteneethuis"), French-Dutch ("brasserie") and English ("Since 1993"). While the Dutch and the Dutch-French inscriptions carry a purely informative message, the English words are emblematic and gesture towards a global commercial culture and its 'quality'. This also counts for the French-Dutch term "brasserie", which usually points toward a more upmaket segment of catering. And it also counts for the sticker of the "Justeat.be"-platform, referring to a website of restaurants that do home deliveries. By joining the online platform *"Do not cook, just eat.be"* the restaurant expands her customer base beyond the neighborhood. Most of the other messages on the window are in "ecumenical

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[5] http://www.oogent.be/sites/default/files/page/documenten/klein%20formaat%20Fiche%20Rabot-Blaisantvest10_WF1540_Fichelv1.pdf

Turkish": words such as döner, pizza Turka, dürüm, … are also know by Dutch-speaking young people. Even though the restaurant clearly started as a Turkish restaurant aimed at a local Turkish customer base (we still see monolingual Turkish light panels above the window), we notice that the restaurant has adjusted itself towards the new users of the neighborhood and the new communication technologies to reach out to a broader customer base.

The examples above are indicators of broader change in the infrastructure of the district, in sync with the sociodemographic dynamics of the neighborhood. We can again distinguish different layers of infrastructure.

1. The first and oldest layer consists of two types of infrastructure. On the one hand we see **'native' facilities targeting a local-native clientele**: some old-skool cafés, the native butcher who sells pork, and a music shop specialized in Dutch music. All these shops use monolingual Dutch signage. On the other hand, we find **native-owned shops that reach out to the super-diverse clientele** of the neighborhood: the recently retired artisan shoemaker - a 'classic Flemish shop' serving a superdiverse clientele – and a laundrette now called QuickWash, but with the old (very 1960s) advertising panel "Wasorama" still showing.

Most of the native shops have disappeared over the years. The ones that stayed have adjusted their selections of goods and services. A good example is the local supermarket, Proxy Delhaize. While Delhaize supermarkets tends to attract a middle and upper-class clientele, the Wondelgemstraat branch has adjusted itself to the neighborhood: 'typical' Turkish products can be purchased and the supermarket also houses a branch of Western Union – a typical infrastructure of superdiversity. Similar adjustments can also be spotted in the weekly Sunday market nearby. The many visitors are superdiverse and some market vendors are responding to this by adjusting their merchandise to local tastes and preferences, now including Turkish peppers, honey melons instead and flat parsley. Thus we see that an important part of the "old" infrastructure of the neighborhood has been affected by its new environment.

2. A second layer consists of shops, coffee houses, cafes, hair saloons and betting offices that have **a relatively stable presence serving the old and the new**

audiences in the district. They focus on the socially disadvantaged. This layer consists of several cheaper shops with household appliances, kitchen material and food and shop names such as "Exit Euro Crisis" create utmost clarity in this respect. Besides these local stores, we see several low cost chain outlets. The neighborhood infrastructure includes a major segment of low budget facilities.

Call and internet shops are of course very well represented in the street and almost all the night shops sell prepaid phone cards. The street is replete with posters of cheap international providers such as Ortel Mobile or Lyca Mobile. The same is true for the betting shops. They individually pop up and disappear but their presence as a category of facilities is permanent. There is no shortage of usually Turkish-origin barbers in the street, and the street is also known for its 'Turkish shops': the old and the new butcher, several bakeries, greengrocers and shops selling (cheap) household appliances. Even though most of these shops have Turkish names, they serve an ecumenical audience, as opposed to most of the Turkish cafes and coffee houses, populated mostly by customers of Turkish origins.

3. A third layer consists of **businesses with a shorter history**. This layer can be seen as the infrastructural translation of the superdiversity in the neighborhood. Bulgarian-run facilities have, thus, become a rather stable presence in the last number of years. Their presence became visible when the Turkish bar "Gecem Bar" suddenly had a new name written on the windows: Café Bar Bulgariya. Today there is a Bulgarian restaurant, a Bulgarian coffee house and two Bulgarian grocery stores, testifying to the remarkable swiftness with which the Bulgarian immigrants have settled in the neighborhood. The reason for this lies in the fact that Bulgarian newcomers were eagerly employed by Turkish subcontractors - jobs not generally known to offer good working conditions. As an effect of this, Bulgarian immigrants started their own businesses and immediately adapted to the superdiverse environment. The lettering and multilingualism on the shop window in Figure 4 can serve as an example of this.

Figure 4: Bulgarian-owned shop. © Ico Maly 2013.

The store clearly tries to attract different groups in the neighborhood. Bulgarian migrants living in the neighborhood are evidently included: in the upper left corner some typical home made Bulgarian food is shown and the potential customers are addressed with monolingual Bulgarian text. But the main inscription on the window, 'Bulgaarse producten' (Bulgarian products), is written in flawless standard Dutch, the lingua franca of the neighborhood, and invites everyone.

And it becomes even more complex. Besides Bulgarian and Dutch we also find Spanish on display, in a Bulgarian-owned store that also aims at the recently arrived South American migrants: an Ortel Mobile poster in Spanish and Dutch advertises the cost per minute for a call to the following countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador and Peru (countries of which the national flags are also shown). Note that the presence of recent Latin-American immigrants is a "below the radar" phenomenon: if we look at the figures of the SumResearch report, only 0.10 % of the entire population of Ghent has Latin-American roots. The official statistics for Wondelgemstraat do not even mention a Latin-American presence. This poster functions as an "early warning" indicator of the presence of a group that does not yet show up in the statistics. We observed the poster in August 2013; several months later the first Latin-American

shop popped up in the street. And again, this must be seen both as an indicator of demographic changes in the neighborhood and as a local reflex of global change. Most of the Latin-American migrants come from Columbia and the Dominican Republic. They migrated to Spain in the 1980s, and left for Belgium in the wake of the recent economic crisis in Spain, to be employed, mostly, in the industrial cleaning sector.

Other new shops appear and old ones disappear at a fast pace, each time pointing towards new forms of presence in the area. A Jordanian butcher, who explicitly advertised in Arabic to reach out to another niche of local residents than the Turkish butchers has disappeared, to be replaced by an African-Asian (Indian-Pakistani) shop that opened its doors in March 2014. A new supermarket called "Mix Markt" opened and uses four different languages to welcome and to thank its customers, namely Dutch, Russian, Romanian and Bulgarian (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Mix Markt. © Ico Maly 2014.

4. A fourth layer consists of **shops and businesses that received an "upgrading" makeover**, targeting a wider and less economically vulnerable audience and distinguishing themselves from the newer shops. Examples are a dog grooming business, a new bicycle shop and several catering businesses. Some Turkish shops have received a visual makeover and new, more upmarket clothes and food shops are started. All these businesses have clearly invested in the appearance of their store. The

façade of a Turkish-owned driving school is finished in black marble and the cars with which the student drivers are learning to drive are new BMWs. Previously these stores were selling mainly cheaper Turkish products; their upgrading has given the neighborhood the budding reputation of a fashionable and attractive shopping area for Turkish-origin people in the wider region. Such changes document a strong upward mobility within the Turkish community. Turkish migrants from the second, third and fourth generation have become middle class and now start businesses that demand higher qualifications: there are Turkish dentists, doctors, lawyers and psychologists in the neighborhood. The Turkish community is upwardly mobile, and this mobility is reflected in its changing infrastructure.

Observe, by way of illustration, Figures 6 and 7. Both pictures document a restaurant owned by the same Turkish-origin family; only, both pictures are separated by some months in which the original restaurant was closed and the new one reopened in another location. And while the original restaurant was a monolingually Turkish-language place serving home-style traditional Turkish food, the new Selâle Restaurant has a menu in Turkish and Dutch, as well as English text on its window – pointing to new middle-class and cosmopolitan ambitions and identity aspirations with its owners. Budgets and tastes move in close harmony, as Pierre Boudieu taught us some decades ago.

Figure 6: Emirdag Köftecisi. © Ico Maly 2013

Figure 7: Selâle Restaurant. © Ico Maly 2014.

5. The fifth layer consists of the different shops and restaurants that **target users from outside the district.** Restaurants and sandwich bars near the courthouse serve visitors from the courthouse and College students, and some of them have acquired a trendy reputation. One very fashionable Moroccan-owned hairdresser chose the name "She Bio Salon" and focuses on a wealthier clientele, a majority of whom are "native" Flemish. The hair salon is specialized in treating women who received chemotherapy – a niche market catering for a very wide catchment area.

6. A sixth layer consists of **religious buildings**. There are five mosques in the wider neighborhood, distinguished on linguistic, historical and political grounds. There are, in addition, catholic, protestant and evangelic churches. Recently, an African evangelical church has started operating in the broader neighborhood, mainly attracting African visitors. The church is located in what was formerly a night shop; it is now called the "End of Time Divine Chapel" and can accommodate over one hundred people.

7. The seventh and last layer in the neighborhood consists of the **official and civil society infrastructure** in this area. We already mentioned the courthouse and the College. Apart from that, the city of Ghent and many civil society organizations have invested in the neighborhood and have had a lasting impact on the neighborhood. One example with a considerable impact is The Site[6]. Located on the premises of the former gas factory and a telephone company, The Site gathers more than ten projects: a mini allotment, a city field, a city farm, a playground, a soccer field, an encounter container, a beekeeper, ... Besides installing a green area in this densely populated district, the project also has socio-economic and participatory targets.

The complex array of different infrastructures in Rabot provides important clues as to patterns of interaction, social trajectories and mobility in the neighborhood. The neighborhood has a very large number of meeting spaces – ecomenical places where people of all directions can come and meet – and lines of mobility, consequently, intersect at numerous points. While some parts of the infrastructure are "segregated" on socio-economic or other grounds – think of the pork butcher, the Western Union booth, the churches or some Turkish coffee houses – most places in the neighborhood are "open", and their owners seem to be aware of the benefits of an ecumenical orientation, invariably expressed through Dutch or (to a lesser extent) through English. It is hard to avoid certain kinds of people in the neighborhood, as hard as it is to spend one's time exclusively with a specific kind of people. The complexity of the infrastructure, or its inherent instability and changeability, do not prevent significant amounts of social interaction from occurring and a remarkable level of social cohesion to emerge, even in the face of sharp inequality and various forms of exploitation – those seemingly opposing forces do not seem to exclude each other in practice (cf. Blommaert 2014; also Simone 2010).

The changes in the infrastructure clearly reflect the changes in historical and demographic layers of the population. Some layers are subject to rapid changes, while others remain relatively stable over a long time span. Some native shops and cafés have been there for decades, while others have closed their doors. The Turkish migrants are clearly visible in the infrastructure and these layers are quite stable over

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[6] http://www.rabotsite.be/nl/de-site

time; the most dynamic and changeable layer is that which characterizes the recent patterns of migration. The neighborhood has rapidly morphed from a multicultural neighborhood into a superdiverse one.

What ELLA can do for us

Repeated ethnographic observation focused on public signage and design in an area such as Rabot has shown us:

(i)   a precise and detailed image of the demography of the neighborhood: we have been able to inform ourselves about the different communities who live there.

(ii)   This in itself, however, equals the outcomes of more traditional quantitative LLS. The edge provided by ELLA is that we do not just get a *distributional* image of the population, but a *stratigraphy* in which old groups can be distinguished from newer ones, small groups from bigger ones, predominant ones from hardly visible ones.

(iii)   In addition, we have been able to connect this stratified and complex image of the population to an equally layered and multifiliar view of the neighborhood's infrastructure – we have seen, in other words, how the different groups in the neighborhood organize *practices* and *relationships* between themselves, by creating and adjusting infrastructural facilities tailored for the needs of communities in the neighborhood;

(iv)   And finally, we have been able to see sociocultural phenomena such as (commercial) ambition and identity aspiration in the deployment of multilingual ("posh") resources. We, thus, begin to see the local ways in which people organize indexicals of social mobility and identity around the deployment of specific semiotic resources – we see, in other words, emergent orders of indexicality and patterns of enregisterment giving shape to the neighborhood (cf. Blommaert 2005: 73-78; Agha 2007).

(v)   Throughout, we have seen these things in a dynamic and multifiliar *historical* process of transformation, in which the old working class and "pillarized" neighborhood gradually transformed into a multicultural ("Turkish") one, and after that into a superdiverse one, in such a way that

"sedimentation" of older stages of the process remains readable during
more recent stages of that process.

Let us briefly pause and consider the last point. Recall Figure 1 – the Polish-Belgian
construction workers' van – and Figure 2 – the Turkish grocery that still bore the
inscriptions of its "native" Flemish predecessor. What we see in this neighborhood,
and on the basis of what we called ELLA, is how *different historicities coincide* in
one social space: slow and long histories such as the gradual decline of "native"
Flemish business and its replacement by Turkish-owned commerce in Figure 2, as
well as fast and short histories such as the occasional "commuting" of Polish
construction workers in areas such as Rabot. The stretch of history recorded in Figure
2 is perhaps longer than half a century; that recorded in Figure 1 probably spans just a
few weeks or months. In between both, we see the relatively fast and recent
transformations documented in Figures 6 and 7, in which upwardly mobile members
of the old Turkish community convert their business from an "ethnic" into a
"cosmopolitan" one, and from a low key and understated into a fashionable and
trendy one.

We begin to see, thus, the fine fiber of superdiversity: the way in which recent history
has turned urban spaces such as Rabot into complex and dynamic spaces not ruled by
one set of forces but by multiple ones, with aspects of the neighborhood developing
slowly while others develop at terrible speed, often in unforeseen directions –
Appadurai's (1996) "vernacular globalization" in full glory. The different forces at
play in these processes compel us to reflect on *scale* issues. We have seen how the
arrival of Latin-American immigrants was triggered by the grave economic crisis in
Spain – their presence in Rabot is thus an immediate effect of global socio-economic
changes – while Bulgarians and Slovakian immigrants entered the area as an effect of
the expansion of the European Union – an effect of political processes on a European
regional scale. The presence of all of these groups, however, considerably changed
the strictly *local* dynamics as well, notably through the economic opportunities
(through rented accommodation and cheap labor) it offered to the resident Turkish-
origin community. And this tendency towards class upgrading coincided with the
opening of the courthouse in the area, now attracting large numbers of "native"
middle-class and highly qualified people to the neighborhood and offering yet again

new and attractive opportunities for more upmarket and cosmopolitan bars, restaurants and snack bars.

All of these differently scaled processes coincide in one "synchronic" arena, the neighborhood – where they are "vernacularized", to borrow Appadurai's term once more. At the end of the sociolinguistic process, language is always a local phenomenon shot through with the accents of all its users (Pennycook 2010; Blommaert 2010, chapter 3). The texture of this vernacularization, though, is not smooth or uniform; in fact, we may witness not one but several different but connected processes of vernacularization: at least one "inward", where the locally residing communities are adjusting to the new environment, and another one "outward", where these adjustments reach new audiences beyond the neighborhood – as when "native" Flemish lawyers working in the courthouse have a nicely served Turkish dish for lunch in one of the newly refashioned local snack bars such as Selâle Restaurant, ordered from a now bilingual menu. For the time being, therefore, it may be best to put scare quotes around terms such as "synchronization" and "vernacularization": even if we cannot yet get to the bottom of it at present, we suspect a more complex set of phenomena there than what is suggested in these singular terms.

Acknowledgments

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