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THE IMPORTANCE OF LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE IN ANALYZING MINORITY LANGUAGE POLICY[1]

This paper examines the concept of linguistic landscape – the study of written language in public spaces – as a tool for understanding multilingualism in specific territories. The authors argue that researchers of minority language policy have paid insufficient attention to the written display of minority languages in public spaces. Emerging technologies and new modes of displaying written language present both challenges and opportunities for researchers exploring societal multilingualism. Further theoretical development is needed, with empirical validation of theoretical foundations representing a key challenge for future research. Linguistic landscape research, through its analysis of language presence and use in public spaces, provides insights into the status and role of minority and official languages, informing decisions about whether to preserve or reform existing policies. Such research can expose challenges faced by minority communities, thereby improving cooperation between these communities and state institutions in realizing linguistic rights. Drawing on literature spanning four decades, this paper provides a comprehensive synthesis of theoretical and methodological approaches in linguistic landscape research, with particular focus on applications to minority language policy analysis, critically evaluating the field's evolution and identifying methodological challenges requiring future attention. While the field emerged in the 1970s, it has experienced exponential growth particularly over the last decade, transforming from a niche area into one of the most dynamic subfields of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, written language, public space, minority languages, liinguistic rights

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[1]   This paper draws upon and significantly expands the author's earlier theoretical and empirical work on linguistic landscape research. The conceptual framework presented here was initially developed in Nedeljković Pravdić (2015) and subsequently refined through the author's doctoral research (Nedeljković Pravdić, 2022).

1. INTRODUCTION

Public space represents the place *par excellence* where different languages come into contact, revealing societal multilingualism and general patterns of human behavior (Edelman, 2010: 1). In these spaces, we see how linguistic diversity plays out in real contexts, shaped by who lives where, what politics dominate, and which cultural groups have influence. The linguistic landscape that surrounds us – from shop windows to directional signage, from street art to official government notices – often goes unnoticed despite its ubiquity, as we tend to perceive it as an inherent part of our environment (Gorter, 2006: 1; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 37; 2022: 5). These signs, though often unnoticed in daily life, encode significant information about power relations, territorial claims, and community identity construction.

Written language is everywhere in public spaces and this creates what some researchers call a "textual environment." These visual manifestations of language fulfill diverse functions beyond mere communication - they establish territorial claims, signal economic opportunities, express cultural identities, and negotiate social boundaries. Their symbolic nature necessitates careful interpretation, recognizing that they represent deliberate human creations rather than neutral artifacts (Shohamy & Gorter, 2008: 1; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 37; 2022: 5). Each visible sign represents a deliberate decision by its creator. Whether it's a government office, a local business, or a community group, decisions get made about which languages to use, what to say, and how to present information to the public.

The examination of these written linguistic elements offers researchers a methodological framework to explore how our material reality is symbolically constructed through visual linguistic practices (Ben–Rafael et al., 2006; Gorter, 2013; Hult, 2013: 510; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 37; 2022: 5). When researchers study linguistic landscapes, they can see how language and power work together. Public signs both reflect existing social hierarchies and help create them. This research helps us understand how communities fight for linguistic rights, show their cultural presence, and deal with changes brought by globalization and urban development. The visibility and prominence of certain languages on written signs marks the relative power and status of linguistic communities living in a given territory (Backhaus, 2007; 2009), serving as tangible indicators of social hierarchies and reflecting the complex dynamics of linguistic dominance and subordination within communities.

This visual representation of power relations becomes particularly evident when examining which languages occupy premium positions on signage, receive official endorsement, or are relegated to secondary or marginal spaces. The study of the linguistic landscape is particularly interesting in bilingual and multilingual contexts, where it greatly contributes to the description and establishment of systematic patterns of presence or absence of written language in public space (Demaj & Van den Broucke, 2013). In such environments, the linguistic landscape becomes a contested

area where different language groups negotiate their place in the public sphere, often revealing tensions between official language policies and linguistic practices.

Therefore, a significant characteristic of the linguistic landscape is precisely the display of such linguistic diversity, with the note that the "official" linguistic landscape rarely represents a true reflection of the diverse linguistic composition of society. The officially displayed linguistic landscape frequently diverges from the actual linguistic composition of the community. The linguistic landscape analysis is more closely related to its symbolic function (Puzey, 2007: 11), since these signs mean more than just the words they contain – they show what a community values and who has power.

The importance of studying the linguistic landscape lies in understanding given linguistic ideologies, usage, motives, language varieties that appear in the public space, and the impact on the perception of the status and use of different languages, as well as the perception of the official language policy of a given area or region (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006). Analysis of language presence on signage reveals underlying attitudes toward different languages and demonstrates how government policies function in practice. Visual information about the presence of language can certainly influence the status perception of different languages and even one's own linguistic behavior (Gorter, 2007: 4; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 38–39; 2022: 6).

The ubiquitous presence of one's language in public spaces engenders fundamentally different perceptions and attitudes compared to its complete absence from the public domain. The goal of analyzing the linguistic landscape of an area is a more comprehensive view of our knowledge of societal multilingualism, with a special focus on the choice and influence of different languages, their hierarchy, applicable regulations, and aspects of literacy (Gorter, 2013: 191). Researchers want to understand how official language policies actually play out on the street level. The research of minority language policy to date has mainly been focused on studying issues of language replacement, revitalization and maintenance of languages, education of minority communities, while less importance has been attached to visibility, or the "written display" of the presence and use of minority languages in public space (Marten et al., 2012: 1–2). While substantial research has examined educational institutions and language programs, relatively limited attention has been devoted to the visibility of minority languages in public signage and commercial spaces.

Recent comprehensive overviews of the field (Gorter & Cenoz, 2024; 2025) confirm that linguistic landscape studies have rapidly emerged as one of the most dynamic and expanding fields within applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, with exponential growth in publications over the last decade. Cenoz and Gorter (2024: 316) emphasize that the field now offers unique insights into multilingualism in public spaces, exploring themes including minority languages, language policy, and effects of globalization. The exponential growth of this field is clearly indicated by the dramatic increase in publications, with Troyer's bibliography (2025, cited in Cenoz & Gorter,

2024: 316) containing 2041 references compared to only 30 publications documented until 2006. This growing body of work underscores the continued relevance of examining how minority languages achieve – or fail to achieve – public presence in contemporary urban environments.

The primary objective of our paper is to provide a comprehensive theoretical overview and synthesis of existing linguistic landscape research as it pertains to minority language policy analysis. This paper does not present new empirical data; rather, it synthesizes and critically evaluates the substantial body of literature that has emerged in this field, with particular emphasis on recent theoretical and methodological developments.

Through this synthesis, we evaluate how linguistic landscape research has contributed to our understanding of minority language dynamics, particularly regarding the implementation and compliance of official minority language policies in multilingual territories, examining what this research reveals about the gap between policy formulation and actual implementation. We begin by establishing a comprehensive definition of the linguistic landscape concept – examining its applications, purposes, and functions, before critically analyzing the diverse theoretical and methodological frameworks that have emerged in this field. Our investigation then proceeds with a systematic review of key theoretical and empirical studies relevant to our research focus, with particular attention to how linguistic landscape analysis reveals the gap between policy formulation and actual implementation in multilingual contexts (Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 38–39; 2022: 6). We are particularly interested in the difference between what policies say should happen and what actually happens in real communities.

2. DEFINING THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

The concept of linguistic landscape is used in several different ways, which can sometimes make it confusing to pin down exactly what researchers mean when they use the term. The term was originally used to denote the general "linguistic situation in a given region or area," to provide clarification of the "linguistic mosaic" of a particular area (Lou, 2009: 31), or for the description and analysis of the general state of language in a specific country (Gorter, 2013: 191). Initially, the term served to describe the distribution of languages within specific geographical areas and their interrelationships. A linguistic landscape described in this way can also be understood as synonymous with concepts such as linguistic market, linguistic diversity, linguistic mosaic, emphasizing that the linguistic landscape primarily refers to the presence of multilingualism in a social context (Gorter, 2006a: 1; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 39; 2022: 6).

Over time, the concept comes to prominence in the field of language planning, meaning that the linguistic landscape informs us about language policy and/or reflects

it (Phillips, 2011: 22). This theoretical orientation reflects a logical principle: assessing language policy effectiveness requires empirical examination of actual language practices in physical spaces rather than relying solely on policy documentation. The question of ethnolinguistic vitality and the perception of linguistic minorities about the vitality of their native languages is also a subject of study in this field (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Puzey, 2007). This is particularly important because minority language speakers often have strong feelings about whether their languages are thriving or disappearing, and these perceptions matter for language maintenance efforts.

However, the concept of linguistic landscape is sometimes understood so broadly that it includes the description of language history (Gorter, 2006a: 1). Some researchers use it to mean almost anything related to languages in a particular area, which can make the term less useful. The linguistic landscape is clearly a complex phenomenon, and its study involves multiple perspectives and disciplines – from sociolinguistics to urban geography to policy studies. What's interesting is how research on specific aspects of linguistic situations has led to new applications of the term itself, which is particularly associated with the range of languages in textual form (Puzey, 2007: 10; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 39–40; 2022: 7). This shift toward focusing on written signs and texts has really changed how we think about linguistic landscapes, moving from broad descriptions of multilingual situations to more specific analysis of visible language use.

The most cited and widely accepted definition of linguistic landscape by leading researchers in this field (Backhaus, 2005; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Lou, 2009; Edelman, 2010; Marten et al., 2012) is that it is »the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings that together form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration« (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 25). This definition has achieved enduring acceptance due to its concrete specificity, focusing on observable written language visible in urban and municipal environments. Essentially, this definition states that the linguistic landscape represents text in public space, which makes it something researchers can actually study systematically rather than just talk about in abstract terms.

Given that most research is conducted in urban environments, due to urbanization and globalization, a more appropriate term might be "linguistic cityscape" (a term introduced by Gorter, 2006). This makes sense because cities are where you really see the collision of different languages most dramatically. Urban environments characteristically display diverse linguistic elements, ranging from official government signs in the national language to immigrant-owned businesses with signs in their heritage languages, plus international brands trying to appeal to local markets.

The authors (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) emphasize that the linguistic landscape has an informative function (determining territorial and linguistic boundaries, as well

as the dominance of a particular language) and a symbolic function (relating to the weakness or strength of a particular linguistic community and closely linked to the question of linguistic identity). The informative function is pretty straightforward – signs tell you where you are and what languages are expected or accepted in that space. But the symbolic function is more interesting and complicated. When you see your language prominently displayed in public spaces, it sends a message about whether your community matters in that place.

Connected to the symbolic function is the question of ethnolinguistic vitality and individual assessment of a language's status, which can also affect an individual's linguistic behavior (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006: 67–69; Puzey, 2007: 11; Moriarty, 2014: 458; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 39–40; 2022: 7). This is where things get really interesting from a psychological perspective. If you're a minority language speaker and you never see your language on public signs, you might start to feel like it's not a "real" language worth using in public settings. On the other hand, seeing your language displayed prominently can reinforce its importance and encourage you to use it more confidently. These individual reactions add up to broader patterns of language maintenance or shift in communities.

Some authors also speak of the mythological or folkloric function of the linguistic landscape, emphasizing that place names can suggest what cultural-linguistic boundaries existed in the past (Hicks, 2002; Gorter, 2006a; Puzey, 2007: 14; Litvinskaya, 2010), as well as the commercial function of language use for product promotion and tourism purposes (Hornsby, 2008 cited in Litvinskaya, 2010: 14). Urban toponymy frequently preserves linguistic traces of communities no longer linguistically active in these spaces. The commercial aspect is readily observable in diverse urban contexts – businesses use different languages to appeal to tourists or to signal authenticity.

Based on these functions, different domains have been defined in which linguistic landscape research can be helpful. With the process of globalization and the spread of the English language, many studies have emerged on its use in contexts where it is neither an official nor a minority language (Litvinskaya, 2010: 14–15; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 39–40; 2022: 7). English now appears ubiquitously, even in contexts with minimal English-speaking populations. English signage in small European or Asian towns frequently serves symbolic functions related to modernity and internationalism rather than practical communicative purposes.

Contemporary scholarship has further expanded our understanding of linguistic landscape functions beyond the traditional informative and symbolic dimensions. Cenoz and Gorter (2024: 318–320) emphasize that linguistic landscapes provide powerful pedagogical tools for developing language awareness and understanding linguistic diversity in educational contexts, demonstrating how signs in public spaces can serve as authentic learning materials that help students connect multilingualism to

historical, social, and political contexts. Moreover, recent work has begun to theorize the relationship between online and offline spaces in linguistic landscape research (Rosendal et al., 2023: 181–182), demonstrating that the translocal interconnectedness between digital and physical spaces reveals important dynamics often invisible when examining only traditional street–level signage. This methodological innovation shows that businesses and organizations may maintain significant online presence even when their physical visibility is minimal, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Some authors believed that the concept of linguistic landscape should be more comprehensive and include all types of text, whether it is written language on a sign or image, inside or outside buildings, shops, and even speech on the street (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009; Litvinskaya, 2010: 11). These authors emphasize that one of the shortcomings of the given definition of linguistic landscape (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 25) is that public space is understood as static and fixed, while ignoring the reality of public space which is dynamic, mobile, and changeable (Ben–Rafael et al., 2006; Moriarty, 2014: 458). Longitudinal observation reveals that – signs change, new businesses open with different language choices, communities shift, and the linguistic landscape evolves.

Building on these premises and recognizing the need for a comprehensive analysis of written language in public spaces to better understand how linguistic landscapes illuminate minority language policy implementation, we advocate for an expanded methodological approach that transcends the examination of isolated sign types (Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 41; 2022: 8). Beyond simple enumeration of individual sign types, researchers need to look at the bigger picture of how language appears across different types of spaces and contexts. This "expanded" conceptualization of the linguistic landscape encompasses "any written sign or advertisement found outside or inside a public institution or private business at a given geographical location" (Ben–Rafael et al., 2006: 14), allowing for a more nuanced investigation of how language policies manifest across diverse textual representations in the public domain.

Within regulated linguistic territories where language use in public spaces is governed by official policies, researchers have identified critical distinctions between two categories of signs in the linguistic landscape. This distinction is really important because it helps explain why you might see inconsistencies in language use even in places with clear language policies. Private written signs (non-official, commercial, "bottom–up" elements such as shop names and street advertisements) primarily reflect individual preferences and market forces, though they may be indirectly influenced by language policies. These signs reflect autonomous decision-making by commercial actors about what languages to use, often based on who their customers are or what image they want to project. In contrast, official written signs (government-issued, public, "top–down" elements including street names, traffic signage, and government

building identifiers) are directly mandated by governing authorities and must explicitly comply with established language policies (Backhaus, 2006; Ben–Rafael et al., 2006; Edelman, 2010; Waiching, 2012: 65; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 41; 2022: 8). These signs remain under direct governmental regulatory authority and can enforce their language policies most easily.

Therefore, two categories serve distinct sociolinguistic functions: official signs operate as markers of institutional status and power, while private signs manifest community-level language practices that express cultural identity and collective aspirations. Together, they provide valuable insights into power dynamics within multilingual communities and demonstrate how globalization influences local linguistic ecology (Huebner, 2006: 31). Moreover, patterns in private signage can reveal how state language policies are interpreted and implemented at the grassroots level (Said, 2010: 3). This official/private distinction proves particularly valuable for evaluating language policy effectiveness – official signs demonstrate authorities' linguistic preferences and priorities, while private signs indicate the degree to which these policies achieve public acceptance and practical implementation (Puzey, 2012: 141; Yavari, 2012: 13; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 41; 2022: 8).

The linguistic landscape offers nuanced insights into a community's language policies and practices (Said, 2010: 3) by examining not only the visible written elements in public spaces but also the complex social dynamics behind them – who initiates, creates, positions, and consumes these linguistic artifacts. Advanced studies in this field investigate how linguistic landscapes are strategically manipulated, whether deliberately or unconsciously, to reinforce existing linguistic hierarchies or to challenge dominant language practices. This approach reveals how the linguistic landscape reflects demographic patterns, actual language usage, attitudinal dispositions toward languages, and the implementation of formal language policies. Conceptualized in this comprehensive manner, linguistic landscape research constitutes a vital component of minority language policy studies, particularly because questions of power and representation for minority language communities in multilingual contexts carry profound socio-political significance (Marten et al., 2012: 1; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 41–42; 2022: 8). We can therefore position the linguistic landscape field as an innovative methodological approach for "mapping" linguistic diversity and multilingualism within urban environments, providing crucial visibility metrics for minority languages that often struggle for recognition and representation in public spaces (Marten et al., 2012, cited in Gorter, 2013: 201; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 42; 2022: 9).

The definitional evolution of linguistic landscape outlined above carries particular significance for minority language policy research. Each conceptual refinement – from broad societal multilingualism to specific visible textuality, from static snapshots to dynamic spatial processes – has enhanced our analytical capacity to

investigate how minority languages achieve (or fail to achieve) public presence. The expanded conceptualization we advocate, encompassing all written signs in public and semi-public spaces, proves especially valuable for minority language contexts, where linguistic visibility often extends beyond official domains into commercial, grassroots, and transgressive signage practices. Understanding these diverse manifestations enables more comprehensive assessment of minority language vitality and policy implementation effectiveness.

3. METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study of linguistic landscape, which some authors also call a new "promising" subdiscipline of sociolinguistics (Backhaus, 2005; 2006; 2007; 2009; Edelman, 2010), finds application in many fields and has an interdisciplinary character, building its foundations in a large number of theories from different disciplines (history, education, tourism, politics, media, economics, law, geography, linguistics, psychology, art) (Shohamy & Gorter, 2008: 1; Litvinskaya, 2010: 17; Marten et al., 2012; Gorter, 2013: 192). Consequently, the field encompasses diverse disciplinary perspectives: historical analyses of toponymy, economic investigations of language choice in commercial contexts, and psychological studies of linguistic visibility's impact on identity formation. This dynamic field is rapidly expanding to neighboring disciplines such as applied linguistics, gender studies, sociology (Lou, 2009: 31; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 42; 2022: 9). It seems like every year researchers find new ways to apply linguistic landscape concepts to their own fields.

Linguistic landscape research draws upon diverse theoretical frameworks: historical perspectives (Coulmas, 2009), sociological analyses (Ben–Rafael et al., 2006; Ben–Rafael, 2009), economic approaches (Cenoz & Gorter, 2009), ecological models (Hult, 2009), geosemiotic interpretations (Lou, 2007), political frameworks (Sloboda et al., 2010), and sociolinguistic paradigms (Spolsky, 2004; Huebner, 2009; Hanauer, 2010). The variety here can be overwhelming – sometimes it feels like researchers are coming at the same street corner from completely different angles and seeing totally different things. These theoretical frameworks frequently transcend pure linguistic analysis, incorporating theories of multimodality, multilingualism, discourse analysis, and gender studies to interpret linguistic landscape texts. For example, a feminist researcher might look at how women's names appear (or don't appear) on business signs, while someone interested in discourse analysis might focus on the power relationships embedded in official versus unofficial signage.

The theoretical and disciplinary foundations remain dynamic and contextually adaptive rather than fixed or universally applicable – a reflection of the field's ongoing conceptual and methodological evolution (see: Litvinskaya, 2010: 18–21; Phillips, 2011: 29–40; Finzel, 2012: 4–16; Gorter, 2013: 193–199). This flexibility is both a strength and a weakness – it means researchers can adapt their approaches to local

contexts, but it also makes it harder to compare studies across different places or time periods.

The field's recent maturation is evidenced by the publication of comprehensive handbooks and edited volumes that synthesize methodological advances and theoretical developments. Gorter and Cenoz's (2025*) Handbook on Linguistic Landscapes and Multilingualism* and Blackwood, Tufi, and Amos's (2024) *Bloomsbury Handbook of Linguistic Landscapes* provide state-of-the-art overviews of current research directions. Particularly relevant for minority language research is Tufi's (2024) theoretical work on space in the Bloomsbury Handbook, which offers sophisticated frameworks for understanding how linguistic landscapes construct and contest spatial meanings in multilingual contexts. These recent contributions demonstrate the field's evolution from primarily descriptive studies toward more theoretically grounded investigations of power, place, and linguistic representation, while simultaneously highlighting persistent methodological challenges that require continued scholarly attention.

Methodologically, quantitative analysis predominates in linguistic landscape studies, involving systematic counting and classification of public signs within defined urban areas. Such methodologies typically encompass enumeration of signs by language, classification by authorship (official versus private), and calculation of proportional representation according to language usage patterns. While methodologically straightforward, this approach requires systematic data collection through photographic documentation and careful categorization of all visible signs. Researchers employ empirical methods to measure the relative visibility of majority and minority languages in public spaces (Ben–Rafael et al., 2006; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006 cited in Phillips, 2011: 40). The idea is that by counting signs, you can get objective data about which languages have more »presence« in a particular area, though critics argue that just counting doesn't tell you much about what those signs actually mean to the people who see them every day.

Qualitative approaches complement this quantitative foundation by describing data patterns and identifying meaningful connections between elements. Common qualitative methodologies in linguistic landscape research include critical discourse analysis, ethnographic investigations, and data collection through interviews and questionnaires that capture language group members' experiences regarding language maintenance and preservation efforts (Phillips, 2011: 41). Given the inherently multimodal character of linguistic landscapes, we advocate for integrated methodological approaches that combine both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques (Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 42–43; 2022: 9).

Temporally, most studies adopt synchronic perspectives – attempting to capture linguistic situations at specific moments of data collection. Diachronic approaches, though less common, offer valuable insights into linguistic landscape dynamics over

time, assessing transformative patterns and identifying causal factors driving changes. Unfortunately, longitudinal studies employing diachronic perspectives remain underrepresented in the literature (Litvinskaya, 2010: 21–23; Edelman, 2010: 51–53). Data collection methodologies primarily involve photographic documentation (Gorter, 2006a: 2; Hult, 2009: 90; Yavari, 2012: 9) of written language in major urban centers (Moriarty, 2014), with strategic focus on high–traffic areas and government buildings (Hult, 2009; Finzel, 2012; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 43; 2021: 9).

Some researchers have extended their investigations beyond typical urban spaces to include specialized environments such as railway stations (Backhaus, 2007; 2009) and educational institutions (Hanauer, 2010). This expansion reflects the recognition that different spatial contexts exhibit distinct linguistic dynamics: transportation hubs serving international travelers display markedly different patterns than residential neighborhoods. Educational institutions prove particularly revealing because, while formally expected to reflect official language policies, they often display informal student-created signage that reveals divergent linguistic practices.

Defining analytical units and determining appropriate sample sizes represent persistent methodological questions in the field. This methodological consideration, though technical, proves fundamental to research validity: whether to include ephemeral texts such as stickers and graffiti alongside official signage remains a contested decision with significant implications for comparative analysis. Most studies operationalize written signs as "any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame" (Backhaus, 2007: 66). Operationally, this definition encompasses if you can put a box around some text, it counts as a sign. The scope of data collection, whether comprehensive or selective, varies according to specific research objectives, with some investigators photographing all visible written signs at street level (Hult, 2009: 96; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 43; 2022: 10). Some researchers photograph every single piece of text they can see, which gives you incredibly detailed data.

Recent methodological innovations have also addressed the challenge of capturing linguistic landscapes in an increasingly digitalized world. Rosendal et al. (2023: 188–189) demonstrate that examining the online-offline nexus through search portals (such as Eniro, Hitta, and Google Maps) and digital platforms reveals commercial enterprises and civil society organizations that maintain only online presence, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged or super-diverse neighbourhoods. Their research in Gothenburg showed that in the Gårdsten neighbourhood, 227 businesses and organizations were attested online compared to only 116 in physical offline space, with more than 87% of online advertisements found only online (Rosendal et al., 2023: 198). This approach challenges traditional assumptions about text density and visibility, showing that neighbourhoods stereotyped as "linguistically passive" may exhibit considerable multilingual vitality in digital spaces. Such methodological developments are particularly significant for minority

language research, as they capture forms of language presence that escape traditional photo-documentation approaches and reveal the translocal interconnectedness between material and digital spaces.

Researchers employ diverse categorization schemes for written signs in linguistic landscape studies. Everyone seems to have their own way of organizing the data they collect, which makes it hard to compare studies sometimes. Common classification parameters include textual genre affiliation, spatial placement, domain context, and functional purpose (Finzel, 2012: 16). Gorter (2006: 3–4) conducts multi–dimensional analyses examining language appearance characteristics on signs, including spatial positioning, language quantity and hierarchical ordering, and typographical features such as font size variations. Comparative analysis of text size, hierarchical positioning, and sequential ordering provides crucial insights into relative language prestige within given contexts.

Other scholars further differentiate between private and official written signs based on institutional typology (Ben–Rafael et al., 2006: 15–16; Backhaus, 2006; Lou, 2009: 35–37; Phillips, 2011: 22, 30; Marten et al., 2012: 4; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 43; 2022: 10). Government signs follow different rules than business signs, and they probably mean different things to people who see them.

Initial analytical procedures typically involve identifying the precise number of visible languages within the studied landscape, using either quantitative metrics or descriptive approaches (further elaborated in: Yavari, 2012: 9–11). This is usually the first step – just finding out what languages are even present in your study area. Most researchers implement a qualitative distinction between official and private signage during data collection and analysis. This distinction reflects theoretical understandings that language use on official signs primarily manifests power relations, while language selection on private signs often represents motivated expressions of solidarity. Official signage thereby manifests governmental authority and language policy priorities. When a business owner puts up a sign, they're trying to connect with their community or customers.

The strategic deployment of foreign languages, particularly English, frequently serves to cultivate a "foreign atmosphere" and establish connections between local linguistic communities and Western cultural paradigms (Backhaus, 2006; Huebner, 2006; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 43; 2022: 10). This phenomenon is observable across commercial contexts: restaurants employing Italian terminology to establish authenticity, retail establishments utilizing English to project cosmopolitan identity. It's not really about communicating with foreign speakers; it's about creating a certain image or feeling.

The sign analysis typically operates across three distinct analytical levels: semiotic interpretation, macrolinguistic examination, and microlinguistic investigation (Finzel, 2012: 16–17). However, the field exhibits certain theoretical

and methodological inconsistencies that potentially compromise research quality. Principal challenges include sample selection protocols, analytical unit definition, and sign categorization frameworks (see: Gorter, 2006a: 2–5; Huebner, 2006: 35–36; Litvinskaya, 2010: 24–30; Gorter, 2013: 199–201; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 44; 2022: 10).

The extensive body of literature in this field has substantially enhanced methodological sophistication, expanding analytical approaches beyond simplistic language enumeration toward multidimensional examinations of written language across diverse contexts and spatial configurations. Contemporary linguistic landscape research increasingly transcends the traditional private/official language use dichotomy (Marten et al., 2012: 3). Consequently, we observe that this research domain operates without a unified methodological framework (Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 44; 2022: 10).

Current research emphasizes understanding how physical manifestations of multilingualism function as vehicles for ideological positioning of languages and how written signs contribute to constructing particular visions of social reality. The linguistic landscape thus emerges as a product of social agency–created by "actors" who participate directly in its formation, either through autonomous expression of individual preferences or through adherence to legal regulations and formalized language policies (Hult, 2013: 510; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 44; 2022: 11).

Despite the methodological diversity and theoretical richness of linguistic landscape research, several persistent challenges merit critical attention. First, the lack of standardized categorization schemes across studies significantly impedes cross-contextual comparisons and meta-analytical synthesis (Gorter, 2006a; Huebner, 2006). Researchers employ divergent definitions of what constitutes a "sign," utilize incompatible sampling strategies, and operationalize linguistic categories differently, thereby limiting the cumulative development of generalizable findings.

Second, the field demonstrates a pronounced synchronic bias, with longitudinal studies remaining notably scarce (Litvinskaya, 2010; Edelman, 2010). This temporal limitation restricts our understanding of linguistic landscape dynamics, policy implementation trajectories, and the causal mechanisms underlying observed changes. Without diachronic perspectives, we cannot adequately assess whether observed patterns represent stable features or transitional states.

Third, while numerous studies document correlations between linguistic landscape features and policy contexts, the literature largely lacks rigorous evidence establishing causal relationships between signage patterns and actual linguistic behavior or language maintenance outcomes (Puzey, 2007). The assumption that visibility directly influences language vitality requires more robust empirical validation through mixed-methods approaches that integrate linguistic landscape analysis with ethnographic and sociolinguistic data on actual language practices.

Finally, methodological inconsistencies regarding the official/private signage distinction raise theoretical concerns. The binary categorization oversimplifies complex ownership structures, regulatory environments, and the negotiated character of signage production (Marten et al., 2012). Contemporary urban environments feature increasingly hybrid signage types that resist clear classification, suggesting the need for more nuanced analytical frameworks that capture the continuum of state involvement and commercial agency in linguistic landscape production.

These methodological considerations prove particularly crucial for minority language research, where visibility patterns often diverge substantially between official and grassroots contexts. The choice of quantitative versus qualitative approaches, synchronic versus diachronic perspectives, and comprehensive versus selective sampling strategies directly impacts our capacity to detect subtle patterns of minority language presence or absence. For minority language communities, even marginal visibility may carry significant symbolic weight, necessitating analytical approaches sensitive to both numerical representation and qualitative dimensions of placement, prominence, and contextual meaning. Future research should prioritize methodological frameworks specifically designed to capture the complex, often contested nature of minority language representation in linguistic landscapes.

4. MINORITY LANGUAGE POLICY AND LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

Most authors consider the linguistic landscape as a multilingual phenomenon, that is, as an example of *de facto* language policy (Spolsky, 2004; Ben–Rafael et al., 2006; Puzey, 2007; Lou, 2009: 21). This indicates that observable linguistic patterns in public spaces constitute *de facto* language policy, regardless of official regulatory frameworks, reflecting community –level linguistic practices and ideologies. In sociolinguistics, language planning and language policy are distinct but related concepts. Language planning typically focuses on developing and standardizing the internal structure of a language itself – its vocabulary, grammar, and writing system. Language policy, on the other hand, addresses the broader question of which languages are given official recognition and legal status within a country or region. This encompasses all legislation that directly or indirectly affects the position and rights of minority languages within a society.

Currently, there is not a large number of studies that would analyze the impact of the use of written language in public space on "real language behavior" or *de facto* language practice (Puzey, 2007: 7; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 44; 2022: 11). This is actually a significant gap in the research – we have lots of studies that count signs and categorize languages, but not many that ask whether seeing your language on public signs actually makes you more likely to use it in conversation.

The linguistic landscape serves as both a reflection and an instrument of official language policy, illuminating how policy decisions manifest in public spaces (Said,

2010: 3; Puzey, 2012: 141; Yavari, 2012: 12). It's like a mirror and a tool at the same time – it shows you what policies are really doing, but it can also be used to implement new policies. Consequently, the regulation of linguistic representation in public domains carries significance beyond mere language use, encompassing moral, ethical, and legal dimensions related to policy implementation and compliance (Gorter, 2013: 202). When governments decide which languages can or can't appear on public signs, they're making statements about which communities matter and which languages are legitimate.

In multilingual contexts especially, language presence in public space becomes inherently politicized, potentially revealing language vitality and power dynamics between language communities that may diverge from officially prescribed policies (Phillips, 2011; Jansen, 2012). Discrepancies between official egalitarian language policies and actual signage patterns reveal underlying power asymmetries that become readily apparent to community members. The political nature of public signage as markers within what might be conceptualized as a "political landscape" represents a relatively recent focus in linguistic research (Puzey, 2007: 8), evidenced by studies examining written communication in both official and private spheres across ethnically homogeneous and heterogeneous urban environments (Ben–Rafael et al., 2001; Bogatto & Hélot, 2010; Marten et al., 2012; Demaj & Vandenbroucke, 2013; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 45; 2022: 11). Scholars increasingly recognize that signage transcends neutral information transmission, functioning as political statements regardless of authorial intent.

Therefore, before starting the examination, the researcher should ask which state institutions, or what types of political systems, control the linguistic landscape (Finzel, 2012: 30). Democratic regimes with robust minority rights frameworks typically manifest markedly different linguistic landscapes compared to authoritarian contexts characterized by linguistic suppression. In accordance with these premises, it is evident that while the linguistic landscape does not directly mirror oral communication patterns, it provides valuable insights into written communication among language users (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006: 79). The linguistic landscape does not directly mirror oral communication patterns: languages spoken in private domains may remain absent from public signage, while languages with minimal spoken use may achieve high visibility through official policy mandates. Conversely, the linguistic landscape – either in its entirety or through specific elements – can influence language usage, the perceived popularity or acceptability of certain languages, and consequently their oral adoption (Gorter, 2007: 4).

Hicks (2002) pioneered the application of the linguistic landscape concept to illuminate challenges in minority language policy implementation (Gorter, 2013: 194). He was one of the first to realize that you could learn a lot about whether minority language policies were actually working by looking at street signs rather than just

reading policy documents. Language policies designed to protect minority languages necessitate effective planning strategies that comprehensively reflect prevailing social conditions (Phillips, 2011: 32–34). Effective policy implementation requires empirical understanding of existing sociolinguistic conditions rather than relying solely on legislative frameworks.

This raises the question of what renders the linguistic landscape particularly suitable for investigating diverse minority language situations. The answer seems to be that it's concrete and visible – you can't hide or fake what languages appear on public signs the way you might manipulate other kinds of data. Its value lies in providing empirical evidence for understanding the position of individual languages. Scholars further emphasize that the linguistic landscape enhances theoretical understanding of minority languages' position within public spaces (Marten et al., 2012: 4–5; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 45; 2022: 11).

The concepts of "minority" and "majority" within the linguistic landscape are relative and politically determined (Gorter, 2013: 197), with distinctions between these groups based not on numerical representation but on disparities in status, position, and power (Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 45; 2022: 12). Examining minority language power encompasses their representation, vitality, determinants of language maintenance versus replacement, the relationship between language, ethnicity and community identity, and their status in educational institutions (Marten et al,. 2012: 6–7).

The linguistic landscape substantiates power relationships between minority and majority languages by indicating linguistic dominance and revealing patterns of minority language use. Moreover, it can potentially elevate the status of less powerful language groups through state-imposed usage patterns in official contexts (Edelman, 2010: 18). However, empirical studies demonstrate that the presence of minority written languages in public spaces affects the identity perception of the dominant population and may influence their degree of political, economic, and social power within a given community. Research emphasizes that the official language of the majority community rarely faces challenges regarding its presence in the linguistic landscape, a privilege not extended to other languages (Phillips, 2011: 35–36; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 46; 2022: 12).

Finally, we must consider the impact of linguistic landscape research on enhancing the visibility of minority (written) languages. The linguistic landscape plays a potentially crucial role in preserving minority languages and uncovering "oppressed" languages (Finzel, 2012: 7), as numerous studies have revealed that despite prescribed language policies, minority languages often remain absent from public spaces. Consequently, several of these investigations have influenced the development of proactive state language policies aimed at safeguarding minority languages in the public domain (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006: 78–80; Huebner, 2006: 32–

36; Puzey, 2007; Yavari, 2012; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 46; 2022: 12). In some instances, governmental institutions have implemented tax incentives to encourage the inclusion of certain languages on commercial signage, thereby promoting their usage (see: Gorter, 2007: 7–8).

It is worth noting that linguistic landscape research in multilingual contexts influences perceptions of different languages' social status and can affect individual linguistic behavior (Gorter, 2007: 4). While initiatives or mandates to incorporate minority languages on public signage may yield positive outcomes in certain cases, many scholars emphasize that proactive state policies can sometimes provoke resistance among majority language communities, particularly regarding private signage-which typically provides the most authentic indicators of a territory's multilingual character and underlying language ideologies (see: Puzey, 2007; Yavari, 2012; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 46; 2022: 12).

The significance of language visibility for minority language revitalization should not be underestimated, as visual representation directly influences attitude formation toward languages. When minority languages lack prominent display, they effectively become invisible to the general population, suggesting that the linguistic landscape fundamentally determines minority languages' status. Although the literature proposes various strategies for language revitalization, we contend that promoting minority languages, multilingualism, multiculturalism, and the adoption of multilingual signage requires a catalyst for more substantial transformation (cf. Puzey, 2007: 119–120; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 46; 2022: 12).

Recent research has also highlighted the intersection of linguistic landscape studies with environmental discourse and sustainability, domains increasingly relevant to minority language communities. Amos (2025: 6–8) demonstrates how minority languages like Tahitian occupy spaces in environmental and public health discourse that challenge traditional associations with tourism and tradition alone. His analysis of signs in French Polynesia shows that Tahitian appears prominently on recycling instructions, public health campaigns, and safety warnings–domains typically dominated by official languages. This work illustrates that minority languages can function as legitimate carriers of contemporary, future–oriented discourses, thereby contesting their relegation to folkloric or heritage domains. Such findings support the argument that linguistic landscape research reveals not only the current status of minority languages but also emerging possibilities for their functional expansion into domains traditionally dominated by majority languages (Amos, 2025: 29–30).

To protect linguistic diversity and catalyze meaningful change, we require robust arguments and empirical evidence derived from linguistic landscape research (Phillips, 2011: 38–39). Thus, the preservation and sustainable future of minority languages necessitates their written representation, particularly within the linguistic landscape.

5. CONCLUSION

As a theoretical synthesis rather than an empirical case study, this review necessarily encounters certain limitations. Our analysis depends upon the quality and scope of existing literature, which, as noted, exhibits methodological inconsistencies and temporal unevenness in coverage. The rapidly evolving nature of the field means that our synthesis represents a particular historical moment in linguistic landscape scholarship. Furthermore, the predominance of English–language publications in our review may inadvertently marginalize valuable research published in other languages or regional contexts. Future syntheses would benefit from more systematic inclusion of non–English scholarship and from explicit engagement with epistemological differences across research traditions.

The predominant areas of linguistic landscape investigation over the past four decades have encompassed the proliferation of English, language distribution patterns, regulatory frameworks, and minority language representation. These research domains will likely continue to define the field of linguistic landscape studies (Gorter, 2013: 202). In our assessment, the linguistic landscape's greatest value lies in its capacity to illuminate the degree of respect for and implementation of language policy, specifically the relationship between *de facto* and legally prescribed minority language policies (Puzey, 2012; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 47). This position stems from our fundamental premise that "the visibility of the minority community's language is equally important for its members as having their voice heard" (Marten et al., 2012: 1).

Language policy governing written language use in public spaces should maintain coherence with language policies in education, media, and other domains (Yavari, 2012: 12). Accordingly, in pursuit of fostering a more inclusive society, linguistic landscape knowledge can be effectively applied within educational contexts to develop multicultural awareness among children, as educational settings offer innovative approaches to teaching about linguistic diversity (Gorter, 2013: 203).

It merits observation that several studies examining minority language policy implementation through linguistic landscape analysis emphasize the influence of English as a lingua franca (ELF) on existing linguistic landscapes (Edelman, 2010; Demaj & Van den Broucke, 2013; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 47). Future research will likely produce an increasing number of studies addressing ELF's influence on the usage and potential displacement of official minority languages.

Technological advances in public written language presentation and the rapid dissemination of new technologies, compared to when linguistic landscape studies originated, present both challenges and opportunities for researchers seeking more comprehensive understanding of social multilingualism (Gorter, 2006b; 2013: 204; Nedeljković Pravdić, 2015: 47). Further theoretical advancement in this field remains essential, with the principal challenge for future research being the empirical testing

of established theoretical foundations. Additionally, more rigorous studies whose findings can be corroborated by other researchers are required (Gorter, 2006b; 2013: 205).

The continued vitality of linguistic landscape research as a field is evidenced by recent comprehensive handbooks (Blackwood, Tufi & Amos, 2024; Gorter & Cenoz, 2025) that synthesize decades of scholarship while pointing toward new research directions. These works emphasize the field's expansion beyond traditional concerns with language enumeration toward sophisticated analyses of how linguistic landscapes mediate relationships between language, space, power, and social change (Tufi, 2024). For minority language research specifically, recent methodological innovations – including attention to online-offline interconnections (Rosendal et al., 2023: 204–205), environmental discourse (Amos, 2025: 13–14), and educational applications (Cenoz & Gorter, 2024: 318–320) – demonstrate the field's capacity to reveal previously underexplored dimensions of minority language vitality and policy implementation. These developments underscore that while methodological challenges persist, the field continues to evolve in ways that enhance our understanding of how minority languages negotiate presence and power in contemporary multilingual spaces.

The linguistic landscape, as both a conceptual framework and interpretive lens for language presence and usage in public space, provides critical insights into the necessity of either preserving or reforming existing minority language policies and the status and function of minority and/or official languages within specific territories. The significance of linguistic landscape research derives precisely from these considerations, and from the fact that such investigations can identify challenges facing minority communities, thereby contributing to improved cooperation with state institutions in achieving and implementing minority language rights.

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ZNAČAJ JEZIČKOG PEJZAŽA U PROUČAVANJU MANJINSKE JEZIČKE POLITIKE

Rezime

U radu se razmatra koncept jezičkog pejzaža – proučavanje pisanog jezika u javnom prostoru – kao sredstva za razumevanje višejezičnosti na određenim teritorijama. Autori polaze od postavke da istraživači manjinske jezičke politike nisu posvetili dovoljno pažnje pisanom prikazu manjinskih jezika u javnim prostorima. Nove tehnologije i novi načini prikazivanja pisanog jezika predstavljaju i izazove i mogućnosti za istraživače koji se bave proučavanjem društvene višejezičnosti. Neophodan je dalji teorijski razvoj, pri čemu empirijska validacija teorijskih osnova predstavlja ključni izazov za buduća istraživanja. Istraživanje jezičkog pejzaža, kroz analizu prisustva i upotrebe jezika u javnim prostorima, pruža uvid u status i ulogu manjinskih i službenih jezika, što omogućava donošenje informisanih odluka o tome da li postojeće politike treba očuvati ili reformisati. Takva istraživanja mogu otkriti izazove sa kojima se suočavaju manjinske zajednice, doprinoseći boljoj saradnji između ovih zajednica i državnih institucija u ostvarivanju jezičkih prava. Oslanjajući se na literaturu iz protekle četiri decenije, ovaj rad nudi sveobuhvatnu sintezu teorijskih i metodoloških pristupa u istraživanju jezičkog pejzaža, sa posebnim osvrtom na primenu u analizi manjinske jezičke politike, kritički evaluirajući razvoj ovog naučnog polja i identifikujući metodološke izazove koji zahtevaju dalja istraživanja. Iako je ovo polje nastalo sedamdesetih godina prošlog veka, doživelo je izuzetan rast, posebno u poslednjoj deceniji, transformišući se iz manje zastupljene oblasti u jednu od najdinamičnijih grana primenjene lingvistike i sociolingvistike.

Ključne reči: jezički pejzaž, pisani jezik, javni prostor, manjinski jezici, jezička prava