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Linguistic landscapes in transition: Polish students' views on Ukrainian and Russian signage

ABSTRACT. In today's globalised world, the presence of foreign languages and signs is not unusual. However, during periods of conflict, these linguistic features gain particular significance, including linguistic landscapes. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has substantially affected the Polish linguistic landscape, prompting an exploration of the attitudes of Polish university students to these changes. The findings indicate, first, that students have observed a noticeable increase in Cyrillic signage in their cities. Second, responses to these multilingual signs – particularly those in Ukrainian and Russian – range from strongly positive to neutral, and in some cases overtly negative. While many participants view such signage as a marker of demographic change and a symbol of solidarity with newcomers, reflecting Poland's openness amidst geopolitical shifts, others perceive it as overshadowing Polish identity or indicating preferential treatment of Ukrainians. As a result, the presence of Ukrainian and Russian signage in Polish public spaces emerges not only as a practical tool for communication but also as a powerful symbol of evolving social values.

KEYWORDS: linguistic landscape, Ukrainian language, Russian language, signs, attitudes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Signs are a foreseeable element of every public space, e.g., they regulate our behaviour as well as advertise products or services and, last but not least, enable us orientation in the area or city. They represent local city or regional authorities or may be implemented by private people. They are not only typical of multicultural metropolises or tourist hotspots like Karlovy Vary¹ (Sloboda 2020) or Świnoujście, both located in the borderlands with Germany, where

¹ A recent case study from the Czech-German border region offers a useful point of comparison: In the context of Karlovy Vary, multilingual signage in both the artistic and regulatory domains is predominantly driven by the tourism industry. The Czech language is dominant, with English serving as the primary accompanying language, while Russian is limited to rare quadrilingual signs, such as those pertaining to spa regulations and leisure attractions. The study interprets this minimal visibility as being compatible with a post-pandemic or post-2022 shift and a possible symbolic distancing from Russia in public space (cf. Lisek 2025: 360).

signs are mainly multilingual (Lisek 2020, 2018b). Linguistic landscapes (LL) are an everyday part of each urban or rural reality, also the post-covid and war reality – not only in Ukraine but also in the neighbouring countries, e.g. Poland.

The COVID-19 pandemic has already redesigned many LL and the way of thinking about language in the public space. Gorter and Cenoz (2024: 1) cogently point out that the pandemic “has made it clear how sudden changes can take place in linguistic landscapes”. Such a sudden change has evidently taken place when the Russian invasion of Ukraine started in 2022, so one may suppose that there currently exist more texts in Cyrillic alphabet² in the public space in Poland than it used to exist before the year 2000.

This pilot study focuses on the presence of Ukrainian and Russian in the LL of Polish cities in general after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and highlights attitudes towards the changed landscapes mainly among Polish students. It is driven by the following research question: How do residents of Polish cities perceive the presence of Ukrainian and Russian language signage in the LL?

The paper begins by clarifying the phenomenon of LL and discussing definitions of signs used for the purpose of our study. Section 2 offers an overview of the methodological framework and instruments employed in this analysis. Next, in Section 3 the paper describes the role of signs for the city communities and the attitudes towards Russian and Ukrainian among young Poles. The conclusions as well as the outlook with (language) didactics implications are presented in the last part, namely Section 4.

2. LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES AS A RESEARCH FIELD

Linguistic landscapes (LL) is defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25) as “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration”. They refer to the public display of written language in broadly understood urban spaces, including firstly road signs, shopfronts, billboards government buildings, and secondly any (also moveable) display surfaces within the sight of another person. This phenomenon offers a precious lens through which sociolinguists can examine how languages coexist in a given territory and the power relations they reflect, because “spaces are embedded in multiple political

² Both Ukrainian and Russian use the Cyrillic alphabet. Inevitably some Europeans perceive Russian as a language of the aggressor. Some of them may not know that a part of the Ukrainian society, especially in eastern Ukraine, uses Russian for everyday communication. Young Poles born in the 2000s often do not distinguish between the Ukrainian and Russian script.

dimensions as ownership, power, identity, rights, exclusion, and marginalisation" (Shohamy 2018: 152). While this sociolinguistic perspective has received relatively little attention in Slavonic studies, it is even more relevant for today's Poland due to the fact that after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 the LL of many cities changed and the coexistence of Cyrillic and Latin alphabet is a new Polish reality. So do new attitudes towards languages and signs in the LL occur among Poles and thus need a categorisation and explanation.

The field of LL origins in inquiries of the 1970s and has gained significant prominence within sociolinguistics or language didactics in the last few years, as the latest findings of Wiśniewska (2018, 2021, 2024), Melo-Pfeifer (2023), Janíková (2019), Ballweg (2018) or Lisek (2018a) display. This paper on one hand focusses on the sociolinguistic facets and considers the language didactics aspects on the other hand, because they are pertinent to teaching not only languages, but to raise the awareness of future language teachers in particular and students of linguistics in general.

In the developmental years of LL research, scholars focused widely on multilingual areas in the western hemisphere. Regions from this part of the world served as prime examples where the coexistence of multiple languages in public spaces could be examined from various analytical viewpoints. The evolution of LL into a multimodal field has prompted a significant incorporation of qualitative elements into various studies. Contemporary inquiries reflect the multimedia interactions among text, imagery, materials, environmental context, and other factors, thereby deeply enriching the semiotic interpretation of LL (Jaworski & Thurlow 2010). The thematic diversity within LL research has expanded dynamically in recent years, leading to the recognition of dominant trends such as a heightened focus on multilingualism and linguistic superdiversity, especially within urban settings (Gorter & Cenoz 2015).

Considering that the article examines a Slavic LL, it is relevant to reference studies originating from or concerning Slavic regions. Pavlenko (2012), as a pioneer researcher³ in Slavia, investigates the prominence and role of the

³ During the 1970s, Lotman and Uspenskij (1970) developed a cultural semiotic framework in which language is conceptualized as a specific element with a communicative function that facilitates reciprocal exchange. The cultural semiotic concept, along with the significance of language perception in public spaces, represents the initial attempts to describe linguistic and semiotic landscapes. In current research concerning Slavic linguistic landscapes, semiotics is at the forefront of some studies. For instance, Henzelmann and Hacı (2025) discuss the semiotization of minority languages and their social relevance from a historical and contemporary perspective. In their remarks, they clearly refer to the background of semiotics and its impact on linguistic landscapes (Henzelmann & Hacı 2025: 115ff.). Consequently, Lotman and Uspenskij (1970) may be regarded as pioneers within the Slavic scientific community, even though they have indirectly influenced contemporary linguistic landscapes research.

Russian language in Kyiv's public spaces. She argues that, despite Ukrainian being the official state language, Russian maintains a dominant presence in Kyiv's LL. This dominance functions as a form of transgression, wherein the linguistic norms prescribed by official language policies are frequently unnoticed. In a similar vein, Müller (2021) explores the LL of Minsk. Müller's study focuses on the roles that Russian and Belarusian play across various contexts, assessing whether they are linked to different life domains or embody distinct symbolic meanings.

Public urban settings present in the context of periods of warfare or in post-war societies. complex and often contradictory landscapes, including intense language debates, are demonstrated for instance in the works of Baranova (2024), Henzelmann (2023, 2024) and Volvach (2023). For example, Volvach's study of Sevastopol illustrates the changes in the LL of the city, marked by an increasing dominance of Russian symbols and language that effectively deletes Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar identities. This transformation is propelled by both governmental initiatives and local community actions, resulting in an LL that normalizes and legitimizes Russian nationalism. Equally, Henzelmann (2023) highlights the sudden visibility of Ukrainian in Polish and German shared public realm subsequent to the war outbreak. These developments show that while the use of the Ukrainian language is subject to unusual fluctuations at home, it has been recognised as a prominent phenomenon in the LL outside the country in Europe for the first time since 2022.

Furthermore, omitting or using a specific language in times of war is also an important mirror of social changes or processes such as protests. The setting becomes even more interesting while "being part of a hidden conflict in a society under censorship, the LL reflects the positions and attitudes of language activists (rather than of the community as a whole), both towards the political agenda and towards multilingualism" (Baranova 2024: 56). This dynamic reveals how conflicts can reshape public spaces, underscoring the relevance of LL studies in understanding the socio-political implications of war.

As the paper examines LL as a phenomenon and incorporates the latest research findings, it is equally important for the pilot study to clarify our definition of "signs". The description of a "sign" is indicative of a variety of methodological schools (Malinowski 2018: 869) and encompasses not only the conceptualization of the spatial limits of signs but additionally the broader contextual implications must be considered⁴.

⁴ In general, there are many perspectives, as Lisek (2016: 143) mentions, which allow us to characterise a sign and that are for instance: governmental (official vs. non official, Leclerc 1989 or government vs. non-government, Huebner 2006), informative (top-down vs. bottom

Contrasting perspectives highlight the diverse ways in which language and signs in public spaces can be understood: one view focuses on functional and interactive aspects of language use (text-linguistic and functional-pragmatic), as Scarvaglieri, Redder, Pappenhagen, and Brehmer (2013: 55) stress “the interactive relationship between author and reader,” while another underscores the physical and spatial dimensions of signs, as put forward by Cenoz and Gorter (2006: 71) and Backhaus (2007: 66).

The understanding of a sign in this study has a rather heterogenous character. For the sake of this paper, signage is perceived as text, which may occur in public space (as well as it can be a part of interaction) within a (spatially) definable setting containing non-Cyrillic and Cyrillic letterings. Arabic and Chinese letterings are not considered in this paper as research units, because they were not as popular as Cyrillic signs before the outbreak of the war in Polish cities and towns.

3. DATA SAMPLING AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section focuses on the research methodology and the collected data within our inquiry. As Blommaert (2013: 41) shows “Signs in social space tell us a lot about the users of the space, how users interact with signs, how users influence and are influenced by them; they so start telling stories about the cultural, historical and social backgrounds of certain space”. Furthermore, due to the fact that the scientific community (Henzelmann 2023; Levchuk 2023) has observed an increase of Cyrillic signs in Poland, the users of the public space are being asked about their attitudes towards Cyrillic (Ukrainian and Russian) letterings. It should be noted that the historical background of Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Russian affairs play a role in this study.

This study concerns language attitudes. As Li and Wei (2022: 1) aptly note, “language attitude is an important construct extensively studied in sociolinguistics for its important role in identity construction, language maintenance, bi/multilingualism, language planning and policy [...]”. Their observation underscores the central role of attitudes toward languages and their speakers in sociolinguistic research, which is particularly relevant in understanding perceptions of Russian and Ukrainian as languages and symbols. Despite it, the term “attitude” itself lacks a single, universally accepted definition and is often conflated with related constructs such as prejudices and stereotypes.

up, Ben-Rafael et al. 2006), functional (municipal vs. commercial and transgressive, Scollon & Scollon 2003)

Two principal theoretical perspectives – the mentalist and the behaviourist point of view – have thus emerged to guide scholarly inquiry into attitudes⁵.

3.1. Methodology

I conducted a quantitative-qualitative study (Dörnyei 2007: 38; Albert & Marx 2016: 12) in which I used the natural setting of the signs situated mainly in Poznań and generated data in an ethnographic way to continue in an explorative manner. We expanded on analysis of the natural setting by employing some of the signs as stimuli as a part of open-ended questions in the survey, which we conceptualised as data collecting instrument. The quantitative part of the study concerned the signs in foreign languages and the increase of the use of foreign language signs in general, so that the qualitative part covered mainly the attitude towards the spotted signs. Open-ended questions in the survey were analysed with resort to qualitative content analysis according to the content-structuring variant (Kuckartz 2018).

3.2. Collected data

I collected the data in spring 2024 via internet using the snowball sampling and gained data from ten voivodships, which formed a sample of $n = 111$ records. After limiting the answers only to L1 Polish speakers and the young respondents, the sample had $n = 83$ records. Female students gave 81% of the answers, while 19% of answers were conducted from male students from the following regions: zachodniopomorskie, wielkopolskie, lubelskie, łódzkie, mazowieckie, kujawsko-pomorskie, opolskie, śląskie, lubuskie. For the purpose of this study, the answers of recipients older than 30 years were not analysed. The students were mainly ($n = 50$) at the age of 20–25, although the second mostly represented group was younger than 20 ($n = 33$). Concerning the educational level of the respondents, 76% ($n = 63$) have declared a school final exam (matura), 23% ($n = 19$) have already finished graduate studies and 1% ($n = 1$) finished a secondary school.

⁵ From the mentalist perspective, attitudes are conceived as complex psychological constructs that, although not directly observable, can be inferred through self-reflection. They exert a relatively stable influence on an individual's perceptions, values, and group affiliations, providing insight into how people internalize and respond to the status of Russian and Ukrainian. By contrast, the behaviourist perspective emphasizes observable responses to external stimuli, defining attitudes in terms of measurable behaviours rather than internal states.

4. NEW LL IN POLAND AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THEM

The following subsections discuss the answers on the posed research question *How do residents of Polish cities perceive the presence of Ukrainian and Russian language signage in the LL?* Firstly, the frequency of the new signs will be analysed, then the role of the signs for the respondents will be characterized and finally their attitudes towards Ukrainian and Russian language signage will be presented.

4.1. New signs in the LL

It is quite evident that Poland's linguistic profile is undergoing significant shifts due to recent political and societal developments, particularly the increased influx of refugees from Ukraine⁶.

The transformations within the (LL) of major cities, towns, and urban areas are undeniable and readily observable by researchers. However, it is more compelling to examine whether linguistic laypersons, who are equally embedded in and active within the contemporary public spaces, perceive these changes in the same manner as researchers.

Only 2.6% of respondents mentioned that they do not encounter Ukrainian and Russian language signs in public spaces within Polish cities, while 97% admitted to coming across Ukrainian and Russian language signs in their city or town with different intensity (34.2% not so often, 40.4% often, 22.8% very often). Furthermore, 84% (n = 76) of respondents reported a significant change in the visibility of signage in both Ukrainian and Russian.

The signs shown above present new (old) signs in the Polish LL, which means that the Ukrainian language signs are not really new in the LL, but the perceived frequency of appearance of such signs increased. New to some extent are Russian language signs that did not occur subjectively so often before February 2022, which is probably connected with different migration waves. In the first one, after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, mainly Ukrainians from the western Ukraine came to Poland, while after February 2022 also Ukrainians from the eastern part of the country migrated there, where Russian is (also) used widely.

⁶ Although Poland continues to be largely perceived as a monolingual country, political events such as the war in Ukraine have profoundly impacted both its linguistic environment and the expectations placed on the education system. Recent data from various sources indicate that the number of Ukrainians currently in Poland ranges from 1,400,000 to four million, and over 200,000 Ukrainian students are currently enrolled in Polish schools (MEN 2022), with schools needing to prepare for further increases in numbers. This creates an urgent need for strategies that facilitate the successful integration of these students into classroom settings.



Figure 1 (left). Signs in Polish cities in year 2019

Source: own study.

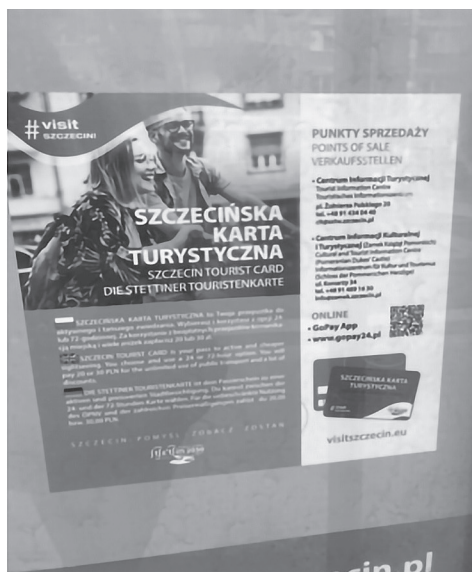


Figure 1 (right). Signs in Polish cities in year 2024

Source: own study.

4.2. The role of the signs

Due to the fact that the respondents mention an increase of the visibility of signage in Ukrainian and Russian language, it is relevant to understand firstly what Ukrainian and Russian language signs represent to the local communities⁷ in Polish cities.

The given responses were systematically analysed and categorised into thematic clusters to uncover predominant patterns and insights. This qualitative approach, known as clustering, enabled the identification of key areas of social strengths, challenges and emphasis among participants regarding the integration and support of Ukrainian and Russian populations within the Polish society. To streamline the analysis and enhance the clarity of the findings, it is beneficial to consolidate the inductive gained categories into broader, more encompassing themes. This step highlights the most significant patterns and insights.

The results of the analysis reveal several key patterns regarding the role of Ukrainian and Russian signage in Polish cities, as perceived by the respondents. The findings suggest that these signs are not only the markers of linguistic diversity but also indicators of broader social dynamics, including demographic presence, openness of the Polish speaking community, communication facilitation, and cultural integration.

Our results emphasize the recognition of the significant demographic presence of Ukrainian and Russian communities within Polish cities. 13 survey participants (out of 71) highlighted that these communities are already integrated into daily life, with some noting that their presence has become an undeniable part of the LL. This inquiry suggests that the signage, whether in Ukrainian or Russian, serves as a visible marker of the increasing foreign population. However, it also subtly underlines the recognition of difference, with a few responses acknowledging the unique challenges faced by Ukrainians, particularly in the context of the ongoing war.

The strongest tendency across the responses points to the openness and support shown by Polish communities towards Ukrainian and Russian speakers. This category received the most responses (25), with a particular emphasis on Polish solidarity with Ukraine. The signs are perceived not just as practical tools for communication but as symbols of support, empathy, and solidarity, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine. The respondents noted the helpfulness of

⁷ I understand local communities as comprising the residents of a city or town, regardless of whether they are predominantly native-born or newcomers and irrespective of their primary language.

Table 1. Themes and categories concerning the role of Ukrainian and Russian signs in local communities (n = 71)

Theme / Category	Number of Answers
1. Demographic Presence and Community Size	15
Many Ukrainians/Russians live among us	13
More foreigners are there	1
Feel the difference, which Ukrainians feel in Poland	1
2. Community Openness and Support	25
Polish help and openness	13
Polish help and being a symbol of war	1
Polish openness and easier living	3
Solidarity with Ukraine	3
Acceptance and Hospitality	2
Openness and inclusiveness of the city	3
3. Communication and Language Facilitation	12
Make the communication easier	8
Reducing the monolingualism in Poland	1
Need for communication	1
Foreign language and culture	2
4. Cultural Integration and Promotion of Culture	8
Culture and belonging	4
Promotion of Ukrainian and Russian culture	1
Need for culture and openness for it by Poles	1
That also Ukrainians like Graffiti	1
Multiculturalism	1
5. Others	11

Source: own study.

Polish society, which they view as facilitating easier integration and coexistence. The theme also suggests that the signage in Ukrainian and Russian serves as an indication of inclusiveness and a welcoming atmosphere, further promoting a sense of belonging among foreign nationals.

Another substantial theme revolves around the role of bilingual signage in facilitating communication. 12 responses reveal a strong belief in the importance of signs as tools for reducing language barriers. 8 survey participants highlighted that these signs make communication easier for both Ukrainians and Russians, promoting smoother interaction within Polish society. Furthermore, some responses indicated that the presence of such signage might help

diminish the prevailing monolingualism in Poland, fostering a more multilingual society. This finding underscores the functional aspect of signage: beyond symbolic representation, it serves as an essential element in everyday communication.

The theme of cultural integration emerged less prominently but still it is significant (with eight responses). These responses linked the visibility of Ukrainian and Russian languages to broader cultural and social dynamics, such as the promotion of multiculturalism and the integration of foreign cultures into Polish society. Some respondents emphasized the importance of cultural belonging and the promotion of Ukrainian and Russian heritage. While less frequent than other, these responses reflect a growing recognition of the cultural value of these languages and the need for openness towards diverse cultural expressions.

Overall, the most significant trend revealed in the table is the widespread recognition of Poland's openness and solidarity, particularly towards Ukrainian speakers, which positions bilingual signage as a powerful symbol of support. These signs are perceived not only as functional communication tools but also as representations of the broader social processes of integration and cultural exchange.

The findings indicate that the presence of Ukrainian and Russian signage in Polish urban environments is not merely a reaction to demographic shifts, but also an expression of the values of inclusivity, cultural promotion, and social solidarity within Polish society.

4.3. Perceiving the signs and attitudes

We already know that there are changes in the Polish LLs and that the respondents see the changes. Based on this, two questions regarding attitudes toward changes in the LL and their perception needed to be addressed. One of the questions was primarily descriptive ("Upon seeing the pictures, what immediate thoughts or associations come to your mind regarding the presence of Russian/Ukrainian signage in a Polish city?"), aiming to assess general attitudes and positions toward these languages in public spaces. The subsequent question addressed the presence of Russian and Ukrainian alongside Polish on signage, specifically: "How do you perceive the use of Ukrainian and Russian alongside Polish in public signage?"

Let us first examine the general attitudes, which are considerably diverse. The responses presented herein serve to illustrate the attitudes that were assessed using a picture stimulus.



Figure 2. Picture stimulus for the inquiry

Source: own study.

The quantitative results do not clearly indicate a strong distinct trend. The values for negative and positive responses are similar, with neutral attitudes being present only moderately in the majority. The resulting responses ($n = 69$) were categorized inductively into three main groups:

- a) negative ($n = 22$),
- b) neutral (31),
- c) positive (16).

Firstly, it is observable that the collected data encapsulate a range of negative attitudes of the respondents towards Ukrainian migrants in Poland. These categories exhibit varying frequencies, reflecting the prominence and prevalence of specific sentiments within the population.

One notable category is the *blocking of learning Polish*, which, although not the most frequently mentioned, underscores concerns about the potential barriers to linguistic integration. The respondents expressing this view perceive that the presence of Ukrainian migrants may impede the Polish-speaking population's

ability to maintain and develop their language skills, potentially affecting social cohesion and cultural preservation.

Another significant category is the *favouring of Ukrainians*, indicating a perception among some respondents that Ukrainian migrants receive preferential treatment. This sentiment may stem from observable disparities in policy implementation, social support, or public resources, fostering a sense of inequality and resentment among the native Polish population.

The feeling of “being abroad in one’s own country” reflects a profound sense of alienation experienced by some respondents. This sentiment suggests that the substantial Ukrainian presence has altered the social and cultural landscape to such an extent that individuals feel displaced or disconnected within their own homeland. This category highlights the complexities of national identity and the challenges of fostering a cohesive society amidst significant demographic changes.

The controversial views on the status of Ukrainians, encapsulated by statements like “Ukrainians are no longer guests”, reveal a shift in perception from viewing Ukrainian migrants as temporary residents to considering them as permanent fixtures within Polish society. This transition may influence attitudes towards integration policies, social acceptance, and the long-term implications of migration on national identity.

Predominantly, the category of negative attitudes emerges as the most prominent among the identified themes. This category encompasses a range of adverse sentiments towards Ukrainian migrants, indicating significant underlying tensions within the society. The negative attitudes are further illustrated by the following quotations:

Q(42): “These are rather negative thoughts, associated with the fact that Ukrainian signage has excessively dominated the landscape of Polish cities.”⁸

This statement highlights discomfort with the visible presence of Ukrainian culture in public spaces, suggesting a perceived threat to the aesthetic and cultural integrity of Polish urban environments.

Q(72): “Personally, I would prefer not to see them because I am in Poland and not in Russian-speaking countries.”⁹

⁸ The longer quotations presented in the footnotes in Polish are intended to facilitate a better understanding of the article. They were translated by the author of the text: *Są to raczej myśli negatywne, związane z tym, że oznakowanie ukraińskie zbyt mocno zdominowało krajobraz polskich miast.*

⁹ *Nie chciałabym ich widzieć, ponieważ jestem w Polsce, a nie w rosyjskojęzycznych krajach.*

This expression reveals a personal aversion to the presence of Ukrainian migrants, rooted in a desire for cultural homogeneity and possibly influenced by broader geopolitical tensions.

Additionally, the issue of *unequal treatment in education* surfaces as a critical category, with concerns about the disparate treatment of Ukrainian and Polish children within educational institutions. Such perceptions of inequality can foster feelings of injustice and exacerbate social divisions, hindering the integration process and the development of harmonious community relations.

Conflict-related concerns, encapsulated by references to “thinking about the conflict”, “war,” and “war and migration”, underscore the impact of ongoing geopolitical tensions on public attitudes towards migrants. The association of Ukrainian migrants with war and conflict likely intensifies negative sentiments and shapes the discourse around migration in Poland, reinforcing fears and prejudices that hinder social integration.

Secondly, the analysis of the data uncovered a range of categories reflecting neutral perspectives on LL and also on migration in Poland. These categories vary in frequency, indicating differing levels of prominence in respondents’ viewpoints. Notably, thoughts such as “there must be many migrants in PL” and “there must be many Ukrainians in PL” suggest a recognition of significant migrant presence, while categories like “associations with migrants” and “demographic changes are proceeding” highlight awareness of ongoing social changes.

Several categories denote neutral or pragmatic perspectives, including “new clients, new needs” and “nothing against the signs, but where is Polish”, which reflect practical considerations related to economic and cultural integration. Furthermore, expressions like “thoughts about aesthetics of the signs” and “associations with shops in the II Polish Republic” may carry underlying tensions related to cultural identity and historical associations. The quotations exemplifying negative attitudes underscore these sentiments:

Q(59): “There are many Ukrainians living in the area.”¹⁰

This statement highlights a perceived overabundance of Ukrainian migrants, potentially reflecting concerns about demographic saturation and its impact on local communities.

Q(93): “I believe that signage for services such as medical professionals should be translated more frequently.”¹¹

¹⁰ *W okolicy (sic!) mieszka sporo Ukraińców.*

¹¹ *Myślę o tym, że oznakowania serwisów takich jak lekarz powinny być częściej tłumaczone.*

This remark not only emphasizes the need for linguistic accommodation but may also imply that current signage is insufficiently inclusive, thereby fostering a sense of exclusion among native Polish speakers.

The diversity in category frequency reveals a complex interplay of acceptance, neutrality, and resistance within the sociolinguistic landscape of Poland. Addressing these multifaceted attitudes requires nuanced policy approaches that balance the facilitation of migrant integration with the preservation of cultural and linguistic heritage.

Thirdly, the inquiry captured also positive attitudes. Key positive categories include sentiments such as “each client is important”, “good idea”, and “happiness about the support”, which emphasize the value placed on assisting Ukrainian migrants. The recognition that “Polish is also present” alongside the migrants underscores a desire for linguistic inclusivity and cultural coexistence. Additionally, categories such as “medical or other live needs of Ukrainians”, “multiculturality, openness and integration”, and “openness to new migrants and clients” reflect a commitment to addressing the practical and social needs of migrants, promoting a welcoming and tolerant societal framework.

The notion that “Poland becomes open and tolerant”, along with “support is important”, and “the Ukrainians feel welcome”, further illustrates the positive reception and integration efforts within Polish communities. Statements such as “we help Ukrainians during the war” highlight solidarity and humanitarian support in times of crisis, reinforcing the overarching theme of empathy and cooperation.

However, amidst these positive categories, there are underlying tensions exemplified by the following quotations which reflect negative attitudes:

Q(22): “It is good that thanks to such signs, Ukrainians do not have greater problems understanding the signs.”¹²

While ostensibly positive, this statement may imply that without these signs, Ukrainians would struggle, subtly suggesting a dependency or highlighting a perceived inadequacy in linguistic integration.

Q(25): “Poland is finally becoming an open and tolerant country.”¹³

Although the statement appears positive, the use of “finally” may indicate a previous lack of openness and tolerance, hinting at underlying frustrations or criticisms regarding Poland’s historical stance on migration.

¹² Dobrze, że dzięki takim znakom Ukraińcy nie mają większego problemu z rozumieniem znaków.

¹³ Polska w końcu staje się krajem otwartym i tolerancyjnym.

These quotations illustrate that while the overarching narrative is positive, there are nuanced negative undertones related to the process and perceptions of integration. The recognition of improvements in tolerance and support does not entirely negate past or present challenges, suggesting a complex interplay between acceptance and residual apprehensions.

The second part of this survey concerned the use of Ukrainian and Russian alongside Polish in public signage. The answers ($n = 77$) of the respondents were also divided in three main categories: negative (5), positive (24) and neutral (18).

Among the three categories depicted here, positive attitudes are the most frequent. Although neutral responses are also common, negative answers can be considered the least frequent. Here are some examples of the positive statements made by the respondents:

Q(38): "This is useful and necessary considering the numerous Ukrainian and Russian migrants"¹⁴.

Q(9): "Positively, everyone should feel welcomed in Poland, especially in a situation where they are fleeing from war"¹⁵.

Q(5): "Using Ukrainian and Russian languages in public spaces alongside Polish seems to me like a step toward openness and integration of communities, as well as a sign of respect for cultural diversity"¹⁶.

The three quotations are connected by a common theme of promoting multilingualism and inclusivity. They reflect a growing recognition of the need to adapt public language practices to accommodate the needs of migrant communities. The quoted answers also reflect how important language policies that embrace diversity and support the integration of migrants are, particularly in the context of Ukrainian and Russian speakers in Poland.

Furthermore, additional categories emerged with varying distributions of responses. Single mentions were also noted, however they were excluded from the in-depth presentation due to their infrequency:

- a) needed and helpful for native speakers ($n = 4$),
- b) it depends on the context, function and language ($n = 9$),
- c) it doesn't bother me ($n = 9$),
- d) natural or now natural ($n = 2$),
- e) needed, because English is needed ($n = 2$),
- f) strange and surprising ($n = 2$).

¹⁴ *Jest to przydatne i potrzebne zważając na liczne ukraińskich i rosyjskich migrantów.*

¹⁵ *Pozytywnie, każdy powinien czuć się witany w Polsce, szczególnie w sytuacji gdzie ucieka przed wojną.*

¹⁶ *Używanie języków ukraińskiego i rosyjskiego w przestrzeni publicznej obok polskiego widzę jako krok ku otwartości i integracji społeczności, a także jako wyraz szacunku dla różnorodności kulturowej.*

Some participants perceived the display of Ukrainian and Russian, alongside Polish, as functionally necessary or beneficial for speakers of these languages (d). Others stressed that the appropriateness of such multilingual signage depends on the specific context, purpose, and language in question (e). For another subset of respondents, this presence was not a source of concern (f). A small group considered the phenomenon natural or having become natural over time (g), or viewed it as equally justifiable as the use of English (h). Conversely, a few respondents found it unusual or surprising (i). Although these categories occurred less frequently and were therefore not analyzed in depth, they illustrate the diversity of attitudes toward multilingual signage in the Polish LL.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

This study offers an initial overview of Russian and Ukrainian in public space in Poland and the attitudes towards the changed LL mainly among Polish students after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The data reveals that for the vast majority of the respondents these multilingual signs are clearly visible and widely recognized as markers of demographic changes tied to migration patterns, especially following recent geopolitical events. Many participants associate such signage with Poland's openness toward newcomers, seeing it as a reflection of solidarity – particularly with Ukrainians – and a practical means of facilitating communication. In this sense, signage in Ukrainian and Russian is often viewed as a gesture of welcome and inclusivity, underscoring Poland's evolving cultural and linguistic environment.

At the same time, the responses given encompass a broad spectrum of attitudes, ranging from strongly positive through neutral to overtly negative. Positive sentiments focus on recognizing migrants' communication needs, appreciating diversity, and highlighting Poland's growing cultural openness. Neutral perspectives note the presence of new populations and the functional necessity of multilingual signage without expressing marked approval or disapproval. Though fewer in number, negative views spotlight concerns about overshadowing Polish identity, perceived preferential treatment of Ukrainians, or a sense of being "abroad in one's own country". These tensions are most pronounced in discussions of language learning, educational equity, and broader reflections on conflict-driven migration. Nonetheless, the mixed attitudes suggest a complex negotiation between fostering integration and preserving linguistic tradition within Polish cities.

Overall, the findings indicate that multilingual Ukrainian and Russian signage in Polish urban spaces serves not merely as an adaptation to demographic

shifts but also as a powerful symbol of evolving social values. On one hand, this practice supports newcomers' integration, mitigates language barriers, and projects solidarity during times of crisis. On the other, it sparks debates about national identity, cultural continuity, and the extent to which public spaces should reflect linguistic diversity. From a sociolinguistic perspective, these results underscore the role of the LL as both a practical medium for communication and an expressive domain for social attitudes.

5.1. Limitations of the study

It is also important to mention that this study has some limitations. First, the sample was restricted to students and individuals under the age of 30, which limits the generalizability of the findings. This demographic focus may not fully represent the broader population's attitudes towards Russian and Ukrainian signs in Poland, especially among older age groups or those with different educational backgrounds.

Second, the survey employed a snowball sampling. This approach, while practical, has inherent limitations in terms of reach. It primarily targeted individuals with internet access, excluding those who may have internet access but were not linked to the survey, as well as those without internet access altogether. This sampling bias likely skews the findings towards more digitally engaged participants.

Third, the survey was structured with a fixed questionnaire format, which prevented the possibility of follow-up questions or deeper qualitative inquiry. As a result, the study could not explore participants' responses in more detail, limiting the depth of understanding on the subject matter. Additionally, the survey was conducted over a period of no more than three months, which constrained the time available for data collection and participant engagement.

5.2. Further research

Subsequent research endeavours may extend the findings of this study by investigating the long-term implications of multilingual signage in Poland and other nations encountering analogous demographic transitions. Such studies could examine how these shifts influence public perceptions of linguistic diversity and the evolving role of language in national identity formation. This research would provide a deeper understanding of how public signage functions not only as a practical tool for communication but also as a symbolic rep-

resentation of the socio-political dynamics at play. In this way, the study serves as a pilot, capturing valuable trends and offering a preliminary sociolinguistic contribution to the understanding of attitudes towards Ukrainian and Russian in Poland's LL. Further research is certainly needed to address these constraints and deepen our understanding.

5.3. Foreign language teaching implications

Incorporating authentic LL materials into school or and university education is not a recent development. Research on teaching has long recognized LL as an effective pedagogical resource for both language teaching and teacher education, mainly due to its capacity to raise language awareness, promote multilingualism, and to connect classroom learning with everyday language use. As Andrade et al. (2023: 207) state,

it is essential to develop teacher education programmes that privilege understanding concerning the (in)visibility of linguistic and cultural diversity and its value in educational contexts. Such programmes may enhance teachers' contribution to the construction of fairer societies, by developing pupils' multiliteracy competences and language awareness (Andrade et al. 2023: 207).

Multiple studies have highlighted the potential of LL across diverse instructional contexts. This includes its application in Slavic language teaching, as demonstrated by Lisek's (2018a) investigation of Polish language courses. According to Lisek (2018a: 292), authentic LL materials – such as signs, menus, and advertisements – enhance language learning by fostering pragmatic skills and offering learners real-world linguistic experiences. Moreover, they contribute to developing intercultural competence, expand vocabulary acquisition, and boost motivation among language learners. Crucially, educators and students alike acknowledge these benefits, further underscoring LL as a powerful tool for broadening the scope of language instruction.

By integrating LL into classroom practice, teachers maintain and promote linguistic diversity, cultivate an atmosphere of shared exploration, and encourage co-constructive knowledge-building between instructors and students. Such an approach dissolves rigid distinctions between experts and novices, providing equitable opportunities for all learners to develop their linguistic and cultural competencies. Ultimately, strategic LL integration champions a comprehensive and inclusive pedagogy that extends beyond specific student groups and large urban centres. This holds true even in contexts where contact with extensive cityscapes is limited, such as peri-urban or rural settings. As Brinkmann and

Melo-Pfeifer (2023: 202) observe, “We can conclude that pedagogical work with LLs brings students closer to societal linguistic (super)diversity, even if this diversity is not immediately apparent or recognisable in the surroundings, and also promotes multilingual pedagogies for all.”

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Krajobrazy językowe w okresie przemian. Opinie polskich studentów na temat ukraińskich i rosyjskich znaków językowych

ABSTRAKT. W dzisiejszym zglobalizowanym świecie obecność języków obcych i ich znaków nie jest niczym niezwykłym. Jednak w okresach konfliktów te właściwości języka nabierają szczególnego znaczenia, dotyczą tym samym krajobrazów językowych. Rosyjska inwazja na Ukrainę znacząco wpłynęła na polski krajobraz językowy, skłaniając do zbadania postaw polskich studentów wobec tych zmian. Wyniki badania wskazują, po pierwsze, że studenci zauważyli wyraźny wzrost liczby oznakowań w cyrylicy w swoich miastach. Po drugie, reakcje na te wielojęzyczne oznakowania – zwłaszcza te w języku ukraińskim i rosyjskim – wahają się od zdecydowanie pozytywnych do neutralnych, a w niektórych przypadkach są otwarcie negatywne. Podczas gdy wielu uczestników postrzega takie oznakowanie jako znak zmian demograficznych i symbol solidarności z nowo przybyłymi, odzwierciedlający otwartość Polski w obliczu zmian geopolitycznych, inni opisują je jako przyćmiewające polską tożsamość lub wskazujące na preferencyjne traktowanie Ukraińców. W rezultacie obecność ukraińskich i rosyjskich znaków w polskich przestrzeniach publicznych jawi się nie tylko jako praktyczne narzędzie komunikacji, ale także jako potężny symbol zmieniających się wartości społecznych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: krajobraz językowy, język ukraiński, język rosyjski, znaki, postawy.

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