

THE MANY FACES OF ONE TOWN: MAPPING THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF DOWNTOWN OF HÓDMEZÖVÁSÁRHELY FROM VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

An examination of the linguistic landscape can happen from different perspectives depending on the aspect of it the linguist wants to investigate. The most frequent thematic categorizations for examination are the viewpoints of tourism, economy and minority language use and the business perspectives. Accordingly, from a touristic point of view the examination focuses on whether the public places frequently visited by tourist present relevant information in foreign languages and what languages are used. This provides information about the preparedness of the area for 'accepting' foreign tourists and can ease their stay. From a minority language perspective the appearance of minority languages in signage in public places is examined to get information about the status of minority language/s. The business perspective examination includes the mapping of signage and names disposed by shops and services. The linguistic landscape is mapped and analyzed from the point of view of the foreign languages applied, their content and relevance to the establishment (shop or service) type to get information about how much the shops of a certain profile follow the international trends in using foreign languages in the signage. In this paper the linguistic landscape of the center of Hódmezővásárhely, Hungary, is examined from the perspective of tourism, minority languages and business. The territory of the research is limited to the center of town as it houses most businesses and tourists are likely to visit it. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the different results gained from the mappings carried out on the different perspectives. The objective is to outline the linguistic landscape of the town center and by comparing the results conclusions as to which aspect the town center is the most and the least prepared for within the same area are drawn.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, rural tourism, foreign languages, business, comparative analysis

INTRODUCTION

The linguistic landscape of town centers is becoming increasingly multilingual in our globalized world. Choosing languages other than the official language(s) of the country for signage in the public sphere can be based on various considerations. The linguistic landscape is present in our daily life: signs and noticeboards are visible in the streets, public buildings and shops (GORTER et al., 2008). The term 'linguistic landscape' was introduced by Landry and Bourhis in 1997 and they defined it as "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop sign and public signs on governmental buildings combines to form the LL (linguistic landscape) of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration" (LANDRY et al., 1997, 25). Therefore, the centers of cities are culturally and linguistically colorful (GORTER, 2006). Studies of the linguistic landscape provide analyses of written information in streets in a certain area (GORTER et al., 2008). The examined places can be shopping centers, schools, offices, companies, buses, swimming pools, and streets (SPOLSKY, 2009). Spolsky and Cooper distinguish eight main

types of public signage: “street signs, advertising signs, warning notices and prohibitions, building names, informative signs (directions, hours of opening), commemorative plaques, objects (postbox, police call box), graffiti” (SPOLSKY, 2009, 34).

Based on Backhaus’s description, I regarded a sign as multilingual sign if it contained at least one language in addition to, or instead of, Hungarian (BACKHAUS, 2006). The multilingual signage in public spaces can have both informative and symbolic functions. Landry and Bourhis distinguish two major functions of public signs: informative and symbolic functions (SPOLSKY, 2009). In the case of the bilingual signs in Hódmezővásárhely, too, it is possible to distinguish between these two functions. As I will demonstrate below, signage examined from the perspective of tourism providing information in bilingual form has real informative value, whereas signage from the business perspective in streets has rather symbolic value.

In international tendencies, cities assign a growing preference to the application of foreign languages, with English in the first place in the shop front signage. English is the most widely used language—after the official language(s)—used in shop signage. It is followed by French, Italian and German. Also, the appearance of bilingual signs is more frequent than that of monolingual foreign language ones (SCHLICK: 2003). In this paper I examined in what degree the linguistic landscape of Hódmezővásárhely corresponds to this tendency.

In the present paper I examine the linguistic landscape of the center of Hódmezővásárhely from three different perspectives: tourism, business and minority language use.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For gathering information about the three perspectives, different types of public signage need to be examined. I have used the distinction of Spolsky and Cooper to carry out the examination. (SPOLSKY, 2009). I grouped the types of public signage thematically, according to which example of signage carries important information in the examined areas. Therefore, for the examination of the perspective of tourism I collected signage such as warning notices and prohibitions, informative signs (opening hours and directions disposed in public places that are likely to be visited by tourists: banks, post offices etc.), commemorative plaques, and objects. For this examination I mapped the signage applied inside the buildings as well, since that is also part of the public space, and tourist can get information from the signage within the building than outside. These buildings were museums, hotels, shops, banks and the post office.

For the business perspective I collected data from advertising signs outside shops and services. Shops and services frequently apply names and signage in foreign languages in order to provoke associations with the stereotype of the country (PILLER, 2003) where the language is spoken as mother tongue, to increase prestige, to express a cosmopolitan feeling (EDELMAN, 2009) or to convey extra meaning (BARNI et al., 2009).

For the minority language examination I collected data from street signs, warning notices and prohibitions, informative signs in order to see whether there are any minority languages applied in the signage.

To determine the area of mapping the linguistic landscape I used a map and limited my data collection to the center of Hódmezővásárhely as it is the place most likely visited by tourists and inhabitants of the town, and most of the shops and services are also here. Following Cenoz and Gorter's method (GORTER, 2006), I took photos of the all the signage, both monolingual and multilingual, to examine their content and visual disposal and noted down all the shop names for a quantitative analysis. Using Griffin's method (GRIFFIN: 2004) I grouped and counted the shop and service names, and established the average in percentages to determine the ratio of foreign language signage.

RESULTS

The tourism perspective

From the tourism perspective I examined the Gingko Sas Hotel, Sas Kávézó café, the post office, three banks (MKB, K&H, and Postabank), and the Emlékpont Museum as well as the interiors of shops in the main street.

As a result I have found that the Gingko Sas Hotel, designed to cater for wellness, holiday and conference tourism, has a high preparedness for the acceptance of foreign tourists. The signage in the interior contains both Hungarian and English in such a way that Hungarian was followed by English signage of the same content. Bilingual information includes the price list, bar and restaurant menu cards, information on the bike rental, smoking prohibitions and signs for location and giving directions. The welcome sign and shop sign was monolingual English. The menu cards use three languages: Hungarian, English and German. Generally, it can be concluded that the hotel is the place in town that is the most prepared for non-Hungarian speaker visitors. The bilingual signage they apply – using the distinction by Landry and Bourhis – has more of an informative than symbolic function. That is, they provide the non-Hungarian speaker guests with relevant information about the hotel and its facilities.

The Sas Kávézó has very scarce written signage; however, all written information is multilingual. Written signage can be found on the menu cards in Hungarian, English, German and Italian.

In the Emlékpont Museum, where memory of the town's life under the Soviet regime is disposed, information about opening hours and ticket prices are written bilingually on the outside of the museum building. However, within the museum, narratives, memory plaques, descriptions and biographies are in Hungarian only. For speakers of English, though, audio guides and tourist guides are available upon request for an extra fee. Bilingual signage in English with the informative function is scarce in the museum. Only the very basic information is displayed in two languages. In bilingual signs only English language is included in addition to Hungarian.

Other places that are likely to be visited by tourists are the post office and banks. In case of the post office, there is only one multilingual sign prohibiting the use of mobile phones and cameras inside the building. It includes Hungarian, English, German, French and Russian. However, all the other functionally relevant information and directions (which button to push on the machine for a ticket for different activities) are in monolingual Hungarian only. It seems that only information regulating customers' behavior is written in

languages other than Hungarian, but no language aid is provided for them if they want to use the services.

In the banks information about the opening hours, the use of ATMs after closing time and information on regulations is written in English, too. In the inside of shops no foreign language signage is disposed, except for the Spar supermarket, where a grammatically incorrect 'Don't smoking' sign is displayed at the cashier's indicating that no cigarettes are sold to underage persons. Furthermore, signs giving directions to the sights of the town are in Hungarian only.

It can be concluded that the city center has multilingual signage to make foreign visitors' orientation easier during their stay, and the Gingko Hotel and the banks are the most prepared for this. However, other facilities that are likely to be visited by foreigners scarcely dispose signage in other languages than Hungarian of informative value. Moreover, mainly the English language is applied, but in some instances German and other world languages appear, too. Although the town is frequently visited by Serbian and Romanian tourists, their languages cannot be found in any signage. This fact suggests that visitors from other, non-English (or German) speaking countries are expected to understand world languages, primarily English.

Business perspective

From the business perspective I examined the signage on shops and services, focusing on their names. I have found that 50% of the signage in shop and service names are written in foreign languages. Among foreign languages, English is the most widely used, it appears in 66% of the foreign names. Italian is the second most widespread, occupying 8% of the foreign language signage, German 7%, and other languages (French, Latin, other) 22%.

The use of foreign languages in the shop and services names in the center of Hódmezővásárhely mainly corresponds with international tendencies (PILLER: 2003), according to which Italian and French languages are mainly used fashion establishments and restaurants, German and English in technology, but English, as the international language of trendiness and very fashionable in advertising, cannot be restricted to specific areas. It is also most widely used in shops that sell jewelry, cosmetics and electronics (SCHLICK: 2003).

Similarly to international tendencies, Italian and French languages appear in the field of fashion (*Amica boutique*), English in the field of electronics and informatics (*Electrodigit*). Also, similarly to international tendencies, English is not limited to a number of categories as it appears in the signage of various types of profiles: traveling (*Last Minute Travel*), fashion (*Trendy, Balance*), banking (*Unicredit*), parfumerie (*Lady*) and catering (*Joker Café*). However, German appears in chemists' (*Rossmann*), supermarkets (*Spar*) and in a hunter's store (*Hargita-Jagd Vadászbolt*).

The appearance of 'mock-language' suggests extra meaning that can be expressed by the not appropriate use of the language (PILLER, 2003). In the center of Hódmezővásárhely this application is also present (*T-Boy, Yesss*). In the first name, the Hungarian pronunciation of the name provides the extra meaning ('t-boy', pronounced as [te:boy] means 'madness' in Hungarian), and in the latter, the ungrammatical use of triple 's' emphasizes the meaning.

The application of foreign names in the center of Hódmezővásárhely also reflects the international tendency that foreign languages in names are applied because they can express

more content than the Hungarian name would: in the shop name *T-Boy* the use of *Boy* implies the shop profile as it sells men's clothing. *Amica boutique* containing both Italian and French words refers to the shop's profile not only in language but also in word use (Italian *amica* means "girlfriend"): it sells Italian and French fashion clothes for women. Furthermore, the names of shops and services do not always reflect the profile. In these cases, the main aim is to be fashionable, to provide a cosmopolitan atmosphere or to express extra meaning by choosing a name from a foreign language (HULT, 2009).

However, there are differences in the application of foreign languages in names in Hódmezővásárhely compared to the international tendencies. In Hódmezővásárhely, the use of foreign languages is rare in catering, certain languages are completely or almost completely missing from certain areas (French from fashion and German from technology), at least in the center.

Languages with no data recorded elsewhere in studies of the linguistic landscape for shops and services can be found in Hódmezővásárhely: Latin in catering (*Lucullus* and *Veritas*), English and German in perfumeries (*Lady* and *Rossmann*). Also, although I have found no data in other studies regarding travel agencies, in the town center these almost exclusively use English, similarly to financial services and private health services (e.g. a dentistry).

In summary, it can be asserted that the application of foreign languages is widespread (50%) in shop and services names in Hódmezővásárhely, with the use of English language in the first place, although, monolingual signs outnumber bilingual ones. As the business profile is not always reflected or connected to the name, it can be concluded that applying Spolsky's categories (SPOLSKY, 2009) they rather have symbolic and not informative value. This way, the linguistic landscape of the center of Hódmezővásárhely from the business perspective fits well into the international tendencies.

Minority language perspectives

In Hódmezővásárhely the minority language groups are very scarce. According to the 2001 census data, 98% of the population is Hungarian, 1% gypsy and 1% other, mainly Slovakian and German, but are inhabitants of Chinese, Bulgarian mother tongues, however, all signage I examined in the area (from street signs, warning notices and prohibitions, informative signs) lack any minority languages.

It seems that the town entirely lacks any signage containing languages other than Hungarian or world languages.

CONCLUSIONS

From the linguistic landscape of the center of Hódmezővásárhely, it can be concluded that foreign language use has a priority in the field of shop and service names and they have primarily symbolic function. However, signage disposing informative function in foreign languages is scarce, it is present primarily in the Ginkgo Sas Hotel, the Emlékpont Museum and banks, and is entirely absent from other outdoor signage providing directions and information. All signage with informative function contains world languages only, primarily English, and German, Italian French in some cases. Foreign tourists from neighboring countries (such as Romania or Serbia) are expected to understand the world

language in getting information. Though there are some minority groups living in the town, no minority languages are disposed on signage.

The town well fits into the international tendency of foreign language application in shop and service names to create a fashionable, cosmopolitan feeling, however, it needs development and amplification in foreign language signage for informative values to promote tourism.

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