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FROM SYMBOLIC SIGNS TO DISCURSIVE LANDSCAPES IN RONYA OTHMANN'S *DIE SOMMER*: A LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This study examines Ronya Othmann's *Die Sommer* through the lens of linguistic landscape (LL) theory and argues for an expanded understanding of LL as a narrative-discursive formation rather than a phenomenon limited to visible public signage. While conventional LL research has focused primarily on signs, place names, and written displays in public space, this article shows that literary texts can also construct LLs through memory, silence, naming practices, and spatial narration. Using a qualitative text-based analysis, the study explores how *Die Sommer* represents language, space, and identity in a context marked by marginalization, displacement, and cultural erasure. The findings reveal five interrelated patterns: contested toponymy and renaming, institutional multilingual asymmetry, border semiotics, memory-based counter-landscapes, and material domestic signification. Together, these patterns demonstrate that the novel transforms homes, villages, borders, and remembered geographies into symbolic LLs, in which official and vernacular languages occupy unequal positions. Kurdish survives largely through family memory, oral transmission, and intimate spaces, whereas state languages dominate institutional and public domains. The study contributes to LL scholarship by proposing the concept of a literary LL and by showing how fiction can illuminate hidden dimensions of language, ideology, and belonging that may remain invisible in studies restricted to material signage.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, literary linguistic landscape, language ideology, space, Kurdish identity.

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ОТ СИМВОЛИЧЕСКИХ ЗНАКОВ К ДИСКУРСИВНЫМ ЛАНДШАФТАМ В РОМАНЕ РОНИ ОТМАН “DIE SOMMER”: АНАЛИЗ ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКОГО ЛАНДШАФТА

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Аннотация. В данном исследовании роман Рони Отман “Die Sommer” (нем. Лето) рассматривается через призму теории лингвистического ландшафта (ЛЛ) и предлагается расширенное понимание ЛЛ как нарративно-дискурсивного образования, а не как феномена, ограниченного публичным городским пространством коммуникации. В то время как традиционные исследования ЛЛ в основном сосредоточены на вывесках, надписях, знаках, указателях и т.п. в общественном пространстве, авторы настоящей статьи приходят к выводу, что литературные тексты также могут конструировать ЛЛ посредством памяти, умолчания, различных наименований и описаний местности. С помощью качественного текстового анализа было изучено, как роман репрезентирует язык, пространство и идентичность в контексте маргинализации, замещения и культуры отмены. Результаты выявляют пять взаимосвязанных паттернов: конфликтная топонимика и практики переименования, институциональная многоязычная асимметрия, семиотика границ, основанные на коллективной памяти контр-ландшафты и материальная знаковость привычного пространства. В совокупности эти паттерны демонстрируют, что роман превращает дома, деревни, границы и упомянутые точки на карте в символические ЛЛ, где официальные и местные языки занимают неравные позиции. Курдский язык сохраняется преимущественно благодаря семейной памяти, устной передаче и личным контактам, в то время как государственные языки доминируют в институциональной и публичной сферах. Данное исследование вносит вклад в изучение ЛЛ, предлагая концепцию литературного ЛЛ и показывая, как художественная литература способна осветить скрытые аспекты языка, идеологии и идентичности, которые могут оставаться невидимыми в исследованиях, ограниченных материальными знаками.

Ключевые слова: лингвистический ландшафт, литературно-лингвистический ландшафт, языковая идеология, пространство, курдская идентичность.

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Introduction

Linguistic Landscape (LL) research has traditionally focused on visible language in public spaces such as street signs, billboards, shop names, and official signage. In their seminal study, Landry and Bourhis [1] define the LL as the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs, emphasizing its role as a marker of the relative power and status of language communities. Early work by Backhaus [2] and others followed this approach by documenting multilingual signs in cities (e.g., Tokyo) to gauge language vitality. Over time, however, scholars recognized that signage is not neutral: it is a semiotic resource that reflects political authority and social hierarchy. Official signs often encode state language policy (e.g., privileging a national language while relegating minorities), and thus function ideologically even as they inform the public, as recent studies on pandemic signage and medical LLs have also demonstrated [3, 4].



Despite methodological expansions (for example, counting signs by language or incorporating digital media), LL studies have remained anchored in material inscriptions, even though recent work has expanded LL into language-awareness pedagogy and virtual LLs [5–7]. As the Bloomsbury Handbook of Linguistic Landscapes [8] notes, the field has evolved into a comprehensive examination of public meaning-making, from graffiti and street signs to even tattoos and literature. Yet much of LL analysis still emphasizes the visible, static display of language. This "visual bias" is increasingly questioned, especially in contexts where minority languages are marginalized or banned. In such settings, a language may be absent from official signage but continue to live in memory, narrative, and everyday speech. Absence itself becomes a semiotic signal: the deliberate removal or silence of a language on the landscape marks suppression and contested identity, with recent studies on public-memory naming and heritage rebranding likewise showing how erasure and selective visibility reorganize space ideologically [9, 10]. These insights suggest that LL should be seen not simply as the inventory of public signs but as a broader semiotic process, in which space is continuously (re)produced through language, discourse, and memory [11].

Despite these developments, limited attention has been paid to how LLs are constructed discursively in contemporary German-language fiction. Novels, memoirs, and other narratives create detailed linguistic geographies: they name and rename places, tell stories of borders and institutions, and encode who belongs or does not. In literature, space is constructed discursively [12, 13], so the choice of language, place names, and dialogue all index power, identity, and belonging across remembered or narrativized landscapes [14, 15]. De Vinne [16], for instance, argues for extending the LL concept into the "fictive world," calling for the study of a literary LL. Likewise, recent LL scholarship acknowledges that contexts like literature and art can function as semiotic sites of language use. Literary texts thus have the potential to reveal how languages are inhabited, contested, or erased in ways that complement the study of physical signage, especially because LLs participate in the construction and reconstruction of multiple identities across historically layered spaces [17]. However, this does not mean that literary narratives are treated as identical to empirical, sign-based LLs. Rather, literary texts are understood here as discursive reconstructions of LLs: they narrate how languages, names, memories, silences, and spatial hierarchies are experienced, remembered, and ideologically organized within the fictional world. In this sense, literary LLs should be seen not as replacements for physical LL data but as interpretive sites that make visible dimensions of language-in-space that conventional sign-based methods may overlook.

Building on these insights, this article develops the concept of literary LL through an analysis of Ronya Othmann's *Die Sommer* [18]. Rather than approaching the novel merely as fiction, the study reads it as a narrative space, in which languages, places, and identities are discursively negotiated. *Die Sommer* follows Leyla, a Kurdish-Yazidi-German girl who spends summers in her grandparents' village in northern Syria until the village is destroyed. Throughout the novel, places are named, remembered, and forgotten through language. Official maps and institutions employ state languages and erasures, while Kurdish place names and speech survive only in family stories, songs, and private memory. As Othmann herself observes, the Yazidi-Kurdish identity and language are being "erased" – cities and villages are systematically renamed, and Kurdish is not taught or officially recognized. In the narrative, the outcome is a symbolic LL: landscapes of memory and silence rather than visible text. Borders, homes, schools, and markets in *Die Sommer* become ideologically charged spaces defined by what can be spoken, displayed, taught, or left unsaid, a pattern consistent with recent work on conflicting language-policy orientations, educationscapes, and schoolsapes [19–21].

This study argues that LL can also be approached as a narrative-discursive formation, while acknowledging an important methodological distinction: a literary text does not constitute a physical LL in the same way as street signs, billboards, or institutional signage do. Instead, it constructs a represented or narrated LL, in which spatial meanings are produced through discourse, memory,



naming, silence, and the distribution of languages across social domains. The analysis suggests that Kurdish place-names and identities survive primarily in dialogue, memory, and intimate narration, whereas institutional domains are more consistently associated with state languages. Kurdish is sung or whispered at home, whereas German and Arabic dominate public contexts. These narrative patterns reflect LL processes (inclusion, exclusion, normalization, contestation) enacted through fiction rather than signs. Theoretically, we build on critical LL approaches that foreground ideology and power [5, 22] and connect them with insights from literary and cultural geography. In this view, novels like *Die Sommer* can be examined as literary or narrated LLs – discursive spaces, in which linguistic hegemony, erasure, and resistance are represented through the organization of names, languages, memories, and silences in the text. Literary LLs do not replace the physical landscape but complement it, exposing hidden dimensions of language-in-space that visual analysis alone misses.

Methodologically, the study uses qualitative textual analysis guided by LL theory. Our unit of analysis includes place names, references to languages, and descriptions of schools, mosques, or other institutions, as well as moments when language is forbidden or remembered. We treat the novel as a culturally situated narrative text whose representations of language and space can be examined as socially meaningful discourse. This aligns with calls for more flexible, interdisciplinary LL methods that draw on cultural texts and narratives [8, 16], as well as on identity-text practices and chronotopic analyses of place and meaning [23, 24]. By reading the novel as a LL, we address three goals: (1) to expand LL conceptual boundaries by applying it to literature; (2) to highlight the symbolic, narrative dimensions of LL in contexts of marginalization; and (3) to offer a model for analyzing transnational minority experiences through literary LL. In doing so, we argue that LLs extend beyond visible inscriptions into the realms of storytelling and memory. The novel's "landscapes" of language shape how places are known, contested, and inhabited, even when not inscribed on signs. Recognizing literature as a legitimate source for analyzing represented or narrated LLs allows researchers to capture these less visible but consequential dimensions of language in space. Accordingly, the study asks: (1) How does *Die Sommer* represent LLs beyond physical signage through its narrative? (2) In what ways does the novel transform physical spaces into symbolic LLs shaped by language, memory, and ideology? (3) What ideological functions do these narrated landscapes serve in constructing or contesting marginalized identities?

Methodological Approach

This study employs a qualitative, text-based literary analysis of Ronya Othmann's *Die Sommer*, treating the novel itself as a symbolic and discursive landscape. Drawing on critical LL theory, we extend LL beyond visible signs to include narrative and memory. As research has shown, linguistic-landscape analysis "has, from the very beginning, engaged with issues of politics, ideology and cultural representation." In this spirit, the novel's passages are read as "linguistic landscapes," in which language, memory, and identity interplay [22, 25]. Our analysis is framed by foundational LL work [1] and later critical extensions [22, 25] as well as insights from spatial and narrative geography [12, 13].

Data Organization

The data consist of narrative excerpts from *Die Sommer*, systematically organized into five analytical categories that correspond to the main findings of the study: (1) contested toponymy and renaming, (2) institutional multilingual asymmetry, (3) border semiotics, (4) memory-based counter-landscapes, and (5) material domestic signification.

1. Contested toponymy and renaming: *road signs, place-names, and acts of official or symbolic renaming.*

2. Institutional multilingual asymmetry: *the uneven distribution of Arabic, Kurdish, and German across bureaucratic, educational, and domestic spaces.*

3. Border semiotics: *narrative representations of the Turkish border, danger, mines, and mobility.*



4. Memory-based counter-landscapes: *remembered homelands, orally preserved place-names, and absent geographies sustained through recollection.*

5. Material domestic signification: *houses, gardens, clothing, foodways, and objects that function as semiotic carriers of belonging.*

These categories were derived from LL theory's concern with symbolic visibility, indexicality, and ideological space, as well as from literary geography's attention to how narrative constructs place, memory, and belonging. For example, the road sign *Tel Khatoun* is coded under contested toponymy and renaming because it indexes both spatial identification and earlier erasure. The phrase *Das Land hatte zwei Namen* ('The land had two names') is coded as a memory-based counter-landscape because it marks the coexistence of official and familial geographies. Likewise, the distant mountain range described as *die Grenze zur Türkei* ('the border with Turkey') is coded as a border in semiotic terms, since it acquires meaning through narrated danger, memory, and geopolitical division. Together, these categories enabled the analysis to move from isolated textual references to broader patterns through which the novel organizes language, space, memory, and belonging.

Units of Analysis and Coding

Our unit of analysis is each discrete narrative excerpt (sentence or paragraph), in which space, language, or material culture is evoked. This approach aligns with interpretive sociolinguistic traditions that treat textual data as socially meaningful discourse. We focus on components such as place-names and linguistic practices (e.g., *mentions of Kurdish or German terms*), as well as descriptions of spaces suffused with silence or memory (e.g., *abandoned village lanes, childhood rooms*). Everyday material details (such as the grandparents' house built of local clay, or traditional dress) are also examined as semiotic markers. Each excerpt is treated as a mini-'textual landscape' that encodes ideological relations and participates in placemaking and sense-of-place processes within the narrative environment [26].

Analysis proceeded in sequential steps rooted in LL and narrative-spatial methodology:

1. Excerpt selection: We conducted a close reading of the novel, flagging all passages referencing toponyms, signage, spatial descriptions, and material culture. These excerpts were entered into an analysis matrix.

2. Thematic classification: Each excerpt was classified according to the five thematic categories developed for the analysis. For instance, the opening depiction of the highway sign *Tel Khatoun* (symbolic/toponymic) contrasted with later discourse about the village's missing official name (renaming).

3. Linguistic feature identification: Within each excerpt, we noted specific linguistic elements (e.g., proper names, adjectives of place, narrative voice shifts) that contribute to meaning. The use of German versus other languages or the appearance of Kurdish toponyms were coded.

4. Spatial function description: We interpreted how each element functions spatially, for example, how the crooked *Tel Khatoun* sign marks a threshold into the old village, or how the border mountains in the distance demarcate a geopolitical edge.

5. Ideological interpretation: We examined the symbolic indexicalities at play (e.g., a renamed town signaling state power, or the dual naming of a homeland reflecting divided identity). LL theory and concepts of narrative spatiality guided this coding, emphasizing how visible and non-visible signs together narrate belonging and exclusion.

Each step was documented in the tables: excerpts, initial theme codes, linguistic observations, spatial context notes, and interpretive comments were recorded. This coding procedure allowed both overt signs and subtler narrative cues such as silence, memory, and material objects to be analyzed as semiotic resources through which language and power are spatially organized.

Illustrative Examples

To illustrate the approach, consider the following applications. The metal road sign on the main street reads *Tel Khatoun* in faded letters, revealing that the village *hatte früher einen anderen Namen* ('had a different name in the past'). This example is coded under contested toponymy and renaming,



since the sign simultaneously identifies the village and indexes an earlier erasure. Another example appears in Leyla's recollection that *Das Land hatte zwei Namen* ('The land had two names'), one official and one family-used. This excerpt is coded under memory-based counter-landscapes, since it captures the coexistence of official cartography and familial geography. Likewise, the distant mountain range described as *die Grenze zur Türkei* ('the border with Turkey') is coded as a border in semiotic terms, because it acquires meaning through narrated danger, memory, and geopolitical division.

Theoretical Grounding

Throughout, our methodology is grounded in critical LL scholarship and narrative geography. We follow Landry and Bourhis's pioneering insight that visible signage carries symbolic power, but we extend this to the "expanded scenery" of signs, stories, and places. In line with Shohamy, Blommaert, and others, we read the novel's semiotic environment as ideologically charged. We also draw on Soja and Tally's conception of narrative space, treating the novel's geography as both real and imagined. Together, these theoretical frameworks justify coding literary elements such as names, objects, and silence as components of a narrated LL. This coding does not claim that the novel offers direct empirical evidence of a physical LL. Rather, it treats the novel as a culturally situated representation of how LLs are imagined, remembered, and ideologically experienced by marginalized subjects. The analytical focus is therefore not on replacing field-based LL research but on showing how literary discourse can reconstruct the social meanings of language, space, and visibility.

Results

The analysis of *Die Sommer* reveals five interrelated patterns, through which the novel constructs a literary LL: *contested naming*, *institutional language hierarchy*, *narrativized border space*, *memory-based counter-mapping*, and *material domestic signification*. Rather than presenting language only as visible signage, the narrative redistributes linguistic meaning across names, silences, memories, objects, and embodied spatial practices. These findings show that the novel transforms the LL from a strictly material phenomenon into a narrative-semiotic field in which visibility and invisibility are equally meaningful.

Contested Toponymy and the Politics of Renaming

A first major finding concerns the novel's use of contested place-names. The opening village sign *Tel Khatoun* is introduced not as a neutral marker of location but as a sign already burdened by a history of renaming. The narration states that the village had previously had another name, and that it became *Tel Khatoun* only after other villages and towns in the area were also renamed. The sign functions simultaneously as spatial identification and symbolic erasure: while it fixes the village within an official naming regime, it also indexes the disappearance of an earlier linguistic order.

This pattern expands at the territorial level when Leyla learns that *Das Land hatte zwei Namen* ('The land had two names'): one appearing in maps and official papers, and another used in the family, namely Kurdistan. The novel, therefore, presents toponymy as a site of tension between state legibility and vernacular belonging. Official names stabilize political authority, while familial names preserve affective and historical attachment. The result is a layered spatial regime, in which one landscape is publicly readable, and another survives only through intimate transmission. This dual naming structure demonstrates that toponymy in the novel is not referential but ideological. Official naming stabilizes administrative power, whereas vernacular naming preserves affective attachment, historical continuity, and communal legitimacy. Shown in Table 1.

Institutional Spaces and Uneven Multilingualism

A second finding is the novel's depiction of uneven multilingualism across space. Institutional settings are consistently associated with Arabic, surveillance, bureaucracy, and asymmetrical power relations, whereas Kurdish is more fully sustained in intimate, oral, and family-centered domains. At airports and checkpoints, Arabic is the language of officials, questioning, and passage control, while Leyla



does not understand the exchanges between her father and the officers. The airport is further marked by portraits of the president and his father, turning the institutional environment into a tightly regulated symbolic order.

In contrast, Kurdish circulates more fully in domestic and oral space. Yet the novel does not romanticize this domain as stable or complete. Leyla's father explicitly notes that only the younger villagers who had attended school could speak Arabic, while older villagers depended on translation in moments of crisis and information exchange. Multilingualism is therefore not balanced bilingualism but a socially uneven distribution of linguistic competence, strongly shaped by age, education, and institutional access. The novel therefore does not portray multilingualism as balanced coexistence. Instead, it depicts a stratified linguistic order, in which access to institutions, mobility, and formal recognition is mediated through state languages, while Kurdish remains socially meaningful but structurally marginalized. Shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Contested Toponymy in *Die Sommer*

Textual Evidence	Linguistic/Semiotic Feature	Spatial/Narrative Function	LL Interpretation
<i>Tel Khatoun</i> [18, p. 5] appears on the village sign in chipped letters, while the village is described as having <i>früher einen anderen Namen gehabt</i> ('previously had another name')	Renamed toponym; visible sign with erased history	Marks entry into the village while simultaneously signalling prior displacement	The sign is not neutral signage but a top-down inscription of authority that covers an earlier local identity
<i>Das Land hatte zwei Namen</i> ('The land had two names') [18, p. 10]: one on maps and official papers, another used in the family	Dual naming: official vs. familial	Splits space into cartographic legality and emotional homeland	Reveals overlapping landscapes: state-recognized Syria and narratively sustained Kurdistan
Leyla is explicitly warned, " <i>Du darfst den Namen des Landes niemandem verraten</i> " ('You must not reveal the name of the land to anyone') [18, p. 10]	Restricted naming	Regulates what can be said in public mobility contexts	Shows that naming itself is politically dangerous and ideologically monitored

Table 2. Spatial Distribution of Languages

Textual Evidence	Linguistic/Semiotic Feature	Spatial/Narrative Function	LL Interpretation
At the airport, bureaucratic space is marked by Arabic, as <i>Die Beamten und er sprachen Arabisch miteinander, und Leyla verstand kein Arabisch</i> ('The officials and her father spoke Arabic with each other, and Leyla understood no Arabic') [18, pp. 11, 12]	Institutional Arabic	Controls passage, questioning, and access	Arabic is linked to bureaucracy, authority, and state surveillance
State authority is also visually inscribed at the airport through <i>die lebensgroßen, in Gold gerahmten Porträts des Präsidenten und des Präsidentenvaters</i> ('the life-sized, gold-framed portraits of the president and the president's father') [18, p. 11]	Symbolic state visuality	Frames official space as ideologically saturated	Language and visual authority work together in institutional landscape-making
Linguistic inequality in the village is made explicit when the father says, " <i>Eigentlich konnten nur die Jüngeren Arabisch ... die, die eine Schule besucht hatten</i> " ('Actually, only the younger ones knew Arabic ... the ones who had attended school') [18, p. 17]	Unequal multilingual competence	Distinguishes generational access to information and public discourse	Shows linguistic hierarchy rather than neutral multilingual coexistence



Border Semiotics and Silent Landscape

A third finding concerns the semiotics of the border. The border to Turkey is visible from the grandparents' house as a distant mountain range, yet it is not narrated as a neutral geographical line. Leyla reflects that she might have found the mountains beautiful had she not known what had happened there. The visual landscape is thus overlaid with historical violence.

This is intensified by the father's stories of mines, night crossings, and smuggling routes near the border. The border becomes legible not through official signage but through narrated danger, remembered bodily risk, and inherited local knowledge. The novel, therefore, constructs the border as a silent LL, a space, in which language is not prominently displayed, but where meaning is produced through fear, memory, and tacit knowledge. In this sense, the border operates as a silent LL: it is minimally textual yet densely semiotic, since fear, violence, and restricted movement are encoded through narrative memory rather than public inscription. Shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Border as Silent Linguistic Landscape

Textual Evidence	Linguistic/ Semiotic Feature	Spatial/Narrative Function	LL Interpretation
The border enters the narrative landscape through the line <i>eine Bergkette, die Grenze zur Türkei</i> ('a mountain range, the border to Turkey') [18, p. 5]	Border named through narration	Connects everyday village life to geopolitical division	The border is narratively inscribed rather than materially signposted
This border is not neutral scenery, since <i>Hätte Leyla nicht gewusst, was sich an dieser Grenze abgespielt hatte, vielleicht hätte sie die Berge schön gefunden</i> ('If Leyla had not known what had happened at this border, perhaps she would have found the mountains beautiful') [18, pp. 5, 6]	Landscape charged by memory	Reframes scenery through violence and historical knowledge	Meaning arises from remembered events, not only visual appearance
Border space is further narrated through danger and mobility: <i>Die Kreuzchen sind Minen</i> ('The crosses are mines'), <i>nachts oft Leute über die Grenze gingen</i> ('at night people often crossed the border'), and <i>Explodierte eine Mine, hörte man es im Dorf</i> ('If a mine exploded, it could be heard in the village') [18, pp. 16, 17]	Oral danger-mapping	Produces an informal geography of risk	The border functions as a silent but ideologically dense landscape

Memory as Counter-Landscape

A fourth major finding is that memory operates as a counter-landscape. The novel repeatedly re-constructs erased or absent spaces through oral recall. This is most evident in the grandfather's conversations with "the Armenian," where names of villages, families, and places continue to circulate long after those communities have disappeared from lived geography. The remembered places survive through speech, not through maps or official recognition.

Similarly, Leyla's family preserves Kurdistan as a narratable homeland even when it lacks officially recognized borders. Memory in the novel is not merely retrospective – it is also spatially productive. It re-inscribes what administrative discourse leaves out. In this sense, *Die Sommer* presents narrative memory as a counter-landscape through which marginalized geographies remain legible despite administrative and cartographic exclusion. Memory in the novel is therefore not merely retrospective recollection. It performs a spatial function by re-inscribing names, routes, and attachments that official discourse either suppresses or leaves unrecorded, shown in Table 4.

Material Domestic Landscape as Semiotic Carrier

The final finding is that *Die Sommer* constructs LL through material domestic space. The grandparents' house is made of the same clay as the landscape, surrounded by gardens, olive trees, and fields, and built collectively by village men. These details are not ornamental description; they encode community, continuity, and cultural rootedness. The house is semiotically dense even without multilingual signage.



Table 4 . Memory-Based Counter-Landscapes

Textual Evidence	Linguistic/ Semiotic Feature	Spatial/Narrative Function	LL Interpretation
Familial geography resists official cartography in <i>Das andere war Kurdistan, ihr Land</i> ('The other was Kurdistan, their land') and <i>Leyla würde Kurdistan später im Schulatlas suchen, vergeblich</i> ('Later Leyla would look for Kurdistan in the school atlas, in vain') [18, p. 10]	Memory-preserved homeland name	Sustains communal belonging across political denial	Memory becomes a counter-map resisting official erasure
Memory functions as a counter-landscape when the grandfather and the Armenian visitor are described as <i>ihre Erinnerungen abzugleichen</i> ('comparing their memories') and speaking of <i>Familien, Dörfer und Namen</i> ('families, villages, and names') [18, pp. 29, 30]	Oral place preservation	Keeps absent places narratively alive	Spoken memory functions as substitute signage
Domestic space is materially tied to the land: <i>Das Haus war aus demselben Lehm wie die Landschaft</i> ('The house was made of the same clay as the landscape') [18, p. 10]	Cartographic absence	Contrasts lived naming with official invisibility	Demonstrates how formal maps exclude minority spatial knowledge

This pattern continues in Germany, where Leyla's father reconstructs the grandparents' garden by planting seeds brought from home and measuring other gardens against that lost one. Material space here becomes a transported and translated landscape. The domestic sphere functions as an archive of belonging in which architecture, cultivation, dress, and everyday objects become semiotic carriers of cultural continuity. Shown in Table 5.

Table 5 . Material Domestic Landscape

Textual Evidence	Linguistic/ Semiotic Feature	Spatial/Narrative Function	LL Interpretation
<i>Das Haus war aus demselben Lehm wie die Landschaft.</i> shows that the grandparents' house is made of the same clay as the surrounding land [18, pp. 5, 6]	Material-cultural landscape	Embeds dwelling within local ecology and social life	The house functions as a lived sign of rooted Kurdish-Yazidi belonging
<i>alle Männer des Dorfes zusammengekommen</i> ('all the men of the village gathered together') shows that the house was built collectively by village men [18, p. 6]	Communal construction	Links architecture to collective practice	Domestic space carries social memory, not merely physical shelter
<i>Die Samen für sie hatte der Vater aus dem Garten der Großeltern</i> ('Her father had got the seeds from her grandparents' garden') shows that in Germany, the father recreates the grandparents' garden using seeds from home [18, pp. 159, 160]	Transplanted material memory	Rebuilds homeland through cultivation in diaspora	Material practice extends the LL beyond homeland territory

Overall, the findings show that *Die Sommer* constructs LL through a combination of **renamed places, unequal multilingual domains, narrativized borders, remembered geographies, and materially grounded domestic spaces**. The novel, therefore, demonstrates that literary texts can reveal forms of language-in-space that remain partly invisible in conventional sign-based LL research. By embedding meaning in clay walls, gardens, household routines, and inherited objects, the novel shows that the LL is not limited to textual visibility. Material domesticity itself becomes a medium through which cultural presence is spatially sustained.

Taken together, these five categories show that *Die Sommer* redistributes linguistic meaning across visible signs, restricted naming practices, remembered geographies, silent borders, and materially encoded



domestic life. The novel, therefore, expands the analytic scope of LL by demonstrating that language-in-space may be narrated, recalled, withheld, and materially embodied, not only publicly displayed.

Discussion

This discussion situates *Die Sommer*'s portrayal of space and language within broader LL scholarship and highlights the study's main conceptual contributions. The analysis shows that Othmann's narrative instantiates an ideologically charged landscape: official place-names and visual symbols (e.g., the Arabic sign *Tel Khatoun*) convey state power, while suppressed Kurdish/Yazidi toponyms and languages survive only in family memory. This mirrors Shohamy's [25, 27] argument that LL reflects power and ideology, and Blommaert's [22] emphasis on the multilayered, scale-sensitive nature of signs. However, *Die Sommer* extends standard LL assumptions by substituting written signs with narrative and silence. Memory, songs, and everyday objects function as elements of a literary LL, forming a kind of counter-signage through which marginalized identities are preserved. We discuss how these findings align with Scollon & Scollon's [28] concept of geosemiotics (signs deriving meaning from their social-material placement) and expand it: here, even unspoken names and home-bound objects carry semiotic weight. Methodologically, treating a novel as LL data invites critical reflection: the text is a crafted, retrospective account rather than field-recorded signage, which raises questions of validity and triangulation. Nevertheless, it reveals aspects of the language landscape (*memory work, absence, emotional valence*) often inaccessible to empirical LL methods. These findings open several directions for future research, including comparative work on other diasporic literary texts, multi-modal approaches to narrative landscapes, and further methodological reflection on literary LL.

Positioning within Linguistic Landscape Scholarship

Scholars like Shohamy [25, 27] have emphasized that public language displays are never neutral: they are "ideologically charged" statements of power [25]. This view aligns with our findings. For example, the Arabized village sign *Tel Khatoun* in *Die Sommer* is not merely a name but a political assertion a top-down imposition that overwrites an earlier Kurdish/Yazidi name. The novel explicitly notes that the old name is gone ('the village had previously had a different name'), spotlighting the ideological nature of renaming. Such toponyms as power fit Shohamy's [27] model of LL as "political markers" reflecting state language planning. Indeed, Othmann's depiction resonates with Shohamy and Gorter's claim that LL reflects linguistic ideologies and symbolic power. The layered landscape of *Die Sommer*, with its contrast between official Arabic toponyms and private Kurdish ones, also echoes Blommaert's [22] notion of LL as a site of multiple "orders of indexicality" linking local speech to global nationalist narratives. The village's dual names (*official vs. family usage*) index two overlapping social worlds: the Arabized nation-state and the Kurdish homeland as experienced in memory. As Blommaert argues, signs can simultaneously invoke different scales (local homes, regional identity, national policy) and histories (empire, nation-building).

Scollon & Scollon's [28] geosemiotics further illuminates these data: they define LL as the "study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses." In *Die Sommer*, geographic features (*mountains at the Turkish border*) and objects (*clay house, bed, radio*) become "sites," in which meaning is made. For Scollon, a text's import emerges from where and how it is placed; here, narrative placement of words, including unuttered ones in space/culture, generates meaning. The novel shows that even silence in place is meaningful (e.g., *the missing Turkish/Kurdish name on maps*). In Scollonian terms, such absences are significant "posts" in the landscape, indexing the presence of censorship and violence. Thus, our findings map neatly onto key LL constructs: ideological contestation [25, 27], scale and indexicality [22], and geosemiotic context [28]. Taken together, these theoretical alignments show that the novel does not simply illustrate existing LL concepts but also stretches them toward narrative, mnemonic, and affective dimensions that are less visible in conventional sign-based research.



Extending Linguistic Landscape Beyond Public Signage

Traditional LL research tends to focus on visible signs in public space, such as billboards, graffiti, and street signs. *Die Sommer* challenges this emphasis by treating literary narrative itself as a LL. The novel contains almost no literal shop-signs or billboards; instead, language appears in conversation, private storytelling, and symbols. This implies a major extension of LL theory: language can inhabit space symbolically, narratively, or silently, while also being stratified through visual styling and unequal symbolic capital across languages [29, 30]. For instance, the silence of the word "Kurdistan" on any official map (told to Leyla as "not existing" to authorities) is a textual gap that speaks loudly: it signposts the state's erasure of that identity. Whereas a photographer of an actual town would find no sign reading "Kurdistan," the novel foregrounds this absence as meaningful. This extends LL's traditional remit: it treats omissions and memories as part of the landscape. In effect, *Die Sommer* presents a form of "negative-space" LL, in which ideological absence becomes meaningful in itself, much as scholars have noted in studies of erased minority histories.

Similarly, the novel's focus on home life (*songs on a cassette, clothes, gardens*) suggests that LL extends into the private sphere. Shohamy [25] stresses that power shapes both public and domestic language use; our results echo this but emphasize how the LL in literature is not confined to public artifice. The grandparents' house and songs operate like bottom-up signs or flags: the peacock symbols and Kurdish music are vernacular signifiers that fill the void left by banned signage. In sum, *Die Sommer* pushes LL theory to consider "signs" beyond signs – including narrative texts, rituals, and memories as legitimate semiotic carriers of language in space. This resonates with recent calls to broaden LL analysis to multimodal and affective dimensions [31], situating Othmann's fiction as a vivid case of such an expanded, literary landscape. This extension is especially important for texts emerging from marginalized or conflict-affected contexts, where linguistic presence may survive more powerfully in memory, story, and domestic materiality than in public inscription.

Memory and Silence as Semiotic Practices

A novel can dramatize how memory itself becomes a sign. In *Die Sommer*, characters repeatedly name ruined villages, lost relatives, and banned symbols. These acts of remembrance function like speech acts in a landscape of absence: invoking "1915–1916" or whispering mythic place-names keeps them alive in defiance of official silence. Memory here is a form of "counter-signage." As Scollon & Scollon [28] reminds us, discourse includes "our actions in the material world," which may mean physical writing or figurative remembering. The grandfather's muttered list of Armenian villages (*Kurukanah, Maribe, Kars...*) is a landscape sketched on the mind rather than on paper. The theoretical implication is that LLs encompass trans-sensory signifiers: even what is unspoken (*the Armenian Genocide, the devil's name, the Kurdish land*) carries weight. This idea extends LL scholarship by highlighting silence and nostalgia as sites of meaning. Just as the absence of English on a sign in Jerusalem might index conflict, in *Die Sommer* the narrative's silences index trauma and resistance.

Furthermore, cultural memory tangibly shapes space. For example, Kurdish revolutionary songs, especially those associated with Şivan Perwer, create an imagined geography in Leyla's mind, listing city names as if they were local roads. This aligns with Blommaert's [22] view of globalization: migrant networks use language media to generate hyper-local meanings. In LL terms, Şivan's lyrics paste patches of Kurdish landscape onto German roads and ceilings. Thus, the novel confirms that signification extends beyond immediate context; a song's lyrics index a homeland across borders (an illustration of Blommaert's polycentricity).

Methodological Reflections

Using a literary text as LL data raises distinctive methodological issues. A possible objection is that narrative is only a representation of a LL, not a genuine LL in the empirical sense. This objection is valid if LL is understood narrowly as the documentation of visible language in public space. However, the present study does not claim that *Die Sommer* provides field-recorded LL data. Instead, it argues that



the novel constructs a literary or discursive LL by representing how languages, place names, silences, and memories organize space and identity within the narrative world. The value of this approach lies in its ability to access dimensions of LL that are often absent from sign-based analysis, especially affective memory, erased toponyms, prohibited names, and the emotional experience of linguistic marginalization. This methodological distinction affects the scope of validity and generalizability. However, Othmann's story is grounded in the actual Yazidi/Kurdish experience, and explicit details (like the ban on Kurdish names) are historically documented. We mitigate subjectivity by cross-referencing known facts (e.g., the 1938 Dersim renamings, the ban on *şal û şapik*) mentioned in the novel with historical sources. In this sense, the novel offers a culturally grounded narrative testimony that can be read alongside, rather than in place of, ethnographic and historical evidence.

Triangulation is another consideration. Traditional LL might combine sign photos with interviews; here, we have instead a single narrative corpus. To compensate, one could incorporate additional texts (other refugee memoirs, folk tales) or visual materials from Kurdistan/Syria for future work. For the purposes of this study, the novel is approached as an interpretive narrative corpus rather than as a substitute for ethnographic participant observation. This limits generalizability but offers depth. Crucially, the literary form allows us to probe unseen aspects of LL: the emotional valence of language loss, and the process of forgetting, are conveyed via prose in ways that pure signage cannot capture.

Finally, there is an ethical dimension: dealing with sensitive content (*genocide, forced assimilation*) demands care. While LL research often preserves anonymity, the novel personalizes trauma. We respect this by presenting quotations and interpretations in context and by avoiding voyeuristic readings. In a broader methodological sense, incorporating literature into LL study encourages reflexivity: it reminds us that landscapes are also mental and imaginative. Researchers should thus expand their toolkits to include narrative analysis and historiography when examining language space, especially for marginalized groups.

Theoretical Contributions

Our study contributes several refinements to LL theory. First, it foregrounds memory as a semiotic system. We argue that memory-work (remembering place-names, folk songs, repressed histories) functions similarly to physical signage: it marks space with identity. This suggests extending the notion of LL to include "landscapes of memory," where signifiers are intangible yet carry communal meaning. Scholars like Ben-Rafael et al. [32] noted LL reflects identities; here, we show identity itself can create a private landscape through recollection.

Second, we show that silence is signifying. LLs research often examines visible signs, but our data underscore that absent or forbidden signs (*blank spaces, unuttered words*) are equally communicative. The grandfather's refrain "we do not even speak the Evil name" and the empty village sign *Name des Dorfes* ('name of the village') are deliberate non-texts that nonetheless broadcast ideology (*fear, reverence, erasure*). This aligns with recent theoretical work on semiotic withholding, including research on language taboo and the sensory dimensions of LL, and suggests that LL studies should systematically account for silences and blackouts as part of the archive.

Third, the research highlights everyday material culture as part of LL. While Shohamy [27] mentions the public-private divide, our findings indicate that homes, clothing, and local architecture carry the linguistic imprint. For instance, the traditional *şal û şapik* clothing worn by men functions like a moving sign of Kurdish identity. Similarly, the grandmother's shrine items (*Lalish water, olive branch*) inscribe religious-linguistic meaning into a domestic corner. This confirms Scollon's insight that "discourse" includes non-verbal actions and extends LL into material semiotics. It suggests a broader theoretical frame: LL as multimodal landscape, where language may be written, spoken, or embodied in objects and experienced through placemaking and material-emotional communication [33, 34].

Future Research Directions

Based on these conclusions, we propose several avenues for further inquiry:



a. **Comparative Literary LL:** Analyze other novels or oral histories from linguistically marginalized communities (e.g., *Kurdish diaspora*, *Irish Gaelic narratives*, *Indigenous literatures*) using the LL framework. This could test whether patterns of memory-signage and narrative erasure recur cross-culturally, and might refine "literary LL" as a genre.

b. **Integrating Visual and Textual Data:** Combine literary analysis with empirical fieldwork. For example, researchers could photograph current LL in Kurdish regions and compare them to the novel's descriptions. This mixed-method approach would triangulate fiction with reality, exploring how *Die Sommer*'s memories align with present-day signage.

c. **Methodological Innovation:** Future work may develop clearer guidelines for LL studies using non-traditional data such as literature, songs, and online narratives. This may include coding schemes for thematic signification or GIS-based mapping of narrative references.

d. **LL and mobility:** Future research may also investigate how LL practices change when places become diasporic. Leyla's Germany experiences (*lack of Kurdish texts*, *invisibility of homeland on post-cards*) point to an exilic landscape.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Ronya Othmann's *Die Sommer* can be read as a literary LL, in which language, memory, silence, and material culture shape the production of space. The analysis demonstrates that the novel relies not only on visible signs but also on contested place-names, erased toponyms, unspoken identities, and remembered homelands to construct an ideologically charged landscape. In this way, *Die Sommer* reveals how Kurdish and Yazidi identities persist symbolically even when excluded from official public representation. The study contributes to LL scholarship by demonstrating that literature can illuminate dimensions of language-in-space that are difficult to capture through sign-based analysis alone. At the same time, it highlights the importance of memory and narrative as forms of resistance to erasure. Future research may further develop the concept of literary LL by applying it to other minority, diasporic, or conflict-related texts.

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