REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING: PUBLIC MEMORY AND LANGUAGE TEACHING [1]

John Macalister

Victoria University of Wellington

Let me start by sharing a small confidence. There's a weekly column in *The Guardian* to which I am mildly addicted. Each weekend I go online to seek it out, and feel cheated if it's not there. The column is called Blind Date, and in it two people who met as strangers report back on a sometimes alcohol-fuelled evening they spent in a restaurant. It's all designed to amuse, and it does, but one thing that always intrigues me is when they respond to the question 'What did you talk about?' The responses are often so different that you might wonder if they had had the same conversations. Certainly you can wonder about the different things they seem to recall, or choose not to mention. It should come as no surprise, of course. We have probably all had those moments in our private lives that go along the lines of 'That's not what I said' to which a partner's response is – inevitably – 'Yes, it is!' And the remembering/forgetting dichotomy is not infrequently a subject for humour.

However, these examples are all about private memory, and this talk is about public memory. It is not just about memory but also about the languages and other semiotic resources that construct that memory. So let me establish what I am talking about; I am talking about 'memory places' such as museums, monuments, and other forms of memorial. Memory places are important because they emplace ideology. In this talk I will be drawing from a corpus of memory places (Blackwood & Macalister, 2020) and because these emplace ideology I will be looking at the less overt constructors of meaning, the meanings that aren't explicit.

I am, of course, locating myself in linguistic landscape (LL) studies. I don't propose to go into the literature of that field. Suffice to say that this is not the traditional, quantitative approach to analysing a LL. Rather, the analysis considers all the elements and how they work together to convey the intended (or unintended) message. It sees the sources of meaning as being multi- rather than mono-modal and including the place, the design elements, the languages used, the people in the landscape, and the way they use it (Shohamy & Waksman,

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[1] This paper is based on a keynote address delivered on 27 November 2019 at the Applied Linguistics Conference 2019, Perth, Australia, the biennial conference co-sponsored by ALANZ and AALA.

2009). This will be the applied linguistics part of the talk; then I consider what it might contribute to language teaching, and in this way I aim to address the conference theme – Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching: Making Connections.

The Wellington Cenotaph

The first memory place I want to look at is the Cenotaph in Wellington, New Zealand (and discussed more fully in Macalister, 2020). Unveiled on Anzac Day 1931, and located close to parliamentary and government buildings, at its unveiling it towered over the surrounding cityscape. Today, by contrast, it seems dwarfed by high-rise buildings and rather than being in the centre of a major intersection is linked to the parliamentary precinct by pedestrian paving, making a pocket park. It is approached up steps flanked by a pair of large bronze lions *couchant*, leading to the closed door of the reliquary chapel above which floral swags are carved into the lintel. To the left and right are carved friezes telling the story of recruitment, enlisting, and departing for war. Male civilians become soldiers, leaving behind women, children, work on the land, pets. A kitten playing with a girl's hoop is just one example of the domestic moments caught here. There is not much language on the Cenotaph, and what is there is all English. The language elements are generally later additions to the monument, such as a series of bronze plaques commemorating different branches of the services, alternating with small shields that spell out virtues or values such as 'wisdom'. Atop the Cenotaph is a mounted horseman and decorative details include bound sheaves, geometric designs, and the horse's clipped mane (For those interested, images of the Cenotaph and some of the features mentioned in this brief description can be found at https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photos/wellington-cenotaph).

The Cenotaph is a memory place and so it seems fair to ask, what, then, is the public memory that this monument is evoking? To me, it is depicting war as noble, with an absence of death and the dead, and is evoking Empire and classicism. It reads as an expression of national identity at the time, of a monolingual and monocultural New Zealand.

But why do I think this? There are no signs telling me what to think, no teacher giving me the right answer. In part it is the associations that elements of the Cenotaph trigger. The evocation of Empire, for example, comes from my linking the bronze lions to their rather more famous, and considerably larger, counterparts in Trafalgar Square, London. This meaning seems intended. However, not all that is experienced by the viewer is intended. I grew up in Wellington, and the horseman atop the Cenotaph had always struck me as a rather grim feature. I had seen him as falling backwards, his raised arm as though in despair after having

been shot or in some way injured. It was only in the course of this research that I discovered I was wrong. The statue has a name, The Will to Peace, and is described thus:

> Pegasus spurning underfoot the victor's spoils of war and rising into the heavens, enables his rider to emerge from the deluge of blood and tears, and to receive the great spiritual assurance of peace.

The fact that the horse is Pegasus does, at least, reinforce the evocations of classicism that were initially derived from design elements such as the floral swags and bound sheaves.

Pukeahu|National War Memorial Park

The better part of a century later, in time for Anzac Day 2018, another war memorial was opened in Wellington. This was a very different type of memorial, being a park rather than a monument, and positioned on the outskirts of the inner city, removed from the places of legislative power among which the Cenotaph sits. It consists of multiple elements, and is signposted and explained. In many ways it is representative of new practices in creating memory places, places that require the viewer to move through rather than just to observe, and that are “often positioned as tourist/learning sites” and laden with “complex references and cultural heritage markers” (Abousnnouga & Machin, 2010, p. 238).

From the air, the hard surfaces of Pukeahu lend it a cruciform shape and the main focus of this talk is on the shorter arm that runs south to north (images of the park can be found at https://mch.govt.nz/pukeahu/park). On the northern side is Anzac Square, where fifteen red sandstone pillars stand, with eucalyptus trees interplanted; here we have a very obvious reference to Australia[2]. The New Zealand equivalent is provided by black granite set into the pillars, and used as interpretation panels here and there. One such panel informs the viewer that this memorial “was a gift from the people of Australia to the people of New Zealand in recognition of shared values, service and sacrifice”. The names of battles and theatres of war are carved onto granite elsewhere.

Already it may be clear that language plays a more prominent role at Pukeahu than it did at the Cenotaph. While English is the dominant language, words of Māori origin, and also Australian aboriginal words, appear on the interpretation tablets. Rather than classical Western values such as ‘wisdom’ and ‘valour’, the words focus on concepts drawn from tikanga Māori (or Māori culture), such as

[2] That this references iconic – or clichéd – Australia is neatly illustrated by a travel website’s evoking a land where “the bright red rock formations of the sandy outback meet the fragrant eucalyptus forests”. (http://www.travelmyne.com/continent-australia)

the valuing of relationships (‘whanaungatanga’) and guardianship (‘kaitiakitanga’). Elsewhere there are even one or two examples of “parallel text bilingualism” (Coupland, 2010, p. 86) within Pukeahu. It is, however, on the southern edge of the park that the Māori language is most obvious, for it appears as whakataukī, or proverbs, set on concrete walls. It is, indeed, in this part of the park that Māori language and culture is most visibly expressed.

If we ask the same questions of Pukeahu that we asked of the Cenotaph, we receive different answers. If we ask about the public memory that has been created, while we again have an absence of obvious reference to death and the dead and we again have an expression of national identity, we can say, first, that the expression is more deliberate than it was at the Cenotaph (for this memory place was commissioned by central government with that expression as a stated intention) and, second, that the identity is rather different. Pukeahu speaks of a bilingual, bicultural nation, and seems to place ties with Australia at its heart. Interestingly, however, the park seems to speak to different audiences in different places. The southern edge seems to be addressing an indigenous audience; the whakataukī, for example, are offered only in Māori. The northern side, where Anzac Square sits, is firmly situated in an English-speaking world.

As for what creates this memory, we can be sure of what was intended for this was a deliberate, and documented, construction. As mentioned earlier, it is intended to be a destination – it is not in the centre of the city; it must be travelled to – and as a site for education – the interpretation panels serve this purpose. Both linguistic and non-linguistic meaning makers are employed; the red sandstone and the eucalypts evoke the Australian landscape, as obvious examples.

All the same, while Pukeahu is new and more or less ‘intact’ as planned, what is experienced is not always what was intended. One example of this is the concrete wall bearing the park’s name. This is marked with skateboard tracks which seem at odds with the seriousness, the solemnity, the sanctity of what is being officially remembered. Another example is a sign in a window of a building at the edge of the park; this is a bilingual notice in English and Chinese, telling people what to do if the office is unattended. Here we have a reminder of the people and the languages that Pukeahu seems to be forgetting.

Challenging or contesting the intended public memory can be more deliberate than this and was in evidence at the Cenotaph. A fading wreath and a plastic-sleeve-encased information sheet at the entrance to the reliquary chapel asked for remembrance of the victims of the Armenian genocide that occurred at the end of the First World War. Studded into the pavement of the pocket park that has been created around the memorial are green discs. These are placed to evoke the stream that once – in pre-colonial times – flowed here; if you listen carefully, speakers

inset into the pavement play the musical sound of flowing water. Both of these examples are adding memories – of other conflicts, of Māori life – to a memory place where they seem to have been forgotten.

Three more memory places

I want now to take a brief look at three other memory places, one in Malaysia (Macalister & Ong, 2020), another in Sarajevo (Kosatica, 2020), with the third being one that has been moved from Morocco to France (Marley, 2020).

The historic heart of Georgetown on the island of Penang received World Heritage Site status from UNESCO in 2008. To commemorate this, a series of iron rod sculptures were commissioned and installed as light-hearted reminders of the history of the place (https://www.sculptureatwork.com/our-work/marking-george-town/). Each sculpture speaks to the history of its immediate location. The dominant language on all these sculptures is English, perhaps reflecting their intended tourist audience, but other languages are present and at least nod to the multilingualism of Malaysia. The sculpture I want to focus on here is called *Win win* and shows two men, one Malay, one Chinese, greeting each other in a mix of English and Bahasa Malaysian with smiles, and an unlikely fist bump. The sculpture remembers the tin trade and suggests a happy, harmonious relationship. The history that is forgotten is that in the 1860s and 1870s three wars were fought over control of the tin trade, with the involvement of both Chinese and Muslim secret societies.

For many people Sarajevo is inextricably linked with the bitter civil war that followed the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. Today, however, it is the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina where, by way of background, there are three main ethnic groups, using three languages and two scripts, for Serbs use both Latin and Cyrillic. Sarajevo is also the place you would go to visit the War Childhood Museum (https://warchildhood.org/). This is a museum that brings together objects and their associated memories contributed by those who grew up during a time of war. In the War Childhood Museum the signage is all in the Latin script. What does the exclusion of Cyrillic mean? Does it mean exclusion of Bosnian Serbs' sharing in the remembering that this memory place promotes, despite an official policy of openness and inclusion of all?

The third and final memory place to look at briefly is a war memorial that was originally erected in Morocco but later moved to a site in France (https://equestrianstatue.org/memorial-ww-i/). It was commissioned after the First World War and is inscribed with both French and Arabic, although the latter is difficult to read due to incorrectly formed letters as a result, perhaps, of their engraving being done by a non-Arabic speaker. While the inclusion of the Arabic

on this monument is deliberate it may also have been included as an afterthought, intended to show respect for the Moroccan troops rather than serving any particular language need. Indeed, an ideological reading of the monument might suggest that it is symbolising French victory over Morocco as much as Moroccan involvement in what was, after all, France's war. The fact that the head of the horse ridden by the Moroccan soldier is bowed towards the Frenchman while the French soldier's horse has its head erect and upright can, after all, be interpreted as an expression of subservience.

When Morocco gained independence in 1956, the monument was re-located to a town in northern France in which location the Arabic inscription loses further meaning. In this new location it simply symbolises Morocco.

Public memory and memory places

In the final chapter of Blackwood and Macalister (2020) we draw some conclusions based on the eleven studies contained in the book, and I hope that the brief account of four of those studies has been sufficient to make those conclusions seem reasonable to you.

The first is that memory places are deliberate constructions. None was created by accident. The Penang State Government, for example, ran a competition after the award of World Heritage Site status seeking ideas for creative uses of public space; the iron rod sculptures are officially sanctioned, therefore, not a random form of artistic expression.

The second conclusion is that memory changes, and that memory places are not immutable. The geographical re-location of the Franco-Moroccan monument is a very literal illustration of that point. The way in which public memory of New Zealand's involvement in the First World War has shifted over time is clear when the Cenotaph and Pukeahu are compared.

The final point to mention here is that, although memory places are deliberate constructions and have an intended meaning, their interpretation is personal. The use of Latin script in the War Childhood Museum, for instance, may well contribute to a Bosnian Serb's interpretation of exhibits differing from that of a Bosnian Muslim or a Bosnian Croat.

Remembering and forgetting

But does an absence in a memory place equate with forgetting? Remembering our focus on language, does it matter that Cyrillic is absent in the Sarajevo

museum? Or that the Māori language is absent from the Wellington Cenotaph? Some might argue that "we cannot … infer the fact of forgetting from the fact of silence" (Blair et al., 2010, p. 18), but I am not so sure. Memory places are deliberate constructions; thought has gone into what is included and what excluded.

Yet there are sound reasons why something – an event, a person, a language – might be remembered or forgotten. Here I want to draw from the work of Connerton (2008) who proposed seven reasons for appearing to forget from a socio-historical perspective. In the final chapter of Blackwood and Macalister (2020) we suggested that three of these seemed to be particularly relevant to public memory and memory places, at least to those represented in the eleven studies. One of these is that remembering/forgetting 'is constitutive in the formation of a new identity'. This is neatly illustrated by the 'remembering' of te reo Māori at Pukeahu, aligning with the 'new' identity of New Zealand as a bilingual, bicultural nation.

The second of Connerton's reasons is what he called 'forgetting as humiliated silence'. He illustrated this most powerfully by recalling the solemn remembering of the millions of "safely dead" after the First World War but not of the millions of "mutilated survivors [who] still haunted the streets of Europe" (2008, p. 69). This type of forgetting is triggered by a collective shame, and arguably can be seen operating in the War Childhood Museum in its treatment of Cyrillic.

The final reason is 'prescriptive forgetting' which equates with forgetting for the national or common good. We find this at work in school curricula sometimes. Government-issued history textbooks in Afghanistan, for instance, omitted mention of recent conflict-riven history in the interests of nation-building (Sieff, 2012). In Penang, similarly, the iron rod sculptures treat the past with humour and overlook race riots in recent history and more ancient ethnic wars.

Public memory and language teaching

By now I hope that I have established that memory places are worthy of attention, that there is more to them than is immediately obvious. They are rich in those 'complex references and cultural heritage markers' that were mentioned earlier. And at this point I am returning to the conference theme. This is where I will do my best to connect applied linguistics and language teaching. In some ways I think the connections are reasonably obvious. If we take the point made earlier that interpretation of a memory place is personal, we can without much difficulty link to interactive reading processes, the interaction between top-down and bottom-up processes, or to reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978). We can

also recall the New London Group idea of Design, that “we are both inheritors of patterns and conventions of meaning and at the same time active designers of meaning” (Group, 1996, p. 65). My mention of the New London Group here is deliberate, as I am invoking the idea of multiliteracies as I make the link to language teaching.

In making the connection to language teaching we can also move from core applied linguistics to more sociolinguistic theory, such as audience and referee design (Bell, 1984, 2001), to explain language choice in memory places. The dominance of English on the iron rod sculptures in Penang, for instance, is surely a case of audience design, just as referee design might explain the Arabic on the Franco-Moroccan memorial. However, I want to focus on linguistic landscape research, which is where I located myself at the outset.

Although not receiving obvious attention in recent books on out-of-class language learning, or learning beyond the classroom (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Nunan & Richards, 2015), the LL has been viewed as a useful pedagogical resource in EFL settings (Rowland, 2013; Sayer, 2009) because it can provide learners with opportunities for meaningful engagement with the target language. Sayer (2009) conducted his own study in Mexico and identified six social meanings in that LL. Rowland (2013) took this further by reporting on a LL project conducted by language learners in Japan, to investigate whether the pedagogical benefits of such a project claimed by Sayer and others did in fact result. These claims (pp. 496-497) were that a LL project could:

- Develop critical literacy skills
- Improve pragmatic competence
- Increase the possibility of incidental learning
- Facilitate acquisition of multimodal literacy skills
- Stimulate multicompetence
- Enhance sensitivity to connotational aspects of language

Rowland seemed to find evidence to support all six of these claimed benefits, although at times the support appeared to be rather weak. The idea that incidental language learning occurs when learners notice a language error on a sign, for instance, seems speculative rather than certain.

I am not arguing against the use of a LL as a pedagogical resource, as a site for meaningful engagement with the target language, but I am suggesting that often the engagement seems to be rather shallow. Much of it appears to be at the level of asking why people in place X use English on signs in public spaces. The presence or absence – the remembering or forgetting – of other languages seems to be ignored. There is also a failure to address the ideology behind language

choice, or to wonder about the role of native speakerism when learners draw attention to an apparent error on a sign. There is no attempt to ask how a piece of discourse – a sign in a public space – might relate to dominant societal Discourses. To illustrate this point, the site information accompanying the *Win win* sculpture in Penang tells the viewer that 'The tin merchants of Penang worked very closely with Ngah Ibrahim as Larut District was one of the major suppliers of tin at that time'; this piece of discourse is reinforced by the fist-bumping image and links to the Discourse of racial harmony in Malaysia. Is this accurate? If not, is it justified in terms of 'prescriptive forgetting'? I strongly believe that learners need to be given the opportunity to identify these Discourses, the way they are constructed through language, and the opportunity to interrogate them. Memory places, as I said at the beginning, emplace ideology.

The New London Group began their advocacy of a new approach to literacy instruction by describing traditional pedagogy as "a carefully restricted project – restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language" (1996, p. 61). They argued that we need to address changing social realities through pedagogical change, in order to prepare learners for their future. The world has not stood still in the twenty-plus years since they made their argument. Yet in much of what we do – and this includes our use of the LL as a pedagogical resource – we are still moving only very slowly away from this traditional view of literacy pedagogy. I want to suggest that we should still be thinking of how to equip learners for changing social realities, of how to live in a post-truth world. I want to end by suggesting that using memory places as a pedagogical tool would be a great place to start.

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