



Walking through kindergarten semiotic landscapes with multilingual children: A way to explore participation and engagement

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ABSTRACT: Practitioners in Norwegian kindergartens are responsible for actively promoting and developing multilingual children's language skills (Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). Children's multilingual language skills develop through participation and engagement. The aim of this paper is to explore how the semiotic landscape encourages interaction and dialogue among children. Semiotic landscapes are public spaces with visible inscriptions made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). Utilizing walking interviews as a method, we explored multilingual children's perspectives on their semiotic environment. Analyzing the interviews through the concept of agency (Duran, 2015), we found dialogues marked by engagement on different levels. We discuss the difference between predictability and unpredictability in semiotic resources and found that the latter leads to stronger engagement and longer dialogues than instructional materials with high level of predictability.

Keywords: *Multilingual, kindergarten, agency, walking interviews, semiotic landscapes*

Introduction

The framework plan for kindergartens (Directorate for Education and Training, 2017) states that "[a]ll children shall be able to experience democratic participation by contributing to and taking part in kindergarten activities regardless of their

communication and language skills" (pp. 8–9). Children's language skills develop through participation and engagement, and yet research has shown that monolingual and multilingual children are given unequal access to participation in Norwegian kindergartens (Kalkman et al., 2017; Sadownik, 2018). Bundgaard (2011) refers to activities in Danish kindergartens affected by values that reflect cultural beliefs belonging to the majority, and Giæver (2020) confirms similar tendencies in Norwegian kindergartens. However, the facilitating staff may not be aware of such values and beliefs (Bundgaard, 2011). The physical environment of kindergarten might therefore not equally appeal to all children, regardless of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Following Bundgaard (2011) and Szabó (2015), we consider the environment in kindergarten as a semiotic landscape that constitutes a space consisting of visual practices marked by certain cultural and linguistic values. "Semiotic landscapes are public spaces with visible inscriptions made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making" (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p. 2). The physical environment is of great importance in multilingual children's language development, as they consciously alternate between oral and body language, supplementing their oral language by pointing to pictures and objects to communicate (Björk-Willén et al., 2018; Skaremyr, 2019).

According to Sadownik (2020), diversity as a social context opens child-initiated explorations and negotiations of the sociocultural surroundings. Thus, facilitating a diverse environment is important to achieve equal participation among children. We have aimed to investigate how multilingual children relate to the ideologies and values reflected in the linguistic landscape of kindergarten. MacNaughton and Smith (2005) suggest seeking alternative perspectives on situations from groups and individuals who experience discrimination and/or marginalization in a specific regime of truth, and in this paper, we aim to investigate kindergarten semiotic landscapes from multilingual children's perspective. This is a small-scale exploratory study with four children participating in two walking interviews. We seek the children's perspective on the semiotic landscapes by accompanying them on a tour around their kindergarten. By giving the children the possibility to engage orally and physically with their kindergarten surroundings and express their opinions to us, we attempted to access the children's perspectives on how they experience the semiotic resources of the kindergarten semiotic landscape, such as objects, text, and visual symbols.

Semiotic landscapes

We found three former research projects investigating the semiotic landscape of Norwegian kindergartens. Pesch (2018) compared two kindergartens in Norway and Germany and found that the kindergarten in Norway had a diverse semiotic landscape,

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while the semiotic landscape in the German kindergarten was more homogenous. However, the dialogues in the German kindergarten appeared more diverse than in the Norwegian. Thus, there is not necessarily a connection between diversity in the semiotic landscape and the dialogues in kindergartens. Further, Pesch et al. (2021) investigated semiotic landscapes in Northern Norway and found that the kindergartens connect closer to migration than to Sami culture, even though the latter is a significant part of the population in Northern Norway. Munch et al. (2022) have investigated literacy presented in the semiotic landscapes in kindergarten cloakrooms and found that there could be a greater potential for children's literacy in this space of kindergarten that works as a meeting point between children, staff, and parents. These research projects focus on the potential of reflecting children's identity in semiotic landscapes. Our contribution to the research field is to consider the dimension of identity and belonging reflected in the semiotic landscape from the perspective of multilingual children.

The semiotic landscape of kindergarten is considered "an empirical domain where children and pedagogical staff co-construct a place for belonging through both the material aspects of the place and everyday interactions" (Pesch et al., 2021, p. 315). Texts, such as posters with pictures and letters, toys, games, and décor are considered parts of the semiotic landscape in our research. When children attend kindergarten, they connect their personal experiences to this physical world that communicates certain values. The connection between children's experiences and the physical environment involves time and place and creates a whole consisting of the physical environment, community, and dialogues that intertwine with the individual's unique experience (Bakhtin, 1981).

In their research about semiotic landscapes, Pesch et al. (2021) quote Szabó's (2015) use of the concept of *schoolscapes*, referring specifically to schools. Szabó's (2015) research shows how schoolscapes are formed by the symbolic integration of the local school and the national culture. Text and visual symbols function as frames of communication and tell us something about how the facilitators model identity and what range of linguistic norms they offer (Szabó, 2015). Linguistic landscape has at times been used as an equivalent term to schoolscapes (Pesch et al., 2021). Although kindergartens and schools differ in their curricula and pedagogical approaches, we agree with Pesch et al. (2021) that these perspectives can be transferred to the understanding of kindergarten semiotic landscapes, as schoolscapes can be understood as a type of semiotic landscape. Blommaert (2013) claims that a space is always somebody's place. Selecting semiotic resources to represent the kindergarten, the staff has the power to create a space that produces and reproduces values, and possibly excludes others. Pesch et al. (2021), draw on Bakhtin's theory and claim that resources in the kindergartens' semiotic landscapes are viewed as utterances that confirm or challenge previous utterances on cultural and

linguistic diversity. The representation of semiotic resources in kindergarten gives an idea of who the place might belong to.

In Norwegian kindergartens, play is considered an important part of the children's daily life, and according to Løndal and Greve (2015), staff can facilitate play by making time, locations, and equipment available for the children, though the choice and initiative are usually entrusted to the children. Løkken (2000) further notes that especially among the youngest children, play supported mainly by the body may be argued to be more socially meaningful to the children than playing with toys. Gadamer (2013, p. 105) defines play as "movement not only without goal and purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself." Facilitation of play is thus an important part of the kindergarten semiotic landscape, and kindergarten staff is responsible for considering this facilitation.

Language

As mentioned in the introduction, participation and engagement are crucial in children's language development. Considering language from a pedagogical perspective, we draw on Bakhtin (1986) who claims that language involves actions, silences, and body language as well as the spoken word. According to Bakhtin (1986), dialogues are always constructed through chains of utterances, where every statement appears as an answer to a previous statement – verbal as well as non-verbal. Further in Bakhtin's perspective, dialogism also includes dialogue with the physical environment. This means that besides dialogues with other people, human beings are always interacting with the world surrounding them.

Connecting people as well as people and the physical world, language must be considered a social practice with context as a fundamental factor that shapes the way people communicate (Bakhtin, 1986; Duran, 2015; Hymes, 1964). Thus, language operates as an integrated social and spatial activity (Pennycook, 2010). According to Pennycook (2010), language is located in certain histories and articulated from certain perspectives. Thus, it is interesting to consider whether children are given the possibility to bring their own experiences with them to the local kindergarten and draw on these when they interact with people and space. As Pennycook (2010) puts it, the local is always interpreted in particular ways, depending on both each person's experiences understood as history and the local history connected to their surroundings.

Several theorists claim that language and identity are closely linked together (García & Li Wei, 2014; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). Alstad (2016) gives examples of how kindergartens visualize multilingual resources and create a space for multilingual children's situations. To establish interest in multilingual perspectives, Alstad (2016) underlines the importance of involving parents and staff. By bringing in multilingualism

as a general subject in kindergarten, it is possible to strengthen multilingual children's identity even if the teacher doesn't know their first language (Alstad, 2016).

Agency

As mentioned above, action is marked by discourses that make it necessary to know history to understand a certain message. However, children make choices about how they relate to the semiotic landscape offered to them in kindergarten. According to Duran (2015), multilingual children are aware of their existence through linguistic practices with a desire to participate, and their experiences can be explored in three ways: accommodation (here understood as fundamental needs), participation, and resistance. In other words, they consider when they need to participate when they want to participate, and when they do not want to participate. In our research, we observed differences in the ways the children approached the semiotic landscape. Bengtsson (2001) claims that we have a choice between a contingent and a general approach to the world that surrounds us. The contingent approach involves no meaning at all, while the general always has a clear predefined meaning. According to Bengtsson (2001), these categories represent extremes, in reality the contingent and the general cross each other in a way that “the general becomes contingent and the contingent becomes general” (p. 64). Exploring their surroundings in kindergarten, children draw on experiences and creativity and approach the semiotic landscapes at different levels on the scale between contingent or general use of semiotic resources. The general approach connects with what Bakhtin (1984) describes as a monologic worldview, considering the world from one single consciousness. The monologic approach leaves little room for individual contributions and interpretations and contrasts with the polyphonic approach, which represents a pluralistic world that consists of multiple voices that are all equal (Bakhtin, 1984). Bakhtin's polyphonic world is unpredictable and can be compared with the contingent approach.

In our analyses, we see agency as an important factor when children approach their surroundings. Duran (2015) puts forward that when learners have the desire to participate in a given context, they voluntarily use the language necessary to engage in that context, which includes various sociocultural elements. We investigate how the semiotic resources that surround the children release engagement, interactions, and use of oral language. According to Dufva and Aro (2015), exploring children's agency is about examining how they feel and embody the concept which in this research will be the semiotic landscape of kindergarten. In our analyses, we include the children's choice about what they want to show us, as well as dialogue with the researchers and each other, and their bodily physical positions.

Methodology

This is a small-scale exploratory study, and data collection was done using walking interviews, with the researchers accompanying the participating children on a tour around the kindergarten.

The walking interview is a qualitative method that is conducted by researchers accompanying informants in an environment that is familiar to them (Carpiano, 2009). Walking interviews emerged as a part of the broader mobilities turn in social sciences (Murray, 2009), and have proven a useful method when exploring spatial practices (Kusenbach, 2003) and the connection between people and place (Evans & Jones, 2011). According to Carpiano (2009), the method is "[...] a unique means of obtaining contextually based information about how people experience their local world" (p. 271). The act of walking and talking has been suggested as a possible way of harnessing the co-ingredients of people and space (Anderson, 2004). Earlier research on linguistic landscapes and schoolsapes has utilized similar methods (Garvin, 2010, Szabó, 2015). Thus, we view walking interviews as a suitable method when researching children's experiences and engagement with kindergarten semiotic landscape, as a semiotic landscape is also a physical space that can be engaged with and explored, and as we understand language as an integrated social and spatial practice (Pennycook, 2010).

Interviewing children by conducting walking interviews has largely been underutilized, but Winger and Eide (2015) had interesting results being taken on a kindergarten tour by a group of children. They note that the method facilitated both engagements with the environment and between the children, both through verbal dialogue but also through play. Lund (2021) also experienced this when interviewing first graders in school. Following Winger and Eide (2015) and Lund (2021), we conducted walking interviews to look for children's perspectives on how they considered the semiotic landscape that surrounded them in daily life.

Data collection

Data collection was done in two kindergartens in Oslo, Norway, Sunshine Kindergarten, and Moonlight Kindergarten, both located in a part of the city characterized by a high degree of cultural and linguistic diversity. Such diversity was present in both kindergartens. Despite an increasing diversity in Norwegian kindergartens, political guidelines reflect research that emphasizes the value of learning the Norwegian language in kindergarten, as a preparation for starting school at the age of six (Gunnerud et al., 2018). Thus, Norwegian was the common language spoken in both kindergartens, and the curriculum is written in Norwegian. The two kindergartens reflected the linguistic and cultural diversity of the area differently. In Sunshine Kindergarten, varied languages and

linguistic signs were visible in the semiotic landscape, such as posters with words written in various scripts and the word “Hi” in different languages. There were also books in other languages and scripts than Norwegian available. In Moonlight Kindergarten there were no signs in the semiotic landscape that revealed the kindergarten was part of a community characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity. We will return to this.

After we contacted the kindergartens, the staff helped us inform the parents and assisted in choosing children for the study. Thus, the staff acted as gatekeepers going into the data collection. The criteria for participating were that the children be 4–5 years of age, as well as being multilingual, though with the ability to communicate with the researchers in Norwegian. In Sunshine Kindergarten, we interviewed Hassan and Sidra, aged five and four, both speaking Arabic and Norwegian, and in Moonlight Kindergarten, we interviewed Ismail and Irin, aged five, both speaking Somali and Norwegian. Thus, the number of participating children is rather low. Implications of this will be discussed in the conclusion.

On both occasions, the interview lasted approximately 40 minutes and was conducted by two researchers – the article authors, both experienced kindergarten teachers. Based on experiences from similar methods used with children (Lund, 2021; Winger & Eide, 2015) and literature on focus groups with children (Hennessy & Heary, 2005), we found that interviewing two children at a time was suitable. This resulted in less pressure on the individual child, while also facilitating a group dynamic that is recognizable to the children (cf. Hennessy & Heary, 2005).

The interviews started with a short conversation about the purpose of our visit, and we asked the children to show us the play area and the rest of the kindergarten, although remaining indoors. We went from room to room, with the children choosing what they wanted to show us and talk about, and the researchers asking questions about specific elements concerning the semiotic landscape, such as posters and materials. The researchers were attentive to both the children's utterances and how they engaged and interacted with the semiotic landscape. Following Bakhtin (1986), we consider actions and body language as well as the spoken word when analyzing how the children perceived and engaged with the semiotic landscape and its qualities.

Being two researchers made it possible to concentrate on the children and write field notes simultaneously. Thus, we could alternately engage with the children and ask questions and observe and write field notes. Nothing was recorded during the interviews. Writing field notes made it possible to observe mimicry, movement, and body language more intently, in addition to listening to what the children said verbally. This gave a holistic understanding of what the children expressed. Immediately after the interviews, the two sets of field notes were edited and compiled, and the findings were preliminarily

analyzed. By writing field notes we miss some of the possibilities for accurate quotes, as well as not noticing certain statements, actions, or utterances. However, we consider capturing the holistic understanding more important, as we view bodily and non-verbal communication to be significant in this study. All statements were translated from Norwegian to English by the researchers, which may result in some meaning and understanding being lost in translation.

Coding

The edited field notes were analyzed using an inductive and holistic approach (Thagaard, 2018), coding the various situations of the interviews into categories based on the degree of engagement observed from the child and the degree of language and dialogue expressed in the situation. The coding was done by the two researchers together, through cooperative discussions and analysis. The coding resulted in categories implying the degree the elements in the semiotic landscape facilitated engagement and the use of language. The categories were:

- High engagement and strong dialogue
- Average engagement and average dialogue
- Weak engagement and weak dialogue

The term engagement is considered in the light of Duran's (2015) definition of agency which involves a desire to participate in a given context. We underline that this is a question of interpretation. The situations in each category were analyzed with the concept of general and contingent approach (Bengtsson, 2001), giving us a sense of the possibility of agency present for the child.

High engagement and strong dialogue were situations characterized by varied language use and a high degree of dialogue, either between the children or between a child and a researcher. The use of language was characterized by play, embodied action, and fantasy. The dialogues were characterized by the contingent approach (Bengtsson, 2001) and by being polyphonic (cf. Bakhtin, 1984). The children themselves also mainly initiated these situations and dialogues, and the children showed what we viewed as engagement and joy.

Average engagement and average dialogue were situations with questions and answers characterized as monologic, though something in the semiotic resource sparked engagement in the resulting answer. The children remained in the dialogue longer, explained more, and supplemented with extra information at their initiative. Following

Bakhtin (1986), the chain of utterances appeared as longer dialogues between researchers and children, and yet, they did not lead to further reflections.

Weak engagement and weak dialogue were situations with questions posed by the researchers about elements in the semiotic landscape, resulting in short answers. The children did answer but quickly moved the focus to other objects. These answers did not result in further dialogue. The conversations were characterized by monologic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984) and a general approach (Bengtsson, 2001).

Concerning the categories, it should be noted that it is possible for a situation to be interpreted to fall into other categories than these (e.g., high engagement and weak dialogue). However, this was not the case for our observations, which consistently could be categorized into these three categories. This can be due to our particular focus on engagement and dialogue, both when collecting data and when analyzing, or it can be due to the low number of informants and the study being small-scale and exploratory. Both caveats highlight the need for further research on children's perspectives on kindergarten semiotic landscapes.

Ethics

In this study, we have given weight and thought to ethical considerations at every stage of the process, from planning to data collection and analysis. As Alderson (2005) puts it, ethics should be "[...] a vital part of every stage of the project, raising questions and proposing standards" (p. 30). Given the potential power imbalance between child and researcher (see e.g., David et al., 2005), thorough ethical considerations are important in research involving children.

Before the data collection, consent from parents was acquired for the children to participate in the study. In Norway, parental consent is required when including children in research (The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities [NESH], 2021). There are some exceptions, though none were applicable in this study. All recognizable names and traits of children, teachers, playgroups, and kindergartens were anonymized in the field notes and the analysis.

As important, when doing interviews, and especially with children, as the formal ethics concerning privacy and the storage of personal data, is the relational ethics (Petersen & Ladefoged, 2020). A researcher cannot follow the guidelines only and, as Alderson (2005) puts it, call the research 'ethical'. It requires continually doing ethical considerations throughout the study. Relational ethics are the ethical considerations done while in the field and collecting data; the choices the researcher made while in direct relation to the participants of the study. An important relational consideration is to acquire consent from

the children in addition to parental consent. The Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities point out that consent from the children should also be present (NESH, 2021), but the discussion is still ongoing on at what age children are mature enough to fully consent and understand the consequences of participating in research (Alderson, 2005), and the child, their experience, the type of research, and the skill of the researcher must be considered. In light of this discussion, we found that instead of viewing the child's consent as informed, it was useful to view the consent as provisional (cf. Flewitt, 2005). We were also attentive to whether the children wanted to continue or stop participating, and we closely considered which questions were appropriate to ask at any given time.

According to Thagaard (2018), the researcher's ethical responsibility includes both data collection and analysis, and following Alderson (2005) in thinking that ethics plays a vital part at every stage of research, we continued doing ethical considerations when doing the analysis and writing this paper. Thus, in our research, we have made ethical considerations at all stages of the project: The formal ethics preceding the fieldwork, relational ethics during the interviewing, and analytical ethics during the analysis and writing.

Children's perspective

"Children's perspectives represent children's experiences, perceptions, and understanding of their life" according to Sommer et al. (2010, p. 23), focusing on the child as a subject in their world. This is what we try to understand when we seek children's perspectives on the kindergarten semiotic landscape in our research. However, we are quite aware that it is a rather contentious term and has been up for discussion for several years (see e.g., Gulløv & Højlund, 2003; Johansson, 2003; Nilsen, 2019; Sommer et al., 2010; Warming, 2019). It has also been questioned whether participatory methods can help us as researchers to close in on the child's perspective or experience (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Greene & Hill, 2005). In our work, we are quite aware that in our material we have only the utterances, dialogues, and actions of a small group of children engaging with semiotic landscapes. If anything, we have the perspectives of these few children, but even then, it is hard to ascertain whether we even have that. Is it truly possible to understand another person's perspective? We agree with Johansson (2003), that the children's perspective is fundamentally the perspective of the researcher. Gulløv and Højlund (2003) call the children's perspective an analytical construction, based on the theoretical considerations concerning the fieldwork. Thus, when we refer to children's perspectives, we mean our theoretical and analytical understanding of the children's utterances and actions.

Interpretation is a central aspect of children's perspective, being a part of the researcher's perspective as well as being a theoretical construction. Analyzation of data will always be interpretive to a certain degree, especially when analyzing interview data. And these interpretations are exactly that, interpretations, and can be uncertain. As Hendrick (2008) puts it, although you aim to treat children as social actors, they still must leave interpretations to adults in power, such as researchers in our case. On one hand, not knowing the children in advance can ensure open-minded interpretations and understandings. Though, on the other hand, both researchers belong to the majority population, and we make our interpretations within a certain context informed by our experiences with traditional Norwegian kindergarten practices.

Analyses

In the following, we present episodes concerning the children's approach to the semiotic landscape taking place in the two kindergartens, representing the categories presented in the methodology section: *high engagement and strong dialogue*, *average engagement and average dialogue*, and *low engagement and weak dialogue*.

High engagement and strong dialogue: Dialogues in the cloakroom

The first two episodes that we will present took place in the cloakroom of Sunshine Kindergarten. The cloakroom is a space where children operate together with their parents when arriving and leaving kindergarten. It is a space for interactions between children, parents, and staff, but also room for transition between different activities.

On the wall next to the shelves in the cloakroom in Sunshine Kindergarten there is a big white sheet with pictures of various winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, such as Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and Aung San Suu Kyi. Next to the pictures were the names of the prize winners written in Latin letters and the word 'peace' written in different languages and scripts from around the world, presumably the languages represented in the playgroup. Hassan and Sidra sought out the collage at their own initiative and they lingered for a long time. They pointed to the pictures with statements like "This woman died in a car crash", "she is sad", and "This man burned down". Their statements do not correspond with the history known to us about the Peace Prize winners.

The collage of the Peace Prize winners reflected significant people who have made a difference internationally and historically—some of them through great sacrifices with dramatic consequences such as imprisonment, accidents, or death. The collage had an international character beyond the diverse script characters, located in certain histories and articulated from a multicultural perspective (cf. Pennycook, 2010). The pictures represented people from different parts of the world whom families with a migration

history in a multilingual kindergarten are likely to identify with. The semiotic resources of the collage seemed to lead to an emotional engagement that inspired new imaginative stories connecting past and present (cf. Dufva & Aro, 2015). The children engaged with the pictures both through storytelling, based on imagination rather than actual history, and through dialogue with each other. One statement followed another, unpredictably like chains of utterances (cf. Bakhtin, 1986). Through pointing and talking about the pictures of Peace Prize winners, the children negotiated the content and the meaning of the different people's stories. Thus, they engaged in varied oral and bodily use of language facilitated by the collage. We consider their engagement with the collage as contingent (cf. Bengtsson, 2001), as it differed from what appeared to be the intent and predefined meaning of the staff. They did not draw attention to the apparent semiotic resources, such as words and letters, and instead focused on the pictures that allowed for a dialogue defined by polyphony rather than monologue and predefined meaning (cf. Bakhtin, 1984). We consider the poster as a way to visualize multilingual resources to create a space for multilingual children's situations (cf. Alstad, 2016). Although the children did not mention the signs and the written text, they did show interest in what the pictured people were named. They asked what their names were, and the researchers answered by reading. Our interpretation is that even though the script signs were of little interest to the children, the meaning of them was. The names of the Peace Prize winners contributed to the storytelling, imagination, and polyphonic dialogue.

The cloakroom consists of benches, hooks, and shelves where each child has their own space to leave their clothes and other private belongings. On the wall above each place is a picture of each child in the group. Hassan takes us through each place climbing up and down between the benches and shelves and tells us who the place belongs to. Then he specifically points out the space belonging to four boys and tells us that they are his friends.

In this episode, Hassan had a bodily approach to the semiotic landscape, seeking it out on his initiative and climbing up and down while presenting his close friends and the rest of the group to us.

A kindergarten cloakroom's purpose is to store clothes and other belongings, as well as the connecting space between home and kindergarten when children arrive and depart the kindergarten. Munch et al. (2022) found that posters with documentation and information directed toward parents dominate the semiotic landscapes in cloakrooms in kindergartens. As such it is a space that facilitates dialogue and language use, but the allotted places themselves are not necessarily thought of as contributing to this, having a clear general and monologic use. The benches and shelves' intended use are not physical actions such as climbing. Following Jaworski and Thurlow's (2010) definition, the allotted places in the cloakroom are both visible inscriptions and are made through human intervention and are thus also part of the kindergarten's semiotic landscape. Through

Bengtsson's (2001) concepts, we consider Hassan's utterances alternating between a general approach, telling us the names of the children, and a contingent approach, climbing up and down, engaging in dialogue both orally and bodily. Following Makoni and Pennycook (2007), we see his language as an integrated part of the social practice where one part cannot be separated from the other. Hassan's climbing and his use of the pictures above the places as an overview of the children in the playgroup are examples of how the cloakroom facilitated contingent use and dialogue. He also used the pictures to point out who his friends were and in doing so he communicated a sense of belonging (cf. Pesch et. al, 2021). The episode with Hassan exemplified other instances where we observed the children use semiotic resources with a clear general intent in a contingent way. For instance, we observed children use board games in original ways that differed from the intended rules, resulting in strong dialogue.

In the following, we present an episode taking place in the entrance hall of Moonlight Kindergarten.

Food for the meals in Moonlight Kindergarten is delivered in cardboard boxes, which are available for the children to play with in the corridor when they have been emptied. We start the interview in the corridor, and upon us asking what the boxes are for they start building stacks with the boxes. Ismail and Irin communicate using expressions like "Lift carefully" and "There we go!". Some of the boxes have been decorated in different ways. We tell them that we think the boxes look cool, and they reply: "We can show you something even cooler?" and run into the playroom and show us a construction with a drawn circle and cardboard stuck to one box. They explain that it is a roundabout, and they proceed to pick up toy cars they drive in the circle and on the cardboard. The situation takes the form of a dialogue where the children communicate about how and where to drive the cars, interspersed with exclamations like "yes!" and "good!"

As with the collage and the allotted places, the cardboard boxes have a general (Bengtsson, 2001) use that differs from how the children used them. Their general use is to store and transport goods, but when emptied they were available to the children to play with and use as they like, which is not considered by the manufacturers of the boxes. Thus, the children applied their meaning to the boxes in their play and other usages, which can be seen as contingent (cf. Bengtsson, 2001), and we note that the staff also contributed to this process. In line with Løndal and Greve (2015), they facilitated play by making the boxes available for exploration by the children. The children engaged with the boxes in different ways, including stacking, building, decorating, and using them as play props, which were the uses we observed while interviewing. All these ways resulted in the continuous use of oral and bodily language, as the children entered into dialogues and negotiations, both with each other and with the researchers, as well as engaging in play. Thus, the varied ways the children engaged with the boxes were characterized by polyphonic dialogue (cf. Bakhtin, 1984) and strong agency, apparently having the desire

to participate and communicate (cf. Duran, 2015). Interestingly, there was also a plastic toy garage in the room that the children took no initiative to mention or to include in the ongoing play with the cardboard roundabout.

Average engagement and dialogue: Equipment for language acquisition

The next two episodes took place in Sunshine Kindergarten.

In Sunshine Kindergarten there are pictures on the wall, accompanied by words written in Arabic and Latin characters. When we ask what the posters are about, Hassan answers: "It is my Arabic". We point to a picture of a butterfly and ask Hassan how it is pronounced in Arabic, and he answers: "I don't remember". When we read the Arabic Word farazje through the Latin audio font, he replies: "That's true. Lasse told me". Lasse is the name of the kindergarten teacher.

Hassan later points to a children's book with Arabic characters and says, "This is my language". He also points to a book with Urdu characters and says: "This is my language". When we ask him what the book is about, he replies: "I am just a child, so I can't read it".

We understand the quote "It is my Arabic" as an indication that Arabic somehow touches Hassan's identity. In line with Alstad (2016), the teachers have established a space for multilingual perspectives by using multilingualism as a general subject. When Hassan further explains that the teacher has told him the Arabic name of the butterfly, we identify a way the staff has taken responsibility to bring in Hassan's language history and making it a part of the kindergarten's semiotic landscape. According to Duran's (2015) three ways of exploring, we interpret Hassan's presentations of the books as a way of wanting to participate and present his home language. Even though he could not read or distinguish Urdu from Arabic, the visibility of different written languages in the semiotic landscape has integrated languages as a social and spatial activity (cf. Pennycook, 2010). Hassan spoke Norwegian and did not need to talk Arabic in kindergarten. The expression "my Arabic" gave the impression that Arabic appealed to Hassan as part of his identity (cf. Alstad, 2016) rather than as a semiotic resource he needed to communicate. Different written languages were presented as cultural and linguistic values in the semiotic landscape (cf. Szabó, 2015), and Hassan responded to these by presenting them as something that belonged to him. By making the posters and books with different languages visible in the semiotic landscape, the staff had given Hassan a chance to tell us something about his skills and his linguistic and cultural identity. However, the dialogue remained short and stayed general (cf. Bengtsson, 2001), following a monologic dialogue with questions and answers.

Further, there is a shelf with different toys and figures that are frequently used by kindergartens in activities organized to practice the majority language. Among these figures of «The three Billy goats» and a model of a storehouse. Sidra points to the material and says: "These are the three Billy Goats" and "This is a farm".

The equipment that Sidra points to is considered instructional materials for language learning giving a clear message about certain subjects. Telling the fairy tale about the three Billy Goats is a well-known strategy for practicing the Norwegian language in kindergartens, often presented in a monologic way to teach children specific words (Giæver & Jones, 2020). Farms are also considered essential parts of Norwegian culture, often being a theme in similar fairy tales. Pointing to the figures, Sidra uses a general approach (Bengtsson, 2001) to present the content of traditional Norwegian fairy tales. However, the figures do not release any more explanations or dialogues. The figures seem to point to some experiences Sidra has had in activities in kindergarten, yet, perhaps, they did not necessarily intersect with her experiences from outside kindergarten. Following Szabó (2015), the figures represent cultural and linguistic values that appeared to engage her only minimally but as she drew attention to the figures herself, we consider the engagement within the category "average engagement". In the next section, we will present an example of similar equipment that released resistance among the children.

Weak engagement and weak dialogue: A fairy tale with nonsense words

The last episode we will present took place in Moonlight Kindergarten.

Moonlight Kindergarten has posters on the wall that point to general learning activities such as letters, numbers, and drawings of different kinds of clothes that belong to different kinds of weather, i.e., wellingtons and rain, or scarf and snow. The children passed the posters without giving them attention. There is also a poster with pictures from "The Mitten", a Ukrainian fairy tale, hanging on the wall. The fairy tale is frequently used in Norwegian kindergartens and tells a story about different animals that move into a lost mitten in the woods. A central aspect of the story is the names of the seven different animals, the names being long and nonsensical consisting of six syllables, such as "Pilemus Silkehår" and "Friskefrosk langelår". When we draw attention to the poster, Irin starts explaining the story to us, before abruptly saying: "We don't need to say those names. I don't remember". Then she moves on to another room.

The researcher drew attention to the poster, it was not chosen by any of the children. Irin's statement indicated that she had already been given some expectations about learning the animal's nonsensical names. She had a general way of relating to the poster (cf. Bengtsson 2001) in the sense that she indicated that she was expected to "say those names". The pictures on the wall, copied from the fairy tale, are full of colorful details with different animals dressed up in costumes as well as creative ways of transforming a mitten into a home and could in our opinion easily appeal to children's imagination. Yet,

Irin communicated no desire to participate (cf. Duran, 2015). The kindergarten teachers have the power to create a space that produces and reproduces values, and possibly excludes others (cf. Blommaert, 2013), and the values Irin reflected through her statement was that it is important to learn difficult words by heart. Yet rather than forcing herself to recite the words, she took control and said, "We don't need to say those names". The semiotic landscape is full of pictures and letters, toys, games, and décor, that to varying degrees appeal to children. It seemed as if Irin had the freedom to choose semiotic resources of interest and reject the activities that did not appeal to her, and she chose polyphony over the monologic.

What characterized the semiotic landscape?

In the following, we will discuss three important elements that characterized the semiotic landscapes: multilingualism, a space for play, and instructional materials.

The importance of multilingualism in the semiotic landscape

This study aimed to attempt to access children's perspectives on how they experienced the semiotic resources and what kind of social context reflected in the semiotic landscape that encouraged interaction and dialogue. Considering the semiotic landscape as a place for belonging (cf. Pesch et al., 2021), Sunshine Kindergarten reflected a diversity of languages, while we observed marginal traces of multilingualism in Moonlight Kindergarten. Thus, multilingual identity was included in our dialogue with the children in Sunshine Kindergarten, while multilingualism was not mentioned at all in Moonlight Kindergarten.

Parents and staff are important actors in the construction of kindergarten as a multilingual space (Alstad, 2016), and posters and books that reflect different languages, are often mainly directed towards staff and parents (Pesch, 2018). Yet, visualizing multilingual resources creates a space for multilingual children's situations (Alstad, 2016; Pesch, 2018) which they can relate to in their personal, unique ways. Hassan related to this by expressing that this language belonged to him, but also that there was a limit to what he could express. Multilingualism was presented as a cultural and linguistic value (cf. Szabó, 2015), leading to the possibility of a conversation about language and identity. This possibility was absent in Moonlight Kindergarten. Although the general character (cf. Bengtsson, 2001) of the dialogues concerning the multilingual semiotic resources did not result in the further initiative and longer chains of dialogue, we still consider multilingual signs as being important for the children's identity.

The linguistic norms consisted of equipment facilitated for Norwegian language development and the children related in general and monologic ways to posters and equipment that had clear linguistic messages, such as written signs and figures that symbolized fairy tales. However, considering the semiotic landscape as chains of utterances (cf. Bakhtin 1986; cf. Pesch et al., 2021), the dialogues went in different directions, depending on what the semiotic symbols communicated. While the Arabic signs seemed to release a sense of belonging and identity, the fairy tale symbols released a sense of coping or not coping with the majority language. Neither of these semiotic symbols encouraged further dialogue.

The playful dialogues

Former research has found that the cloakroom in kindergarten is a place for exchanging information (Munch et al., 2022) and a space where the home language is often used between parents and children when the children are picked up (Tkachenko et al., 2021). Both the cloakroom in Sunshine Kindergarten and the hall in Moonlight Kindergarten were facilitated for general use, as a transition space between activities rather than being a space facilitated for activities and play, though not being particularly inviting for play, in our view. Interestingly, we observed a high degree of playfulness among the children in dialogue with the semiotic resources in the cloakroom and the hall. Løkken (2000) emphasizes the bodily aspect of playfulness among toddlers, and we observed similar bodily actions accompanying the dialogues in the cloakroom. When the dialogue moved from general to contingent, it was frequently followed by bodily movements by the children. Following Bakhtin (1986) we consider body language as part of the dialogue, and both Hassan, Sidra, Irin, and Ismael's ways of embodying the concepts of the semiotic resources (cf. Dufva & Aro, 2015) gave the dialogues a contingent and playful character.

We consider the collage with pictures of the Peace Prize winners with political messages directed towards adults rather than children. Yet, the Peace Prize concerns countries that the children's families possibly connect with and might release a feeling of identity among the children (cf. Szabó, 2015). In opposite to the posters and equipment with a clear message about language learning, the collage appeared to us with no clear goal or purpose, the contingent character released a polyphonic dialogue conducted by the children themselves (cf. Bakhtin, 1984; Gadamer, 2013). The descriptions from the cloakroom and the hall had in common that the children conducted them, and they released language used in a contingent way.

The effect of instructional material

Semiotic symbols that function as instructional materials are commonly used in Norwegian kindergartens and appeared in both Sunshine and Moonlight Kindergarten.

Linse (2005) recommends material that appears as brightly colored visuals, toys, and puppets, in line with the fairy tale posters and figures we passed by with the children. Yet, in contrast to the collage with the Peace Prize winners, the instructional material released monologic utterances. The children pointed to the different figures and told us the names, and even expressed resistance (cf. Duran, 2015) in the case of the fairy tale about "The Mitten". When the children engaged with the instructional materials, the interactions were characterized by the general approach (Bengtsson, 2001), although such materials are produced to facilitate the use and learning of language. However, following the children's perspective, they made it clear that they were free to communicate how they feel and embody the concept (cf. Duran, 2015), also if they wanted to reject the activity.

Conclusion

Norwegian kindergartens are obliged to "ensure that all children gain varied and positive experiences of using language as a means of communication, as a tool for thinking, and as a way of expressing their thoughts and feelings" (Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 24). Sunshine and Moonlight kindergartens had different ways of reflecting the children's belonging in a culturally and linguistically diverse society, whereas only the former led to dialogues that reflected multilingualism. However, all the children expressed some sense of engagement related to semiotic resources.

The limited number of informants can be linked both to the strengths and weaknesses of the study. It gave us access and the possibility to engage with the few children closely, although it provides limited possibility to generalize and draw strong conclusions. However, we have shown that a mobile methodology can be utilized when exploring kindergarten semiotic landscapes with children. The study can also be an inspiration for further research into the field of semiotic landscapes in the kindergarten field. An example could be to research the experiences of children with less capabilities in the majority language.

Although this is an exploratory study, our findings can still give us some inklings and indications as to what in the semiotic landscape appeals to children and what leads to varied language use. We observed that instructional materials with an instructional purpose, intended for the children to pick up and learn certain words and to control the content of children's dialogues, only appealed to these children to a limited degree. We view this as significant, even though we interviewed only four children, as it affirms our experiences as practitioners. Also, our observations of what materials appeal to children could have been very different if we had interviewed a larger group of children. Further research is necessary to further explore children's views on instructional materials as a part of kindergarten semiotic landscapes.

We also found it interesting and informative that many of the polyphonic dialogues took place in areas and rooms that were not facilitated for language learning and play, such as hallways and cloakrooms, and it is reasonable to deduce that such spaces are generally not considered important parts of the semiotic landscape. Our observations remind us that such spaces also must be considered by kindergarten practitioners when facilitating language use and learning, as well as play. Thus, every room and space within the kindergarten should be considered a part of the semiotic landscape. We observed that play, playfulness, and playful dialogues seemed to trigger the use of varied language. The dialogues were strong when the children interacted with undefined materials and spaces and is a reminder for practitioners to offer the children such materials and spaces. Thus, this study can serve as an inspiration for practitioners when facilitating kindergarten spaces and materials. As the children have demonstrated, the semiotic landscape includes more than the rooms and materials facilitated specifically for play and learning.

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