

## **The Linguistic Landscape of Rijeka (Fiume) During the Austro – Hungarian Monarchy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to study multilingualism and multiculturalism in public discourse in the town of Rijeka during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, precisely in the period from 1870 to 1918. As a consequence to the Croatian-Hungarian Settlement, the town of Rijeka (the Italian name was Fiume) became part of Hungarian part of the empire, which thus gained access to the sea. As the town was mainly inhabited by Italian, German and Croatian population, the government tried to impose a magyarization of the population. The authors inquire the effects of social, political and economic changes on language choice and usage, and on manifestations of collective identity/identities of the town dwellers during a period of fast developing industrialization, globalization and urbanization. A valid method to investigate and assess the real identity of the town and its inhabitants is to study the linguistic landscape by observing public signage in a diachronic perspective. Language policies reflect the relations of power, offering thus an exceptional insight in social relations particularly if language preferences in public spaces are to be observed. The presence of a number of languages and the way they are displayed on public signs says much on actual multilingualism, and the role in society of their respective speakers.

**Keywords:** multilingualism, multiculturalism, linguistic landscape, linguistic policy, collective identity

### **Introduction**

The Hornby Dictionary of the English Language (Hornby, 1993: 699) defines the concept of landscape as *1. Scenery of an area of land*, and *2. Picture showing a view of a countryside*. The study of linguistic landscapes is a relatively new and wide field, developing in the last thirty years. Rosenbaum and his colleagues studied the use of English in Jerusalem in 1977, and focused on street signs that featured both Hebrew and English. Since then many studies have been published

in a number of linguistic journals. They have shown that this aspect of language is mostly shown in the public sphere, where it demonstrates whether the community is monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual. The term *linguistic landscape* was first used by Landry and Bourhis in 1997, and they define linguistic landscape in the following way:

“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; 25)

Their definition is very precise in pointing out the focus of study – signs in public spaces. From the semiotic point of view our world is a world of signs and symbols, and without them communication would be impossible. Since all signs are signs of communication in different languages, together they form the linguistic landscape of a particular area.

Itagi and Singh define the concept of linguistic landscape in a broader way. The terms *Linguistic Landscape/Landscaping (LL)* are defined as ‘language use in its written form (visible language) in the public sphere.’ (Itagi & Singh, 2002b;ix) Their conception of the term ‘linguistic landscape’ slightly deviates from the definition of Landry and Bourhis in that it includes potential study objects items such as newspapers, visiting cards, and other print media. (Itagi & Singh, 2002b;ix) This definition points to studying linguistic landscapes from a diachronic aspect that helps us to see the wider framework of language use in a particular public space and wider area in the past.

### **Sign**

Sign is the key term in the field of semiotics. From its point of view, our world is a world of signs and symbols, without which communication would be impossible. All the signs are signs of communication written in different languages and together they make a linguistic landscape of a particular area. The semiotic sign contains meaning that is not necessarily identical to the sign itself. A sign normally has a physical aspect, such a sound or an icon. Everything we know about our surroundings is based on the representation and interpretation of signs. Backhouse defines it thus:

‘A sign was considered to be any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame. The underlying definition is physical, not semantic. It is rather broad, including anything from the small handwritten sticker attached to a lamp – post to huge commercial billboards outside a department store. Items such as ‘push’ and ‘pull’ stickers at entrance doors, lettered foot mats botanic explanation plates on trees were considered to be signs, too. ...Each sign (...) was counted as one item, irrespective of its size’ (Backhaus, 2007: 66).

Signs allow us to determine the multilingualism of a social space. During the analysis we must take into consideration who created the signs, whom they are aimed to, the historical period and the political context within which they were created. Different time periods have produced different signs, and the development of signs is temporal as well. The diachronic development of a linguistic landscape can be analysed by a continual observation of signs in different time periods within the same social space. By comparing signs from different time periods we get a picture of the diachronic development of a linguistic landscape.

The linguistic landscape is closely tied to the linguistic politics. Leclerc (1989) differentiates official government inscriptions from those that came from private initiatives. Official government inscriptions Backhouse refers to as *top-bottom*, while those coming from private sources he refers to as *bottom-up* signs. (Backhouse, 2007). These terms will be used in the study.

Analysing the motives behind public inscriptions Ben-Rafael (2009) distinguishes four basic motives: self-presentation, a valid reason, power relations, and collective identity. When he discusses self-presentation, he defines them as those inscriptions that by their choice of language express the collective identity of the people who put the inscriptions up. A valid reason means that the choice of language followed the expectations of the public. Power relations dictate the use of language of the dominant ethno-linguistic group, while collective identity refers to the affirmation of minority languages on the signs created for minority groups. The choice of language, sequence and position of languages in multilingual inscriptions show us an image of the linguistic reality in a given society. The inscriptions themselves have the roles of providing information as well as being symbolic. The informative function of signs, especially, when it comes to multilingualism, is visible in providing information on the number of languages in a particular area, while the sequence, prominence or marginalisation of a language inform us of their status. When it comes to their symbolic function, the prominence of a language on a public sign can signalise that the given language is positively valued in the given sociolinguistic context and that it has a respectable status. That can influence its speakers to use their language more frequently and in a variety of contexts. On the other hand, the lack of presenting a language in public can suggest that the language is not valued, and that can influence its speakers to use it less. In this way the symbolic function of a linguistic landscape is linked to the ethno-linguistic vitality.

### **Rijeka during the Austro-Hungarian period**

The city of Rijeka in Croatia provides an interesting context for the study of the linguistic landscape from the diachronic aspect, due to its geo-political location where the middle-European and Mediterranean cultures meet. The history of Rijeka demonstrates a particular example among

the wider historical turning point of middle Europe. It is a city of a turbulent and complex history, where the earliest found archeological sites date to the 11th century BC. This site developed into a Roman military camp, and then into a medieval walled city. The fatal earthquake of 1750 changed the landscape of the city dramatically and it accelerated the spreading of the city outside its walls, under the impetus of the Austrian and Hungarian civic powers. The city's location has always been attractive to Austria, Hungary and Italy, and there have been a number of conflicts between them over the territory. The question was raised in the middle of the 18th century, where Austria, Hungary and Croatia argued over which country the city belonged to. It became a burning question in the first half of the 19th century, which witnessed strong social, economic, political, national and cultural movements in Croatia. In 1867

Hungary acquired an equal and autonomous status in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose ruler had the title of czar in Austria, and of the king in Hungary. The territory was divided into two sections in the 1868 agreement: *Cislatania* of Austrian lands, and *Translatania* that covered Hungarian territory. The agreement thus created a political prerequisite for the economic development of Rijeka, which included a railway that connected the city with remote parts of the empire and allowed for the growth of markets for variety of products. Hungary also invested into building a port, which became its main point for export abroad. Alongside these economic developments, Rijeka witnessed a number of cultural and social movements that were written about in several local papers, in different languages. They include *La Bilancia*, *Fiumaner Zeitung*, *Riečki novi list*, and *Magyar Tengerpart*, and witness to a developed newspapers production. At that stage Rijeka also developed in tourism. This was the time of the city's greatest economic growth, and it was accompanied with a significant population growth.

The ethnic element of the populace was considered less significant to their social class, and there were many who rose from the peasant and the working classes into the bourgeoisie, and denied their heritage in order to make their economic and social progress easier. The Hungarians tended to work in civil service, held important positions in the economy and the railway, and were followed by the locals of Italian heritage. This elite section of society also included Croats who did not define themselves as such, and among them were no peasants or workers.

The so-called *Ungarezi* belong to the political faction that supported the autonomy of the city, but over time they turned into the supporters of Hungary, as Hungarian capital in Rijeka grew. Even though their numbers were small, these families possessed significant capital and had a lot of power. But the situation changed in 1914.

With the First World War Rijeka found itself in a difficult situation. The Otranto Gate was closed due to the war and thus ended economic and maritime traffic on the Adriatic Sea that affected all ports on both the east and west coasts. The traffic of big ports such as Rijeka and Trieste (Italy) was limited to the eastern Adriatic coast, and even that was not very secure. This situation ruined the entire economic framework of both cities, and Rijeka, once a vibrant and prosperous city, descended into poverty until 1918 when the war ended.

## **Methods**

The method used for the study of multilingualism in Rijeka during the Austro-Hungarian Empire is a diachronic approach. The starting point is the analysis of language used on public signs in the public space. The presence of language on public signs can point to the sociolinguistic structure of a given territory, that serves as an informative structure of the linguistic landscape. The symbolic function that determines to whom the signs belong also demonstrates the linguistic dominance and thus the power structure in society. In order to get a deeper understanding of the context it is needed to understand the economic, cultural and political circumstances of the time. A diachronic method employed in this study uses verified historical facts and articles from newspapers between 1870 and 1918.

This study employed the method of deliberate sampling, also called diversity or heterogeneity sampling. (Edelman, 2010). This method allows for the generalisation of results that follow from the study. The reason for choosing this method in this study is primarily the desire to cover the wide spectrum of the linguistic landscape, which includes more unusual linguistic landscapes. We find the same method in the work of Ben-Rafael (2004, 2006), Edelman (2010) and Hübner (2006). This study looked into one hundred samples of archived materials and postcards. All the samples were divided into public and private signs. The difference in interpretation of both signs points to linguistic politics and linguistic ideology of that time period. In order to analyse this linguistic landscape we used 17 variables, the most significant among them being the public or private sign, the type of discourse, the presence of signs of collective identity, written language and icons, the number of languages on signs, as well as the sequence of languages on the sign.

## **Results**

This section focuses on the way data was organised and its analysis. The authors looked into the workings of linguistic politics and ideology and the way it influenced public life and contributed to subsequent changes.

In order for the authors to define the real identity of Rijeka and its citizens it was first necessary to define the public space in which we found the linguistic signs. The public space encompasses the social, political, economic and cultural context in Rijeka, and it was identified in historic documents and newspapers. The public space was divided into variables of the types of institutes and objects. 42% of the signs came from shops, while other services provided 35% of the studied signs. The signs themselves were found on a number of carriers. Depending on the type of signs among the used one hundred samples, the majority of 43% came from commercial ads, followed by postcards (13%), monetary shares (13%), posters (11%) and inscriptions (11%). Lesser percentages were found on receipts (3%), pictures on carton packaging (1%), different types of pictures that included text (1%), calendar bases (1%), cover pages (1%), time schedules for different modes of transportation (1%), and personal documents (1%). We divided the signs into the top-bottom, and bottom-up groups during the analysis.

*Table 1: Official or private sign*

<u>Official or private sign</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Official	30	30,0
Private	70	70,0
Total	100	100

Out of one hundred samples we studied, 70% were private signs. They primarily included names and writing on shops and other types of services, and thus fall into the commercial discourse.

Official signs were found in the writing on local government buildings, hospitals, schools, public buildings, and university buildings, as well as bank shares, and travel tickets and time tables. These belong to the municipal-regulatory discourse. Given that the sample was dominated by private signs, the commercial discourse of 47% is found on three quarters of all ads, while the municipal-regulatory discourse takes 26%.

If we follow Bourdie's perspective, the relationship between different language landscape codes should be explained by the power relations between the dominant and subordinate groups, with special attention being paid to the top-down units of a language landscape that are under higher scrutiny of authorities and politics than the bottom-up units. This is due to members of the ruling

groups enforcing the top-down units and determining the codes of a linguistic landscape. These actors have more power than those who belong to the bottom-up units, such as private parties. This tension between the top-down and bottom-up units in a particular linguistic landscape can point to the effect of government power on the individual who seeks a certain autonomy. Language found on official signs (top-down) demonstrates who held power. Table 2 shows the sequence of languages on signs according to their importance.

*Table 2: Sequence of languages on signs*

Language	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	The only language
Hungarian	21,0	2,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	42,0
Italian	46,0	9,0	5,0	1,0	0,0	0,0	9,0
German	20,0	8,0	3,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	28,0
Croatian	12,0	3,0	1,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	14,0
English	1,0	1,0	1,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	6,0
French	0,0	2,0	0,0	1,0	0,0	0,0	0,0

The table shows that when it comes to single language signs among the studied hundred samples, Hungarian takes first place with 21% on 42% of ads. This sheds lights onto the agents that put these signs up regardless of the type of discourse. It is followed by German with 20% on 28% of ads. This witnesses to the existence and activity of the German community and the influence of Austria on the region. When examining the 9% of advertisements we identify that 46% of them featured monolingual, Italian texts.

The figures of the local demographic show that 2,842 people spoke Hungarian and 7,924 spoke Croatian, and we note that among the 14% of monolingual signs the Croatian language was the first language in 12% of signs. This suggests that Croatian had a marginal status in both civic and private use.

This figure of 12% that belongs to the Croatian language can also be interpreted from the point of the 'good reason', discussed in the previous section. (Boudon, 1990, 2007). This position holds that the creators of the linguistic landscape shape units and signs of the given landscape in

accordance with the needs and the understanding of the public. In this case of the percentage of the use of Croatian language we can conclude that the number of Croats living in Rijeka at the time was not insignificant, and that the motiv behind it was interest rather than social power of this group. The creators of signs in a linguistic landscape have to compete for clients and this imposes certain limitations in their strategies. Desire to win clients requires them to respect their values, as well as their language. This study found that when it came to monolingual signs in Croatia, they always belonged to the commercial discourse, and there were no signs found that featured Croatian in the municipal - regulatory discourse.

The fact that receipts, travel tickets, and time schedules were written in Italian suggests that Italian was used in daily life, rather than Hungarian. Hungarians could not ignore Rijeka's orientations towards Italy, so for purely practical reasons they issued the above items in Italian because that was the language the majority of local people could speak, rather than Hungarian. Overall, the high percentage of monolingual signs points not just to the existence of minority communities, but also to the entire population being multilingual. Hungarian was the official language and the linguistic politics sought to impose the language. However, we see that this intention was not accomplished, given that Italian and German languages were heavily present in the public sphere. The presence of Croatian, even though small, cannot be ignored. This supports one of Ben-Rafael's factors of the linguistic landscape: the rationale behind opting for specific signs aimed at certain groups of clients. “ It is in this perspective that we speak of LL in terms of symbolic construction of the public space which we explain by context – dependent differential impacts of three different factors - rational considerations focusing on the signs' expected attractiveness to the public and clients; aspirations of actors to give expression to their identity through their choice of patterns that, in one way or another represent their presentation of self to the public; and power relations that eventually exist behind choices of patterns where sociopolitical forces share relevant incompatible interests'. (Ben-Rafael et al, 2006) Rijeka was under Hungarian jurisdiction, but alongside the Italian clients there was also a significant number of Croats.

Alongside Italian, Hungarian, German and Croatian languages we also see the presence of English and French, where English has been found in the first, second, and third place on a number of signs. There are no great differences when it comes to the amount of English signs found in comparison to French, which at that time was the language of prestige, culture and class. We interpret the presence of English in reasons more commercial in nature: there were local ties to English firms. For example, firms selling washing powders and whiteners. Another significant variable for analysis regards the signs of collective identity. We have found these signs on 3% of



all advertisements. Out of 39 advertisements that feature collective identity signs (see table 3), 665 have a linguistic feature, and the rest feature visual imagery.

*Table 3: Features of collective identity*

Presence of collective identity features	Frequencyt	Percentage
Linguistic	26	66,7
Image	13	33,3
Total	39	100,0

The examples of signs that contain elements of collective identity are primarily private and in which we recognise the principle of self-representation. These feature the use of both Italian and Hungarian languages, which suggests that the local Hungarians spoke Italian, while other inhabitants of Rijeka did not speak Hungarian. This explains the preference of Italian in bilingual signs.

Alongside the Italian and Hungarian identities we have found the expressions of the German identity in a noticeable extent, while the Croatian identity was marginalised and not as expressed.

## **Conclusion**

One of the primary denominators is the difference between the official and private sign. During the period in which Rijeka was ruled by Hungary the official language was Hungarian. This was established in 1868 and accelerated Hungarian nationalism, even though the third of the local population did not speak Hungarian language. The position of language on public signs – the top-down units – demonstrated who held social and political power. In the study of one hundred signs we identified monolingual signs on 76% of them. The highest percentage held Hungarian (21%) on 42% of advertisements, and by Italian with 46% monolingual signs on 9% of advertisements, out of which 30% belonged to official signs and 70% to private signs. Rijeka was considered to be an

Italian city under Hungarian jurisdiction, but local people did not embrace the Hungarian language. They organised protests and demonstration, which caused the withdrawal of bilingual Hungarian-Italian signs and tram tickes on 17th November 1899.

The choice of language and its position on a sign demonstrates the power relations where the Hungarians were in charge of the city, rather than the Italians. Croatian language was not at all present on official signs. This divide includes official documents as well. However, it is important to note that passports and transportation tickets were issued in Italian, which suggests that this language was used in everyday life for practical reasons, and confirms the previous assertion that Hungarian was not widely used in that context.

When it comes to the sequence of languages on signs, the preferred language is Italian with its 46% on 30% of the signs. Italian also featured in the first place among other languages. It is followed by Hungarian with 22% of 7% of studied signs, then German with 19% on 13% of the signs, and finally Croatian with 11% on 8% of the signs. We have included the private (bottom-up) signs in this analysis. Most private signs were in Italian, which points to the dominance of that language in the everyday usage among the local people. German and Croatian languages were also present on private signs, and 13% of advertisements featured German as the only language.

This suggests the existence of the German speaking minority group, that answers the previously posed question about the audience. The study confirms the existence of the Croatian community, given that the Croatian language held 11% on 8% of all private signs. The presence of Croatian can be explained through Ben-Rafael's thesis on language landscape factors: the *rationality of respect*. (2006). This term refers to making signs attractive to clients. Looking at the statistics of the year 1910, we find 47% Italians, 32% of Croats, and 7% of Hungarians. In 1918 the figures show 63% of Italians, 20% of Croats, and 10% of Hungarians.<sup>1</sup>

The preference of the Croatian language can also be explained through Boudon's 'good reason' (2007). The creators of the language landscape signs shape its units according to the needs and interests of the public. According to this thesis the example of using Croatian language in this context has commercial interest as its motive, where potential clients are shown respect through the use of their language. As noted previously, most signs were bilingual, and for that reason we have encountered translations. Monolingualism on signs suggests there was a high percentage of multilingualism among the people, as well as the existence of minority groups.

Linguistic signs suggest that the questions of identity, vitality and relations within the social sphere are crucial in the construction of the linguistic landscape. The very choice of language on a

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<sup>1</sup>It must be taken into consideration that the criteria for determining nationality in a census was spoken language, and Italian language in this case. The Hungarian authorities encouraged this with the aim to suppress the Croatian language and culture

sign is a way for showing one's own identity and is aimed at those people who also identify with that language, or to put it differently, a single unit thus represents the collective identity of a group. The existence of multilingualism points to the vitality of a given linguistic community. The more languages are present on a sign, the greater linguistic variety there is in society. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), the linguistic landscape reflects the degree of vitality of the ethno-linguistic groups. However, it must be noted that politics and ideology also play a role in its creation.

The authors conclude that the languages spoken in Rijeka in the period of study coexisted and influenced one another, a feature found on bilingual signs. The high percentage of monolingual signs points to the existence of several linguistic communities that coexist within the same space. However, rivalry between them was also present, which was recognised in the linguistic power relations on the studied signs. The changes in language use were immediately present on the signs of Rijeka's public space. The disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 caused major changes in Rijeka's political, cultural and linguistic spheres. The proposed doctoral thesis with its interdisciplinary approach presents a contribution to the research of urban history and understanding of social transformations through the prism of language and cultural pluralism of the city of Rijeka.

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