

Pre-interaction language management and the relevance of ideology in a semiotic landscape of a plurilingual tourist area

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1 Introduction

Tourism has been established as one of the most prolific service industries of the late modern era. This prolificity involves not only an apparent economic side, but also sociocultural development. As a matter of fact, one does not exclude the other, and it is of my interest here to examine the link between tourism and globalization, and its manifestation in the semiotic landscape of a globalized yet peripheral tourist area in the Slovak Republic.

Following a recent paradigm shift in sociolinguistic studies leaning towards constructivist epistemologies, I approach ‘languages’ of tourism discourse not as mere translations of each other, i.e., not only as products, but as translingual processes with context dependent and context forming characteristics shaping a transidiomatic tourist environment (Jacquemet, 2005). Thus, I shift from a traditional understanding of language as politically bound and rather an abstract phenomenon (though still acknowledging this perspective in a sense that tourism discourse participants may consciously or not perceive languages exactly like this) to new understandings revolving around linguistic resources, their horizontal and vertical movement, and multiple centers to which their users orient, all affected under the presence or absence of global and local flows.

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, I explore if and how theoretical-methodological approaches to linguistic landscape can be effectively combined with Language Management Theory (Jernudd and Neustupný, 1987) to access linguistic repertoires of tourism discourse participants as manifested in public signs. Then, I investigate homogenizing and heterogenizing forces of globalization and localization and their pre-interactionally managed and ideologically underlined manifestations in the linguistic landscape of a tourist site, through which I aim at achieving a better understanding of contemporary linguistic and sociocultural practices.

2 Theoretical-methodological background

As Coupland and Jaworski (2001, p. 134) note: “Local instances of language-in-use are rich in socio-cultural significance; large-scale norms, values and ideologies are inscribed in discourse patterns.” To approach tourism discourse as consisting of varied linguistic resources reflecting and producing social structures and cultural practices (thus ideologies) and its cyclical character, I analyze these resources on both micro and macro levels.

The chosen theoretical-methodological background backing my assumptions consists of tools and methods of the transdisciplinary approaches of linguistic landscape (Landry and Bourhis, 1997), ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis (Blommaert and Maly, 2014), geosemiotics (Scollon and Scollon, 2003), sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert, 2010), and language management theory (Jernudd and Neustupný, 1987) which allow me to

investigate synchronic snapshots of public signs as more complex historical, social and cultural issues.

2.1 Socio-semiotic approaches

The starting assumption is that linguistic landscape signs reflect people's repertoires, which allows researchers to make statements about sociolinguistic structures. Pennycook (2009, p. 308) notes that "our linguistic landscapes are the products of human activity not merely in terms of the signs we put up but also in terms of the meanings, morals and myths we invest in them." Following this, languages of linguistic landscapes can be viewed as social facts relating to various social phenomena (Ben-Rafael, 2009). In this sense, public signs are always ideologically marked (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006) and actively participate in social and power positioning (Torkington, 2009). Thus, I should be able to achieve the understanding of the processes behind pre-interaction management through the investigation of semiosphere.

While earlier linguistic landscape studies were oriented rather quantitatively, i.e., focused on ethnolinguistic vitality, language distribution, mapping, or categorization (e.g., Backhaus, 2006), more recent trends in sociolinguistics have been revolving around qualitative aspects (social aspects) of languages of public spaces. Ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis developed by Blommaert and Maly (2014) presents an optimal tool to analyze such socially oriented relations between elements of linguistic landscape. It deals with public signs as complex indexes of micro and macro contexts and takes into consideration their production, emplacement, and readership, where production could be partly equivalent to pre-interaction management.

Another socio-semiotically oriented concept is geosemiotics (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) dealing with the placement of signs in the material world. It allows me to approach social, cultural, and political consequences of space semiotization (Blommaert, 2013).

To analyze more specific effects of globalization (and localization), I use Blommaert's (2010) concept of sociolinguistics of globalization dealing with semiotic resources in plurilingual landscapes, their mobility, or complex and pluricentric norm orientations of their users. In relation to ideology, sociolinguistics of globalization offers a notion of "orders of indexicality". Social meanings are made by "ordered" and "indexable/indexing" signs which explain "how [economical, linguistic, ecological etc.] "things" were, are and/or should be" (Sloboda, 2009, p. 74). According to Neustupný (1989), language ideologies are deductible from linguistic interactions and metalinguistic idioms.

2.2 Language management theory

Language management theory developed by Jernudd and Neustupný in the 1980s shifts from (but still acknowledges) earlier rather neoclassical approaches to language policy and planning to more interaction-based management. The concept captures both "how people use language but also how they interact with it" (Jernudd and Neustupný, 1987, p. 1). It encompasses institutional management (organized/off-line management) and individual interactions (simple/online management), the latter being "starting points" for large-scale language planning. Language management theory deals not only with linguistic competences, but also with communicative practices, sociocultural and socioeconomic phenomena in arranged hierarchical order (Nekvapil, 2006). As Marx and Nekula (2015, p. 151) sum up, "spoken and written statements are not only produced and received but are also reflected and managed by the participants in due consideration of the communicative norms in the context. Such communicative norms can be described for example in terms of grammatical norms, language attitudes, or expectations of political correctness".

In this paper, I examine these notions as manifested in the linguistic landscape through the perspective of pre-interaction language management. Nekvapil and Sherman (2009, p. 185)

define this stage as “the language management process...done in anticipation of a future interaction or, more precisely, in anticipation of potential problems in a future interaction.” Concerning the purpose of pre-interaction management, it can be divided into specific management of prospective interaction or generalized management aimed at more interactions of similar or same character (Nekvapil and Sherman, 2009) where the latter seems to concern public signage. Through this perspective, not only am I able to analyze the “present” of public signs, in other words, the final products, and their “past” or “processes that generate them” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 138) which are to different extents affected by ideology, but also, I can predict, anticipate or avoid some of those potential communicative problems and adjust the processes in the future.

3 Methodology

While Language management theory seems to be designed primarily for the examination of direct communicative interactions and speakers’ reflections of these interactions with metalinguistic behavior being in its core, here, as already mentioned and hopefully justified above, I explore this behavior manifested in the semiotic landscapes or, as Scollon and Scollon (2003, p. xi) put it, in languages appearing in the material world whether it is “on the lips of two people having a casual conversation or engraved in stone on the face of national public monument.” Data are analyzed inductively I make broader generalizations about a sociolinguistic development in the area from the observation of individual signs.

4 Data

Tatranská Lomnica is an administrative division of the municipality of Vysoké Tatry (The High Tatras). It is one of the most frequented year-round tourist areas in the Slovak Republic with mountain, nature and winter being its prime “consumption” motifs (see, Urry, 1995). Accordingly, the area provides a considerable number of entertainment facilities and an abundance of plurilingual material to put under sociolinguistic scrutiny.

Ethnographically collected data consist of snapshots of public signs produced by a local business (and linguistic) stakeholder offering entertainment service in the form of toboggan run (Figure 1: *Local stakeholder and their linguistic landscape*). Its relatively unique character (one of three runs is the whole Tatra Mountains in the country) at exceptional 925m altitude presupposes its frequent use by tourists. Being a regular visitor to the area, the researcher herself can confirm its “traffic”.



Figure 1 Local stakeholder and their linguistic landscape

The corpus of data consists of 17 snapshots collected in March 2020 depicting a number of semiotic resources in isolation or semiotic aggregates. I would like to note that there is no single method to determine what counts as one sign. Even the often referenced definition of sign, “any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame (Backhaus 2006, p. 55) presents more challenges than answers or “guidelines” as it is, indeed, seldom that in the real material world signs have clearly defined boundaries and they are never in isolation, but always in configurations with other signs. Spolsky (2009, p. 32) notes: “One needs to make ad hoc decisions about boundaries [of signs], raising problems for the reliability of counts”. Rather than trying to count each individual sign, I approach the linguistic landscape of the area as consisting of semiotic aggregates reciprocally contributing to the meaning of the others.

5 Analysis and discussion

The semiotic object in Figure 2: *A resourceful sign* contains what may have been in the past, or by some more “structurally” oriented contemporary scholars, referred to as a Slovak-English bilingual sign. Under the recent paradigm shift mentioned in the theoretical part above, I understand this object as consisting of linguistic resources coming from translocal and global centers.



Figure 2 A resourceful sign

Regarding code preference, the preferred position, in Western cultures usually towards the left or top of the sign (Scollon and Scollon, 2003), is occupied by resources coming from translocal center and its nominal character suggests translocally conventionalized way of communicating illocutions, particularly prohibitions or restrictions, via public signs – block language. Similarly, repeated exclamation marks represent fairly established though not necessarily standard translocal practice of foregrounding (Ferenčík, 2018). By placing these translocal resources, or, in de Swaan’s (2010) rather political classification, a central language¹ in the preferred position, the author adheres to linguistic policies discussed in the Act of the Slovak National Council No. 270/1995 Coll. on the State Language of the Slovak Republic,

¹ A national language functioning as official language.

and willingly or not exercises and reinforces national language ideology, a tradition popular in European countries² (Sherman, 2018; Seidlhofer, 2018).

The secondary position consists of resources coming from hypercentral scale of English, “the pivot of the world language system” (de Swaan, 2010). Language users operating on this scale do not necessarily rely on linguistic norms from traditional centers, e.g. British or American normativity, their repertoires consist of resources available in their environments. The “resourcefulness” (Pennycook, 2012) of the author in Figure 2: *A resourceful sign* is manifested by a complementary pattern in language use (Reh, 2004), viz. s/he rescales different local and global resources to provide one illocution – prohibition. In other words, the author does not employ resources coming from one center and resources coming from the other(s) to form a duplicating pattern of the same information, but creates an “unfinished product” defined as “partial realizations of genres with partially ‘correct’ bits of languages” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 104).

Instead of the established normative centers mentioned above, the author orients towards a peripheral normativity relating “to the sociology of the periphery” which “show[s] us the core of sociolinguistic of globalization process” (Blommaert 2010, p. 82). The irregular capitalization or the use of adjective *dead* in *risk of injury and dead* (where the noun would be more common from an EFL perspective) are manifestations of such peripheral normativity. The author of this semiotic object uses both economically and geoculturally valued and powerful resource – English and locally available resources by which s/he to a certain extent resists the dominant form of globalization (Appadurai, 1996) and its homogenizing effects causing cultural assimilation.

Through the pre-interactionally managed composition of the sign, i.e., the represented participants (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) using resources from translocal scale in the preferred position and hypercentral or global resources in the secondary position, the author displays and promotes his/her ideological orientations, and reflects the ideological “clashes” in the area. The strong national ideology is “weakened” by the desire of the author to be a part of “global citizenship” (Ben-Rafael and Ben-Rafael, 2015) and perceived as a worthy global economic competitor.

Hypercentral scale seems to be characterized by high mobility and “ad hoc flexibility” meaning that its peripheral users may employ other resources they have in their linguistic repertoires to negotiate meanings. The semiotic object in Figure 3 *Vernacular globalization* suggests that pre-interactional rescaling of various resources may end in rather unexpected but still patterned results (Ferenčík, 2018).

² Ideology of Central and Eastern Europe changed towards the end of the 20th century. Previously under central ideology of the Soviet Union, many states, including Slovakia, were free to focus on their own national aims, one of which is language and its legal status. The (political) importance of the state language of the Slovak Republic is expressed in the Act of the Slovak National Council No. 270/1995 Coll. on the State Language of the Slovak Republic, especially in its introduction: “...the Slovak language is the most important attribute of the Slovak nation’ specificity and the most precious value of its cultural heritage, as well as an expression of sovereignty of the Slovak Republic and a general vehicle of communication for all its citizens, which secures their freedom and equality in dignity and righty in the territory of the Slovak Republic...” (The Act of the Slovak National Council No. 270/1995 Coll.).



Figure 3 Vernacular globalization

The translocal message conforming the central normativity seems to be comprehensible for readers who possess these sociolinguistic competences. Same as in Figure 2: *A resourceful sign*, the author uses three exclamation marks and capitalization as resources of foregrounding (Ferenčík 2018). The composition and the visual design of this semiotic object suggest producer's national language and political affiliations.

The secondary code using resources from hypercentral scale appears to be more problematic. The author's effort to provide the same information in both codes in a duplicating fashion, upscaling of translocal resources and their haphazard organization contribute to the unexpected and unfinished character of the semiotic object manifested by unnecessary capitalization and unusual use of progressive aspect in *Bobs are moving automatically!!!*, the choice of resources from different registers – *Abstention in the designated exit zone is strictly forbidden!!!*, or marked spelling of the word “injury” as *onjury*. As Motschenbacher (2016, p 109) notes: “For ELF as a discursive formation, this means that the degree of structural sedimentation is lower than for other formations that have traditionally been labelled ‘languages.’”

The author of this regulatory sign follows the national language ideology and constructs the like identity. However, s/he also aspires to be perceived as a stakeholder operating on a prestigious global scale using English resources. The use of the hypercentral resources does not result in cultural and linguistic hegemony; on the contrary, their high mobility and the noticeable effects of locality create a heterogenous product contributing to the diverse transidiomatic (Jacquemet, 2005) linguistic landscape of the area. This phenomenon may be referred to as “vernacular globalization” (Appadurai, 1996) described by Blommaert (2010, 197) as “the myriad ways in which global processes enter local conditions and circumstances and become a localized reality.”

Though not necessarily relying on grammatical norms from the traditional loci, the author attempts to profit from symbolic attributes of those centers as their values “stay” on the scales in which they operate, in comparison to resources which travel horizontally across space and vertically across social spheres (Blommaert, 2010). These values usually revolve around the concepts such as prestige, globality, modernity³, “Westernism,” or “poshness”.

The semiotic aggregate in Figure 4: *Pluricentricity* presents yet a more complex matter and captures a (socio)linguistic gist of diverse tourist environments and their “eclectic” ideological background. The aggregate features resources coming from multiple centers. Moreover, the author uses non-linguistic resources (symbols) to index those centers and supercenters, and thus manifests his/her geo-politically bound understanding of languages.

³ Adj. modern as a quality or attribute of something, not as a philosophical movement of the 20th century.



Figure 4 Pluricentricity

The reasons behind the choice of Slovak and Polish flags are fairly straightforward as these languages function almost exclusively at the central scale. They are the state languages of the Slovak Republic and Poland, respectively (though resources from those centers may be, of course, used as *lingua francas* in online language management situations), the choice of Russian and German flags are less obvious because of their central and supercentral position in Russia, Belarus, Germany, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Lichtenstein. By combining these resources with exclusively political notion of national symbols – the Russian and the German flags, the author both confirms and enhances their powerful political position in local, translocal and global spheres.

However, the reasons behind the choice of hypercentral ELF resources and the Union Jack are less transparent as there is more than one prestigious and powerful center connected with English. The author had the array of options with the United States being the most prominent socio-political entity and the epitome of globalization. The choice of the British flag may index his or her perception of the United Kingdom as more prestigious and preference of “European ideology⁴” rather than global one, though one does not necessarily exclude the other.

The composition of the aggregate and code preference may again provide some clues about authors’ ideological orientations. What is marked and goes in contradiction with national linguistic policies is the use of ELF in preferred positions in the top left position of the aggregate. While the word *stop* is translocally understood, the word *go*, and its placement does not fulfill the “legal” requests of the government and may pose a problem for readers who do not possess linguistic competencies to understand the message. Pragmalinguistic skills may, however, substitute the linguistic deficiency. The symbolic properties of hypercentral English and prospective economic profits apparently overweighed the risk of financial punishment. In this case, global values suppressed the national language ideology.

In a similar vein, the topmost position in the semiotic object in Figure 5: *Economic value of English* is occupied by a proper name consisting of resources from higher scale centers. In this case, however, the sign does not have to be necessarily against the linguistic policies as the subsections 7 in The Act of the Slovak National Council No. 270/1995 Coll. on the State

⁴ Note that the sign had been made before the ideas about Britain quitting the European Union became politically relevant.

Language of the Slovak Republic cancels certain duties established in the previous subsections, namely the order requiring all public signs to be presented in the state language.



Figure 5 Economic value of English

Taking into consideration the fact that micro and macro managements are in a dialectical relationship, i.e., “in particular interaction the participants recognizably orient themselves towards social structures and thereby reproduce them, and secondly, that in particular interactions the participants contribute to the transformation of these structures” (Nekvapil, 2012, p. 16), I can argue that this organized implementation of the subsection 7 allowing globalization to “legally” enter the country may have been the result of simple interaction managements using the resources originating from various global and translocal but “niche” prestigious centers for economic profit.

6 Conclusion

Employing pre-interaction language management perspective for the study of semiotic landscape has proved to be beneficial for understanding of the processes behind translanguaging communication in a heteroglossic tourist area. This transdisciplinary combination allows me to investigate ideological background of “eclectic” and emergent post-modern language practices situated in time and space, the reasons why authors and producers of semiotic objects adhere or do not adhere to the linguistic policy, correction activities and their “center(s)”, and ultimately prepare a ground for proposing new (more relevant) regulations to national language management agencies in the country.

The results show that the national language ideology and its territory, and national identity determining power co-occurs with prestigious notions of globality manifested by symbolically and referentially functioning ELF and create a “glocal” environment promoting diversification rather than cultural hegemony. The authors of the semiotic aggregates do not just use linguistic resources, they also draw on their geo-socio-cultural background.

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Summary

Pre-interaction language management and the relevance of ideology in a semiotic landscape of a plurilingual tourist idea

The contemporary world is characterized by multilateral flows of globalization on our everyday practices. Globalization has been rather extensively penetrating into various socio-cultural spheres and related discourses. Tourist destinations and their discourses seem to be one of the most affected areas by this phenomenon. The current socio-linguistic understanding of language and communication follows this direction and accepts subjectivist perspectives on the world and language (cf. objectivist paradigm popular in the previous century) as not easily or clearly defined matter. Thus, I consider language not as a politically bound and context-free abstract system, but as semiotic resources existing in time and space or in the real material world where they function as both reflectors and producers of socio-cultural relationships, ideologies and values. Through the post-modern sociolinguistic approaches and their theoretical-methodological tools I examine the semiosphere of a frequented tourist destination located in the Slovak Republic. The aim of the paper is to discover the ideological background of resources forming the linguistic landscape of a local service provider and the effects of global and local factors on this landscape.