



INFORMATION PLATFORM "CENTER FOR INNOVATIVE THINKING"
UKRAINIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENTIFIC STRATEGIES
EUROPEAN UNION RESEARCH DEPARTMENT
SCIENTIFIC AND PUBLISHING CENTER "PROGRESS"

Наука і Суспільство в умовах війни SCIENCE AND SOCIETY IN TIMES OF WAR



PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC
AND PRACTICAL CONFERENCE

**JUNE 5-7, 2026
KHARKIV, UKRAINE**

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THE EFFECTS OF THE RUSSO–UKRAINIAN WAR ON THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF UKRAINIAN SETTLEMENTS

Abstract. The Russo–Ukrainian war has profoundly transformed the public visual space of Ukrainian settlements. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, linguistic landscapes have become important sites of political communication, national resistance, collective mourning, and identity construction. This paper examines the main effects of the war on the linguistic landscape of Ukrainian settlements, with particular attention to the increased visibility of the Ukrainian language, the spread of patriotic and military discourse, the commemoration of fallen soldiers, and the emergence of new visual and multilingual practices connected to humanitarian aid, displacement, and international solidarity. The study argues that the war has turned linguistic landscapes into visible arenas of wartime identity, memory, and geopolitical orientation.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, Russo–Ukrainian war, Ukraine, public space, language policy, identity.

Introduction. The linguistic landscape of a settlement includes the written signs visible in public space: street names, institutional nameplates, advertisements, shop signs, posters, memorial plaques, graffiti, banners, public notices, and digital or semi-digital displays [6]. According to the classic definition by Landry and Bourhis [8], the linguistic landscape refers to the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory. It is not merely a neutral reflection of language use; rather, it is also a symbolic field in which power relations, identity, ideology, and social change become visible [2].

In Ukraine, the linguistic landscape has long reflected the country's complex historical and sociolinguistic situation. Ukrainian and Russian, as well as minority languages such as Hungarian, Romanian, Polish, Crimean Tatar, Bulgarian, and others, have shaped the visual multilingualism of different regions. However, the Russo–Ukrainian War, especially after Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, has radically altered the meaning of language in public space. Language has become not only a means of communication, but also a marker of political loyalty, national identity, resistance, trauma, and memory.

This paper examines how the war has affected the linguistic landscape of Ukrainian settlements. It focuses on the transformation of public signage, the symbolic status of Ukrainian and Russian, the appearance of new wartime signs, the commemorative function of public space, and the role of multilingual signs connected to international support. The central argument is that the war has intensified the symbolic value of the Ukrainian language and has transformed the linguistic landscape into an important visual expression of national resilience.

Theoretical background. Linguistic landscape research has shown that public signs are not simply practical tools for orientation. They also communicate social hierarchies, political ideologies, and collective identities [10]. Signs may be produced by state institutions, local authorities, businesses, schools, churches, activists, or ordinary citizens. Therefore, the linguistic landscape is often divided into top-down and bottom-up signs [1]. Top-down signs are created by official actors, such as state

institutions or municipalities, while bottom-up signs are produced by private individuals, companies, local communities, or civil society [3].

In times of conflict, the linguistic landscape becomes especially important. Wars, revolutions, regime changes, and border shifts often lead to the renaming of streets, the removal of monuments, the replacement of languages, and the appearance of new political slogans. Public space becomes a symbolic battlefield where competing historical narratives and political identities are represented. In the Ukrainian case, the war has given linguistic choices a particularly strong political meaning [4]. The use of Ukrainian in public space increasingly signals national unity and resistance, while Russian has become associated with the aggressor state and imperial domination [5].

This does not mean that language practices in Ukraine can be reduced to a simple Ukrainian–Russian opposition. The war has accelerated processes that had already begun after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 and after the adoption of language legislation strengthening the position of Ukrainian as the state language.

The growing visibility of Ukrainian. One of the most visible effects of the war is the increased presence of Ukrainian in public space. Ukrainian has become more dominant on official signs, public notices, institutional communication, commercial advertising, and patriotic banners. This development is connected both to language policy and to spontaneous social change.

Before the full-scale invasion, many Ukrainian cities, especially in the south and east, still had a high proportion of Russian-language commercial signs, advertisements, informal notices, and everyday inscriptions. Since 2022, however, many businesses and institutions have switched to Ukrainian or have increased its visibility. This shift is not only administrative, but also symbolic. Choosing Ukrainian in public space has become a way of expressing solidarity with the state and distancing oneself from Russian political and cultural influence.

The growing visibility of Ukrainian can be observed in several domains. Municipal announcements, public transport notices, safety instructions, school signs, cultural posters, and local government communication increasingly use Ukrainian as

the primary or exclusive language. Commercial actors have also adapted to the new symbolic environment. Shop windows, cafés, restaurants, and service providers often use Ukrainian patriotic phrases or Ukrainian-language slogans to show their support for the country.

This process may be described as “wartime Ukrainisation” of the linguistic landscape. It is not simply a replacement of one language by another, but a broader symbolic reorientation of public space. Ukrainian becomes the language of defence, resilience, civic belonging, and statehood.

The marginalisation and removal of Russian. Another major effect of the war is the reduced visibility of Russian in public space. This process is closely connected to de-Russification and decolonisation debates in Ukraine. Russian-language signs, Soviet-era inscriptions, monuments, street names, and memorial plaques have increasingly been questioned, removed, replaced, or reinterpreted.

In many settlements, streets named after Russian or Soviet figures have been renamed after Ukrainian cultural figures, local heroes, soldiers, volunteers, or events connected to the struggle for independence. This renaming is a linguistic and symbolic act. It changes not only the practical address system of a settlement, but also its historical narrative. The public space is rewritten in accordance with a Ukrainian national and local memory framework.

The removal of Russian-language elements does not always occur uniformly. The pace and extent of change vary by region, settlement type, political leadership, and local community attitudes. In western and central Ukraine, the shift may be more advanced, while in eastern and southern regions, where Russian has historically had stronger everyday functions, the transformation can be more complex. Nevertheless, the general direction is clear: Russian has lost much of its former symbolic legitimacy in the public visual sphere.

It is important to note that the marginalisation of Russian in the linguistic landscape does not necessarily mean the disappearance of Russian from everyday spoken communication. Many citizens may continue to use Russian in private or interpersonal contexts. However, in the public and symbolic domain, the language

has increasingly become politically sensitive. Public space now tends to favour Ukrainian as the legitimate language of collective representation.

Wartime signs. The war has also introduced new types of signs into Ukrainian settlements. Air-raid shelter signs, evacuation instructions, curfew notices, military warnings, humanitarian information, and mine-risk education materials have become common elements of the linguistic landscape. These signs reflect the everyday realities of wartime life.

Air-raid shelter signs are among the most characteristic new visual elements. They often include arrows, pictograms, and Ukrainian-language instructions such as “*Укриття*” or “*Бомбосховище*”. In some areas, these signs may also appear in English or with universally understandable symbols, especially in places frequented by foreigners, humanitarian workers, or internally displaced persons.

Public notices about curfews, checkpoints, prohibited photography, military restrictions, and emergency behaviour also shape the wartime linguistic landscape. These signs are functional, but they also constantly remind residents that the settlement exists under conditions of threat. The ordinary urban or rural environment is transformed into a securitised space.

At the same time, signs of resistance have become highly visible. Patriotic slogans, murals, flags, stickers, posters, and graffiti communicate defiance and unity. Phrases such as “*Слава Україні!*”, “*Героям слава!*”, and “*Все буде Україна!*” appear in many forms and locations. These expressions function as visual acts of solidarity. They mark the public space as Ukrainian and communicate collective determination.

Memorialisation and the landscape of mourning. The war has also changed the commemorative function of public space. Many Ukrainian settlements now include memorial boards, portraits of fallen soldiers, flags, flower arrangements, temporary shrines, and renamed streets dedicated to local defenders. Schools, municipal buildings, churches, and central squares have become places where wartime loss is publicly represented.

This memorialisation creates a landscape of mourning. The names and faces of fallen soldiers appear in everyday spaces, reminding the community of the human cost of the war. These signs are usually in Ukrainian and often use highly emotional and patriotic language. They connect individual biographies to the national struggle.

Memorial signs also have an educational and identity-building role. They present fallen soldiers as heroes and integrate local communities into the broader national narrative of resistance. In smaller settlements, this process may be especially powerful because the commemorated individuals are personally known to many residents. The linguistic landscape thus becomes a space where private grief and public memory meet.

In addition to official memorials, spontaneous forms of commemoration are also important. Handwritten messages, candles, photographs, ribbons, flags, and children's drawings contribute to the emotional texture of the wartime landscape. These bottom-up signs show that public space is not controlled only by institutions; it is also shaped by local communities and individual acts of remembrance.

Multilingualism and international solidarity. Although the war has strengthened the role of Ukrainian, it has also produced new forms of multilingualism. English has become more visible in signs addressed to international audiences, journalists, volunteers, diplomats, and humanitarian organisations [7]. English-language slogans such as “*Stand with Ukraine*” often appear on posters, murals, banners, and social campaigns.

Humanitarian aid has also contributed to multilingual signage. Notices connected to aid distribution, refugee support, medical assistance, and international organisations may include Ukrainian, English, and sometimes other languages. In western border regions, signs in Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak, or Polish may also play a role, especially in areas with minority populations or cross-border mobility.

This wartime multilingualism differs from pre-war commercial multilingualism. It is less connected to tourism or consumer culture and more connected to survival, solidarity, diplomacy, and international visibility. English, in particular, functions as a

language of global communication. It helps communicate Ukraine's message to the outside world and connects local suffering to international political discourse.

At the same time, minority-language landscapes in Ukraine may be affected in complex ways. In regions with Hungarian, Romanian, or other minority communities, local multilingualism continues to exist, but it is increasingly embedded in a wartime state-language framework. Ukrainian often becomes more visible alongside minority languages, especially on official signs and school-related materials [11]. This may strengthen bilingual practices but may also create tensions if communities perceive language policy as overly centralised.

Commercial signs and patriotic branding. The commercial sphere has also adapted to the wartime context. Many businesses use patriotic colours, national symbols, military references, charity messages, or Ukrainian-language slogans in their public communication. Cafés, shops, banks, and service providers often display signs supporting the Armed Forces of Ukraine or announcing donations to the army.

This phenomenon can be called patriotic branding. Commercial actors use national symbols not only for marketing, but also to demonstrate moral and civic positioning. The boundary between advertising and political communication becomes blurred. A shop sign or advertisement may simultaneously sell a product, express solidarity, and participate in the symbolic defence of the country.

The colours blue and yellow have become especially prominent. Flags, ribbons, hearts, maps of Ukraine, tridents, and military motifs appear frequently. Such signs contribute to the visual nationalisation of public space. They create a shared emotional atmosphere in which everyday consumption is linked to wartime patriotism.

Digital extensions of the linguistic landscape. The wartime linguistic landscape is not limited to physical signs. Digital screens, QR codes, online maps, social media pages of municipalities, school websites, and Facebook groups extend public space into digital environments. In wartime Ukraine, digital communication has become crucial for safety information, mobilisation, fundraising, and community organisation.

Many settlements use social media to publish air-raid information, humanitarian announcements, memorial posts, and patriotic messages. These online texts interact with physical signs. For example, a QR code on a poster may lead to a donation page.

This means that the linguistic landscape should be studied as a hybrid phenomenon. The public visual environment now includes both material and digital layers. The war has intensified this hybridity because rapid communication often take place online before being materialised in physical space.

Regional differences. The effects of the war on the linguistic landscape are not identical across Ukraine. Regional differences remain significant. Western Ukrainian settlements may show stronger Ukrainian monolingual dominance and more established patterns of de-Russification. Central Ukrainian cities often display rapid symbolic transformation, especially in street renaming and public memorialisation. Eastern and southern settlements may show more complex language dynamics because of the historical presence of Russian in everyday life and public signage.

In areas directly affected by occupation, destruction, or liberation, the linguistic landscape may carry additional layers of meaning. Occupying forces often impose their own signs, symbols, flags, and language policies. After liberation, the removal of occupation signs and the restoration of Ukrainian symbols become acts of political and symbolic recovery. In such contexts, the linguistic landscape may visibly document the sequence of occupation, resistance, destruction, and reconstruction.

Settlements receiving large numbers of internally displaced persons may also develop specific signs connected to humanitarian aid, housing, education, and social services. These signs show how the war reshapes not only language ideologies but also the social functions of public communication.

Conclusion. The Russo–Ukrainian war has had a profound impact on the linguistic landscape of Ukrainian settlements. Public space has become more explicitly political, emotional, and symbolic. The Ukrainian language has gained visibility as the language of statehood, resistance, unity, and public legitimacy. Russian has been increasingly marginalised or removed from symbolic public domains, especially where it is associated with imperial or Soviet legacies [9]. At the

same time, new wartime signs have appeared: shelter signs, safety instructions, patriotic slogans, military warnings, memorial plaques, humanitarian notices, and international solidarity messages. The war has transformed the linguistic landscape into a space of national values and collective memory. Public signs now document not only language policy, but also trauma, resilience, mourning, and geopolitical orientation.

Further research should be based on systematic photographic data from different regions of Ukraine. Comparative studies between western, central, eastern, and southern settlements would make it possible to analyse how local histories and sociolinguistic conditions influence the transformation of wartime public space. Attention should also be paid to minority-language regions, liberated territories, and digital extensions of the linguistic landscape. Such research would contribute not only to linguistic landscape studies, but also to a broader understanding of how war reshapes language, identity, and public memory.

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