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*Salvatore Del Gaudio*RECENT CHANGES IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE  
OF ČERNIHIV

У статті стисло висвітлюються сучасні тенденції до змін, які спостерігаються у міському мовному ландшафті Чернігова. Даний опис розглянуто у контексті актуальних видозмін, що тривають у загальному українському мовному просторі.

Також у вступній частині окреслено значення подібних студій як відносно нового напрямку соціолінгвістичного дослідження у пострадянському просторі.

**Ключові слова:** мовний ландшафт, соціолінгвістика, українська мовна ситуація, Чернігів.

This paper essentially describes the current tendencies and the most evident changes which took place in the urban linguistic landscape of Černihiv, the main town of the homonymous region, over the last decade. This short account is contextualized within the ongoing modifications affecting the entire Ukrainian linguistic landscape.

The significance of linguistic landscape as a relatively new field of sociolinguistic research for the post-Soviet space is shortly outlined in the introductory lines.

**Keywords:** linguistic landscape, sociolinguistics, Ukrainian language situation, Černihiv.

**Introduction.** The notion of linguistic landscape is a relatively new subdivision of sociolinguistics. According to a widely accepted definition, linguistic landscape is the «visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region» [3, p. 23]. It emerged as a consequence of a renewed interest in multilingualism and new globalization tendencies affecting world languages and their environment.

In a more strict definition, linguistic landscape is «the use of language in its written form in the public sphere» [2, p. 2]. Since the

public and private spheres interact in urban and rural spaces and it can be hard to separate them neatly, the practice also implies the concomitant study of the private sphere. Therefore this sociolinguistic field deals with the study and the use of written language in both the public and private domains such as public signs, symbols on governmental and administrative buildings, place names, advertising billboards, street names, commercial shop signs and the like. Even extemporaneous and unstructured forms of writings such as graffiti or restaurant menus have become objects of research [3, p. 27].

The fact that in many European countries signs containing place-names in minority languages are being (increasingly) promoted, in compliance with the recommendations of the «European Charter for Regional and Minority languages» (cf. art.10, point 2, g.) [7], this enhances the significance of the studies on linguistic landscape and its *raison d'être*. Contemporary plurilinguism and the use of different languages within a given territory makes the urban landscape much more varied than it used to be even a few decades ago.

The interdisciplinary character of these kinds of studies, at the intersection point of geography, history, political sciences, sociology, onomastics and sociolinguistics, has contributed to a rapid increase also in post-Soviet states, particularly in the last few years. This statement especially concerns the sociolinguistic sub-field dealing with the application of language policy in the public space.

In a broader definition linguistic landscape also includes multiple contextual factors. Here I will avoid discussing linguistic landscape and its broad social-communicative implications which, beside language elements, includes images, sounds, music, smells, graffiti, clothes, food, buildings, history as well as people involved in the space and interacting with and within linguistic landscape in different ways [5, p. 154]. This paper in fact intends just to outline

the most evident and current changes in the linguistic landscape of Černihiv. It represents a small segment of a larger study on the language situation of Černihiv and some rural districts <sup>1</sup> of the homonymous region.

**1. Research Methods.** As mentioned in the introductory lines, my interest in Černihiv and some of its surrounding districts is part of a larger research project on the sociolinguistic situation of this area. The constant personal observation of the interaction between language and society in this town over the past decade and the related changes induced me to collect some primary data about its linguistic landscape. The primary materials consist of personal field notes and up-to-date photographs recording the recent adjustments of the public and private linguistic landscape of the main regional town.

A secondary source is represented by the website of the city council of Černihiv and online newspapers in which a full list of the renaming of the streets is provided [8; 9].

The sources of information are however selective and limited, lacking that quantitative research approach and requirements advocated by some new trends in sociolinguistic studies.

Photos and images with relative comments are not going to be reported below for reasons of space.

**2. New Trends in Ukrainian linguistic landscape.** The renaming of streets and public places is a topical issue in present day Ukraine. The process of adapting previous toponyms to mutated historical-political and cultural circumstances has been very active since the proclamation of Independence in 1991. This practice developed faster after the Orange Revolution (2004), reaching its peak in consequence of the so called «Majdan Revolution» (2014) and the unpleasant events of the last four years.

It is clear, as a few times pointed out by Ukrainian sociolinguists, that behind the constant changes in the Ukrainian linguistic landscape, both in the Soviet period and after it, there is a certain degree

of ideology [4]. This is interrelated with new courses in language policy and it can be interpreted as a way of either solving language conflicts or aggravating them.

Typical Soviet place and street names have been gradually replaced in all the major cities and towns all over the country. However, until the 'annexation' of Crimea (March 2014) and the subsequent outbreak of the Ukrainian-Russian hybrid war in the Donbas area (August 2014), some typical names reminding of Russian main cities, common past events and outstanding cultural-historical figures were still preserved in part of the urban linguistic landscape of Ukrainian towns; for example in Kyiv one still had a Moscow square (*Moskovs'ka plošča*), a Red Army street (*vulycja Červonoarmis'ka*) and similar.

The first regions of the country to exclude Soviet 'ideological' signs from their public space were the western regions, primarily L'viv, Ivano-Frankivs'k, Ternopil' and Volyn'. This is easily explained if one thinks about the different historic and social-cultural background of western Ukraine [4, p. 892].

Between 2007–2010, 2754 names associated with communist ideology were replaced in public space (*ibid.*). An inversion of this tendency was registered after the election of the President Viktor Yanukovich (2010) and came to an end with his abrupt flight from the country (February, 2014).

The visible effects of a more active continuation in the removing and substitution of former Soviet and, to a certain extent, Russian public signs started after the issuing of the Decree «On Specific Measures of Standardizing the Description, Use and Protection of State Symbols of Ukraine» (23<sup>rd</sup> August, 2014, No. 667/2014). This law proscribed «the symbols of totalitarian and other non-democratic regimes, self-proclaimed quasi-state entities, terrorist and separatist organizations or groups». The primary aim of these measures was «to ensure the democratization of Ukrainian society and its transition to European values» [4, p. 893].

In the last two years one can assist at a rapid renaming also of the last traces of the former mutual common Soviet cultural-political heritage. More resilient to changes appear to be, as assumable, the most isolated and peripheral areas of Ukraine <sup>2</sup>.

**3. The Linguistic Landscape of Černihiv.** The active process of 'de-communization' <sup>3</sup> brought about visible changes in the linguistic landscape of Černihiv and other district towns <sup>4</sup> of the region.

In 2016 former names were replaced by new Ukrainized ones <sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless some of the previous nomenclature could still be noticed in some peripheral zones of the town until recently.

Sign posts in the centre are all in Ukrainian: they indicate places of historic-cultural interests such as museums and churches. Streets are basically entitled to Ukrainian renowned people and historical characters, e.g. left bank Ukrainian hetmans or they show a neutral denomination as, for example, the main street: *prospect myru* (peace avenue). The main historical square of the town is named «Krasna plošča». Although the first mental associations and the popular etymology are with «Red Square» because of its typical, red paving, the toponym derives from literary Ukrainian (also old East Slavic) «krasnyj» <sup>6</sup> meaning «beautiful, bright, fine». This place played an important commercial role already at the time of the Rus' of Kyiv.

My recent personal observation (28.10.2018) revealed rapid ongoing changes. One can observe a completely different picture of the linguistic landscape, if only compared with a decade ago. Most private shop signs and advertising billboards, with some limited exceptions as it could be a «Kebab seller», are in Ukrainian. This can be seen all along the town centre and in the area surrounding the market place <sup>7</sup>.

A calculation, not based on statistical methods, lead me to affirm that about 90 % of the small buildings and shops around the market display Ukrainian signs and advertisements. An insignificant number of shops and selling points still keep older Russian denominations.

One can occasionally notice an Ukrainian commercial shop sign or a billboard with one or few Russian words in an Ukrainian context, a kind of hybridization *sui generis*. This could be the case when an owner or a manager of a particular shop did not pay much attention to the standard language usage or was indifferent to it; for example Rus. *perčatky* (перчатки) instead of Ukr. *rukavyc̣ky* (рукавички) stands out in a completely Ukrainian writing context.

All the boards in the main supermarkets, e.g. АТБ (АТБ) are, as in the rest of the country, in Ukrainian. At the counter, the majority of checkout clerks, as first option, use the state language.

An element of novelty can be caught in the fact that even in the domain of private-business, street-flyers and stickers are prevalently in Ukrainian.

The use of Ukrainian has been characterizing both written and oral information (announcements) of the public sphere since two decades at the least. All the names of governmental and administrative buildings are strictly in Ukrainian just as the local transport and the main train station.

A visible exception is still represented by the private company organizing bus service and vans (Ukr. «maršrutky») connecting Černihiv with Kyiv and other major cities <sup>8</sup>, situated at the main parking place, next to the Mc Donalds' (now under reconstruction). The timetable and all the basic information are still to be read in Russian.

The general linguistic landscape has been lately 'enriched' with a number of new signs in English which mark new cafes, 'pubs' and restaurants, placed along the elegant sector of the main avenue.

The use of English is likewise rapidly spreading around. At present it still occupies a minor space of Černihiv (and Ukrainian) linguistic landscape, for example: street menus, outdoor boards etc.

A similar tendency can find parallels in the Russian Federation. As pointed out in similar studies, «*the appearance of English public signs in those countries where English does not have any official*

*status reflects language globalization trends, spread of brand names and involvement in the global market».* English undoubtedly plays a significant role in the naming of bars, restaurants, clubs but also in drawing graffiti, thus covering a segment of the private communicative in most of Europe.

Worth of note is that in some of the new restaurants «à la mode» the waitresses often address their customers in Ukrainian as first language option and not in Russian as it used to be customary in this area. The choice, however, also depends on a subjective language evaluation of the potential customer.

**Final remarks.** The ongoing changes in the linguistic landscape of Ukraine, associated with personal research on the language situation in the region of Černihiv, urged me to shortly outline its linguistic landscape.

The specific description of the linguistic landscape of Černihiv revealed generalized trends confirmed both in Ukraine and other countries. Significant modifications can be noticed in the urban linguistic landscape of the town centre. The latter, besides an evident linguistic and, above all, cultural Ukrainization tendency, shows a gradual increase of English signs whose future development is hardly predictable at the present. In conclusion, one can say that Ukrainian, at least in its written form, noticeably prevails in the linguistic landscape of Černihiv of the last five-year period.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ukr. *rajony*

<sup>2</sup> The latter statement still need to be re-proofed.

<sup>3</sup> Ukr. *декомунізація* / *dekomunizacija*.

<sup>4</sup> Ukr. *районні центри* / *rajonni centry*.

<sup>5</sup> A list of new street names can be consulted at [8; 9].

<sup>6</sup> Old Church Slavonic *красьнь*; (*krasīnyi*, «beautiful») [6, p. 368; 10].

<sup>7</sup> Worth to point out is that my research was limited to the town centre and surrounding neighbourhoods.

<sup>8</sup> A Russian billboard that used to indicate the round trip Kyiv-Moscow has been removed.

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