

Naming Public Space: Language Policy, Globalisation, and Linguistic Visibility in Macedonian Cities

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Abstract:

Name signs are not neutral labels in public space: they can materially organize language hierarchy through script, ordering, placement, and visual prominence. This paper examines how governmental and private-sector name signs in Bitola, Kumanovo, and Tetovo make legal regulation, local demographic power, and globalization visible in the linguistic landscape. Using a linguistic landscape and geosemiotic approach, the study analyses a photographic corpus of public signs, focusing on language choice, script, spatial ordering, and visual prominence. The findings show that Macedonian was the most frequent language overall and was generally placed first on governmental signs, reflecting its legally privileged position. This ordering was locally contested in Albanian-speaking majority areas, where Albanian appeared first on governmental signage. English functioned as the clearest marker of globalization: although it had no official legal status, it appeared on governmental name signs, exceeded co-official Albanian in private-sector frequency, and was more visually prominent than Macedonian on private-sector name signs. The paper contributes to linguistic landscape research by showing that name signs are not peripheral objects of analysis, but central sites where public language hierarchies are materially organized through the interaction of legal status, local demography, commercial naming, and English as a globalizing resource.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, geosemiotics, name signs, language policy, globalisation

