



Școala doctorală de Filologie și Istorie  
Domeniul de doctorat: Filologie

## TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

Sprachliche Vielfalt in der urbanen Sprachlandschaft  
Siebenbürgens. Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen und  
Forschungsperspektiven der *Linguistic Landscape*

Diversitate lingvistică în spațiul public urban din  
Transilvania. Abordări interdisciplinare și perspective de  
cercetare în domeniul *Linguistic Landscape*

Rezumat

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## SUMMARY



The PhD thesis researches the linguistic landscape of the urban public space of Transylvania indicating approaches and the research potential of the discipline Linguistic Landscape (LL) for surveying linguistic diversity.

The study aims to capture the presence of the German language and the particularities of the multilingual urban landscape in the historical centre of Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca and Braşov using procedures and tools acknowledged in the research area of this discipline which has experienced an impressive development in the last decade.

The historical roots of the German language and culture in Transylvania and the continuous decrease of the German minority require research on the vitality of the German language in the urban area of this region. After the exodus of the German population in 1990, German continues to be cultivated as a prestigious language variety by non-natives, so that a significant part of the Transylvanian population is characterised by a pronounced bilingualism.

While there are numerous and extensive studies on the linguistic landscape of many countries or regions, the urban landscape of Transylvania has not yet been thoroughly researched. The presence of several languages in the public space not only provides conclusive information about the language policy imposed by the authorities, but can also point to the vitality of a community. Since language is a defining factor in the preservation of the collective identity, the present PhD thesis shows to what extent it is still possible to talk about the vitality of the German minority in these cities that are emblematic for the population of German ethnicity in Romania.

The linguistic landscape in the urban public space is very diverse and dynamic. The large amount of material required the delimitation of the research area and object. Therefore, the data collection has been limited to units of analysis present in the historical city centres of Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca and Braşov, and the PhD thesis includes only written mono-, bi- or multilingual visible language elements, easily accessible and static, in the public space at the time of data collection (2022-2023)

such as orientation panels, plaques and inscriptions placed on buildings (institutions, churches, shops), canals, posters and notices. The PhD thesis examines, therefore, in terms of the variety of signs in the urban public space, the presence of the German language from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. For the present study, 357 analysis units (images of signs) significant to the objectives and purpose of the research were selected. For each city, it was necessary to compile a sub-corpus in which an identification code was assigned to each unit. Therefore, out of a total of 357 units of analysis 269 are from Sibiu, 20 from Cluj-Napoca and 68 from Braşov.

According to the title of the thesis and the objectives of the research - the investigation of the linguistic diversity in the urban public space of Transylvania - the study will illustrate relevant aspects of the interdisciplinary approach and research perspectives in the field of LL through the empirical data collected in the three cities. Hence, the data collection and analysis will highlight two major aspects of the LL discipline:

- 1) the obvious potential in the research of mono- or multilingual signs present in the historical centre of Sibiu: visual peculiarities, function and disposition of languages (German, Romanian, Hungarian, international languages), importance for the German community;

- 2) the interdisciplinary potential and the openness towards other approaches and themes of exploration for didactic purposes (the subcorpus of Cluj-Napoca) or linguistic purposes (the subcorpus of Braşov).

Starting from these major investigation directions in the configuration of the thesis, the first part (chapters 1-3) of the thesis is focused on theoretical considerations, followed, in the second part (chapters 4 and 5), by a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the empirical material collected. The third part (chapters 6 and 7) summarises the results of the study and outlines some research perspectives on urban public space in multilingual regions such as Transylvania.

The introduction (chapter 1) presents the relevance of the research topic and the delimitation of the research area and object in order to justify the methodological approaches, principles of the corpus composition and the thesis structure.

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical and methodological orientations in the discipline Linguistic Landscape (LL). The chapter provides an overview of the research development, focusing on important researchers and studies with an impact

on the dynamics and expansion of LL. The chapter records linguistic and interdisciplinary research approaches, including the results of several studies on the multicultural regions of Banat and Transylvania. Providing a solid theoretical foundation, this chapter draws the profile of the analysis criteria of the empirical reality for the research of the linguistic diversity.

The review of the the theoretical, methodological and applicative concerns in the field of LL is followed, in chapter 3, by the presentation of the manifestation forms of scripturality in urban spaces, the chapter describing delimitation and classification criteria, the functions of language and signs, as well as the current regulations regarding the use of the languages of autonomous minorities in Romania that respect the principle of non-discrimination.

Since the existing urban linguistic landscape can be analysed from different perspectives, the empirical part of the research is introduced by chapter 4 which explores quantitatively and qualitatively the urban linguistic landscape of Transylvania in a micro-study dedicated to Sibiu, a representative city for the German minority in Romania.

The research of urban scripturality and linguistic diversity in Sibiu is explored on several levels: the issuers of urban scripturality and the influence of local authorities on the linguistic regime, the visual and linguistic particularities of visible signs, the function and disposition of languages, the relevance of signs for the German community. The current profile of the city space is completed by researching the occurrence of the toponym *Hermannstadt* in the data corpus, as well as the Hungarian language as another important autochthonous minority language and English as an international language.

The configuration of the urban linguistic landscape of Sibiu is richly illustrated by figures, tables and diagrams. The research on the presence of German in the urban public space can provide evidence demonstrating both the role of German in preserving the identity of a demographically declining minority and the vitality of the native German-speaking community at the local level. The chapter is enriched by comments on the importance of strengthening the German language. Engaging the younger majority of the population towards the German language and culture would not only ensure the revival of the language in the public space, and thus of the

community, but, more importantly, it would contribute decisively to the preservation of a significant cultural heritage.

Chapter 5 focuses on data and visible signs collected in the urban space of two other important cities for the German community in Transylvania.

Therefore, the subchapter (5.1) presents interdisciplinary approaches exemplified from the perspective of the practice of teaching German as a foreign language at Bachelor level (Cluj-Napoca). Possible future research perspectives are illustrated in some linguistic (sub)fields or the ones of LL (Braşov).

Based on the data material collected, the first subchapter describes the didactic potential of the LL in language teaching at different levels and offers practical suggestions for projects and seminar topics dedicated to the urban space of downtown Cluj-Napoca. The practical reflections are based on a modern concept (Spot German) which includes the identification of German language signs in the urban public sphere, both for the awareness of diversity and language policy in that language area as well as for the development of intercultural competence among different categories of learners.

The next subchapter (5.2) reveals the research potential of the LL for relevant segments of the recent urban linguistic landscape. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, the urban linguistic landscape has changed worldwide, so that the LL has also included all those warning and/or prevention signs related to the spread of the virus in the research area. Thus, one possible research direction is the 'visual and linguistic imprint' caused by the health crisis.

Since the timeframe for the empirical data collection (2022-2023) for the case study dedicated to Braşov coincided with the partial or total withdrawal of these warning and/or prevention signs from the city space, it was not possible to collect sufficient relevant data on the linguistic consequences of the pandemic visible in the urban public space of Braşov.

Therefore, future research directions have only been indicated and not illustrated with examples from the corpus.

However, the data collected from Braşov offers sufficient possibilities for researching urban public space from multiple perspectives and linguistic or LL (sub)domains.

The chapter ends with some considerations on the possibilities offered by new technologies that enable data collection, management, visualisation and geolocation. The chapter points very briefly to the inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary potential of digital applications (Digital Humanities) in exploring the multilingualism of Transylvania. The contribution of Digital Humanities to the preservation, research and promotion of the cultural heritage of the medieval cities are obvious.

Chapter 6 summarises the main conclusions of the conducted analysis. The occurrence of different languages on the 17 distinct sign categories (e.g. billboards, memorial plaques, inscriptions, posters and notices) indicates linguistic hierarchies and political-linguistic attitudes. Thus, the exclusive occurrence of some official monolingual signs indicates a more restrictive language regime imposed by local authorities as representatives of the state, while bi- or multilingual signs illustrate a permissive language policy (towards minorities) of the state and local authorities, the detailed analysis of the sign categories revealing both the functions of the language but also the impact of the language used on that sign. The analysis of the specifics of the urban linguistic landscape profile based on the empirical data reveals the respect towards the demographic and linguistic diversity at the highest level (of the authorities) in Sibiu, the prestige of the German language resulting from a number of factors.

The thesis concludes with a chapter dedicated to the research possibilities of language in the urban public space from an inter- and transdisciplinary perspective (chapter 7), highlighting the potential of the LL discipline for the preservation of the cultural heritage of the minorities, e.g. through the digitization and reconstruction of multi-ethnic urban topography in the context of designating Timișoara as European Capital of Culture (2023).

The study is accompanied by a rich bibliographical list, followed by an appendix including explanations on the coding of the analysis units of the three sub-corpus divided by cities, a cartographic material and other representative analysis units of the data corpus.

Keywords: *Linguistic Landscape, German Language, Multilingualism, Spot German, Interdisciplinarity, Research Perspectives.*

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