

ENGLISH IN A LOCAL LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

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Abstrakt

Angličtina v miestnej jazykovej krajine

Výskum jazykovej krajiny je pomerne nová oblasť interdisciplinárneho jazykovedného výskumu, ktorá súvisí s geosemiotikou, teda s výskumom diskurzov lokalizovaných do ulíc, miest, krajín a pod. Zaoberá sa jazykom nápisov umiestnených vo verejných priestoroch, jeho účelom či kontextom. A keďže tento jazyk produkujú sami ľudia, odráža názory a tendencie danej komunity. Účelom tejto práce je analyzovať úlohu angličtiny v lokálnej jazykovej krajine (Demänovská dolina a lyžiarske stredisko Jasná) a pokúsiť sa zistiť, či táto lokalizovaná angličtina má črty 'slovenskej angličtiny', t. j. lokálnej variety angličtiny fungujúcej na rozhraní 'lokálneho' a 'globálneho'. Práca je ukotvená v aktuálnom výskume 'svetových angličtín' (World Englishes), ktorý skúma miesto a funkcie angličtiny v multilingválnych komunitách, vrátane posunov v jazykovej praxi (napr. od angličtiny ako cudzí/kontaktný jazyk k angličtine ako druhý jazyk). Skúma sa tu tiež vzájomné postavenie jazykov v rámci nápisov, druh ich autora (oficiálny alebo neoficiálny autor), či to, komu sú jednotlivé nápisy určené. Výskum sa uskutočňuje na základe sto tridsaťtri fotografií nápisov v spomínanej lokalite zozbieraných v mesiacoch august a december 2013. Korpus tvoria všetky také nápisy, v ktorých bola identifikovaná prítomnosť angličtiny v akejkolvek forme.

Introduction

Public signage is often overlooked and taken for granted with respect to linguistic research. As any other sort of text, however, it can reveal views and tendencies of the particular community of speakers. In the last decade the research into public signage, the research area labelled Linguistic Landscape, started to acquire recognition. It was first used in bilingual areas, such as Canada, to describe the sociolinguistic situation of the region. This thesis employs the linguistic landscape of a Slovak tourist destination as a research resource in order to determine the role of the English language in Slovakia, its functions and the tendencies of its users. An attempt is also made to determine whether traces of a possible future paradigm shift (from EFL/ELF to ESL) and thus, whether there is a potential for emergence of the 'Slovak variety' of English in future.

1 Linguistic Landscape- introducing the subject

The research discipline of Linguistic Landscape (LL) is a relatively recent phenomenon. It has reached considerable popularity among researchers and especially the last decade has been marked by an increased interest of scholars in public signage. LL is often considered to be a subfield of sociolingu-

istics and it in fact emerged as such, however, it currently appears to be in the process of becoming a discipline of its own by means of developing its distinctive terminology.

One of the most frequently quoted definitions of the notion is the one provided by Landry and Bourhis, who are considered to be the first to use this term. They claim: “[t]he 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 & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25).

1.1 LL Research

Previous research into LL includes studies of bi-/multi-lingual environment of large cities, such as Montreal (Monnier, 1989) or Jerusalem (Ben-Rafael, 2004, 2006), comparative studies of two environments, and several empirical studies concerning areas of one dominant language group: Tokyo (Backhaus, 2009), Bangkok (Huebner, 2006), etc. Some studies focus on a particular sort of sign such as shop signs (Dimova, 2007) or road signage (Puzey, 2007). Other researchers concentrate on the transgressive art of graffiti (Pennycook, 2009).

2 Geosemiotics

Scollon and Scollon (2003) propose the framework of geosemiotics, which they define as “the study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world” (p.2). In other words, they study the meaning systems of signs in relation to their placement in the real world. Their study, however, is not limited to linguistic signs only, but they take into consideration all semiotic systems. The authors claim that signs possess the property of *indexicality*, in other words, they refer to the real world and therefore depend on the context. They put emphasis on the fact that this is a quality of all signs, including not only indexes, but icons and symbols as well. The authors then propose to approach geosemiotics as a combination of following three concepts.

2.1 Interaction Order

The interaction order can be understood as a categorization of the manners in which social interactions are formed, i.e. how we may come together with others in the real world. It is also connected to three concepts first defined by Hall (1966), *the sense of time*, *the perceptual spaces*, and *the interpersonal distance*. Another notion in connection with the interaction order is Goffman’s dichotomy of *frontstage and backstage performances*.

2.2 Visual Semiotics

Kress and Van Leeuwen’s visual semiotics can be defined as a study of the manners in which social meaning can be produced through visual images. Their approach is very complex, Scollon and Scollon (2003), however, focus on four major of the semiotic systems which Kress and Van Leeuwen apply, namely: *represented participants*, *modality*, *composition*, and *interactive participants*.

2.3 Place Semiotics

The last aspect of geosemiotics, and the most crucial one for the present thesis, is what Scollon and Scollon call *place semiotics*. Under this label are included all those semiotic systems which affect the meaning of the particular place. These are such systems as *code-preference*, *inscription*, and *emplacement* as well as features of the sign’s environment. Let us now examine those systems, which are relevant for the research of public signage.

2.4 Code Preference

One of the main elements in the study of multilingual signs, which are also the focus of this thesis, is their code-preference. Preference of one language over another can be seen in its placement in relation to other languages within the sign as well as its prominence.

The label *inscription* includes all those systems of meaning which derive from “the physical materiality of language (signs and pictures) in the world” (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 212). These encompass fonts, material, layering, and state changes.

Emplacement refers to the meaning which arises from placing a sign in the world and the study that is related to it. Scollon and Scollon propose a threefold categorization of what they call ‘geosemiotic practices’ into *decontextualized*, *transgressive*, and *situated semiotics*.

3 Language Ideologies

It seems crucial at this point to include a brief discussion of three language connected ideologies, which are, arguably, most widely spread and acknowledged among scholars. These are the Standard Language Ideology (SLI), World Englishes (WE), and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF).

3.1.1 Standard Language Ideology

The Standard Language Ideology is based on the assumption that in any linguistic culture there is always one variety which is considered to be ‘standard’, i.e. the norm for other varieties. It is also the variety used by the most prestigious speakers and considered optimal for educational purposes. Standard languages do not develop naturally; they result from a deliberate process of societal intervention.

Any attempt to apply this paradigm to English appears to be far from unproblematic. The IC (Inner circle) countries are often regarded as standards for countries of the other two circles, which are, therefore, labelled as exonormative. Selection of an IC standard can be, at times, quite complicated, which is given by plurality of such standard languages.

3.1.2 World Englishes

The authorship of the label ‘World Englishes’ is often assigned to Braj Kachru. The basic idea behind this ideology is that the ownership of English is no longer in the hands of IC speakers, and it is, thus, not appropriate to enforce IC norms on OC countries. Due to this shift, the OC nations should not be considered exonormative any longer, as many of them are developing their own standards and, therefore, consider these a norm. These varieties are not to be considered interlanguages, i.e. learner languages that are yet to reach their target (Jenkins, 2009); they are to be perceived as “legitimate variations because, first, they both follow the universal processes of language evolution, and, second, they result from the influence of local contexts” (Ferenčík, 2012, p. 42).

3.1.3 English as a Lingua Franca

The label ELF has emerged as a response to the fact that the number of speakers who use English as a contact language is increasing. Jenkins (2009) defined several ELF characteristics, the most crucial of which is the following: “It is used in contexts in which speakers with different L1s (mostly, but not exclusively, from Expanding Circle) need it as their means to communicate with each other” (pp. 143-145). The position of ELF paradigm is, however, still quite unclear, some scholars perceive ELF as only a new label for EFL, others consider it one of ‘New Englishes’. Still others see it as a register of English which is at the users’ disposal in intercultural communication, which appears to be the most widely accepted position.

4 Research Material

The analysis is based on a corpus of digital photographs which depict occurrence of English in the Linguistic Landscape of the valley of Demänovská Dolina and Jasná Nízke Tatry ski resort. This location has been chosen due to its status of a tourist destination. The probability of presence of English was perceived to be higher in areas with greater incidence of foreign speakers. Such increased frequency of the English language in areas sought by tourists is given by the fact that English has little intranational function in Slovakia and is mostly used to communicate with the rest of the world. The research sample was collected in the months of August and December 2013 and includes one hundred and thirty-three images.

4.1 Research Area- Sociolinguistic Situation in Slovakia

Slovakia is a monolingual country, with Slovak as the only official language (Lanstyák & Szabó Mihály, 2009). The most recent census proved the English language was the most frequently used foreign language both in public (0.5%) and at home (0.2%) (Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, 2012).

Since the fall of the iron curtain in 1989, the presence of English in Slovakia started to acquire an increasing tendency. In addition, with the republic's admission to the European Union in 2004, the dominance of English over other foreign languages (especially Russian) only strengthened. It has recently gained the status of compulsory foreign language in Slovak elementary education. Slovakia is, therefore, considered to be an exonormative EFL country. There already are, however, such domains where English performs official functions (e.g. foreign businesses, or university departments). This might signal the beginning of a shift from EFL to ESL paradigm.

5 Data analysis and findings

5.1 Language

The division of signs according to the language(s) used in them seems to be the first step in the analysis. It is, however, not sufficient to divide these signs into monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, as different kinds of bi-/multilingualism occur. It, therefore, appears to be vital to apply the subdivision of such signs proposed by Reh (2004). The photographs are, therefore divided into the following categories: monolingual (English), bilingual: duplicating, fragmentary/overlapping, and complementary, and multilingual with the same subcategories. Except for English and Slovak, this research sample contains other European languages, namely German, Polish, Russian and Hungarian (as well as one Czech lexeme).

The majority of analysed signs (39%) proved to be of monolingual character, i.e. English was the only carrier of the message. Such monolingualism may result from the fact that English functions as world's lingua franca and therefore the target reader of such signs includes not only all the non-Slovak speakers, but Slovak speakers as well. It is also assumed that this choice of code is connected with the connotations that it might bring with itself, as English is often associated with notion such as modernity, openness to the world, or even higher quality, in other words, English functions as a symbol.

The second, bilingual, category comprises as many signs as the monolingual one. Similarly to the former category, the authors of these signs try to be open to the world, they, in addition, try to maintain their Slovak identity. Of these signs, the dominant subgroups were made up of duplicating and fragmentary/overlapping signs, most of which contained the Slovak and the English language variants of the same or very similar content. The fact that there is a need for the same or similar content to be in two languages presupposes the existence of two target reader groups: the Slovak and the non-Slovak ones. The smallest number of bilingual signs belongs to the complementary subcategory, which – as the respective languages provide different contents – presuppose a bilingual reader of the signs. In this sort of bilingual signage one language is often more complex and, therefore, suggests that readers' proficiency is greater than in the less complex language. Let us take Picture 52 as an example. The Slovak language is obviously dominant here, the only English element is the single word *NEW*. Arguably, this inscription is not intended for foreign audience, but appears to, once again, be a marker of modernity.

Only over twenty-one percent of signs were of the multilingual category. It was assumed that there will be little such signs that would belong to the complementary subgroup, as the probability of there being no correspondence altogether between and among the contents of the languages appears to be quite low. In addition, a multilingual inscription might presuppose a multilingual reader, in Slovakia, however, monolingualism is the norm. Naturally, there can still be multilingual individuals, these signs appear not to be intended for them, rather for different groups of foreign visitors with the aim of rendering the same information as the text of the dominant language. The assumption was confirmed as no multilingual sign in the research sample was identified as complementary. The largest multilingual category proved to be the fragmenting/overlapping one. It needs to be pointed out, however, that there were many such cases, in which, for example, only a title failed to be present in all the lan-

guages of the sign. These were mostly educational signs describing local fauna and flora, and if this one element remained unnoticed, they would have been a part of the duplicating subcategory, and it would gain the dominant status among multilingual subgroups. On the other hand, this category includes such signs, in which their multilingualism is caused by a single element. Picture 76, for instance, is basically a bilingual sign with the addition of the word *WELCOME* in five languages.

Let us now consider the manner in which bilingual inscriptions create prominence of one language over another. As discussed in chapter 2, notions such as placement of a lexical item within the sign, its lettering, colour, size, etc. may affect the way it is interpreted.

The majority of signs proved to display Slovak as the more prominent language. Some signs use significantly bigger font in the Slovak portion of their 'title'. There are other cases in which the font size plays a role, even though not as significant, such as Picture 15, where the Slovak variant is not only larger, but also written in bold, which only adds to its prominence. Picture 30, however, uses bigger and bolder lettering for the word *NEW*, despite which it was categorized as Slovak dominant. This is especially so, because of the central position of the word *POTRAVINY* in what appears to be the primary layer of the sign. Other signs were assigned to this category due to the order of codes, i.e. the Slovak variant of the message was followed by the English one, or, at times, by the overall pre-dominance of the Slovak language.

The prominence of English was established by similar means. Picture 36, for instance, places English in central position and the lettering is bigger. In addition, the black colour of the lettering contrasts with the white background more significantly than the yellow colour of the Slovak text with its black background, which underlines the dominance of English.

5.2 Authorship

Next, it appears crucial to categorize the signs according to their author. A sign's author is considered to be that individual, organization or company that assigns or requests creation and placement of a sign in place. The present categorization divides signs into those ordered by an official entity, such as municipal authority, government, etc., and those ordered by a non-official one, e.g. an individual or a company. For this purpose, the terminology of Ben-Rafael (2006 & 2009) will be employed, i.e. *top-down* for the former, and *bottom-up* for the latter. As Slovakia's legislation requires any official public inscription to be in the national language only, it is assumed that majority of these signs, because of the presence of English and other languages, will be of the bottom-up kind.

As almost ninety percent of signs proved to be of the bottom-up category, our assumption was confirmed. These were especially commercial signs, issued by shop owners and service providers. Also, there was one case of an advertisement- a sign offering something outside of the area and used nationwide (probably even internationally). Other bottom-up authors include the small business owners (e.g. ski service shops, accommodation services, and grocery stores) and a great number of signs were issued by the 'Jasná Nízke Tatry' ski centre, which is owned by the Tatry Mountain Resorts.

The top-down category comprised signs issued by state organizations, such as the Slovak cave administration (Správa slovenských jaskýň, the Low Tatras National Park (NAPANT), or the Mountain rescue service (Horská záchranná služba); and by municipal authorities, such as the town of Liptovský Mikuláš to which this area belongs.

5.3 Intended Readership

In an attempt to determine who constitutes the target recipient of a sign, it is necessary to consider its geographical location. As the photographs were collected in what is generally considered a tourist destination (few people actually reside here, most buildings house various kinds of facilities), an increased number of foreign visitors is presumed. This, however, does not exclude Slovaks from other parts of the country as well as the locals from the tourist category.

As the multilingual signs contained languages such as Russian, German, Polish, Czech or Hungarian, it is assumed that these nationalities constitute (some of) the major tourist groups in the area. The amount of bilingual signs is, in comparison, significantly higher, which suggests that English replaces these languages and functions as a lingua franca. As such, it is not intended to native speakers, at least not exclusively, but its target audience consists of all kinds of language groups. This is supported by

the even higher number of monolingual English signs, in which the Slovak readers are included as an intended audience as well.

5.4 Symbolic versus Indexical Function of English

As already suggested, English can hold a number of functions within a sign. These are mainly the symbolic and the indexical functions. The former can be perceived as connected to the associations that readers have with the English language. These include “globalization, worldliness, trendiness, modernity, progress, Westernness, etc.” (Ferenčík, 2013, p. 830) an example of which can be Picture 30. The latter function is present in such signs which employ English to “communicate messages with factual content” (Ferenčík, 2013, p. 830). These functions, however, do not necessarily occur separately, as there can be signs in which English has both the functions.

5.5 Transgressive Behaviour and Signs

When people interact with signage in an inappropriate manner it is often referred to as transgressive behaviour. The most notorious example of this category are graffiti. Of the present corpus of images, only two were identified as victims of this kind of behaviour. On the other hand, Picture 1 evidently lacks the initial letter of the word *RENT*, which can also be assigned to such behaviour. Some signs were wholly or partially misplaced from their original location or position. For example, Picture 3 was clearly once standing on a pole.

5.6 The ‘Privat’ and ‘Pension’ Phenomena

During the data collection, it was noticed that many signs carry the words ‘privat’ or ‘pension/penzion’. It was assumed that these words are foreign language versions of Slovak nouns ‘privát’ and ‘penzión’ respectively. They are, supposedly, translations into one of the five languages identified within our corpus of images. The word ‘privat’ in the present form, however, exists only in German as an adjective. Still, the German is not the only option, it can be supposed that an author of such ‘pension’ sign intended to create an English text, but failed to realize that, despite their phonological and orthographical resemblance, these words (Slovak *penzión* and English *pension*) differ greatly in their semantic content. Still, neither language contains the form ‘*penzion*’, which only supports the theory of structural resemblance. The diacritical marks seem to be removed from the Slovak words in attempt to achieve an internationally understandable word.

5.7 Non-standard forms

In an attempt to define any possible features of ‘the Slovak variety’ of English the following sections will consider the departures from standard forms of English. It will be discussed whether such deviations shall be considered the results of ‘poor translation’ or of natural process of simplification. It will also be attempted to determine whether there exists a common denominator of a kind in signs oriented towards acrolect (SLI paradigm), mesolect (ELF paradigm), and basilect (WE paradigm) forms respectively.

Let us first consider the inscription of our corpus and determine the proportion of those that contain deviations from standard English of a sort. The majority of signs (64%) proved to be following the standard rules of the English language. It seems, however, important to note that the vast majority of these signs, or rather the English portion of the inscriptions was quite simple and brief, and therefore there was only a slight possibility of departure from the standard form. For example, Picture 30, contains only a single English word. The non-standard portion, on the other hand, contained mainly complex and relatively long texts, or short texts with a hybrid form of a sort.

Let us now shift our focus to the specific non-standard forms. In the process of analysis, various instances of Slovak impacting the form of the English text occurred. The most frequent tendencies observed within the present corpus appear to be simplification and hybrid forms.

5.7.1 Hybrid Forms

Hybrid words are created using elements of different languages, for instance, adding a Slovak inflection to an English stem, such as the word *skipassy*, which occurs in the area of Demänovská dolina

and Jasná quite frequently, especially in the spoken form. In our corpus of images, several such hybrids occurred, most frequently the word *servis*, which actually is identical to the Slovak word denoting the notion of service. Its frequent occurrence in this form is attributed to the great phonological resemblance of the two language variants, and while the pronunciation of the hybrid word can be seen as English, the orthography bears traces of the Slovak word. This hybrid form appears to be used much more frequently in this area than its standard counterpart. As the signs in which the hybrid form was present were predominantly English monolingual or multilingual signs, it was concluded that the English language serves as a lingua franca here, and therefore, the focus is on communicating the message to a great number of language groups rather than on accord with the standard language rules.

Another hybrid form can be seen in Picture 21, where the word *toalet* appears to be a combination of the Slovak word *toaleta* and the English *toilet*. Its formation appears to be the result of maintaining the Slovak orthography (based on phonological resemblance) while reducing it to the number of syllables of the English standard word by means of removing the final vowel.

5.7.2 Word Order

The contact of two (or more) languages can also result in the influence of the syntactic structure of one of the languages, especially word order, on the other. During the analysis of the present data, several such influences were encountered. Picture 10, for instance, shows the phrase *parking free*, which appears to be following the Slovak word order (*parkovanie zadarmo*) rather than the English one. In this case, the more standard version probably would be *free parking*. Another example in this category can be found in Picture 110. Rather than following the order of the Slovak text that precedes it and saying *RETURN 2€ DEPOSIT*, it would be more appropriate to phrase it as *2€ DEPOSIT RETURN*, not only to achieve standardism, but to avoid ambiguity as well. The original phrase might be interpreted as a command or a request rather than a notice.

5.7.3 Simplification

Under the umbrella term of simplification, processes like avoidance of articles, reduction of consonant clusters, or avoidance of complex sentences or tenses, etc. are included. Probably the most common of these simplification processes in the LL of the research area was the absence of articles. Several cases of this phenomenon have already been mentioned, it was, however, present in a number of other signs. An indefinite article, for example, appears to be absent from *UNIQUE PLACE TO EAT*, and the definite one from *BEST FAMILY ACCOMMODATION*.

Other simplification processes identified within the corpus include pronoun dropping (+ *achieves European significance*), preposition dropping (*Do not use + the GOPASS card and flexible ski passes*), conjunction dropping (*goshawk, sparrow hawk, + kestler*), or preference of the present tense over other tenses and over modality (- *which is recharged by you* rather than *can be recharged*). Note that the places of absence were marked by a plus sign.

5.7.4 Other non-standard forms

A rather significant number of signs included the attempt to name an establishment with its main purpose of serving coffee, however, the standard forms *café* or *cafe* proved to be in minority over the non-standard variants, e.g. *caffè* or *caffé*. Other inscriptions included such phenomena as addition of plural inflection to uncountable noun (*informations*), using the adjective form where an adverb was required (*other caves [...] are evolutionary correlated*), or the placement of apostrophes, such as *kid's centre* suggesting that the centre is owned by a particular child rather than that it is designated for children.

The top-down portion of the signage including non-standard forms contains several educational signs which attempt to achieve native-like impression. In this effort, however, the translators often exaggerate the style, which results in, for instance, the overuse of commas, or in the overall lack of comprehensibility of their content.

Conclusion

Most of the identified non-standard forms suggest that there is still a little evidence of English in Slovakia functioning as a marker of linguistic identity (basilect form), there are little such features that could be classified as specific to the Slovak variety and therefore, it seems premature to speak about its position as an emerging New English variety at this point. English is rather used as a means of communicating content to a varied group of speakers, and therefore it mainly functions as a *lingua franca*.

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Appendix

Selected pictures from the corpus



Picture 1



Picture 3



Picture 10



Picture 21



Picture 30



Picture 36



Picture 52



Picture 76



Picture 110