

THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF BANSKÁ BYSTRICA

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the quantitative and qualitative systematic analysis of the multimodal semiosphere pertaining to the linguistic landscape of the selected urban spaces in Banská Bystrica. It examines public urban communication in the form of text-based public signs (road signs, billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, public signs, etc.) as information units to which passers-by are exposed. This paper explores both local features and commonalities that may show the patterns of globalisation, as well as general areal and historical patterns.

Keywords: Banská Bystrica, Linguistic Landscape, multilingualism, languages, multimodal semiosphere, sign

1 Introduction

This paper is a partial research output of the project “Language in the City – Documenting the Multimodal Semiosphere of Linguistic Landscapes in Slovakia and in Comparative Perspective” (2019 – 2023), which focuses on documentation and analysis of the selected intra-urban locations, namely, the city of Banská Bystrica as the Central Slovakia midpoint. The project aims at quantitative and qualitative documentation and systematic analysis of multimodal semiospheres of the linguistic landscapes pertaining to the selected intra-urban locations in Slovakia (Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, Komárno) and their comparison with two locations in Germany (Munich, Erlangen) and two in Hungary (Komárom, Békéscsaba). Therefore, this project studies public urban communication, treating public signs created by inscription or linguistic means (road signs, billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, government buildings, etc.) as information units, which can be considered public texts and to which passers-by are exposed.¹ The project is interdisciplinary in nature; it draws from general research paradigms in cultural linguistics, sociolinguistics, multimodal linguistics, and cultural semiotics as well as other ongoing research projects related to the study of linguistic landscapes.

This paper presents partial results of the qualitative analysis of the selected intra-urban location in Banská Bystrica in terms of its characteristics and specificities, with a focus on their multilingual aspects.

2 Banská Bystrica linguistic landscape research methodology

Linguistic Landscape (Ger. *sprachliche Landschaft* / *Sprachlandschaft*) has emerged as a research area in the field of sociolinguistics at the end of the 20th century, when the written form of language in the public spaces began attracting scholarly attention. Although the first probes into this subject matter can be traced back to the 1970s, it has been conceptualised later by Landry and Bourhis (1997). Their definition of linguistic landscape laid the foundation for all the following research into this subject matter (Jurčáková – Štefaňáková, 2021, p. 18). Landry and Bourhis (1997) define linguistic landscape as „*the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, places names, commercial shop signs, and public sign on signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration*” (p. 25).

The linguistic landscape is a key concept in this interdisciplinary study; it represents a language component and embodies its social interaction. Linguistic landscape is a dynamic entity

created by institutions or individuals; yet, on the other hand, the linguistic landscape influences the people who occur within it and perceive its space (Krško, 2021, p. 62). The authors of language means used in the so called “commercial shop name signs,” i.e. written signs labelling shops, facilities, and companies interact with recipients who occur in the given location randomly or purposefully.

Originally, the term linguistic landscape used to refer specifically to the texts found on the signs placed in the exterior. Today, the texts appearing inside public buildings as well as on smaller objects are also considered relevant, e.g. restaurant menu, banknotes, postcards, business cards. Linguistic landscape involves any written signs placed in the external or internal premises of public institutions, private shops, or companies in the given geographic location (Jurčáková – Štefaňáková, 2021, p. 19). To sum up, linguistic landscape research deals with written language in public spaces from different perspectives.

For the purpose of this APVV project, linguistic landscape has been defined as a set of public signs with inscriptions such as road signs, billboards, street names, shop names etc. The data is analysed from a quantitative point of view, covering approximately 25,000 geographic units. These units (and close-ups of the elements composing these units) are annotated in the database system with respect to a wide range of parameters relevant to the study of the linguistic landscape, such as the predominant types of speakers in a given inner-city area, the language (languages) encountered and degree of multilingualism, font, sign type and size, etc., including also other characteristics such as functional aspects (e.g. language economy) or types of buildings (architecture). Another natural area of comparison is foreignness, or the use of a given language in another country. Xenolinguistic research involves a comparison of the visual database pertaining to the selected city (Banská Bystrica) with other cities in Slovakia, Germany, and Hungary (Istók – Lörinzc – Tóth, 2021, p. 33). Qualitative analysis therefore deals with the interpretation of the statistical and topographic findings, i.e. semantics, language legislation, tourism, etc.

In terms of research methodology, this paper focuses specifically on the following characteristics: linguistic landscape as public urban communication; linguistic landscape as a body of public texts perceived by the passers-by; linguistic landscape as a representation of the semiotic world with a high multimodality level (Dobřík, 2021, p. 33). The basic hypothesis can be formulated as follows: a specific intra-urban linguistic landscape represents a semiotic world (semiotic sphere) characterised by a high multimodality level and comprising both the traditional and creative aspects of public communication.

Partial research results have already been presented at a number of conferences and published in the following proceedings: *Od textu k prekladu XIV*, Part 2, Linguistic Landscape (2020), (ed. A. Ďuricová) and *Od textu k prekladu XV*, Part 2, Linguistic Landscape (2021), (eds. A. Ďuricová/J. Lauková).

An intra-urban public space in the Banská Bystrica city centre was selected for the purpose of partial empirical research presented in this paper. As the regional centre and seat of the self-governing region (Banskobystrický kraj, cf. Map 1), i.e. the administrative centre of the entire region, Banská Bystrica (roughly 80,000 inhabitants) provides the infrastructure (hospital, schools, universities, administration etc.) and services (shopping, restaurants etc.) not only for the local inhabitants, but also for the surrounding towns and villages.

¹ Cited from the APVV project documentation, Part 1.1 Basic goals and hypotheses.



Map 1. The location of Banská Bystrica in Slovakia

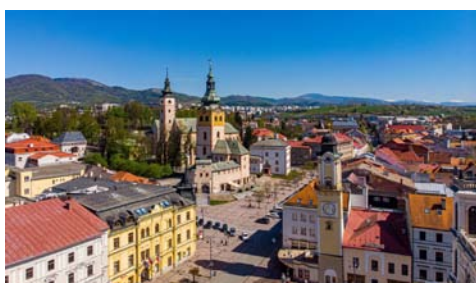
Figure 1. Banská Bystrica²

Figure 2. Banská Bystrica (centre)

Identifying a specific area within the sub-study was the first step of this research. The study area includes all streets and their segments within the selected location. The streets analysed in this paper (Štefan Moyses Square, Horná Street) are located in the very centre of the Banská Bystrica city, which increases their tourist appeal. Horná Street connects to the SNP (Slovak National Uprising) square as well as the following streets: Skutecký, Komenský, Kukučín, Železničarska, Československá armáda, and Partizánska cesta. Štefan Moyses Square is located almost in the centre of Banská Bystrica. It is named after Štefan Moyses, Slovak church official and vice president of Matica Slovenská, a major cultural institution in Slovak nation-building. Štefan Moyses Square is one of the most visited parts of the city, along with the Slovak National Uprising square. This location also comprises a marketplace (referred to as “stará tržnica by many, especially native Banská Bystrica inhabitants).



Figure 3. Štefan Moyses Square (map)



Figure 4. Štefan Moyses Square (satellite image)



Figure 5. Horná Street (map)

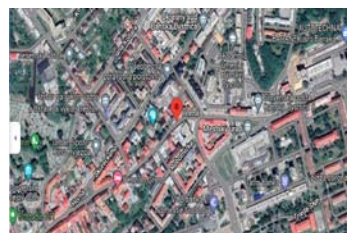


Figure 6. Horná Street (satellite image)

During the initial phase of this research, the selected intra-urban location was delineated on the map. Google Earth and Google Maps applications were used for this purpose. In the next step, the register for documenting the route length was created. This length then had to be calculated for each side of the street. Within this project, the required data collection area for partial research studies is a total of 4 km. The second step was data collection. This was done through photo documentation (with a mobile phone camera). For example, the photographic documentation of Štefan Moyses Square and its individual sequences comprises approx. 200 large-scale photographic units (building facades). Some of these were taken before the pandemic in November 2019, while the others were made during the pandemic in July 2020.

On Horná Street, about 186 large-area objects were documented, some of them repeatedly, as the location had been part of the preliminary research before the APVV project was submitted in 2018. This “double” documentation serves to explore dynamic changes in the linguistic landscape. Photographs of large-scale units (“aggregates” in the project terminology) were further edited into individual signs.

A prerequisite for the study of linguistic landscape signs requires documentation of the respective intra-urban space, as well as sorting and labelling of the photographic material. The goal of this partial research was to collect information and data as the basis for further statistical processing and a more detailed qualitative analysis of the linguistic landscape could.³ The basic

² All photographs presented in this paper are part of the database pertaining to the aforementioned APVV research project.

³ Compare Jurčáková – Štefaňáková, 2021, p. 19

unit in linguistic landscape research is *the sign*. The examples collected in the Banská Bystrica city centre will be used to explain, analyse, and interpret the basic unit of the emerging new interdisciplinary subfield of linguistic landscape linguistics. However, linguistic landscape research is not limited to the study of linguistic signs; it also focuses on signs as such. A sign can take the form of a grapheme, a logo or logonym, a word (toponym, urbanonym, chrematonym, etc.), a phrase, a syntagm, a text, an image, a road sign, etc. (Jesenská, 2021, p. 45).

The definition of a sign is rather broad. Specialised literature often refers to Backhaus' definition (2007, p. 66) of a sign, which stated: "any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame." However, this definition is rather vague and does not frame the size of the basic unit. A piece of data can consist of several signs or posters placed on a large shared space (shop window, advertising column). For the purpose of this project, a single poster, plate, or sticker is considered a sign. Co-occurrence of several signs in a shared context or space is called a cluster⁴.

Linguistic landscape research distinguishes the following types of signs:

- 1) *Public signs* (alternatively called top-down signs). This group comprises all signs pertaining to institutions. In general, top-down signs are installed by official authorities and institutions. This includes the signs placed on and in state-owned buildings, schools, nurseries, hospitals, as well as street signs, public transport signs, such as schedules, bus stop signs, etc. Even signs on public transport vehicles such as buses (e.g. final destination, direction) are considered public signs.
- 2) *Private signs* (alternatively called bottom-up signs). This group comprises the signs created and placed by individual people and businesses. It includes the signs on and in shops, posters on signposts, lamp posts, etc., and even graffiti. Some of them are considered transgressive as they are placed on objects without permission.

Bottom-up signs can be created both by individuals and legal entities. This group of linguistic landscape signs includes, for example, shop signs, fixed or mobile signs offering goods and services, advertising posters and billboards, and graffiti (Rosenbaum et al., 1977).

The aforementioned categorisation is sometimes disputed, because laws of language can affect the design of a sign. Moreover, under certain circumstances, a private sign can also be considered a public sign if its form and content are determined by legislation, such as the obligation or prohibition related to using certain language, specific signs, colour, or their combination⁵.

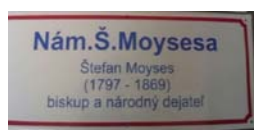


Figure 7. Street sign – Štefan Moyses Square (top-down sign)

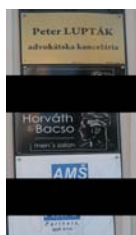


Figure 8. Fixed signs – Štefan Moyses Square (bottom-up sign)

In addition to the producer of the sign, multilingualism (or its lack thereof) is also an important criterion in this research (compare Molnárová – Lauková, 2022). Multilingualism has become more pronounced and frequently discussed since Slovakia joined the European Union. It can be considered one of the basic features of the contemporary globalised world (compare Michelčíková, 2013). The EU understands the concept of multilingualism dichotomously:

- Multilingualism is *a person's ability to use multiple foreign languages*.
- The term multilingualism also refers to the *co-existence of different languages in a shared geographic space* (in this case, the EU).

This study focuses on multilingualism in individual signs, e.g. for example in the names of shops and establishments. Depending on the content of the information conveyed by the different languages represented on a single sign, we distinguish four types of signs based on the classification of Reh (2004, pp. 8–15).

Reh (2004) classified multilingual texts as follows.

- a) Repeating multilingualism: – the sign offers identical information in two or more languages.

E.g., Abfahrt – Departure

- b) Fragmentary multilingualism: the information presented in the foreign language is partial, i.e. only fragments of the sign have been translated into a foreign language.

The part of the sign presented in a foreign language is incomplete in comparison to the part presented in the source language. E.g. German: Zugverbindung: Nürnberg-München via Ingolstadt/English: Nuremburg-Munich (in the latter case, the information that the train travels through Ingolstadt is missing).

- c) Overlapping multilingualism: part of the information mediated by the sign is identical in all languages, while another part of it varies.

The entire text can only be understood with a certain degree of knowledge of all the languages used. Some bits of information overlap, i.e. they are present in all the languages, while other information is missing in some languages.

- d) Complementary multilingualism: a sign bears complementary information in different languages, e.g. a Slovak text using English words (Gašová, 2020, p. 71).



Figure 9. An example of fragmentary multilingualism in a sign

To sum up, multilingualism is one of the factors shaping the linguistic landscape. Moreover, it is closely connected with vocabulary internationalisation resulting from the intense multilateral language contacts. The linguistic perspective provides information on the number of languages present in the area under study as well as information about the types of script used. It allows for the evaluation of lemmas from the viewpoint of grammatical word classes and their semantic and stylistic characteristics. The text placed on a single sign is perceived as a whole and evaluated in terms of multilingualism (Gašová, 2021, p. 25).

3 On certain specificities of the Banská Bystrica city centre linguistic landscape (Horná Street and Štefan Moyses Square)

According to the linguistic landscape research methodology, the analysis of the selected intra-urban location in the synchronic

⁴ Cited from Projektleitfaden – Project Guidelines, Phase 1: 1/7–31/2/2019 (author: Dr. Iлона Schulze).

⁵ Cited from Projektleitfaden – Project Guidelines, Phase 1: 1/7–31/2/2019 (author: Dr. Iлона Schulze).

aspect shows a clear prevalence of bottom-up (unofficial) signs. Some of them utilise other languages besides Slovak. In top-down signs, Slovak prevails, which is in line with the Law of 1995 on the State Language of the Slovak Republic. It can be concluded therefore that the state and public institutions located in the investigated location comply with this Law (Jurčáková – Štefaňáková, 2021, p. 18).

Partial linguistic landscape research led to a number of interesting findings related to multilingualism. The qualitative analysis showed that nine languages (including Slovak) were used in the signs.



Figure 10. Fotky pre radosť [Photos for Joy] – a monolingual Slovak sign

Foreign languages occurring in the signs analysed included English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Russian, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. However, English clearly prevailed. The signs using English were bilingual as well as monolingual, i.e. English was combined with Slovak or used as the only language of the sign.

The prevalence of English in the analysed linguistic landscape is not surprising, as English names of shops, casinos, or restaurants have already become a common occurrence in the linguistic landscape (compare Schulze, 2019). However, the use of English is usually limited to shop, brand, or product names, while the rest of the relevant information is presented in Slovak (Lauková – Molnárová, 2020, p. 103).

The *Kooperativa a. s. Vienna Insurance Group* sign can be used as an example. It is the exact name of an Austrian insurance company with branches in Central and Eastern Europe, and this sign is placed above the entrance.



Figure 11. Kooperativa Vienna Insurance Group

Another example of an English sign is *GoodZone hookah & bar*.



Figure 12. GoodZone hookah & bar

However, there were also signs consisting of more than three languages. One of them, for example, is the fashion clothing shop *Boutique Natali, Moda Italy* in Štefan Moyses Square.

Its shop window presents in five different languages: Slovak (*dámska kolekcia*), English (*Moda Italy; fashion clothes*), French (*boutique*), Russian (*модная одежда*), and Spanish (*Ropa de moda*). Since Russian can be rarely found in the investigated area, the question arose why this language appeared in a shop advertising itself as an Italian fashion boutique. A personal interview with the shop owner clarified that she used a Russian sign because she was Ukrainian and spoke Russian (Molnárová – Lauková, 2022, p. 265).



Figure 13. Boutique Natali

The survey has also shown that Italian is the language most frequently used in the names of eating places such as cafés (could be also French) and restaurants, e.g. pizzeria, café, etc. The use of Italian can be interpreted as a cultural and language stereotype referring to international culinary phenomena like pizza, pasta, and coffee (compare Lauková – Molnárová, 2020).



Figure 14. Da Luigi Pizza – example of a monolingual sign in Italian

The shop *Coccodrillo* (Eng. “crocodile”) is another example of a multilingual sign in Italian (name and logo) designating a Central European brand specialising in kids’ fashion.



Figure 15. Coccodrillo – example of a monolingual sign in Italian

As for the occurrence of German in Horná Street, it was found in two surnames (Schneider, Fischer) – in the names of a pharmacy and a travel agency respectively. Lupták explained that in the case of Fischer travel agency, the proper name was transferred from one onymic system to another: anthroponym → name of an object, company (2013).



Figure 15 Fischer – example of a monolingual sign in German

The kitchen studio bearing the Slovak sign “Kuchynské štúdio” also utilised German in the form of a subtitle “Küchen”, i.e. German for “kitchens”.



Figure 16. Kuchynské štúdio – example of a multilingual sign using German

The use of French in shop names may also indicate a clear line of stereotypical cultural and linguistic connotations. French was observed in the signs of shops selling fashion, clothing, and jewellery, such as “bijouterie” or “boutique”.



Figure 17. Mirage – casino



Figure 18. Bonjour Palacinky – Bagety – Káva [Bonjour Pancakes – Baguettes – Coffee]

The sequence of languages, i.e. which of them comes first, is also important. All these aspects are relevant for analysing the relationships between these languages in terms of their equality or dominance (compare Androutsopoulos, 2020).

In addition to the linguistic analysis, the study of signs also aims at the manifestations of multimediality and multimodality in intra-urban locations. Linguistic landscape research deals with the shape and type of script, its size, placement, and colour. Multilingual signs use different scripts for different languages. Their selection is often related to cultural traditions or stereotypes. The font size used to present information (e.g. on a shop sign) in different languages is also taken into consideration (Molnárová, 2021, p. 60).

For lack of space, these aspects cannot be accounted for in this study; however, they are part of the author's ongoing empirical research. Therefore, the presented partial interdisciplinary linguistic landscape research into the selected location of the Banská Bystrica city centre (Štefan square, Horná Street) focused on multilingualism, which expresses itself in the occurrence of multiple languages in shop names. This finding confirms intercultural intentions of the producers of signs.

The foreign languages in the shop signs that we observed in the investigated area are usually company names, brands, and

internationally known identifiers of shop and product types. On the other hand, more detailed information was presented in Slovak, e.g. assortment, names of goods, opening hours, etc. Nevertheless, the shop name remains the most important part of its sign regardless of the language used (compare Lauková – Monárová, 2020).

4 Conclusion

The presented study focused on the characteristics and specifics of the linguistic landscape in the selected intra-urban location, i.e. the Banská Bystrica city centre. The goal of this partial research was to map the selected area with the aim to lay a foundation for further partial research within an international APVV project. The selected location was analysed in the synchronic context, i.e. taking into account the dynamics of the linguistic landscape development with a focus on multilingualism and the characteristics of the signs constituting the intra-urban space of Štefan Moyses Square and Horná Street.

The comparative perspective of this linguistic landscape research revealed shared features e.g. simultaneous representation of identical communicative strategies selected by international companies, appropriation and globalisation of sign presentation, and language laws potentially leaving room for cultural misunderstanding.

The linguistic landscape of the selected Banská Bystrica downtown public space will be further explored using qualitative and quantitative methods.

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