Chinatown transformed: Ideology, power, and resources in narrative place-making

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Abstract

Combining textual, visual, and ethnographic approaches to discourse, this article examines a variety of resources employed in the narrative construction of Washington, DC's Chinatown in a billboard advertisement that de-ethnicizes the neighborhood. Analysis of the linguistic resources of narrative structure, comparative reference, and lexical cohesion reveals how the gentrification of Chinatown is constructed as a positive transformation driven by a corporation. Further, the visual juxtaposition of text with photos and graphics appropriates the community voice and infuses it with corporate identity. This ideological multimodal construction of the transformation of Chinatown is finally actualized in its durable material form and strategic spatial emplacement. Incorporating ethnographic observation and an interview, this article illustrates how the symbolic power of narrative in place-making is interdependent on the economic power of its producer to propagate ideological discourse in the material world.

1. Introduction

Research on narrative and place has shown that not only can place evoke and enrich stories (e.g. Basso, 1988; Johnstone, 1990; Myers, 2006), stories can in turn create place (e.g. Finnegan, 1998; Johnstone, 1990; Schiffrin, 2009). From the latter social constructionist viewpoint, narrative about place presents us with rich material for analyzing how the politics of place-making comes into play through language and discourse (Modan,

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2002, 2007). However, although researchers often acknowledge the multiplicity of narratives about place, only a few have further investigated how some narratives emerge as more dominant discourse than others in shaping the identity of a place (e.g. Bruner and Gorfain, 1984; Flowerdew, 2004; Jensen, 2007).

Adopting an ethnographic approach to narrative as social practice (e.g. Bauman, 1986; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008; Scollon and Scollon, 1981), this article suggests that, to understand the ideology and power in the narrative construction of place, we need to go beyond the narrative text and ask who tells the story using what resources and in which contexts. Specifically, I examine a billboard advertisement which appeared in various locations across Washington DC's Chinatown. As part of a campaign to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Verizon Center, a multi-purpose arena located in the center of Chinatown, this advertisement features a prominent Chinese-American restaurant owner and his daughter telling the story of the neighborhood's recent transformation.

After providing an overview of issues pertaining to the role of language in the current urban revitalization process in Washington DC's Chinatown, I summarize previous studies on narrative and place and discuss how this line of inquiry can be extended for critical analysis. Then, I present the advertisement under analysis. Beginning with the question of how the story represents Chinatown, I increasingly draw on ethnographic observation and visual analysis to examine the lamination of narrative voices and the shifting of participant structure across contexts. Finally, I turn to discuss the importance of the material form and spatial locations of the advertisement in making this particular narrative of Chinatown a prevalent ideological construction. I argue that the economic power of the corporation enables it to exercise its symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) to construct itself as a benefactor to the community in the process of gentrifying the neighborhood.

2. Contested landscape of Washington, DC's Chinatown

Language is of central concern in the preservation and revitalization process of the Chinatown in Washington, DC. A small downtown neighborhood with Chinese-owned businesses mostly concentrated on one block of H Street, its size has been continuously shrinking over the past 20 years, as the residential pattern of Chinese immigrants shifts to the suburbs and as more American national and transnational chains move into this downtown neighborhood. Facing the challenge of Chinatown disappearing completely, the Chinatown Steering Committee, formed in 1986 by a group of local Chinese-American entrepreneurs, has devised and implemented a policy in conjunction with the Office of Planning of the district government to mandate that all stores in the officially designated Chinatown area carry Chinese-English signs on their storefronts. The result of this policy is a unique linguistic landscape not observed in other major North American Chinatowns: Chinese characters are inscribed not only on Chinese restaurants but are also seen on the outside of American businesses such as Starbucks and AT&T.

This phenomenon has generated much discussion in the local press (e.g. Gillette, 2003; Moore, 2005) as well as sociological (Pang and Rath, 2007) and sociolinguistic research (Leeman and Modan, 2008, 2009; Lou, 2007, 2009). While Chinese-American entrepreneurs and city planners are usually held responsible for devising and implementing the

municipal regulations which result in this symbolic commodification of urban space, a closer, geosemiotic analysis of the shop signs (Lou, 2007) and a larger multidimensional study of the neighborhood's linguistic landscape (Lou, 2009) reveal a much more complicated picture.

In particular, large American corporations located in the area do not simply comply with the regulations, but they actively seek to make their corporate identity a visible imprint on Chinatown's landscape. In addition to semiotic strategies such as minimizing the visual prominence of Chinese characters and maintaining corporate chromatic schemes in shop signs, corporations also employ other forms of discourse to legitimize their presence in Chinatown and to build a positive public image in relation to the neighborhood. Therefore, in this article, I shift the focus away from shop signs and turn to a billboard advertisement to examine the ideology and power in discursive place-making.

3. Narrative and place: Moving towards multimodal and ethnographic analysis

Place is perhaps one of the earliest variables that has been correlated with language use. The subject of traditional dialectology, the predecessor of modern sociolinguistics, was essentially the correlation between linguistic features and geographic areas (Milroy and Gordon, 2003). As Johnstone (2004) points out, 'in most work in dialectology and variationist sociolinguistics, place has been implicitly conceived of in objective and physical terms' (p. 65). Theoretical developments in cultural and humanist geography (e.g. Cresswell, 2004; Tuan, 1977), particularly the distinction between space and place, have motivated the reconceptualization of the relationship between language and place in sociolinguistics. Johnstone (2004) explains:

> A space becomes a place through humans' interaction with it, both through physical manipulation, via such activities as agriculture, architecture, and landscape, and symbolically, via such activities as remembering, 'formulating' (Schegloff 1972), depicting, and narrating. (p. 68)

It is therefore not surprising to find narrative a frequently studied form of language in connection with this experiential view of place, for narrative, like place, is also a phenomenological concept, a chief means through which humans recapitulate, organize, and construct experiences, and thereby learn about the world around us (Berger, 1997; Labov, 1972; Ochs, 1997; Toolan, 2001). As Bruner (1984) remarks, 'Names may construct the landscape but stories make the site resonate with history and experience' (p. 5).

Narrative and place interact in complex ways. First, place can evoke narratives. In Myers's analysis of focus group discussions (2006), the seemingly straightforward question, 'Where are you from?' frequently invites personal stories which either align the speakers with or distance them from their places of origin. In a more extreme case, Basso (1988) notes that, among the Western Apache, place names not only trigger narratives but also encapsulate them. Second, place can be drawn on as a linguistic resource in storytelling. Johnstone (1990) observes that extrathematic details such as precise references to geographic locations, which are not essential for the unfolding of stories, nevertheless give the personal narratives of Fort Wayne residents a 'local color' (p. 108).

While researchers mainly focus on personal narratives in illuminating how place can evoke and enrich stories, they often turn to public discourse for illustrations of how narratives also construct place. For example, Johnstone (1990) examined a corpus of local newspaper stories about the flood in Fort Wayne in 1982 and found that the city was increasingly portrayed as an animate heroic figure, who 'saved itself' (pp. 109–125). In Finnegan's study of Milton Keynes (1998), she has observed that urban planning documents portray this new city in southern-central England as organically growing into an ideal place for people to live and work, in stark contrast to the story circulated in the mass media, which represents the city as a 'concrete jungle', 'an artificial and unnatural settlement' (p. 41). It is in these public stories that the capacity of narrative in ideological construction of place becomes most evident and powerful.

While both Finnegan (1998) and Johnstone (1990) acknowledge this multiplicity of stories about cities, they seem hesitant to further explore the inequality among these different narrative representations. Perhaps because of their focus on personal narratives, both emphasize the creative agency of individuals in storytelling, as Finnegan (1998) reflects towards the end of her study:

> These differing personal narratives are equally part of the whole, intertwining and co-existing with the other stories to formulate the images and experiences of urban life. To explore only certain types of tales or to focus primarily on putatively 'opposed' categories (those of 'actors' as against 'theorists', perhaps, or ruling-class as against proletarian stories, resistant and struggling against 'dominant' tales) is tacitly to ignore the reality of other voices and the complex plurality of the co-existent tellings. (p. 166)

It seems that what Finnegan describes is a kind of *ideological complex* (Hodge and Kress, 1988), a system of co-existing yet contradictory beliefs (Jones, 1997). It is true enough, in its broader definition, ideology is not an exclusive property of the ruling or dominant class (Blommaert, 2005; van Dijk, 1998). Rather, it is a ubiquitous, observable phenomenon in any social group. However, these different ideologies are only potentially equal; they are not actually so if we consider the social conditions for discourse production, or the *logonomic rules* that articulate ideology (Hodge and Kress, 1988). In fact, many narrative scholars have observed that, endowed by its innate power to create reality, narrative is often a form of 'political action' (Toolan, 2001). In the words of Bruner and Gorfain (1984), 'Occasionally, a story becomes so prominent in the consciousness of an entire society that its recurrent tellings not only define and empower storytellers but also help to constitute and reshape the society' (p. 56). While all stories shape sense of place, some of them are louder than others in 'public ways of place-making', in which 'power, in the sense favored by social theorists, come prominently and fully into play' (Tuan, 1991: 686). Carrying this argument even further, Jensen (2007) argues that narrative not only shapes the meaning of place but also legitimizes urban intervention and the material reconstruction of place.

Thus, in order to fully understand how narratives of place are linked with ideology and power, I approach them from the perspective of critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 1989, 1995, 2003; van Dijk, 1993) as well as its recent critiques and extensions (Blommaert, 2005; Scollon, 2001), with the emphasis on non-linguistic resources.

Traditionally, critical discourse analysts seek to locate power and ideology in text by examining linguistic features such as presupposition, nominalization, and passivization. Adding to this repertoire, Blommaert (2005) and Scollon (2001) suggest that, in order to link text to power more directly, researchers should also pay attention to non-linguistic *resources* (in Blommaert's term) or *mediational means* (in Scollon's term) employed in discursive practices. As Hymes (1996 [1973]) argues, inequality does not derive from the linguistic system itself, but lies in the actual ways resources are combined in producing language.

One important resource for building narrative that deserves more analytical attention is its multimodality. As Ochs (1997) points out and Haviland (2008) emphasizes again, even in the spoken narratives that serve as the data for most sociolinguistic analyses, stories are always told with the accompaniment of gestures and facial expressions. It is only in the transcription that narratives are reduced to text alone. Further, stories do not have to be told through words. For example, narrative can also unfold through visual vectors of action in images (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The economic cost associated with many multimodal resources is another potential cause for inequality between discourses. For example, an ordinary resident of a city may not be able to afford the resources required to advertise their personal narrative of a place in the way that a corporation can.

The second kind of resource pertinent to the analysis of inequality in narrative discourse is the material means of its presentation (Hymes, 1996 [1973]; Scollon and Scollon, 2003). Materiality is especially relevant for the analysis of written narratives, as whether a narrative is printed on the glossy pages of an international fashion magazine or handwritten on manually bound pages of a personal zine (Stockburger, 2006) is an integral part of how a story is told and read.

Besides multimodal and material resources, the complexity of the production format (Goffman, 1981) in public narratives of place also highlights asymmetrical social relationships. A public narrative often involves more than one person in its production. For example, Johnstone (1990) notes that the newspaper stories revolving around the flood in Fort Wayne are 'most immediately the work of fourteen reporters and a number of editorialists and columnists' (p. 188). Interestingly, drawing on Goffman's production format, Johnstone concludes that although different individuals penned the news articles, the stories are communal as they share the same morale and thus the same principal and that the process of its construction is a kind of collective storytelling. While these different production formats may converge into a single voice of the community as in Johnstone's study, they may also diverge into competing and asymmetrical voices, as often observed by researchers taking an ethnographic approach to production formats (e.g. Haviland, 2008; Irvine, 1996; Scollon, 1998).

Finally, the spatial context of storytelling is especially important for understanding the power and ideology embodied in narratives about place. As Leech suggests, 'a story must be attached to a place in order to acquire value as a ''charter for social action or moral injunction'' ' (cited in Johnstone, 1990: 120). Similarly, Gaudio (2003) observes *coffeetalk* as a new kind of conversational practice that emerges from the conflation of the physical space of coffee shops and the socio-cultural process of global capitalism. Extending this discussion to linguistic meaning in general, Scollon and Scollon (2003) argue it is only when language is concretely grounded in place that its meaning potential

becomes actualized. Taking their argument a step further, I would like to suggest in this article that the potential ideological meaning of a narrative only becomes effective when it is concretely located.

In summary, narratives about place provide us with rich materials for examining ideology and power in discursive place-making. However, in order to understand how certain narratives prevail, we need to move beyond the text of the narrative and look at it as *a discursive practice enacted by a variety of social actors employing a multitude of semiotic and material resources in concrete settings*. This practice-oriented view of narrative allows the analysts to discern not only the ideology in a particular discursive construction of place, but also the power that actualizes such construction. To reach this objective, a combination of methods is required, including structural and textual analysis of the narrative text, multimodal analysis of non-linguistic means, and ethnographic study of the process of narrative production and locations of emplacement.

4. Data and methods

The narrative examined in this article is from a billboard advertisement placed in various locations across Washington, DC Chinatown, featuring a prominent Chinese-American restaurant owner and his daughter celebrating the Verizon Center's 10th anniversary. Figure 1 presents the advertisement; for readability, Figure 2 reproduces the narrative text, preserving font style, choice of bolding, and line breaks.
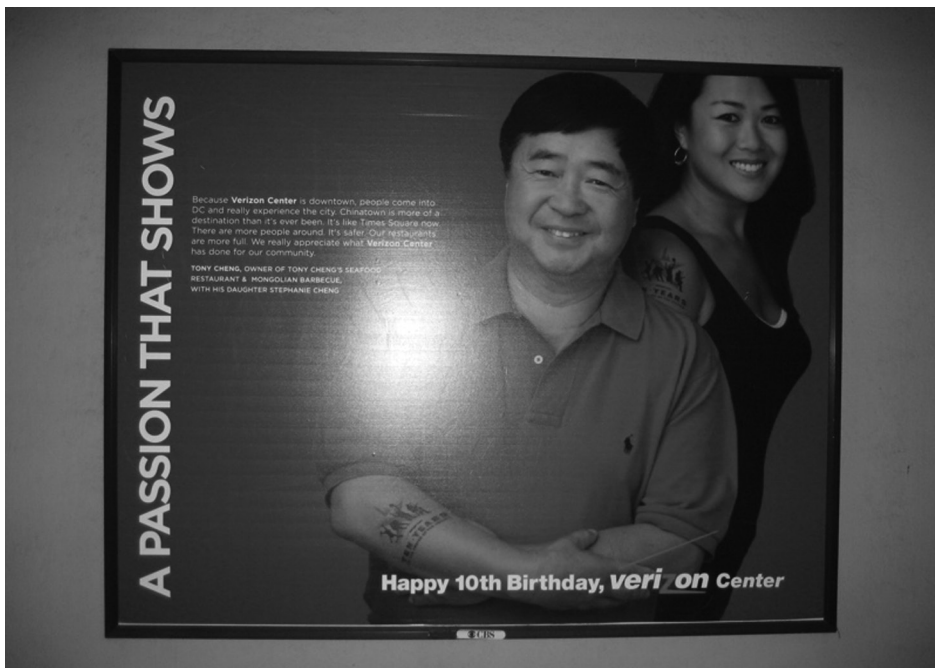

Figure 1. The billboard advertisement inside Gallery Place, Chinatown Metro Station (photo taken on 2 October 2007)
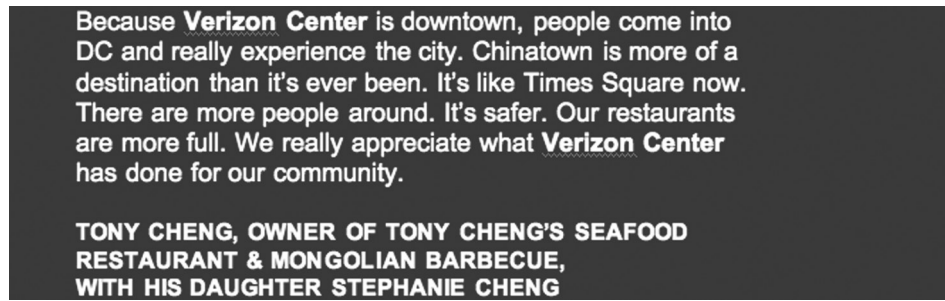
> Because **Verizon Center** is downtown, people come into DC and really experience the city. Chinatown is more of a destination than it's ever been. It's like Times Square now. There are more people around. It's safer. Our restaurants are more full. We really appreciate what **Verizon Center** has done for our community.
>
> **TONY CHENG, OWNER OF TONY CHENG'S SEAFOOD RESTAURANT & MONGOLIAN BARBECUE, WITH HIS DAUGHTER STEPHANIE CHENG**

Figure 2. Narrative text in the advertisement

Figure 3. Location of the Verizon Center in relation to Chinatown on Google Satellite Map

The Verizon Center is a 20,000 seat multifunctional arena 'located in the heart of Chinatown' in downtown Washington, DC (Verizon Center, 2008; also see map[1] in Figure 3), owned and operated by the Washington Sports and Entertainment, LP. Until 5 March 2006, this arena was named MCI Center. After Verizon Communications closed their $6.7 billion acquisition of MCI Communications in January 2006, the name change took place swiftly on all signs at the arena. Although the MCI Center had been the

arena's name for more than eight years since its opening in 1997 and is still often used by many long-time residents and office workers in the area, this history is elided in the advertisement.

Launched on 27 September 2007, this year-long campaign began with a project named 'station domination', in which the Gallery Place–Chinatown Metro Station, the closest metro station to the arena, was flooded with advertising for two months (Verizon Center, 2007). The campaign included 14 advertisements,[2] each of which portrayed one or two individuals with a block of text next to their photos. The people featured in these advertisements included not only local political figures and celebrities, for example, Washington, DC Mayor Adrian Fenty and Washington Mystic's All Star player Alana Beard, but also many 'friends of the neighborhood' (Verizon Center, 2007), for example, farmer's market organizers, a bartender, a chef, the Spy Museum director, and even a costumed Shakespeare. Each of them wears a tattoo of the Verizon Center's 10th Anniversary logo. During the two months leading to the anniversary on 2 December 2007, these advertisements were lined up on both sides of the corridors connecting the underground metro turnstiles and the street-level entrances and occupied all available advertising space inside the station. In addition, the campaign appeared outside the Verizon Center in the form of banners attached to street lampposts. While many of the advertisements in the campaign extol the role of the Verizon Center as a catalyst in downtown revitalization, the featured advertisement in Figure 1 is particularly interesting, because it is the only advertisement that refers specifically to the recent changes in Chinatown.

Throughout the article, the textual and visual analyses of the narrative are informed by ethnographic information gathered during 18 months of participant observation in the neighborhood and a recorded interview with Stephanie Cheng, one of the participants portrayed in the featured advertisement. Aiming to demonstrate how an ethnographic and multimodal approach to narrative helps us understand the ideological construction of place in public discourse, I move the analytical focus gradually away from the verbal text of the narrative, to its visual composition, and finally to its spatial context. However, it is important to note that these three layers of meaning interact with each other and together form a gestalt in the eyes of an ordinary viewer.

5. Analysis

5.1. What is the story? – The transformation of Chinatown into a destination

The text in this advertisement tells the story of how Washington, DC Chinatown has been transformed by Verizon Center into a popular tourist destination. However, its structure does not conform entirely to the canonical narrative template as outlined by Labov (1972). It begins with a typical *orientation* and closes with an *evaluation*, but as we will see in more detail in the following analysis, the sense of temporal progress in Chinatown is conveyed, not through a sequence of past events, but through a series of comparatives in the body of the story. To show its structure more clearly, the text is re-arranged and numbered in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of the narrative text

Orientation	1. **Because Verizon Center is downtown, people come into DC and really experience the city.**
Development	2. Chinatown is **more of a destination** that it's ever been.
	3. It's **like** Times Square now.
	4. There are **more people** around.
	5. It's **safer**.
	6. Our restaurants are **more full**.
Evaluation	7. We really appreciate what Verizon Center has done for our community.

The *Orientation* asserts that Verizon Center is the cause for people to come to downtown Washington, DC. Despite the lack of explicit connectives between Sentence 1 and Sentences 2–6, causality is implied in their sequential ordering (Johnstone, 1990). In this way, Verizon Center becomes not only the reason for people to come to downtown Washington, DC, but also the cause for the improvement of Chinatown as reported in the *Development*.

At the beginning of the narrative, Sentence 1 also presents this geographic location of Verizon Center as a familiar fact, which sets the scene for the following development of the story, but which in itself does not require further explanation (Labov, 2006). However, the non-reportability of this clause is questionable. First of all, the opening of this multifunctional sports arena in 1997 was often pointed to as the first step in the expanding urban development project and the trigger of high real estate price in the area (Leeman and Modan, 2008; Pang and Rath, 2007), which subsequently made Chinatown increasingly unaffordable or unprofitable for Chinese businesses to stay. Second, although the sentence presupposes the constant existence of the Verizon Center by using the verb 'is' instead of a change-of-state verb such as 'opened', the name of the arena changed only in 2006, and it is still referred to by many people that I encountered during fieldwork as MCI Center. Presented as the theme of the orientation clause, however, the presence of Verizon Center in downtown Washington, DC is reported as a commonly accepted fact.

Interestingly, the choice of where to begin the story in this case is not a cognitive 'preconstruction' process on the part of the depicted narrators as is typically the case in the analysis of oral narratives of personal experience (Labov, 2006). Rather, the decision lies in the hands of the corporate publicists, who chose the onset of the quote from an informal 15-minute interview with Tony and Stephanie Cheng before they had their photo taken. Thus, the structure of the original narrative became a manipulatable linguistic resource during this 'post-construction' stage.

Skipping the *Development* of the story momentarily, I will first turn to the *Evaluation* of the narrative. In Sentence 7, the verb 'appreciate' carries *positive evaluative assumption* (Fairclough, 2003) about what happened, which is rather abstractly summarized in the nominal subordinate clause – 'what Verizon Center has done for our community'. While in the *Orientation*, Verizon Center is implied to be the cause of changes, it is grammatically cast as the *agent* of transformation by the end of the text. In contrast, 'our

community', which, as we will see in the following analysis of pronominal references, is a highly problematic term, is cast as the *beneficiary*.

Returning to the development of the narrative, we find that Chinatown's progress is communicated through the use of comparatives, as highlighted in Sentences 2 to 6 in Table 1. Four of the comparatives are examples of *particular comparison* (Halliday and Hasan, 1976), which 'expresses comparability between things in respect of a particular property' (p. 80). The two things that are being compared here are in fact the same place, albeit at different points in time. In Sentence 2, the 'it' is an anaphoric reference to Chinatown, and the comparative structure 'more . . . than' cataphorically establishes 'it's ever been' as the referent of comparison in terms of its characteristic of being a 'destination'. With this line of chronological comparison established in Sentence 2, even though the comparative referents in Sentences 4–6 are elided, it is reasonable to assume that it is still the present and the past of Chinatown that are being compared. In Sentence 6, although the subject shifts from 'Chinatown' to 'our restaurants', it is natural to assume that the missing comparative referent in Clause 6 is more likely to be 'our restaurants in the past' rather than 'their restaurants'. Thus, if we were to reconstruct the elided referent, the sentence would read, 'Our restaurants are more full [than before].' In short, although these clauses are not temporally ordered, the comparisons give the text a narrative quality, as they '*depict a temporal transition from one state of affairs to another*' (Ochs, 1997: 189, original emphasis).

It is noticeable from the above analysis that many comparative referents are elided, 'carried over by presuppositions' (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 82). Presupposition, broadly defined as 'a speaker's backgrounding, in their utterance, of various kinds of assumptions that are nevertheless retrievable from that utterance' (Toolan, 2001: 227), is an important resource in building ideological discourse, 'for ideologies are generally implicit assumptions' (Fairclough, 1995: 5). These comparisons analyzed above not only convey a sense of progress but also function as 'presupposition-triggers' (Levinson, 1983). That is, they implicitly avoid a negative representation of Chinatown's less than desirable history. Saying 'Chinatown is more of a destination than it's ever been' presupposes that Chinatown was a destination before but just less so in degree. Similarly, 'it's safer' presupposes it was less safe instead of 'it was dangerous'. In contrast, stories that I heard about Chinatown's past during interviews and observations voice the safety concerns of the area in the past more straightforwardly. A current resident of a newly-built condominium in Chinatown remembered on her first visit to the area five years ago, she was afraid to cross the street to the site where her current home would be located. Similarly, a teacher leading a college student group on a trip to Chinatown Community Cultural Center told them that 10 years ago people would not set foot in the area after dark. By drawing attention to the safety aspect of the neighborhood as worthy of remarks, saying 'it's safer' also tacitly alludes to the persisting safety concern of the neighborhood, but again in a relatively positive light.

In addition to the *propositional assumptions* about Chinatown's improvement, these comparatives also fundamentally make *existential assumptions* 'about what exists' (Fairclough, 2003: 55). Comparing Chinatown's present and past with respect to certain qualities such as safety presupposes that Chinatown is still a recognizable neighborhood, which has been a debatable issue as captured in titles of newspaper articles such as

'Beyond the Archway: D.C. Chinatown debate: Vanish vs. Varnish' (Moore, 2005; see also Knipp, 2005). Similarly, the statement 'our restaurants are more full' presupposes the existence of the same number of restaurants in Chinatown, whereas, in fact, at least five Chinese restaurants have closed down in the past three years, with only fewer than 10 of them still staying in business. Thus, the existential presuppositions carried by the comparatives are strategically employed to present what could be controversial and contestable claims as commonly accepted facts.

While the four *particular comparatives* discussed above describe the diachronic transformation of Chinatown as a series of positive changes, Sentence 3 in Table 1 ('It's like Times Square now.') presents a *general comparison* (Halliday and Hasan, 1976), drawing attention to the 'likeness between things' (p. 77), in this case, the likeness between Washington, DC's Chinatown and New York City's Times Square. Upon first reading, many locals found this comparison as rather exaggerated if not absurd, because these two places share little in common in terms of physical characteristics. However, the following discussion will also show that the analogy is a reference to their similar histories of gentrification rather than appearances.

Whereas Times Square includes the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue and 42nd, 41st, and 40th Streets a block to its west (Reichl, 1999), DC's Chinatown is now only less than two blocks, with Chinese restaurants and gift shops concentrated on H Street, giving rise to a joking reference to Chinatown as 'China-block' (see similar comments documented in Pang and Rath, 2007). Moreover, most buildings in DC's Chinatown are townhouse structures in contrast to the massive commercial buildings on Times Square; even newer buildings (e.g. the Gallery Place complex) in Chinatown are limited in height following the municipal building code.

Despite its seeming unnaturalness, the analogy is not uncommon. As Stephanie commented during the interview, it was a rather casual association that 'just happened':

> The first time I heard it, it was a few years ago. That was kinda, like, when, I think when they first built Gallery Place. Umm, I don't remember who I heard it from. But I heard like, oh, Chinatown's going to be like a mini Times Square kind of thing. I don't know it's a goal, necessarily. But it's naturally evolved into it. Not with our intention. You know, we don't have the intention, oh, we want it to be Times Square. But now with the addition of like the screens on the rotunda, people are kinda naturally making connections. There is also the big screen on the Verizon Center. So, not something kind of premeditated. You know what I mean. But it just happened. (Interview with Stephanie, 19 February 2008)

The ostensible haphazard circulation of this comparison as mentioned by Stephanie actually hints at its ideological nature. As the following analysis of lexical cohesion shows, Chinatown is indeed 'like Times Square now' as it has also been transformed into a tourist destination by a corporate-driven gentrification effort (see Reichl, 1999 and Smith, 2002, for in-depth discussion of the politics and economics of the redevelopment of Times Square).

This connection is first revealed in the lexical cohesive chain (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Schiffrin, 2006) that threads Chinatown and Times Square together. As shown in Figure 4, the first tie (marked by subscript 1) links 'Chinatown' with the category of

$$\text{Chinatown}_{1,2,3} \text{-destination}_1 \text{-it}_2 \text{-it}_{2,3} \text{-Times Square}_3$$

Figure 4. Cohesive chain linking DC Chinatown with Times Square

places called 'destinations' through the lexical relation of hyponymy. The second tie (subscript 2) establishes Chinatown as the anaphoric referent of the two uses of 'it', the second of which is linked with 'Times Square' through comparative reference (subscript 3). Through these chains of cohesion, 'Chinatown' and 'Times Square' are connected as both hyponyms of 'destination'. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) points out, the word 'destination' presupposes a fleeting relationship between people and place and excludes 'the possibility of anyone going native' (p. 8). Just as Times Square has been redeveloped into a place offering middle- and upper-class entertainment in its theatres (Reichl, 1999), DC's Chinatown has become a place offering middle and upper class dining in its restaurants (only some of which are Chinese).

The second underlying connection between DC's Chinatown and NYC's Times Square lies in the de-ethnicization of both places. Although the Chinatown in New York City is also a well-known tourist destination and an ethnic counterpart of the Chinatown in Washington, DC, it is intriguingly not chosen as the comparative referent. When asked about her view of the Chinatown in New York City during the interview, Stephanie commented:

> For me, it's too busy. It's too [blazy?]. It's too dirty. But you know, that, that's what people think when they see Chinatown. You know, it's like, all Chinese people. It's like street vendors, like uh, street-level shops, you know, selling everything, fruit, vegetable, and a lot of little Chinese restaurants. (Interview with Stephanie, 19 February 2008)

Such a view does not present the ethnic identity of Chinatown in a positive light, which explains the absence of reference to NYC's Chinatown in the text of the advertisement. Similarly, the pro-growth discourse of Times Square's redevelopment in the 1980s had one of its roots in the fear of its racial diversity, constructed in terms of danger and decline on the surface (Reichl, 1999). As Basso (1988) remarks, 'narratives and truths alike can be swiftly "activated," foregrounded, and brought into focused awareness through the use of placenames alone' (p. 121). Thus, in this narrative, the absence of reference to New York City's Chinatown backgrounds the ethnic identity of DC's Chinatown, while the evocation of 'Times Square' aligns DC's Chinatown with a class of places called 'destinations' for middle and upper class consumption.

To recapitulate, using the linguistic resources of narrative structure, comparative reference, presupposition, and lexical cohesion, the advertisement constructs a tale of Verizon Center transforming Chinatown into a de-ethnicized tourist destination. The above analysis has in various places alluded to the complex production format of the narrative text. In the next section, I will examine the lamination of narrative voices in more detail, thereby revealing the third connection between DC's Chinatown and NYC's Times Square, that is, the role of corporations in urban gentrification.

5.2. Who tells the story? – The fusion of corporate and community voices

Enlarging the investigating lens for a broader view of the advertisement as a whole (Figure 5), we see that the two photographically represented characters, Tony and Stephanie, look at the viewer with a direct gaze, creating a 'visual form of direct address' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Further, only the top halves of their bodies are represented here, as if in a close social distance with the viewer. The placement of the quote at the level of their mouths is reminiscent of a speech bubble. Altogether, the visual composition of the advertisement depicts Tony and Stephanie as the *animator* (Goffman, 1981) of the story, engaging the viewer directly with their words. The two lines in all capitalization below the block quote function similarly to bylines of newspaper articles, positioning Tony and Stephanie as the *authors*, who 'have selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded' (Goffman, 1981: 144), in addition to identifying them as owners of a local restaurant – *Tony Cheng's Seafood Restaurant and Mongolian Barbecue*, located in Chinatown.

Bringing the focus back to the text, especially to the three occurrences of first-person plural pronouns (underlined in Figure 6), we find that Tony and Stephanie are not only speaking as restaurant owners themselves but also on behalf of the Chinatown community, which is, however, left vaguely defined.

Figure 5. Tony and Stephanie as *animator*

> Because **Verizon Center** is downtown, people come into
> DC and really experience the city. Chinatown is more of a
> destination than it's ever been. It's like Times Square now.
> There are more people around. It's safer. <u>Our</u> restaurants
> are more full. <u>We</u> really appreciate what **Verizon Center**
> has done for <u>our</u> community.

Figure 6. First-person plural pronouns in the text

The first plural possessive pronoun in 'our restaurants' seems to refer to other restaurant owners (especially Chinese) in Chinatown, because Tony and Stephanie's family currently owns only one restaurant. The referent of 'we' is more ambiguous. It could be Tony and Stephanie speaking for themselves. According to Stephanie, the influx of visitors brought into Chinatown by Verizon Center has been a great boost to their restaurant's business, and for this reason, they have always been strong supporters of Verizon Center. However, the scope of reference expands to the entire 'community' in the last use of 'our'. Hence, in the last two sentences of the narrative, the 'community' in Chinatown has gradually become the *principal*, 'someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say' (Goffman, 1981: 144).

However, it is questionable how much their appreciative opinion of Verizon Center is shared among the 'community' in Chinatown. First, I have observed during fieldwork that there is no single unified sense of community in Chinatown. In fact, some residents who have remained in the area have reported a sense of loss of community. There are also competing groups with different economic and political agendas. As many people have complained to me during my fieldwork, the developer of an ongoing condominium building built on the site of three former Chinese restaurants is a Chinese-American woman. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Tony Cheng is a wealthy and successful entrepreneur, who is influential not only in Chinatown but also in the DC government. His family lives in an affluent neighborhood in suburban Virginia. Stephanie went to 'a very white' private school, in her own words, where she was one of the only two Asian students, and graduated from an Ivy League university. If the 'community' here refers to the entire ethnically Chinese population in Chinatown, most of whom live in affordable housing complexes, it is doubtful how well they can represent the community. If the 'community' here refers only to the group of restaurant owners, they are not representative of them, either. Tony Cheng's restaurant is one of the few Chinese businesses that have been able to stay in the area because the Chengs own the building and thus have benefited from the crowd brought in by Verizon Center. In contrast, at least five other Chinese restaurants and the only Chinese grocery store have closed their doors in the span of three years, either because the owners could not afford the skyrocketing rent or property taxes, or because selling their properties generated more profits than running the businesses.

Ethnographic observation not only throws the identity of the *principal* of these words into question, it also sheds light on how multiple authors of the story are strategically laminated in a single narrative voice. As already mentioned in the previous section, the

quote in the advertisement was extracted from a 15-minute interview, which the publicist of Verizon Center had conducted with Tony and Stephanie before the photo shoot in the studio.

> They interviewed us right before the photo shoot. They really kind of asked us very specific questions, like you know, what has the Verizon Center done for Chinatown. (Interview with Stephanie, 9 February 2008)

This piece of ethnographic information complicates the participation format of the narrative. During the interview in the studio, Tony and Stephanie were still the *animators* and the *authors* of the words, even though they were not talking to the future viewer of the advertisement. The printed words were part of their response to a question posed by the Verizon Center PR representative, who recorded the utterances in a notepad. In this way, the publicist was not just a passive addressee but also a co-author of this narrative. The role of the publicist as *author* became even more important, as she would later select the segment from the interview and juxtapose it in the advertisement with the photo of the interviewees.

The permeation of the corporate voice into the narrative becomes more visible when we move from the textual to the visual components of the advertisement. The chromatic identity, corporate logos, and slogans of Verizon Center are thoroughly embodied by the depicted narrators: at the request of the publicist, the father and daughter were dressed in red and black for the photo shoot to cohere with Verizon Center's corporate color scheme; the logos of the 10th Anniversary Campaign were printed on their arms as temporary tattoos; the slogan on the bottom – 'Happy 10th Birthday, Verizon Center!' – is addressed to the personified corporation, again in the semiotically orchestrated voice of the community; finally, the advertisement is visually framed by the vertical slogan on the left – 'a passion that shows'.[3]

By combining ethnographic information with a close examination of the visual resources in the advertisement, we are able to discern the process of 'multimodal synchronization' (Sclafani, 2005), during which the multiple voices of the narrative are linguistically and visually synchronized as one voice. Table 2 summarizes how this fusion of corporate and community voices has been accomplished during the shift from the interview to the narrative in the advertisement.

Table 2. Contrasting participation frameworks in the advertisement and the interview

Discourses	Animator	Author	Principal	Addressee
The interview with Verizon Center PR	Tony & Stephanie	Tony & Stephanie + Verizon Center PR	Tony & Stephanie's family business	Verizon Center PR
The advertisement	Tony & Stephanie	Tony & Stephanie + Verizon Center PR	'The Chinatown Community' + Verizon Center	Viewer of the advertisement & personified Verizon Center

The foregoing analysis has demonstrated how linguistic and visual resources have been used strategically to build an ideological account of the recent changes in Chinatown as a positive transformation by the Verizon Center Corporation. In the last analytical section, I turn to examine the material and spatial resources used in the production of this narrative.

5.3. Where is the story? Space as economic and symbolic power

Advertising as a type of discourse highlights the effects of substances and situation on linguistic and visual meaning (Cook, 1992). The durable material and strategic location of this advertisement turn the narrative about how Verizon Center has transformed Chinatown into dominant discourse.

The analysis of the visual composition above has shown how gaze and size of frame are used to represent the narrators as engaged in a direct conversation with the viewer of the advertisement, whereas the speech event in which the narrative was originally created involved the publicist of the Verizon Center as both audience and co-author. The participant framework is not the only thing that has shifted during this process. In addition to this shift in participant framework, a stretch of spoken discourse is 'resemiotized' (Iedema, 2001, 2003) into written text, resulting in an illustrative example of *secondary orality*: 'even when printed it affects the style of personal spoken communication' (Cook, 1992: 24). While producing the illusion of the immediacy of social interaction, the print advertisement also retains the message in the narrative much longer than the original interview, and entextualizes (Silverstein and Urban, 1996) it across time and space. Adding to the durability of the message, the advertisement is printed on glossy paper, framed in black metal, and firmly mounted onto the walls and pillars in the metro station and on the lampposts on the street, which further 'indexes a longer time of preparation and a greater expense in production' (Scollon and Scollon, 2003: 136). With these material resources, the ideological construction of Chinatown's transformation in this particular narrative has a longer-lasting impact.

More importantly, this story of how Verizon Center has transformed the neighborhood appears on advertisements that are strategically installed at various locations across Chinatown. As mentioned previously, the advertisement is part of a campaign that was designed to inundate the Gallery Place – Chinatown Metro Station for two months leading up to the anniversary. It was seen on the wall of the corridors between the ticketing gate and the exit (see Figure 1), on the pillars next to the escalators inside the station (Figure 7), and in lit advertisement boxes on the platform. In addition, it appeared on the high-definition scoreboard hanging from the ceiling inside the Verizon Center arena (Figure 8) and on the lampposts on Seventh Street just outside the exit of the metro station.

In the framework of *geosemiotics* (Scollon and Scollon, 2003), the metro station combines multiple kinds of semiotic spaces into one and shapes an *interaction order* (Goffman's term re-introduced in Scollon and Scollon, 2003) that is particularly conducive to the circulation of commercial discourse (see Lock, 2003 for a study of advertisements in subway stations in Hong Kong). First, the metro station is a *passage space*, 'designed to facilitate or allow passage from one space to another' (Scollon and Scollon,

Figure 7. Advertisement on the pillar inside the metro station

Figure 8. The high-definition scoreboards where the advertisement appeared before a basketball game

2003: 214). One exit of the station connects to Verizon Center, and another exit leads up to Seventh and H Streets, the center of Chinatown, where the Friendship Archway stands. Thus, the placement of the advertisement in the metro station creates an exophoric link between it and its geographic surroundings, making the narrative spatially relevant to the passers-by and visitors and influencing how they make sense of the place that they are going to see, are seeing, or have seen.

The metro station is also a kind of *exhibit-display space*, a term which refers to spaces meant 'simply to be looked at as we do other things in them or as we pass through them' (Scollon and Scollon, 2003: 170). Compared with the vast array of competing visual messages above the ground, the corridor's grey cement wall is a *site of attention* (Jones, 2005) par excellence, providing a monotonous background against which any advertisement would stand out. Hanging from the ceiling of the arena, the 14 foot high, 25 foot wide, high-definition scoreboard is an even more effective attention magnet. With four screen panels facing all directions, it can be seen from anywhere in the 20,000 seat arena. Furthermore, as *exhibit-display spaces* are 'set aside not being open for public use, or least not "use" in the sense that we may act upon them or alter them' (Scollon and Scollon, 2003: 170), the advertisement and the narrative contained in it thus acquire from their spatial location a certain kind of authority, a meta-message that the message is indisputable.

Whether mounted as a billboard on the wall of the metro station or displayed on the scoreboard inside the sports arena, the advertisement is located in the vicinity of the very physical *space* that it seeks to construct as a particular kind of *place*. Such durable and strategic emplacement entails high cost. Therefore, this analysis argues that it is through the economic power of the corporation that the linguistic and visual construction of Chinatown's transformation becomes a dominant ideology.

6. Conclusion

In his thesis on symbolic power, Bourdieu (1991) cautions us against 'a pure and purely internal analysis (semiology)' of 'ideological productions as self-sufficient, self-created totalities' (p. 169). Instead, he argues, 'symbolic power, a subordinate power, is a transformed, i.e. misrecognizable, transfigured and legitimated form of the other forms of power' (p. 170). Hence, it is the task of the researchers to describe how other kinds of capital are transformed into symbolic capital.

This article takes up this analytical challenge by incorporating ethnography into textual and visual analysis to examine a variety of resources employed in narrating the recent transformation of Washington, DC Chinatown in a billboard advertisement. It is found that a story of how Verizon Center has helped Chinatown become a more attractive destination has been constructed with the use of the linguistic resources of narrative structure, comparative reference, presupposition, and lexical cohesion. In addition to the ambiguous use of pronominal references, visual resources such as photos, colors, and visual composition are employed to create an illusive fusion of the corporate and community voices. This particular narrative about Chinatown, which has thus emerged from words and images, is then durably framed and strategically placed in spatial contexts highly relevant to the place it formulates. Thus, by considering both

linguistic and non-linguistic resources, this analysis shows how the economic power of the corporation transfers symbolic power into the narrative and makes it a dominant account.

Marchand (1998) observes that the public relations departments of giant American corporations during the first half of the 20th century evoked 'countless touching instances, in both sacred and secular lore, of powerful figures bestowing tender and beneficient attention upon frail subjects' (p. 1). At the time, corporations needed to create fictional towns and communities to 'afford them a gratifying sense of rootedness and legitimacy' (Marchard, 1998: 1). A century later, as this analysis has illustrated, this image of corporation as a powerful yet benevolent figure is increasingly built upon real cities and neighborhoods, resulting in what Klein (2000) calls 'the branding of the cityscape' (pp. 35–8).

Nowadays, the significance of such constructions is also much more than building a neighborhood-friendly public image. Corporations are in fact actively involved in and driving the material reconstruction of places around the globe (Smith, 2002), including urban neighborhoods such as the Chinatown in Washington, DC. Narrative is then, as suggested by Jensen (2007), often employed to legitimize their actions. Since critical geographers and urban planners (e.g. Jensen, 2007; Reichl, 1999; Smith, 2002) have already pointed to the power of language in the making of place (Tuan, 1991), it is hoped that this article will contribute to our understanding of the complexity of this power, with its consideration of not only linguistic but also visual and economic resources.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. The officially designated area of Chinatown in the *Chinatown Design Guideline Study* published in 1989 is slightly larger than what is included in the square here, which is based on the author's observation of the area as of July 2008.
2. Thirteen of the advertisements can be viewed and downloaded from the website http://www.verizoncenter.com/10years/. However, the advertisement under the focus of the analysis in this article is missing from this online collection.
3. A corporate press release defines the word 'passion' in the slogan as 'the individual's passion for the city dating back to 1997 when the revitalization efforts of downtown began with the opening of Verizon Center' (Verizon Center, 2007).

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