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# HYBRIDITY AND THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

## Abstract

This article argues that a linguistic landscape can be considered a hybrid when many languages and scripts simultaneously work within it. Being heterogeneous, urban signage (shop signs, business signs, outdoor advertising etc.) is open to hybridization, particularly in moments of historical and geopolitical transformation and at the intersections of different cultures. Analyzing the linguistic landscape of Kiev's Podil district, conscious, unconscious, explicit, and implicit hybridity are identified and examined. Linguistic hybridity, as an element of cultural hybridity, is closely related to everyday practices associated with work, food, clothes, hygiene, health, leisure, etc. Organic/unconscious and intentional/conscious forms of hybridization occur in linguistic creativity. The article shows that three languages (Ukrainian, Russian, and English), and two scripts (Latin and Cyrillic), participate in the hybridization process, and examples are cited. During the Soviet period, Russian was the dominant language in Ukraine and Kiev. The Soviet authorities reinforced Russian and weakened Ukrainian. The consequences of this colonial policy can be observed today, and one can see these results in the Ukrainian-Russian hybrid city-text. Since the restoration of Ukrainian independence in 1991, Ukraine has transformed from a post-colonial state to a European state, and has become part of a globalized world which uses English as a lingua franca. The effects of this transformation are visible in the linguistic landscape in the form of Ukrainian-Russian-English, Ukrainian-English, and Russian-English hybrid signs.

**Keywords:** linguistic landscape; hybridity; Kiev Podil; city-text; languages

*Landscape is . . . neither nature nor culture, neither mind nor matter.  
It is the world as known to those who have dwelt in that place,  
those who currently dwell there, those who will dwell there,  
and those whose practical activities take them through  
its many sites and journey along its multiple paths.  
(Urry, 2007, p. 32)*

## 1 Introduction

**1.1** A cityscape usually forms part of the past, present, and future. A city's architecture and its language, or languages, are the best demonstrators of this mix of past-present-future. Humans do not only know and speak a language, but they also live in a verbalized space, especially in

the contemporary city. Every time a person leaves their home they step into the linguistic world of public signs, advertisements, billboards etc. The linguistic picture painted by all these signs depends on the time and place; on the history of the region, state and city; on cultural and language policies; on the type (official, commercial, private); and on the values, education, native language and bi-/multilingualism (or lack of) of the author. These parameters have an influence on the content of signage and determine its heterogeneity. Being heterogeneous, urban signs are open to hybridization, particularly in moments of historical and geopolitical transformation, and at the intersections of different cultures. The first aim of this article is to show that the postcolonial and globalized linguistic landscape is a hybrid landscape. For this purpose, an analysis was conducted of the contemporary linguistic landscape of Kiev's Podil district. The second aim of this article is to prove that the linguistic landscape hybridity of the Podil district is the consequence of mixing Ukraine's colonial past, its present independence, and its ongoing Europeanization/westernization as part of the wider process of globalization.

**1.2** In contemporary Ukrainian society, the words *hybrid / hybridity / hybridization*, popularized by the military conflict on the Ukrainian-Russian border, have a strong negative connotation. Meanwhile, the world on the border has always been, and still is, *hybrid*. Amar Acheraïou points out that ‘*hybridity* has been much discussed in postcolonial theory over the last three decades’ (Acheraïou, 2011, p. 5; see also Bhabha, 2004; Burke, 2009, 2012; Joseph, 1995, 1999; Kraïdy, 2005; Spivak, 1999; Young, 1995). However, the idea “that cultures are not pure but mixed is not a new one. It was the Belgian classicist Franz Cumont who launched the idea of syncretism in his book *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*” (Burke, 2012, p. 4) in 1906 (for more detail see Acheraïou, 2011; Burke, 2012). The contemporary notion of *hybridity* as a ‘historical fact and theoretical tool’ is rooted in 19th century colonial discourse. At the end of the 20th century Homi Bhabha rethought and adapted this term to the field of post-colonial studies:

“Bhabha adopted the term ‘*hybridity*’ and divested it of its colonial connotations of ontological and racial degeneration. With its adoption by Bhabha and, more generally, by postcolonial scholars, the concept of *hybridity* has seen its semantics rehabilitated and widely inflected to stand for inclusiveness, dialogism, subversion, and contestation of grand narratives.” (Acheraïou, 2011, p. 5)

Language makes cultural hybridity visible while also being an element of it. This is why *linguistic hybridity* should be treated as part of cultural hybridity, rather than as a separate phenomenon.

**1.3** The concept of *Linguistic hybridity* was introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin at the beginning of the 20th century.

“What is hybridization? – Bakhtin asks and answers. – It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 358)<sup>1</sup>

Bakhtin then explains the concept of a ‘*linguistic hybrid*’ as ‘it is obligatory for two linguistic consciousnesses to be present, [...], with each belonging to a different system of language’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 359) and he distinguishes between *unconscious* and *intentional/conscious* hybrids. The former ‘is a mixture of two impersonal language consciousnesses’, and the latter is ‘a mixture

<sup>1</sup>More precise explanation of lingual hybridity is in Bakhtin's Russian text: “Мы называем гибридной конструкцией такое высказывание, которое по своим грамматическим (синтаксическим) и композиционным признакам принадлежит одному говорящему, но в котором в действительности смешаны два высказывания, две речевые манеры, два стиля, два «языка», два смысловых и ценностных кругозора. Между этими высказываниями, стилями, языками, кругозорами, повторяем, нет никакой формальной – композиционной и синтаксической – границы; раздел голосов и языков проходит в пределах простого предложения, часто даже одно и то же слово принадлежит одновременно двум языкам, двум кругозорам, скрещивающимся в гибридной конструкции, и, следовательно, имеет два разноречивых смысла, два акцента...” (Bakhtin, 1975, p. 118).

of two individualized language consciousnesses as well as two individual language-intentions' (see Bakhtin, 1975, 1981).

**1.4** *Unconscious* and *intentional/conscious* linguistic hybridity can be *implicit* or *explicit*. Implicit linguistic hybridity is usually unconscious and exists in any natural human language. Such hybridity is not easy to identify or verify. It is mostly interpreted as a neutral phenomenon, as a fact, for instance. The lexicon of any language is always hybrid, created by native and alien elements; furthermore, natural language is the product of this hybridization, the end point of this process. Explicit linguistic hybridity may be unconscious or conscious. Explicit linguistic hybridity is usually regarded as the starting point of the hybridization process. It affects the recipient, provokes conflict and rejection, and creates a negative connotation of the sign. Visibility in the linguistic landscape is a key feature of such hybridity.

## 2 Linguistic Landscape

**2.1** The concept of *linguistic landscape* started its own multidisciplinary career at the moment when the smartphone, equipped with camera, became widely available to researchers. "Signs are part of the textual decor that surrounds us every day, as we walk, ride, or drive through urban environments." (Gorter, 2013, p. 190). The language or languages of this 'decor' have become important not only for different scholars (geographers, sociologists, linguists, historians etc.) but also for authorities, politicians, and businesses. Durk Gorter provides an excellent overview of the concept of 'linguistic landscape' which covers the scope, history, trends and researchers of modern linguistic landscape studies (Gorter, 2013; see also Garvin, 2010, pp. 252–253; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010a, pp. 2–5; Pavlenko, 2009, pp. 248, 249), starting with Rodrigue Landry and Richard Bourhis' well-known 1997 definition of this notion:

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

Such an understanding and definition have made the *linguistic landscape* a part of culture and a research tool.

**2.2** According to Landry and Bourhis, the *linguistic landscape* 'serves as a marker of the geographical territory inhabited by a given language community' and 'delineate the territorial limits of the language group it harbors relative to other linguistic communities inhabiting adjoining territories'. As a part of culture, it has a symbolic function 'where language has emerged as the most important dimension of ethnic identity' (see Landry & Bourhis, 1997, pp. 25–27). Today, it is hard to find 'pure' monocultural and monolingual geographical territories and communities. Territories have become more and more amorphous, borders more and more diaphanous, and communities more and more heterogeneous. 'Pure' linguistic landscapes are more and more difficult to find, especially in regions where colonial past, independent present, and Western / European future meet. In this mixed space, the linguistic landscape uses many languages which identify many cultures. Several languages often coexist and work simultaneously in the same community. Under such circumstances one 'impersonal language consciousness' mixes with another 'impersonal language consciousness', or one 'individualized language consciousness' mixes with another 'individualized language consciousness', or these two impersonal and individualized consciousnesses mix mutually. As a result, one can observe examples of unconscious and conscious linguistic hybridity in the city-text of the Podil district of Kiev, where more than two languages are present in one sign. Three languages are mainly used: the language of the former metropole (Russian), the official language (Ukrainian), and the lingua franca (English).

### 3 The Linguistic Landscape of Kiev's Podil District

**3.1** Aneta Pavlenko, in the article *Language Conflict in Post-Soviet Linguistic Landscapes*, twice mentions that ‘only a few studies have examined post-Soviet linguistic landscapes’ (Pavlenko, 2009, pp. 248, 254). This is true. There have only been a handful of works dealing with the Ukrainian linguistic landscape (see Beleň, 2012; Bever, 2010; Matsiuk, 2017; Oliňnyk, 2013; and the most famous Pavlenko, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2017). Moreover, the notion of the linguistic landscape of the Podil district of Kiev as a hybrid space has never been taken into consideration. The linguistic landscape of Podil is worthy of investigation because it is one of the oldest parts of Kiev. The history of Podil dates back to the end of the 15th century (when Kiev was granted Magdeburg Rights), but some artefacts from this area date back to the 9th century or even older. Podil has been the city’s political, commercial, intellectual, and cultural centre for 400 years. During the Soviet period, the city centre shifted from Podil to Chreshchatyk and Sovetskaja / Kalinina / October Revolution square. Nowadays, the shift of the centre from Chreshchatyk and Maidan back once more to Podil and Sofijska square is underway. Eastern Europe’s oldest university, the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, and other high schools, institutions, multinational corporation offices, museums, global, regional and Ukrainian restaurant chains, hotels and hostels, boutiques etc. are now located in Podil. The district’s pedestrian streets and squares are the stage for both traditional and modern performances and events. Ukraine, Kiev, and Podil are fruitful objects for investigation ‘because, in the past two decades, post-Soviet symbolic landscapes have undergone drastic changes reflecting both nation-building efforts and the transition to the new capitalist and global economies’ (Pavlenko, 2009, p. 253).

**3.2** Podil’s linguistic landscape, as a ‘public use of written language’ (Pavlenko, 2010, p. 133), reveals its hybridity at both the micro and macro levels. The micro level encompasses single texts (the names of institutions, companies, stores, and restaurants, advertising and posters, etc.) which are interlinked with only one extra-lingual object. The macro level covers the whole of Podil’s textual space. Microtexts usually mix two (Ukrainian and Russian/Ukrainian and English/Russian and English) or three (English/Ukrainian/Russian) languages, and two scripts (Latin and Cyrillic) in one narrative. However, not all microtexts here are hybrid. Depending on the ‘information arrangement’ of the text, scholars identify “... (i) *duplicating*, (ii) *fragmentary*, (iii) *overlapping*, and (iv) *complementary*, where different types of information are provided in each language, transmitting somewhat different messages to different audiences” (Reh, 2004, pp. 8–15); or “*Equivalent* texts are those that have similar content in two or more languages [...]. *Disjoint* texts have different content [...]. It is also possible to have *overlapping* language content, a mixed type in which some of the content is repeated in the other language” (Sebba, 2012, p. 36).<sup>2</sup> *Overlapping* and *complementary* texts are definitely hybrid. As a general rule, such features are characteristic of commercial signs and some private signs in Podil. Official signs, with the official language (Ukrainian) duplicated into English, and private announcements on city notice boards, mainly in Russian, are usually non-hybrid and lie beyond the scope of this article.

**3.3** As mentioned above, Ukrainian, Russian, and English, along with both the Latin and Cyrillic scripts, are involved in the hybridization process of Podil’s commercial linguistic landscape. For instance, there are signs in which **Ukrainian-Russian-English** are blended: *ЖЕЛТОК* / *Київ-дайнер Жовтюк* / *Kyiv 2012 / DINER CAFE*; *Салон краси* / *Tamriko* / *Відчинено без сухідних* / *L'oreal Professionnel* / *Парикмахерские услуги...*; *Premium coffee* / *Если кофе –*

<sup>2</sup>“Similar observations are made by Backhaus (2007, p. 90) and Reh (2004, pp. 8–15) using different terminology. Backhaus calls texts *homophonic* when they are complete translations of each other (i.e. the same message is conveyed in two or more different codes); *mixed*, where there is a partial *overlap* of messages but the content conveyed is not identical in the different codes, and *polyphonic*, where the messages are different. Reh uses the terms *duplicating* (for complete translations), *fragmentary* (where translation is partial), *overlapping* and *complementary*” (Sebba, 2012, p. 36; see also Pavlenko, 2017).

то только премиум / Їж пий насолоджується / Холодні коктейлі / Термінал тимчасово не працює / Чаєвые на Одессу; Ноябрь / Ресторан подільської кухні / авторський проект Іллі Ноябрьова / Меню / Смачно та атмосферно... / Welcome to the Noyabr; Руккола / италіянське кафе для друзей / щасливі години Tasty! Examples of **Ukrainian-Russian** blending are: *Мир Поля и Декора / ПАРКЕТ / ШПАЛЕРИ / ШТОРИ;* Горячая выпечка / Гаряча випічка / Завітайте до нас; ЗРУЧНО ТА ВИГІДНО / МАМА ДАРАГАЯ / ТАК! МИ ДОРОГО ОЦІНЮЄМО ЗОЛОТО І ТЕХНІКУ / НОВА ПРОГРАМА / Реальна ціна; Ремонт взуття, шкіргалантереї / Виготовлення ключів, металокераміки, автодзеркал / Пошив штор / Фотокерамика / Ремонт одяжди любой сложности / Замена молний / Подгонка одяжди по фігури; Будинок № 35 належить ЖЕК-802 / Товарищи жильцы! Надстройка балконов запрещается; The mixing of **Ukrainian-English** occurs: Кліринговий дім / Цінуємо більше / Privat Banking; LONDON / кавовий дім; #BLINSTORY ... твоя історія смаку; STAR BURGER / БАР ОРИГІНАЛ БУРГЕР / я твій бургер назважись; PROcosmetics / професійна косметика та аксесуари / Косметика; Golden Company / Innovation System / Професійна косметика; Optica.ua: Eyewear and sunglasses / Контактна корекція / Комп'ютерна діагностика / Виготовлення та ремонт окулярів; and **Russian-English** hybrid microtexts can also be found: DECORATION CLUB / ОБОИ, ТКАНИ, МЕБЕЛЬ, КОВРЫ, СВЕТ; Beauty Avenue / шоу-рум / косметология / Мы открыты для Вас / Без выходных; Enjoy smoke / vape shop: Замените средний дым вкусным паром; ЭйнШтейн coffee / All you need is love / a good cup of COFFEE; Coffee dream / Mocco / Frappe / Хороший день начните с чашечки хорошего кофе.

Typical practices of hybridization include combining (i) the common name in Ukrainian and the proper name in English, such as *PENCILVANIA* Мережа канцелярських магазинів; *ROSHEN* Фірмовий магазин; *The FLEXX* Італійське взуття; (ii) the proper name in English or Russian and additional information in Ukrainian, e.g. *Імперія Хутра / Империя Меха / Пн-Вт-Ср-Чт-Пн-Сб-Нд* (неділя instead of воскресенье); *Николай / Пироговая / Бар-буфет / Очень вкусные пироги!* / Щоденно 10-23.

Ukrainian-English and, to a lesser degree, Russian-English hybrids belong to the commercial signage of mid-market and upmarket businesses, oriented towards the wealthy middle class and foreigners; Russian-Ukrainian hybrids are typical for the commercial signage of downmarket businesses, oriented to a poorer clientele.

**3.4** Ukrainian language legislation still is in progress. the Constitution of Ukraine, the Declaration of the Nationality of Ukraine, the “Principles of the State Language Policy” Bill (which has now been cancelled, leading to the return of the Soviet-era “Languages in the Ukrainian SSR” law), the “Languages in Ukraine” Bill, the “Prohibition of Narrowing the Spheres of the Use of Regional Languages and the Languages of National Minorities of Ukraine” Bill, and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) are the legislative documents which regulate language usage in Ukraine. All these documents determine different aspects of language usage in the official and public spheres. According these documents, Ukrainian, as the official state language has prerogative. Russian is classified as one among other minority languages. Consequently, the use of Ukrainian and the Cyrillic script in the commercial sector, being a public space, is obligatory. Nevertheless, the examples from the Podil district show the subversion of the official norms of language choice. The ‘unique characteristic of today’s Kiev is [with] the discontinuity between the language of the cityscape (predominantly Ukrainian) and the language of everyday interaction (predominantly Russian)’ (Pavlenko, 2010, p. 133). Russian, as the main language of the former colony, still circulates in Ukraine, and for many citizens it is their native or first language and is used in the public space. Due to the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict, the shift from Russian to Ukrainian, the upgrading of Ukrainian and the downgrading of Russian, the creation of a new Ukrainian identity, and the rethinking of history (especially that of the Soviet era), the Russian language is increasingly interpreted as a marker of the colonial past. In place of Russian, English has been aggressively conquering space in Ukrainian cities and villages, displacing not only Rus-

sian, but also Ukrainian. Such language perturbations are a slow process, and the rival languages exist in the cityscape simultaneously, regardless of legislation.



Figure 1: Restaurant sign in Podil, Kiev 2018  
(Reproduced with the permission of the author, Anna Lishchynska)



Figure 2: Restaurant sign in Podil, Kiev 2018  
(Reproduced with the permission of the author, Anna Lishchynska)

**3.5** Errors are a natural occurrence in any linguistic landscape, and Podil is no exception. There are many examples of microtexts containing errors, e.g. *Wake Up Навчання іноземним мовам в Україні* (correctly *іноземних*); *VVS Fashion. Від українського виробника Зроблено з любовью* (correctly *з любов'ю*); *ONE MORE PIZZA ще одна піцерія another на ПОДОЛІ* (correctly *ПОДОЛІ*). The first and second are examples of grammar mistakes which arise as a result of the influence of Russian grammar and orthography. The third is more a verbal game, or an example of conscious hybridization, widespread in Podil, and achieved through the combination of not only the languages, but also alphabets, e.g. *BestПАР* (electronic cigarettes); *OXOTA NA OVETS МЯСО И АЗИЯ* (Figure 1); *Невинное Leto; Цветочный FЛОом; РИБАLOVE; Cheburек; ковЗанка, ЛюбиStock*. All these examples, with the exception of *РИБАLOVE*, are explicit hybrids. **РИБАLOVE** (Figure 2) is both an explicit and an implicit hybrid. Explicitly,

the Ukrainian **риба** and English **love** are joined into one word, **риболов** [rybolov], which means fisherman; additionally, the semantics ‘*someone, who likes to eat fish*’ is contained in the restaurant’s name. Implicitly, the name of the restaurant is a trilingual hybrid. In Ukrainian, there is no such word as *риболов*, it is a Russian word. The Ukrainian equivalent is *рибалка* [rybalka]. Therefore, the casual observer can see the conscious and explicit Ukrainian-English hybrid, while a philologist or anybody else who knows more about the words *рибалка* and *риболов* can discern the implicit Ukrainian-English-Russian hybrid. Constructions which mix English, Ukrainian or Russian words in the Latin script and/or English spelling or transliteration are also examples of conscious hybridization: **Bochka Art Pub**, **Ars Kerylos**; **Bursa Gallery**; **Coffe in the MISTO**; **Uspikh / agricultural corporation**; **buterbrod V stakane / vegan café**, **Illinsky / bisness centre and conference hall**.



Figure 3: National Bank, former St. Katherine church and Greek Monastery, Podil, Kiev 2019 (Author’s photograph)

**3.6** A *Hybrid macrotext* is an integral continuum of microtexts, joined by a common space (city, district, street etc.), type (official, commercial, private) and functional purpose (object name, announcement, prohibition etc.). Only one difference exists between microtexts and macrotexts – the author of a microtext is personalized (an owner, seller, buyer, resident of Podil, etc.). A macrotext is written by a so-called collective author. The main feature of this collective author is polyphony, which mainly predetermines unconscious hybridity. Again, three languages, Ukrainian, Russian and English, are the actors at the macro level of Podil’s linguistic landscape, with predominance belonging to English and the Latin script, for instance, *Vagabond café*, *Living room*, *#SexEdMuseum / Art centre / Art-Café*, *Ranch / Burger state*, *Concept store and Hair design studio / Esthetic syndicate / In esthetics we trust*, *Podil East India Company*, *English school Speak up*, *Tequila House*, *Magic Snail*, *Irish Pub / O’Connor’s*, *Andrew’s Irish pub*, *Star Burger*, *Tarantino / Wine Bar / Steak is here*, *Sl Talking / Fresh and healthy take away*, *FlyBAr / Eat*.



Figure 4: Shop sign in Podil, Kiev 2019 (Author's photograph)

*Drink. Fly, Laura Ashley, PR Bar.* The most frequently used word in the Latin script is *coffee*, e.g. *CoffeeDoor / brew bar & Coffee shop; Coffee club, Sex Ed Coffee; Coffee stop / best in city; Coffee Dream; Coffee to go; Maryland / coffee blend; Coffee Guru; Hot Dogs Coffee; CoffeeBox* etc. This is a feature of globalization and a manifestation of the culture of public consumption of coffee, which is typical of the contemporary European city.

**3.7** Several other languages reinforce English and the Latin script in Podil's linguistic landscape. **Italian:** *Dolce caffè; Silvio D'Italia; Gastro di Italia / Club; Roberto Boticelli; Cipollino; Pizza; Piatto / Pasta Bar;* **Spain:** *Festival de Cocina Espanola; Viva la revolution!;* or **French:** *CafeBoutique; Reprisa / Artisanale Boutique Patisserie.* Additionally, **Church Slavonic, Greek** (Figure 3), **Turkish**, with an exotic Arabic script حلال (halal / Turkish restaurant / халяль), and **Japanese** hieroglyphs (Figure 4) strengthen the displacement of not only Russian, but also of Ukrainian in the commercial segment of contemporary Podil's linguistic landscape.

## 4 Conclusions

**4.1** Contemporary *hybridity/cultural hybridity* has shifted from the periphery into the centre of human life and has become 'one of the emblematic notions of our era' (Kraidy, 2005, p. 1). This shift has been conditioned by a 'moment of historical transformation' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 1) in Eastern Europe and Ukraine (the end of colonial subordination, the beginning of independence and globalization). As an 'emblematic notion of our era', *hybridity*, or more precisely *cultural hybridity*, is definitely a neutral phenomenon, an 'effort to maintain a sense of balance among practices, values, and customs of two or more different cultures' (Albert & Páez, 2012) or 'an association of ideas, concepts, and themes that at once reinforce and contradict each other' (Kraidy, 2005, p. VII).

**4.2** During the Soviet period, Russian was the dominant language in Ukraine and Kiev. The Soviet authorities reinforced Russian and weakened Ukrainian. Today, the consequences of this colonial policy can be observed and one can see them in the Ukrainian-Russian hybrid city-text. Since the restoration of independence in 1991, Ukraine has been undergoing a transformation from a post-colonial state to a European state, and has become a part of a globalized world with English as a lingua franca. This process is also visible in the linguistic landscape, through Ukrainian-Russian-English, Ukrainian-English, and Russian-English hybrid signage.

**4.3** The commercial segment of Podil's linguistic landscape is characterized by a downgrading of Russian and an upgrading of Ukrainian and, especially, English. Linguistic hybridity, as an

element of cultural hybridity, is closely connected to everyday practices of work, food, clothes, hygiene, health, leisure, etc. Organic/unconscious and intentional/conscious hybridization occur in linguistic creativity. Some contradictions occur when spelling, stylistic or semantic mistakes emerge in microtexts, or when the macrotext is too variegated.

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