

# Odesa in Diachronic and Synchronic Studies of Urban Linguistic Landscapes of Ukraine Conducted between 2015 and 2019

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Article abstract

Diachronic and synchronic studies of linguistic landscapes of central streets and markets were conducted in five cities in Ukraine with different language use preferences in 2015 and 2017–19. The relationship between a monolingual state language policy and the reality of language use in public spaces was investigated. This study focuses on the dynamics of the linguistic landscape of Odesa, a Russian-speaking city with a weak historical connection to the state of Ukraine, and compares them with the linguistic landscapes of central Kyiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, and Lviv. Linguistic landscape data are complemented with semi-structured interviews investigating de jure policies, de facto practices, and beliefs of individuals who make their language choices in public signage, often contesting the official language policy regulations. Linguistic data can deliver messages about power, values, and the salience of languages used in public places. This mixed-methods research is grounded in a critical ethnographic approach to the study of language policy, politics, and planning. The linguistic landscape in Odesa, a polyethnic city, is exceptionally dynamic in reflecting the de facto language policy in the city. The effects of globalization and language commodification were marked by compliance with the official policy on the central street, but proof of inhabitants' identity with the Russian language as the lingua franca was evident as the data collection site moved away from the city centre. This synchronic and diachronic studies of languages in Odesa is compared with the languages spoken in four Ukrainian regions and marks a proportional increase in the presence of two main languages—Ukrainian and Russian—independent of the Ukrainization efforts of the state at the time of war. It also suggests that an increase in the use of English, as observed in Odesa, is a way to avoid using the state language.



# Odesa in Diachronic and Synchronic Studies of Urban Linguistic Landscapes of Ukraine Conducted between 2015 and 2019<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Diachronic and synchronic studies of linguistic landscapes of central streets and markets were conducted in five cities in Ukraine with different language use preferences in 2015 and 2017–19. The relationship between a monolingual state language policy and the reality of language use in public spaces was investigated. This study focuses on the dynamics of the linguistic landscape of Odesa, a Russian-speaking city with a weak historical connection to the state of Ukraine, and compares them with the linguistic landscapes of central Kyiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, and Lviv. Linguistic landscape data are complemented with semi-structured interviews investigating *de jure* policies, *de facto* practices, and beliefs of individuals who make their language choices in public signage, often contesting the official language policy regulations. Linguistic data can deliver messages about power, values, and the salience of languages used in public places. This mixed-methods research is grounded in a critical ethnographic approach to the study of language policy, politics, and planning. The linguistic landscape in Odesa, a polyethnic city, is exceptionally dynamic in reflecting the *de facto* language policy in the city. The effects of globalization and language commodification were marked by compliance with the official policy on the central street, but proof of inhabitants' identity with the Russian language as the lingua franca was evident as the data collection site moved away from the city centre. This synchronic and diachronic studies of languages in Odesa is compared with the languages spoken in four Ukrainian regions and marks a proportional increase in the presence of two main languages—Ukrainian and Russian—independent of the Ukrainization efforts of the state at the time of war. It also suggests that an increase in the use of English, as observed in Odesa, is a way to avoid using the state language.

**Keywords:** linguistic landscape, language policy, Odesa, Ukraine, diachronic study.

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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: due to the General Data Protection Regulations in the EU, I am obligated to anonymize informants' identities. All informants consented to data collection before the interviews.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**T**his diachronic and synchronic comparative study of the urban linguistic landscape (LL) of Odesa in the years 2015–19 is part of a larger project investigating the LL in areas in Ukraine that present different language use patterns. The study uses a critical ethnographic approach to language policy, politics, and planning, and focuses on the effects of Ukraine's management of the state language since the beginning of Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2014. The events of the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–14, followed by a military attack of the Russian Federation, took the matter of further elevation of the status of the Russian language off the Ukrainian legal agenda. As Arel expressed it, “An important shift may have occurred, placing the language question on a different plane than the one that characterized twenty years of cyclical contestation over the public use of languages” (“Language” 234). Kulyk argues that post-Maidan citizenry expressed strong pro-Ukrainian language attitudes supported by a governmental campaign calling for bilingualism and national unity (“Memory”). However, a swift repeal of the 2012 language law which made it possible to declare Russian as a regional language, was reversed in the absence of the new legal instrument and the 2012 language law remained in force until February 2018 (Csernicškó and Fedinec, “Four Language Laws”; Kulyk, “Memory”). This left Ukrainian language activists disappointed and seeking to accelerate the *de facto* status shift of the Ukrainian language. The law on state language requirements for civil servants in 2015, and the state language law certification in 2017 that was supported by changing quotas in media and television in May 2017, were reinforced by a new education law that limited the teaching of minority languages to primary schools (Kulyk, “Memory”). At the same time, language legislation was maneuvering between activists' demands to take more decisive measures to promote Ukrainian and a fear of alienating speakers of Russian. The Russian-speaking population—officials and ordinary citizens—were starting to feel the pressure and did not like this violation of their language space (Kulyk, “Memory”).

The question of “what would happen in a situation where a significant segment of the local population was requested to switch from one language to another, at least concerning its use in public spaces” was investigated in Odesa by Polese and others from 2003 to 2006 (“Negotiating Spaces”). Polese and others chose to research Russian language use in Odesa, a city in which the majority of the population expressed and continues to express a positive attitude toward Ukrainian, and bilingualism is valued for the economic opportunities it provides. However, over the years, pressure from the top shaped an official “façade of Ukrainianness”—for example, submitting all documentation in Ukrainian while conducting work in

Russian. All of these relations exist in Odesa without challenging the hierarchical order or influencing the identity of a Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizen (Polese et al.; Shevel).

The third-largest city in Ukraine, Odesa, was founded in the late 1700s by Catherine the Great. Odesa is an historically Russian-speaking city located in a predominantly Russian-speaking region in the southeast of Ukraine (Besters-Dilger 8). Research of linguistic landscapes in post-Soviet space provides a unique perspective of changes in public spaces due to language planning efforts during nation-building at the end of the twentieth and the first two decades of the twenty first century. This quantitative diachronic and synchronic study of urban linguistic landscapes (LLs) of Ukraine investigates the complex social actions mediated by material objects dividing the public space. In this study, the quantitative LL data are supported by information collected using qualitative semi-structured interviews with shop owners, sales personnel, waiters, street vendors, hotel staff, taxi drivers, and even with security guards who apprehended me for taking photos. I solicited my interlocutors' linguistic biographies (Weirich), family language practices (Lanza and Vold Alexander), and education histories. I was interested in their migration stories, their thoughts about language politics in Ukraine, and their language practices.

This mixed-methods research contributes to the development of a multi-dimensional critical ethnographic approach to sociolinguistic research of language policy, politics, and planning (Bastardas-Boada; Hornberger et al. 152; Martin-Jones and da Costa Cabral 71–72; Hult, “Language Policy”). The project answers the following questions:

1. How has the linguistic landscape of Odesa changed from 2015 to 2019?
2. How do the changes in public spaces of Odesa correspond to the nation-state building aspirations based on the linguistic unity compared to other cities?

## 2. UNDERSTANDING ODESA: ITS PLACE IN HISTORY AND IN THE NEW NATION-STATE

Although Ukraine is a multicultural, multilingual country, it is often viewed by researchers as a bilingual country because of the two main linguistic groups, Ukrainian and Russian, whose language is competing for the use in the public space (Arel; Kuzio; Kulyk, “The Politics”; Søvik). Schmid and Myshlovska, describe the time since Ukrainian independence in 1991 as a “constant transformation of malleable, open, and unfixed identities, identifications, allegiances, and loyalties inherited from the pre-Soviet and Soviet pasts” in different parts of the country (17). Those “pasts” of Odesa,

coupled with today's freedoms in the independent state of Ukraine, continue to be manifested in claims of a distinct Odesan "nationality" in which "despite the efforts of national elites to reshape geography and rewrite history, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union have material and discursive afterlives that persist in the city, challenging the legitimacy of new temporal and spatial regimes" (Richardson 5).

Analyzing historical texts by foreign and Russian authors, Lozoviuk highlights descriptions of Odesa's historical development from the end of the nineteenth century as the third-largest Russian-speaking city of the Russian Empire before World War I. Richardson notes that after World War II Ukrainians represented small minorities in Odesa, and the initial diversity and strength of Jewish, German, Tatar, and Romanian communities, among others, were annihilated by killings, deportations, and cosmopolitanism show trials in the Stalin era (10–17). Odesa is a place where historical attachments "and localism are articulated in the language and culture of the former empire from which the Ukrainian nation-building project has been attempting to differentiate itself" (Richardson 11).

Inhabitants proudly call Odesa "a pearl by the sea." Lozoviuk and Prigarin note that many researchers have recognized the modern dynamics and distinctive identity of this kaleidoscopic place (5–13). The same authors reference the works of Skvirskaja and Humphrey from 2009, 2012, 2014, and 2015, who aimed to study the "new" communities in Odesa, such as the Turkish, and the "myth" of Odesa (Lozoviuk and Prigarin 12–13; see also Richardson 15). Dovichpolova (Dovgopolova) marks the strength of Odesa's urban myth sedimentation in historical and literary texts about the city where the cultural memory is often translated into recognizable linguistic landscapes that make sense of the place. However, what unites the multi-faceted space of Odesa into a special place is the territorial identity that is bound and loyal to the place where more than 100 ethnicities are proud to be called "Odesyt/ka" (Ukr.) / "Odessit/ka" (Russ.) (Odesan).

Informants from Odesa emphasize points found in Lozoviuk and Prigarin. The authors argue that loyalties in this imagined community lie not in ethnic or national pride, but in pragmatic tolerance, in the flexible and multiple identities of "the true Odesan." While "not fitting imperial, Soviet, or any other nationalist discourse," the Odesans are bound to continue doing their "thing," often against the interests of the state—a point of special pride (Lozoviuk and Prigarin 15).<sup>2</sup> Lozoviuk attributes this freedom to follow the local interests to the fact that Odesa, one of the largest seaports of the USSR and now Ukraine, was historically wide open to international trade, foreign capital, and foreign cultural influences (22). Odesa was defined by Sifneos as

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<sup>2</sup> All translations in this study are my own.

cosmopolitan with strong European influence (27). Furthermore, being a borderland, and therefore politically marginalized, Odesa has never become an administrative centre.

This territorial loyalty to a place does not mean that Odesans easily melt in the cosmopolitan pot; when asked about their stories and linguistic biographies, informants first mention that Odesa is a special place and a special case, then proudly connect themselves with distinctive ethnic groups, traditions, languages, and neighbours of other ethnicities and confessions. The unifying theme of those stories is the tolerance and sharing of space, and the efforts to preserve Odesa as a common, peaceful place, where Russian remains the language of everyday communication in the city and has been so for as long as the current generation can remember.

Recently, discussions about the two main languages in Ukraine—especially in Russian-speaking regions and in towns like Odesa—have become painful again. Statistical data on everyday language preferences among young people of eighteen-nineteen years in Odesa, questioned between 1991 and 2015 and presented in Kniazeva, indicate a 7% increase in the use of Russian, a 6% increase in the use of both Ukrainian and Russian equally, and an 11% decline in the use of Ukrainian (183–91).

Interview data and field notes that I collected between 2015 and 2020, particularly those regarding young people who moved to Odesa alone or with their families from Ukrainian-speaking settlements outside Odesa, confirm a tendency to abandon Ukrainian, as it is more convenient to use Russian in the city. Claiming a solid command of Ukrainian, they state that Russian has replaced Ukrainian in their daily professional and personal communications, as it “was not needed in this Russian-speaking environment” (25 y.o. female, Odesa, 2018). Moreover, when going back to their villages, they took Russian home, bringing new language mixes from the “big city.” Some informants grew up in non-Ukrainian-speaking villages around Odesa, where Russian was the *lingua franca* outside of the house. One informant, a male, 27 years old, from a Bulgarian village, studied in a Ukrainian school with many subjects taught in Russian due to the educator’s inability to teach in Ukrainian. This informant moved to Odesa in his early 20s and rarely used Ukrainian in everyday communication. Becoming more and more disillusioned about his chances for a better life at home, he used an opportunity provided by the Bulgarian government to repatriate, received his EU passport, and immediately left Ukraine for western Europe with his wife and child. He claimed to be happy that he had studied English rather than Ukrainian, as English provided him with a path to economic prosperity.

Whereas Russian continues to dominate everyday life in Odesa, in 2018, 83% of Odesa’s first graders went to classes with Ukrainian as a medium of education (Liskovich). Interview data confirmed that it was a conscious

parental choice to send their children to Ukrainian-language schools. The parents noted that the children's future is in Ukraine, and that higher education is offered in Ukrainian. Most parents identified as bilingual. My informants from Odesa reported that they themselves graduated from Ukrainian schools and sent their children to Ukrainian schools, which did not influence the home language. (It mostly remained Russian but became mixed with Ukrainian.) In answer to my question about the state's efforts to produce a language shift to Ukrainian, the parents strongly resented the obligation to switch, especially in a Russian-speaking Odesa. Even though the new language law does not regulate the language used in the private sphere, some people feel that it invades personal space with increased quotes for Ukrainian-language content on TV channels, in printed media, in movies, and in music. One of the interviewees, a woman in her late thirties from a Russian-Ukrainian family, was very excited about new quality products advertised in Ukrainian on TV that her family (even the Russian-speaking father) liked very much. She described these advertisements as "using real language spoken in Ukraine, modern, mixed with recognizable local expressions, and made with taste." However, when answering my question about her vision of language use in Odesa, she replied that the official language policy was doing harm to the local identity and charm of the place; moreover, she hoped that local and state languages would exist in a balance, not at war. This interviewee pointed out that quality media products in Ukrainian did not feel invasive and promoted an interest in the state language in her mixed family because it was so close to "how people really talk." She acknowledged a love for the rich cultural heritage of Ukraine.

Summarizing the language situation in Odesa, Herlihy refers to historical, comparative, economic, geographic, linguistic, and religious data regarding language preferences in different areas of Ukraine and concludes that Russian is not only preferred but would completely replace Ukrainian in Odesa if the choice of language use was left to the inhabitants (77–78). Language choice in a public space is the product of a complex sequence of decision-making—a reflection of local marketing research, financial investment, and individual ethnolinguistic identities envisioning the preferences of potential customers. Thus, linguistic landscapes visualize and index official language regulations, but they are offset by local language preferences and language hierarchies (Hult, "Language Policy"; Rafael et al; Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses*).

### 3. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE RESEARCH IN ODESA

For the last quarter of the century in Ukraine, official language management has been built around strengthening Ukrainian as the sole state language with provisions for all minority languages, including Russian, a recent majority language. In 2012, representatives of the pro-Russian Party of Regions under the Ianukovych administration passed a law<sup>3</sup> that allowed Russian to be a regional language in Ukraine. In April 2019, under President Poroshenko, the Ukrainian parliament passed a new state language law that took away the regional status from Russian and set a gradual plan for making Ukrainian a sole language of the state.

To collect data for this report, I divided the complex ethnolinguistic landscape of Ukraine into the three territorial groups proposed by Arel: “central and western Ukrainians speaking Ukrainian, eastern and southern Ukrainians speaking Russian, and Russians in eastern Ukraine speaking Russian” (“Language, Status” 234). During the second and third synchronic linguistic landscape (LL) data collections in 2017–19, I expanded the data collection sites from the central streets to the “upper class” streets and marketplaces; research areas were carefully marked to replicate the studies. The map below, constructed from quantitative Ukrainian regionalism research data collected in 2013–17 (University of St. Gallen and MAPA projects, Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute), confirms this division of language use patterns. Thus, I gathered LL data from accurately defined areas on the central streets of Kyiv (central area), Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, and Odesa (east and south), and Lviv (west) for synchronic analysis in 2015; data gathering in the same areas was repeated in 2017–18, and 2019 for diachronic<sup>4</sup> analysis.

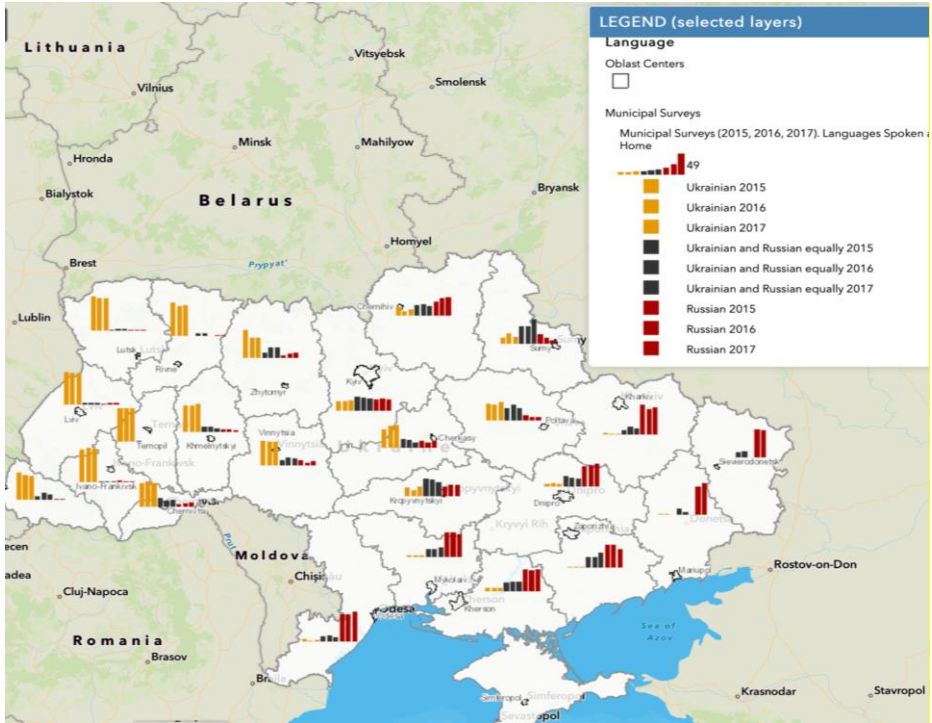
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<sup>3</sup> 2012 Language law (a.k.a. Kivalov-Kolesnichenko law): <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/5029-17#Text>.

<sup>4</sup> I use the term “diachronic,” usually belonging to the field of historical linguistics, to define the study of LL repeated over time, which is the meaning of “diachronic” (see the discussion in the research section).



**Figure 1. Map of language preferences in Ukraine and linguistic landscape data collection sites, 2015–19.<sup>5</sup>**



### 3.1. Linguistic Landscape in the Context of Language Policy Research Theories

Research of language policy, politics, and planning is often criticized for its fragmented approach to the complex processes in the language ecosystem—an open system of exchanges that needs to develop more connections of its elements with their external relations (Bastardas-Boada 364–65). In this case, language policy discourses and state ideologies are “resemiotized, or transformed into other forms of expression by being taken up by LL actors” (Hult, “Language Policy” 340). This study of linguistic landscapes draws its analytic inspiration from multi-faceted language management theory (LMT), which is defined as a deliberate intervention in changing language status within a social structure ideally based on “language repertoire of the

<sup>5</sup> *Ukraine: Revolution of Dignity. The MAPA Digital Atlas of Ukraine*, HURI: <https://harvard-cga.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2fa308aa641d43139d3a5b5b59081a5a>

population” and “on the government’s knowledge of the language practices of the nation as a speech community and its beliefs about the role and value of the individual language varieties” (Spolsky 164–65). Here, I also research a symbolic construction of public “space” in a general sense, from a critical ethnographic perspective, focused on power and inequality caused by language policies (Spolsky; Tollefson and Pérez-Milans; Nekvapil and Sherman; Nekvapil; Jernudd and Neustupný). The linguistic landscape (LL) is a material result of such construction unfolding at different sociolinguistic scales, each unit of analysis representing deliberate social actions (Blommaert, “Sociolinguistic Scales”); moreover, a linguistic landscape can be used to detect regional differences, where various agents implement, appropriate, or contest language legislation (Hult, “Language Policy”; Martin-Jones and da Costa Cabral; Johnson 3–25; Blommaert, *Ethnography*; Hornberger and Johnson). Blommaert calls LL studies “a branch of sociolinguistics that could be of immense interdisciplinary value,” providing first-line diagnostic data of particular physical spaces with profound descriptive and analytical potential (*Ethnography* 2).

The current development of a critical ethnographic approach to the study of language planning and policy (LPP) tends to move beyond language management into macro- and micro-relations, and this division restricts our understanding of the historicity and complexity of the social processes unfolding slowly in time and space (Martin-Jones and da Costa Cabral 75–78). LPP changes dramatically in times of crisis, with sociolinguistic scales influencing each other. The criticized macro/micro distinction (roughly through state authority vs. individual initiatives) is similar to the “top-down vs. bottom-up” categorization of public signage—sometimes applied to the origin of signs whether they are officially commissioned by governments or produced by individual entrepreneurs. Consequently, many nuances could influence sign categorization; a hand-written sign could be temporary and made at the request of a corporate director who is bound to follow the national politics of language (Hult, “Language Policy”). However, I find such categorization helpful when analyzing the data collected in a state with an explicit language policy.

Diachronic changes in linguistic landscapes are influenced by language management processes, with the state language being the most significant marker of desired national identity (Kulyk). This is evident in the “top-down” category of toponyms, geographic names, street signs, plaques on government institutions and cultural establishments, and in foreign corporations’ compliance with state language policy (see, for example, changes in “GUESS” displays below) (Ivanova 387; Hult, “Language Policy” 335). However, changes in the “bottom-up” category, unless strictly regulated by language legislation, follow the patterns of local demographics,

language repertoires, economic considerations, and communicative competencies in the communities of practice.

### *3.2. Earlier Studies of Language Policy and Linguistic Landscapes in the Post-Soviet Countries*

After the fall of the Soviet Union, most of the post-Soviet governments immediately established “vigorously nationalizing policies to address the Soviet legacy of ethnic and language policies and to tackle the privileged status of Russian and the asymmetrical bilingualism associated with it” (Ryazanova-Clarke 7). However, in Belarus, Russian was re-established as a second state language: Brown researched regional differences in the use of Belarusian and Russian on the signage of governmental buildings in Belarus (294–95). Conducted in Vitebsk (the city closest to the Russian border), Minsk (the capital of Belarus), and Grodno (by the Lithuanian border), the study revealed a struggle for equal representation of state languages in the capital, with Russian signs disappearing from the capital, and the state’s strict regulations of language’s symbolic function being contested (Brown 295). Remarkably, signs in Russian in the government domain were not found in Vitebsk, where the linguistic influence of the former colonial power remained very noticeable—this could indicate efforts toward decolonization.

The opposite dynamic was reported by Muth, who investigated the distribution of languages in Tiraspol, Transnistria, which is located on a “strip” of land between Moldova and Ukraine. In 1992 Transnistria broke away from the independent state of Moldova with the help of the Russian army regiments still stationed in and especially transferred to the region to support the local separatists’ movement—in a scenario similar to that in Abkhazia, Southern Ossetia, Georgia, and Ukraine. Muth’s quantitative analysis of the linguistic landscape of the central street, deepened by a discursive and ethnographic perspective, shows how the continuous insistence on Russian language use by now out-of-state political players influences and hinders the formation of local national, ethnolinguistic, and cultural identities (30). Muth concludes that while the official policy of Transnistria encourages multilingualism, the top-down signs and private announcements in place demonstrate the dominance of Russian in political advertising and in personal communication in public space.

Fishman pointed out that institutional language planning measures are not really about language, they are about directing societal development (26). It is always about the distribution of power between policy actors, which could be out-of-state like the Russian Federation, that are pursuing non-linguistic (political and economic) goals (Cooper 31–45; Tollefson and Pérez-Milans 3–5).

Pavlenko and Mullen relied on the Nexus analytical framework to argue that a diachronic approach was important to the study of LL. As a nexus is a connection or series of connections linking two or more things, the signs we encounter in a linguistic landscape are understood dialogically in connections with other signs, and intertextually in connections to other texts, scales, and times, as well as to demographic and social factors (Pavlenko and Mullen 117; Hult and Johnson 225; Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses* 14). Pavlenko conducted diachronic research of the LL in Kyiv from a historical perspective, locating the sources for her LL corpus from the nineteenth century to today (“Linguistic Landscape”). The history of Kyiv, where she was born, was traced to its foundation via historical, archeological, epigraphic, and linguistic evidence of its language use (Pavlenko, “Linguistic Landscape” 148).

A short-term or micro-historic diachronic approach to the study of the LL in a city or state is a productive way to account for changes at times of crisis: Hires-László conducted surveys (2013 and 2017) in the predominantly Hungarian-speaking multi-ethnic town of Berehove in western Ukraine (88). She focused on changes brought by the war with Russia. A rise in nationalist sentiment affected the economy of the Hungarian national minority in Ukraine and triggered transformations in the local linguistic landscape. Increased domestic travel increased the use of Ukrainian. However, difficulties with diachronic data comparison arise when the authors do not explicitly define the collection sites and gather samples from different areas.

### 3.3. *Diachronic and Synchronic Studies of a LL*

Most linguistic landscape studies in the post-Soviet space are collected synchronically. I have found only one example of research involving synchronic and short-term diachronic LL data collection; it was conducted by Pearson in Rwanda. For six years Pearson led a mixed-methods study of language policy and planning (LPP) that connected a language shift in education from exclusionary colonial French to a more inclusive arrangement that used cosmopolitan English as a primary language of instruction. Those language policy changes were initiated by the state to accommodate English-speaking refugees returning to Rwanda after a devastating genocide in 1994; moreover, these changes were reflected in the public space, changing the linguistic landscape and, in turn, influencing the ecology of language in society (Pearson; Hult, “Language Policy” 340). Our investigations ran in parallel and, although I was not aware of it at the time, both comprised a mixed-methods diachronic study to produce qualitative and quantitative data sets for critical language policy research.

In diachronic studies, the LL serves as a palimpsest of socio-political processes revealing language erasure, language alteration, or language replacement in public displays; moreover, it provides quantitative visual evidence of language stability or of a language shift, reflecting official language management, language politics, or language practices that control access to spaces, goods, and services (Landry and Bourhis; Shohamy and Gorter; Hult, "Language Policy"; Hult and Kelly-Holmes; Pavlenko, "Language Conflict"; Pearson). The LL reflects the urban process that "harbors social and ecological processes that are embedded in dense and multilayered networks of local, regional, national, and global connections" (Swyngedouw and Heynen 899).

As a project of many actors and a process unfolding in time and space, the LL presents a complex environment in which humans have to find their ways. The diachronic study approaches a linguistic landscape from a historical ethnographic position, i.e., as a "historical trace of social action" (Blommaert, *Ethnography* 51) where social actions might become necessary for understanding and negotiating "space" (Harvey 125–26). In the synchronic study, I share the position of the co-author of the Nexus analysis approach, Suzie Scollon, where signs in their textual form are seen as mediators of social actions here and now: a sign is a geographic spot where the "tire meets the road" (personal correspondence with Suzie Scollon). The point of contact is a place with its discourses, Scollon explains, that the sign occupies in time, and where space becomes a place via discursive connections, from which the researcher can start unraveling the whole nexus of complex social actions finding nexus points that may take the entire development of the LL, in my case, in a different direction (Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses in Place*; Scollon and de Saint-Georges; Scollon, personal interview). Of course, it is impossible to separate the historical points from the "here and now points," as discourses and actions are intertwined in a dynamic relationship. What we need to understand is the "discourse cycle" by detecting crucial discourses that influence the social actions we are investigating now. Furthermore, we need to connect current discourses with circulating and intersecting discourses of the past, and finally, we need to find the nexus points, where the accumulation of those practices and their salience at the time of our research can transform the existing nexus into a new nexus of practices (Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses in Place*; Scollon, *Nexus Analysis*; Scollon and Scollon, "Nexus"). The replacement of an ethnic Ukrainian restaurant in the heart of Odesa in 2017 by an Italian restaurant with a name written in Latin letters and supporting information decals written in Russian with international symbols is an example of the new nexus points arising in Ukraine.

A short-term diachronic and synchronic study of the LL can be a powerful tool for tracing the policy and/or crisis-induced changes and

contestations of official policy intended to nationalize the state. To achieve this we look at the legal context of the LL in the next section.

### *3.4. The Legal Context of the Linguistic Landscape at the Critical Nexus Point of 2014*

Ukraine, a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, has an endoglossic state language policy with Ukrainian designated as the only state language (as listed in “Article 10” of the Constitution of Ukraine). During Soviet times and at the time of independence, Russification and Ukrainization—including language legislation—went in cycles (Arel, “Language, Status” 246–48). In Odesa, according to Polese (“Building”), use of the Russian language in the public space was uncontested until Ukraine achieved independence in 1991. After independence, the number of Ukrainian users began to increase following implementation of the mandatory use of Ukrainian in state affairs, official communications, media, and education; however, the language of everyday use, reflected in the LL of the city, remained unchanged (Arel, “Language, Status”; Polese, “Building”).

Loyalty of Odesa, whose Russian speakers are not viewed as “true” Ukrainians in the nationalist context, was put to the test with the onset of war in the Donbas (considered here as the critical nexus point), when together with other eastern Ukrainians from Dnipro, Kharkiv, and other nearby areas, Odesans went to support the underfunded army, formed volunteer groups and battalions, and in majority rejected the separatist aspirations of Donbas (Arel, “Language, Status”). My informant, a thirty-five-year-old male born in a Russian-speaking family and very involved in local politics and commerce, added that it was the first period of national awakening in Odesa, and it was followed by demonstrations of belonging to sovereign Ukraine. It was also strongly underpinned by a looming economic disaster, a “grey zone” that came to Donbas with the “Russian World.” He is not sure which sentiment, the national or the economic, was more potent, but they worked together to keep Russia away.

In the LL of Ukraine, commercial advertising was regulated by the following legal instruments, which were operational during my data collection from 2015 to 2019.

1. The Law on Advertising 270/96, active since 1996,<sup>6</sup> refers to information about the language allowed for use on external displays

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<sup>6</sup> According to Article 6 of the Law of Ukraine on advertising. See *Stattia* 26.

and the current legislation on state language<sup>7</sup> from 2012, later declared unconstitutional. Article 6, which refers to the language used in advertising has not changed since 2012, but the latest version, verified on 7 August 2019, refers to the newest language law.

2. Article 26 of the Law on Provisions of Functioning of Ukrainian as a State Language. Language of advertising and consumer goods markings: “advertisement announcements, notices, and other forms of visual advertising are executed in the state language or *in the different languages of the advertiser’s choice*” (emphasis is mine) (*Stattia 26*). Article 26 underwent some changes between 2003 and 2012: the last version of Article 26, accessed in August 2021, does not require logotypes implemented in foreign languages to be dubbed in Ukrainian. The latest version of Article 26 does not require Ukrainian companies to use the state language in their advertisements of goods, services, and logotypes.
3. Article 27: The language of toponyms. Toponyms (geographic names) must be produced and presented in the state language. In the territories where regional or minority languages are used, according to Part 3 of Article 8 of this law, regional language(s) can be used together with the state language. If the need arises, transliteration of the toponym can be used. Article 8, Part 3 of the current language law affirms the language rights of people and citizens, guaranteeing defence of language rights in cases of their violation (“Pro zasady”).

The current version of the Law on Provisions of the Functioning of Ukrainian as the State Language from 2019<sup>8</sup> affirms, “Advertising announcements, notices and other forms of audio-visual advertising are executed in the state language or the language of the advertiser’s choice.”

As could be seen in 2019, at the time of data collection, the provisions of the 2012 law were still in force, allowing entrepreneurs the freedom of choice to use languages other than the state language in external advertising—this is what made the study of the LL in Ukraine genuinely reflective of the local linguistic situations and languages used for instrumental communication (Hult, “Language Policy”). In 2018, a group of

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<sup>7</sup> See the Law of Ukraine on state language with amendments and links to previous versions: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/5029-17#n66>.

<sup>8</sup> Visual advertising regulations are in effect from 2012 until 2021: “Reklamni oholoshennia, povidomlennia ta inshi formy audio-vizual'noi reklamnoi produktsii vykonuiut'sia derzhavnoiu movoiu abo inshoiu movoiu na vybir reklamodavtsia.” (“Poiasnuival'na zapyska”).

deputies proposed a new law for advertising, #8522 (“Pro pryiniattia”), demanding total Ukrainization of the advertising sphere, but it was rejected in The Supreme Council of Ukraine, Verkhovna Rada. That was the case until the summer of 2021 when the provisions of the 2019 language law went into force.

#### 4. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

##### 4.1. *Areas of Research*

This research project commenced in the spring of 2015, a few months after the beginning of the Russian military assault in the Donbas. Following the division of Ukraine into three major areas by linguistic preferences (see Figure 1 above), I collected LL data from the central streets of Lviv, Kyiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, and Odesa. I spent three to four weeks at every location, walking the streets, taking notes and photos, talking to shop managers or sales personnel, and conducting interviews. In 2017–18 I returned to those locations to photograph the same central streets. I included new data sets from the streets in the same cities nominated by the informants as “upper class” areas and from the market areas close to the city centres (Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia) and on the outskirts (Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa). Some synchronic data are omitted from this article. I followed local developments in language legislation, and two years after the Kyiv Rada passed regulation #166/3173<sup>9</sup> regarding use of the state language in Kyiv, I returned to Kyiv in December of 2019, and photographed two centrally located areas—Khreshchatyk Street and the upper-class area Vozdvyzhens'ka—for the third time.

##### 4.2. *Data Collection Methods: Mixed-methods Research and Signs Categorization*

Aiming for empirical validity, replicability, and representativeness, I chose a slightly modified “principle of comprehensive photography,” photographing all textual data at defined geographic locations, excluding the outdoor electronic displays without text, but including the moving billboards where images accompanied by text floated up every few seconds (Hult, “Language Ecology” 96; Hult and Kelly-Holmes 83). Temporarily stationed delivery vehicles with advertising were excluded for consistency; graffiti with clear

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<sup>9</sup> Kyiv City Council passes regulation 166/3173 establishing regional enforcement of the state language use (see “Pro zakhody”).



textual messages were included. Cenoz and Gorter used this type of analysis in the Basque Country, where the aim of the research was not to investigate the linguistic composition of the whole city but to create a careful inventory of all texts for various case explorations (see also L'nyavskiy 58; Gorter 3). Each site provided from 700 to over 1,200 signs for analysis: altogether, about 12,000 signs were classified according to 19 categories (see a discussion below).

To connect the points of analysis with real people, I use the data from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted over five years in the areas of LL data collection. Throughout the research, about twelve thousand signs from seven different cities in four areas were categorized; data from five of the cities mentioned above were used in this article.

The methodology for this study was inspired by Hult, Pearson, Bever, and Pavlenko. Below, I discuss and answer methodological concerns expressed by Pavlenko ("Language Conflict"). I followed the recommendations of Pavlenko to study the LL in Ukraine as a dynamic phenomenon by collecting comprehensive data in the diachronic context (even if it is not in the *longue durée* sense) ("Language Conflict" 247). Linguistic landscape studies comprise a quickly developing field, yet there is no consensus on many methodological applications, such as sign categorizations, units of analysis.

To answer the research question regarding the changes in regional LLs and to form an empirical point of view, I chose areas in every target city where data collection could be easily replicated in future research, such as the central streets which are a universal feature of urban development, enabling regional comparisons. Second, I photographed the entire central streets in Odesa, Kyiv, Lviv, and Truskavets, the entire central commercial areas in Dnipro and Zaporizhzhia, and all "upper class" streets, gathering extensive samples from the markets.

### *4.3. Unit of Analysis*

The smallest unit of analysis, a "sign" for this study, is defined by Backhaus as "any piece of the written text within a spatially definable frame" (55). Considering that this question is in a state of theoretical development, the whole design of a store or group of transient signs were photographed to be later analyzed together or individually in the context, because "specific language items, displayed in specific languages, in a specific manner, send direct and indirect messages concerning the centrality versus marginality of certain languages in society" (Shohamy 110). In that respect, the storefront, an entire store inside and out, or a group of stores could become a unit of analysis (Hult and Kelly-Holmes). Moreover, central streets, which represent open and public spaces that usually showcase the existing language regimes

and the direction of language development, could be defined as a unit of analysis. For example, Brown gathered data in the city centre close to the government quarters; as government is an LL shaping feature, this area could be defined as a unit of analysis (290). Finally, the central streets of a city, defined by Pryor and Grossbart as areas that mark a community's wealth and quality-of-life, function as social, cultural, and commercial hubs that facilitate social interaction (806). Thus, the central streets in a city could be considered to be a multimodal, multi-dimensional "historical body" travelling through time and space.

Central streets chosen for analysis represent sites of prime real estate with a limited number of owners, divided between clans and families (Mischenko). For example, Central Department Store in Kyiv now occupies the whole block of Khreshchatyk Street and has been rented since 2013 by the Ukrainian oligarch Rinat Akhmetov; it is managed by his real estate group ESTA Holding which is headed by a former director of De Bijenkorf, a luxury store in Amsterdam. Deputies of the Kyiv City Council leased the land to Akhmetov's company (Wilson 121–22), which rents the land from the city and pays fifty-four times less per square meter than the regular market price: thirty-three hryvnias instead of eighteen hundred hryvnias per square meter (Shul'ga). Akhmetov bought this piece of land in 2021 (Glazunov). Inside this prime piece of real estate in the heart of the Ukrainian capital, I had trouble finding Ukrainian-speaking hosts. Moreover, Central Department Store rents whole units to Russian companies (see Figure 2) with directors located in Moscow. Central Department Store could be an example of a multimodal and multi-dimensional unit of analysis representing the façade of Ukrainianness, private economic interests, and the type of politics where rules do not apply.

**Figure 2. A cosmetic salon “Ruchki / Nozhki” (“Little Hands / Little Feet”), a chain from Russia, renting space in Central Department Store on Khreshchatyk St., Kyiv, photographed in 2017.<sup>10</sup>**



Another example found in Odesa adds an additional aspect to the “unit of analysis” discussion. Advertising signs are constructed to “speak” to assumed audiences. The sign could be marked or embedded in the other signs and the surrounding context (see Figure 3). In Figure 3 the sign is layered with textual deposits on top of one another, with the much-hated parking meter tagged and covered by the announcement of a rock concert (all in English), layered with a meditation flyer in Russian. A new deposit of electrician’s services in Russian is offered right under the word “Meditation,” all at eye level, with a pest control proposal politely glued on at the bottom. All are competing for the consumer’s attention.

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<sup>10</sup> All photographs are my own.

**Figure 3. A parking meter sign layered with textual deposits, Odesa.**

Situating advertising signs in the policy contexts provides one more point of analysis (Pavlenko, “Language Conflict” 250). Considering that the authorship of the sign is difficult to determine, the top-down and bottom-up categories help to attribute the signage to government-controlled sites regulated in Ukraine by explicit policy and private actors. Signs promoting international corporations or national chain stores typically follow the state language policy, sometimes creating a façade of Ukrainianness (see section 5, Results and Discussion). Signs promoting small enterprises, such as sports bidding and lottery shops, are government-regulated, whereas signs that promote private establishments adopt their target audience’s *de facto* language policy for economic reasons (Bever 146). Those are the two most important categories in this research on the effects of Ukrainization because they reveal the *de facto* policy on the ground (Hult, “Language Policy” 343). The bottom-up category is subdivided into private, commercially produced signage involving specific volume, design, and planning, in which private, computer or hand-written notes are glued to all imaginable surfaces (Pavlenko, “Linguistic Landscape” 134; Ivanova 388).

#### 4.4 Language of the Signs and Coding in this Article

To answer the research questions, I used the following numbers to categorize the advertisement signs according to the language used or to ambivalence:

1. Signs only in Ukrainian (Ukr), and signs with Ukrainian as the primary language (Ukr Pr);
2. Signs in English (Eng) only, signs with English as the primary language, signs with Ukrainian as a secondary language (Eng+Ukr), and signs with English as a primary language and Russian as a secondary language (Eng+Rus);
3. Signs in Russian (Rus) only, and signs using Russian as a primary language and English as a secondary language (Rus+Eng);
4. Ambivalent (a.k.a. interlegible) signs with words used or understood by the speakers of Ukrainian and Russian (Amb).
5. For chart readability, some categories were counted together: Eng+Ukr/Rus, English as a primary language supported by Ukrainian or Russian.
6. Non-commercially produced “hand-made” private signs labelled Russian and Ukrainian were categorized as RusPr and UkrPr, respectively.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the time of the first research visit to Ukraine in early 2015, the Ukrainian economy, which was on its long way to recovery from the colonial times of the useless centralized ordonnance, had again suffered a significant blow from Russia. On the streets, one could see the signs of economic and physical destruction (mostly in post-Maidan Kyiv) that had followed the violent events in the Crimea and the Donbas in 2014. At that time the Russian language had become a security issue in all post-Soviet states, and as one of the informants in Odesa expressed it, one had to decide one’s loyalty and manifest it clearly and straightforwardly, preferably in Ukrainian (Siiner and L'nyavskiy-Ekelund). Many Russian businesses left Ukraine because of uncertainty and fear, changing the linguistic landscape of Dnipro and Kyiv. The Russian language in the public space was erased as the businesses departed (Pavlenko, “Language Conflict” 254–55). The changes are reflected in Table 1 and Figure 4.

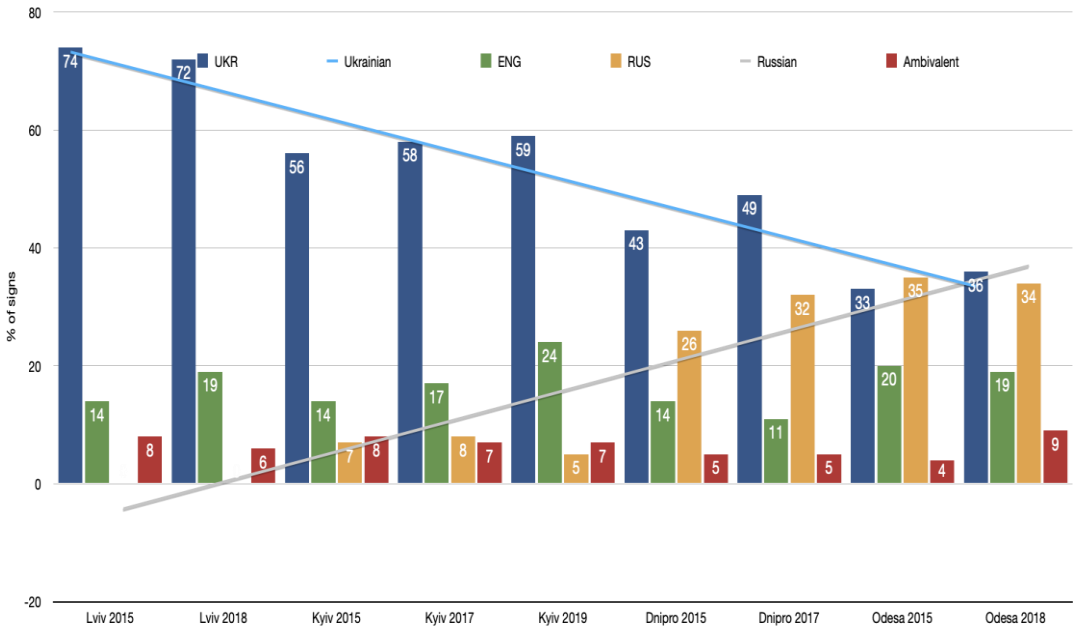
In Table 1 the numbers demonstrate the sign distribution among the three main languages. Table 1 shows that between 2015 and 2017–19, the economic activity increased by 2.5 times on Kyiv’s central street,

Khreshchatyk, almost doubled in Dnipro, and increased by nearly 1.5 times in Lviv and 1.5 times in Odesa. The number of businesses displaying commercial signage in Ukrainian increased by almost 2.5 times in Kyiv, doubled in Russian-speaking Dnipro, increased by 20% in Ukrainian-speaking Lviv, and increased by 40% in Russian-speaking Odesa. The number of businesses that displayed information in English—the language of power, prestige, and globalization—increased fivefold in Kyiv, 30% in Dnipro, almost 60% in Lviv, and 20% in Odesa (L'nyavskiy 93; Bever 46; Bilaniuk, *Contested Tongues*; Bilaniuk, “Speaking”; Bilaniuk and Melnyk; Pavlenko, “Language Conflict”). The number of commercially produced signs in the Russian language had also steadily increased, doubling in Kyiv and in Dnipro and steadily growing in Odesa at the same rate as the Ukrainian and English languages.

**Table 1. Diachronic LL data from central streets in Ukraine, 2015–19; the numbers represent the signs.**

Central streets	Kyiv 2015	Kyiv 2017	Kyiv 2019	Dnipro 2015	Dnipro 2017	Lviv 2015	Lviv 2018	Odesa 2015	Odesa 2018
UKR	457	792	1013	377	715	487	616	221	303
ENG	115	236	406	125	154	93	150	138	161
RUS	55	103	94	225	460	1	0	235	288
UKR PR	77	59	14	3	5	20	32	1	4
RUS PR	45	67	65	100	44	0	1	46	58
Ambivalent	64	97	118	43	68	55	53	28	25
ENG+UKR	44	63	145	9	6	61	95	18	14
UKR+ENG	50	131	249	37	40	44	122	22	29
ENG+RUS	9	15	21	41	45	0	1	35	40
RUS+ENG	22	4		29	16	0	0	32	15

**Figure 4. Regional comparative chart of diachronic LL data with the sign categories in percentages (UKR blue, ENG green, RUS yellow, Ambivalent red). Straight tendency lines of languages distribution are blue for Ukrainian and grey for Russian.**

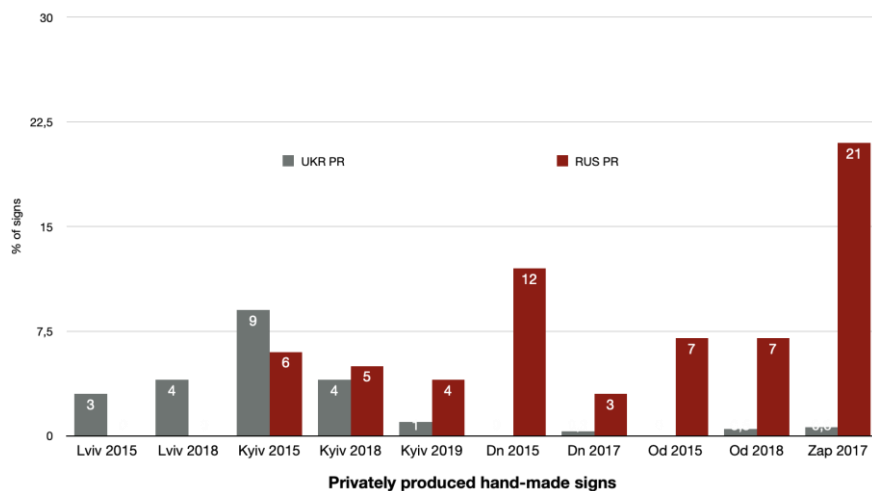


The space division and languages' visibility in Kyiv and Zaporizhzhia has been analyzed by Bever (130), Ivanova (389), and Pavlenko ("Transgression" 48–53). These data confirm their findings regarding the state ideology in play in commercially-produced signage in the LL of central streets in Ukraine in 2015–19. Signage was displayed by companies with capital, by state-regulated industries such as banking, and by government. Regulatory and geographic signage, tourist signs, signs representing foreign corporations and local chains in Ukrainian (the preferred language) were also observed. Signs in English trailed in second place in Kyiv and Lviv, and in third place in the Russian-speaking cities of Odesa, Dnipro, and Zaporizhzhia (Bever).

### 5.1 Managing Public Space “Bottom-up”: Hand-made Signs

The private non-commercially produced signage is where the state ideology retreats, and the demographic’s communicative needs take over (Figure 5). The central streets in Ukraine are not the best sampling areas, as the street poles, building walls, and official billboards are usually cleaned to remove computer-printed and hand-written communications. However, across the board, those privately produced items signal the regional language preferences between Ukrainian and Russian: Lviv is very consistent in all LL features, with private announcements written 100% in Ukrainian. In Kyiv in 2015, messages in Ukrainian claimed a little more space than messages in Russian: the interviewees explained that not many dared to disclose their linguistic preferences in the open even if the economic need to sell goods or services was acute, as emotions still ran high following the Maidan events. In 2019, Russian private messages on Khreshchatyk Street continued to claim four times as much space as Ukrainian messages, mostly due to the increase in internally displaced Russian-speaking people who moved to the capital from war-afflicted areas. One of the informants, a taxi driver from Kyiv (most of my informants were not local), noted that since the war began, they had seen a dramatic increase (hundreds of thousands) in vehicles with Donetsk license plates on the streets of Kyiv. In Odesa, Dnipro, and Zaporizhzhia, 95–98% of the hand-made signs in Figure 5 were written in Russian.

**Figure 5. Diachronic LL data for privately produced hand-made signs observed in 2015–19 in Lviv, Kyiv, Dnipro, and Odesa, with synchronic LL data from Zaporizhzhia from 2017.**



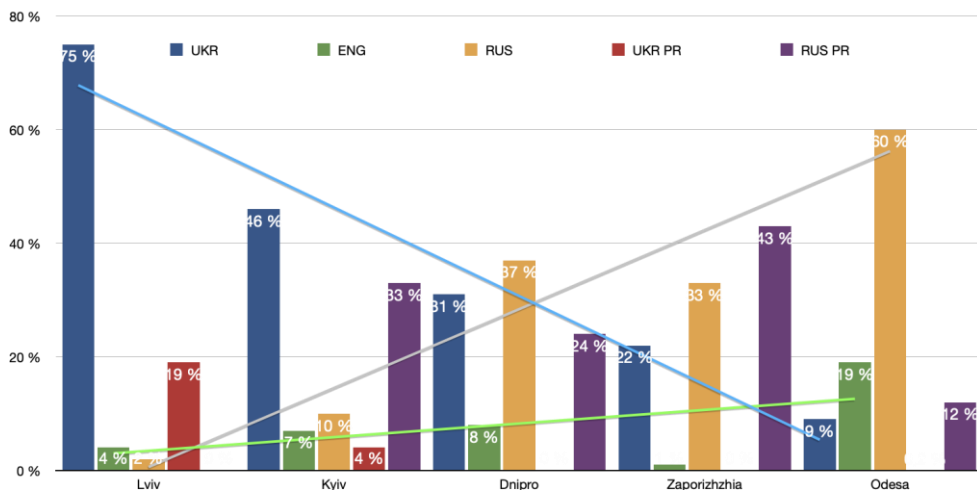


The economic interests moved away from the central streets to streets where the official state language regulations were not monitored as strictly. Local market politics lingered in the background, giving way to the choices of shop and stall owners with respect to which languages to display. Heller and Duchêne theorize that, as an object of commodification and as an economic resource vital for regional economies, regional and minority languages could be marketing tools for the tourist industry adding value to the product and facilitating consumption (139–42). The current law concerning advertising is helpful because it considers the economic conditions of the marketplace. Markets were the most difficult to photograph due to security measures that often forbid photography; the shops presented stalls close to each other and owners were looking out for customers and waved away unwanted visitors; thus, a lot of information was provided in a tight space. Most of the time, I could distance myself enough to take a photograph without disturbing the shop owner. Sometimes I introduced myself, interviewed the owner, and took pictures; however, twice my investigation was prevented by the market security. One time I ended up disclosing my intentions, giving a short lecture on LL analysis, and interviewing a young guard.

Figure 6 below contains comparative synchronic LL data with respect to signage in the marketplaces of five cities in Ukraine. Straight tendency lines show the percentages of languages present in the public signage as they change from Lviv's market, *Halyts'ke perekhrestia*, to Kyiv's market, *Darnytsia*, to the street market running just a few hundred meters away in parallel with Iavornyts'koho Avenue in Dnipro, and from an extensive street market area close to the central district in Zaporizhzhia and a gigantic wholesale "town" seven kilometers outside Odesa. The percentages are calculated for five language categories: Ukrainian, English, and Russian signage produced commercially and Ukrainian and Russian hand-written messages.

The blue bar represents the presence of Ukrainian commercially produced signage: 75% in the public space of Lviv's market, 46% of the visual field in Kyiv's Darnytsia, 30% in Dnipro, 22% in Zaporizhzhia, and 9% in Odesa's market, where Ukrainian is present only on fast food stands that serve market visitors. The green bar, representing English, is present in about 5% of the advertisements, mostly the household equipment brands displayed for customers in Lviv. The market of Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, also uses English in displayed advertisements of well-known brands, with some shops displaying catchphrases in English. The commercial signage in Dnipro is similar to that in Kyiv. In Zaporizhzhia, English advertising is nearly absent, but in Odesa, it occupies about 20% of the advertisement space.

**Figure 6. Synchronic LL data from the marketplaces in five cities in Ukraine in 2015–19. Colours represent the languages spoken, and percentages refer to the level of language visibility.**



The yellow bar in Figure 6 marks the presence of Russian. In Lviv, Russian was visible only on a few packages of seeds on a single stand. In Kyiv’s market, Russian ads occupied about 10% of the space—similar to the language distribution in the ads on the central street in Kyiv. In Dnipro and Zaporizhzhia, advertising displays in Russian approached the 40% mark, and in Odesa’s market Russian took over 60% of the advertising space (see a discussion about Odesa’s market below). The red bar in Figure 6 indicates the presence of private hand-made announcements in Ukrainian; these Ukrainian announcements occupy 20% of the advertising space in Lviv, about 5% in Kyiv, and are not present in the other markets. The purple bar in Figure 6 represents hand-made messages in Russian, which are absent in Lviv and present in 33% of the markets in Kyiv. Together with commercially produced signage, signs written in Russian and signs written in Ukrainian each take up 50% of the space, similar to that indicated in the Pavlenko demographics (“Transgression” 41–42). Hand-made messages in Russian are present in 24% in Dnipro, 43% in Zaporizhzhia, and 12% in Odesa. In Odesa’s market, private messages are not numerous, and messages in Russian of all sizes and types of communication dominate the space. Hand-made messages are usually transient; they might indicate the relocation of a shop, for example.

**Figure 7. A typical market stand at Halyts'ke perekhrestia in Lviv, displaying stickers with known brands in English.**



Figure 7 shows a market stand where functional information, such as “Open,” is hand-written in Ukrainian, while storefront advertising of appliances (tiles, bathtubs, locks) is ambivalent but would be understood by visitors who speak Ukrainian and Russian. Here we can see the salience of economic discourses that shape the economic realities in the Ukrainian regions (Fairclough and Chouliaraki qtd. in Kelly-Holmes 165).

### *5.2 Diachronic and Synchronic Linguistic Landscape Data, and the Seventh Kilometer Market in Odesa*

Linguistic landscape data were collected on the entire length of Derybasivs'ka Street (Odesa's "signature" location, open for traffic for about one third of its length), Rishel'ievs'ka Street (specified as an "upper class" area by informants and also a main street in Odesa), and a few "prestigious" lanes in the Seventh Kilometer Market outside Odesa. The Seventh Kilometer market employs over 18,000 people and serves up to 350,000 customers every day.<sup>11</sup> In 2021, the market is dying due to the COVID pandemic and the relocation of sales online (informant, 35 y.o. male, Odesa).

Odesa, populated by over a million people, is an important seaport on the Black Sea coast southeast of Ukraine. Due to a partial blockade of Ukrainian ports in the Azov Sea, Odesa acquired significant cargo traffic. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Odesa became an administrative centre of Novorossiiia (New Russia) after the colonization of nearby territories by the Russian Empire, but lost its status under the Soviet regime, becoming a kind of "éminence grise" of the region. Among the five cities under investigation, historically, Odesa had the weakest ties to Ukraine. According to Skvirskaja and Popova, it hosts representatives of 127 ethnic groups, of which seven percent communicate in Ukrainian and seventy-seven percent communicate in Russian. During Soviet times, Odesa was famous and, together with the Crimea, was known in official discourse as an "all-Union health resort." Since Ukraine achieved independence, Odesa has had no objections to the new state ideology, as long as mandates from the Ukrainian governing body did not affect personal choice. Polese and others reported that in spite of formal compliance with official demands, the actual trends of Russian language use in the city continued to thrive—the language landscape in Deribasivs'ka Street being a prime example ("Negotiating Spaces" 272). Every organized Ukrainization campaign—for instance, during the wave of Ukrainization in 2007 under President Viktor Iushchenko and held under the slogan "Think in Ukrainian!"—has been met by the pro-Russian language political action "I speak Russian!" (Skvirskaja 177–79).

Participants in the pro-Ukrainian language demonstration of 2020 in the streets of Odesa objected to changes in the law that delayed Ukrainization ("Ruky het' vid movy!"). Participants in social networks caused a storm with demands to support educational choices in Odesa. However, outside cyberspace, the transition to education in the Ukrainian language is progressing with the help of predominantly Russian-speaking parents. They

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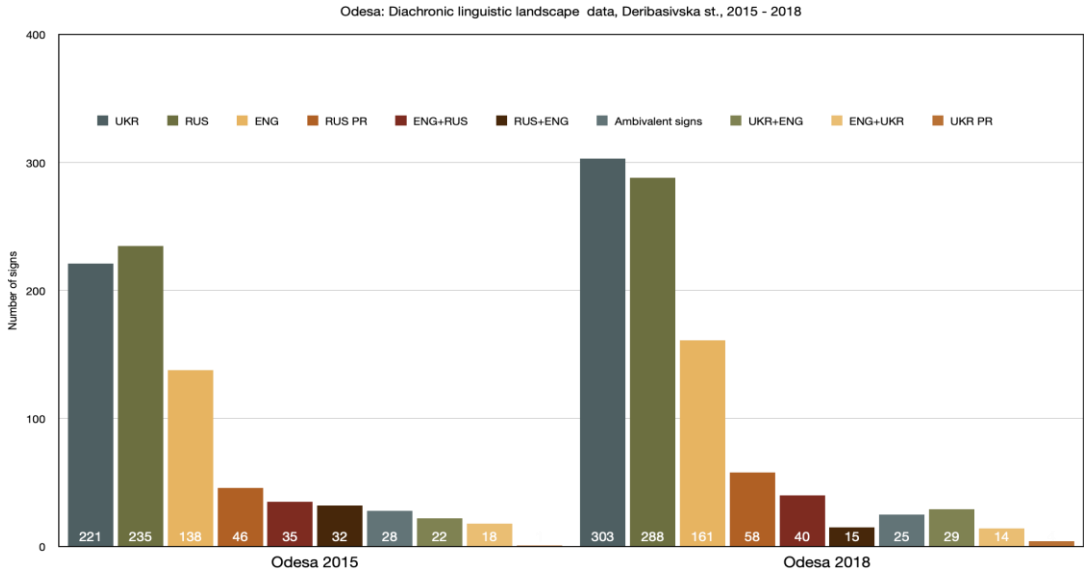
<sup>11</sup> Official website of the Seventh Kilometer market: <http://www.7km.net>. The site does not have a Ukrainian version.

would like to see balanced bilingualism as that is the best option for their children's future (interview data). Russian speaking parents do not object to quiet Ukrainization as long as their Odesan linguistic identity is not framed as "a problem" (Polese et al. 269). Bilingualism is understood as "a recourse" that Russian speaking parents would like to preserve for future generations (Ruíz). Odesa's language landscape continues to display sociolinguistic context attributed to its specific situation within a nation-state (Cenoz and Gorter 67). It is reflected in the LL of Odesa: the situated discourses, the interactional order, and the "historical bodies" of sign producers (Scollon and Scollon, "Nexus"; Hult; Hult and Johnson).

Like other large cities in Ukraine, the commercial activity on Odesa's central street had increased by 2018 compared to the commercial activity witnessed in 2015, when Odesa still feared Russian aggression. Although there is limited space for expansion of commercial activity on the historical Deribasivs'ka Street, outdoor dining has been expanded, accompanied by an increase in transient signage (carried out in the morning) and a proliferation of tourist-oriented ads in Russian and English displayed by private companies. This is accompanied by officially-produced tourist information in Russian (first), Ukrainian (second), with English signage being in the third position of the language hierarchy (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 provides a chart of diachronic LL data from the central Deribasivs'ka Street presented in raw numbers. The chart demonstrates the general increase in commercial activity between 2015 and 2018, with sign space in the Ukrainian language (blue bar) increasing by almost 40%, and sign space in Russian (yellow bar) increasing by 20%, but losing about 5% of sign space to Ukrainian in 2018. English sign space, which in the post-Soviet countries is often used to signal globalization and replace Russian, in Odesa seems to be used to replace Ukrainian or to avoid the use of Ukrainian (Pavlenko, "Language Conflict" 257; Bever 51; Bilaniuk and Melnyk). The orange bar represents the increase in hand-made Russian ads from 45 to 58. The dark red bar shows a slight increase in advertisements with English dominating.

**Figure 8. Diachronic LL data from Deribasivs'ka Street, the central street in Odesa. The numbers indicate the number of signs in each category.**



**Figures 9 and 10. A Ukrainian restaurant in Odesa that lost prime space to an Italian pizzeria between 2015 and 2018.**



**Figure 11. The Italian pizzeria presents practical information in Russian on its front door.**



In the Odesa of 2015, storefronts and commercial signage on the central street that displayed the Russian language surpassed even those with Ukrainian displays. By 2018 signage in Russian had slightly given way to signage in Ukrainian, as the foreign chains adopted state rules. Figures 12–15 show the Guess storefront on Deribasivs'ka Street in 2015 and in 2018: the pictures on the left are from 2015; they are written in English with all essential information and security company stickers written in Russian. The pictures on the right were taken in 2018; all the text is written in Ukrainian, including the hours of operation and two sets of security stickers. Unlike the storefront display, the street display for GUESS is written in English with the address written in Russian (Figure 14).

**Figures 12–13. Left: GUESS storefront in 2015, with signs written in English and Russian. All essential information is presented in Russian. Right: GUESS storefront in 2018, with signs written in Ukrainian.**

GUESS ?		
Guy		
Куртка	3990	4536
Трикотаж	1350	1080
Джинсы	2900	2952
Сумка	2300	1752
Обувь	3970	3176
Girl		
Куртка	3990	3752
Свитер	2850	2152
Трикотаж	370	536
Джинсы	1350	2680
Бижутерия	2190	
Сумка	3990	3192
Обувь	2800	3600

Светр	2 950
Трикотаж	2 150
Брюки	3 790
Годинник	5 890
Взуття	4 890
<b>GUESS</b>	

Figures 14–15. GUESS storefront continued.

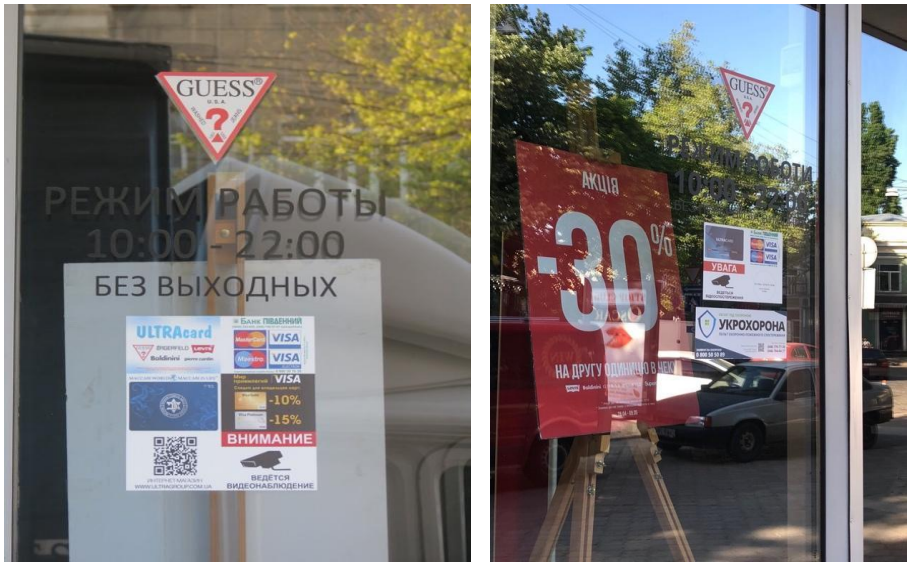


Figure 16. GUESS store street poster on Deribasivs'ka St. in Odesa in 2018; text is written in English and Russian.





The article of law regulating geographic names in signage in the state language (dubbed or transliterated in a regional language) was discussed earlier. In Figure 17, a geographic sign in Russian was present in 2015 when I stayed in this hotel right after its opening.

**Figure 17. A geographic sign in Russian in 2015 with a memorial plaque in Ukrainian added later and a tourist information poster featuring the regional language on the top with Ukrainian and English below.**



Figures 18 and 19. A progression of commercially produced private tourist ads: the ad on the left, photographed in 2015, was replaced in 2018 by the ad on the right. The replacement has larger Russian characters that dominate over the English script, and the state language (Ukrainian) is altogether ignored.



The pattern of compliance with the official language policy (LP) without challenging the rules was observed on the doors of foreign and state banks. In 2015, *Credit Agricole* displayed instructional messages in Russian, which is no longer the case. The traces of language erasure, a deliberate act that aimed to achieve a language shift in the LL, could be seen in many places in Odesa (Pavlenko, “Language Conflict” 255). Figure 20 is an example from Rishel’ievs’ka, one of the historical central streets in the city centre. Here the old plaque on house #69, with Ukrainian and Russian displayed according to the official hierarchy of languages, has been replaced on the building next door (#67) with a sign solely in Ukrainian, with a trace of the old house number still visible in brown below the sign.

**Figure 20. Geographic signs on Rishel'ievs'ka Street, 2018.**



Another example of language management was found on the door of a national cosmetics chain with the ambivalent name “EVA”<sup>12</sup> (“Eve,” see Figures 21 and 22) spelled in Latin script (although the cosmetic chain was founded by a Ukrainian businessman). In 2015, special posters advertising vacancies in EVA could be filed in any desired language when written by hand. In Figure 21, a hand-written job opening in Russian is extended to the salesperson/cashier and a cleaner. In Figure 22 a photo taken in 2018 shows a commercially-produced sticker advertising for the same sales/cashier position. The advertisement is written in Ukrainian and specifies that only individuals with appropriate language skills (at least officially) need apply.

<sup>12</sup> In 2017, “Eva” opened 168 cosmetic stores (“Za 2017”).

**Figures 21 and 22. EVA cosmetic shop doors in 2015 (top) and 2018 (bottom—close-up showing the replacement of the job announcement in the Russian language by the one in Ukrainian.).**

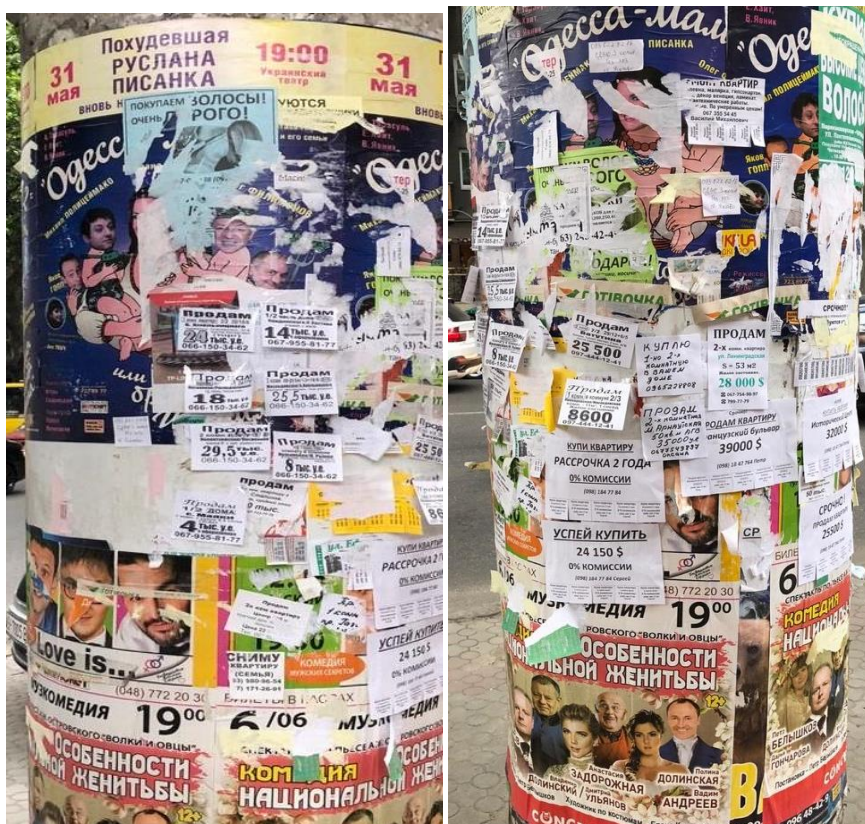




In Odesa I was addressed in Ukrainian first only in two establishments founded in western Ukraine (Lviv Hand-made Chocolates and Lviv Coffee Mining Company). Walking the LL data collection routes countless times in 2018, especially in Odesa, I experienced what I called a “Russian-language comeback,” even though statistical data state the opposite. The changes in the statistical presence of Ukrainian could be attributed to the increase of small signs in Ukrainian; from three to eight of the signs I observed were written mainly in the Ukrainian language. However, such changes are less visible when a Ukrainian restaurant is replaced by an Italian restaurant and the information written on the restaurant door is in Russian (see figure 9 above).

Moving away from the Odesa city centre, Rishel'ievs'ka Street—an “upper class” street that runs perpendicular to Deribasivs'ka Street—has beautiful buildings that house expensive boutiques without any visitors. We find that Ukrainian and Russian languages (blue and yellow bars) swap places on Rishel'ievs'ka Street in comparison with their distribution on Deribasivs'ka Street; even English (green bars) retreats, giving way to the rise of Russian, the regional lingua franca. The number of hand-made signs (dark red) moves away from the central street. These signs even take over the towers designated for posters advertising cultural events (Figure 23). (The posting of hand-made signs is punishable by a fine.) Most of the posters for theatrical performances and concerts are in Russian. This situation will not be found anywhere in Kyiv or Lviv; it is found only in Odesa, Dnipro, and Zaporizhzhia.

**Figure 23. Towers for placing announcements of cultural events on Rishel'ievs'ka Street in 2018. Private announcements are produced predominantly in Russian.**



From the city centre, we move to the biggest wholesale market in southern Ukraine, the Seventh Kilometer Market. The area of LL data collection is marked in yellow.

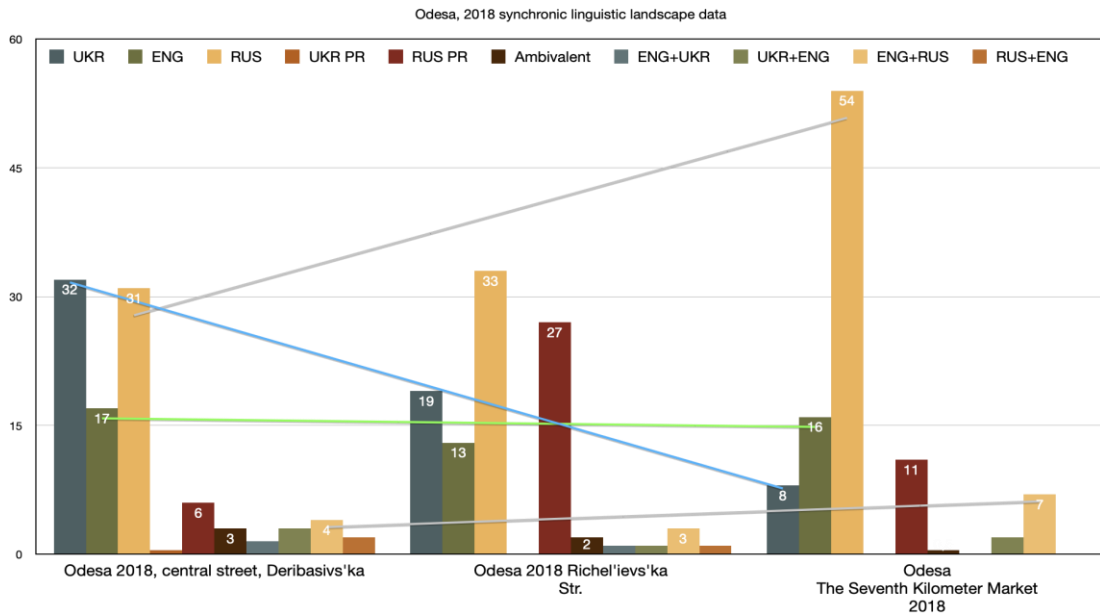
**Figure 24. The Seventh Kilometer Market landscape. Image courtesy of Google Maps.**



Figure 25 indicates that 54% of the LL of the market belongs to the Russian language (yellow), 16% to the English language (green), and 7% to English plus Russian (red) (mostly in storefronts on the market’s central lane). Hand-written communication in Russian is 11% (short yellow bar). Ukrainian (dark green) is present in 8% of displays in the Odesa Seventh Kilometer Market, mostly in cafés serving the vendors and in regulatory signs. Russian seems to dominate the market altogether, as the central lane storefronts are predominantly in Russian and in English with Russian in tow.



**Figure 25. Synchronic LL data from Odesa's central street, Deribasivs'ka, its upper-class street, Rishel'ievs'ka, and the Seventh Kilometer Market outside of Odesa.**



Outside of Deribasivs'ka Street, even the national cosmetics retailer, Prostor, with more than 300 stores, advertises a job opening in Russian (“wide space” in Russian, spelled with Latin script) (see Figure 26).

**Figure 26. National cosmetic chain PROSTOR advertising a job opening in Russian on Rishel'ievs'ka St. in Odesa.**



The economic forces setting the atmosphere at the marketplace outside of Odesa and driving the language of access to goods and services are best understood via numbers according to Prigarin (141). The price of the stores on the central lane of the Seventh Kilometer Market starts at 500,000 US\$ (Figure 27). Shipping containers, coloured and coded in the central arteries of this market, would cost a new owner about 250,000 US\$. Extensive bus routes connect the market to the largest Ukrainian cities and to Moldova, Russia, and many eastern European countries. There is a complex network of business practices and business relations, and in rituals and beliefs that foster good trade; moreover, business spheres incorporate local ethnic groups as well as groups from China, Vietnam, Turkey, India, and Syria, among others. The traditions of these groups influence the work hours and workdays of these businesses (Prigarin 146–50).

**Figure 27. The Seventh Kilometer Market, on a main street just outside of Odesa with storefronts in Russian.**



The diversity in traders' languages generates a need for a linguistic and cultural brokerage. Foreign traders prefer to employ local experts as salespeople and representatives, creating an ethnic hierarchical structure (Prigarin 147). The jobs provided depend on the local communicative repertoire, and on the "deployment of linguistic resources" (Heller 102). This in turn produces and reproduces the "language regimes" valid in a particular space (Blommaert et al. 198). Language commodification makes it difficult for a nation-state like Ukraine to maintain the status quo and enforces political boundaries and ideologies that dissolve under the economic forces and loose domination in public spaces (Heller 102; Polese et al. 273). The language landscape in the Seventh Kilometer Market in Odesa proves this point. The traders create their own codes (Figures 27 and 28) and dictate such terms that even manufacturers from Lviv invest in expensive billboard ads in Russian (Figure 29). Reflecting on the distribution of languages in the public space, "one can think of the multidimensional expression of discourses on languages in the personal and physical spaces when in one place the politics and policies are made, and in the other, they

are implemented and challenged by ethnic-regional, ideological and economic realities” (L'nyavskiy 111).

**Figure 28. Traders have their own language: the message on the left informs customers that “men’s underwear, tank-tops, thermals, and teen’s clothing have been moved to the shop across, shop # 286.” The poster on the right warns that “socks were moved to shop #285.”**



**Figure 29. A manufacturer from Lviv advertising men’s clothing in Russian at the Seventh Kilometer Market.**



## 6. CONCLUSION

This research was completed before the latest provisions of the 2019 law in Ukraine regarding state language use were enforced in 2020–21. In the Ukrainian model of a monolingual nation-state, provisions of the law with respect to advertising allows the use of regional and minority languages and

therefore serves as an important marketing apparatus as well as “an emblem of authentic identity” (Heller and Duchêne 139). As a dynamic phenomenon, the language landscape changes at different scales, as government and private actors interpret, implement, negotiate, and conflict with the official language policy.

In areas where people have distinct preferences in language use, this research of synchronic and diachronic changes in the linguistic landscape of Ukraine between 2015 and 2019 demonstrates how language policies that promote the construction of a symbolic Ukrainian-speaking nation reshape the observers' sense of place. During the last five years, explicit language policies continue to change the “visual representation of linguistic order” in the central streets, the city cores, replacing Russian, the language of the former majority, with the state language of Ukraine (Hult, “Language Policy”). However, LL data show that the renegotiation of the public space, with Russian remaining *the lingua franca* in Odesa, Dnipro, and Zaporizhzhia, was historically and artificially constructed by labour migration, similar to the situation in the Russian-speaking cities during Russian imperial and Soviet times. After gradually losing the status and prestige of a dominating language—especially after the events of Maidan and the Russian military aggression—the Russian language continues to maintain high prominence, visibility, and communicative function (Landry and Bourhis 29). It is particularly visible in the Russian-speaking urban centre of Odesa where it has increased proportionally, together with Ukrainian, on the central street from 2015 to 2019. Synchronic LL data collected at the marketplaces away from the “ideologically charged” central streets where a “one state language” policy is regulated, show a domination of Ukrainian in Lviv, a 50/50 distribution of Ukrainian and Russian in Kyiv, and a domination of Russian in Odesa, Dnipro, and Zaporizhzhia (L'nyavskiy). The marketplaces of Odesa and Lviv, where the proportions of Ukrainian and Russian are entirely reversed, demonstrate the importance of local identities in commercially and hand-produced signs. Such signs signal the potency of economic discourses in shaping semiotic landscapes (Chouliaraki and Fairclough). Moreover, synchronic LL data collected in the centre of Odesa, at the adjacent upper-class street and at the marketplace away from the city center show alignment with the local linguistic repertoire, with Russian as the *lingua franca* for businesses and market traders.

English, the language of power, globalization, prestige, shared understanding, business, and tourism, is increasing its presence in all regions of Ukraine. English is often used to replace Russian; moreover, in Odesa, a seaport of international importance, the use of English and other languages negotiates the space away from the state language (Pavlenko, “Language Conflict”). In the LL of Ukraine, Odesa also represents an

international trade city with a robust Russian-speaking linguistic identity and a Russophone target audience. In the modern world, multilingualism is recognized as a “legitimate social practice in both the academic and the political sphere (whose agendas, as we know, often overlap)” (Duchêne 92). After thirty years of independence, Odesa and the other urban centres of central, eastern, and southern Ukraine continue to contribute to the Ukrainian national project while maintaining and negotiating the right to preserve their unique identities in the fabric of modern Ukraine.

This diachronic and synchronic study of linguistic landscapes in Ukraine examines the circulating and intersecting discourses in public spaces between 2015 and 2019 during a war with the Russian Federation (but prior to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022). The LL data reflect territorial differences within Ukraine, where the language landscape matches *de facto* communicative needs on the ground. Depending on demographics, current economic goals, possibilities, and local interests, cities like Odesa keep “doing their thing” away from the state authorities; they maintain the use of the Russian language and have also creatively negotiated the official language policy by replacing the state language with English.

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