

**A STUDY OF THE PUBLIC INSCRIPTIONS
IN VELIKO TARNOVO AS PRODUCTS
OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF LITERACIES
("Exploring Local Linguistic Scenery amongst
Superdiversity: A Small Place in the Global Landscape")
by Svetlana Atanassova-Divitakova)**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yarmila Daskalova

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo

Abstract. The book explores the linguistic cityscape of Veliko Turnovo focusing on the multimodal aspects of the signs that make the landscape. Special attention is paid to double writing (using two languages – Bulgarian and English), which is manifested in the landscape in its two basic modes – “mirror imaging”, where the two languages are clearly visible and translanguaged (mixed) writing, where features of the two languages are blurred. These two modes of writing are related to the two main functions that signs in the landscape perform – informative and symbolic.

Keywords: linguistic landscape; public signs; translanguaging; literacy

The monograph “Exploring Local Linguistic Scenery amongst Superdiversity: A Small Place in the Global Landscape” presents a kaleidoscopic overview of the public landscape of the historical city of Veliko Tarnovo. The inscriptions on the signs in these modern urban surroundings are explored through the lens of Linguistic Landscaping Studies (LLS), a burgeoning branch of sociolinguistics.

The study of public signage requires an adequate analysis that grasps the different aspects of the signs that are emplaced in a given milieu – their semiotic aspects, including their materiality, visual layout, typographic characteristics, and their indexical nature, the choice of language and the ability to write in more than one language that naturally leads to the discussion of literacy or the different types of literacies, which the people inhabiting a given public space possess. All these theoretical assumptions that underlie the study of the local landscape are discussed at length in **Chapter 1**. It becomes clear that signs do not function individually but that they together make the landscape, which turns

out not to be a disparate collection of inscriptions but a complex sociolinguistic system, in which signs interact with each other and which, following Jan Blommaert's (2012) model of analysis is characterized by dynamics, historicity, and indexicality.

The urban locus described in **Chapter 2** of the book is relatively small but shows a variety of foreign languages used on its signs. The use of these languages does not index that they are naturally used by different ethnic groups for everyday communication. Foreign language instruction is the main factor that presupposes their use and the author presents a detailed overview of the learning institutions that provide the background for the occurrence of languages other than the local one in the landscape. The place whose public signs are the main object of discussion in the book is also presented as a cityscape in the context of superdiversity – part of a globalizing world, where different types of mobility and new forms of electronic communication are essential features.

All kinds of signs, including signs in public space are semiotic objects and their characteristics as such are touched upon in **Chapter 3**. Special focus is placed on their indexical character, and their emplacement in the landscape, following R. Scollon and S. Scollon's (2003) geosemiotic model of situated, decontextualised and transgressive semiotics.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the typology of the public signs, of which the language-based criterion turns out to be the most significant for the purposes of the LLS analysis of public signage in the local space. Signs can be monolingual and bilingual (multilingual) and it is namely bilingual signs (written in two languages) that serve as the basis for the development of two main types of public inscriptions – mirror images and translanguaged (mixed) inscriptions. The two types of writing are manifestations of two main types of literacy – the ability to write in two languages correctly (an elite form of writing) and the ability to produce translanguaged writing (a non-elite form of writing).

Chapter 5 discusses mirror images, in which an original inscription in Bulgarian is converted into an inscription of a foreign language. Most frequently, the foreign language is English (in its variety as a global language) but multiple conversions into Russian and/or German are also possible. Considering the multimodality of public signs, the author prefers the term “conversion” for signs rather than translation because translation is only one aspect of rendering the sign in a foreign code. Other paralinguistic and semiotic aspects are also taken into consideration in the process of sign conversion. For example, a sign converted into English will retain its Bulgarian punctuation, which will signal that it is a replica of the original sign rather than a completely different one. The top position of the sign of the local code will symbolize the precedence of its creation rather than relations of power and dominance. Other aspects of the process of sign conversion include the symmetrical order of information in

the two inscriptions, the use of font and colours, and the visual design. Being a manifestation of an elite form of literacy, producing mirror images presupposes aiming at correct language use in both the native language and the foreign one, knowledge of grammar and spelling rules, appropriate use of vocabulary, the ability to translate, transliterate or transcribe.

Translanguaged writing (discussed in **Chapter 6**) is a mixed form of writing that presupposes the mixing of two languages. It is a manifestation of a non-elite form of writing called “grassroots literacy”, a term borrowed from J. Blommaert (2007). Grassroots literacy is a peripheral form of literacy, usually considered the result of unsystematic learning and partial knowledge. The author of the monograph however claims that in some cases, translanguaged writing can lead to the production of deliberate and subtle mixtures, which are the outcome of profound learning and which produce a desired effect. A special form of translanguaged writing is the attempt of the sign makers to write their own native language using a foreign code (the Roman alphabet). Such inscriptions are written in a language that can hardly be given a name – they are Bulgarian inscriptions “disguised” in foreign letters and as such they produce voice in the local landscape – they symbolize adherence to global values and adapt the local landscape to fit in the superdiverse framework of a globalizing world. The author adopts the level of the linguistic features as the most appropriate level of analysis for translanguaged signs rather than the level of the named languages, which are ideological abstractions.

Chapter 7 deals with the two main functions of the signs in the local space – the informational and the symbolic. The two languages that perform informational functions are Bulgarian and English and it is clearly represented in mirror images. The two languages can also be used symbolically. For Bulgarian this happens in inscriptions where we can observe script imitation (writing that imitates the shape of Old Bulgarian letters) and spelling imitation (writing that imitates the obsolete form of Bulgarian spelling). Another symbolic function of monolingual Bulgarian signs is their occurrence in the public landscape in a state, in which they are deprived of their agency – sold as antiques in an old market street, which has become a modern tourist attraction. These signs used to be emplaced in the landscape during the communist past when they used to function as signs regimenting public space and regulating social life. Now they are exposed as objects to sell symbolizing a period of Bulgarian life which already belongs to the past.

Finally, **Chapter 8** focuses on human participation in the local landscape. Participants that take part in the discourses going on in public space fall into two main groups – signs makers and “sign consumers”. The author offers a deconstruction of these two groups of participants into different social roles of which the most salient roles are the roles of the translator, language learner, guide, and tourist.

In conclusion, it can be said that the book will be of interest not only to researchers

working in the field of sociolinguistics, but also to those involved in the sphere of foreign language teaching, translation studies, cultural studies, sociologists, teacher, students and others.

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✉ **Dr. Yarmila Daskalova, Assoc. Prof.**

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7556-0780>;

Scopus Author ID: 55348293200

Department of English and American Studies

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo

Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria

E-mail: yarmich@yahoo.com