

Linguistic Landscapes in Northern Norway – Language History and Language Policy

Gro-Renée Rambø

On a global scale, multilingualism is far more prevalent than monolingualism. It is often stated that multilingualism is a typical feature of modern societies, and especially of cities, due to the general cultural complexity among their large groups of inhabitants. However, also smaller societies can of course be characterized as predominantly multilingual (as is well known for instance within anthropological studies), and neither is it necessarily a modern feature. In this paper I will focus on Finnmark county, situated in the extreme north-eastern part of Norway, historically recognized for its multiculturalism and multilingualism. I will focus on aspects of the linguistic landscapes found in different areas in this specific county, to explore the relationship(s) between these linguistic landscapes and the sociolinguistic situation (in past and present), as the linguistic landscape can both reflect and influence the relative power and status of different languages in an area (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006, 67f).

The term *Linguistic Landscape* was first used by Landry and Bourhis, who defined it as:

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 (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

Shohamy and Gorter have since widened the scope of the definition, saying:

It is the attention to language in the environment, words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces, that is the center of attention [...] (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

What makes the linguistic landscape so interesting linguistically, is that it constitutes the very scene where society's public life takes place, and as such, this scene carries crucial sociosymbolic importance when it comes to identity and identification (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara & Trumper-Hecht, 2006). It also tells us something about language awareness in a society (Dagenais, Moore, Sabatier, Lamarre & Armand, 2009), and it gives us insight into official and unofficial language policy (Puzey, 2012), and, one could add, also into language history, the culture of a specific physical area, and aspects of the social situation in the area in question – and actually also of aspirations for future social and cultural development.

My point of departure in this paper, is my own five-day long road trip to Finnmark in 2017. Through features of the linguistic landscape that I experienced in various parts of this county, I will highlight and discuss some central historical and modern linguistic characteristics of different parts of Finnmark. My aim is to contribute to describing the complexity of multilingual societies, both regarding historical developments, and demographics, as the linguistic landscapes tell us something important related to identity of people, and different groups of people, in an area. The languages used in public signs indicate what languages are locally relevant, or they give evidence of what languages are becoming locally relevant (Hult 2009; Kasanga 2012) – and they sometimes even tell us what has been locally relevant in the past.

Keywords: multilingualism, linguistic landscape, sociology of language, Northern Norway

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