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Linguistic landscape in Mostar

“...[writing on open display] is
a genie let out of the bottle.” (Coulmas 2009)

In this paper we aim at presenting the results of a new type of research – linguistic landscaping – done for the very first time in the city of Mostar. The theoretical and methodological approach combines postulates and paradigms developed by the linguistic landscape researchers like Rosenbaum et al. (1977), Spolsky and Cooper (1991), Landry and Bourhis (1997), Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), Cenoz and Gorter (2006), Backhaus (2007), Edelman (2010) etc. We aimed to find out information about the sociolinguistic situation in the city of Mostar using linguistic landscape methodology. Namely, linguistic landscape research can lead to various conclusions about speech community and its social and political implications, about prevailing cultural beliefs; it mirrors different social issues. The study aims to answer the following research question: To what extent does the linguistic landscape of Mostar reflect the languages spoken by the speech community? We used the methodology described in recent publications in the discipline and analyzed one thousand and ten linguistic signs collected at six survey areas in the city. Data analysis results have shown that linguistic landscape in Mostar has its specific traits influenced by ethnolinguistic composition, geographical distribution, power relations, prestige, symbolic value, vitality and literacy.

Key words: linguistic landscape; linguistic sign; public space; multilingual spaces; ethnolinguistic composition.



1. Introduction

The study of language on signs in public space is a novel field in sociolinguistics developing at a very high speed since 1997. In the literature in English language the term *linguistic landscape research* has been applied to the concept and has already entered common usage in scientific circles. Numerous scientists from all over the world have discovered the heuristic potentials of the young discipline, which offers answers to multiple questions about language and society, about language vitality, about intergroup relations. This is especially true in the areas with diverse ethnolinguistic compositions, which are centers of language contacts and conflicts. *Linguistic landscape* or – in Croatian terminology – ‘*jezični krajobraz*’¹ is a testimony about people, economic situation in an area, language politics, identities, multilingualism etc.

The term *linguistic landscape* was first used by Landry and Bourhis (1997) in 1997 and since then it has started its sudden ascend in usage in numerous scientific papers across the globe. These papers have been reporting on language on public and commercial signs in various multilingual spaces: Jerusalem (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006), Lira in Uganda (Reh, 2004), Bangkok (Huebner, 2006), Tokio (Backhaus, 2007), the Bask Country and Friesland (Cenoz and Gorter 2006) etc. But the study of public signage goes back further in the history. As far as back in the 70s of the 20th century we have the very first papers on some of the aspects of the linguistic landscape (Massai 1972, according to Backhaus 2007; Rosenbaum et al. 1977; Tulp 1978, according to Backhaus 2007). Those papers are considered to be the pioneering works in the field. At Croatian language area this kind of research has just started. This paper presents the first results of linguistic landscaping in Croatian speaking region.

Landry and Bourhis were the first authors who defined the term *linguistic landscape* clearly:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 25).

¹ Based on the analysis of etymology, dictionary meaning and usage of the word *landscape* in other languages (cf. Gorter 2006: 83) we strongly believe that *jezični krajobraz* is the best equivalent of the English term *linguistic landscape* and recommend it for further usage in Croatian scientific terminology. *Linguistic landscape researchers* could be translated as *istraživači jezičnoga krajobraza*, *sign writers and actors in the linguistic landscape* as *tvorci jezičnoga krajobraza*.



This is a very important definition used by almost all researchers in the field. Gorter (2006) defines the concept as “usage of language in its written form in public sphere”. We see it as “a *picture* of linguistic signs in the public space of a city” (Grbavac 2012). These definitions bring us closer to the next two basic terms in the linguistic landscape research, namely *linguistic sign* and *public space*. Backhaus offers the following definition of a sign, which was, with the exception of a few radical and more experimental approaches (e.g. Shohamy and Waksman 2009), accepted by the majority of the researchers:

A sign was considered to be any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame. The underlying definition is physical, not semantic. It is rather broad, including anything from the small handwritten sticker attached to a lamp-post to huge commercial billboards outside a department store. Items such as ‘push’ and ‘pull’ stickers at entrance doors, lettered foot mats or botanic explanation plates on trees were considered to be signs, too. ... Each sign ... was counted as one item, irrespective of its size (2007: 66).

As regards public space, *lived* spaces are battlefields of ideological conflicts and tensions. The public space is not neutral, it is rather “a negotiated and contested arena” (Shohamy and Waksman 2009: 314). City centers with their high language density are open and accessible to the ‘crowd’, and as such they have become the best places for linguistic landscape research.

We look at the city of Mostar and its linguistic landscape as a dynamic and multifunctional, lived and interactive space, too. A city is a multicultural, hybrid surrounding characterized by complex asymmetries and imbalance in social and political relations. The coexistence of different languages and different language varieties at one place gave an impetus for scientific research of linguistic diversity in the 70s as well as for more recent multilingualism research. The majority of this research has paid heed to spoken language, whereas language in its written form has not been given much attention to, so far. But the city is not just a place of talk. It is a place of writing and reading, too (Backhaus, 2007: 1). Therefore the huge and sudden interest for this growing field across the globe is not surprising. A new dimension and a new heuristic potential has been discovered in the research of language in the city.

In our research we aimed to unveil data about the linguistic situation in the city of Mostar using linguistic landscape methodology. The city of Mostar, as a multilingual, multiethnic space with live language contacts and conflicts, is *the* city for linguistic landscape research. The overall aim of the paper is to analyse the socio-linguistic situation in the city using languages on the public signs. The specific



aim is to find out to which extent the linguistic landscape of Mostar reflects languages spoken by the speech community.

2. Methodology

Using theoretical paradigms and analytical instruments described in the recent contributions to the field (Backhaus 2007; Cenoz and Gorter 2006; Edelman 2010), 1,010 linguistic signs were analyzed. These units of analysis were collected at six survey areas in the city using *Diversity or Heterogeneity Sampling Method* (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Edelman 2010; Huebner 2006). The quantitative analysis was used as described and applied by Backhaus (2007) and Cenoz and Gorter (2006). Linguistic features (e.g. languages used, scripts used), semiotic features (e.g. the order of the texts in different languages, the size of font of the texts in different languages) and other features (e.g. government or private sign) were investigated.

2.1. Survey areas

In the six survey areas four most frequented city streets and two shopping malls were included. Since the city of Mostar is divided into two parts with clearly different ethnolinguistic composition, a great care was taken so that three locations be in the eastern part of the city and three locations in the western part. Survey areas *Rondo*, *Avenija* and *Orca* were in the western part, whereas survey areas *Fejićeva*, *Korzo/Musala* and *Stari grad* were in the eastern part of the city.

2.2. Diversity or Heterogeneity Sampling Method

The linguistic signs in these survey areas were photographed with a digital camera.² The sampling method that was applied is called *Diversity or Heterogeneity Sampling*. Cook and Campbell (1979: 75–77) call this ‘deliberate sampling for heterogeneity’. They maintain that this model does not require random sampling. Deliberate sampling for heterogeneity is usually more useful than random sampling for representativeness. In this way we can get a broad spectrum of linguistic landscapes, which includes even most unusual ones. The aim is to note diverse landscapes, and not to represent all the linguistic landscapes proportionately. In other words, the survey areas are illustrative, not representative examples of the linguistic landscape of the city. Table 1 shows the fieldwork plan.

² The camera used was a Canon Digital IXUS 95 IS.

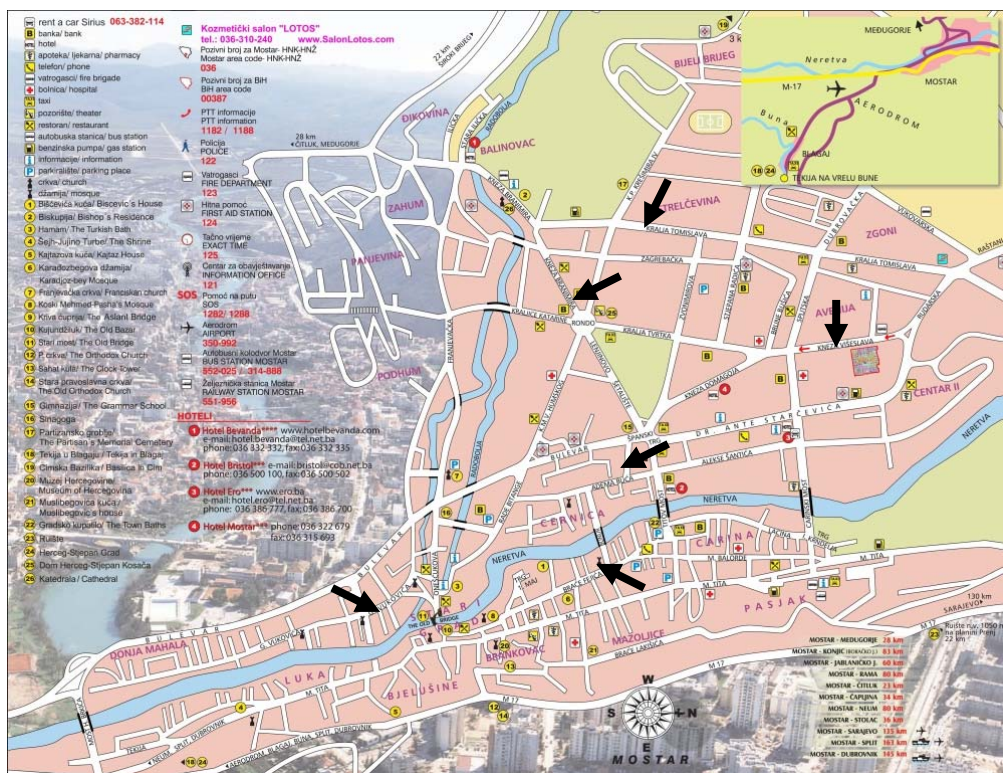


Figure 1. Survey areas in Mostar.³

Table 1. Overview of the data collection.

Date	Survey area	No. of institutions	No. of signs
15/10/2010	<i>Orca</i>	15	137
14/9/2011	<i>Rondo</i>	16	216
26/9/2011	<i>Avenija</i>	22	153
7/10/2011	<i>Fejićeva</i>	25	161
27/9/2011	<i>Korzo/Musala</i>	24	137
28/10/2011	<i>Stari grad</i>	18	206
Total		120	1010

³ Source: http://www.psiho.biz/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=484&Itemid=1004.



2.3. Coding

Using the statistical package SPSS v. 19 (*Statistical Package for Social Sciences, Version 19*), the signs were coded according to the following variables⁴:

1. Sign number
2. Date on which the sign was photographed
3. Survey area
4. Government or private sign
5. Type of establishment
6. Name of establishment
7. Type of sign
8. Type of discourse in urban space
9. Number of languages on sign
10. Languages, in order of appearance
11. Font size of texts in the languages
12. Languages, in order of font size
13. Type of text font per language
14. Visibility of the multilingual nature of the sign
15. Mobility of the text carrier
16. Number of scripts
17. Scripts, in order of appearance

Using selective criteria, methods most adequate for the chosen sociolinguistic context were applied – methods used in comparable sociolinguistic settings like Jerusalem, also a divided city (cf. Ben-Rafael et al. 2006) and Amsterdam, a highly multiethnic city (cf. Edelman 2010). After work done in the field, analysis of the photographs, data in-put into the SPSS base, data processing in the SPSS, a detailed comparison of the variables and correlations setting ensued.

3. Results and discussion

As a result of different ethnolinguistic composition, the linguistic landscape of Mostar is divided into its eastern and western part. The eastern part of the city is inhabited by Bosniaks, who declare as speakers of Bosniak language, whereas the western part of the city is populated by Croatians, speaking Croatian language. We have made a comparison between those two distinctly different parts of the city in order

⁴ A detailed description of the sign coding according to the variables is to be found in Grbavac (2012: 153–162).



to clarify to which extent the linguistic landscape reflects languages spoken in the speech community.

3.1. *Language distribution*

Table 2 shows language distribution on signs in the survey areas in the eastern and western part of the city. In all survey areas together, a total of fifteen different languages were found.

Table 2. Languages on signs in survey areas in the eastern and western part of the city of Mostar (percentage).⁵

	Eastern part of the city	Western part of the city
1 English	52,2	63,2
2 Bosniak	73,3	4,6
3 Croatian	4,6	59,3
4 Italian	4,2	5,6
5 German	3,4	3,4
6 French	2,4	2
7 Turkish	2	0,2
8 Serbian	1,2	0,4
9 Spanish	0,4	1
10 Latin	0,2	0,6
11 Arabic	0,6	0
12 Greek	0	0,4
13 Portugese	0	0,2
14 Russian	0	0,2
15 Polish	0,2	0
N	504	506

In the survey areas in the eastern part of the city the most frequent language is Bosniak. It is followed by English as a language of prestige and positive connotations. In the western part of the city we came up with a surprising result – the international language English is more frequent on the signs than the national language Croatian. It means that the western part of the city is highly inclined and open towards Western culture and globalization processes. In the same time, the high percentage of English language serves as a distinctive feature compared to the eastern side of the city, which is very much oriented towards oriental influences, as a quite

⁵ If a sign contained, for example, both English and Croatian, then it is represented in the table twice. That is why the total percentage in one column is higher than 100. That is because of the presence of multilingual signs.



recent phenomenon. In the eastern part the percentage of the presence of the English language on signs is also high (52,2%), but not as surprisingly high as in the western part of the city.



Figure 2. English language in the name of a coffee shop.



Figure 3. English language even on government signs.

After English the next most frequent foreign languages in Mostar are Italian, German and French, both at the eastern and western side of the city. These European languages have only but slight presence in the linguistic landscape of Mostar. They seem to enjoy a prestige in the domain of marketing. They are carriers of



positive connotations, which they carry over to certain products and services. These languages do not necessarily represent their ethnolinguistic groups in an area, they are “outer languages”, so that here we can talk about the instance of impersonal multilingualism.

After the group of European languages, the high seventh place at the scale of frequency belongs to the Turkish language. From the sociolinguistic point of view this is a very interesting and, if we take into consideration recent political turbulences, somewhat expected result. In the eastern part of the city the presence of the Turkish language in the linguistic landscape is 2%, in the western part of the city 0.2%. But, since in the city of Mostar, to our knowledge, there is practically no speech community whose mother tongue would be Turkish, we believe that this is a case of impersonal multilingualism, too.

A peculiarity present in the linguistic landscape of Mostar is the emergence of the Arabic language in the eastern part of the city (0.6%), which could be explained as a result of stronger ties to the Islamic culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the recent history.

As regards minority languages, in LL research they have shown low frequency on signs in general (cf. Edelman, 2010: 83), as a consequence of their low ethnolinguistic vitality. Such results have been obtained also in this research: Serbian language, as a minority language in Mostar, is present only 0.8% in the linguistic landscape of Mostar: 1.2 % in the eastern part and 0.4 % in the western part of the city. The Romany language and Albanian, as minority languages that do have their active speakers in the city, are not present in the linguistic landscape at all.

According to our results, it seems that the status of Croatian language as a dominant language in the western part of the city is not in danger. Judging from the extremely low percentage of the Bosniak language in that part (4.6%), we can say that Croatian, at least for now, is not endangered by the supremacy of neither Bosniak nor any other language. In the eastern part we have the very same situation: Bosniak language with the presence of 73% is definitely the dominant language. These results are in line with the principle of power relations, which was proved by Ben-Rafael (2009) in his research, too. According to that principle, the language of the dominant ethnolinguistic group is much more frequent in the linguistic landscape than the languages of the subordinate groups. Eastern and western parts of the city of Mostar are the prototypes of that principle.



3.2. Linguistic structure of the signs

Untill now we have dealt with the composition of the linguistic landscape as a whole, but it is also interesting to look at the linguistic makeup of the signs themselves. The extent to which a speech community is multilingual can be expressed with the proportion of multilingual signs in the linguistic landscape. Table 3 shows percentages of the monolingual and multilingual sign in the two compared parts of the city.

	Eastern part	Western part
Monolingual signs	63	62
Multilingual signs	37	38
N	504	506

Table 3. Monolingual and multilingual signs in the eastern and western part of the city of Mostar (percentage).

From the table 3 it is clear that most of the signs, in both parts of the city, are monolingual. Approximately 38 percent of the signs contain more than one language. If we compare this result with the results of similar studies elsewhere, for example with the comparable study in Amsterdam (Edelman, 2010), where the ratio of monolingual and multilingual signs was 73:27, we can come up with a conclusion that Mostar is a city with a very high level of multilingualism.



Figure 3. A multilingual sign in the Old Town.



The order of appearance of the languages on signs and font size of the texts in different languages speak for themselves about the importance and relations among the languages in a speech community. The results have shown that in the western part of the city three most frequent and graphically largest languages are English, Croatian and Italian, whereas in the eastern part of the city Bosniak, English and French appear to be the most frequent and the largest.



Figure 4. Non-Latin scripts in Mostar: Cyrillic script, western Cyrillic script (*bosanica*) and Arabic script, symbolic functions.

As regards scripts, Latin script (99.7% as first script) is the only script used for informative purposes. Other scripts detected in the landscape are Cyrillic script, Arabic script and western Cyrillic script (*bosanica*), but their presence is indeed small (approx. 0.1–0.6%). When written in these scripts, a sign becomes more



conspicuous, so that such signs leave the impression that the language group using that script is more numerous in the speech community. The prominence that the Arabic script (0.3% as the first script) carries is significant. All the signs with the Arabic script are located in the eastern part of the city. On the other hand, the Cyrillic script signs are present in both parts of the city. In the eastern part of the city Cyrillic script is being imposed “from above”, “in vitro”, from the government, and not by private actors in the linguistic landscape, not “in vivo,”⁶ since it has been detected only on government signs. In Mostar the Cyrillic script mainly appears on government multilingual signs – therefore its function in the speech community is not informative, but symbolic. As regards Arabic script, it is noted only on private signs, which means that it is being imposed “in vivo”, by the inhabitants, and not “in vitro”, by the government. *Bosanica* or western Cyrillic script, as a historical symbol of the Croatian identity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was found only on one single sign (0.1%), but it was the name of the most important cultural institution on the main square in the western part of the city, which speaks for itself about its importance for the sign writer. To sum up, non-Latin scripts in Mostar have a symbolic, and not informative function.

This research has shown that the basic distinction between the linguistic landscapes in the eastern and western part of the city is the difference in usage of the national languages. The characteristic trait for Mostar is a clear geographic distribution of the languages, determined by the front line from the war period 1992 – 1995. Geographic distribution is also typical of some other multilingual cities (e.g. Brussels, Montréal), but not with such a clear borderline. The characteristics of the linguistic landscape of Mostar seem to prove that Mostar is a “divided city”.

4. Conclusions

The linguistic landscape of Mostar only to some extent reflects the languages spoken in the city. In addition to the ethnolinguistic composition factor, as the most prominent one, the linguistic landscape of Mostar is influenced by the following factors: geographic distribution, power relations, prestige, symbolic value, identity issues, tourism, language vitality and literacy.

In the city of Mostar, depending on the location, the characteristics of the linguistic landscape change. On the locations in the eastern part of the city from the local languages only Bosniak language is present; on the locations in the western

⁶ Cf. Calvet (1990, according to Backhaus 2007).



part of the city – exclusively Croatian language. Practically there is no usage of the other national language in the opposite part of the city.

Extremely high percentage of the English language presence in the western part of the city, which was even higher than the national, Croatian language percentage, indicated orientation towards Western culture. We believe that it is also a distinctive feature as opposed to the eastern part of the city, where the influence of the Eastern culture is more important.

In the eastern part of the city, having detected a high percentage of the Turkish language, we identified impersonal multilingualism, which is probably fostered by recent cultural and political bonding with the Republic of Turkey.

Since the languages of the minority linguistic groups are not frequent or are absolutely absent from the linguistic landscape, we came up with a conclusion that the factor *ethnolinguistic vitality* is very pronounced in Mostar. The units of linguistic landscape do not represent well the whole linguistic repertoire of the city.

The actors in the linguistic landscape of Mostar conform to the public values and use only „most wanted“ languages. Herewith we have supported the thesis that in multilingual surroundings, like the city of Mostar, factor *symbolic value* plays a very important role.

Having set the ratio of the multilingual and monolingual signs and having compared it with the ratios in other European cities, we determined that Mostar was a highly multilingual city.

We established that the official language policy was dormant, since in the linguistic landscape of Mostar the official languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina are not equally represented on the government signs.

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JEZIČNI KRAJOBRAZ U MOSTARU

Cilj je ovoga rada predstaviti rezultate jedne novije vrste istraživanja – istraživanja jezičnoga krajobraza – koja je po prvi put primijenjena u gradu Mostaru. U teorijskom i metodologijskom pristupu primijenjene su teze i paradigme istraživača jezičnog krajobraza počevši od Rosenbauma i sur. (1977), Spolskog i Coopera (1991), preko Landryja i Bourhisa (1997), Ben-Rafaela i sur. (2006), Cenoza i Gortera (2006), Backhaus (2007), pa sve do Edelman (2010). Cilj je istraživanja otkriti bitne informacije o sociolingvističkoj situaciji u gradu Mostaru. Naime proučavanjem jezičnoga krajobraza u danom gradu možemo doći do zaključaka o jezičnoj i društvenoj zajednici, dominantnim kulturološkim idealima i različitim društvenim segmentima. Zanimalo nas je u kojoj mjeri jezični krajobraz grada Mostara reflektira jezike kojima se govori u jezičnoj zajednici toga grada. S tim je ciljem, koristeći se teorijskim postavkama i analitičkim instrumentarijem opisanim u recentnim radovima u disciplini, analizirano tisuću sto deset jezičnih znakova prikupljenih na šest lokacija u gradu metodom uzorkovanja radi postizanja raznovrsnosti. Rezultati analize znakova pokazali su da jezični krajobraz u Mostaru ima svoje specifičnosti uvjetovane čimbenicima kao što su etnolingvistički sastav, geografska distribucija, odnosi moći, prestiž jezika, simbolička vrijednost, vitalnost jezika i pismenost.

Ključne riječi: jezični krajobraz; jezični znak; javni prostor; višejezične sredine; etnolingvistički sastav.