GAGAVUZYA BETWEEN THE PAST AND TOMORROW: AN ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

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Abstract: *As an ethnographic approach to language studies Linguistic Landscape is one of the new trends in investigating the interaction between the human and place. Gagavuz Yeri, which became an Autonomous Territorial Unit in 1994, is a multilingual place. Field investigations show that officially recognized languages are the Gagavuz, Russian and Moldovan Languages are apparently not represented in public space equally. In this study, the representation of the languages in the area as a Post-Soviet context will be explored on the basis of the sociolinguistic role of Russian language and Gagavuz language as an endangered language.*

Keywords: *Linguistic Landscape, Gagavuz language, Moldovan Language, Russian Language, The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagavuzya.*

Geçmişle Geleceğin Arasında Gagavuzya: Bir Dilbilimsel Görüntü İncelemesi

Öz: *Dil çalışmalarına etnografik bir yaklaşım olan Dilbilimsel Görüntü insan ve mekân arasındaki ilişkiyi inceleyen en yeni akımlardan biridir. 1994'te Özerk bölge hâline gelen Gagavuzya çok dilli bir bölgedir. Saha araştırmaları resmi olarak tanınan Gagavuzca, Rusça ve Moldovancanın açıkça kamusal alanda eşit bir şekilde temsil edilmediğini göstermiştir. Bu çalışmada bu dillerin temsili Sovyet sonrası bağlamda Rusçanın toplumdilbilimsel rolü ve Gagavuzcanın tehlike altında bir dil olması açısından ele alınacaktır.*

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Dilbilimsel Görüntü, Gagavuzca, Moldovanca, Rusça, Gagavuz Yeri Özerk Bölgesi.*

Introduction

Being a relatively new field of research, linguistic landscape has long been of a great interest in linguistic studies. In their seminal work Landry and Bourhis (1997:25) first used the term Linguistic Landscape (hereafter, LL) to refer to "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street signs 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". The authors emphasize the visibility and salience of these signs by public in area. Another definition was offered by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006:14) who suggest that "any sign announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location" can be considered as LL. Therefore, the object of LL studies can be any example of written linguistic output represented in public sphere.

LL research offers important insights into bilingualism, language maintenance, planning, endangerment, ethnolinguistic vitality, etc. According to Sebba (2010:73), LL studies are "somewhere at the junction of sociolinguistics, sociology, social psychology, geography, and media studies". A multiple perspective covering the fields of architecture, communication and discourse studies contribute to the analysis of LL

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(Gorter 2006). Moreover, LL studies are instrumental in the understanding of social attitudes, the status and power, and identities (Torkington 2009). Landry and Bourhis (1997:23) state that LL studies "…may serve informational and symbolic functions as a marker of relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting the territory".

LL also provides insights as to the dimension of linguistic contact. The contact can be observable at orthographic, lexical, morphological or syntactic level Gorter (2006). Backhaus (2007: 145) emphasizes the importance of city in the studies of LL on the basis of language contact as in the following:

The city is a place of language contact, (…) the signs in public space are the most visible reminder of this. LL not only tells you in an instant where on earth you are and what languages you are supposed to know, but it (…) provides a unique perspective on the coexistence and competition of different languages and their scripts, and how they interact and interfere with each other in a given place.

The scope of the material under investigation in linguistic landscape studies varies in the literature. Backhaus' (2006:55) scope of linguistic landscape is broader asserting that "any piece of text within a spatially definable frame from small handwritten stickers to huge commercial billboards" can be examined. Similar to Backhaus, Kasanga (2012:555) offers a broader source of data. The author asserts that "besides urban public and private signage […] several other forms of graphic display are being studied, mostly printed materials that are part and parcel of everyday consumption but also graffito, and even manhole covers" can provide information about the LL of an area.

LL has an important role in the perception and attitudes towards languages (Cenoz & Gorter 2009). More specifically, it provides insights into the identity of a community. As Landry and Bourhis (1997) assert, the use of a certain language contributes to social identity of ethnolinguistic groups in a positive way. In the same vein, according to Landry and Bourhis (1997:143), the lack of the use of a certain in-group language may lead to "devaluing the strength of their own language community; weaken their resolve to transmit the language to the next generation, and sap their collective will to survive as a distinct language group". The authors emphasize that LL is a good indicator of the vitality of a language. It is claimed that the availability of a certain language in public signs indirectly shows that the members of the community have roles in economy, mass media, education, health and civil administration. The control over institutional and state functions indirectly strengthens the group identity.

LL in Moldova as a Post-Soviet State

Being one of the post-Soviet countries, Moldova provides a good context for LL studies. Language has created a fragile balance in Moldovan politics. Between the poles of Russian Federation and European Union, the use of language symbolizes the current political situation of Moldova in international arena (Ciscel 2008). Strict language policies for minorities in Soviet period have influenced the sociolinguistic environment for years. One of the most salient implementations of these policies is the Common rule which dictates the spelling of non-Russian words. The obligatory use of Cyrillic alphabet for the words of minority languages led to differences between orthography and the pronunciation. According to Grenoble (2003), as an end result, the difference became problematic for the minority groups learning L1 reading skills.

After the collapse of Soviet Union, the derrusification process started, aiming to clear out the use of Russian in daily and institutional contexts. Du Plessis (2010) asserts that a change in regime directly reflects the linguistic landscape of the country. Shibliyev (2014:210) states that "shifting from Cyrillic to Latin was seen as a symbol of independence, derussification, and shift in orientation to the West." However, it is crystal-clear that the derussification process is not entirely successful at the elimination the Russian language in official and public life. Pavlenko (2008:301) summarizes the current role of Russian language in the context of post-Soviet countries:

Russian remains the language of a major political, military, and economic superpower of the geopolitical region, its main energy supplier, and an important cultural, informational and academic center. Thus, it has retained its status of a regional lingua franca, spoken by political, cultural, and business elites in most post-Soviet countries.

In addition to Russian's function in these countries, specifically Moldova and Russia improved their relations in the recent years. Pavlenko (2012) argues that the political contact between Moldovan and Russian governments led to formation of more positive attitudes towards Russia and the Russian language. According to the Gradirovsky and Esipova (2008), there is an increase in the respondents who stated that learning Russian is important for their children. The consensus held in 2004 also showed that although its number of speakers is fewer than Moldovan and Romanian speakers, Russian is the language used by many other minority groups in the area.

In a similar vein, linguistic representation of these languages in Chisinau as a post-Soviet capital was explored in a study conducted by Muth (2012). Displays of written language data were collected from the four districts in urban center. The results showed that minority languages such as Ukranian, Gagavuz and Bulgarian are not represented in in public space. Muth (2012) emphasizes that although there are restaurants serving Gagavuz cuisine in the city, the use of the Gagavuz language does not go beyond symbolic function.

LL of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagavuzya

Currently an autonomous region within the borders of Moldova, the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagavuzya was under the Soviet rule in past. The Soviet period for Gagavuz people started with the occupation of Bessarabia by Soviet army in 1944. According to Olson (1994:238), Gagavuz identity was encouraged in order to prevent the assimilation: "the Gagavuz were then encouraged either to retain their Gagavuz culture or to russify". These attempts include certain improvements in educational and cultural domains (Munteanu 2002). To exemplify, in 1957 the Gagavuz language became one of the official languages of the Soviet Union which was followed by the use of the language as a medium of instruction in the region (Menz, 2006). However, it was clearly seen that these attempts did not significantly improve the vitality of the language or political status of the Gagavuz people. Thanks to Gorbachev's *glasnost* (openness) strategy starting from mid-1980s, Gagavuz identity was supported again on the basis of social and linguistic rights (Kapaló 2011). Upon the collapse of Soviet Union, Moldova declared its independence. After a decade, in 1994, Gagavuz people declared autonomy that Moldovan authorities recognized.

The Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagavuzya has three official languages: the Gagavuz, Russian and Moldovan languages. Detailed information about the use of

these languages is stated in the Law of Gagavuzya ATU on languages. Sirkeli and Lisenco (2012:11-12) present the articles from the Law of Moldova on Languages and Law of Gagavuzya ATU on Languages below.

Article 13 of the Law of the ATU Gagavuzya on Languages

Settlements or other geographical objects in the territory of Gagavuzya have only one official name, Moldovan or Gagavuz or any other in accordance with the local historical traditions

Article 24 of the Law of Moldova on Languages

Names of squares, streets, alleys, town districts are formed in the official language without translation (in settlements with a population of Gagavuz origin – in the Gagavuz), and in rural areas where most of the population has Ukrainian, Russian or Bulgarian origin – in an acceptable language

Article 15 of the Law of Gagavuzya ATU on Languages

Signs with the names of the state authorities, local public administrations and public organisations, economic, commercial, cultural units, etc., signposts of squares, streets, alleys, towns, villages, etc., are executed in the Moldovan, Gagavuz and Russian languages.

However, there are inconsistencies in the implementations and the practices on the basis of the Gagavuz language. In their report, Sirkeli and Lisenco (2012), emphasize the use of a single language which is Moldovan in signposts of Gagavuz Yeri ATU. According to their observations, the signposts of Ceadir-Lunga and Ferapontievca are in Gagavuz language. They are one of the rare cases where sign is Gagavuz and monolingual. Moreover, the researchers draw attention to the fact that the ethnic minorities are not equally represented where they populate. Sirkeli and Lisenco (2012:11) exemplify the signpost of Chirsova where the Gagavuz and Bulgarians live together. Instead of a signpost with the Gagavuz name *Başküü* and Bulgarian transcription *Кирсово,* there is a monolingual, Moldovan name. In similar vein, Sirkeli and Lisenco (2012) assert that as the names of the streets have not been systematically updated since Soviet period, the Russian monolingual signposts are still available in streets and squares.

Taking current sociolinguistic situation into consideration, the present study aims at studying the LL of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagavuz Yeri, Moldova through addressing the following research questions:

1. Which languages are represented in the linguistic landscape of the Gagavuz Yeri ATU?

2. What are the characteristics of bilingual and multilingual signs in terms of a) the first language displayed, b) the amount of information offered and c) the size of the text?

The answers given to the questions posed above will help to shed light into the representation of the Gagavuz, Russian and Moldovan languages in the area. Having discussed the concept of linguistic landscape, the previous and current sociolinguistic situation Moldovan and Gagavuz Yeri ATU, this paper will provide the analysis about the visibility of those languages.

METHODOLOGY

In this study data were gathered from Gagavuz Yeri ATU, more specifically from Comrat, Ceadir-Lunga, Besalma, Congaz, Copceac, Dezghingea, Chirsova, Tomai,

Baurci, Ferapontievca and Avdarma. Digital photos of the linguistic signs were mainly taken from commercial streets, open-air markets, faculty building, museum, government and financial institutions. The number of linguistic signs in the photos is 112 which include various texts from rental ads on streets to government buildings. The sampling method used to collect data is random sampling. It is defined by Singh (2003) as "the simplest and most common method of selecting a sample, in which the sample is selected unit by unit, with equal probability of selection for each unit at each draw." In this type of sampling each sample has equal probability of chosen in it universe. In other words, each sample has not been chosen based on the researcher's judgment or selection but likelihood of selection.

The criteria according to which the codification and analysis done was taken from Ben Rafael et al.'s (2006) study. The codification scheme which explores the degree of visibility can be categorized into three groups which are a) language(s) displayed in text, b) order and orthographic properties of the language(s) in text and c) the amount of text for language(s). The first criterion mainly investigates whether linguistic signs are monolingual, bilingual or multilingual. As Gagavuz Yeri ATU is a multilingual and multicultural context, the linguistic representation of groups in the area plays an important role in the maintenance of multicultural context. As a second criterion, the order and the size of the linguistic signs are essential for analyzing the availability of the language(s) for its/their speakers. Thirdly, the investigation of the amount of information offered in signs would help to identify the degree of informativeness for groups of language speakers.

Ben Rafael, et al.'s (2006:10) coding scheme is based on four sociological perspectives: *Bourdieusard* perspective, *presentation-of-self* and *primordialist* perspectives, *good-reasons* and *collective identity* perspective. The first of these, *Bourdieusard* perspective investigates unequal power relations, in other words, the predominance of a language in relation to the dominant and subordinate groups of language speakers. To put it another way, dominance and subordination is visible and reflected through LL. Likewise, *presentation-of-self* and *primordialist* perspectives, which put linguistic activity front and center, emphasize on the availability of identity markers in the linguistic context. Ben Rafael et al. (2006:9) assert that "a presentation of self […] is bound to strategies of inclusion and exclusion requested by members' commitments to primordial identities". Thirdly, *good-reasons perspective* supports that individuals' interest play important role in the shaping of immediate linguistic context and linguistic actors as clients have cost-and-benefit considerations. Finally, LL is considered as the markers of *collective identity* in multicultural contexts. These perspectives contribute Ben Rafael, et al.'s (2006:10) degree of visibility of linguistic signs in linguistic landscape studies. Taking those accounts into consideration, the representation of the languages in Gagavuzian context will be discussed in the next chapter.

RESULTS

Languages on display

In the current study the representation of the languages in the linguistic landscape of the Gagavuz Yeri ATU was explored. The items were analyzed on the basis of the number of the language(s) on display, the order and size of the languages on the LL item and the amount of information given in each language available. Table 1 given below illustrates the number of languages in LL items.

Table 1. LL items by the number of languages

Languages	n	%
Monolingual	98	72
Bilingual	28	20,5
Trilingual	10	7,3

As can be seen in Table 1, the number of the monolingual items (n=89, 72%) is more than bilingual and trilingual ones. In this study 28 (20,5%) bilingual and 10 (n=7,3) trilingual items were documented. Table 2 shows the distribution of the monolingual items across languages.

Table 2. LL items by the distribution of languages in monolingual items

Languages	n	%
Russian	36	36,7
Moldovan	24	24,4
Gagavuz	17	17,3
English	14	14,3
Turkish	6	6,1
Finnish	1	1

The number of monolingual signs in the present study is 98 as mentioned above. 36 (36,7%) out of 98 items is Russian as indicated in Figure 1. In this study 24 (24,4%) of these signs are in Moldovan language. In regards to Gagavuz which is one of the official languages of the Gagavuz ATU, which is densely populated with Gagavuz people, it is seen that only 17,3% of the total monolingual items is in Gagavuz language. Other languages displayed in items are English (14,3%), Turkish (6,1%) and Finnish (1%), respectively.

Figure 1. A monolingual Russian sign

The order and size of the linguistic items

Apart from the languages in display, the order and the lettering of the linguistic signs are also explored in the present study. In multilingual signs the presentation order of languages plays an important role in the representation of their speakers linguistically. As mentioned above, only 27,8% of the all linguistic items is

multilingual in this study. According to the results, Russian is the first language in bilingual signs in 8 out of 28 linguistic items as in Figure 2. When trilingual signs (n=10) are taken into consideration, it is seen that in only one linguistic item Russian is the first language on display.

Figure 2. A multilingual sign with Russian is the first language

As far as the order of Moldovan language is explored, it was found that Moldovan is the first in 6 bilingual signs and 4 trilingual signs. In the case of Gagavuz language, it is seen that in 4 bilingual and 3 trilingual signs it is in the first order. What is interesting about the data in this group of findings is the presentation of English. The results show that English is the first language in 10 of the bilingual signs. In the next part of the survey, the use of English in linguistic signs will be discussed.

The results about the size of the languages on display are similar to those of the presentation order. It was found that the number of the linguistic signs where Russian is written bigger outnumber the Moldovan and Gagavuz languages. In 5 bilingual and 2 trilingual items Russian is written in bigger fonts whereas Moldovan and Gagavuz language are bigger in 3 bilingual and 1 trilingual items.

There are also bilingual and trilingual signs where languages are written in similar sizes. These are Moldovan-Gagavuz-Russian (n=5), Moldovan-Gagavuz (n=2), Gagavuz-Russian (n=2), Moldovan-Russian (n=1), Gagavuz-Turkish (n=1), Gagavuz-English (n=1) and Russian-English (n=1). In these sings no languages takes the most prominent place in terms of size.

The amount of information on display

The third criterion to be investigated in the linguistic landscape of Gagavuz Yeri ATU is the amount of information. In some cases, the informativeness of each language in multilingual sign differs from each other. The results show that the largest amount of content is offered in Russian in multilingual signs as in Figure 3. More specifically, in a combination of Russian, Moldovan and Gagavuz multilingual sign, in 50% of the cases Russian contains more information than Moldovan and Gagavuz language. Only in two cases, where Gagavuz- Russian-English and Russian-Gagavuz-Moldovan are present, more information is given in the Gagavuz language.

Figure 3. Russian as a more informative language

Apart from the official languages of the Gagavuz Yeri ATU, English is the most commonly used language in linguistic signs. 15 (39,4%) of the 38 multilingual signs include information in English and in one Russian-English bilingual sign English is the language greater amount of information is offered.

Discussion And Conclusion

In the current study, the linguistic representation of endangered Gagavuz language has been explored. Coding scheme is taken from Ben-Rafael et al.'s (2006) study which analyzed the visibility of three languages namely Israel-Hebrew, Arabic and English. The languages on display, characteristics of signs and the amount of information given are the criteria to be investigated.

Gagavuz language is an endangered official language which has not been studied empirically on the basis of the linguistic visibility. Being one of the markers of power and status of a language, linguistic landscape provides invaluable evidence in about the vitality of a language. The results of study also support the fact that the use of the Gagavuz language among other official languages, Russian and Moldovan is relatively less.

As mentioned before, Gagavuz Yeri, ATU is a multilingual region where Gagavuz (82,6%), Bulgarians (5,1%), Moldovans (4,6%), Russians (3,7%) and Ukrainians (3,7%) are living (National Bureau Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, 2004). In such a multicultural area the visibility of languages gains importance on the basis of the vitality of their communities. When the previous research on the attitudes towards the Gagavuz language (Dağdeviren-Kırmızı 2015; Menz 2003; Bechir 2008); socio-cognitive processes (Büyükkantarcıoğlu 2013), the use of Gagavuz in media (Teosa &Kuyjuklu 2008; Avram, 2010; Pavlenko 2008), the implementation of Gagavuz linguistic rights (Sirkeli & Lisenco 2012) and socio-economic problems (Corethci et al., 2002; Keough 2006) are taken into consideration, the potential risk of endangerment for the Gagavuz language can be clearly seen. The results of current study seem to be consistent with above-mentioned research on the Gagavuz language.

Russian, as the regional lingua franca of the post-Soviet countries, is apparently visible in the linguistic landscape of the Gagavuz Yeri, ATU. In the current study, Russian monolingual signs are more frequent in daily life. Similarly, in bilingual and multilingual signs Russian is more frequently used than other official languages. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), linguistic signs have two main functions: informative and symbolic functions. Symbolic function refers to the representation of

the less spread, minority language in daily life. When the context of the current research is taken into consideration, it is seen that symbolic function of the Gagavuz language in linguistic landscape very limited. Instead of the Gagavuz language, Russian is the language through which the Gagavuz identity is expressed and constructed.

One of the findings that need to be interpreted with caution is the language used in handwritten rental ads and fliers on public property such as walls and lampposts. Being more authentic and natural examples of language when compared with institutional signs, rental ads and fliers represent the most functional language in daily life. In the current study, Russian is the mostly commonly used language in the authentic materials created by individuals. Therefore, the use and importance of Russian language among Gagavuz people is seen again.

Figure 4. Rental ads and fliers on public property

Apart from the official languages of the Gagavuz Yeri ATU, English is the most commonly   used language in linguistic signs. At this point, the use of English in public areas should be discussed on the basis of cultural globalization which can be observed regardless of geographical borders. The dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991 brought the legalized foreign direct investments to most of the post-Soviet countries. Being one of these, Moldova has been attracting foreign investments since 2004 (Popa 2007). Except from the brand names of western investments, in the current study there are also cases especially when English is canonically used for sophistication (Piller 2001) as in Figure 5. Piller (2001:168) considers English signs as "the symbols of high culture and civilization". These signs are mostly available in Gagavuz towns (instead of villages) and shopping districts. The signs in English are used in cafes, restaurants, clothing stores and hotels in this study.

Figure 5. The use of English in linguistic signs

Taken together, these results support the previous findings about the use and role of the Gagavuz language as an endangered language. As asserted by Cenoz and Gorter, (2009:24), "the linguistic landscape can affect the perception and attitudes people have about languages and influence the use of languages in society". The dominance of Russian language in public areas is more visible than the Gagavuz and Moldovan language. It shows that Russian is still playing an important role in daily life and bureaucracy. The existence of Russian signs from Soviet period shows the acceptance of the functions of the Russian in the Gagavuz Yeri, ATU. A previous study by Dağdeviren-Kırmızı (2015) on the native Gagavuz speakers' attitudes towards the Gagavuz and Russian languages has a similar result which shows that Gagavuz speakers have more positive attitudes to Russian language.

Due to practical constraints, this paper cannot provide more comprehensive investigation of linguistic signs in the area. Further research could be carried out to explore the phenomenon by including more linguistic signs from other cities or villages of Gagavuz Yeri. Additionally, interviews on the speaker attitudes towards the availability or absence of the Gagavuz and Russian languages can be conducted. Finally, other approaches, such as top-down and bottom-up analysis could be adopted to analyze data. By any means a study onlinguistic landscape would reflect the current sociolinguistic context in the area vividly.

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