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Linguistic escapism and symbolic value of signs of (good) times

Abstract: Our research describes the linguistic landscape of three Croatian towns where we compare the signs on coffee shops and bars in reference to the symbolic function of foreign languages used on them, especially when compared to the mostly informative value of signs in Croatian. The sampling method applied was Cook's and Campbell's *Diversity or Heterogeneity Sampling* (1979:75–77) where the survey areas are illustrative, and not representative examples of the linguistic landscape. The results indicate that the higher percentage of signs in a foreign language, predominantly English, may be seen as an instantiation of processes related to economic and cultural globalization in a *multilingual world* (Gorter, 2013) when foreign language signs imply prestige and positive connotations, as confirmed by their frequency in comparison to those in the mother tongue. In areas burdened by a politically charged atmosphere, foreign language signs are seen as a form of escapism from the implications the use of any of the minority or majority language signs may cause.

Key words: linguistic landscape, multilingualism, commercial signs, English language

1. Introduction

Studies that analyse the intersection of linguistic landscape as the study of linguistic signs and multilingualism all touch upon the relevance of commercial signs in creating an oasis of recognizable and secure environment (Backhaus 2015, Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Darmawan et al., 2018; Görgülü, 2018), in some cases even when the strict government policy of prescribing public signage in a native language is opposed, as exemplified on the case of Arabic in Saudi Arabia (Alotaibi & Alamri, 2022). Multilingualism is part and parcel of life in larger urban areas that serve as meeting points for people with various cultural and linguistic backgrounds but are very frequently exposed to rather uniform commercial geography. Oxford

Street in London would at the first glance be rather similar to Mariahilfer Strasse in Vienna or Váci street in Budapest, although the targeted customer category is carefully selected according to their income bracket, as is visible on the choice of brands, e.g. haute couture vs. street fashion brands. Still, global companies structure their branding strategy by providing the sense of equality to their international customers in the process of creating the same or similar visual landscape, advertising in that way the idea of the same quality of their goods in all parts of the world.

Unlike shop signs, which may contain text with trademark names in foreign languages as a simple necessity to advertise the wares sold, cafés and bars are not conditioned in this way but strive only to advertise themselves as places of leisure. As meeting points providing respite and (possibly) entertainment, in comparison to shops and similar businesses, cafés and bars could be seen as places where profit may not be of utmost importance, provided we disregard those belonging to popular global catering chains that very frequently are to be found in English speaking countries. It is more likely that they would be owned by locals, even in the above mentioned urban centres, and that there would be much more freedom in naming them, especially in using one's mother tongue so that there would be less necessity for an institutional intervention.¹

Commercial signs on shops are mostly directly linked to either the franchised branches of major retailing brands or to foreign product names, but names on coffee shops and bars are strangely disregarded as a separate group of commercial signs in linguistic landscape (LL) studies, mostly due to the focus on how the use of language is dependent on the basic distribution of *top-down*, i.e. institutionally prescribed and *bottom-up*, or individually applied linguistic signs. Multilingualism on these signs very frequently boils down to the use of English, but the status of the mother tongue may vary and is, actually, a very fluid and dynamic process which is worth examining both in terms of the status of English as a *lingua franca*² and in terms of the treatment of national languages in public discourse. One interesting example is found in the description of coffee shops in a Chinese university campus in Shanghai where Deng (2021) very aptly connected coffee shops to Oldenburg's (1999) theory of "the third place" where consumers can find equality and can get rid of the pressure from their homes and work places as the first and the second "place". It seems, however, that in Shanghai these common features of "the third

¹ Interestingly enough the Croatian *Company Law* (*Zakon o trgovačkim društvima*, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1993_12_111_2133.html) underwent a transition from a complete prohibition of company names in any foreign language in its version from 1993 to its transformation in 2013 when all EU languages were allowed to be used on company signage.

² English has been globally used in fields such as science, technology, diplomacy, commerce, popular culture (music and the movie industry), and now in online communication platforms, such as social networks, which makes it necessary to define it as a world language or as McArthur (2000, p. 33) points out "the global *lingua franca*".

place” have been disappearing and giving way to a more business-like environment where students and other patrons typically study and work, as is visible in the more and more dominant presence of Chinese in comparison to English signs.

The impetus for this research was thus found in this observation about the evolution of the status of places of leisure and their signs as a phenomenon present in more technologically bound societies. It was contrasted to the tradition of socializing in coffee shops as an important aspect of everyday life in Croatia. The instinctive assumption about smaller linguistic communities in continental Croatia where the central urban area is not considered to be a tourist hot spot and multilingually not so diversified would be that the mother tongue, Croatian, would be dominant even on commercial signs in public spaces, but a surprising result ensued in our research where signs for coffee shops were largely written in English or some other European language (Gradečak et al., 2018). Namely, although our research was focused on the categorisation of signs according to the bottom-up, top-down origin and their distribution according to the number of languages represented on them, what emerged as a somewhat surprising result was a higher proportion of commercial signs in foreign languages, either monolingual or bilingual, i.e. containing Croatian and some other (foreign) language, mostly English, in comparison to monolingual signs in Croatian. This result, however, coincides potentially with another aspect of linguistic signs in public spaces, as emphasized by Grbavac (2013), that in speech communities in the Central European area, plagued by recent wars and ethnic and nationalist ideologies, it is not only the prestige and modernity that English as a global *lingua franca* provides, but it is its quality to isolate the person from being put in a strict frame of an ethnic categorization and native language use. This ideological aspect of linguistic landscape in the Slavonia region, burdened by the war in 1990s was studied in Gradečak-Erdeljić et al. (2016) and in this research study we readdress the role of the English language in its symbolic function in the marketing strategy when the owners of coffee shops are concerned and the element of escapism of “the third place” when their patrons are concerned.

The hypothesis of this research was that English is predominantly used in the names of coffee shops, bars and night clubs in Croatian towns of Vukovar, Osijek and Đakovo and our research questions are formed as follows:

1. What is the ratio of signs in foreign languages in the three studied Croatian towns (Vukovar, Osijek, Đakovo) and how is English represented on them?
2. What is the status of languages on commercial signs (with a narrow observation of coffee shop and bar signs) in reference to the symbolic vs. informative function of signs?

We are aware that identities can be placed in a variety of ways, ranging from public debates on political issues, through education and economic policies, statements about religious affiliation, food choices, or the clothing we wear. However, in this paper we are primarily interested in the ways in which identities are placed, that is, expressed, in language. We hypothesized also that Vukovar, Osijek and Đakovo,

as once multilingual communities, may have preserved some remnants of their multilingual past in their linguistic landscape, mostly German and Hungarian as languages of now national minorities, once dominant ethnic communities in those towns. Still, we assumed that we shall find English as a primary foreign language influence on commercial public signs. A field study research conducted for the purposes of this paper replicated our study from 2018, with a focus on linguistic signs on coffee shops, pubs and bars in those three towns and a quantitative analysis of the data was conducted and the qualitative assessment of the motivation behind naming and the reception of the signs was made in an attempt to combine those two approaches into a more or less coherent picture of the role of English on linguistic signs in public spaces in non-English speaking communities.

Initially we present an overview of the theoretical model used for this research within the framework of linguistic landscape, one of the latest sociolinguistic strands of research combining multidisciplinary methods of analysis which includes the role of multilingualism in contemporary speech communities.

2. Linguistic Landscape (LL) and multilingualism

The relatively new approach to multilingualism can be found in what has become known as *linguistic landscape* (LL), defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 23) as the “visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region”. In settings ranging from war-struck or multi-ethnic communities to urban or commercial and residential areas of large cities these types of studies explore the issues of language use and language policy as well as the influence of globalization on language signs in public and private spaces. The public space is not neutral, it is rather “a negotiated and contested arena” (Shohamy and Waksman, 2009, p. 314) where public use of foreign language becomes an expression of the attitude of the town’s inhabitants towards their mother tongue as well as towards different foreign languages.

Scollon and Wong Scollon (2003, p. 175-189) distinguish four basic types of discourse in urban space: urban regulatory discourse, urban infrastructure discourse, commercial discourse, and transgressive discourse. City regulatory and infrastructural discourses include signs erected by official bodies. These are traffic signs, public announcements, warnings and prohibitions, signs with toponyms, etc. Commercial discourses include all kinds of inscriptions on shops and other business advertisements. Transgressive discourses refer to signs that, intentionally or accidentally, violate the semiotics of a particular place in the sense that it is a sign out of its usual place, e.g. a price tag on the road or graffiti.

As noted by Gradečak-Erdeljić and Zlomislić (2014, p. 8), LL is a research field at the cross section of disciplines and borrows from its visual content the very name for the geographical structure it represents, where the geographical structure

is construed with the help of linguistic signs. LL views public spaces as maps where the key to reading them can be found in deciphering the role of language in the sociological and linguistic dynamics of the city. City centres with their high language density are open and accessible to the 'crowd', and as such they have become the best places for LL research. Public spaces become a way to encode and publicize not only information of common civic value but of the sociolinguistic structure on a par with other media such as press, electronic media, TV, or radio.

Referring to the decoding power of LL, Grbavac (2018) notices that it mostly deals with multilingual environments where language choices and attitudes toward language issues are closely linked to politics, power relations in that community, language ideologies, and interlocutors' views on their identities and the identities of others. As a consequence of various historical and economic trends, such as interethnic conflicts, the formation of new regional communities (e.g. the European Union), the disintegration of former communities (e.g. the former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union), globalization, consumerism changes in language ideologies and available identities occur. In such social and linguistic constellations, English is seen as a bridging element in an attempt to traverse the obstacles of linguistic identification among members of various speech communities.

The higher percentage of signs in a foreign language (English, French, Italian, German) may be seen as an instantiation of processes related to economic and cultural globalization in a multilingual world (Graddol, 1997; Gorter, 2013) wherein foreign language signs are used to achieve the sense of prestige and positive connotations. Graddol further observed that in its current historical stage of late capitalism or post-modernity, and we may add the exponential rise of both the speed and quantity of information spread over the Internet, the world is becoming increasingly multilingual as previously established nation-state institutions of language control and language planning have been undermined by the global flows of information, media, people, and technology.

In that sense, we follow Bourdieu's (1991) idea of the 'linguistic marketplace', where different languages and varieties are hierarchically ordered and function as commodities, and where they are attributed specific symbolic value. Thus, using or accessing a particular highly valued language then implies symbolic prestige and profit (Bourdieu 1991) and not only its referential force. Bourdieu sees linguistic markets as simultaneously structural forces and constructions of linguistic practice and local agency (Park and Wee, 2012), which are some of major strands of LL research, and in many of those 'markets of English' (Park and Wee 2012, p. 7) LL research occupies a variable position.

The outreach of these linguistic market conditions is by no means reserved for global urban centres or national capitals, usual objects of study in LL research, since we can witness their impact in smaller urban areas in the three researched towns. In the contemporary digitalised world, globalisation is erasing cultural and linguistic borders and setting new standards for what is local and what is not,

making the use of English a basic necessity of survival, especially in terms of commercial positioning and taking a piece of the profit cake in sometimes much more restricted geographical and business area.

3. Methodology

As proposed by Backhaus (2007, p. 66) an LL sign is considered to be “...any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame. The underlying definition is physical, not semantic. It is rather broad, including anything from the small handwritten sticker attached to a lamp-post to huge commercial billboards outside a department store”. Most analyses of LL consist in distinguishing top-down and bottom-up flows of LL elements or *in vitro* and *in vivo* signs (Calvet 1990, 1994, in Backhaus, 2007). The first set includes signs placed by institutional agencies of any kind and at any level and the second set consists of signs displayed by individual, associative or corporative actors. The main difference between these two wide categories of LL elements resides in the fact that the former are expected to reflect a general commitment to the dominant culture while the latter are designed much more freely according to individual strategies. Both categories of LL items, however, offer themselves to the public that walks through, perceives and interprets the LL. Top-down signs are coded according to their belonging to national or local, and e.g. cultural, social, educational, medical or legal institutions. Bottom-up items are coded according to categories such as professional (legal, medical, consulting), commercial (and subsequently, according to branches like food, drink, clothing, furniture etc.) and services (agencies like real estate, translation or manpower).

Since the focus of our research is on commercial signs on coffee shops, we mostly observed the *in vivo* signs, but for the sake of illustration of the opposition between the two sets in our field study, we included several signs on national or local authorities' buildings as examples of the *in vitro* signs.

In the present study, we applied the method of field research replicating partially the steps from Gradečak et al. (2018) by focusing on commercial signs, more specifically coffee shops, pubs, clubs and bars.³ It relied on the methodology of qualitative and quantitative analysis of photographs taken by camera(s) on researcher's mobile phone(s) in the narrower area of the Vukovar, Osijek and Đakovo city centre in spring 2024, which is typical for these types of studies (according to Grbavac, 2013). A standard geographical map is used to mark the area covered (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

The sampling method applied in the second step was Cook and Campbell's *Diversity for Heterogeneity Sampling* (1979, pp. 75–77) as 'deliberate sampling

³ Their categorization depends on the label the establishment itself uses, as indicated on detected signs on doors or walls, providing specific data on owners, address, tax number etc.

for heterogeneity' where the survey areas are illustrative, and not representative examples of the linguistic landscape of the city and the focus was primarily on *in vivo* or *bottom up* signs produced by members of general population and not by institutions as *top down* signs. It typically involves the most relevant area in reference to the chosen type of discourse, i.e. set of signs. The aim is to get as diverse linguistic landscapes as possible, and not to present all linguistic landscapes in proportion. Our field research data were gathered in major commercial zones of the towns of Vukovar (Županijska and Stjepana Radića street, Franjo Tuđman square, Figure 1), Osijek (Stjepana Radića Street, Europska avenija, Tvrdā, Figure 2) and Đakovo (Ban Josip Jelačić Street, Korzo, Figure 3) in a stretch of approximately 2 km in each town.

The distribution of languages on signs was established by counting signs and simple descriptive statistics in terms of percentages of specific language in the total sample.



Figure 1. The map of Vukovar with the researched area marked in red.

Results

We provide at the beginning a sample of commercial signs from Vukovar to illustrate the tendencies of the use of English and other foreign languages in bottom-up signs. In the initial study from 2018 more than 200 photos were taken, but now we photographed only commercial signs, i.e. signs for coffee shops, bars and pubs.



Figure 4a. Commercial signs on shops and shopping centres – bilingual Croatian and English (Golubica mall (department shop), Cult London (clothes shop)), and monolingual English (CineStar cinemas, Posh store (clothes shop)).⁴

The photographs in this category represent the focal point of this study since, in order to check the hypothesis on the role of commercial signs, we separated the photos of signs found on bars, coffee shops and restaurants and analysed them in terms of the language they are written in. Images in Figure 4a. refer to the mixture of languages, Croatian and English in initially intended bilingual signs. On the other hand, images in Figure 4b show signs representing the category of monolingual signs with establishment's names containing a total of 18 signs, with 11 names for coffee shops in the English language, which represent 62% of the total number of all signs for coffee shops in the observed area in Vukovar, as shown in Table 1. The photos in Figures 4a and 4b are aligned according to the geographic distribution in the observed area, following the path from the main street, and the commercial pedestrian zone in the city centre in the north to south direction.

Table 1. Distribution of coffee shop signs in Vukovar according to the language used

Language	Number	Examples
English	11 (62%)	<i>The Way, Escape, Sunshine, Infinity, The Dublin Pub, The best x 2, History, Step, Onyx, Riverside</i>
Croatian	2 (12%)	<i>Novi Vukovar, Restoran Vrške</i>
Latin	1 (5%)	<i>In fumen</i>
Dutch	1 (5%)	<i>Den Hag</i>
Spanish	2 (11%)	<i>El maritimo, Madre</i>
Italian	1 (5%)	<i>Chiara</i>

⁴ All photographs used in the present paper were taken by me during my field research in in the towns of Vukovar, Osijek and Đakovo.

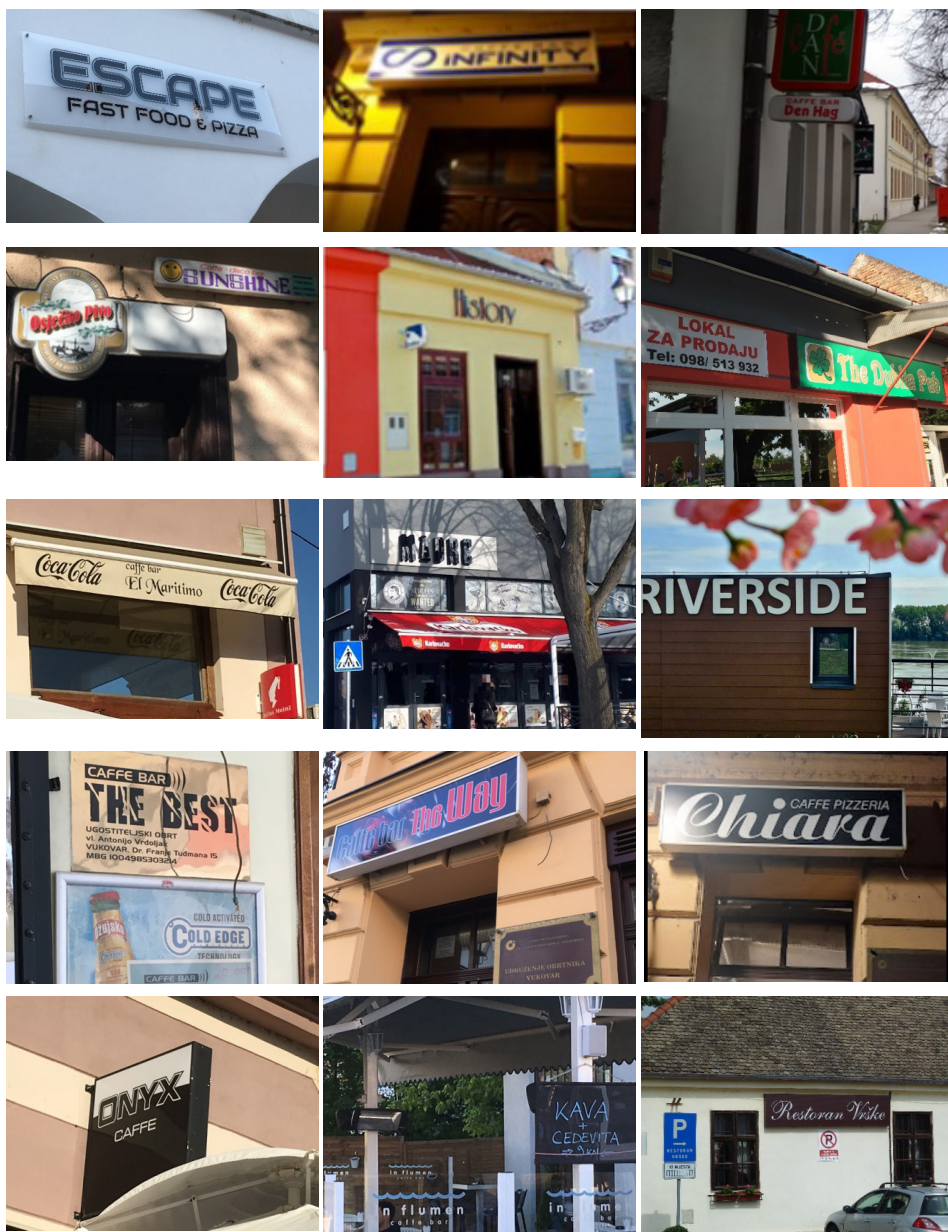


Figure 4b. Commercial signs - bars and coffee shops – monolingual names of coffee shops with bilingual (Croatian and English) or monolingual (Croatian) interventions with signs for working hours or special offers.

Only one example in Latin, Italian and quasi Dutch with only 2 Croatian examples, *Novi Vukovar* (Eng. *New Vukovar*) and *Restoran Vrške* (Eng. *Restaurant*

Fishing Net) is what makes this set particularly interesting and what prompted the research of the corresponding central town areas in Đakovo and Osijek. In Figures 5 and 6 we present photographs of some representative examples of monolingual (either English or Croatian) coffee shop signs as well as their bilingual versions from these two towns. Elaboration of the distribution of all observed coffee shop names in Tables 2 and 3 below.



Figure 5a. Monolingual English coffee shop signs in Osijek.



Figure 5b. Bilingual English and Croatian coffee shop signs in Osijek.



Figure 5c. Monolingual Croatian coffee shop signs in Osijek.

Table 2. Distribution of coffee shop signs in Osijek according to the language used

Language	Number	Examples
English	16 (42%)	<i>Caffe Bar G, In, Rubicon, College, Mind, Stop, San Francisco, Club, Outside, Club Q, Fort Pub, Matrix, Memories, St. Patrick's, Exit, Old Bridge Pub</i>
Croatian	5 (14,2%)	<i>Runda, Radić, Kaos, Dubioza, Osječka pivnica Tvrdá</i>
Italian	3 (7%)	<i>Tivoli, La Cioccolata, Venti due</i>
Latin	2 (5,3%)	<i>Moneo, Magis</i>
Spanish	1 (2,6%)	<i>Luna</i>
German	2 (5,3%)	<i>General Von Beckers, Franz Koch</i>
French	3 (7,8%)	<i>Mignon, Merlon, Rocher</i>
Dutch	1 (2,6%)	<i>Amsterdam</i>
Ambiguous	5 (13,2%)	<i>Nargilla, Glembay, Petar Pan, Beertija, Bure bar</i>

Croatian monolingual signs account for only 14.2% of all observed signs, where e.g. *Runda*, *Radić*, *Kaos*, *Dubioza* were arguably labelled as Croatian due to their adjustment to Croatian pronunciation and spelling, although only one, *Radić*, is strictly of Croatian etymology, as a surname of the historical personality after whom the street where the coffee shop is situated is named. Other names are all slang words in Croatian, but mostly with an international background (*Runda* after English or German 'round', *Kaos* as possibly English 'chaos' and *Dubioza* as a local jargon word stemming from the English adjective 'dubious'. The same problem existed in the section with ambiguous signs because some of them may belong to e.g. Arabic (*Nargilla*) but we opted to assign it to this more neutral category due to its international path of arriving into the Croatian language. A similar problem is the calque form of the personal name for the literary hero Peter Pan, who in the Croatian version is *Petar Pan*, a name of the pastry shop/coffee shop, or *Beertija*, a very successful morphological blend of the English word 'beer' and the label used for pubs or bars, 'birtija', which is actually a Croatian folk etymological version of the German word 'Wirtshaus' ('inn, porterhouse'). In Table 3 above there are three separate categories of signs in terms of the number of languages displayed on

a single sign, two monolingual and one bilingual, with names e.g. *Bure bar* (Cro. ‘barrel bar’), but since we are not dealing with the element of language dominance in terms of the informative value ascribed to national languages (cf. Grbavac 2013), we analyse these examples as instances of signs containing English words or, in this case English morphosyntactic features. Namely, undeclensed nominal appositive premodification of the nominal head is considered ungrammatical or at least substandard in Croatian but increasing in frequency and is considered a result of the English influence (cf. Starčević, 2006; Hudeček, 2016).

Slightly less varied distribution of languages can be found in Đakovo with 23 photographed signs where only three languages, English, Croatian and French, were clearly distinguished and the international (*Film*) and potentially Turkish or Arabic background of *Fess* was what assigned them in the category of ambiguous signs. Croatian signs were labelled as such due to the Croatian transcription of mostly international words (‘fountain, ‘gallery’), but *Enigma* may have been an English example as well.



Figure 5a. Monolingual English coffee shop signs in Đakovo.



Figure 5b. Bilingual English and Croatian coffee shop sign in Đakovo.



Figure 5c. Monolingual Croatian coffee shop sign in Đakovo.

Table 3. Distribution of coffee shop signs in Đakovo according to the language used

Language	Number	Examples
English	15 (65,2%)	<i>Vigor, The Eagle Pub, Cape Town, Sense, Shine, Royal Pub, Escape, Exit, 3D, °C Club, My Place, Central, London, People, Click</i>
Croatian	4 (17,4%)	<i>Fontana, Galerija Raa, Larisa, Enigma</i>
French	2 (8,7%)	<i>Godot, Passage</i>
Ambiguous	2 (8,7%)	<i>Film, Fess</i>

4. Discussion

Since our sampling method was based on Cook and Campbell's *Diversity for Heterogeneity Sampling* (1979:75–77) as 'deliberate sampling for heterogeneity', both the surveyed areas and the data, i.e. photos of signs on coffee shops in Vukovar, Osijek and Đakovo are illustrative, and not representative examples of the linguistic landscape of those towns. Our preliminary evidence shows, however, a strong visual representation of English as the language of preference on these signs since this language individually carries the highest percentage in all three areas observed (64%, 42% and 65.2% respectively). The relatively lower frequency of monolingual English signs in Osijek can be explained by a relatively high frequency of signs with other foreign languages, 43,8%, and only 14,2% signs were monolingual Croatian. The fact that Croatian was rather underrepresented, both in Vukovar, 11% and Đakovo, with 17% monolingual signs in Croatian, or rather just borrowings from a foreign language adapted to Croatian morpho-phonological system (*Galerija* is derived from 'gallery' or e.g. *Fontana* from 'fountain', although some other European language may have served as a direct source, e.g. German or French), may indicate that the national language is considered not attractive enough for commercial signs of this type, as some previous research shows (Grbavac 2013). Grbavac pointed out the rising attraction of English for typically commercial signs, as a language of negotiation between prevailing

cultural beliefs and conflicting social issues. Her research showed that public use of foreign language is seen as an open expression of the attitude to mother tongue and other national and foreign languages. Our data indicate that the role of the English language in commercial signs should be readdressed, as it does not always convey a message about the establishment in question with its informative value, but rather has a symbolic function as a part of the marketing strategy to attract customers by what we termed the element of escapism of “the third place”, as suggested by Oldenburg (1999). So, it is not only that the sign in English is the index of a more successful life and poshness that a potential, imaginary life in the West may bring, but it is a comfort of a different place that offers some kind of a sanctuary and a hideaway from the millstone of everyday life and drudgery. On the other hand, the role of Croatian in commercial signs, on coffee shops and bars especially, should be readdressed as well, because it is obvious that this bottom-up category of signs shows a tendency of distancing the public from their mother tongue. It is indicative that the majority of signs in Croatian were actually borrowings from other languages, English included, as can be seen in the results above, so, the gap between source languages is actually even wider.

One aspect of signs for these establishments is a prevalent use of the otherwise non-existent phrase “café/café bar” for both coffee shops and bars proper. This unusual coinage is typical for this area of the ex-Yugoslav territories and represents an enigmatic mixture of the adjusted Italian words for coffee (‘caffé’) and coffee shops (‘bar’, used alternatively to ‘caffetteria’). It seems that the label has been unequivocally accepted as an official label for these types of businesses and remains a peculiar linguistic and cultural hybrid.

Some signs in English exhibit monolingual interventions in Croatian with signs for working hours or special offers clearly directed to their usual clientele, local inhabitants whose mother tongue is Croatian, making them actual areas of bilingual communication. This is a standard approach for business purposes noticed by Grbavac (2013) and Deng (2021) as well because the purpose is the financial gain from the reliable and regular source, that is regular patrons.

The primary hypothesis of the preference for English signs is well represented in the sign for the coffee shop *The Best* in Vukovar in Table 1.b, advertised by its name in English. The informative element in the sign, however, is in Croatian when in the announcement of the party (in English spelling) with days of the week in Croatian makes this sign bilingual, with an aim to attract the regular clientele but focusing on earning money by specifying in Croatian the specific time of the party to be held there.

If we are to objectively observe the quantitative results of the survey, we could conclude that there is an obvious discrepancy between the informative and symbolic function of signs in foreign languages. The use of English lexemes ‘bar’ or ‘club’ on signs is clearly informative, but the modifying lexemes in English have a clear indexical, if not symbolic function. The use of Italian lexemes, e.g. *Venti*

Due on the sign for a pizzeria and coffee shop serving Italian coffee is indexical in terms of pointing out the obvious Italian origin of the drinks and food served there, as might be the toponym *San Francisco* for coffee (although it is actually Portland where *Starbucks* was founded), but it is clearly the language's symbolic function of associative links to specific cultural items, such as luxurious life style or entertainment that is present in the majority of examples.

Contrary to initial assumptions, when it is assumed that one's mother tongue would present a "safe place", a language one feels the most secure while using, it is almost an established norm that hospitality establishments providing service use foreign labels to attract customers. Neither the awareness of a higher level of knowledge of Croatian, a mother tongue one would feel independent and not self conscious in comparison to using some foreign language, nor the sense of the safe cultural environment one's mother tongue evokes, contribute to higher frequency of Croatian examples in our data set.

Since the use of national languages in public spaces is considered to be an important corner stone in preserving the ethnolinguistic vitality, in terms of the foundations of LL research promoted by Landry and Bourhis (1997), it would be our next step to provide a qualitative analysis of the sentimental value of signs in specific languages, both outside and inside the establishment, and both among their owners and their patrons alike.

5. Conclusion

In multilingual environments, in different interactions, the process of negotiating or assuming identities takes place on a daily basis, with different language ideologies and identity ideologies coming to the fore. The question is often asked which languages or which language variants certain people should speak and in which contexts, which linguistic identity they should promote, all of which creates a rather dynamic linguistic landscape.

This rationale may explain some of the findings observed in the past (Gradečak-Erdeljić & Zlomislić, 2014), especially in the opposition to the use of Croatian on *in vivo* public signs. The results of the field research analysed in this paper conducted in the fairly monolingual speech communities of there Croatian towns, Vukovar, Osijek and Đakovo, showed that English has the highest percentage of use on public signs for coffee shops, bars and pubs, which indicates that the commercial attraction of English and other foreign languages is amply used in open space, as indicated in much of previous research.

The high frequency of *in vivo* signs in English in our data set focused on signs on hospitality establishments such as coffee shops, restaurants and bars. English is profiled to be a bridging element, a part of the commercial discourse intended mostly for external visitors and tourists, but also a point of attraction for

local population, an advertising gimmick used to attract attention by providing an escapist haven where the parallel world of otherness and assumed opulence exist. The escapism effect of the so called “third space” is mostly the reason why English is prevalent in signs on commercial signs in general, especially on coffee shops as places of leisure and the ethnographic description of its use would be a natural step in the future of LL research in this multilingual part of Croatia.

The shortcomings of this research refer to the width of the researched area and the depth of the details examined in the semiotic category of characteristics of signs, but since the research was based on the principle of deliberate sampling for heterogeneity where the survey areas are illustrative, and not representative examples of the linguistic landscape of the city, the data are still relevant in view of the points made at the outset of the research. Further micro and macro studies would be necessary to support the ideas suggested in this paper and the social (r) evolution of English as contemporary *lingua franca* is to be observed, especially in its multimodal environment.

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