




## A study of the English language and the processes of glocalization in the linguistic landscape of Bratislava

## Research Article

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Olha Bohuslavská and Elena Ciprianová 

Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia

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**Corresponding author:**

Elena Ciprianová,  
email: [eciprianova@ukf.sk](mailto:eciprianova@ukf.sk)

**1. Introduction**

Over the last few decades English has become an integral part of urban signage while taking different forms and performing a variety of functions. Numerous studies of linguistic landscapes, such as Gorter (2006), Huebner (2006), Cenoz and Gorter (2009), Lanza and Woldemariam (2009), Bolton (2012), and Tupas and Rubdy (2015) have demonstrated that the investigation of linguistic landscapes in multilingual settings can increase our understanding of the close relationship between English and globalization. Slovakia being no exception, the widespread use of English is observed on a large amount of public and private signs in the country's urban environment. Since Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, frequently becomes a meeting point for diverse languages and cultures, this study focuses on the phenomenon of glocalization and investigates the ways in which the English utilized in the signage mirrors the interaction between the global and the local. The results based on the corpus of 464 signs collected in the city centre indicate not only the substantial extent to which English penetrates the Slovak urban space but also shed some new light on how English, mainly through carrying its symbolic value, contributes to the construction of social reality and participates in the processes of glocalization.

**2. The global and the local in the study of the linguistic landscape**

Public space is never neutral; rather it can be viewed as a negotiated area where local and global conditions are intermingled. In the early 1990s, Robertson (1992) termed the combination of globalization and localization as glocalization and characterized the process as 'the universalization of particularization and the particularization of universalism' (Robertson, 1992: 100). The concept originally comes from the Japanese word *dochakuka* meaning 'living on one's own land'. In the context of micro-marketing the term referred to adjusting products and services to local cultures (Robertson, 1995: 28). Glocalization is a multifaceted process which, in Urry's (2000: 210) words, shows that the relationships between the global and local are symbiotic, unstable, irreversible and cannot exist without each other.

With the rapid expansion of English, glocalization finds itself reflected greatly in public signage and becomes of interest to researchers in the rapidly developing studies of the linguistic landscape (Gorter, 2006; Pan, 2015; Manan et al., 2017). The concept of 'glocalization' periodically appears in relation to transliteration from one language to another (Curtin, 2009; Alomoush, 2018). While Curtin (2009) discusses Romanization of Chinese in official signage on trans(local), regional and global levels, Alomoush (2018) exemplifies how global and local elements manifest themselves through the employment of Arabic, English, and Roman scripts. More importantly, Pan (2015: 163) observes that 'public signs are a product of an unequal process of glocalization as the localized forms, functions, and values of Englishes illustrate people's social aspiration, their differentiated access to social resources, and their places in the social hierarchy'.

When English migrates to a new place, it consequently becomes appropriated by its users. The relocation and adjustment to particular communication contexts divulge the specific position of English in a multilingual society. Although English has no official status in Slovakia, it closely follows the pattern common in other European countries by achieving the privilege of being the most studied foreign language at all stages of national education. The recent data (EF EPI, 2021), which included 2 million participants

from 112 countries, shows that Slovakia ranks 20<sup>th</sup> and belongs to those countries with a high proficiency level of English. The special role of English, however, goes beyond the educational context and manifests itself in other societal spheres such as the massive inflow of English words into Slovak (Vépyová, 2011), publication of newspapers in English (e.g. *The Slovak Spectator*), and above all in the growing use of English in the Slovak urban landscape (Ďuricová & Lauková, 2021). Several studies of city signage in Eastern Europe have been published (Dimova, 2007; Pavlenko, 2010; Ferenčík, 2013; Atanassova, 2022), but the topic of glocalization in East European linguistic landscapes in comparison to other regions of the world still remains a less researched area. Thus, this study aims to investigate various forms of glocalization in the Bratislava cityscape, language creativity, linguistic innovations and the mutual construction of the global and the local accompanying the Englishization of the public space. While exploring the linguistic landscape of Bratislava, we seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What languages predominate on public and private signs?
2. How is English specifically used on different types of signs?
3. How do the global and the local components of Bratislava's LL interact with each other?

### 3. Research location, data and methodology

The choice of the locality was motivated by the fact that the capital city has traditionally been a multilingual place. Historically, Bratislava was a meeting point for many nationalities, among whom Germans, Hungarians, and Slovaks emerged as the largest ethnic communities. The historical names – German Pressburg, Hungarian Pozsony, and Slovak Bratislava – also testify to the multicultural past of the city. In the 1880s almost 63.5% of Bratislava's population considered their mother tongue to be German, 15% Hungarian, and only approximately 15% used Slovak as their native language (Nádaská, 2017). Since then the ethnic composition has changed significantly, but Bratislava has kept its multilingual nature. According to the latest census (The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2020: 75), out of 435,295 Bratislava inhabitants, 89.74% of population are Slovaks, 3.43% Hungarians, 1.57% Czechs, and only 0.39% are Germans, while other minorities such as Polish, Ukrainian, Ruthenian and Romany constitute less than 1% each.

Nowadays, Bratislava is a modern commercial centre, a cosmopolitan city, located close to two other capitals, Vienna and Budapest, and which is annually visited by thousands of tourists. The research was conducted in the central area of the capital, in the Main Square and the adjoining streets which are within a radius of 500m. A map of the research site (Figure 1) displays the selected streets and squares where the signs were captured. The central part of the city was chosen mainly because of high concentration of governmental and foreign institutions as well as various private businesses associated with the appearance of English. We assumed that the linguistic diversity essential to the city centre would provide rich linguistic data for the analysis of English and other languages used in the area.

Using a mobile phone camera, a total of 464 signs were gathered for the purposes of this study. Based on Backhaus's work (2006), we identified a unit of analysis as 'any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame' (Backhaus, 2006: 55). The corpus contained signs from the windows, walls or doors of commercial entities such as shops, offices, restaurants and hotels, signs from public entities such as museums, monuments, libraries, schools and other governmental institutions, billboards, advertising posters or placards, and bus stops. Only fixed, immovable signs that could be read from the outside at arm's length distance were recorded (Griffin, 2004: 6). If the same sign was repeatedly found within the research zone (in a street, on window displays or doors within the same building), it was counted only once. The data collection was limited to public and commercial discourse. Following Schlick's study (2003), we included proper names written in Slovak or in foreign languages such as Kaufland or Billa, the meaning of which we could identify. Transgressive signs, for example graffiti, were excluded from the sample.

Indeed, the linguistic landscape is shaped by various social actors who make decisions about the languages displayed, the placement and the design of signs. The government is a significant participant in controlling the form and content of public signage with respect to the language policy, while private signs produced by individual citizens or companies exhibit greater diversity and serve different functions. Following the classification of Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), we divided the collected items into the top-down signs issued by public authorities to regulate some of the activities in the LL and the bottom-up signs of the non-official agents such as shop owners, providers of sports, and recreation businesses, as well as catering services or accommodation. Next, all signs were categorized as monolingual, bilingual or multilingual (involving at least three languages) in order to show the representation of English in relation to other languages used on signage in Bratislava. English, as far as it occurs in a multilingual environment, becomes part of multilingual repertoires. This means that whenever we study the role of English, we also need to look at the languages with which it co-exists and co-occurs (Blommaert, 2014: 131).

Signs are inherently multimodal as they typically rely on both verbal and visual content to convey their messages (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010). According to Kress (2010), signs make specialized use of three modes: writing, image and colour. Each of these plays a significant role: 'writing names and image shows, while color frames and highlights . . .' (Kress, 2010: 1). All resources including textual organisation, placement, typography, letterform size, colour and image help to construct the complex meaning of the sign. Blommaert and Huang argue that 'the text supports, emphasises or repeats the information contained in the non-textual, visual sign, and vice versa' (Blommaert & Huang, 2010: 6). Therefore, the written elements of the sign cannot be studied separately from the visual. Taking a visual semiotic perspective, we will explore language choice and code preference (Scollon & Scollon, 2003: 116–124) in signage displayed in the centre



**Figure 1.** A map of Bratislava Main Square and adjoining streets (created by Ivan Magala, 2021)

of the Slovak capital. Our basic assumption is that the presence or absence of certain languages as well as the signage design provide information about ‘the relative power and status of linguistic communities in a given territory’ (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006: 8).

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 English and other languages on monolingual signs

English was found on 322 out of 464 signs and comprises 69% of the signs collected in Bratislava’s centre. The data indicates that language choice correlates with the top-down and bottom-up authorship of the signs, but compared to other foreign or minority languages English predominates in all categories of top-down, bottom-up, monolingual, bilingual and multilingual signs photographed in Bratislava. Figure 2 below shows that the percentage of monolingual English signs is not particularly high (approximately 7%); nevertheless, it still outstrips any other non-Slovak

language used in public signage, such as Czech, German, French, Polish and Latin, which together constitute only about 10% of top-down monolingual signs. These signs, which appeared mostly on the walls, doors or window



**Figure 2.** Monolingual top-down signs

displays of embassies, consulates, institutes and collegiums representing foreign missions, demonstrate that everyone is an addressee of a visual sign, but not everyone is an addressee for the text written on the sign (Blommaert & Huang 2010:7).

The high frequency of Slovak-only public signs demonstrates the power of the government to determine the nature of the linguistic landscape. Slovak is the official language in Slovakia and its usage in public communication is regulated by law. The Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic (1995) asserts that the state language (Slovak) is prioritised over other languages in all areas of public communication. In accordance with the law, Slovak is the main language in more than 82% of monolingual top-down signs. Governmental authorities seem to play an important part in constructing the nationalist discourse through shaping the linguistic landscape. The prevalence of Slovak as the language of pride (Heller & Duchêne, 2012) points to the consistent implementation of the 'Slovak first' language policy viewing Slovak as 'the most important attribute of the Slovak nation specificity and the most precious value of its cultural heritage' (The Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, 1995: 1).

The amount of English used in monolingual bottom-up signs is striking. Despite the legal requirement that Slovak has to be used on all types of signs, including advertisements and notices which aim to inform the public, particularly in retail shops, sporting facilities and restaurants, in streets, by and above roads, at airports, bus stations and railway stations, as well as in public transport vehicles, English prevails with a significant number of nearly 70% (see Figure 3).

The majority of monolingual bottom-up English signs were found on the fronts of restaurants, cafés, and bars (39 out of 75 signs, which corresponds to 52%), or on food, book, music and fashion shops (14 signs, which correlates with 19%). Monolingual English signs were also located on gift shops (eight signs, which is consistent with 11%), and on hotels and hostels (five signs, which corresponds to 6%), while a few appeared on other facilities including some business office buildings, massage centres and night-clubs (nine signs, which equates to 12%).



Figure 3. Monolingual bottom-up signs

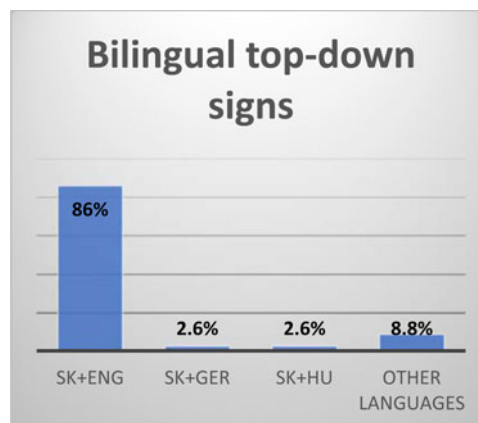


Figure 4. Bilingual top-down signs

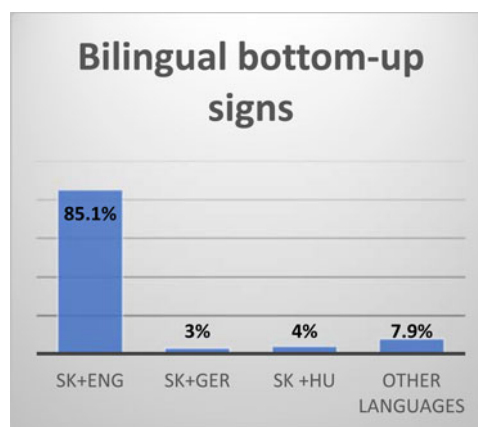


Figure 5. Bilingual bottom-up signs

#### 4.2 English and other languages on bilingual and multilingual signs

Similar patterns of English presence also emerged in the category of bilingual signs. The graphs below show that English is equally dominant among top-down and bottom-up bilingual signs. Both Slovak and English appeared on 98 out of 114 signs (86% in top-down items) (Figure 4) and on 86 out of 101 signs (85.1% in bottom-up items) (Figure 5). By contrast, less than 3% of top-down signs and between 3% and 4% of bottom-up bilingual items encompassed Slovak and German or Hungarian.

On the whole, multilingual signs were far less frequent in the analysed sample, but again the predominance of English was obvious. Out of 55 items displaying mixed codes 52 contained English, which corresponds to 95%. The most common language combinations were Slovak-English-German (21 signs) and Slovak-English-Hungarian (ten signs), while the occurrence of other combinations (for example, Slovak-English-French, English-Chinese-Slovak, Slovak-German-Italian, Slovak-German-Swedish) was much lower, limited only to a few instances.

The same legal regulation (The Act, 1995) which determines the choice of language on signs in public spaces and makes the use of Slovak mandatory also determines the visual design of bilingual or multilingual signage. If a



Figure 6. Identical Slovak-English bilingual texts in Bratislava city centre

sign contains a text in other languages, the text in another language must be presented after the text in the state language and be contextually identical with the state language text. The text in the other language has to be presented in the same or smaller font than the state language text. Data gathered in this study include a plethora of contextually identical Slovak-English signs, as seen in Figure 6. However, several violations of the law signalling the prime status of English occurred in bottom-up signs.

Figures 7 and 8 illustrate mismatches between the official language policy and the autonomous practices of the sign makers. In both signs below the preferred code proves to be English. The visual hierarchy is created through placement, typography, and textual organization.

The poster in Figure 7 shows English in a privileged position on top, above Slovak. Figure 8 advertising a casino in Bratislava contains multiple languages. The French advertising corporation, the Italian name of the gambling place *Banco Casino*, and the Spanish word *plaza*, a part of the name of the luxurious four-star hotel. Most of the information in the billboard is presented in English. It is written in serif capital letters located in the centre position. The red colour makes English even more noticeable. Slovak appears only in the city name Bratislava and in the translation of the original English sentence: *Located at Hotel Crowne Plaza*. The direction of translation also

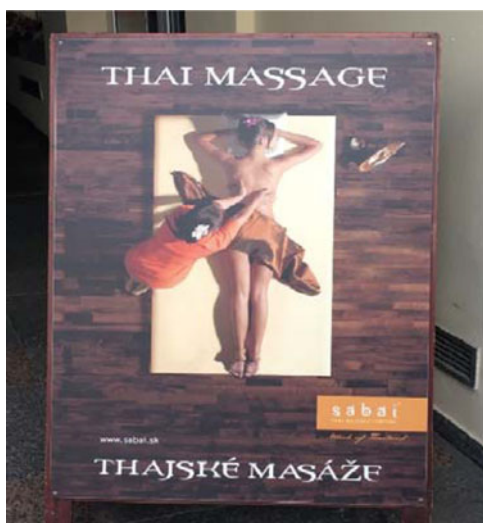


Figure 7. Thai massage poster



Figure 8. Banco Casino Bratislava billboard

reflects the prominent position of English since the Slovak text, in considerably smaller font size, comes second.

#### 4.3 Glocalized English in Bratislava's linguistic landscape

The excessive presence of English has been confirmed in monolingual, bilingual and multilingual bottom-up signs. Increasingly, English encounters the local languages and cultures and becomes involved in the parallel processes of globalization and localization, making the city's linguistic landscape a more heterogeneous place. The nature of the data presupposes that English, as a lingua franca, will address people of various linguacultural backgrounds. The results of our study are in line with Ben-Rafael's claim (2009: 50) that bottom-up signs are more oriented toward less strictly local customers. Bratislava is a popular tourist destination, so English found on signage often serves as a means of communication with foreign visitors. Information concerning opening hours, smoking areas, air conditioning, availability of Wi-Fi and the content of menus is often provided in English. Nevertheless, our data largely indicates that English on commercial businesses has been selected and adapted mainly to perform a symbolic function as the language is typically associated with modernity, social prestige and luxury. These observations are consistent with the major trends reported in previous linguistic landscape studies



Figure 9. Good life night club sign



Figure 10. Beauty & Woman Salon



Figure 11. Just For You Nail Studio

of English in different regions of the world including European cities (Ross, 1997; Schlick, 2003; Griffin, 2004), Addis Ababa (Lanza & Woldemariam, 2014), Beijing (Pan, 2015), and Jarash (Alomoush, 2018). In Bratislava, fashionable English names of private businesses such as *Luxury Bratislava* (a luxurious fashion store), *Beer Palace*, *keiks*, *pulitzer restaurant* (both written in nonstandard English orthography with small initial letters), *Nobile Restaurant*, *Good Life* (a night club), *CORK Taste & Shop* and *CAFFE 4 U* connote delicacy and excellence, and invite one to enjoy the individualized pleasure of

beautiful things. The English names were mostly found on upmarket restaurants, cafés, bars and clubs, on confectionery, ice cream, coffee and wine shops, and on hairdressing or modern nail salons (see examples in Figures 9, 10 and 11). The occurrences of English inscriptions correlate with certain 'areas of activity' (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006) intended for wealthier clientele as opposed to the unilingual Slovak shop names, such as *Pekáreň* 'Bakery', *Potraviny* 'Grocery', *Stará tržnica* 'The Old Market' or *Papiernictvo Arka* 'Stationery shop Arka', which tend to evoke everyday mundane activities,



**Figure 12.** An ice cream shop sign

and thus are unlikely to carry the same aura and have the same effect on the viewer.

Additionally, to heighten the attractiveness of local businesses, captivating English slogans expressing human language creativity are commonly employed to draw customers' attention: *Life is short make it sweet*, *Behind every successful person is a substantial amount of coffee* (a variation of the common English saying: *Behind every successful man there stands a woman*), *Nice to meet you!* (a welcome sign based on homonymy, i.e. the identical pronunciation of *meet* and *meat*, displayed on a window of the gourmet restaurant *Carnevalle* located in one of the main squares in the Old Town), *You cannot buy happiness - but you can buy ice cream* (Figure 12) and many others.

The plentiful fashionable English signs are intended to beautify, and to appeal to foreigners as well as to the younger English-speaking local generation. Due to the fact that English has been the most studied foreign language in Slovak education since the 1990s, the sign writers may assume that educated Slovaks are competent in English at least to the degree that enables them understand the message. The same tendencies to perceive English as the language of opportunity and prosperity documented elsewhere (e.g. in Pakistan by Manan et al., 2017), also emerge in Slovakia (Ciprianová & Vančo, 2010). By contrast, the decline of interest in German, once widely spoken in Bratislava and taught extensively in Slovak schools as a foreign language, is now clearly reflected in its infrequent occurrence on signage. The photograph of a confectionery shop below (Figure 13) provides an illustrative example of the fairly rare signs containing German on the streets of Bratislava. The statistics also speak for themselves. In 2022, only 1,089 high school graduates chose to take the *Maturita* (a school leaving exam) in German, compared to 33,901 (86%) who preferred English (The National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements, 2022).

The wide-spread code-mixing using English words or phrases in advertisements adds 'a cosmopolitan flair to the message' (Huebner, 2006: 48) and encourages the growth of the multilingual and international character of



**Figure 13.** German on the window of a confectionery shop

Bratislava. Mixing English with other languages on the fronts of ethnic restaurants such as *Ashoka Authentic Indian Restaurant*, *Nepal restaurant* (also in Nepali script) and *LA CAVA BARCELONA Spanish restaurant* serves as a means of attracting and serving predominantly foreign tourists. An interview with one of the restaurant owners in Bratislava disclosed that before their menu was translated into English, the restaurant was less successful. Although the evidence may be anecdotal, it implies that the use of English is perceived by local business owners as one possible way of increasing their profits.

The combination of Slovak and English words was abundant in signs featuring meals and drinks. Figure 14 shows the items *zmrzlinové sendviče* 'ice cream sandwiches', milkshakes and freshly baked cookies which represent the influence of globalizing American culture, while Figure 15



Figure 14. Code-mixing on a Slovak-English food menu



Figure 15. Lochness Scottish Pub

illustrates an international menu offered by a Scottish pub found in the city centre.

On the red wall of the Scottish restaurant, we can see three messages in close proximity. There is a symbol of Scottish folklore, the Loch Ness monster, after which the pub is evidently named. In the upper left corner, we find a picture of a burger and the information saying *Slovak*. In addition, the menu on the bottom includes – alongside steaks, fish and chips, salads, and soups – different kinds of burgers: Swiss Burger, Classic Burger, Wild Wild West Burger, Double Royal Burger, and a local version of the burger made with beef, vegetables, bacon and *bryndza* (a typical Slovak soft cheese which is a key ingredient in local cuisine). Burgers are sold throughout the world, so the *Slovak burger* serves as a prototypical example of the localization of globalized fast food.

The commercially motivated choice of English becomes an expression of globalisation as well as of local identity. Our sample contains many cases in which English becomes a marketing tool for selling local products. The interaction between the global (the English language) and the local

(the Slovak language and culture) takes various forms. For example, in Figure 16, the English words *Slovak restaurant* appear alongside symbols of Slovak cultural identity. Firstly, the name of the restaurant itself *Koliba Kamzík* invokes a poetic image of rural Slovakia. *Koliba* refers to a traditional wooden hut built by shepherds and a *kamzík* is a chamois, a symbol of the High Tatras, the popular tourist destination in northern Slovakia. The logo positioned on top in the centre and a piece of Slovak embroidery placed on the bottom visually stand out and work together with the text to construct the message inviting potential, mostly foreign customers. The English inscription in the centre above the entrance indicates the superior quality of the restaurant to the guests.

The advertisement in Figure 17 provides another example of the global-local interplay. The billboard advertises a shop which, according to the website, sells primarily high-quality locally produced wines. Through code-mixing and local cultural resources, the advertisement is especially more likely to appeal to younger English-speaking Slovaks. The two blends *wincho* & *caffcho* obviously index glocalization. The newly created blends are joined by the symbol &, representing the English conjunction *and*, and are composed of the first parts of the words *wine* and *coffee* (here spelt as *caff*, which is the same orthographic feature reported by Dimova, 2007, and Jaworski, 2015) and the final parts of the Slovak *vinčo* and *kafčo* (words for *wine* and *coffee* characteristic of Slovak youth slang): *wine+vinčo = wincho*, *coffee+kafčo = caffcho*. The Slovak name of the shop positioned in the centre and highlighted in red alludes to the regional identity. *Kuca Paca* is an expressive dialect phrase meaning a physical conflict or a chaotic situation. In the right upper corner, there is a list of phrases: *rezervácie, degustácie, akcie* (in English ‘reservations’, ‘tastings’, ‘events’). At the bottom, more information written in Slovak, in black, bold characters, appears: *vinotéka a vínny bar* ‘wine shop and wine bar’, *kávička, koláčiky, šaláty* ‘small coffee’, ‘small cakes’, ‘salads’, respectively. The suffixes *-ička, -áčik* are used to create diminutives, which in Slovak more than in English perform important sociopragmatic functions.

As Wierzbicka (2003: 50–51) notes, the productivity of diminutive derivation in Slavic languages, including food offers, reflects the core qualities of warmth and affection which are from the Slavic perspective highly valued in communication. Therefore, the diminutives in this advertisement not only select the target audience by the choice of language but also by conveying informality and particular emotional attitudes that are easily identified by the locals. Hand in hand they create an idea of a friendly and hospitable place where guests are welcomed.

The significance of diminutives as a particular dimension of Slovak culture is reflected in other blends in the sample. For instance, the name of the shop *Mega mini shopík* ‘a small shop’ involves the English noun *shop* and the Slovak diminutive suffix *-ík*: *shop+ík*. Similarly, a huge dominant billboard promoting the German hypermarket chain Kaufland in Figure 18 echoes expressive derivation.

In the upper part, we can see a capitalized sentence in Slovak: *VYPAPPKALI SME ZL’AVY* that can be loosely





Figure 16. A traditional Slovak restaurant



Figure 17. Wine shop and wine bar advertisement



Figure 18. Kaufland advertisement

translated into English as: We have eaten up the discounts. The diminutive *paĥkat* 'eat' is very common when speaking only to children in Slovakia. The novel blend *vypappkali* consists of the Slovak past tense verb form *vypaĥkali* ('we ate') and *app*, an easily recognisable English abbreviation for application, so it has the potential to reach out to both the local and international audience.

It goes without saying that the exploitation of the local cultural resources and creative linguistic forms are all indicators of the continuing glocalization. This is the process that Gorter (2006: 88) describes as leading to 'new expressions of cultural mix in music, food and clothing, but also in languages'. The provided examples do not imply that the global forces dominate the local context. Quite the opposite, they are illustrative of the increasing linguistic diversity, novelty and strengthening of the local identity in the Slovak public space.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored the Bratislava cityscape. We could witness the wide range of English language manifestations and the extensive penetration of English into the LL of central parts of the Slovak capital. English was selected in 322 out of 464 signs and comprised 69% of all gathered tokens. The findings evince the extensive presence of English in Bratislava's linguistic landscape and point to its 'special role' (Crystal, 2003) that extends beyond the city's community. In broad terms, Lanza & Woldemariam (2014: 499) claim that 'the prevalence of English in the LL, in general, is an indicator of the important role the language plays in society and hence the high placement on the vertical scale of prestige'. Generally, our results reveal that English

fulfils both informational and symbolic functions (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) in Bratislava. The emblematic status of English is evidenced especially by the design of commercial signage found in certain business domains. In private, non-official signs, the use of English appears to be a common marketing strategy for increasing the saleability of a variety of products and services either to foreign or local predominantly higher income customers. The frequent occurrence of English names of businesses and slogans in bottom-up signs indicates that sign makers are aware of the decorative, embellishing power of English (Griffin, 2004; Manan et al., 2017) and its potential impact on customers.

Consistent with the previous studies, the enterprise activities associated with English predominantly evoke entertainment, leisure, superior quality and affluence. The data from Bratislava also suggests that other languages encountered on signs (Slovak, German, Hungarian), at least in the context of this study, do not carry the same connotations to an equal extent. The representation of English on commercial signs implicitly promotes a particular vision of the world and behaviour patterns that tend to be loaded with consumption, self-interest and individual well-being, probably best epitomized by the *Good Life* name of one of Bratislava's night clubs. It is beyond the scope of this paper to prove any effect of English on the social perceptions of the viewers, but given the dominance of visual stimuli in processing information over other senses, the omnipresent English used to tout products or services takes its share in fostering a dividing social line and perpetuating social inequality. Being associated with prestige, exclusiveness and luxury, and through carrying the cultural baggage of Western values of individualism and consumerist lifestyle, English helps to maintain the unequal social relations between those who have access to material resources, i.e. higher income or non-material resources (being literate in English) and those who have not.

On the one hand, English emerges as the bearer of the global neoliberal ideology (Holborow, 2007), but on the other hand it would be very simplistic to view the process of globalization as a one-way flow. We have exemplified through the advertising practices of local sign makers how they actively adjust English to serve their needs. Concerning the simultaneously occurring phenomena of globalization and localization, it is worth quoting Bennett et al. (2005: 149) at length: 'The forces and pressures of globalization, however they may be conceived, do not simply impose themselves everywhere in just the same ways, with local practices and identities simply succumbing passively to these new forms. Instead, local societies, cultures, economies, and political formations respond in active and distinct ways to the changes that confront them. The results are unique, composed out of the encounter between the global and the local'. Based on the results of the analysis presented in this study, we have shown that the global language is not adopted passively on the part of local communities. Rather, as demonstrated by the autonomous practices of the local sign owners and designers, the use of English appropriated for their own instrumental purposes results in new ways of expressing local identity and the emergence of unique forms of linguistic and cultural hybridization.

**Competing interests.** The authors declare none.

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OLHA BOHUSLAVSKÁ is a PhD student at the Department of English and American Studies, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. She is working on her thesis and her research concerns the position of English in the linguistic landscape of selected Slovak cities. Although she mainly focuses on the domain of sociolinguistics, globalization and language policy, she is also interested in discourse analysis and literary studies. Email: [bogusl1510@gmail.com](mailto:bogusl1510@gmail.com)



ELENA CIPRIANOVÁ works as an Associate Professor at the Department of English and American Studies, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. Her research interests include sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, and intercultural communication. She is particularly interested in sociocultural aspects of English language teaching.

She is author of two monographs and co-author of several teaching materials for English language students. She has published research papers in linguistics both at home and abroad. Email: [eciprianova@ukf.sk](mailto:eciprianova@ukf.sk)