

EDITORIAL

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Linguistic landscapes in Slavic studies

This thematic volume brings together academic research that approaches linguistic landscapes (LL) in Slavic studies as both a record of written language in public (and semi-public) space and a complex indicator of social changes. The contributions share a commitment to analysing how languages become visible – through scripts, signage and other semiotic resources – and to asking what this visibility evokes: whom it includes or excludes, what identities it foregrounds, and how it shapes everyday language practices (cf. Themistocleous 2025; Gorter & Cenoz 2024). An important feature of our volume is that it highlights the interaction between linguistic landscapes, language learning and teaching methods. The article selection grows out of the ongoing consolidation of Slavic linguistic landscape research as a field that is theoretically rich and yet methodologically plural, reflecting the heterogeneity of research cultures across Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe and their neighbouring regions.

A unifying context for this special issue is the reconfiguration of linguistic landscapes in the context of contemporary geopolitical changes. Since 2022, at the latest, there has been a marked emphasis on the interconnection between language, power and society. The ongoing war in Ukraine has resulted in a significant shift towards the visibility of the Ukrainian language, while concurrently leading to a restriction on the use of Russian within the same country. Thus, language in public space serves as a significant indicator of societal development. Against this background, several authors examine how the public presence of Ukrainian and Russian is being renegotiated, how new forms of solidarity and tension are

semiotically expressed, and how altered landscapes are perceived by different communities. Other contributions broaden the scope to include borderland ecologies, to contested or weakly researched regions, to historical depth, and to playful or commodified language in advertising. Altogether, the studies show that linguistic landscapes are not merely “texts in space”, but dynamic arenas in which political events, migration, market logics, and educational practices become materially legible.

This special issue is the result of a long-standing and intensive collaboration between the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and the University of Greifswald. Common research interests were applied to organise the international conference *New Insights into Slavic Linguistic Landscapes* in Greifswald on 28–29 June 2024, which enabled pluralistic perspectives on the study of linguistic landscapes. Conference reports were published in the academic journals of *Opera Slavica* (cf. Lisek & Henzelmann 2024) and *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* (cf. Henzelmann & Lisek 2025). The conference participants came from Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Germany, Poland, Serbia, and Slovakia, enabling a diverse basis for a critical analysis of heterogeneous structures in the field of linguistic landscapes in Slavic studies. Selected papers presented in Greifswald are included in the present volume. In what follows, we summarise the main themes of these contributions.

Lilit G. Brutian’s paper, *Linguistic landscapes of modern Armenia: In the footsteps of Russian-speaking relocants*, reports a particularly timely configuration: the arrival of Russian-speaking newcomers and the semiotic traces of their presence in the LL of Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. Building on contemporary examples such as posters and newly established cafés, Brutian highlights how Russian textual elements are combined with Armenian, producing hybridised sign forms that can be read as indexes of language contact, accommodation, and emergent belonging. Importantly, this is not reduced to a simple narrative of dominance or replacement. Rather, the paper points to a layered semiotic synthesis in which the cityscape becomes a site for negotiating cultural proximity and social integration under conditions of accelerated mobility.

Next, the study *Exploring the linguistic landscapes of Transnistria* by Martin Henzelmann widens the geographical and political scope to a region whose contested status is embedded in a complex multilingual reality. While Russian may dominate public life in Transnistria in many respects, Henzelmann draws attention to patterned deviations, localised multilingual practices, and the classificatory challenges they pose. The paper contributes to a better understanding of “dominance” in linguistic landscape research: apparent monolingualism can conceal structured multilingual repertoires, and the landscape may encode pragmatic accommodations that are not captured by high-level policy narratives.

Olga Iakovleva and Miłosz Huber offer in contrast in their paper *The linguistic landscape of Lublin in a diachronic aspect based on selected examples* a diachronic linguistic-landscape portrait of Lublin, reading the city's sacred and secular inscriptions as an archive of centuries of multicultural contact. Based on systematic fieldwork in 2025 (inventorying and photographing frescoes, façades, cemetery inscriptions and signage texts), they map the distribution of languages and scripts – Latin, Polish (including older forms), Yiddish, German, Church Slavonic and Russian – across key heritage sites. The study links documentation to heritage protection, and highlights the pedagogical value of historical landscapes for language and intercultural learning.

With Věra Janíková's contribution *Linguistic landscapes in the sociolinguistic and foreign language teaching research field in the Czech Republic*, the volume turns towards disciplinary mapping and research-practice transfer. Janíková situates linguistic landscape inquiry at the intersection of sociolinguistics and foreign language teaching, demonstrating how public signage and other semiotic artefacts can be used to connect linguistic forms with social meaning, and to foster interpretive competences that traditional classroom materials rarely provide.

Marta Koszko's article, *"Solidarity" and "inclusion" in the linguistic landscape: The presence of the Ukrainian language in public urban spaces in Poland and its language learning implications*, examines how Ukrainian has entered – and, in many places, stabilised within Polish urban agglomerations. The study foregrounds explicit and implicit references to solidarity and inclusion as they are materialised in signage, thereby connecting macro-level sociopolitical discourse with micro-level semiotic choices (lexis, script, placement, and addressivity). At the same time, Koszko extends the analytical lens: the urban environment emerges as an informal learning resource and an affectively charged contact zone that can be mobilised in language education, precisely because it renders multilingualism publicly visible and socially meaningful.

In his paper, *Linguistic landscapes in transition: Polish students' views on Ukrainian and Russian signage*, Grzegorz Lisek focuses on language visibility with an emphasis on perception. As linguistic landscapes shift, responses to them become a research object in their own right: how do viewers interpret Ukrainian and Russian signs, what emotions or evaluations are activated, and how do these reactions relate to wider sociopolitical frames? By engaging an exploratory design centred on attitudes, the paper makes a methodological case for integrating perceptual approaches into landscape studies – particularly in contexts where language visibility has become newly salient and socially contested.

The contribution by Tigran Simyan, *Language play and norm deviation in art and advertising in Old Tiflis: Occasionalism as a didactic tool*, examines how commercial discourse strategically mobilises Russian – through stylisation, indexicality,

and cultural referencing – to produce effects such as authenticity, nostalgia, cosmopolitanism, or irony. This perspective is crucial, because it demonstrates that linguistic landscape meanings are not reducible to “who speaks what” but are also shaped by market-driven semiotic play and by the commodification of language varieties.

Questions of scale and pedagogical relevance are central to the joint study by Magdalena Steciąg and Urszula Majdańska-Wachowicz, entitled *“Leave no trace”: The macro and microscale analysis of the linguistic landscape of the Polish-Czech border area*. By focusing on a Czech-Polish border region that is simultaneously touristic, environmentally regulated, and socially porous, the authors show how “macro” framings (institutional discourses and normative orders) interact with “micro” practices (situated, often ephemeral inscriptions and audience-oriented messages). Their approach underscores that landscape analysis benefits from tracing the mutual conditioning of infrastructures, ideologies, and everyday communicative behaviour – and that such analyses can be transferred into teaching formats that develop learners’ semiotic awareness and critical reading of public texts.

Across these varied settings, a common set of concerns emerges. First, the contributions demonstrate together that scripts and language choices are never neutral: they index histories, social alignments, and imagined audiences. Second, the contributions illustrate the analytical value of moving across different levels of description – connecting fine-grained semiotic observations to broader dynamics of migration, conflict, regionalisation, and institutional governance. Third, several chapters draw attention to the didactics / pedagogical potential of linguistic landscapes: public space may be read as a living textbook, though one that demands careful guidance and ethical attentiveness. This is particularly the case when the signs in question are associated with displacement, war, or contested identities.

Bringing these studies together, our volume seeks to advance research on Slavic and neighbouring linguistic landscapes in two key respects: by presenting empirically grounded analyses from contexts requiring nuanced interpretation, and by deepening the dialogue between foreign language teaching, sociolinguistic theory and applied linguistics methodology.

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