

# RUSSIAN IN ARTISTIC AND REGULATORY DISCOURSES? THE APPEARANCE AND THEMATIC COMPOSITION OF MULTILINGUAL SIGNS IN LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF THE CZECH TOWN OF KARLOVY VARY

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UDK: 811.161.1 \* 81'286  
DOI: 10.15291/csi.4811  
Izvorni znanstveni članak  
Primljen: 8. 4. 2025.  
Prihvaćen za tisak: 20. 6. 2025.

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This paper investigates the linguistic landscape (LL) of Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic, specifically addressing the under-explored artistic and regulatory discourses in the city. In the context of current geopolitical changes, the study critically examines the presence, constellation, and thematic functions of languages in urban signage, with special attention to the shifting perception and visibility of Russian as a language which was perceived as problematic before the COVID-19 pandemic by local residents and politicians. The aim is to fill a research gap concerning LL studies in the Czech context and to explore functional multilingualism in a Central European urban environment. The analysis uses a sub-corpus systematically collected from a central city street in Karlovy Vary. Methodologically, the study combines qualitative categorization based on theoretical frameworks proposed by Opiłowski and Makowska (2023) and Scollon and Scollon (2003), with a quantitative frequency analysis inspired by Gorter (2018). The findings reveal a predominance of Czech, frequently combined with English in multilingual signs within both researched discourses. Russian emerges marginally and only within regulatory discourse linked to spa regulations, signifying its limited symbolic role. Thematically, artistic signs primarily advertise cultural events (concerts, shows, films), while regulatory signs cover topics such as spa rules, waste management, and parking. These insights highlight local practices of multilingual communication and the retreat of Russian from the city after the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, offering implications for future research in sociolinguistic studies of language visibility.

## KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

*artistic and regulatory discourses, Czech language, linguistic landscapes (LL), Russian language, multilingualism*

## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Linguistic landscapes (LL) are a significant sociolinguistic topic that cannot be doubted anymore, and research interest grows with each new sign in the public space: “The study of linguistic landscapes is one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing fields in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. An increasing number of researchers analyse language on signs in public spaces, mainly in urban contexts” (Gorter and Cenoz 2024: 2). Therefore, it is not surprising that in unstable times<sup>2</sup>, in which we are living now, it becomes even more relevant to focus on the appearance or disappearance of languages in public spaces, because “[during] periods of turmoil and crisis, the public space plays a pivotal role” (Themistocleous 2025: 127). There are several studies concerning LL in East-Central Europe<sup>3</sup>.

Urban public settings during periods of conflict, migration, or in post-war societies frequently exhibit complex and often contradictory landscapes marked by intense linguistic debates (cf. Henzelmann 2023; Henzelmann 2024; Baranova 2023; Henzelmann/Hacı 2025). We should remember that code choice always carries a symbolic meaning. Furthermore, “factors such as the target audience, identity, ideologies, reasons that motivate the protest, political and historical trajectories, as well as linguistic creativity, humor and the expression of different emotions, play a significant role in the inclusion or exclusion of certain languages” (Themistocleous 2025: 132). For instance, Henzelmann (2023) documents the sudden prominence of the Ukrainian language in public spaces across Poland and Germany following the influx of Ukrainian migrants, a phenomenon that likely signifies inclusiveness and hospitality. The deliberate omission or selective use of a language during military or political conflicts similarly reflects broader social changes and protest movements. Also, Baranova (cf. 2023: 56) notes that various groups become aware that the linguistic landscape may be a very powerful tool. For example, in contexts characterized by covert conflicts, the linguistic landscape encapsulates the positions and attitudes of language activists – rather than those of the entire community – towards both the political agenda and multilingualism.

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers who provided feedback on my paper. I am grateful for their insightful comments and valuable suggestions for improvements.

<sup>2</sup> With this I refer to the current period marked by global instability, including recent armed conflicts, economic fluctuations, and ongoing social repercussions several years after the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>3</sup> I use this term here to contextualize the linguistic landscape of the region, which is characterized by a complex interplay of Slavic languages (i.e., Polish, Czech, Slovak) and historical contact with German, Latin, and other languages. It is a zone of convergence and divergence, not just an “Eastern” extension of Western linguistic norms.

Russian is one of the languages present in LL of East-Central Europe and is currently a topic of research and political debates as a language that, for some, may now be controversial as the language of the invaders, while for others, it remains an everyday language of communication, as was the case in eastern Ukraine or as it continues to be in Daugavpils in Latvia. There are also other countries where this language was highly present, for economic and touristic reasons – for example in some regions of the Czech Republic (cf. Sloboda 2021)<sup>4</sup>. Shánělová (2005/2006: 5), who analysed the sociolinguistic situation in the region of Karlovy Vary and the city itself, draws a picture of the city – especially in the tourist areas and the spa district – dominated by Russian. According to her, the residents are surrounded by Russian, both in written and spoken language. It is, for example, the city of Karlovy Vary<sup>5</sup>, with emphasis on the word city, because “cities constitute spaces of diverse socioeconomic, political, and, not least, linguistic processes. They encompass language in both its written and spoken forms. Linguistic landscapes, as a phenomenon, pertain specifically to language manifested in writing, i.e., texts. While texts may appear individually, they create collectively within an urban environment distinct context that can be understood as specific discourse types”<sup>6</sup> (Lisek 2020: 417). Such discourses play an essential role for understanding the social aspects of language use, perceptions, and attitudes towards a given language or social group, which in times of conflicts seem to be even more important.

In order to integrate diverse perspectives and clarify the close relationship between discourses and linguistic landscapes more systematically, I refer to discourse analysis<sup>7</sup>. Discourse linguistics – a term primarily used by German researchers for discourse analysis – is primarily concerned with analysing discourses as complex, socially and historically constructed practices. Already at this stage we may see some similari-

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that since 2013 Russian has also been taught in Czech secondary schools as a second foreign language, alongside German, Spanish, and French, which means, that the language is not only historically associated with tourism and economics.

<sup>5</sup> Karlovy Vary is a major spa town in western Czech Republic known for its thermal baths and historic architecture. The official language of the Czech Republic is Czech, a West Slavic Indo-European language. The capital and largest city of the Czech Republic is Prague, other major cities and urban areas include Brno, Ostrava, and Plzeň. Karlovy Vary is situated in the valley of the Ohře River and now has around 78,000 inhabitants. The town lies not far from the Czech-German border. The Czech Republic also borders Poland, Austria, and Slovakia.

<sup>6</sup> The translation was carried out by the author of this article.

<sup>7</sup> This brief overview of the topic is intended to demonstrate the scope of discourse and the fact that it is not a phenomenon unique to linguistic landscapes, but rather a widespread phenomenon in linguistics. Consequently, it does not provide a conclusive view of the phenomenon. The section on research design explains how I understand discourse.

ties between perceiving discourses and cities and their high complexity. The scope of discourse extends well beyond the examination of linguistic structures to include phenomena that surpass mere text production, such as power relations, the formation of knowledge, social dynamics, and even visual and media modes of expression (cf. Warnke and Spitzmüller 2008: 4). In this context, a clear distinction is drawn between the terms “discourse” and “text”: while discourses are understood as the overarching network of practices and processes of meaning formation – that is, as the very basis upon which societal constructions of knowledge and power are built – a text is seen as a concrete materialization of language<sup>8</sup>. Here, signs<sup>9</sup> play a crucial role. Although signs – as elements of linguistic expression and, by extension, as integral components of texts and discourses – are central to the analysis, it is repeatedly emphasized that discourses cannot be reduced merely to the sum of their signs. Rather, these signs represent only one facet of a broader field of practice, one that also incorporates paralinguistic, visual, and actor-related dimensions. Additionally, we should remember that “code choice on signs is neither neutral nor random; code choice and how it is calibrated (e.g. which code to use in which order, font, typeface, and color) involve significant decisions which in turn carry symbolic meanings” (Themistocleous 2025: 132). Analysing features such as layout/design, typography, text–image relationships, and materiality opens up perspectives that extend beyond purely linguistic sign analyses, allowing these elements to be interpreted as a kind of landscape of linguistic phenomena (cf. Warnke and Spitzmüller 2008: 12–13). Consequently, a promising approach lies in examining linguistic landscapes as an extension of discourse-linguistic analyses to include the visual and media dimensions that further structure and contextualize discourse.

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it has been argued that “one of the most important properties of the discourse is what is not said, but remains implicit, as in the case of implications, implicatures and presuppositions” (van Dijk 2011: 50).

<sup>9</sup> The characterization of a “sign” as a research unit and object in linguistic landscapes reflects a variety of methodological approaches (Malinowski 2018: 869), encompassing not only the delineation of its spatial limitations but also its broader contextual implications. Lisek (2016: 143) refers to several dimensions: governmental (official vs. non-official, as noted by Leclerc 1989, or government vs. non-government, according to Heubner 2006), informative (top-down vs. bottom-up, as outlined by Ben Rafael *et al.* 2006), and functional (municipal vs. commercial and transgressive, following Scollon and Scollon 2003). Further studies may focus on the interactive aspects of language use – text-linguistic and functional-pragmatic in nature – as Scarvaglieri, Redder, Pappenhagen, and Brehmer (2013: 55) underline. In contrast, other perspectives stress the physical and spatial dimensions of signs, as advanced by Cenoz and Gorter (2006: 71) and Backhaus (2007: 66). For the purposes of this inquiry, signs are defined as written texts that occur in public spaces – and which may also participate in interactions – within spatially definable locations characterized by the presence of both non-Cyrillic and Cyrillic scripts. Due to practical considerations, however, Arabic and Chinese scripts are not included as research units in this study.

In this context, the paper aims to fill the existing research gap in functional discourses within LL studies concerning the Czech Republic and to characterize those that are still insufficiently described. As there have already been attempts to characterize discourses in Karlovy Vary (cf. Lisek 2025; Lisek 2026) with the most and the least units – namely the commercial (n=36) and educational (n=3), this inquiry focuses on the artistic (n=12) and regulatory discourses (n=7) as the next mostly represented in the analysed street in Karlovy Vary<sup>10</sup>. This article's objectives are to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What languages appear in the artistic and regulatory discourse in Karlovy Vary?
- 2) In what constellation do the languages appear?
- 3) What are the themes of the named discourses?
- 4) What role does Russian play in the named discourses or themes?

To respond to the questions, a mixed-methods approach will be employed. The article begins by providing a brief definition of the phenomenon of linguistic landscapes and focusing on the Czech Republic as a research area in Section 2. Next, in Section 3 the paper aims to capture the characteristics of the linguistic profile of the analysed street in the city centre of Karlovy Vary, putting emphasis on functional discourses. Section 4 provides an insight into the methodology of the inquiry and research instruments. The findings, conclusions, as well as the outlook are presented in the last part, namely in Section 5 and Section 6.

## 2. CZECH REPUBLIC AND LL STUDIES

The Czech Republic provides a solid ground for research in the field of LL studies. To address this issue, a brief overview of selected existing studies follows and, subsequently, the next chapter introduces the linguistic landscape of Karlovy Vary, including recent findings on multilingual practices observed there.

Firstly, one should be reminded of the roots of the idea of linguistic landscapes, originating in the 1970s, when Lotman and Uspenskij (1978) developed a cultural semiotic framework within which language is conceptualized as a specific element

<sup>10</sup> It might seem that the artistic and regulatory discourses differ a lot, but the fact that the signs will contain foreign language elements is equally possible. They were chosen due to this assumption and even more due to the fact that they were strongly represented in the whole data set (cf. 4. Research methodology and data).

with a communicative function that facilitates reciprocal exchange. Given that the cultural-semiotic framework and the importance of language perception in public spaces represent early attempts to conceptualize linguistic and semiotic landscapes, these scholars can be regarded as pioneers within the Slavic academic community, despite having influenced contemporary linguistic landscape research only indirectly and not as a separate scope of research.

Secondly, a brief notice on the foundational definition by Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25) is useful in this context: “The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration.” This definition highlights that LLs encompass visible linguistic elements in public spaces that serve as indicators of a society’s linguistic practices or ideologies.

Thirdly, the early empirically quantitative orientation of linguistic landscape research established a foundation upon which contemporary currents mutually influence one another. The integration of qualitative and multimodal approaches now facilitates in-depth analyses of the interactions of text, image, material, and environment (Jaworski & Thurlow 2010). This methodological expansion has significantly enhanced our understanding of multilingual phenomena and, notably, linguistic superdiversity in urban contexts of metropolitan landscapes (Gorter & Cenoz 2015; Van Mensel, Vandenbroucke, Blackwood 2016; Földes 2020). Concurrently, the didactic relevance of language perception is increasingly foregrounded, thereby informing both theoretical debates and practical applications within the field<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, in Slavonic studies, the examination of language contact situations and global geopolitical dynamics offers new perspectives to the interdisciplinary discourse on the multimodal, semiotic, and empirically grounded exploration of language in the public sphere (Pavlenko 2012; Müller 2021; Henzelmann/Hacı 2025) and its connection to power relations.

Importantly, linguistic landscape research – situated within the broader field of sociolinguistics – encompasses diverse perspectives, ranging from studies of school language policies to analyses of societal multilingualism. Within the Czech-speaking context, linguistic landscape scholarship emerged primarily in the early twenty-first century, initially focusing on language management and language contact phenomena.

Language management in the Czech Republic is characterized by an interplay of explicit policy and spontaneous practice. According to the Czech tradition of Lan-

<sup>11</sup> For more details in the field of language didactics, consider, among others, Lisek/Putzier (2024).

guage Management Theory, scholars distinguish between organized, top-down interventions and the everyday “simple” management of discourse (Nekvapil 2006). Following the political changes of 1989, state language planning reaffirmed Czech as the dominant official language while cautiously accommodating historical minority languages through legal provisions; however, as Sloboda (2010) observes, public discourse continues to frame the nation as monolingually Czech. In practice, minority and immigrant communities engage in grassroots management of multilingualism. For example, Vasiljev and Nekvapil (2012) document how Vietnamese community members strategically alternate between Czech and Vietnamese in market settings and family contexts to navigate social and economic integration. Such bottom-up adjustments illustrate how local actors manage language choices in response to Czech-centric norms.

Significantly, this integrated micro-macro perspective aligns with linguistic landscape studies. In this framework, public signage becomes a site of negotiation between state language policy and community agency – a connection explicitly drawn by Czech language management research, which links language intervention traditions with spatial analyses of multilingual public space (Sloboda 2010). Further analyses include Nekvapil and Neústupný’s (2003) study on language management in binational and bilingual German-Czech organizations, as well as Sloboda’s (2016) examination of super-diversity in the Czech context through both macro- and micro-sociological lenses. Moreover, an increasing number of student theses at various academic levels now focus on linguistic landscapes. One notable example is Váňa’s (2022) bachelor’s thesis, which ethnographically examines the multilingual landscape of Písek. The study, drawing on Blommaert’s framework, combines on-site data collection, online resources, and participant observation.

In the same year appeared a study examining the sociolinguistic landscape of Hradec Králové, a significant Czech regional centre of approximately 100,000 inhabitants that has been extensively researched since the 1960s. The paper by Nekvapil (2022) synthesizes diverse research strands – including urban speech variation, onomastics, interactional studies, and the linguistic landscape – to explore language variation in everyday interactions such as direction-giving, service encounters, and religious proselyting. It documents a shift towards a non-standard, equalized form of Czech – termed “Common Czech” (*obecná čeština*). Additionally, Nekvapil’s study (2022) employs a perception scale to analyse the LL of Hradec Králové in terms of sign frequency, location, and design, revealing that, although Standard Czech overwhelmingly dominates, a multilingual dimension exists with fifteen detected languages; notably, only Czech and English serve both identification and operational functions.

The findings suggest that multilingual signage primarily indicates the origin of goods and services rather than reflecting distinct ethnic communities. Overall, the study demonstrates that sociolinguistic situation is the product of historical legacy, social stratification, and evolving communicative practices, underscoring the need for an interdisciplinary approach to urban identity and linguistic diversity in public spaces.

As we see, linguistic landscapes provide valuable insights into how language is used, how the signs are designed, perceived, and regulated in various sociocultural contexts, which are presented only briefly in the picture below with the signs from Karlovy Vary.



PICTURE 1. Signs in the LL of Karlovy Vary in the year 2024

The collage illustrates the multimodal linguistic landscape in Karlovy Vary, where textual and visual elements co-construct meaning, texts, and, consequently, discourses in the public space. Different sign types in their modality – regulatory panels, advertising columns, recycling bins, and directional signage – combine language with icons, colours, and layout to guide, inform, or persuade. The spa rules sign employs minimalist symbols alongside bilingual Czech-English text, enhancing accessibility through visual clarity. Advertising pillars are saturated with images of luxury vehicles, architecture, and food, pairing Russian and German with compelling visuals to appeal to specific tourist groups. Waste containers rely heavily on colour coding and pictograms, emphasizing functional communication. Meanwhile, multilingual directional signs merge spatial orientation with institutional branding through typography and



emblematic arrow design.

These layered modalities underscore how linguistic choices intersect with visual grammars to navigate different discursive domains. The prominence of Russian and German beside Czech and English reflects both the historical presence of these communities and their economic significance in contemporary tourism. The landscape thus reveals a dynamic negotiation between local identity, global consumer culture, and inclusive communication strategies in a spa town.

Building on these developments, the subsequent chapter turns its full attention to Karlovy Vary, where emerging multilingual practices reveal gaps in the existing inquiries – gaps that this article tries to address. Moreover, contemporary demographic trends in the Czech Republic illustrate a complex interplay between an ageing native population and an increasing influx of younger, multilingual residents. As a miniature of broader societal transformations, Karlovy Vary exemplifies how a heterogeneous population structure can precipitate significant alterations in the local LL. This demographic evolution – marked by the dual processes of preserving longstanding cultural traditions and integrating different and new linguistic practices – highlights the imperative for advanced language policies that accommodate both influences.

### 3. KARLOVY VARY'S LL AND FUNCTIONAL DISCOURSES

Until now, Karlovy Vary has predominantly been examined in scholarly research as a primarily Russian-speaking city (Sloboda 2021). However, this description requires reconsideration as of 2024, given the city's emerging profile as a multilingual urban space. The linguistic landscape of Karlovy Vary can be considered as noteworthy multilingual, with Czech and English<sup>12</sup> dominating most LL discourse types. The LL of Karlovy Vary reflects a dynamic interaction of local, regional, and global linguistic influences, with historical, economic, and political factors playing crucial roles in shaping the multilingual landscape of this border city. The mix of languages in various discourses reflects the complex sociolinguistic setting of the city<sup>13</sup> and the inhabi-

<sup>12</sup> English, as a global language, plays a prominent role in various functional discourses, particularly in the commercial and educational sectors, where it serves as a lingua franca for international communication. Czech, being the official language of the Czech Republic, maintains dominance in regulatory and identity-related discourses, emphasizing the local cultural and legal context.

<sup>13</sup> Here, the term “borderscapes” is invoked, referring to border regions in a manner analogous to Janczak's conceptualization of dynamic territories – *Grenzschäften*, namely that “permeable border regions are sites of distinctive language diffusion, and within them, processes of multilingualism – including language hybridisation – occur more intensely than in inland areas” (Jańczak 2024: 344).

tants' efforts to cater to a diverse, international audience while maintaining its Czech heritage. The heritage is mainly reproduced in the Czech language, although in the LL of Karlovy Vary, other languages are used as well: "The dominance of Czech as the official language of the Czech Republic is unsurprising. Similarly, the notably higher prevalence of English compared to other foreign languages was also anticipated – not only within this spa town but in general – given its global significance and prominent role in tourism. The relatively minor difference in the frequency of German (n=27) and Russian (n=22) can likely be attributed to the proximity of the border and the popularity of the spa town among Russian-speaking tourists. More striking, however, is the observation that the proximity to the border does not appear to exert a particularly strong influence on the local linguistic landscape"(Lisek 2025).

As the first analysis in the year 2024 shows, Russian does not play a prominent role in the LL of Karlovy Vary, but yet this language is present in the commercial discourse, particularly in sectors like beauty, medicine, and tourism, probably reflecting the town's historical ties to Russian-speaking visitors<sup>14</sup>. In contrast, despite the proximity to Germany, the German language does not dominate the LL today. This could be due to the international mix of tourists and the increasing use of English as a primary means of communication.

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Although the study predominantly employs a qualitative framework – reflecting the intrinsic characteristics of urban signage as delineated by Dörnyei (cf. 2007: 38) – its aim is also to conduct a systematic analysis of the languages present and their distribution across the designated discursive categories. Adopting an exploratory paradigm inspired by Gorter (2018), the research concentrates on a central thoroughfare in the city centre, methodically documenting the signage to construct in a such way a corpus for analysis.

The signs are analysed primarily within the model of functional discourses of contemporary multilingualism in urban texts, as proposed by Opiłowski and Makowska (cf. 2023: 39)<sup>15</sup>. In this context, I understand the term discourse as an interconnected network of texts sharing a common thematic focus and fulfilling specific communi-

<sup>14</sup> The historical bounds have their roots, inter alia, in the visit of Peter the Great, Tsar and Emperor of all Russia, at Karlovy Vary in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>15</sup> Their model is to some extent related to the conceptual framework of Scollon and Scollon (cf. 2003: 167).

cative purposes and also being embedded in the discourse-linguistic tradition, which was outlined in the introduction. Opiłowski and Makowska (2023: 26) propose a typology of ten discourse categories typically identifiable in urban environments. They differentiate discourses serving orientation functions, intended to guide individuals spatially or temporally within the urban space, and regulatory discourses, which communicate instructions or stipulate compliance with local regulations. Furthermore, commemorative discourses are identified as those commemorating notable historical figures or events, whereas commercial discourses involve texts aimed at advertising or cultivating positive public images of products and brands. Additionally, educational discourses encompass texts that inform or raise public awareness on various issues, while artistic discourses include expressions intended to reflect aesthetic sensibilities or cultural heritage. Protest discourses, on the other hand, articulate critical positions or demands for societal change, and political discourses convey explicitly political messages or advocate ideological stances. Identity discourses focus specifically on affirming group identity or facilitating self-presentation, and lastly, alerting discourses serve as mechanisms to warn citizens of potential dangers or to solicit assistance during emergencies. Taken together, these categories of discourse highlight the diverse communicative roles performed by multilingual signage in urban contexts, providing a clear analytical framework for studies exploring the intricate relationship between language, communication, and the urban public sphere. In order to facilitate the next steps of the research, the categories defined in these studies provide a deductive basis for the initial stages of data analysis. This part of research goes on in an inductive manner.

To explore how non-linguistic semiotic resources complement and influence linguistic messages within the selected two discourses in the LL of Karlovy Vary, the study further employs a Multimodal Analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006; Jewitt 2014) in connection with Russian signs. The multimodal approach reflects visual elements – such as colour symbolism, font sizes, positioning of languages, layout hierarchy, and imagery – that accompany textual language on signage. Certain attention is given to how these elements reinforce or challenge linguistic prominence, symbolic value, or marginalization of specific languages, notably Russian.

The data were gathered in July 2024 in the centre of Karlovy Vary along a 1,000-metre stretch encompassing the streets of *nábřeží J. Palacha* and *Mlýnské nábřeží*, extending from *Varšavská* street through *Dvořákovy sady* to the crossing with *Lázenská* street. This area represents a prominent and vibrant city-centre promenade frequently visited by residents and tourists alike, making it probable to display diverse signage associated with various discourses. The main research corpus consists of 88 photographs, containing 108 research units. The collected material includes signs featuring

ten different languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, and Ukrainian. Regarding their linguistic composition, 36 % (39 signs) are monolingual, while 64 % (69 signs) display multilingual features. For the purpose of this study, a sub-corpus<sup>16</sup> consisting of 19 signs was used. The corpus selected for my analysis contains artistic and regulatory signs in an unbalanced proportion and may be perceived as small. On the one hand, it is a clear limitation of this study; on the other hand, conducting qualitative analysis does not require large samples. Further, both discourses have a touristic element in common, which means that tourists are interested in artistic events and look after regulation to learn how to behave in a foreign town or region.

## 5. FINDINGS

As already conducted research shows (cf. Lisek 2026), the artistic discourse understood here as including content intended to reflect aesthetic sensibilities or cultural heritage “is primarily composed of Czech signs, although there are occasional signs in English or multilingual signs”. Embedded in previous findings (cf. Lisek 2026), we can characterize the regulatory discourse – communicating instructions or stipulating compliance with local regulations – as follows: “The regulatory discourse that communicates rules e.g., of dealing with rubbish, or restrictions in parking places in Karlovy Vary to guide public behaviour, is constituted by Czech signs, although there are some multilingual units (...)”.

Based on this brief classification, I closely analyse the frequency of occurrence of different languages and examine whether clear trends or even causal relationships can be identified. Czech (n=12) dominates the artistic discourse (n=12) on the multilingual units (n=8). There are only five monolingual units within this discourse; they contain only Czech. On the multilingual signs it is followed by English (n=6), and in one case the research unit is quadrilingual (Czech, English, German, and Russian). The dominant language constellation is Czech and English appearing in that order. As the table presents, the following themes were identified inductively in the artistic discourse when looking at mono- and multilingual units.

<sup>16</sup> For reasons of comprehensiveness, all discourses identified in Karlovy Vary in 2024 that collectively constitute the source corpus are enumerated here: artistic discourse (n=12), commercial discourse (n=59), memorial discourse (n=3), educational discourse (n=3), identity discourse (n=6), regulatory discourse (n=7), and orientational discourse (n=6). For an extensive discussion of the corpus and detailed descriptions of its respective sub-corpora, see Lisek (2025).

**TABLE 1.** Themes in the artistic discourse among mono - und multilingual signs

| Themes in the artistic discourse among mono-lingual signs (n=4) | Themes in the artistic discourse among multi-lingual signs (n=8) |
|---|--|
| concert and shows (n=2)   | concerts and shows (n=4)   |
| films (n=1)   | films (n=2)  |
| guided tours (n=1)  | leisure time attractions (n=1)                                   |
|   | exhibitions (=1)   |

As we see in the table, the most research units among the multilingual signs concern concerts and shows. These signs are written in Czech and English. Also, the theme regarding films is bilingual as well – Czech and English. The only fully multilingual sign is related to leisure and attractions and is written in Czech, English, German, and Russian. The latter does not appear on any other multilingual sign and so it seems to have no importance in the multilingual artistic discourse.

There are also advertisements for concerts and shows written only in Czech, which is predictable, but, surprisingly, the number of such signs is lower than that of the multilingual ones, which suggests, on the one hand, that the sign-makers are aware that the clients are likely to be tourists. On the other hand, it seems less realistic that there are fewer monolingual signs related to concerts and shows, because the Czech inhabitants do not use it as frequently as the guests speaking languages other than Czech.



**PICTURE 2.** Examples of multilingual signs in the artistic discourse

The two collages exemplify the artistic discourse in Karlovy Vary's linguistic landscape, where Czech remains the predominant language, while English functions as an important secondary language. The signs which advertise cultural events, such as concerts and film screenings, employ a visually engaging multimodal design that not only attracts local residents but also international visitors. This bilingual presentation aligns with current research findings, suggesting that, while Czech is the core medium, the incorporation of English reflects a strategic effort to cater to the town's diverse tourist audience.

A closer look at the regulatory discourse reveals that all (n=7) the signs use lettering (n=6), except for one. Every sign in the resulting dataset contains Czech. Three of the signs are monolingual (only Czech), the other three are multilingual (Czech and other languages). The dominant language constellation is Czech and English. One unit contains Czech, English, German, and Russian. The table below demonstrates which themes were extracted inductively from the artistic discourse concerning mono- and multilingual units in the scope.

**TABLE 2.** Themes in the regulatory discourse among mono- und multilingual signs

| Themes in the regulatory discourse among monolingual signs (n=3) | Themes in the regulatory discourse among multilingual signs (n=3) |
|--|---|
| security and surveillance (n=1)                                  | street cleaning (n=1)   |
| waste management (n=1)   | spa rules (n=2)   |
| parking (n=1)  |   |

The table shows that both waste management and spa rules appear among the themes of regulatory discourse in Karlovy Vary. Among the multilingual sign, the spa rules theme dominates. Among the monolingual signs, all three themes (security and surveillance, waste management, parking) were equally represented. The only case when Russian appears were the spa rules along with Czech, English, and German. The Russian language does not have any deeper significance in the themes and in the discourse.



PICTURE 3. Examples of multilingual signs in the regulatory discourse

The images in Picture 3 exemplify the regulatory discourse in Karlovy Vary's public signage. In these contexts, Czech functions as the primary language for delivering instructions and guidelines, with English strategically incorporated to engage both local inhabitants and international guests. For example, one sign related to street maintenance adopts a bilingual format that enhances clarity across different linguistic communities, while another sign delineating spa regulations highlights the imperative for unambiguous communication in a prominent tourist location.

A brief analysis of the two signs in the Russian language follows, aiming to determine whether they exhibit any particular characteristics regarding their modality (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006; Jewitt 2014).



PICTURE 4. Signs in the artistic and regulatory discourses which include the Russian language

The analysis of the two images – a promotional poster for the Karlovy VARY REGION CARD and a prohibition sign at the colonnade – provides important insights into how multimodal elements in the linguistic landscape not only convey information but also implicitly reflect attitudes towards different language communities.

On the promotional poster, the title is prominently displayed in English, a choice that highlights the role of English as the global lingua franca, particularly in the context of tourism. Following the title, the languages are presented in the following order: Czech, English, German, and Russian. This arrangement suggests that the official language (Czech) is prioritised, with English positioned as the international communication medium. German and Russian follow, presented in a typographically similar manner. While Russian, with its Cyrillic alphabet, introduces a distinct visual element, it does not stand out in terms of layout or font style. Instead, it is integrated harmoniously with the other languages, signalling recognition of the Russian-speaking audience without giving it excessive importance.

The prohibition sign at the colonnade follows a similar approach, with large, red, crossed-out pictograms being the dominant visual element. The explanatory text, provided in Czech, English, German, and Russian, serves a secondary function. Here, the presence of the text is clearly additional to the universally recognizable symbols, which serve as the primary means of communication. The text in all four languages is presented without distinction in terms of size or typographical prominence. No single language, including Russian, is visually highlighted over the others. This balanced presentation of the languages suggests a functional approach to communication, where each language has a clearly defined role without any language being marginalized or elevated.

The multimodal aspects, such as the use of colour (red, white, and black) and the spatial arrangement of the text, subtly reflect attitudes towards the different language communities. On the promotional poster, the use of large, vivid tourist images alongside the text emphasizes the international nature of the destination, highlighting both its modernity and appeal to global visitors. The choice of colours and the spatial prominence of the Czech and English texts signal the importance of these languages in the context of tourism and international communication. While German and Russian are included as well, their positioning and typographical treatment suggest that, while these languages are acknowledged, they do not receive the same level of visual importance. This design reflects a hierarchy in which the local (Czech) and global (English) languages are foregrounded, while the regional (German) and historically important (Russian) languages occupy a secondary position.

The interplay between the visual, spatial, and linguistic elements is key to under-



standing how meaning is constructed in the linguistic landscape. The spatial organisation of the text, coupled with the dominant use of visual symbols and colour, guides the viewer's interpretation. The large, eye-catching visual elements on the promotional poster suggest an openness to international audiences, while the equal but less prominent placement of the Russian text reflects an acknowledgement of the Russian-speaking community without prioritizing it. This visual strategy subtly reinforces both the functional and socio-political hierarchies integral in the space, revealing the underlying cultural attitudes towards different language groups.

While the spatial and visual arrangements of signage elements – such as colour, font size, and layout hierarchy – suggest differentiated communicative strategies, these should be interpreted with caution. It may be hypothesized that the prominence of Czech and English reflects their functional and symbolic dominance in the local context, while the inclusion of Russian and German in a more subdued design indicates their secondary role. These linguistic and visual decisions offer only a glimpse into the sociolinguistic dynamics of Karlovy Vary, still revealing the complex ways in which language, power, and identity are mediated in the public space. However, further ethnographic or reception-oriented studies would be needed to validate such assumptions.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

This study examined the artistic and regulatory linguistic landscape discourses in Karlovy Vary, yielding significant insights into language distribution, constellation, thematic categorization, and the specific role of Russian. In the artistic discourse, Czech is unequivocally dominant, appearing on all observed signs (n=12). A substantial portion of these signs (n=8) are multilingual, predominantly combining Czech with English, while only one instance incorporates additional languages – German and Russian. The prevalent bilingual configuration, consistently foregrounding Czech, underscores its foundational status within the local LL. Thematically, the artistic discourse primarily advertises cultural events such as concerts and shows, films, guided tours, leisure attractions, and exhibitions, with concerts and shows being especially prominent in the multilingual units. This pattern suggests a deliberate strategy by LL actors to cater to an international audience, particularly tourists.

In the regulatory discourse, Czech likewise maintains its dominant position, appearing on every identified sign (n=7). This discourse features an equal distribution of monolingual and multilingual signs, with the latter mainly pairing Czech with En-

glish; only one regulatory sign is quadrilingual, also including German and Russian. The regulatory signs address themes such as security and surveillance, waste management, parking, street cleaning, and, notably, spa rules. The prominence of spa rules in the multilingual category indicates an emphasis on ensuring that critical local regulations are accessible to international visitors.

The presence of Russian remains marginal across both discourses, manifesting exclusively within quadrilingual signs related to leisure attractions in the artistic discourse and spa rules in the regulatory discourse. Although Karlovy Vary has historically attracted Russian-speaking visitors, the current, minimal occurrence of Russian may reflect broader socio-political shifts – potentially influenced by recent geopolitical events, such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – resulting in a symbolic distancing from the language in public spaces.

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## RUSKI JEZIK U UMJETNIČKOM I REGULATIVNOM DISKURSU? EMPIRIJSKI UVIDI U JEZIČNI KRAJOLIK KARLOVIH VARA

GRZEGORZ LISEK

### SAŽETAK

U radu se analizira jezični krajolik (JK) Karlovih Vara u Češkoj Republici s posebnim osvrtom na umjetničke i regulativne diskurse. U kontekstu aktualnih geopolitičkih promjena, studija kritički istražuje prisutnost, raspored i tematske funkcije jezika na gradskim natpisima, pri čemu se posebna pozornost pridaje promjenjivoj percepciji i vidljivosti ruskoga jezika. Cilj je rada popuniti istraživačku prazninu vezanu uz proučavanje JK u češkom kontekstu te istražiti funkcionalnu višejezičnost u srednjoeuropskom urbanom prostoru. Analiza se temelji na podkorpusu sustavno prikupljenih natpisa u središnjoj gradskoj ulici. Metodološki, studija kombinira kvalitativnu kategorizaciju utemeljenu na teorijskim okvirima koje predlažu Opiłowski i Makowska (2023) te Scollon i Scollon (2003), s kvantitativnom analizom učestalosti prema pristupu koji je predstavio Gorter (2018). Rezultati pokazuju dominaciju češkog jezika, često u kombinaciji s engleskim u višejezičnim natpisima u oba diskursa. Ruski se jezik javlja marginalno i isključivo unutar regulativnog diskursa vezanog za pravila lječilišta, što ukazuje na njegovu ograničenu simboličku ulogu. Tematski, umjetnički natpisi uglavnom reklamiraju kulturna događanja (koncerte, predstave, filmove), dok regulativni natpisi obuhvaćaju teme poput pravila korištenja lječilišta, upravljanja otpadom i parkiranja. Dobiveni uvidi ističu lokalne prakse višejezične komunikacije te naglašavaju promjenjivu percepciju ruskog jezika u urbanom JK, pružajući smjernice za buduća sociolingvistička istraživanja jezične vidljivosti.

### KEYWORDS:

*regulativni i umjetnički diskursi,  
češki jezik, jezični krajolik, ruski  
jezik, višejezičnost*