

# IMPORTANT ECOLINGUISTIC INSIGHTS INTO THE RUSSIAN LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE AND DISCOURSE

**Martin Henzelmann: *Linguistik des ökologischen Diskurses. Untersuchungen zu Kommunikationsformen in Ökologie und Umweltschutz in der Russischen Föderation*. Berlin, Brüssel:**

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Martin Henzelmann's monograph, published in 2024 as volume 39 of the series *Symbolae Slavicae*, poses a clear and timely question: How is ecological discourse in Russia anchored in language, law, and visual practice in public space? The study's most consequential decision is to relocate the empirical focus of Linguistic/Semiotic Landscape research from the well-trodden urban centres to protected natural areas. In doing so, it complements metropolitan work—such as Romanowski's (2024) Polish-language study of London—and aligns with emerging small-town (cf. Koszko 2022) and non-urban perspectives. For Slavic linguistics, where extra-urban communicative ecologies remain under-documented, this work marks an important and overdue shift.

The book's aims are stated with commendable precision. Its main focus lies in examining the functioning of visual communicative artefacts—signs, panels, maps, pictograms—in natural spaces and their embedding in legal norms, discursive frames, and linguistic constructions (p. 9). The author seeks to demonstrate how distinct linguistic approaches can be coordinated within a complex discourse via what he terms an “inner interdisciplinarity” (p. 9). This is not merely a programmatic gesture; it is reflected in a carefully layered architecture. The theoretical scaffolding interweaves ecolinguistics (pp. 37–58), discourse linguistics (pp. 59–70), substantial chapters in legal linguistics (pp. 135–172; 173–227), construction grammar (pp. 229–271), and visual linguistics/Semiotic Landscapes (pp. 273–288). Methodologically, the book advances a qualitative, multimodal micro-analytics: it employs close readings of signage and large-format boards; an evaluative account of colour and layout choices (pp. 306–313) operationalised through a centre–periphery heuristic lens (pp. 313–316); and selective corroboration by corpus and associative data to situate key lexical carriers (Tab. 29; pp. 304–306). The balance

between interpretive depth and empirical anchoring is, on the whole, well assessed.

At its empirical core lies the case study of the Volga-Kama Biosphere Reserve (pp. 297–317). This is where the analytical virtues of the book are most visible. The dataset comprises field photographs of prohibition signs and a prominent information board. Three findings of Henzelmann’s research deserve highlighting. Firstly, typographic design matters: text blocks in versals and strong contrast are shown to form the semantic centre, whereas the map, the UNESCO emblem, and an illustrative vignette function as indexical supports placed peripherally (pp. 314–316). Secondly, colour grammar is functional rather than decorative: white enhances legibility and connotes “purity”; green signals vegetation and the ecological frame; blue indexes water/sky (Volga/Kama); and red operates as a warning and boundary mark (pp. 306–313; 302–304). Thirdly, lexical anchors—*заповедник*, *биосфера*, *государственный*, *природный*—serve as nodal points of the discourse (pp. 300–306), while the addendum “*основан в 1960 году*” historicises and legitimates the institution (pp. 300–304). The exclusively Russian signage, in a region characterised by bilingualism, is read as evidence of standardisation and top-down chains of responsibility (pp. 315–317). The claim of wider relevance is measured: the study demonstrates with precision how norms are materialised and made behaviourally effective in protected landscapes, while remaining cautious about any generalisation beyond comparable settings.

One of the book’s most valuable contributions to Slavonic Studies is conceptual. It consolidates Linguistic Landscape and Semiotic Landscape approaches into a single, consistently applied analytic frame (pp. 276–296, 306–316). The semiotics of colour and symbol is fully integrated rather than treated as an afterthought, becoming part of the account of text-image relations and spatial composition. The centre/periphery distinction, often invoked loosely in LL work, is operationalised with clarity and consequence (pp. 313–316). In effect, discursive patterns emerge not merely as linguistic constructions but also as spatial-visual arrangements whose perceptual design steers reception and renders normative texts in public space behaviourally salient (pp. 300–304, 314–316).

This perceptual-visual synthesis dovetails with the groundwork in ecolinguistics, discourse, and legal linguistics (Chaps. 3–7) and productively deepens the construction grammar perspective (Chaps. 8–9). A particularly persuasive thread shows how verbal patterns of prohibition and classification—for example *заповедник*, *государственный*, *природный*—undergo semiotic condensation in the material design of signs, maps, and emblems, thereby making institutional responsibility, protection logics, and historical legitimation visible (pp. 300–306, 315–317). The legal-linguistic chapters provide a twofold contribution. On the one hand, they demonstrate how national terminologies such as *заповедник* (pp. 298–306), *биосферный* (pp. 302–

306) and the noun chain *государственный природный биосферный заповедник* (pp. 302–306) exert what Henzelmann aptly terms “precision pressure” on interpretation. On the other hand, they trace how international documents and emblems—notably UNESCO’s—enter local visibility through translation and adaptation (p. 315). At the level of discourse, four frames crystallise: protection/prohibition, state responsibility, nature as purity/originality, and international prestige. Linguistically, these are realised by noun chain densification and prohibition constructions (e.g., “Вход и въезд запрещён”, pp. 300–303); visually, they are stabilised through centre–periphery composition (pp. 314–316), colour logic (pp. 306–313), and boundary mapping (pp. 302–304). The evidential coupling—“text dominates, iconography indexicalises” (pp. 314–316)—is supported judiciously by corpus frequencies and associative norms (Tab. 29; pp. 304–306) without swamping the qualitative core.

There are, clearly, limits and opportunities for further work. The material base is necessarily circumscribed. While the author is candid about the logistical constraints of non-urban research, a multi-site design (as Grzeškowiak 2010 applies in other context in Europe)—spanning several reserves or natural parks—would strengthen claims to generality and enable finer-grained comparison of regional governance regimes and signage ecologies. Moreover, the book offers a measured critique of quantitative LL approaches. Much of this is warranted, especially in contexts where token frequency poorly predicts comprehension or compliance. However, recent attitude-focused LL studies (e.g. Przybył and Wiśniewska 2025) or discourse centred LL research (Lisek 2025) suggest room for hybrid designs in which carefully constrained counts or experiments complement the kind of semiotic micro-analysis practiced here. Engaging more explicitly with such work would broaden the book’s interlocutors beyond the qualitatively inclined.

These reservations aside, Henzelmann has written an unusually coherent and methodologically assured study. It is theoretically (not for the first time, as shown already in the research on language of infrastructure in Bulgaria and Montenegro—Henzelmann and Hacı 2025; Vujović and Henzelmann 2025) ambitious without jargon, empirically concrete without parochialism, and stylistically precise. For scholars of Russian and wider Slavic linguistics, the book fills a genuine gap by showing how ecological governance is made legible—indeed actionable—through the coupling of legal categories, discursive frames, and the visual-material design of public signs. For Linguistic Landscape and semiotic researchers more generally, it provides portable heuristics—centre/periphery, colour grammar, text-image-relation—that goes well beyond the Volga-Kama setting. The result is a persuasive demonstration that transitioning from urban LL settings to non-urban Semiotic Landscapes is not only possible but also revealing, and that the language of the environment requires attention both visually and auditorily.

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