SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE POLITICAL LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

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Abstract: The paper captures a cross-section of the dynamics of the semiotic political linguistic landscape (PLL) in Banska Bystrica. The PLL is perceived as a linguistic landscape (LL) used for political purposes, i.e. the LL that is used to express a political stance in order to agitate, argue and defend specific politically attuned positions. The urban space contains reminiscences of the electoral struggle ahead of the 2022 local elections. The main objective was to analyse and compare chosen PLL with a time interval of one year. The author also notes the LL immediately after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 and the reflection of these events in the semiotics of the LL. She confronts this spacial-temporal moment with the current state of affairs in March 2023. Through the methods of observation, description, analysis, and comparison, the author comes to conclusion about the misuse of the themes of war and war refugee and leavers for political reasons reflected in the LL semiotics. The research results show value clashes reflected by the layering of the studied signs, which are manifested by dialogicality and expressiveness often caused by the anonymity of their interlocutors. The study concludes that the dynamics of the LL narrative is strongly influenced by the state of war in the neighbouring country, not only in the static signs but also in the mobile signs found and examined in the LL.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, multimodal sign, wartime, warscape

1 Introduction

The object of research interest is the political, especially wartime, linguistic landscape (LL) and its continuous shift into the virtual space where it finds a wider range of recipients (resp. interlocutors). Manifestations of the *warscape* (blended from the compound *war landscape*) are a variety of static and mobile multimodal signs. Static signs include buildings, façades, billboards, flags, etc. Mobile ones include cars, signs on clothing, etc.

It would be a mistake to assume that the wartime LL can only be located in a country where a war is currently being fought by traditional means (i.e. a war in some "narrow" sense). Slovakia, as a member of the Euro-Atlantic structural relations, has been in a hybrid war for a long time, to which it has been exposed by the Russian Federation through hoaxes, disinformation and pro-Russian propaganda disseminated mainly on social networks (especially Facebook profile statuses of the Embassy of Russia in Slovakia), but also others. Citizens of Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and other European countries calling for peace ignore the fact that the aggressor is the Russian Federation, whose representatives are of the opinion that "The goals that Russia has set for itself in Ukraine can now only be achieved by military means" (Peskov, www.facebook.com/ambasadarus, 13/3/2023). Protests against the war (or for "peace") in front of the US embassy, in front of the Slovak National Council, in front of the Grasalkovich Palace in Bratislava, or in front of the National Museum in Prague (Wenceslas Square, etc.) and elsewhere are meaningless unless they take place in front of the Russian embassy, or the Russian consulate, etc.

2 Objectives, Materials and Methods

The main objective is to observe, capture, describe, analyse, and compare urban area of the examined LL with a time interval of one year. The term political linguistic landscape (PLL) was studied and defined within the framework of the linguistic landscape background (see below). The study observes and describes a selected slice of the LL, approaching it in an analytical-interpretive manner. The investigation focuses on the qualitative analysis of politically oriented speeches of selected multimodal signs in Banska Bystrica (BB) LL with an emphasis on the war situation in the neighbouring country after the invasion of the territory of Ukraine (UA) by the troops of the Russian Federation (RF) on 24/2/2022 to the present. The

subject of the investigation are static and mobile signs located mainly in the inner city of BB, however, the universal validity of their content is also demonstrated by examples from LL other cities in the neighbouring Czech Republic. Important factors were their accessibility, reliability, exposure of the given LL space (i.e., coverage of the number of potential recipients), thematic focus, and contextualized topicality, i.e., thematization of contemporary war events in the UA.

After 2022 collection, classification, description and qualitative analysis, we proceeded to the interpretation of the investigated signs with subsequent comparison with other signs collected in 2023. The thematic and value universality of the shared ideas in the public space is confirmed precisely by the dynamics of dialogicity mediated by the influence of the accessible LL to citizens, i.e., to the interlocutors for whom is the LL intended. And they react, communicate and polemicize with their LL, i.e. with other interlocutors - the author and commissioner of the medium thus becomes the creator of the LL as well as the reacting interlocutor expressing clear agreement or disagreement with the medium's narrative. (Co)LL creators thus convey their positions publicly (though often anonymously) in the actual geopolitical context in a given spacial-temporal context.

The range of potential communicants is widening due to the intermingling of the real urban space of LL with the virtual world of social networks, which have become a suitable source for collecting research material. These were mainly Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Thus, we explore the interconnection of warscape-oriented LL with the cyberscape and the netscape, respectively (cf. Tóth - Istók - Lörincz, 2022). The time range of data collection is from March in 2022 to March in 2023 in location of the BB urban area. The data are stored as visual-text files. We have observed the given media in the current geopolitical context and compared them with other media in the neighbouring country.

3 Political Linguistic Landscape

It is a term referring to LL carrying political statements, opinions, promises, appeals and attitudes. In general, in terms of LL research "multimodality as a term refers to images (signs) that combine with linguistic elements, thus enhancing the informative value of the sign" (Molnárová, 2021, p. 209). "Our" LL is characterized by a billbordization bordering on visual smog. In the case of a billboard, it is a semiotic "visual-verbal communication" (Klincková, 2014, p. 88) placed mainly in an exposed urban space focused on the largest possible number of potential recipients (i.e. customers, interlocutors, etc.) The SSSJ A - G (SSSJ, 2006) defines a billboard as "a large panel designed for outdoor advertising, usually located along highways and roads, an eye-catcher". According to Mistrík (1975, pp. 133-134), the billboard represents a means of communication of rapid dialogue with the addressee, who is in constant motion. The billboard, as a static, yet compact communication, needs to effectively (i.e. quickly, clearly, unambiguously, comprehensibly and legibly) communicate an economically accurate message targeted at a mobile recipient. This requires expressiveness, creativity, colourfulness, emotionality, readability, contextual topicality, as well as brevity (cf. Klincková, 2014, pp. 89-91). Non-linguistic means of expression play an equally important role as linguistic signs (expressions, syntagmas, logonyms, etc.), if not more so, because they can be (and often are) signs of intense symbols and expressive messages conveyed through graphics, images, colour, or overall composition in updated geopolitical contexts.

4 Results and Discussion

The Slovak and Czech LL also dynamically react to the current situation (see figures 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11) since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (24/2/2022).

Currently (September 2022 – March 2023), a billboard (Fig. 1) reacting to the war events with the text "We have given enough to the Ukrainians, let's help the Slovaks already!" is located in the intramural area of the Fončorda quarter (Nové Kalište Street) in Banska Bystrica. It is an election billboard spreading the narrative of disproportionate help to Ukrainian war refugees or leavers (mostly mothers with young children). The communication suggests that political leaders do not pay enough attention to the problems of Slovak citizens or that they prefer the interests of refugees at the expense of the domestic population. The communication reinforces this impression of 'patriotism' not only in the verbal but also in the visual plane (several folkloric motifs). Patriotism is presented in the verbal plane ("let's help Slovaks", "people's candidate"), in which the contrast between us ("Slovaks") and them ("Ukrainians") is implicitly present. At the same time, there is a graphic highlighting the phenomenon explicitly in the form of the party's logo with the motif of the Fatra, Tatra and Matra Triple Cross symbolism. A reference to 'folkness' and folk traditions in the form of a distinctive blue embroidery with a folklore motif on a white shirt (as a prototype of a Slovak national costume). The political-military LL thus becomes a part of the pre-election fight for the position of the chairman of the Banska Bystrica region (i.e. mayor) during autumn municipal elections in 2022. The billboard was still available in the intravillan area in March 2023, i.e. $^3/_4$ of the year after the autumn elections of 2022.

Figure 1 Nové Kalište1 in BB
Source: Author's own archives (March, 2023)

The counterpart of billboard 1 (Fig. 1) is billboard 2 (see Fig. 2), which is placed on the opposite side of the carrier (sign) and was still available in March 2023 as a reminiscence of the pre-election period in order to address the electorate of the municipal elections. As in the previous case, it addresses potential voters in a combination of graphics (a likeness of a candidate for mayor/member of the county with his/her name and surname) and text (proper nouns, candidacy, promise, appeal). Election promise "I will serve you, and not the oligarchs!" gives the recipients the idea that the current representatives of the city serve the oligarchs at the expense of the citizens of the city. This phenomenon is highlighted by the vague and unaddressed appeal "stop the dark city!" and we ask who is to "stop" the dark city? What makes it "dark"? Alleged cooperation with alleged oligarchs?

Figure 2 Nové Kalište2 in BB
Source: Author's own archives (March 2023)

Both billboards (Figure 1 and Figure 2) are located in an exposed location near a well-known grocery chain with a solid customer base (Figure 3). Moreover, the popular grocery store (Fig. 3) has a good access to the main road and is situated near the exit of the city, which increases its footfall and thus makes its surroundings interesting for advertisers and positioners of various (not only politically oriented) carriers in the linguistic landscape.
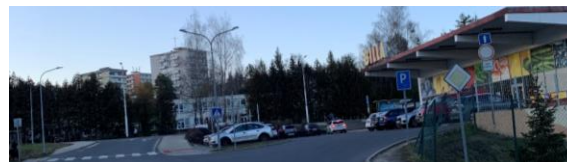

Figure 3 Nové Kalište3 in BB
Source: Author's own archives (March 2023)

An appropriate example of the impact of political language landscape on city participants is the billboard below (Figure 4) from Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic, in March 2022, appealing for the purchase of arms for UA. In addition to the image of the Ukrainian president casually dressed in khaki colours (thus referring to the state of war in his country), the appeal text ("The real president. Buy him weapons!"), the banner includes a link to a website with an account number and a QR code for electronic payment. President Zelensky's own name is not mentioned on the billboard at all because it is assumed that he is so well-known that it is unnecessary. The billboard was placed in the city near the main train station by the activist civic association *Let's Talk Together*, to which the advertising company BigMedia rented commercial space for three months. About halfway through the lease, BigMedia had the billboard removed, arguing that the town's citizens had complained about the medium (Moláček, 2022).

Figure 4 Billboard in Hradec Králové (Czechia, 2022)
Source: *Mluvme spolu* (Moláček, 2022)

On THK Street (Trieda Hradca Kralove/Hradca Kralove Street) in Banska Bystrica something similar occurred with the difference that the "communication" took place directly on the billboard carrier in the public space in front of passers-by. Just after the Russian invasion in March 2022, a series of billboards appeared all over the Slovak (linguistic) landscape depicting the Ukrainian flags with a legendary statement by the former Czechoslovak (and later Czech) president V. Havel that "Truth and love will triumph over lies and hatred". Such a series of three billboard signs were placed at the aforementioned Banska Bystrica THK in early March 2022. In a short time, the sign was responded to by the anonymous author(s) with a capital letter "Z" referring to the pro-Russian denotation of "for" of "in favour": "for the (Russian) Motherland" (not recognizing Ukraine's territorial integrity or its right to a sovereign independent state, rejecting the participation of the Russian Federation in decision-making processes on the foreign as well as domestic political direction of Ukraine), "for Putin", i.e. "for war", "for sending troops to the territory of the UA", "for invading a neighbouring state" (see Fig. 5 below).

Figure 5 THK in BB (2022) with two message layers
Source: https://bystrica.dnes24.sk/galeria/v-obrazoch-na-
billboardy-v-ukrajinskych-farbach-niekto-nasprejoval-symbol-z-
99440/fotografia-3?articleId=412151

However, this was not the end of the "communication" in LL at THK in BB. The anonymous author/group used the white colour to crossed out the red letter "Z" and wrote their message in Cyrillic directly addressing the Russian president (see Fig. 6), sending him to the place where, at the beginning of the war, the Ukrainian defender had sent the Russian warship. The previous quotation of an UA soldier became topical and contextualized similar way as the Havel´ quote on Fig. 5. Both value and opinion clashes take place publicly on the ground of a publicly accessible medium fulfilling the role of a kind of public "bulletin board" providing enough space for passers-by to engage effectively due to its size, good readability, persistence of the message, etc.

Figure 6 THK in BB (2022) with three message layers
Source: https://bystrica.dnes24.sk/galeria/v-obrazoch-na-
billboardy-v-ukrajinskych-farbach-niekto-nasprejoval-symbol-z-
99440/fotografia-3?articleId=412151

The semiotic political linguistic landscape in March 2023 at the THK in BB looks like this:

Figure 7 THK BB (2023)
Source: Author's own archives (March 2023)

The top-down sign in Figure 7 refers not only to the values of peace and freedom, but also to energy independence (meaning from the RF, from which EU Member States have imported oil and natural gas in the past). Complete energy self-sufficiency is not possible in the EU situation yet, but independence from a war aggressor is, and so is diversification of resources. The medium targets the young generation not only graphically (illustration of young people), but also by means of a nod ("You are Europe."), thus involving the young interlocutor in European and domestic public affairs. The motif of the Ukrainian flag is represented in the form of blue-yellow graphics throughout the medium.

Hence, urban public space becomes a place-value-bearer for the expression of personal civic stance not only within large-scale signs, but also for private residents who aspire to enter the socio-political narrative (see Figure 8 below). At the same time, this space in the current technically advanced era provides the conditions for a certain degree of interactivity in the sense of "if I share, I can be shared" or "my sharing will be shared" and commented on at the same time, e.g. on social networks as in Figure 9 below. Sharing does not only work within a given social network, but also outside it. An LL captured and shared within a profile on one social network (e.g. on Facebook as in Figure 8) can be shared on another social network (e.g. on Twitter as in Figure 9).

Thus, LL enters the narrative of the polemics of the war landscape by stepping out of the private sphere (private apartment) into the public sphere (balcony facing the street shared on a social network) in the form of a Czech and Russian flags positioned in such a way as to make it obvious with whom the author sympathizes. To be sure, he explains his position:

"If a yellow-blue cloth [referring to the Ukrainian national flag, explained by PJ] can hang on the National Museum [he means the National Museum in Prague 11/3/2023., supplemented by PJ]", then why shouldn't red-blue-white flags [referring to the flag of the Czech Republic and the flag of the Russian Federation, explained by PJ] be hanging on my balcony. That's not supporting Russia. Unlike the director of the National Theatre, I obey the law. I have two flags. The Czech one as seen from the outside on the right, the other on the left. Glory to the Czech Republic [referring to the password-hello Glory to Ukraine, expl. by PJ]."

The author of the translated Facebook status above makes clear his clear value position through axiological (evaluative) expressions - "yellow-blue rag", "red-blue-white flags", "if it can...on the National Museum...why not on my balcony...", "it is not support", "glory to the Czech Republic" (Fig. 8).

Figure 8 LL on Facebook
Source: https://www.facebook.com/profile.ph
p?id=100069688525360 (13/3/2023)

OstraVanda's Twitter profile sharply contradicts (14/3/2023) the status posted by Aldo Svoboda's profile (13/3/2023) by declaring "To make it clear from afar that Ales is a stupid moron" (fig. 9).

Figure 9 Twitter status
Source: Twitter.com

One of the disadvantages of sharing value preferences is that anyone can react to anything anytime, i.e. not only according to their preferences, but also to the cognitive competence of the interlocutor, e.g. by pointing out that he did not place the flag of the Russian Federation correctly, to which the communicant responds with a new status (see Fig. 10):

Figure 10 Commented LL on Facebook
Source: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php
?id=100069688525360 (14/3/2023)

The statuses captured in the Fig. 8 and Fig. 10 refer to a specific situation of a clash between several citizens and the police in front of the National Museum (NM) in Prague on 11 March 2023, when anti-government protesters attempted to enter the museum building in order to tear down the Ukrainian flag hoisted to express support and solidarity with the country defending its territorial integrity against the aggressor who attacked them on 24 March 2023. Protesters in Wenceslas Square demanded the resignation of the current government of Czech Prime Minister Fiala due to high inflation and high process of energy and food. They also called for peace negotiations. They carried banners "Stop the war - stop NATO" or "US bases back to the US and there will be no more war", etc. One of the protesters then called to enter (attack) the NM building and remove the Ukrainian flag from its façade. On the other side of the square, a pro-European and pro-Ukrainian demonstration took place. Paradoxical about the whole situation is the high level of aggression among the protesters demanding peace.

A tweet (i.e. a Twitter status) reacting to the political situation is shown in Fig. 11, which shows a mobile LL - a private car serving as signs carrier ("Stop the Ukrainisation of the Czech Republic", "Politicians must not leave the world by natural death", "White lives matter", etc.) and Czech flags. The car as a carrier would deserve a separate analysis in a separate study, not only with regard to the author's phobias (e.g. phobia against

migrants and aid for them), but also death threats (to politicians), etc.

Figure 11 Mobile LL (car)
Source: OstraVanda, Twitter.com (13/3/2023)

With regard to the peace marches in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the level of interactivity in this direction is considerably high (see Figure 12): 'We also want peace, that is why we support the defence of Ukraine'. We conclude from the above that the main feature of the war landscape is unambiguous value attitudes asserted in a dialogical form often with an emotional charge, and thus not infrequently these are stylistically symptomatic communications (cf. Figs. 5 and 6, Figs. 9 and 10, Fig. 12). The monologic nature of LL (Figs. 1-4, e.g. Havel's statement and truth and love) is disrupted through the active approach of the communicant(s) (Figs. 5, 6, 9, 10, 12) in order to assert his/her/their value-based vision of the world on the pro/con axis (for/against the government, Ukraine, Russia, NATO, the EU, politicians, etc.). There is a clear consensus on peace - but each of the polarised sides interprets peace differently. At least one opinion group sees peace as a capitulation of the UA (or at least an acceptance of the status quo) and another as a capitulation of the RF. Another feature is the intensification of the billboardisation of public space in order to proclaim opinion not only at the top-down level (authorities and elites, e.g., signs/whistleblowers placed on a museum building, official EU billboards, billboards of political parties, activist associations, etc.) but also bottom-up (e.g., a personal car, the space of a private balcony). Urban public space becomes a site of clashes of opinion and values (Fig. 12): a leaflet in the village with the wording "We want peace" prompted a reaction in the form of "We also want peace, therefore we support the defence of Ukraine". In this way, the warlike linguistic landscape or political linguistic landscape moves from the real to the virtual space. A phenomenon occurs in the warscape where is merges with the cyberscape or netscape (cf. Istók - Lörincz - Tóth. 2022, p. 12), thus reaching a wider spectrum of recipients/interlocutors.

Figure 12 We want peace
Source: *Dárek pro Putina*, Twitter.com (13.3.2023)

5 Conclusions

The dynamics of the LL narrative is influenced by the state of war in the neighbouring country, not only in the static multimodal signs (billboards, buildings, façades) but also in the mobile signs of the LL (car, mobile banners, leaflets, signboards). We observe several basic features of the signs captured in the space of the LL in the Czech and Slovak urban areas, namely: contextual topicality (reaction to the state of war in the neighbouring country from 24/2/2023, resp. 2014 to the present), the shift from monological to dialogical reading resulting in multilayered communication, the billboarding of communications, stylistic markedness (or the shift to stylistically coloured communications), the shift to expressiveness and the escalating emotional charge from "we want peace" to death threats (e.g. to politicians). These tendencies are intensifying in view of the pre-election period in the Slovak Republic (the forthcoming autumn parliamentary elections) and possibly in other countries in the run-up to the elections. Thus, the topic of war becomes not only part of the LL (political advertisers and activists expressing clear value positions), but also enters the internal political struggle to win the electorate to their side.

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