

THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF A REVOLUTIONARY COUNTRY: THE CASE OF CUBA

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo de investigación es dar una visión de conjunto de lo que es el paisaje lingüístico de Cuba después de más de 50 años de revolución socialista, ya que puede considerarse un lente para interpretar hechos sociales y políticos. A través de una metodología cualitativa, el artículo presenta los datos extraídos del paisaje lingüístico Cubano y analiza el mensaje político, las características lingüísticas y los objetivos de una muestra de anuncios presentes en el LL cubano, y como esto ha sido utilizado por el sistema de propaganda en Cuba con la finalidad de celebrar la revolución, difundir los valores y las ideas revolucionarias.

Palabras clave

Cuba, propaganda, ideología de estado, paisaje lingüístico.

Abstract

The present research article aims to give an overview over the linguistic landscape of Cuba shaped by more than 50 years of socialist revolution, because the linguistic landscape of a country can be considered as a lens, which can be used to interpret social and political facts. With a qualitative methodology, the article present data on the Cuban Linguistic Landscape and analyze the political content, linguistic characteristics and objectives of a sample of signs present in the Cuban LL, and how this has been used by the propaganda in Cuba in order to celebrate the revolution and spread revolutionary values and ideas.

Keywords

Cuba, propaganda, state ideology, linguistic landscape.

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EL PAISAJE LINGÜÍSTICO DE UN PAÍS REVOLUCIONARIO: EL CASO DE CUBA

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Linguistic landscape, state ideology and propaganda

The linguistic landscape of a Country can be considered as a lens, which can be used to interpret social and political phenomena. Analyzing the linguistic landscape, namely the visibility and salience of languages in a territory, has to do with society and politics since the reading of the presence of language(s) in the public space can be very representative of the social identity and political situation of a given Country. Through the lens of the linguistic landscape it is possible to see how a society is shaped, what are the power relationships and how the public space can be used in order to exercise power by the government. This paper aims to give an overview of the linguistic landscape (LL) of Cuba as the result of more than 50 years of influence by socialism and the socialist revolution and at a crucial point in the history of Cuba after the death of Fidel Castro in 2016. After the revolution, the Cuban government adapted commercial billboards for political purposes, deleting any advertisements for consumer goods.

My interest lies in investigating how LL can be used as an agent of power and especially as a tool of propaganda to advance state ideology and to shape the social identity of a country through the analysis of a particularly relevant case study. The analysis will show

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how LL can contribute to affirm ideology and how governments can rely upon LL to exercise authoritarian control over public space. The paper will present and discuss several pieces of data gathered in Cuba which are strongly linked to the revolution and very representative of the values established through and fostered by the revolution itself. It will analyze the content, main linguistic characteristics, location, intended audience and objectives from a sample of signs present in the Cuban LL, and how the Cuban LL has been used and forged by the propaganda in Cuba to spread state ideology. Visual propaganda is very relevant since images are interpreted immediately compared to long texts.

The paper will focus firstly on the structure of power and propaganda which the revolutionary government has created over the past decades, before discussing in detail signs of the Cuban LL and their connections to revolutionary propaganda.

Before going into detail regarding the Cuban LL, it is necessary to provide a few concepts for researching the LL and its relationship with state ideology and propaganda.

As Barni and Bagna (2015, p. 7) claim, the objects, methods, and tools of analysis in LL studies have changed partly in order to interpret and understand the public space, among other purposes. Even though LL research methodologies have been developing for twenty years mainly in the field of multilingualism, more recently LL has started to be analyzed from different perspectives - semiotic, sociological, political, geographical, economic - and attention is now being paid to a wider range of topics of analysis. The analysis of public space has started to focus not only on written text, but also on the use of colors, images, sounds, movements, music, smells, graffiti, clothes, food, buildings, history, and people as authors and users, thus expanding the definitions of Landry and Bourhis (1997) and Shohamy (2015, pp. 153-154). According to Blommaert and Maly (2014), studies on LL can adopt a qualitative approach especially if we consider public spaces as social arenas and instruments of power, discipline and regulation. Public spaces can be regulated by official authorities, which can thus create a semiotic regime in which public communication is communication in the field of power. In this article, I will try to outline the Cuban case, since public communication in the LL is produced by the government and its local bodies, and is subsequently used as a vehicle of power and propaganda, a tool to manipulate the masses wielded by a narrow group of people to promote a political cause or point of view.



The relationship between state ideology and LL has been investigated especially in post-soviet Countries e.g. the comparative work of Sloboda (2007) on Belarus, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In these works, signs in the landscape are considered able not only to “index ideology, but also perform it, so interaction with them can lead to the formation of particular ideological social practices in individuals” (Sloboda, 2007, p. 6). From this perspective the LL can profoundly affect both the global social environment and individuals, showing how powerful the use of signs in the landscape can be, especially when this power inherent to the state is exercised by the state itself. As Sloboda (2007) affirms “State ideology can not only be practiced tacitly, but can also be explicitly described and metadiscursively named as ‘state ideology’” (p. 6). In the case of Cuba, state ideology is explicitly present in the public communication all around the country as we will see below.

One of the first study on propaganda in the 20th Century is the one by Lasswell (1927) regarding propaganda during World War I and analyzing in particular the content of mass-media’s messages. Studies on political communication, which has to do with the exchange of information among policy makers, media and citizens, have analyzed the topics of propaganda and persuasion especially referring to the relationship between the media and the masses in order to create consensus and preserve power. According to Lasswell, propaganda is used to influence behaviors through the manipulation of messages and information with a propagandistic purpose, using words, images and symbols to influence and manage collective attitudes, especially in the case of political propaganda. Lasswell adopted an approach influenced by Edward Sapir to analyze the content of propagandistic messages produced by the mass media during the WWI, to describe symbols of power and to point out the most common topics in propagandistic campaigns. In this kind of propaganda analysis, words, sentences, and topics are classified as micro units and interpreted as meaningful symbols, able to generate collective attitudes and to guide social behaviors, and to be analyzed from a semantic perspective.

Jowett and O’Donnell (2006, p. 7) define propaganda as a deliberate attempt to shape perception, manipulate cognitions and direct behaviors. In this perspective it can be seen as very similar to advertising. Propaganda makes use of the same modalities of advertising, arousing strong emotions, both positive (self-esteem, patriotism, etc.) and negative (fear, disdain, etc.), through slogans and symbols. As Rutherford (2000) says it, it is difficult to distinguish propaganda



from marketing, public relations and advertising. Propaganda and advertising are both part of social communication and share the aim of persuasion, the target, the media, the use of the same rhetoric and linguistic strategies such as slogans (Capozzi, 2014, p. 99). As advertising, propaganda persuades people through the use of powerful and inspiring words and images: it makes use of persuasion strategies and techniques, namely of rhetoric, to disseminate ideas and information in order to modify the way people think, feel and behave, according to the interests of the propagandist. According to Aristotle there are three modes of persuasion: *logos* (reasoned discourse, logic and dialectic) *pathos* (appeal to emotions, imagination) and *ethos* (the speaker's moral character). As well as advertising, in order to persuade propaganda must fulfill the following requirements: the message must be seen, attract the attention of the audience and be easily understood and remembered by people; the audience must receive the message and accept it as true and then think, feel and behave consequently. Both advertising and propaganda make use of concise texts in order to maintain the attention for a period of time which permits to understand the text and for this reason slogan is widely used in both cases (Ferraresi et al. 2007). As advertising, propaganda creates messages that can have direct effects on people's mind, activating processes of attention and memory, raising of emotions, brand awareness and brand attitude. It aims to make comprehension as easy as possible, presenting familiar elements, basic reasoning and explicit conclusion and making use of the same direct, simple, catchy, assertive language of advertising. As in the case of advertising, propaganda makes use of connotative language in order to give value to ideas, as we will see in the analysis of Cuban LL (Vulli, 2003, p. 60). The difference between propaganda and advertising is that advertising messages are explicitly biased, whereas propagandistic messages want to appear more impartial and indisputable, even if they are biased as well (Testa, 2003, p. 24).

In this paper I will take into consideration a sample of signs collected in urban and rural areas of Cuba, showing how public communication is strongly linked to power and especially to propaganda as a tool to exercise and preserve power, but also as a tool to create and reinforce identity and to diffuse state ideology. In Cuba, propaganda has occupied the public space in the landscape to convey values and ideas linked to the revolution, using the LL for its own goals as we will see. Among the many different tools propaganda can use, and has used in Cuba for its own goals, I decided to focus only on signs



in the LL, and not on newspaper, official documents, TV and radio shows, etc. This is because the impact of the presence of propaganda in the LL on anyone traveling around the island, whether in towns or the countryside, is considerable, since it is impossible not to notice it. This presence and its effect on local people as well as on foreigners represent an interesting point of departure for investigating the relationship between the LL and propaganda, to see how propaganda can use signs in the landscape.

Up to now, relatively few studies have investigated propaganda in the LL. As far as Cuba is concerned, studies on propaganda and the landscape have adopted different perspectives such as those focusing on Art History, Urban Studies, and Media Studies.

Ortega (2006) investigates the landscape in Cuba, in particular examining the strategic use of signs in the landscape to create the Cuban community as a revolutionary and timocratic society. He concentrates on several signs present in the Cuban landscape and their relationship with power, but also on the effect of such signs over everyday life and the community identity construction processes.

The use of billboards and other signage by Cuban socialist propagandists has not received as much attention, except if we consider studies on the artistic and political value of socialist art forms such as the work of David Kunzle and other American art historians. Kunzle (1975) highlights the transition of the Cuban visual mass media from capitalist to socialist values, with no precedent anywhere. Sontag (1970) claims that heroic national figures are used in political communication for “ideological mobilization”, and in the same way that advertisements try to stimulate viewers to buy something, propaganda tries to use the same persuasive techniques to inspire people to become involved, such as in public information campaigns, focusing on consciousness for the common good. Cushing (2003) analyzes Cuban poster art, identifying three primary producers of political graphic art: Editora Política, OSPAAAL (the Organization in Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia and Latin America), and ICAIC (the Cuban Film Institute). Liu (2001) claims that posters and billboards have a higher artistic quality than other socialist propaganda examples, such as those from the former Soviet Union and China, since the Cuban artist is encouraged to use slogans, heroes and other graphic elements in a more imaginative and creative way.

González Valdés (2014) takes into account the graphic discourse in the city of Havana, examining a selection of signs made in 2008 and 2010 to observe communication in placards, analyzing different types



of messages and which strategies and communication resources they adopt.

A paper by Turner (2007) analyses propaganda in the city of Havana from the perspective of Urban Studies, focusing on the use of propaganda billboards to shape the public space with socialist ideology and values in order to re-construct the socialist city. Turner cites the so-called 'billboard war', namely the positioning of Cuban propaganda billboards in front of the U.S. Interest Section in Havana, which is located in the Embassy of Switzerland and represents U.S. interests in Cuba and acts as a de facto embassy, in 2004 in response to a post set up by the U.S. Interest Section making reference to the number of dissidents Cuba had imprisoned the previous year. This kind of war, whose battleground is the public space, highlights the great relevance of billboards for propagandistic goals, to contribute to the spread of socialist ideology and values in the environment with a physical and visible presence. In his work, Turner quotes the founder of *Editora Política*, José Papiól, who claims that propaganda on billboards aims at promoting unification and patriotism.

Pons' (2008) study on Cuba's propaganda in all its aspects takes into consideration Cuban posters used for propagandistic goals and distinguishes between Cuba's aggressive and passive propaganda. From this perspective, aggressive propaganda attempts to describe the United States in a negative way and to influence public opinion against the U.S. Passive propaganda is used to promote the revolution in a positive manner.

Soules (2015), analyzing the relationship among media, persuasion and propaganda, presents Cuba's revolutionary landscape as a case study and highlights how the propaganda *murales* completely replace advertising billboards and announce the values, heroes and challenges of Cuba's socialist revolution.

The most recent study is the one by Gonzalez Quesada (2017), who collected more than 500 images of Cuban billboards and murales, most of them belonging to *Editora Política*, the Cuban Communist Party's body responsible of the design and creation of visual propaganda in Cuba.

All the literature we analyzed is focused, from different perspectives, on the relationship among state ideology, propaganda, public space and community identity: the main ideas of these studies are that to preserve power and incite people to defend the socialist revolution the Cuban government needs to enter into daily life and to occupy the public sphere in order to give visibility to the socialist ideas and



values and to shape people's identity according to state ideology. The analysis of Cuban LL that I will present in the following paragraphs takes into account this relationship and analyze the signs according to this framework.

In the next paragraphs, we will see how socialist propaganda shapes the public space, especially in a country like Cuba where architecture has not changed radically since 1959, thus making the billboards and any other signs in the LL even more relevant and interesting for study. As Soules (2015) affirms "propaganda is transparent and unapologetic in Cuba: *murales* remind the Cuban people of their history and values and educate tourists about socialism's virtues and Cuba's struggle to retain its independence" (p. 86).

Cuban propaganda

From the beginning, Fidel Castro considered propaganda an essential tool to create consensus regarding the tenets of the revolution to come. During the period spent in the Sierra Maestra, a pirate radio station, Radio Rebelde, was created to broadcast messages throughout the island to gain support for the revolution; the same purpose was also served by the broadcasting of personal interviews given by Fidel Castro to international journalists such as Herbert Matthews from the New York Times. Fidel Castro was well aware of the relevance of visual propaganda, as the pictures taken by foreign journalists and photographers during the period Castro spent in the Sierra Maestra show.

The revolutionary government used propaganda in order to promote its own views, to form a consensus, but also, from a foreign relations perspective, to attack the United States. Propaganda was seen as a "necessary condition in constituting (and moving) the masses" (Ortega, 2006, para. 3), the masses being one of the key elements of socialism and henceforth of Cuban society, where notions such as class, power, privilege etc. were to be rejected and only notions like community, competence etc. to be accepted. Past events and people were reconstructed through propaganda, creating political myths which were strictly linked to the present situation to serve the revolution in an ongoing fight for ideas which formed part of the Cuban identity as a revolutionary identity.

According to Soules (2015, p. 7) propaganda in Cuba has both vertical and horizontal dimensions: it is exercised by the government downward to the masses as well as by community and volunteer



organizations, e.g. the traveling teachers – *maestros ambulantes* – who travelled all around the country in the early decades after the Revolution to teach illiterate workers to read and write and to transmit revolutionary values to them.

The Cuban propaganda system included radio stations, newspapers, magazines, posters, publishing houses, and a news agency with offices located around the world, but also institutes and other organizations under the control of the Political Bureau of the Cuban Communist Party. The *Granma*, a daily newspaper, and the *Prensa Latina*, a news agency, are among the most important elements of the Cuban propaganda machine. Castro personally used to visit the editorial offices of *Granma* and *Prensa Latina*, as well as to write editorials on different matters, especially concerning the U.S. The performing arts, e.g. the Cuban National Ballet with the prima ballerina Alicia Alonso, have also been part of the structure of revolutionary propaganda.

Furthermore, another propagandistic method is that of using billboards, murals, buildings, walls, etc. to occupy the public space and to diffuse messages. As Turner (2007) says, “rather than capital investments in monuments, the state communicates through signs, partly because the revolution has brought literacy to the people too” (p. 26). These kinds of signs are highly visible to anyone and can be placed strategically in spaces, and therefore become a powerful tool for propaganda. Billboards are under the direction of the Interior Ministry of the Communist Party both in Havana and in provincial propaganda agencies.

In the next paragraph we will examine data which shows how the LL of Cuba has been used by the propaganda system to convey an ideology and its values, affect the public space of the country, shaping its social life and identity.

The Cuban revolutionary linguistic landscape

The urban and rural landscape of Cuba has not changed very much since 1959, as seen in the historical centre of Havana, with its preserved colonial buildings which have been declared a World Heritage Site by Unesco. After the revolution, the commercial signs were substituted by propagandistic billboards with political purposes. According to Cushing (2003) since Cuba is a small country, posters and billboards are especially useful modes of communication to reach the public at large. The propaganda in the Cuban LL is a prominent fea-



ture both in urban and rural areas, affecting public spaces and the country's social life, since, it is neither possible for Cubans nor for the general public to ignore such a massive presence of propagandistic messages in the public space all around. As Turner (2007) claims, propaganda represents “how the significance of public space is contentious and not simply a matter of physical structure” (p. 10), as well as how billboards used by the propaganda system “contribute to an ideological rather than a physical re-construction of Havana in the image of a socialist city” (p.10). From this perspective billboards demonstrate a perfect convergence and alignment of public space with socialist discourse. In addition to this and according to Ortega (2006) in Cuba “the graphic material has been strategically utilized in the landscape in order to create a self-surveilled, normalized community” (para. 1), thus producing “a distinct urban landscape that at once displays, informs, and enforces the Cuban conception of community” (para. 1). González Valdés (2014) claims that “al invadir el espacio público, las vallas intervienen en nuestras vidas transformando nuestro entorno” (para. 3). In this way public communication can influence the formation of opinions and aesthetic judgements among people. Posters and billboards are therefore aimed at transmitting ideology and power.

The data to be presented in this paper were collected in 2014 and 2017 in 12 of the 15 provinces along the island: Pinar del Río, Artemisa, Ciudad de Habana, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus, Ciego de Ávila, Camagüey, Las Tunas, Holguín, Santiago de Cuba. During the two journeys in 2014 and 2017 I took pictures of signs located in the provinces mentioned above, according to the following criteria: I selected signs with a propaganda purpose which were placed by government along main roads in all the provinces I visited and in the urban and suburban areas of cities such as of small villages along the main roads, since this locations provide signs with very high visibility for both local and international people. In 2017, after the death of Fidel Castro I came back to Cuba to analyze if LL has changed after this pivotal event and following the same itinerary of 2014 I collected pictures only of those signs which were not present in the Cuban LL in 2014, especially those referring to the death of Fidel Castro, and a very few that were located or renewed between 2014 and 2017. This is the reason why the pictures taken in two different periods can be considered as one corpus, since the same signs collected in 2014 were still present in the LL in 2017, even if I did not take a new picture of them and I focused only on new signs which



were related to Castro's death above all. Even if the data do not include every single sign present in the Cuban LL, I can claim that they represent a good sample of the Cuban LL for having been collected in many provinces and in different areas, both rural and urban.

Data were collected and then were analyzed according to criteria such as: placement, size, design (composition, color, material, etc.), use of images, language(-s) used and language style, communicative functions, and content. By virtue of the multimodal nature of the LL and signs in the LL it is essential to adopt a multi-modal approach, which takes into consideration not only written texts, but also features such as location, images, typography, layout, and colors (Shohamy, 2015). The approach adopted was also inspired by the propaganda analysis of Lasswell mentioned previously.

I gathered 118 pictures both in urban and rural areas, in town centres and in suburban areas, along main roads and highways. Afterward, the photos were analyzed according to the aforementioned criteria.

Signs in Cuban LL

The presence of propaganda signs both in small villages and towns, in rural as well as in urban areas, highlights the pervasiveness of revolutionary ideology, and the impact the Cuban State wants to have in order to spread its ideas and shape community identity. As well as advertising, to be effective propaganda billboards must communicate a clear and readable message and must be located in appropriate site to be seen by the audience. Many signs are located, not surprisingly, on the road entering or exiting the cities in both directions to be seen by as many people as possible. This is obviously due to the government's goal of reaching people and being as visible as possible. The location not only in urban areas, but also in the countryside depends on the fact that in Cuba agriculture is still a very important sector and many people live in rural areas. For this reason it is very important for the government to address not only people in urban areas, but everywhere across the country. I collected 50 pictures in rural areas and 68 in urban areas (especially along suburban streets, but also along urban streets and in town centres). Signs in the countryside are located along the road or crossing the road, especially on bridges over the roads themselves. In urban areas, signs are located along the road but also on buildings of all types, including institutional and private, commercial and residential structures. The placement of propaganda



signs not only on institutional buildings such as in *Plaza de la Revolución* in the heart of Havana, but also on residential, commercial and industrial buildings shows the relevance of propaganda itself and the power of its presence in public spaces regardless of the specific identity of a place.

As far as the authorship of the signs in the Cuban LL is concerned, every sign has been created and placed by the central government or by local authorities under the direction of the Interior Ministry of the Communist Party.

The vast majority of signs I analyzed are billboards of quite huge dimensions, since they have to be seen even from a great distance or moving fast on a vehicle. Billboards are so visible and widespread that nobody can ignore them going around Cuba. Furthermore, the signs are characterized by the use of colors and images in order to maximize the attention given them by people as much as possible, such as in commercial billboards. Only 6 signs out of 118 that I considered are black and white, the others have at least two colors, and words are written in a large font to be readable even from a long distance. The most used colors are white, red and blue, those of the Cuban flag. Among the signs in my sample there are also monuments, murals on walls, buildings and on small stones, as well as stones on green areas representing and celebrating revolutionary figures such as Che Guevara.

The use of images in the Cuban LL is quite interesting. Images can be pictures or drawings. Only 37 signs out of 118 lack an image, but 23 of these were placed just after the death of Fidel Castro along the journey of the coffin containing the remains of Castro during the 9 days of national mourning and time constraints did not allow for elaborate designs. All the other signs have images representing Fidel Castro and Raúl Castro, the heroes of the revolution and those of the Independence period, or the so-called friends of Cuba e.g. Hugo Chávez. Many signs are aimed at celebrating important people in the past and the present of revolutionary Cuba, so it is very common to find their images in the LL as a tool for propaganda. The image of Che Guevara is used all over the world as the expression of values linked to Socialism, Revolution, resistance against oppression, etc. but in the case of Cuba, Che Guevara has become the most powerful tool for propaganda for celebrating not only the man himself, but also the Revolution and its values, as well as to give people a model of behavior and action. The image of Fidel Castro is also ubiquitous, but until 2016 not so much as one might expect and much less than that of Che Guevara, whose image appears on 13 signs collected in 2014



against 10 signs with Fidel's image. The *líder máximo* has not been really the object of cult worship in the Cuban LL until his death: he is represented both in military uniform in pictures taken years ago and in civilian clothes in more recent pictures, but as Turner (2007) claims even if "Fidel is the Country and he is the revolution, the propaganda office is careful not to turn his image into a personality cult, which could be counter-productive" (p. 51). For example, before dying Castro declared that after his death he did not want any streets, public buildings and so on renamed to celebrate him. After his death in 2016 many signs were placed representing the image of Fidel Castro, which is now more diffused than before since we collected 12 new signs with his image especially along the journey of the coffin to Santiago de Cuba where he was buried.

In several signs the Cuban flag is displayed and in many others it is possible to find the logos of committees - e.g. Committees for the Defense of the revolution - or images of the crowd participating to public events, as well as the star, which is a characteristic of the beret used by Che Guevara. I found also images of *campesinos* and ordinary people fighting for the revolution, workers building a road, and maps of places where events significant to the revolution took place.

Among the main techniques usually used in propagandistic messages according to the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (1939), in Cuba it is possible to notice signs adopting the following techniques, including both text and image analysis: testimonials (e.g. signs with quotes of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara), glittering generalities (e.g. "La revolución es invencible"), virtue words (e.g. "A la felicidad se llega a través del trabajo"), slogans (e.g. "Hasta la victoria siempre"), bandwagon (e.g. "De nosotros depende el futuro de la revolución"), transfer (e.g. "Bloqueo, el genocidio más largo de la historia"), appeals to authority (e.g. signs with quotes of Fidel Castro), flag waving, testimonial. Many of the messages in the Cuban LL represent quotes from inspirational speeches by Fidel Castro.

A linguistic analysis of the Cuban LL

The first thing which is clearly evident in observing the Cuban LL is that it is highly monolingual: all the signs are in Spanish. According to the a 1995 document *Regulaciones sobre Anuncios, Carteles, Vallas, Señalizaciones y Elementos de Ambientación y Ornamentación* issued by the *Dirección Provincial de Planificación Física y Arquitectura de Ciudad de La Habana* Spanish was declared the only language to be



used in advertising and public communication. Foreign words could be used only for proper names or brands registered in Cuba, or in messages addressed to international tourists.

Monolingualism is due to the author of the signs, the Cuban government, and to the goal of reaching as many Cuban people as possible. But I can assume that monolingualism in the Cuban LL is aimed at reinforcing the Cuban identity, emphasizing the unity, cohesiveness and strength of the Cuban people also in the eyes of foreigners, and, last but not least, avoiding other languages, especially English which is the most widespread language in the global LL, but which being the language of the U.S. represents the language of the enemy, at least in the perspective of Cuban state ideology.

Even if the main audience of the Cuban LL, as it is used for propagandistic reasons, are Cubans, signs can also be addressed to foreigners who can not ignore the presence of such a massive number of signs and who can also infer their general meaning from the images on signs even if they do not speak Spanish fluently. From this perspective, propaganda can affect not only nationals, but also foreigners. The massive presence of billboards along the route between Havana and the international airport or between Havana and Varadero, a very popular tourist town, or in other touristic places, highlights the fact that the messages are also addressed to tourists.

It is also very interesting to notice that after the revolution the literacy rate increased significantly thanks to a massive campaign in every part of the country to teach people to read and to write. This fact allows the government to use the signs in the LL so widely across the Country, to convey its messages and makes the LL such a powerful tool for propaganda.

Observing the data gathered and also taking into account the analysis of Cuban LL by Ortega (2006) and Turner (2007), it is possible to identify 8 different communicative purposes among Cuban LL signs:

- to celebrate the revolution;
- to celebrate other events of Cuban history, even prior to the revolution and mainly from the Independence period;
- to celebrate the reforms of the Cuban revolutionary government;
- to celebrate the heroes of the Cuban revolution and especially Fidel Castro and Che Guevara;
- to celebrate the friends of Cuba e.g. Hugo Chávez;
- to promote the values of the revolution and the state ideology;
- to incite people to preserve the revolution;
- to create and reinforce Cuban social identity.



The vast majority of signs serve more than one purpose, combining for instance the goal of reinforcing social identity and that of inciting people to preserve the revolution, very often using quotes of Fidel Castro to convey a message. Even if it can be hard to distinguish the functions in a sign since they often co-occur and are related one to each other, we can claim that 21 signs have only one dominant function, mainly that of celebrating a reform of the government like Figure 1 on agrarian reform. Figure 1 celebrates not only the agrarian reform, but also the government and all its actions of reform. It is presumably mainly addressed to people living in the countryside and working in the agriculture sector, since it celebrates the 55th anniversary of the agrarian reform. The message in green says “55 años de patriotismo, independencia y dignidad” and recalls some of the most important values of the socialist ideology of Cuba, making use of words with a positive connotation from a linguistic and semantic perspective at least in the socialist discourse. The image of the Cuban flag and the use of red and black colors – the colors of the Movement of 26th of July which emerged as the leading revolutionary group – for the number have a visually iconic effect to reinforce a shared identity.

The other signs have 2, 3 or 4 functions variably combined.



Figure 1. Sign celebrating the agrarian reform law (located on the road from Santiago de Cuba to Holguín)

The most common purpose is inciting people to preserve the revolution, to defend its values and to act in a better way as citizens in order to be part of society and to form a perfectly socialist society. Propaganda urges people to believe in the revolution in spite of the socio-economic situation. Texts like “Cienfuegos sin fallar a la revolu-



ción” are very common in many cities. Figure 2 incites all Cubans to defend the revolution, but what is most interesting is that “En defensa de la Revolución todas las cubanas y cubanos dignos” does not simply address all Cubans, but especially virtuous Cubans, inciting them to preserve the revolution. The appeal to be better citizens to belong to the Cuban community is not only a good example of the propaganda technique called “bandwagon”, but also recalls a keyword and value of the socialist discourse: to be part of the socialist society individuals have to act appropriately and in a virtuous way. The real purpose of the sign seems to be a sort of public teaching, not only to create a shared identity, but also to raise a new consciousness and to affirm state ideology in people’s mind. Also the Cuban flag, the message written in blue and red, the same colors of the flag, and the logo of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution plays a role since they reinforce the visual perception of a unique community fighting for the defense of the revolution.



Figure 2. Sign inciting Cubans to preserve the revolution (located on the road from Santiago de Cuba to Holguín)

Others signs aimed to incite people to act according to revolutionary tenets, those ones encourages people to be like Che Guevara “Queremos que sean como el Che”. Many signs quote Che Guevara or Fidel Castro such as those texts like “Hasta la victoria siempre”, “Venceremos” or “Revolución: es cambiar todo lo que debe ser cambiado”. From a semantic point of view all the words used in these messages have a positive connotation, in order to arise positive feelings in the people. The use of words with a positive connotation is aimed at giving people the idea that in spite of economic



and material problems the present is good and future will be even better. The language used in these signs, such as in many others which will be discussed later, is highly ideological and rhetoric, having as main purpose to persuade and to gain consensus and being very similar to the language of advertising.

Many signs incite the people to preserve socialism as well, such as the following: “Tenemos y tendremos socialismo” or “Socialismo o muerte”. In the first case it seems that socialism is the only option, since the use of present and future tense from a linguistic perspective represent the permanent condition of revolution, with no other choices for the future. The opposition socialism or death confirms that in the socialist discourse socialist state ideology is the only option.

Another purpose often present in the Cuban LL is that of creating and shaping the social identity of Cuban people: signs are aimed at contributing to the process of forging a community identity. Through the LL, the state propaganda tries to convince people to act in accordance with revolutionary values, to adhere to the ideas of the revolution and to behaving consequently in their daily life. Furthermore, these kinds of signs are also used to make Cubans feel they are part of a compact and solid social body, to strengthen the cohesiveness of Cuban society as opposed to that of its enemies, namely imperialism, capitalism and the U.S. The anti-imperialistic and anti-U.S. perspective is prevalent in propagandistic rhetoric in Cuba, as it is in the Cuban LL.

Signs like “Queremos que sean como el Che” represent the goal of making people act in accordance with revolutionary tenets. Others like “Unidos por un socialismo prospero y sustentable” incite people to be cohesive, promising a better and prosperous life with Socialism through the use of words with a very positive connotations and the idea of including and unify people.

Figure 3 is precisely aimed at giving the idea of a cohesive mass, which all together has the strength of exercising power: the slogan “El Poder del Pueblo ¡Ese sí es Poder!” means that only the power belonging to the people is real power. This sign has the purpose of fostering the construction of an identity for the Cuban community, making Cubans feel part of a huge mass of people which has the power to decide for itself. The evocative power of the picture in the sign strongly supports the process of constructing a community identity, such as the use of the colors of the Cuban flag. The idea of ‘people’ as a unified community is here reinforced by the image itself and the huge dimension of the billboard suggests the idea of a powerful people.



The sign is not aimed at beautifying the landscape, but rather at forging the social identity of the people.



Figure 3. Billboard celebrating people's power (located on the road from Las Tunas to Santiago de Cuba)

The concept of power belonging to the people is quite common in the Cuban LL as the following text in a sign shows: “¡La Revolución sigue igual, sin compromisos con nadie en absoluto, solo con el pueblo!”. This sign's very peremptory and dogmatic tone focuses not only on the revolution, but also on power as it belongs to the people, who do not need compromise with anyone. The sign reinforces the idea of community as a cohesive and autonomous body and contributes to spread state ideology.

Signs like “Los jóvenes camagüeyanos fieles a sus ideas” also reinforce the identity of young people, focusing both on the concept of community and on the ideas and values of the community.

On a smaller scale signs like “Por la unidad de mi barrio. CDR 55 aniversario. Una organización que nació para ser eterna” highlights this cohesiveness even at a very local level, a barrio being a small socio-geographical unit and the Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR - Committee for the Defense of the Revolution) an organization found everywhere as a neighborhood group and a powerful tool of social control. The presence of signs produced by local CDRs complicates the vision of the Cuban LL as a merely top-down phenomenon. As Ortega (2006) claims, the activities and the signs produced by the CDRs have a bottom up orientation aimed at forging community identity and affirming models of governance. In this sign the notions of unity, organization, eternity are used in the socialist discourse to



reinforce the feeling of belonging to a community which will never disappear.

Many signs are composed of 3-4 physically separated signs close enough to each other to function as one unit and aim both to incite people and to reinforce the Cuban identity such as “Fieles a nuestra historia, unidos en el deber, hasta la victoria siempre” or “Donde nosotros los revolucionarios cubanos proseguiremos la lucha con optimismo y unidad” or again “Firmes desde nuestra raíz”.

The purposes of celebrating the revolution, its heroes and values are other very common threads in the Cuban LL. Many signs celebrate events, ideas, and people of the revolutionary period: their aim is that of celebrating Cuban recent history and its heroes as a great moment of Cuban history, one which indeed still persists and influences the present. These signs narrate national history as a strongly shared experience. The same can be said of those signs celebrating events and heroes of the Independence period, such as José Martí, seen as a precursor of the socialist revolution which is considered as a further step in Cuban history towards the full independence of the country from the U.S. and the imperialist world.



Figure 4. Banner celebrating the triumph of the revolution (Cienfuegos)

Figure 4 celebrates the revolution: “55 aniversario del triunfo de la Revolución. Unidos a la dirección histórica de la Revolución”. In this sign it is interesting that the message to be addressed to the public is that the revolution is part of history, without any other perspective being plausible, despite the fact that the support is only a



banner which is located on a commercial building in the main road of Cienfuegos. The aim here is presumably not only to celebrate the anniversary of the revolution, but also to make people feel they are part of a great history, which is characterized by the fact that it is unavoidable and inescapable, also thanks to the use of the pictures of a sea of people, the Cuban flag and the Castro brothers on the sign. The message seems to be that the Cuban revolution and identity are not only part of the present, but are rooted in the past and oriented towards the future. Here again the sign shows how state ideology can be represented in the public space, which is used as an agent of power.

Among the heroes celebrated in the LL are Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, Raúl Castro and obviously Fidel Castro, who are used like a sort of testimonial in advertising. Many of them are also celebrated through quotes like “La palabra enseña el ejemplo guía”, credited to Che Guevara. Figure 5 is a good example of how Che Guevara is celebrated all over the country. The text says that a star placed Che Guevara in Cuba and made him one of the Cuban people. Again the concept of a unified community of Cuban people is recalled in the LL, but in this case to celebrate Che Guevara as an icon of Cuban identity and history. In figure 5 the most visible word is ‘people’, to highlight one of the key concept of the socialist discourse and to make Che Guevara a member of the community. It is worthwhile noticing that this billboard was substituted between 2014 and 2017 by a new one, conveying the same message with a new graphic design. Signs in more touristic areas like the one in Figure 5 which is located in one of the most visited places in Cuba are more frequently substituted not to change the message, but to show especially to tourists, both national and foreigner, a new billboard for visual and aesthetic reasons. The new version placed between 2014 and 2017 is composed of three different billboards and the message is distributed in the three billboards, gaining in this way much more visibility than before.

Many signs all around the country are also dedicated to the Cuban Five, the five Cuban intelligence officers who were arrested in 1998 in the U.S, a sore point of relations until the last three of them were released in 2014 (Figure 6). In Figure 6 the vertical columns represent the five officers with a very iconic effect. The colors are those of the Cuban flag and the use of future as a state with no doubt clearly shows the determination of the government about the issue to be solved: it seems not only a promise, but a certainty.



Figure 5. Sign celebrating Che Guevara located in front of his Memorial (Santa Clara)



Figure 6. Sign representing the Cuban Five and the promise to make them come back home (Viñales)

Among the signs celebrating revolutionary values Figure 7 focuses on socialism as a value, as well as proclaiming cohesiveness and efficiency the foundations which render socialism enduring and successful. The use of *nuestro* is aimed to raise the feeling of belonging and unity in the name of socialism and in order to develop a unified and efficient society. It is finalized at involving people and reinforcing the community identity. I found this small sign, located on a shop window in Havana Vieja, also in other places around the historical area of Havana, given the fact that it can be easily produced, distributed and posted. The diffusion of such a kind of signs highlights how



much pervasive propaganda can be, occupying the public space to convey values and ideas linked to the revolution and to better enter into people's minds affirming state ideology.



Figure 7. Sign on socialism as a value (Havana vieja)

Less commonly found are signs aimed at celebrating events from the war of Independence or the events of the 26th of July, or other events such as political congresses. Figure 8 celebrates the events of the 26th of July not only as a relevant fact in Cuban history and the history of the revolution, but as a victory of ideas, especially revolutionary ideas. The colors are those of the Movement 26th of July, red and black, supporting also from the visual perspective the message, which include a very positive word such as 'victory'. The location across the road provides the sign with very high visibility, since it can be viewed from anyone traveling along that road which is one of the main roads of the Country. Through the massive physical presence in the LL propaganda acquire more strength and power to advance state ideology.



Figure 8. Sign on the events of the 26th of July (located on the road from Trinidad to Sancti Spíritus)



Another purpose assumed by signs in the Cuban LL is that of celebrating politicians belonging to countries considered friends such as Hugo Chávez from Venezuela or Nelson Mandela from South Africa (See Figure 9). These signs celebrate international relations with partners who support, or had supported, Cuba and supporting the nation in facing the consequences and the problems arising from the *bloqueo*, namely the embargo, imposed by the U.S.



Figure 9. Billboard on international friends of Cuba (Havana)

In the case of Figure 9, the purpose is not only to celebrate the international friends of Cuba, but also to highlight the vision of a global alliance of countries united against the enemy of socialism. The text “La patria grande que crece” gives the idea of a union of people and beliefs which gives rise to general development for the people of Cuba and their international friends. Words such as ‘homeland’, ‘great’, ‘develop’ convey the meaning that Cuba is already great, but with the help of other countries it can become even greater. The positive message is supported visually by the smiling faces of Castro, Chávez and Mandela, to rise positive attitudes and feelings in the audience.

Other signs are used against the U.S such as Figure 10 which condemns the embargo: “Cuba contra el bloqueo”. Visually there is a strong contrast between the brilliant colors of the first part of the message, the one referred to Cuba, and the second part referred to the U.S. which is in black. This is one of the few examples of texts containing words with a negative connotation, due to the fact that this message is a form of aggressive propaganda against the U.S. It is located along the road from Havana to Viñales, one of the most touristic cities of Cuba, so it is addressed not only to Cuban, but also to foreigners visiting the island to denounce the U.S. resolutions against Cuba to the international public opinion.



Figure 10. Billboard against the embargo (located on the road from Havana to Viñales)

From a linguistic perspective, it is also relevant for my analysis to make some observations on a few semantic aspects. In the Cuban LL one of the most frequent words used is ‘people’, which in Cuban rhetoric is a key element. It is usually associated with the concept of ‘power’, as a socialist regime presumes, as well as with the revolution, and in addition is linked to its heroes as part of the people and an example for them.

The idea of time in the Cuban LL is extremely interesting since from a semantic perspective it is dominated by continuity in the past, present and future. The past is seen as the basis for the present socialist era, which started a few decades ago and is going to last forever into the future. Expressions like *venceremos* or *hasta la victoria siempre* are not only quotes meant to celebrate Fidel Castro or Che Guevara; they give the idea of being out of time, in a permanent state of revolution for the people, in which people share actively in the past, the present and the future. The same can be said for expressions such as *tenemos y tendremos socialismo*, where the use of ‘we’ and the present and future tense have both the aim of involving people beyond the present time. In addition to the presence of the word ‘people’, there is a very common use of words like ‘we’ and ‘our’ as well as the use of verbs at the first plural person, in order to highlight the sense of belonging to a solid and cohesive community. Expressions like *nuestro socialismo* or *nuestro mejor amigo* aim at giving the idea of a shared vision and feelings among the people.

As in communicative strategies used by both propaganda and advertising there are a large number of words with positive connotations such as *optimismo, unidad, eficiencia, crecer, victoria, triunfo, próspero,*



sustentable, fiel, eterno. All these words are obviously part of the propagandistic goal of making people feel positive, happy, cohesive, efficient, and true. The language of propaganda is characterized by exaggeration, such as the language of advertising. Also the presence of many words belonging to the semantic field of war is interesting, not only words such as ‘revolution’, but also ‘to win’, ‘to die’, ‘fight’, ‘triumph’, ‘defense’ ‘victory’, ‘challenges’, all used with positive connotations. Other words in the LL which are very widespread in the revolutionary rhetoric are *historia, trabajadores, barrio, patria, sin tacha, sin miedo*.

Conclusions

The data I collected in Cuba show how pervasive propaganda placed to spread ideas and shape community identity in the public space can be. I discussed how public communication is strongly linked to power and especially to propaganda as a tool for exercising and preserving that power through the public space, but also as a tool to create and reinforce national identity and to spread state ideology. As the case of Cuba deftly shows, the LL contributes to ideology and governments can rely upon it to exercise authoritarian control over public space.

In Cuba, propaganda has occupied public spaces in the landscape to convey values and ideas linked to the revolution. As Turner (2007) states, the revolution created a new type of public space free of private businesses, which can serve as an ideological arena and can be harnessed to forge an identity which arises from a vision devoted to socialism and the revolution supported by the authorities. The Cuban LL does not feature signs with commercial messages; propaganda billboards are almost the only signs in the LL, even if they act like advertising messages. Signs are not aimed at beautifying the landscape, but rather at constructing the social identity of the country. They are solely intended to convey a social or a political message.

The location of signs in very visible places, and in front of the U.S. Interest Section in Havana, is chosen to reinforce the propaganda messages, to better enter into people’s minds, and to construct and strengthen the Cuban identity, in particular as opposed to the ‘other’.

The purpose of propaganda signs in Cuba is not merely to build the morale of the community, but rather to raise a new consciousness, which is one of the aims of the revolution itself, and these signs act as a sort of public teaching.



Signs in the Cuban LL have a great artistic value recognized by international art historians. But they have also a political value since their content is mostly political, and a spatial meaning as well, due to their physical presence in the public space. Lastly, they possess linguistic value since the text in signs convey messages to the Cuban people and to any other individuals moving around in the Cuban LL. The language used in Cuban LL can be defined as hortatory language, adopting the registers of ideology and rhetoric, the goals of persuasion in the perspective of gaining consensus and stability (Edelman, 1976). The use of words with a positive connotation is aimed at giving people the idea that everything is going to be fine, that the current situation is good in spite of economic and material problems, and that the future is going to be brilliant. The call for a promising future and for the enduring fight for the revolution and the autonomy of Cuba places Cubans in a dimension which is outside of time, in an eternal dimension. The use of ‘we’, ‘our’, and ‘everyone’ in texts is finalized at involving people, emphasizing their shared vision, beliefs and desires, simultaneously constructing and reinforcing a community identity. These three levels of analysis don’t exclude one another; indeed, they interact in shaping the Cuban public space and defining the identity of the Cuban community.

The Cuban LL effectively demonstrates how public space can be used as an agent of power and as a tool of propaganda to advance state ideology and to shape the social identity of a country. The massive physical presence in the LL of propaganda messages cannot be ignored, so propaganda and power acquire even more strength, even if no act of interpretation is required to the audience, who does not make any criticism and consequently does not pay always so much attention, considering the elements of the LL as part of the landscape itself, as a routine communication. The Cuban LL in this way becomes one of the key factors in constructing the Cuban identity, supporting revolutionary values and ideas, creating a sense of belonging detached from the present time, and which instead is rooted in the past and oriented towards the future, a sense of identity inspired by Cuban heroes and by its leaders. A quote of José Martí present in a sign illustrates this sentiment: “El que levanta a su país, se levanta a sí mismo”.

Recent events, namely the election of Donald Trump and the death of Fidel Castro, such as the very recent election of Miguel Díaz-Canel to President of Cuba, could eventually change the Cuban LL. After the death of Fidel Castro, new signs were created to celebrate the *líder máximo*. Many of them are located along the journey followed by the



coffin of Fidel Castro during the 9 days of national mourning, but at the same time, many were located everywhere in the country to say goodbye to Castro and to celebrate him. The vast majority of these signs was produced by the government or its local bodies, but many of them were created by individuals to say goodbye to their beloved leader using every kind of surface such as painting on stones or walls, white small stones on the grass, etc. The most frequent messages are “Hasta siempre comandante”, “Fidel para siempre”, “Seguiremos tu ejemplo” and the recently well-known “Yo soy Fidel” and “Fidel entre nosotros”.

With Donald Trump as president of the U.S. and the recent election of Díaz-Canel as president of Cuba after a long period of government guided by Fidel and Raul Castro, it is not possible to make forecasts about the future development of propaganda and the LL in Cuba, but it will be necessary to verify in a few years whether any changes have occurred, and if so, what kind of changes they may be and, finally, what the consequences will be on society.

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