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"This Way or That? Par ici ou par là?": Language in the Theme Park

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ABSTRACT

Language and its multiple forms and functions in the theme park have only received scant attention in cultural and media studies-oriented theme park scholarship. In both written and oral form, however, language not only constitutes an integral part of the pluri- or multimedial mix that makes the theme park a hybrid, composite, or meta-medium, but also offers visitors a large variety of information on safety, park operations, and theming. Using examples from parks in both the U.S. and Europe and drawing on such theoretical concepts as paratextuality and "linguistic landscapes," this essay suggests a tripartite approach to studying the complex forms and the multifunctionality of language in the theme park: firstly, I propose to discuss *spoken* language (e.g. in safety announcements or greetings) as part of the theme park's complex soundscape and give examples of how the informational and thematic functions of spoken language interact and sometimes clash. Secondly, I argue that *mobile written* texts (e.g. in printed park guides and on apps) belong to what has been referred to as theme park paratexts. Finally, I focus on (fixed) *written* signs and conceptualize the theme park as a "linguistic landscape" – a concept developed in sociolinguistics that seeks to describe the forms and functions of written language on signs in the public space. Taken together, these three approaches would not only fill a significant gap in theme park scholarship and contribute to a deeper understanding of the sites as a hybrid, composite, or meta-medium, but could also provide theme park professionals with valuable insight on how to effectively use language in their designs and operations.

Keywords: theme parks, intermediality, language, paratext, signage, linguistic landscape, Disneyland Paris, Europa-Park

INTRODUCTION

Having passed through the heart-shaped tunnel of foliage at the entrance, visitors to Alice's Curious Labyrinth at Parc Disneyland in Paris find themselves confronted with a veritable forest of signs – indeed, the signs almost look as if they had sprouted from the maze's hedges and trees – that offer such confusing and utterly useless directions as "This Way," "That Way," "Hither," or "Yonder." In a way, this section of the attraction constitutes a parody of the park's entrance, where after emerging from the tunnels underneath Main Street Station, visitors similarly find themselves in front of a closed composition (the Town Square section of Main Street, USA), but where there are no signs whatsoever to guide them – instead, the tall spires of Sleeping Beauty Castle at the end of Main Street are supposed to draw visitors into the park (see Freitag, "'Like Walking'" 715). The comparative paucity of written signs in Parc Disneyland has been commented on by a number of scholars (e.g. Lainsbury 67-68; Younger 242); and a little further into the maze, visitors to Alice's Curious Labyrinth encounter a sign that illustrates the main reason these scholars have given for the park designer's decision to generally "rely upon dramatic visual symbols rather than written words" (Lainsbury 67): below a drawing of the Cheshire Cat pointing in two directions, the sign reads "'This Way or That?'" and gives, underneath and in a smaller and differently colored font, the French translation of that phrase: "'Par ici ou par là?'" With Parc Disneyland targeting a multilingual audience from all over Europe, Younger explains, the designers sought to avoid "visual overload" (242) and therefore eschewed written signs that needed translations into multiple languages, although for the

Cheshire Cat – or, more generally, for purely "thematic" rather than more "informational" signs such as this one – they seem to have made an exception (for a more elaborate typology of written theme park signs see 4. below).

Read from top to bottom, with the drawing of the cartoon character sitting on top of the sign and the sign itself offering a transcription of what the character supposedly says, the Cheshire Cat sign functions like a speech bubble in a comic or – note the inverted commas that enclose the two phrases – like an intertitle in a silent movie, thus subtly pointing to the adaptational source text of Alice's Curious Labyrinth in particular (namely, Disney's 1951 animated feature *Alice in Wonderland*) and to the intermedial connections between theme parks and movies in general (see Freitag, "'Like Walking'"). At the same time, and more importantly for the purposes of this article, the sign also points to the complex role of written and spoken language in the theme park: in the shape of signs positioned in the park landscape, price tags and menus in shops and restaurants, texts in printed visitor guides and apps, pre-recorded announcements, dialogue, and song lyrics, and "live" speech from employees, performers, and even other visitors, language conveys a large variety of information to visitors, ranging from content that, like the pointless directions on the Cheshire Cat sign, primarily contributes to visitors' engagement with and enjoyment of the park's offerings to practical knowledge and orientation as well as critical safety rules. Whatever form it may take and whatever function it may fulfill, language thus forms an integral part of the multi- or plurimedial mix that makes the theme park a "hybrid," "composite," or "meta-medium" (see Rajewsky, *Intermedialität* 203; Wolf, "Intermediality" 253; and Geppert 3, respectively), that is, as Freitag has argued, a medium that combines and fuses "various art forms or media that in themselves have been historically and conventionally viewed as distinct, including painting, architecture, sculpture, landscaping, music, theater, and film" ("'Like Walking'" 706) – as well as language.

Somewhat surprisingly, however, language and its various forms and functions in the theme park have only received scant attention in (cultural and media studies-oriented) theme park criticism. The past two years have seen the publication of an astonishingly large number of exciting monographs and edited collections on theme parks that all seek to address specific gaps in the scholarship: for instance, whereas in the past, theme park criticism has often focused on Western (and specifically U.S.) as well as large destination (and specifically Disney and, to a lesser extent, Universal) parks, Crispin Paine's *Gods and Rollercoasters* (2019), Florian Freitag and Chang Liu's *Chinese Theme Parks* (published in Chinese; 2019), and Filippo Carlà-Uhink's *Representations of Classical Greece in Theme Parks* (2020) explicitly go beyond the established canon of theme parks by either taking a truly global perspective anchored by a specific theme (Paine and Carlà-Uhink) or by concentrating on theme parks in one specific non-Western location (Freitag and Liu). Sabrina Mittermeier's *A Cultural History of the Disneyland Theme Parks* (2020) and Freitag's *Popular New Orleans* (2021; see 132-231), in turn, respond to Alan Bryman's implicit call for historical theme park studies (see *Disney* 83) by tracing the development of Disney's New Orleans-themed spaces in the U.S. and Japan (Freitag) and the evolution of Disney's "castle park" form from Anaheim to Orlando, Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong, and Shanghai (Mittermeier). Both Freitag and Mittermeier are also interested in the reception of theme parks, as are the revised edition of Janet Wasko's *Understanding Disney* (2020; see 243-58) and Rebecca Williams's *Theme Park Fandom* (2020) – all of these studies thus seek to heed the repeated calls for "triangulated" or "integrated" theme park studies that simultaneously take into account the parks themselves as well as their production (by employees) and reception (by visitors, fans, and artists; see Raz 6; Wasko [2001] 152; Lukas 168; Clément 17-18). Finally, *Performance and the Disney Theme Park Experience* (2019), edited by Jennifer A. Kokai and Tom Robson, constitutes the latest in a list of publications that examine the contribution of specific media to the theme park's hybrid, composite, or meta-mediality – a list that includes, amongst others, the work of Marling (on architecture), Carson as well as Camp (on music), and Freitag ("'Like Walking'"; on film), but that still lacks in-depth studies e.g. on landscaping, on digital media, as well as on language.

Offering a detailed and comprehensive examination of the role of language within the theme park's complex semiotic or medial mix would go beyond the scope of and the space allotted to this article. Instead, I would like to lay the groundwork for such a study by offering some preliminary structuring and methodological thoughts. More specifically, I will suggest discussing *spoken* language as part of the theme park's soundscape (see below 2.) and *mobile written* texts (e.g. in printed park guides and on apps) as belonging to what has been referred to as theme park paratexts (see below 3.) before then focusing on (fixed) *written* signs and conceptualizing the

theme park as a "linguistic landscape" (see below 4.). The latter is a concept developed in sociolinguistics that seeks to describe the forms and functions of written language in the public space. Linguistic landscape research generally excludes spoken language and mobile written texts (and thus provides the basic rationale for the structure of this article); I find it especially intriguing, however, for the way its later transdisciplinary extension into "semiotic landscapes" (see below) dovetails with the idea of the theme park as a multisensory, plurimedial environment. Taken together, these approaches would not only fill a significant gap in theme park scholarship and contribute to a deeper understanding of the sites as a hybrid, composite, or meta-medium, but could also provide theme park professionals with valuable insight into how to effectively use language in their designs and operations. To be sure, this essay merely provides the groundwork for such an endeavor – in a way, it functions itself as a sign, pointing readers into the direction of potential areas of future research on the modality and other aspects of theme parks. All readers need to do is choose: "This Way or That? Par ici ou par là?"

SPOKEN LANGUAGE AND THEME PARK SOUNDSCAPES

Notwithstanding its omnipresence in theme parks, its complexity, and its multifunctionality, sound has received surprisingly little attention from theme park scholars. In his magisterial, 492-page study of Walt Disney World in Florida, *Vinyl Leaves* (1992), Stephen M. Fjellman devotes, as Gregory Camp has pointed out (57), a mere four pages to music; similarly, only four of the 313 pages of *Spectacular Nature* (1997), Susan G. Davis's monograph on SeaWorld San Diego, discuss sound. The few journal articles about sound in theme parks that have been published (see Carson; Nooshin; Baber and Spickard; and Camp), in turn, have all been (co-)written by musicologists and thus primarily discuss music, literally silencing the many other components of the complex soundscape of theme parks: pre-recorded soundtracks, which include instrumental music, but also sound effects and spoken words, and which pervade each and every corner of the "onstage" area via powerful, individually controlled speakers hidden in the landscaping, in building facades, and in the ceilings and corners of indoor spaces; the sounds of machines (mechanical rides, cash registers, trash compressors) and landscaping features (fountains or waterfalls); the sounds of performances, which in addition to live and/or recorded music as well as the sounds of firework shells or water features (e.g. during fountain spectaculars) may also comprise spoken words from the performers and the reactions of the audience; as well as the manifold "live" sounds produced by the people in the park, employees as well as visitors.

Of course, all of these elements are carefully regulated and mixed, with acoustic engineering (architectural, environmental, and/or electroacoustics) being used to increase the volume and reach of some types of sounds while lowering and restricting those of others (noise control). Spoken and sung words are no exception. Visitors' sonic behavior, for instance, is as much regulated as e.g. their visual appearance: the park rules of Europa-Park (Germany), for instance, not only ask visitors to wear shoes and shirts at all times, to show their face, and to cover up shirts and tattoos "that might offend people," but also to refrain from "verbal □…□ abuse," "defamation," and making "loud noise" by using "vuvuzelas, megaphones, horns, or musical instruments" (see https://www.europapark.de/en/park-rules). Other parks are even more vague and, hence, more restrictive, with, for instance, Efteling (Netherlands) pointing out that on their premises "the Dutch law and the Dutch standards and values apply" and that "unnecessary noise □…□ will not be tolerated" (see https://www.efteling.com/en/terms-and-conditions). At Parc Disneyland in Paris, similar rules apply (see https://www.disneylandparis.com/en-us/legal/theme-parks-rules/); moreover, employees are encouraged to relocate "difficult" conversations with noticeably agitated visitors (about e.g. lost children or items, safety concerns, injuries and other health issues, or general complaints) to the "backstage" areas, presumably as much in order to protect the stressed customers from the noise "onstage" and to thus calm them down as in order to prevent other visitors from hearing "unpleasant" sounds such as loud complaining, crying, or screaming.

The sonic behavior and particularly the speech of theme park employees – like the behavior of theme park employees in general – is usually regulated in even greater detail than that of customers, in turn. Following Alan Bryman's *The Disneyization of Society* (2004), labor in theme parks (as well as in other sectors of the service industry) has generally been conceptualized as "performative labor": "By 'performative labour,'" Bryman notes, "I simply mean the rendering of work by managements and employees alike as akin to a theatrical

performance in which the workplace is construed as similar to a stage" (103). Apart from the heavy use of theatrical metaphors in the internal discourse of labor (e.g. "cast member" for "employee"), the concept of "performative labor" manifests itself at Disney theme parks first and foremost in the intricately detailed regulations concerning workers' visual appearance, including their clothing, their grooming, and even their facial expressions: an internal training manual reminds employees that they "get paid for smiling" (qtd. in Younger 277). Such training manuals, however, not only prescribe employee's visual appearance and general behavior, but also script their language. Indeed, Parc Disneyland in Paris not only asks workers to use internal codes when talking to each other (e.g. arbitrary numbers such as "101" for "out of order"), but also to employ linguistic expressions and puns that reflect their working area's theme when talking to customers (see below). As early as 1968, Richard Schickel disdained Disneyland and its employee training unit, the so-called Disney University, for "training employees in the modern American art forms □…□ of the frozen smile and the canned answer delivered with enough spontaneity to make it seem unprogrammed" (318). Continuity and coherence in employees' performances, including their use of language, are assured through constant supervising by supervisors, fellow workers, and test customers (see Kuenz 124-25; Lukas). Hence, even if they are not part of a pre-recorded soundtrack or announcement, spoken language, whether from visitors or employees, is largely pre-programmed and highly controlled in the theme park.

Two examples from Disneyland Paris illustrate the various ways in which pre-recorded and live spoken language may contribute to establishing the theme of an area, but also the ways in which this "thematic" role of language interferes and sometimes clashes with other uses of spoken language in the theme park. The main function of the pre-recorded safety spiel at the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad roller coaster in Parc Disneyland's Frontierland, for instance, is to remind visitors to "keep their hands and arms inside the train" and to "remain seated at all times." This central message is flanked by a greeting and some additional advice on how to keep personal belongings safe during the ride. Whereas the safety message is delivered in standard American English, however, the greeting and the additional advice use easily identifiable lexical, grammatical, and phonetic features of colloquial and specifically Western speech in order to fit in with the geographical setting of the ride: "Howdy folks! □…□ Hang on to them hats 'n' glasses, □…□!" Moreover, while the voice actor chosen to record the message employs the same gravelly voice throughout the spiel, he also uses an increasingly jocular tone towards the end of the message in order to further enhance the theme. (Interestingly, in the French version, the "thematic" function of the spiel solely relies on the voice of the actor, whereas the grammar and pronunciation are immaculate throughout – including the so-called optional liaisons, which are usually realized in formal speech only.) Hence, the (secondary) thematic function of the spiel, realized through language register and vocal acting, is relegated to the fringes of the recording so as to not interfere with its primary safety function.

The second example, by contrast, shows what can happen when thematic uses of spoken language do interfere with the more practical concerns of communication with visitors. Around the turn of the millennium, Disneyland Paris asked employees at its resort hotels to welcome visitors with fixed phrases that were supposed to reflect, in one way or another, the theme of each hotel: "Welcome aboard!" at the nautically themed Hotel Newport Bay Club, for instance, or "At your service!" at the Big Apple-themed Hotel New York. For the American Southwest-themed Hotel Santa Fe, "Buenos días!/Buenas tardes!" were chosen, depending on the time of the day. Although hotel guests were generally accustomed to the thematic use of Spanish at the site – the hotel's restaurant, for example, is called "La Cantina" – the themed greetings caused numerous misunderstandings, with non-Spanish-speaking visitors wondering embarrassedly why they were addressed in Spanish and Spanish-speaking visitors assuming that employees spoke Spanish, only to be disappointed in case they did not. Hence, visitors failed to connect the use of Spanish to the theme of the hotel, and instead of enhancing their immersion, the thematic use of language rather produced unpleasant customer experiences.

MOBILE WRITTEN TEXTS AND THEME PARKS PARATEXTS

One of the distinctive characteristics of the theme park as a (composite, hybrid, or meta-) medium is its high level of "physical immersion" (Craig and Sherman 10) or "immersivity" (D'Aloia 89): surrounded by a multisensory environment that is carefully separated from the outside world through visual and audio barriers such as tall buildings or landscaped berms, theme park visitors find themselves right in the middle of the action. In other words, unlike e.g. in the cinema or in the theater, in theme parks the mediated space and the space of medial reception are one and the same. However, and somewhat paradoxically, visitors only rarely experience this space immediately (in the literal sense of the term). Instead, multimedia representations of the park or its parts usually produced by the parks themselves serve as medial interfaces between visitors and the park landscapes before, after, and even during the visit. Drawing on the work of literary scholar Gérard Genette and media scholar Jonathan Gray, Rebecca Williams has referred to these medial interfaces as "□theme park□ paratexts" (159): in the shape of guide maps and apps, but also ads, signs, announcements, websites, and pictures and videos posted on social media, theme park paratexts, like other media paratexts, provide visitors with "frames and filters" (Gray 3) or scripts on how to experience the sites.

Although particularly historical theme park studies have frequently drawn on theme park paratexts as sources (for the simple reason that the parks have changed or are gone; see Freitag, *Popular* 143-44), paratexts themselves have rarely been the objects of scholarly research. To be sure, there are in-depth studies of individual paratextual genres and artefacts, including *Disney TV* (2004), J.P. Telotte's monograph on the *Disneyland* television show, Stephen Yandell's discussion of Disneyland souvenir maps (2012), Carol J. Auster and Margaret A. Michaud's quantitative analysis of the still images used on the official websites of the five Disney "castle parks" in Anaheim, Orlando, Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong (2013), as well as a growing list of studies on Disney's MyMagic+ system (see Williams 68; note, once again, the prevalence of the Disney parks in these studies). Yet what about the more general representational principles and frames, filters, and scripts used in theme park paratexts? Yandell, for instance, speaks of an "agenda of perfection" (34) in the context of maps; likewise, Freitag has described Europa-Park's self-portrayal in its "Historama" attraction (2010-2017) as an "'enhanced'" version of the park that uses "theming's 'politics of inclusion/exclusion' or its strategies of selection and abstraction □…□ to full extent" ("Autotheming" 143). Much the same could be said about the self-representation of theme parks in postcards, souvenir books and videos, advertisements, and social media posts.

Even more importantly for the purposes of this article, how do these and other representational principles of theme park paratexts manifest themselves in paratextual language, especially in such paratexts as guide maps and apps that accompany patrons during their visit and that therefore constitute another form in which language is used in the parks? What different sorts of information does language convey in these texts; what narrative or literary strategies are used in order to translate the three-dimensional, multisensory, and immersive park landscape into language; and how does language interact with the other media (e.g. still images, drawings, or videos) employed in these paratexts? Finally, how has paratextual discourse – along with the paratexts themselves – changed over time?

In the case of Europa-Park's visitor guides, for instance, language in the shape of verbal descriptions of individual attractions has retained its relevance largely due to the introduction of virtual guidebooks – i.e., the "Europa-Park & Rulantica App" – but generally focuses on technical details, while theme and content are left to the pictures accompanying the texts. From the mid-1980s and until the late 1990s, Europa-Park did not distribute free folded park maps to visitors, but rather sold yearly updated letter-sized 50-page color brochures that simultaneously served as guidebooks during and as souvenirs after the visit. Dedicating a double page to each of the park's themed lands as well as to some of the major rides and attractions, the brochures feature large color photographs as well as one- to three-paragraph descriptive texts in both German and French (a collection of digitized brochures from the 1980s can be examined on the fan-run website epfans.info, itself a fascinating paratext). While this choice of languages already indicates Europa-Park's target group at the time, the descriptions themselves are surprisingly technical. For example, the 1987 brochure opens with two double pages on that season's newest

attraction, "Piraten in Batavia" (the park's first dark ride and one of several rather obvious imitations of Disney rides, in this case "Pirates of the Caribbean," see also below). To be sure, the three paragraphs that accompany the numerous pictures also tell readers about the setting and the plot of the attraction and assert its immersivity: "After exiting this impressive ride, the visitor needs to get used to the European reality again" (Europa-Park, *Europa-Park* n.p.; author's translation). Yet the rest of the text is mainly concerned with technical details about "Piraten," listing the size of the ride building, the overall length of the journey, the number of robots and ride vehicles, and the ride's theoretical hourly capacity. Even the plot description seems oddly impersonal and technical, as it focuses on the journey of the ride vehicle: "The journey begins □…□. The boat then reaches □…□. The journey continues □…□. The boat travels □…□" (3; author's translation). Hence, while the pictures convey the content and atmosphere of the ride, the text invites readers to marvel at the enormous effort and the complex machinery necessary to produce the spectacle rather than to immerse themselves in it (what Alison Griffiths has termed a "revered gaze"; see Griffiths 286). This impression is reinforced by the shorter French version of the text, which contains no description of the sequence of scenes in the ride, but instead stresses the quality of the attraction by explicitly judging it, five years before the opening of Disneyland Paris and its "Pirates of the Caribbean" ride, "rivalling that of Disney" (1; author's translation).

With the introduction of folded park maps during the late 1990s, the function of the brochures did not immediately shift to that of a mere pictorial souvenir: referred to as "ParkGuide," they now offered short introductory texts and detailed tables listing the attractions, shows, restaurants, and shops of each themed section (see e.g. Europa-Park, *ParkGuide*). In both the brochures and in the new maps, however, the amount of text and pictorial material dedicated to even such headline attractions as "Piraten in Batavia" was dramatically reduced. In fact, while the maps merely list the names of the rides and offer no pictures at all, the brochures feature one-sentence descriptions of each ride in each themed section instead of selectively highlighting, as older editions of the brochure did, individual attractions. Probably due to the reduced number of pictures of the ride interior, in the case of "Piraten" the verbal description is no longer concerned with the technical details of the ride (or its Disney source material), but provides readers with a different script on how to "properly" enjoy the attraction: "Witness an attack by pirates during a journey through the Indonesian jungle" (*ParkGuide* 29; author's translation; note the use of the imperative). In the introduction to the Dutch-themed area printed on the very same page, the reader is even invited to become "the main protagonist of a buccaneers' attack in Batavia" (29; author's translation) and thus to interact with the ride.

With the introduction of the Europa-Park app, written text (and pictures) literally gained space again, as a click on the virtual park map leads users to a new page entirely dedicated to the selected attraction, show, restaurant, or shop. Combining a number of still pictures with short texts, these individual pages are surprisingly similar to those in the old brochures: in the case of "Piraten," for instance, it is once again the pictures that offer information about the content of the ride, whereas the text may first invite users to join the pirates on their quest for riches, but then quickly focuses on technical details again, including the length of the journey and the number of robots – a list at the bottom of the page even names the total hourly capacity of the ride and the ride manufacturer. In Europa-Park' guidebooks – whether printed or virtual ones –, then, language once again takes visitors behind the scenes rather than immersing them.

WRITTEN SIGNS AND THEME PARK LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES

Spoken language and mobile written texts such as advertisements on buses, words printed or embroidered on clothing, or handbills and flyers have traditionally been excluded from studies of so-called "linguistic landscapes." Instead, as conceptualized by Rodrigue Landry and Richard Y. Bourhis in their 1997 article "Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality" – often considered the "founding text" of this branch of sociolinguistic research – linguistic landscape scholarship is concerned with "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region," i.e. the "language[s] of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings" (Landry and Bourhis 23; 25). While a number of scholars have examined the "LL" of tourism destinations, themed urban ethnoscapes (especially Chinatowns), and other spaces that are, in one way or another, connected to commercial themed environments, only Leeman and

Modan (350; 356), Thurlow and Jaworski ("Tourism Discourse" 305), and Wee and Goh (20; 99) have even gone as far as mentioning theme parks – which may be due to the fact that LL research has been mainly concerned with the display of written language in *public* rather than private spaces.

Nevertheless, I maintain that theme parks constitute an interesting field for LL research – and, conversely, that the LL approach constitutes an appropriate methodology for research on theme parks' hybrid, composite, or meta-mediality – if only because theme parks' private spaces often mimic public spaces along with the latters' linguistic landscapes, from Main Street, USA to New Orleans Square. Moreover, following the publication of Scollon and Scollon's *Discourses in Place* (2003), Shohamy and Gorter's *Linguistic Landscape* (2009), and particularly Thurlow and Jaworski's *Semiotic Landscapes* (2010), LL scholars have become increasingly interested in multimodal approaches to LL that also take into account the visual design of signs as well as the surrounding architecture, landscaping etc. Drawing on various interacting semiotic systems, art forms, or media to convey a particular sense of place, story, or theme, theme parks constitute a prime example of such multimodal or semiotic landscapes in which language in the shape of written signs collaborates in meaning-making.

Of course, like spoken and paratextual language, written signs in theme parks do not only serve thematic but also various other functions as well. In *Theme Park Design and the Art of Themed Entertainment* (2016), David Younger distinguishes between, on the one hand, directional, identification, informational, safety, and thematic signage, and, on the other hand, diegetic signs (signs "that would genuinely appear within the story-world"), semi-diegetic signs (which "display extra-diegetic content, but do so in a way that could have been put together by the residents of the story-world"), and extra-diegetic signs (which "would not exist within the story-world either in content or design," 206). The following case study of Europa-Park's "Italy" section will show that while heuristically useful, Younger's typologies of theme park signs sometimes prove too neat and clear-cut for the "messy" reality of theme park LL – especially when, as in the case of "Italy," different signage policies have superseded and paralleled one another over the years, leaving material traces in the park landscape. As my example will show, however, this is precisely what makes research on theme park LL also and particularly interesting for historical approaches to theme parks.

Opened in 1982 as the first of Europa-Park's European country-themed sections, "Italy" has since undergone numerous changes in both design and content: for instance, while the "Piazza Italiana," as it is officially called, was originally built "in the Tuscan style" (Europa-Park, *Europa-Park* 17; author's translation), visitors now also find numerous architectural and discursive references to Venice, from the façade of the "Teatro" building, which has featured elements of Venetian Gothic since its complete redesign in 2018, to the so-called "pali da casada" (colorful wooden poles) in the little lake that forms the center of the "land" and the name of the section's main restaurant, changed from "Restaurant Pizzeria" to "Pizzeria Venezia" in 2010. In 2011, Tuscan elements were again stressed when the "Mack Ausstellung" ("Mack Exhibition"), a small company museum named after the park owners and located on the first floor of one of the buildings, was replaced with the station of the Leonardo da Vinci-themed "Volo da Vinci," an outdoor suspended flight ride manufactured by ETF. Other changes have included the 2010 retheming of the "Piccolo Mondo" dark ride and the addition of characters from the 2017 animated movie *Happy Family* (co-produced by Mack Media, a subsidiary of Europa-Park's parent company) to the land's main attraction, the "Geisterschloss" ("ghost castle"; another ride that draws heavily on Disney).

From the perspective of signage, however, the most important developments have been the gradual Italianization and Anglicization of the area's linguistic landscape. While all of the buildings in "Italy" originally bore Italian names – "Theatro [sic!] Communale," "Castello Leone," "Palazzo Ducale," "Casa dei Cavalieri" etc. – these were only used in the brochures (see e.g. Europa-Park, *10 Jahre* 15) but never appeared in the park itself. Instead, the signs on the buildings displayed the German names of the various rides, restaurants, and shops housed in the buildings, from the aforementioned "Geisterschloss" (originally referred to as "Spukschloss" ["haunted castle"]) to the "Märchenbahn Schlaraffenland" ("fairy-tale ride Cockaigne," as "Piccolo Mondo" was originally called) and the souvenir shop below the "Mack Ausstellung," whose signs simply listed the various items on sale, among them "Hüte" ("hats"; see Europa-Park, *10 Jahre* 23). Originally, then, language was not employed as a medium of theming in "Italy."

This changed when most of the rides, restaurant, and shops started to receive names in Italian, including "Piccolo Mondo," "Pizzeria Venezia," and "Volo da Vinci," but also the "Casa dei Dolci" and "Casa dei Souvenir" (the former "Hüte" shop) and the "Pasticceria dell Arco" (the former "Waffelbäckerei" ["waffle bakery"]). As a result, Italian now features much more prominently in the LL of "Italy," and the marquees not only bear informational and identificational, but also thematic functions. However, the implementation of this strategy of Italianization has been inconsistent at best. Not only are some elements still referred to in German (notably the "Geisterschloss" and the adjacent "Kleiner Horrorladen" ["little shop of horrors"]). The section has also seen the addition of purely thematic signs that are nevertheless in German. For instance, during the early 2000s the coats of arms of several well-known Italian cities were painted on the façade right above the "Casa dei Dolci," with the names of the corresponding cities given in Italian (e.g. "Firenze," "Venezia," and "Roma"). Similar coats of arms have appeared on both sides of the three-bay archway that has welcomed visitors to "Italy" since 1982 – here, however, the cities are identified exclusively in German (e.g. "Florenz," "Venedig," and "Rom").

At the same time, it is not only the amount of Italian that has increased in the LL of "Italy," however, but also that of English. Via loanwords (e.g. "snack"), English had been featured on signs in "Italy" from the very beginning (see e.g. Europa-Park, *10 Jahre* 19). Rather than on (diegetic) identification or informational signs, today English is mainly employed on (non-diegetic) directional and safety signs (e.g. signs that indicate the entrances and exits of waiting lines or tell visitors about the safety rules of specific rides and attractions), where it appears as a third language in addition to German and French. Hence, whereas the Italianization of the LL of "Italy" has resulted from the integration of language into the park's hybrid, composite, or meta-mediality of theming, English bears no thematic function here. Rather, its growing use in the LL of the park points to the progressive internationalization of Europa-Park which, starting with the opening of resort hotels from 1995 onwards and a "second gate" in 2019, has sought to attract an increasingly international audience. As in the case of thematic signs, however, Europa-Park's policies of safety and directional signage have not been entirely consistent: one can, for instance, still find older directional signs that "only" use German and French (e.g. in front of "Piccolo Mondo"), and the newest directional signs in "Italy" (e.g. at the exit of "Volo da Vinci") have added Italian as a fourth language.

CONCLUSION

During a field trip to Europa-Park in summer 2019, organized explicitly to investigate the site's linguistic landscape, we noticed that the park had once again added the word "Waffelbäckerei" ("waffle bakery") to the awnings of the "Pasticceria dell Arco" at the entrance to "Italy" – now, however, and like the Italian words below, in the colors of the Italian national flag. Perhaps the new Italian name had failed to resonate with and attract visitors despite the strong smell of freshly baked waffles that surrounds the place. And perhaps it had done so especially with German-speaking visitors, whereas francophone customers may have connected the word "pasticceria" with the French "patisserie" ("pastry shop"), which allowed them to at least guess what exactly the place offers. Hence, adding the German term in the colors of "il Tricolore" could be seen as a compromise between the (direct) commercial interests of the park and its strategy of "Italianizing" the signs in order to offer visitors a more immersive "metatouristic" experience (see Freitag, "Theme Parks and COVID-19"; likewise a commercial interest). Why the park did not simply add e.g. a graphic depicting a waffle so as to also cover the non-German- and non-French-speaking audience remains subject to speculation. Interviews with the sign designers – a method that has, in fact, become increasingly popular with LL scholars (see e.g. Blommaert and Maly) – could have brought some clarification about the designers' intentions, but ethnographic fieldwork in private spaces such as theme parks remains problematic for several reasons (see Freitag, *Popular* 142-44).

This is just one of the methodological difficulties connected to studying theme park linguistic landscapes in particular and the manifold forms and functions of language in theme parks in general. In fact, this essay has failed to offer – or, more precisely, has refrained from offering – a single, unified methodology for the study of language in the theme park. Instead, I have suggested investigating spoken language as part of theme parks' soundscapes, mobile written

texts in the context of theme parks' paratextual discourses, and written signs using the "linguistic landscape" approach. Of course, such a tripartite strategy risks neglecting the parallels and connections between these various manifestations of language in the park, e.g. the choice of languages used to address visitors on safety signs, in safety announcements, and in park guides and apps. One alternative would be to expand the concept of linguistic landscapes to include not just the design of signs and their immediate surroundings (in the sense of "semiotic landscapes"; see above), but also spoken language and mobile texts – which, in turn, risks overlooking the connections between e.g. park guides and advertisements or other paratextual genres used outside of the park. What is clear is that the complex forms and the multifunctionality of language have not yet received the scholarly attention they deserve. Theme parks may not be "inert texts," as Bryman has pointed out (*Disney* 83), but they contain a lot of texts, and theme park scholars have yet to read and analyze them.

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