

WRITING AND LITERACY



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WRITING IN PUBLIC LINGUISTIC SPACE

What is public linguistic space?

"areas of our mainly urban and generally built up [...] environment - the city streets and squares, roads and parks, railway and bus stations and stops [...]"
(Spolsky 2009: 65)

Where does written language appear in public space?

For which purposes?

Who writes (lets write) for whom to read?

How are public signs made and how do we read them?

EXAMPLES





Bangkok, Thailand



Poland, at the sea side

A shop in Poznan, Poland (ul. Glogowska)





Perth, Scotland



Main station in Szczecin, Poland



**Saint Petersburg,
Russia**

**Handwritten
message: "Where
there is beer, there is
home/fatherland."**



**Graffiti using words of the local dialect of Poznan:
"Hi! Lots of people against ACTA"**

PUBLIC SIGNS: WHO?

"public signs are the culmination of a process with several participants:" (Spolsky 2009)

- Owner of the sign (initiator)
- Owner of the space where the sign is located
- Producer of the written material (sign maker)
- The general public (reader)
- Some extra-domain authority

FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC SIGNS (SPOLSKY 2009)

1. Communicative functions

- Information
- Instruction
- Persuasion

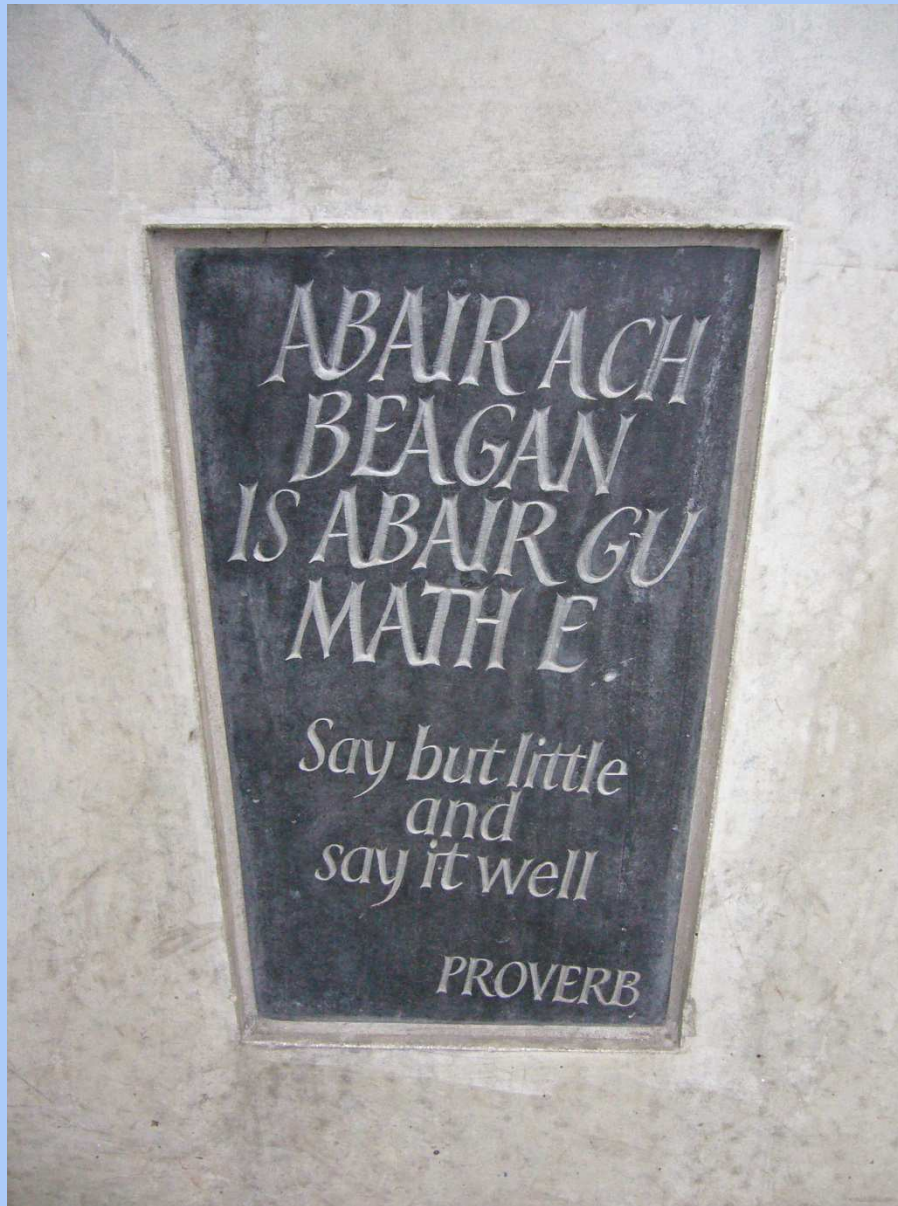
2. Symbolic functions

- Declare ownership
- Mark linguistic dominance
- + ?

FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE WE CAN SEE IN PUBLIC SIGNS

- Information (regarding a topic)
- Influencing the addressee (persuasion, instruction)
- Expressing one's ideas, feelings (regarding the author)
- Poetic, aesthetic function (playing with language, writing as decoration)
- Phatic function (filling empty space)

- creating and maintaining social relationships and group identity
- performative function: performing an act (for example, "no parking" = prohibiting parking)
- magic function
- ...



Symbolic, poetic, and decorative function of writing:

Inscription at the Scottish Parliament Building in Gaelic and English

read more:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Parliament_Building#Artwork_and_features



Phatic function?

MORE THAN TEXT...

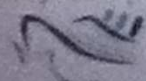
- verbal message combined with non-verbal signs (e.g. logos), pictures
- (relative) size of letters is important
- design of letters (examples next slide)
- possibly relating the content to place, situation of the sign
- relating the sign to other signs/texts ("link" to a web-site, quotes from television, associations with other texts...)
- combining naming and information
- using abbreviations, condensation of information ("Aptieka 24h")
- using more than one language
- ...





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BIURO PODRÓŻY



tanierokowanie.pl

SALON SPRZEDAŻY

**WYLOTY
Z NIEMIEC**



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WHAT DETERMINES THE LANGUAGE(S) OF A PUBLIC SIGN?

Spolsky and Cooper's "condition model"

Three major conditions for language choice:

- Write a sign in a language you know.
- Write a sign in a language which can be read by the people you expect to read it.
- Write a sign in your own language or in a language with which you wish to be identified.

WHY MULTILINGUAL SIGNS?

- To help people who don't know the dominant language.
- To specifically address people who speak a certain language.
- To bring a (minority) language into public space, make it visible.
- To make use of the associations a certain language evokes in the public (especially English; also French, Latin)
- To signal the author's identity.

Two different signs in Scotland

GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL

IN THE INTERESTS OF HYGIENE AND SAFETY
MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ARE REQUESTED
TO REFRAIN FROM FEEDING THE BIRDS
AS FOOD DEBRIS ATTRACTS VERMIN

食物碎屑招惹老鼠，為安全及衛生起見，請勿餵雀鳥。

स्वास्थ्य व सुरक्षा को ध्यान में रखते हुये जनता से यह प्रार्थना की जाती है कि पक्षियों को भोजन के लिये भोजन आदि मत दें क्योंकि भोजन के बचे हुए डब्बे उहे आदि जीव जन्तुओं को निमज्जण देते हैं।

تحتفظ اور حفظان صحت کے اصولوں کے پیش نظر عوام الناس سے التماس ہے کہ پرندوں کو کھانا ڈالنے سے اجتناب کریں کیونکہ بچے کھجے ٹکڑے چوہوں کے پھیلاؤ کا باعث ہوتے ہیں۔

ਸਿਹਤ ਅਤੇ ਸੁਰੱਖਿਆ ਨੂੰ ਮੁਖ ਰਖਦਿਆਂ ਆਮ ਜਨਤਾ ਨੂੰ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਪੰਛੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਚੁਗਣ ਲਈ ਰੋਟੀ ਆਦਿ ਨਾ ਸੁੱਟੇ। ਬਚੀ ਖੁਚੀ ਰੋਟੀ ਕਾਰਣ ਚੂਹੇ ਆਦਿ ਆਉਣ ਲਗ ਪੈਂਦੇ ਹਨ।



Sign at a shop in
Poznan, Poland

Shop name "Petit
chien" (French),
"gallery" (English)



**Sign at a church in
Inverness, Scotland**

**Which languages are
used in which
function(s)?**



ROAD SIGNS
AND STREET
NAMES:
INFORMATIVE
OR SYMBOLIC?

ROAD SIGN IN
SCOTLAND





**TWO STREET SIGNS IN SCOTLAND:
WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?
(WHY) IS IT IMPORTANT?**



**WHAT HAPPENED TO STREET SIGNS
IN LATVIA IN THE EARLY 1990S?**



Sign at a shop in Rēzekne, Latvia
left: Latvian, right: Russian



Poznań, ul. Głogowska

„LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE” APPROACH

Counting and categorizing signs in public space

- **Top-down signs:** created by authority, directed at the common citizen
- **Bottom-up signs:** created by individuals, directed, for example, at clients

(Ben-Rafael et al. in: Dirk Gorter, ed. *Linguistic Landscape: A new approach to multilingualism*. Clevedon 2006.

Watch a video explaining the approach and the linguistic landscape of Tokyo:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnwByvSI_gE

Or a video made by students about Maastricht, The Netherlands:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aSg75rbxLA>