

Proximal Repetition in the Linguistic Landscape

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Abstract

Many walls or gates along Metro Manila's streets have signs asking drivers not to block driveways or pedestrians not to loiter. What is interesting is that these signs are often repetitious and are spaced very close to each other. This phenomena, what I call proximal repetition, differs from standard repetition: the regular and rational spacing of signs installed by corporations or local governments. In this paper, I examine instances of proximal repetition in Metro Manila and Coron, Palawan through an analytical framework informed by politeness theory, particularly studies on nagging, and Tim Ingold's writing on practical culture. I conclude that those who use proximal repetition in sign placement have, like naggers, status but weak power. Lastly, I provide arguments for the inclusion of proximal repetition and its counterpart, standard repetition, as salient features of the linguistic landscape, mainly because they allow the field to consider not just sociolinguistic phenomena but spatial practice as well.

Keywords: linguistic landscapes, proximal repetition, nagging, practical culture

1.0 Introduction

The side streets of the Cubao district in Quezon City, Metro Manila lead to major thoroughfares, large malls, a train station, and the city's largest arena. These streets are lined by dense residential buildings such as townhouses and multi-door apartments, many of which also house businesses on their street fronts. There is also at least one slum. High density, high traffic, and scarce parking has led to blocked driveways or loiterers. To discourage this, most home or business owners place signs on their gates asking drivers not to block driveways and pedestrians not to loiter.

What is interesting, however, is that these signs are often repetitious on the same gate or wall. Although these perimeters are not very large, signs are placed very close to each other, sometimes merely an arm's length apart. I call this feature *proximal repetition*. It is the main topic of this paper.



Figure 1. Proximal repetition of “No parking” and “Don’t Block Driveway” gate in Cubao.

Figure 1 shows proximal repetition of signs on a garage gate in Cubao. All three signs serve the same function; thus, from an outsider's perspective, one sign will suffice. There appears to be no need for the same sign to be proximally repeated. Compared to the repetition of signs in key infrastructure such as airports and highways, or in uptown streets, these proximally repetitive signs do not ‘cover’ one part of a large whole. A majority of the gates can be seen with one sweep of the eye. Thus, the questions: What purpose does proximal repetition serve? What social conditions does its use imply?

Moreover, proximally repetitive signs are found not only in high-density, generally low-income districts with poor traffic and pedestrian infrastructure, such as Cubao, but also in wealthy neighborhoods such as the Ortigas and Makati central business districts (both in Metro Manila) and in small towns such as Coron in Palawan province. Figure 2 shows proximally repetitive “no parking” signs in Coron, Palawan which line the entire frontage of the lot occupied by an ice plant.



Figure 2. Proximally repetitive “no parking” signs in Coron, Palawan.

This paper examines instances of proximal repetition in these locations through a framework informed by politeness theory, particularly studies on nagging. Although proximal repetition is part of the linguistic landscape, no studies within the eponymous field examines the phenomenon. Thus, this paper hopes to demonstrate that proximal repetition (henceforth, PR) and its counterpart, standard repetition, are salient features of the linguistic landscape. The proximal repetition of signs, like the choice and positioning of languages on public signage, can provide important sociolinguistic and indeed sociological data about sign owners and sign readers. This paper also suggests that proximal repetition can provide a rapid diagnosis of whether a particular space encourages or resists civic-mindedness: whether or not the space they move through obliges pedestrians to give due respect to private property and drivers to obey traffic signs. That is, PR marks out the pressure points in a particular space where pedestrians or drivers are encouraged to act for their own convenience without concern for others.

2. Salient features of the linguistic landscape and proximal repetition

A concept that subsumes proximal repetition is Landry and Bourhis' (1997) linguistic landscapes (henceforth, LL) which is how "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combin[e] to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration" (p. 25). The salient features or categories of the LL discussed in their study and in subsequent studies can describe proximal repetition but they do not make it superfluous. In some cases, PR fits neatly into categories frequently encountered in LL research. PR signs, for example, are straightforwardly classifiable into top-down and bottom-up, a pair of categories fundamental to research on the LL. Gorter (2006) defines top-down and bottom-up as, respectively, "official signs placed by the government or related

institution and nonofficial signs put there by commercial enterprises or by private organisations or persons" (p. 3).

Bottom-up signs that are not commercial but normative, a descriptor usually reserved for top-down signs, is a class of public signage usually overlooked by studies on the LL. For instance, in Scollon and Scollon's (2003) four types of discourses as used by Moriarty (2014) in his study of the Dingle, Ireland LL, "regulatory and infrastructural" discourses are described as coming from "official bodies" (p. 468). That is, normative signs, for these studies, are top-down signs. This of course does not amount to an a priori understanding of bottom-up as exclusively commercial or 'transgressive', the fourth type of discourse that includes graffiti or other signs that "intentionally or accidentally violate the expected semiotics of a place" (Moriarty, 2014, p. 468). The communication of normative information, usually the domain of public authority and expressed quintessentially in traffic signs and other official signage regulating behavior, can obviously be communicated by bottom-up signs. But what makes this shift interesting is that bottom-up signage will have to do so without the authority and abilities of enforcement that the state enjoys. It is from this opposition—that of having status but without the ability to enforce this status—that PR arises.

How PR fits into other established categories of LL literature is also unclear. For instance, although PR can have informational and symbolic functions, it is probably less concerned with demarcating the territory of linguistic group (i.e. the 'informational' function) or reinforcing in-group language use (i.e. the 'symbolic function') and more concerned with demarcating the territory of a property owner and reinforcing his rights through repetition while associating sign-readers, who may be part of the same language community as the owner, with habitually deviant behavior. Still, some may find this adjustment of Landry and Bourhis' (1997) original concept, awkward. The point is that PR as a feature of the LL may not be easily or elegantly described by the established categories of the field.

Many studies of the LL cannot but comment on the increasing dominance of English in non-English parts of the world. In his use of the LL in a “socially sensitive pedagogy for teaching English as an international language”, Sayer (2009) notes six meanings of English in the LL of Oaxaca, Mexico: “English is advanced and sophisticated”, “English is fashion”, “English is being cool”, “English is sex(y)”, “English for expressions of love”, and “English for expressing subversive identities” (p. 147-150). All of these uses of English, Sayer (2009) claims, are directed not at foreign visitors but at locals who may not be proficient in English but recognize the “social value or meaning” of the language (p. 146-147).

In a similar vein, Huebner (2006) studies, through the LL of Bangkok, how English interacts with the Thai language. He concludes that “the influence of the use of English lexicon and syntax with Thai script can be seen at all levels of linguistic analysis” (p. 48). Another popular theme is to take the LL as an index of language ideologies or language policy, with the use of English as a frequent coordinate.

The latest research on the LL indexed on the EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier database are all solidly within these two themes of English dominance and language ideology. In his study of the LL along San Antonio’s highway system, Hult (2014) concludes that “English is normalized as an unmarked language for all aspects of the linguistic landscape, reproducing national language ideologies about the status of English in the United States” (p. 507). Lanza and Woldemariam (2014) examine the LL of Addis Ababa, one that “is increasingly marked by the use of English” and which is “perceived by locals as prestigious, indexing their aspirations towards modernity” (p. 491). Of the second theme, Tan (2014) sees in the LL of Singapore “evidence of some tension in the balancing act between the official languages” mandated by the state (p. 438). Moriarty (2014) in his study of the LL of Dingle, Ireland “suggests

that the LL can be viewed as a dynamic space that is significant in indexing and performing language ideologies that are continually being contested and renegotiated” (p. 464).

These are solidly sociolinguistic treatments of the LL that emphasize the language of signs, their content, over their physicality. This approach is valuable in that it reveals language hierarchies, attitudes, ruptures between policy and reality that are concealed when a sign is taken at face value, like how a tourist or layman would. However, signs as they appear to passers-by qua passers-by, not as linguists or analysts, may already have some analyzable content. This is not totally lost on laypersons: Billboards in Manila, for example, have entered popular discussion not only for their content but because of their appearance, not individually, but as a part of the shape of Manila’s landscape. One angry post by webmaster ‘benig0’ on the popular blog getrealphilippines.com completes the circuit between landscape and culture analysis in its title: “What Metro Manila billboards tell us about the Filipino character” (2011).

The linguistic landscape is a gestalt as Ben-Rafael (2009) points out. It is composed of disparate objects but is experienced as one whole and this whole “is more than the sum of its individual constitutive elements and illustrates properties of its own” (p. 43). In an earlier paper, Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Hasan, and Trumper-Hecht (2006) describes the LL as gestalt as “a familiar reality to many” and “is most often perceived by passers-by as one structured space” (p. 8). That is, assuming a preponderance of signs as in the “central areas” (Ben-Rafael, 2009, p. 41), the LL as gestalt is the first moment of perception. It is how the LL ordinarily appears to passers-by who may not yet be interested in a careful reading or analysis of individual signs but nonetheless ‘take it in’.

If the LL is a “structured space” as Ben Rafael describes it, then the patterns of this structure would probably be manifest to human observers whose visual processing system, after all, depends

on and excels at the recognition of patterns (Tarr, 2000). To take the LL as gestalt, which is Ben-Rafael's (2009) valuable recommendation, not only allows us to see the LL as whole greater than the sum of its parts but also as a problematique of perception (and not just of language hierarchies, ideologies, etc.) an interest which after all marked the beginning of gestalt psychology in the early nineteenth century.

One of the early principles of the gestalt understanding of perception still fundamental to psychology today is that of *similarity*, where "similar features are grouped together" by the human pattern recognition system (Tarr, 2000, p. 1). Thus, the LL taken as a whole can be made sense of not just by reading and analyzing the languages on signs but, in an even earlier and more fundamental moment, by taking note of similar signs or the repetition of signs which is, really, to become aware of what our recognition system does effortlessly. It is at this juncture that proximal repetition appears as a feature of the linguistic landscape.

The study closest to a consideration of PR would be Backhaus' (2005) examination of the LL around the Tokyo Yamanote line. Although he does examine repetitious signs, these however are spread out over large areas. In Backhaus' study, each property owner who wishes to make known that his property is protected places stickers bearing the logo of a security agency (p. 115-116). Backhaus makes no mention of the density of these stickers, probably because they did not strike him as salient during his qualitative analysis. What he does study is *layering*, which is the existence of earlier versions of a sign alongside more current versions and how this "lays bare different linguistic states in the recent history of the city" (p. 107).

Furthermore, the rationale behind sticker placement is probably similar to the placement of top-down "no parking" signs along a public road or to "no bomb jokes" signs in a public airport, and to bottom-up "no smoking" signs in a private establishment such as a mall. In these places, signs are installed to serve particular areas of a relatively large property. Thus, a box-shaped property will

presumably have one or a few stickers on each side, depending on how large that side is and how visible it is to passersby. The general rule followed in placing signs such as these is a consideration of the visual field of its target audience. If a very long platform, such as boarding areas in bus terminals or train stations, is to be "no smoking", then this would require the repetition of signs spaced according to the visual field of occupants. If a particular sign remains inconspicuous to a significant number of users occupying a space of significant traffic, this would probably require the placement of a second sign whose distance from the previous ensures visibility for all users no matter their location in the space. This results in fairly regular placement. I call this style of sign placement or density *standard repetition* (hereafter, SR). Like streetlamps on a highway that are spaced according to the range of light they emit, standard repetitive signs are also placed according to their 'range', with range being the visibility of a sign from the vantage of its prospective readers. If the custodians of a particular space foresee that some patrons will remain outside the range of a particular sign, that would necessitate the placement of a second sign.

SR as a regime of sign placement is invisible. Sign-readers are not expected to pay attention to the repetition of signs but solely to the content of each individual sign in a series. This invisibility may be the reason why Backhaus (2005) does not comment on the density of the security-provider stickers he studies. On the other hand, with proximally repetitive signs, sign owners probably expect sign readers to pay attention to both content and repetition (see figures 1 and 2). Nonetheless, whatever the intent of sign owners, signs become proximally repetitive when readers become conscious of repetition as a means of reinforcing the sign's normative content. That is, for ordinary pedestrians or drivers, PR becomes a marked feature of the LL when the LL as gestalt is organized by the pattern recognition system not only according to congruent contours but also according to the similarity or indeed sameness of signs.

2.1 Proximal repetition and standard repetition as indicators of civic health

Proximal and standard repetition are categories that can potentially include all signs of two or more instances. Most importantly, the use of these categories in studies of the LL can broaden attention beyond the field's current concerns. Research on the LL has mostly been on the relationship between local language and the dominance of English, how this interfaces with language policy, and its expression in top-down and bottom-up signage. The latest research on the LL stored on the EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier database all fall within this range.

All of these studies make use of the LL as an index. Indeed, as Tan (2014) points out: signs in the LL, “apart from their very local informational content, can symbolically represent something with meaning beyond that very local context. Symbols serve a semiotic or pointing function. Among other things, they point to the kind of society for which the signs operate” (p. 441). Many studies within the LL have done so by taking note, through these signs, of the increasing dominance of English and its effect on surrounding languages and language users. The “kind of society” indicated by Tan's (2014) study of signs in the Singapore LL, for instance, is one where linguistic ideology or policy avowed in state documents is not always expressed in signage. This is a society where language ideals are not always what is maintained ‘on the ground’; the rupture indicating the presence of a less static and more negotiated language subculture of which the LL is symptomatic. The LL, as Tan (2014) notes, “is symptomatic in that it betrays the assumptions underlying a society. Signs reveal what is taken for granted in that society” (p. 441).

What this paper suggests is that the LL betrays not only the linguistic “assumptions underlying a society” and what is “taken for granted” linguistically, as Tan (2014) does in his study (p. 441), but also in the widest sociological and not just sociolinguistic sense. The far-reaching

implications derivable from the LL was already suggested by Ben-Rafael in a 2006 article where he suggests the theoretical limitations of two of the field's early works, Landry and Bourhis' seminal 1997 paper, often taken to be the starting point of LL as a field in its own right, and Spolsky and Cooper's 1991 book, *The Languages of Jerusalem*.

The Landry–Bourhis approach sees LL as ‘given’ context of sociolinguistic processes and thus does not focus on the very factors which give shape to LL with limited consideration, if any, to the dynamics of LL. The Cooper–Spolsky approach turned more clearly toward aspects of change, but it does not pay attention to the complexity of LL with regards to the vast numbers of actors that participate in its moulding. Moreover, while both approaches do emphasise the *sui generis* interest of LL as a set of facts deserving study and research, they provide only a limited grasp of the genuine and far-reaching importance of LL. (p. 8)

In both his evaluations of the two works, Ben-Rafael (2006) emphasizes the importance of focusing attention upon the LL not just as a given fact but as a thing molded, shaped by complex factors that are in themselves as or perhaps more crucial than the givens of a particular sign. A diachronic approach, one that analyzes not just particular signs but the LL as gestalt, and takes into consideration its myriad and sometimes oppositional causes in language policy or ideology, would appear to satisfy. However, in a later article, Ben-Rafael revisits the same point but expands its implications.

It is actually our contention that the LL is an area of investigation all the more important considering that it is the public space where the dynamics of major aspects of social life are asserted, either

directly or indirectly. Hence, the study of LLs should allow for confronting basic theoretical questions stemming from the social sciences in general and sociology in particular (Ben-Rafael, 2009, p. 41).

What this passage recommends is an expanded consideration of the LL, from something symptomatic of the myriad configurations between language reality and language ideals, whether of the state or substate groups, to something symptomatic of social life at its most fundamental: how one human being expects to be treated, what actually happens, how both sides react, and all of this visible in the LL both linguistically and in its very configuration in space. It is in this later significance of the LL, its configuration in space as indicator, that proximal repetition and standard repetition can find their place in the study of the linguistic landscape.

The use of PR and SR as analytical categories in studies of the LL enriches not only through the provision of additional variables through which the effects of the spread of English or language policy on the LL can be examined – but also because it allows the discussion to comment not just on language culture but also on civic culture incarnated in space: Owners of proximally repetitive signs want to be respected by their communities, ought to be respected, but probably are not. This lack of respect toward property owners (signalled by bottom-up PR) and state authority (signalled by top-down PR) can be only partially explained by a strictly sociolinguistic framework. Proximally repetitive signs make a claim for physical space by face threatening practices of size, placement, and especially density, and not just with language. In addition, the relations revealed are not between languages and their users per se, but between sign owners and sign readers. Thus, it would be fruitful at this point to bring in pragmatics as a framework.

2.2 Proximal repetition and deictics

One concept from the field of pragmatics that is useful in describing PR is *deixis*. A deictic expression derives a part of its meaning from context. Once an expression has been identified as deictic, it can be further classified as *gestural or symbolic* (O’Keeffe, Clancy & Adolphs, 2009, p. 37-39). Gestural deixis is often accompanied with pointing, such as when we point to an object on a table and ask a person next to us ‘what is *this*?’. Symbolic deixis refers to “context outside the text for meaning” or to “a common cultural background” (p. 40).

A deictic expression can be further classified as *person, place, and time* deixis according to its deictic center. The deictic center, therefore, of person deixis is a speaker, for place deixis it is where the speaker made the utterance, and for time deixis it is the time at which the utterance was made (p. 42). Deictic expressions “depend for at least some of their meaning on a deictic center” which is in turn dependent on context (Chapman, 2011, p. 41).

The phenomena proximal repetition is composed of two parts: the sign itself, and its conspicuous repetition within a defined area. The sign itself is gesturally deictic – that is, to make sense of it, it will have to point toward or adumbrate the area within which a specific behavior is proscribed. This is accomplished by the owner placing the sign on or within the area itself. For instance, in the case of ‘do not block the driveway’ signs, because the sign is on this gate, it is *this* driveway that must not be blocked.

The proximal repetition itself, however, can be both gestural and symbolic deixis. It is gestural because PR emphasizes that it is *this* driveway that should not be blocked, and symbolic because it refers to the outside contexts such as high-traffic, scarce parking and, fundamentally, low empathy from pedestrians and drivers towards owners of private property such as homes and businesses.

PR can be also be understood as place deixis since, to make sense of it, a context-dependent deictic center will need to be identified. For instance, a ‘do not block the driveway’ sign is understood by most readers not as a normative generalization proscribing the blocking of all driveways by all persons, but as a normative expression referring to a particular driveway and a particular person. This is accomplished by identifying the deictic center of the expression, for instance: “The driveway” is 33 Columbia street’s driveway in Cubao and not any other driveway. This information is only made available by referring to context: that sign is on that particular gate.

Deictics is useful for understanding PR as gestural. It is a sign that points toward a specific place of more or less definite dimensions; the comprehension of this deictic center is necessary for properly interpreting the sign. Context, in this sense, is entirely material. It refers to a space around the sign with fuzzy or definite borders that designates for readers its zone of enforcement. However, context is not always material. What Lefebvre (1991) refers to as “spatial practice” cannot just refer to facts of physical environment. Rather, spatial practice is what “secretes” a society’s space. It is the immanent origin of the built spaces of everyday life which can be revealed by working backwards, an analysis that Lefebvre calls a “deciphering of its space” (p. 38). That is, put into the terminology of deixis, spatial practice is a what symbolic deixis points toward. It is in the “common cultural background” (O’Keeffe et al., 2009, p. 40) that we can make sense of the proximal repetition of signs. To interpret the symbolic deixis of PR, salient concepts can be found in politeness theory, particularly in studies of nagging.

2.3 Politeness Theory and proximal repetition

Perhaps the most well-known theorists of politeness are Brown and Levinson (1987). According to them, every person has two types of ‘face’, with face being “the public self-image

that every member [of society] wants to claim for himself” (as cited in O’Keeffe et al., 2009, p. 63). These two types are *positive* and *negative face*. Positive face is understood as our desire to be accepted, to be listened to, admired and valued. Negative face, on the other hand, is our desire not to be interfered with (Dunleavy et al., 2009, p. 4). Statements that threaten negative or positive face are called Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), which have four levels of severity: *bald on record*, *negative politeness*, *positive politeness*, and *off record* (p. 4). Bald on record FTAs make no attempt at mitigating the offensiveness of a statement. Negative politeness is an FTA done while showing concern for the negative face of the listener. To use Dunleavy et al.’s (2009) example, this occurs when students request instructors for recommendation letters while showing concern for the time the instructor will have to allocate. Positive politeness is an FTA accomplished by having listeners empathize with speaker. Again using Dunleavy, a student may remind the teacher of their influence hence the recommendation letter. Off record is the least threatening FTA and is accomplished indirectly through ambiguity and hints.

2.4 Politeness theory and nagging

A recent development within politeness theory are studies of nagging, which is defined in one study as “an exchange in which a person makes persistent, non-aggressive requests which contain the same content to a respondent who fails to comply” (Dunleavy et al., 2009, p. 2) and in another as a request that progresses to a reminder and when this reminder is repeated, becomes nagging (Boxer, 2002, p. 51). In both definitions, a feature that defines nagging is persistence or repetition.

According to Dunleavy et al. (2009), nagging threatens the positive and negative face of both speakers and respondents. It threatens positive face by throwing into doubt the speaker’s ability to get others to do required tasks. It

threatens the speaker's negative face by placing him in debt, should the nag be satisfied. For respondents, nagging threatens positive face by suggesting that they are incapable of performing tasks. It threatens a respondent's negative face by requiring respondents to do something (p. 5).

Boxer's (2002) study of nagging in the family posits common topics or themes of nagging: The object nagged about is usually important to the nagger but unimportant to the person nagged, parents who nag usually want to control an aspect of their child's life which they deem good but whose benefit the child has not yet grasped (p. 52-53). Nagging, for Boxer, usually comes about when there is an imbalance of power or when there is a mismatch between status and power. For instance, parents who nag children may have status but lack power. Children who are nagged because they do not comply have no status but exercise some power over their parents, if only to ignore them (p. 54). In the workplace, for example, nagging rarely occurs because power relations are usually clearly defined and consequences are quick to come if employees flaunt these relations. For instance, consistently ignoring what your boss tells you to do will probably result in firing. Parents, on the other hand, cannot fire their children. Consequences are less clear-cut in families (p. 54-55).

Boxer (2002) proposes a detailed 'nagging process' in three (but actually four) moves: the first move is the request, typically presented as a command or hedged request. The second move is a reminder typically expressed as a question. The third move is an expression of exasperation. This may then be followed by a threat or scolding, depending on the relationship between the nagger and its respondent (p. 52).

3. Methodology

According to Hult (2014), "LL analysts tend to purposefully select focal geographical areas within a city that provide useful insight into the symbolic construction of place in a particular

metropolis" (p. 511). He cites as examples studies such as Backhaus (2007), Blackwood (2011) and Pavlenko (2009). By "symbolic construction" Hult (2014) refers to the ability of the LL to indicate "not merely passive scenery; it projects a set of indexicalities, specific discursive frames of meaning, within which to interpret acts of communication as well as relationships between individuals and the material world" (p. 511). That is, the LL as deixis points toward or indexes spatial practice which composes the material landscape but is itself an immaterial though thoroughly human reality.

Like many studies of the LL (Hult, 2014, p. 511), I went on foot and took digital photographs of as many signs as possible within the Cubao neighborhood I had initially selected for exploration. This was the zone demarcated by Aurora Boulevard on the south, New York Avenue on the north, Annapolis Street on the West and Stanford on the East (see Figure 3). This zone is located immediately north of Araneta Center, which is just across Aurora boulevard. Furthermore, the length of the zone is roughly equal to that of the Araneta Center, which is the main landmark and commercial center of Cubao.

My initial visit to this zone in Cubao was done with no hypothesis in mind. I made that trip precisely to discover and formulate one for a term paper required by a graduate course on the LL. I chose Cubao because, on previous visits for leisure to Gateway Mall or while in transit, I noticed that the LL of the neighborhood immediately adjacent to it was particularly dense not only spatially but also in types of activity: not only are there homes in this neighborhood, there is a mammoth mall just across its main street, attached to this mall and above the street is a major metro station, and on street level one finds all manner of business from motels, fast food giants, shops selling genuine and pirated goods, job agencies and eateries for laborers, and thick pedestrian traffic. Cubao is thus the archetypical "public space" that Ben-Rafael (2009)

Proximal Repetition in the Linguistic Landscape

describes: it is not just any ‘non-private’ space but where one goes to see ‘the crowd’ (p. 40-41).

It was during my initial visit that I first noticed PR. I took photos of as many LL items as possible but decided to focus upon PR during the post-visit analysis of these photos. I then made a second visit to the same neighborhood to search for and photograph more instances of PR. During the period between the submission of the first, term paper version of this article and its development into this present article, I came upon more instances of PR in upscale areas of Metro Manila and on the island province of Coron, Palawan, which I then included in my analysis. All photographs were taken with Apple iPhones. Figure 3 show the locations of photographs taken in Cubao.



Figure 3. Locations of Cubao photographs.

Figures 4 to 8 show the photographs with PR Tagalog signs translated in their captions. The Tagalog is given in italics with an English translation in square brackets. When a literal translation does not capture the sense of the original, I provide an English approximate. Also, for photos that do not make this clear, I mark out proximally repetitious signs with numbered arrows. The numbers correspond to the number of iterations of the same sign. I have also transcribed in the caption signs in English that may not be clear because of the camera angle.



Figure 4. PR on a residential gate in Cubao.¹



Figure 5. PR on the gate of what appeared to be a lot used for commercial activity.²



Figure 6. Proximally repetitious “No parking on driveway” signs on a townhouse gate in Cubao.

¹) *Bawal po ang tumambay dito* [please do not loiter here].

²) *Bawal po tumambay dito* [please do not loiter here].

²) *Bawal nga harangan* [Do not, I repeat, block the driveway!].

²) *Bawal nga harangan ang gate koha mo. Mga sira ulo...* [Do not, I repeat, block the gate! Do you understand? Idiots!] ³) **Bawal* harangan ang gate kong makintidi ka!!!* [Do not block my gate!!! Do you understand?!].



Figure 7. PR on the gate of a lot used for commercial activity.³



Figure 8. Close-up of two signs on a small, residential gate.

In the next section, these proximally repetitive signs are interpreted using nagging as a framework. Instances of PR from areas other than Cubao are also analyzed. In one of these areas, PR is exhibited by top-down signs which, despite having the authority of the state, must also nag in an attempt to increase effectiveness. This examination of PR in different contexts and from

different sources is only partially explained by the decoupling of status from power that provokes nagging. Thus, the last section of the analysis, drawing from Ingold's (2003, 2004) writing on practical culture, locates the origin of PR in spatial practice: PR is not just a local battle fought in particular neighborhoods by persons who have rights and those who have none, or those who understand civility and those who do not. Its origin is in the very way space conducts our movement. That is, it is a culture that begins in the feet, rises to the head, and from there erupts as PR onto the linguistic landscape, which is language incarnated in space.

4. Analysis

Although PR can be classified as a place deictic that makes use of both gesture and symbolic deixis, nagging as a framework is more salient. Both nagging and PR share features such as repetition, non-compliance, and power inequality. Furthermore, PR is an FTA that threatens the negative face of drivers or pedestrians through a 'bald on record' strategy. Pedestrians and drivers are unambiguously asked to do something for the benefit of the sign owner.

However, unlike a bald on record FTA done in person (i.e. through speech), the textual nature of PR mitigates its effectiveness as an FTA. A property owner who stood by his gate to tell off loiterers and illegal parkers would probably succeed in all cases or, if not, cause the escalation of the situation. However, a property owner who uses text to dissuade parkers and pedestrians would have to employ some other means to equal or at least approach the effectiveness of a personal FTA.

In prestigious establishments and residences, a textual bald on record FTA is backed up by security guards, surveillance cameras, and even the expensiveness of the architecture. All of these indicate the socioeconomic power of the

³The top photo shows the front right side of the gate. Number 1 is also a "no trespassing" sign. The bottom photo shows the backside of the gate, also painted with "no trespassing" and seen only when the gate is open

property owner and thus the prevalence in these areas of *standard repetition*, a regime of sign density that emphasizes range and assumes compliance. Most Cubao homes and establishments outside the Araneta Center, however, bear none or very little of these markers of power. Furthermore, the decrepit state of many of these gates indicates as much. Thus the necessity of PR to at least approach the effectiveness of a personal FTA.

The scarcity of PR in economically advantaged areas such as the Makati central business district, Bonifacio Global City, and even in the newly redeveloped parts of the Araneta Center in Cubao can be likened to the scarcity of nagging in the workplace. In these districts, as in the workplace, power goes with status. Building owners in these business districts of Metro Manila, where the largest local and international corporations have their offices, enjoy the status of private property and are able to enforce the rights that go with it.

However, PR differs from nagging in that it is only the good of the sign owner (i.e. property owners) that is directly served. The lack of this bargaining chip - the pedestrian's or driver's direct benefit - probably exacerbates the power inequality between sign owners and sign readers, and contributes to the sign owner's decision (whether conscious or not) to employ PR.

Lastly, sign owners, although they are like nagging parents and teachers in their having status but weak power, are unlike parents and teachers in that they have almost no way of directly punishing or threatening erring drivers or pedestrians. This exacerbates the power inequality beyond that in family nagging. Sign owners have all the status afforded by owning private property, but have no power to enforce their rights as such. PR, therefore, is a 'sign of desperation' and a weak attempt to control a detrimental situation.

The desperation behind PR and its similarity to nagging, is clearly seen in figure 5 where, like a nagger brought to their limit, the sign owner employs exasperated language and even insults. Furthermore, in that instance, the speech-derived syntax of nagging is carried over into the

textual PR: *Bawal nga harangan ang gate ko ha mga sira ulo* [approximately translated: 'Do not, I repeat, block the gate you idiots] brings to the surface the subject position of the sign owner, something only implied in impersonal signs such as "Do not block the driveway". Also, the decrepitude of the gate does little to mitigate this power inequality

4.1 PR in provinces and prestigious neighborhoods

Proximal repetition is not entirely absent in the neighborhoods of the rich, whether commercial or residential, and neither is it a purely urban phenomenon. Take, for instance, these proximally repetitive "*Bawal ang pagdura, pagkakat, pagihi dito* [Spitting, littering, urinating here are not permitted]" signs that line the perimeter wall of Alexandra Condominium along Amber drive in the Ortigas business district six kilometers south of Cubao (see Figures 9 and 9.1). These mid-rise tower blocks, just behind the Philippine Stock Exchange, are in a highly desirable part of the metro: streets are clean, giant malls and upmarket restaurants are close by, traffic is moderate, and security provided by both the tax-rich *barangay* (i.e. a barrio, the smallest administrative division in the Philippines) police and the condominium's private guards.



Figure 9. PR outside the Alexandra Condominium in Ortigas.⁴

⁴ The top portion of the sign reads "Bawal ang pagdura, pagkakat, pagihi dito sa pampublikong lugar. Pasig City Ordinance No. 45-1995". [Spitting, littering, urinating are not permitted in public places. The bottom portion lists the corresponding penalties for first, second, third, and fourth and subsequent offences.



Figure 9.1 PR on the perimeter wall of the Alexandra Condominium.⁵

However, we can infer from the proximal repetition of these signs (see Figures 9 and 9.1) that both the condominium and the barangay have not been very successful in preventing pedestrians from spitting, littering, or urinating on or near the wall. The same sign is placed on every segment of the more or less fifty meter wall leading up to the condominium's guarded entrance. As I discussed earlier, as a regime of sign placement, range or sign visibility is not what motivates PR. If that were so, then there would be no need for these signs to be so closely spaced. Rather the residents of Alexandra Condominium are trying to enforce their rules with repetitive threats, just like in nagging.

This reveals an interesting feature of PR: not only is it analogous to nagging through repetition, but also in that the nagger, just like the owner of a proximally repetitive sign, feels compelled to nag at every instance they feel their preferences threatened. Thus, a jealous spouse will ask the same question several times before his or her partner leaves for a night out and several times when he or she comes home. Translated into space: those who have status as owners of property but little power to enforce their rights upon pedestrians or drivers are compelled to nag at every location where they feel their rights are threatened. Thus, every part of Alexandra Condominium's wall that a pedestrian might pollute must have a proximally repetitive sign. Without proximal repetition, a male pedestrian

who finds the buttresses of Alexandra's perimeter wall convenient for answering nature's call can ignore a nearby and clearly visible sign forbidding him from doing so, even if that sign obviously pertains to the entire length of the wall. Because he enjoys near-impunity, he will have to be nagged at the very spot, and on every spot, he might choose to pollute. These signs will have to be, so to speak, 'in his face'.

The same phenomenon is noticeable in Coron, a large island at the northern end of Palawan province (see Figures 2 and 10) An ice plant along the busy main road of the largest town (also called Coron) had 'no parking' signs along its entire frontage. These signs were spaced barely a foot apart and, just like in Alexandra's Condominium's wall, every possible space where a driver might park had a 'no parking' sign. Since tricycles and motorcycles far outnumber four-wheeled vehicles in Coron, each 'no parking' sign covered a space about as large as a tricycle or motorcycle. Through proximal repetition, tricycle and motorcycle drivers are nagged at every possible parking location along the ice plant's frontage. Otherwise, just like stubborn children who know the rules but balk at obeying, erring drivers may claim that 'they weren't told'.



Figure 10. Proximally repetitive "no parking" signs along an ice plant's frontage in Coron, Palawan.⁶

⁵ Within the superimposed rectangle on the right are six more iterations of the sign on the right (See figure 9).

⁶ There are 13 signs from end to end. The superimposed rectangle on the left contains eight more iterations.

Proximal Repetition in the Linguistic Landscape

Although the poverty or wealth of a neighborhood may influence the incidence of PR, its primary cause is the pedestrian or driver's disregard of the interests of property owners, which is then exacerbated by the property owners' weakness in enforcing their rights. Thus, in the absence of civic decorum or law enforcement, there arises a culture of nag-like pleas and threats from property toward passersby, a sign of which is PR. However, as seen especially in Figures 2 and 10, PR provokes from passersby not cooperation but attempts to 'get away with it' by moving a little ways from the sign so that, in his view, it no longer concerns him.

4.2 Proximal repetition in top-down signs

Even top-down signs placed by local governments and related institutions can make use of PR, signalling the same combination of status and weak power found in Cubao and Coron. The signs placed by Alexandra Condominium, for example, can be considered top-down because they come from authority. Each sign is tagged as coming from "TACC [The Alexandra Condominium Corporation] Management". Also, they invoke "Pasig City Ordinance No. 1995-45".

However, even the most prototypical of top-down signs, the government-owned and installed traffic sign, can also exhibit proximal repetition. Take, for instance, these 'no parking/no waiting' signs along the westbound lane of Arnaiz Avenue in the Makati Central Business District some ten kilometers south of Cubao. Far from the informal and haphazard 'no parking' signs in Cubao and Coron, these signs were installed by city government of Makati and were built to the specifications of the Department of Public Works and Highways. Four such signs are shown in Figure 11. To aid the reader, I have inserted arrows to point at the signs.



Figure 11. PR along Arnaiz Avenue, Makati CBD.

Although these signs are standard in design and spaced more or less equally apart. They are placed very close to each other (the wide-angle lens of my phone camera makes these signs appear further apart than they actually are), such that a driver who attempts to park will have in his field of vision two or possibly three legible signs. The 2011 edition of the Department of Public Works and Highways' (DPWH) Road Signs and Pavement Markings manual does not specify a minimum or maximum distance between 'no parking/no waiting' signs. However, it does contain a general proscription against excessive use: "The use of regulatory and warning signs should be restricted to the minimum consistent with their particular requirements, as signs tend to lose their effectiveness if used unnecessarily or too frequently." (p. 10). Clearly, these 'no parking/no waiting' signs along Arnaiz avenue are too frequent in that two or three are visible to drivers at any one time. However, does this frequency make them

“lose their effectiveness” as the DPWH manual claims? And why are these signs so closely spaced to begin with?

Arnaiz westbound ends at an intersection controlled by a stoplight for the left lane while the right lane ends in a right turn into Amorsolo Street. Beyond this intersection is an entry ramp of the Metro Manila Skyway while Amorsolo continues into the western fringe of the central business district. Arnaiz Avenue is particularly busy on weekday rush hours because of through-traffic to the Metro Manila Skyway and because of the numerous offices and restaurants that line the avenue. Thus, a vehicle parked along the right lane will not only obstruct traffic turning into Amorsolo, it will also force those who want to make a right turn to infringe upon the left lane, obstructing those who want to continue onto the Skyway. Furthermore, because the left lane is controlled by a stoplight, right-turning traffic blocked by a parked car may find themselves with no choice but to wait behind that parked car.

Even without a ‘no parking / no waiting’ sign, congested weekday traffic should make it clear to drivers that parking there, however briefly, will severely inconvenience drivers on both lanes. The minimal use of regulatory signs prescribed by the DPWH in this situation will serve as reminders of the obvious. However, should Makati adhere to the minimal usage prescribed by the DPWH, this will result, contrary to the manual’s prediction, in decreased effectivity. Just like in Cubao, where drivers block driveways despite the glaringly obvious inconvenience this will cause to property owners, many drivers along Arnaiz avenue may have parked or waited despite the clear inconvenience to other road users. This is indicated by the proximal repetition of signs in both Cubao and Makati. Furthermore, these proximally repeated signs along Arnaiz indicate a disconnect between the rules and regulations of government bureaucracies such as the DPWH and ‘on the ground’ reality in third-world cities such as Metro Manila. Whereas the DPWH manual

presumes a public ready and able to heed traffic signs, many drivers (and pedestrians) in Manila navigate its streets through *diskarte* [cleverness], threats received and given and, when disobeying traffic signs, a keen sense of what can be gotten away with and just how far is too far.

4.3 Proximal repetition as practical culture

If culture is not (or not just) shared concepts handed down through traditional means, but “human *practices*, situated in the relational context of people’s mutual involvement in a social world” (Ingold, 2003, p. 329), then PR can be understood as a human practice born out of the relationship between people who dwell in or own property and people who walk the streets or drive. It is not a reaction to Metro Manila’s road and pedestrian culture, it is itself the expression of this culture in its linguistic landscape. How we drive, how we walk the streets, and how as inhabitants and owners of property we communicate to drivers and pedestrians are not acquired as “templates or schemata for the organization of experience” (Ingold, 2003, p. 332). Rather, we inherit from previous generations “the specific conditions of development” through which we acquire our “own embodied skills and dispositions” (p. 332). That is, PR is not one side of two competing ways of understanding, one from property and the other from drivers and pedestrians. Rather, all these are ways of acting learned within “the specific condition of development” that is the city we inherit and leave behind. Like how the placement of different languages on a single sign are an emanation of language politics in a particular neighborhood or city, PR emanates from human relationships conditioned, in this case, by the urban environment of Metro Manila. That these human relationships are lacking in respect for each other’s interests is not caused, as many impute, by a lack of education; that is, a lack of shared concepts that make educated culture. Those who put-up proximally repetitious signs are not on the other side of a conceptual divide. Rather, they are one step in the performance that is Metro Manila.

In an article entitled “Culture on the Ground: the world perceived through the feet”, Ingold (2004) amends Geertz’s (1973) famous anthropological statement that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (as cited in Ingold, 2004, p. 323). For Ingold (2004), “only booted and seated man, artificially insulated – whether in movement or at rest – from direct contact with the ground, would consider himself so suspended” (p. 323). What causes this suspension is the practically universal use of boots and chairs in the West, technologies that encourage the separation of “thought from action and of mind from the body” (Ingold, 2004, p. 323). Boots and chairs are likely not the only causes, but there is indeed a presumption in the west that culture emanates necessarily from the mind and radiates to the feet. The “elevation of head over heels as the locus of creative intelligence”, for Ingold (2004), “is not only deeply embedded in the structures of public life in western societies. It has also spilled over into mainstream thinking in the disciplines of anthropology, psychology and biology” (p. 330). In the sociolinguistic subfield called linguistic landscapes, this spillover is seen in the preponderance of studies that take signs as linguistic signs. That is, as fixed units of language(s) important for their indexing of language hierarchy, ideology, vitality, tensions, and other real but abstract sociolinguistic phenomena. The signs of the LL, however, are not just language but language incarnated in space. Fully acknowledging this physical, spatial quality in research of the LL will allow the indexing not only of sociolinguistic data but of sociological data as well. The LL indexes not just culture handed down through and about language, but also a culture from the feet. This embodied culture is imposed by a city’s spaces primarily as ways of moving and only secondarily as mental propositions. And these ways of moving originate not from education, media, or association, that is, not from the head but from the human being’s primary means of locomotion, the feet, and are conditioned by the technological

appendages we attach to them from boots to cars and trains.

Thus, the roads and sidewalks of Metro Manila conduct a particular way of moving, and this particular way of moving has almost no resistance to stopping. The most popular form of public transport in and outside Manila, jeepneys (minibus-like public utility vehicles with second-hand diesel engines and decorated stainless steel bodies assembled in small garages), are very frequently maligned by drivers of private vehicles for their stopping anywhere a passenger wishes to board or alight. However, this is probably not because drivers of private vehicles possess a superior civic culture or better education, but because they have less reason to stop than jeepneys, but would stop and inconvenience others if they had to. The proximally repeated ‘no parking/no waiting’ signs on Arnaiz Road (see Figure 11) in the Makati CBD and the proximally repeated ‘no parking’ and ‘do not block the driveway’ signs in Cubao point to the stubborn delinquency of private vehicles (for jeepneys, “no loading/unloading” signs are used to regulate stops and are largely ignored). Pedestrians are of course part of this performance as well, for vehicles both private and public would not stop if pedestrians did not stop to hail or wait for their rides on road-side spaces ill-suited to the need.

It is the inherited urban space of Metro Manila that is the “specific condition of development” through which we acquire our “own embodied skills and dispositions” (Ingold, 2003, p. 332). It is this space—congested, very badly planned if at all, and often unpleasant—that moves and will move the feet of pedestrians and drivers into stopping in places and times that impinge on everyone else around them. It is the feet, and not the head, or more precisely the feet in traction with the space around it, that is the starting point of this embodied culture, this spatial practice. Unless space is modified to encourage conscientious stopping, no amount of honking, cursing, condescension, vehement criticizing on media and social media will put an end to it. In

a very recent article linked on the wildly popular Top Gear Philippines Facebook page, Sharne (2015) draws attention to and recommends what is the natural progression of PR or nagging: the posting of signs on frequently blocked gates that issue direct threats of physical harm to drivers or their vehicles. As of my writing, the day-old article has been shared 9,500 times on Facebook.

That parking in front of someone's gate, completely blocking vehicles from exiting or entering, is harmful to property owners is so glaringly obvious that it infuriates many Filipino netizens. However, there is a gulf between knowing what is good and doing what is good as Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, understood in his criticism of Socrates' dictum 'to know the good is to do the good'. "This view plainly contradicts the observed facts", the philosopher wrote. Between knowing and doing, there is space. And this exerts pressure on the human being through the body, encouraging or resisting civic mindedness, and at times leaving its mark on the linguistic landscape through proximal repetition.

5. Conclusion

Landry and Bourhis (1997) in their seminal paper "showed us how LL is a most important indicator capable of providing relevant information about societies, [linguistic] vitality and the inter-relationship of groups, especially in linguistic contested regions" (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009, p. 2). In this paper, I have explored how the linguistic landscape, through proximal repetition, can also be an indicator of power relations between property owners and dwellers on the one hand, and drivers and pedestrians on the other. More importantly, PR can give at one glance an indication of whether or not a particular space encourages or resists civic-mindedness, and whether this has carried over into antagonism between property, pedestrians, and drivers. Because proximal repetition, standard repetition, and gradients between are easily accessed indicators, they should be included as salient features of the linguistic landscape.

Nonetheless, to play devil's advocate, a possible explanation for PR is that sign owners want a large sign, but cannot make one without expense or the tools to do so. Therefore, the repetition of signs serves as a substitute for size. This can only be confirmed by interviewing sign owners, something I tried to do by revisiting the same Cubao neighborhood. However, during that visit, home owners responsible for putting up proximally repetitive signs were either not at home or unwilling to speak to a stranger at the gate. But, even if some sign owners do use PR in lieu of single large sign, sign size can still be an important indicator of neighborhood relationships. Sign size, along with PR, are features of the LL that indicate not just relationships between languages and language groups, but between owners and readers.

Lastly, there may be significant correlations between the incidence of PR and the socioeconomic status of a particular neighborhood. Although PR does occur in relatively wealthy neighborhoods as I discussed, it is overwhelmingly more prevalent in grittier parts such as Cubao. One interesting lead is the response I got from maids employed by Cubao households who were willing to speak with me for a few moments (because of low wages, a majority of middle to upper class Metro Manila households employ maids). When I asked about the reason behind PR, two mentioned the "squatters" (i.e. informal settlers) living nearby. This is a question for future research: Is PR, like racism and nationalism, encouraged by (spatial) boundaries between groups? In socioeconomically homogeneous neighborhoods, PR is uncommon. It was, however, very common in socioeconomically heterogeneous neighborhoods like north Cubao. Does perception of difference create or make more severe antagonism between drivers and pedestrians on the one hand and property on the other?

One of the earliest functions of writing was to proclaim to subjects the laws of a monarch (Coulmas, 2009, p. 16). These were displayed on monumental stone stelae such as the Codex Hammurabi and various obelisks from the ancient

Proximal Repetition in the Linguistic Landscape

world. Standing in visible and august locations in a monarch's territory, signs in stone such as the Codex Hammurabi communicated to subjects how they were expected to behave and were, most likely, obeyed. "The stela functioned both as an exhortation to obey the law and as an assurance of justice that everyone can invoke" (Coulmas, 2009, p. 16). Had Hammurabi been born Filipino and in their capital city Manila, one august obelisk or stela will not suffice. Two, three, or even four standing close to each other may just win attention. However, despite his efforts, he still risks being ignored as any nagger knows too well.

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