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The Covid-19 pandemic within a global linguistic landscape:
A comparative case study

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of our lives profusely and irreversibly and has changed the way we experience public spaces. This study aims at portraying instances of linguistic landscapes (LLs) of the pandemic by comparing three very different cities, a provincial Greek town, a developing city in Serbia, and a world metropolis in the U.S. Due to restricted mobility and limited possibilities to carry out fieldwork, the photographic data have been collected by the researcher and trained informants, followed by interviews about opinions/impressions of Covid-19 related language in public spaces. The results show that the three LLs share the expected universal characteristics but also reflect different political, socioeconomic, and cultural idiosyncrasies. My findings also show that (a) LLs seem to lag behind other sources when sharing information and communicating meanings and (b) we appear to rely less on them to guide us as we navigate our cities.

1. Introduction

The emergence of Covid-19 has had a significant impact on our lives and has affected us in numerous ways. The way we communicate both locally and globally has changed, with specialized discourses emerging as a result. Scholars from various parts of the world have already started analyzing such discourses adopting macro- and micro-linguistic perspectives, ranging from corpus-based analysis to content analysis studies (see for example, Tan et al. 2020[1]). The fact that the pandemic has had such a profound effect on a global scale means that cross-lingual analyses of this phenomenon can be conducted in order to answer questions such as whether new words or usages of words have entered the language (Tan et al. 2020) and how we relate to the language around us.

The authorities in the three countries under study, Greece, Serbia, and the U.S., have had a similar response to the pandemic since the start of the outbreak, as is the case with the rest of the world, with lockdowns, opening and closing of schools, workplaces,

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[1] This is a special issue of *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, COVID-19 insights and linguistic methods (June 2020) 3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies 26(2):1-23. Retrieved from https://ejournal.ukm.my/3l/article/view/40794/10725

and commercial establishments except for essential services, such as grocers or clinics and hospitals, in an effort to battle the outbreak of the coronavirus. To date (March 2021), the pandemic has not been contained although the vaccination process has begun and the measures recommended by the WHO to governments and public worldwide are in practice, with everybody becoming acquainted with the notion of a new normalcy for the immediate future.

In the time of the pandemic our interactions seem to have striking similarities wherever we reside. The abrupt and constant changes in our communications are worthy of observation and reflection. As we navigate in our new daily lives, we are surrounded by signs that comprise the linguistic landscapes in our cities reminding us of hand-hygiene, social distancing, staying-in-place, wearing a mask, etc. and we chose to pass by experiencing them either fleetingly, maybe unconsciously, or decide to pay attention because to them. As Jessica Bradley, an ethnographer from the U.K., aptly puts it:

> Our geographies are infinitely smaller now and the landscapes in which we carry out our everyday lives are suburban and almost rural. The number of people I come into contact with, the number of things I touch, the opportunities to spread the virus, all infinitely diminished … my research into the everyday is more inward-looking, more reflexive, more small-scale … I settle into the new smallness of our lives, a smallness which is actually so big, so vast. I get used to it just in time for things to start to open up again. (Bradley 2020)[2]

2. The study of linguistic landscapes
2.1 A brief literature review

LL study focuses on language displayed and exposed in public spaces. Meanings, messages, purposes, and contexts of LLs are analyzed and interpreted by scholars from various disciplines such as applied linguistics, semiotics, sociolinguistics, literacy, etc. (Shohamy & Gorter 2009). The objects or artifacts of LL research are multi-leveled depictions of multimodal texts, from single words and images to rich creative representations of language sharing messages and information. According to Shohamy and Gorter, apart from the language displays that "share the ecology in local, global and transnational contexts and in multiple languages" (ibid.: 1) there is an endless array of virtual and cyber spaces that add a whole new dimension to LL research. In those spaces LL texts are exposed and serve various social and communicative functions. Shohamy and Waksman (2009: 315) list the following functions: "promoting, informing, attracting, notifying, signing, indexing, creating realities, perpetuating and affirming identities."

In retrospect, LL studies have maintained the early interest in issues of bilingualism and multilingualism in public spaces, with a special focus on linguistic diversity and vitality (e.g., Spolsky & Cooper 1991; Landry & Bourhis 1997; Gorter 2006; Grbavac 2013), but they have also started to employ more experimental approaches (cf. Shohamy & Waksman 2009; Canakis & Kersten-Pejanić 2016). Alongside the shift towards largely "monolingual" urban spaces (Canakis 2012; Papen 2012; Grbavac 2013), broader theoretical and methodological perspectives have been proposed, in an effort to

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[2] Retrieved from https://panmemic.hypotheses.org/534

understand the phenomena related to LLs, such as the system and the messages it conveys in various areas of public discourse –political, socioeconomic, ideological and cultural. As Canakis (2016) points out, more recent work has taken this ethnographic approach even further (Blommaert & Maly 2014; Stroud & Jegels 2014; Blommaert & De Fina 2015; Kitis & Milani 2015; Blommaert 2016) and to such an extent that specialists in the field now talk about "second wave LL research".

We live in a dynamic, volatile, ever-changing world and the current health crisis is a perfect reminder of that. Documenting and analyzing language in public space as expressed in different forms of public signage can add to the understanding of how the motivation of the sign creator and the reaction of the recipient affect both of them in dealing with the pandemic. For the purposes of the present study, I adopt the framework for the linguistic analysis of artifacts, their linguistic forms and their relationships in a particular context offered by Huebner (2009). He examines LL artifacts from the perspective of the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1972), geosemantics (Scollon & Scollon 2003), multilingual advertising (Piller 2003), and the grammar of design (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1998). According to Hymes' (1972) model of communication, there are necessary components of a communicative act expressed in the mnemonic acronym SPEAKING (S=setting or scene; P=participants; E=ends or goals; A=act sequences; K=key; I=instrumentalities; N=norms; G=genre). When applied to the study of LLs they translate as follows (Huebner 2009):

- Setting and Scene

The choice of the setting and the scene with respect to sampling domain is driven by the purpose of the LL study. Researchers may look into a neighborhood, a single street, shopping districts, etc. and may be interested in the immediate context surrounding the sign and its orientation to the audience as well as the positioning of the linguistic vs. the visual content, the amount of text and images used and the type of language, among others.

- Participants

Agents and audience are participants in LLs (Huebner 2009). According to Spolsky (2009), those are the initiator, the owner and the sign-maker, and the audience/the reader. He also emphasizes the importance of the language management authority as another participant, with the well-known distinction between "top-down" and "bottom-up" signs or "between LL elements used and exhibited by institutional agencies which in one way or another act under the control of local or central policies, and those utilized by individual, associative or corporative actors who enjoy autonomy of action within legal limits" (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 10).

- Ends: Commonality of Function

The signs found in the LL can be anything from notices, billboards, commercial advertisements, to placards, graffiti, to name but a few, and they all serve a number of distinct purposes. They may promote a product, service, or event; inform the viewer/reader of the significance of the objects to which they are attached; or regulate actions, movements, or behavior in the public domain.

- Act Sequences: Commonality of Form

As signs contain written texts, visual images or a combination of both, the positioning of all those elements is important for their understanding. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1998) propose three signifying systems (salience, framing, and information value) as crucial in providing meaning.

- Key

The tone, manner or spirit in which an act is done (Hymes 1972: 43), when it comes to LLS, are achieved through how much text there is on a sign, how explicit or implied the message is, and which code (language or dialect) is used. Malinowski (2003) distinguished between two discourses of authority in his study of regulatory signs: the discourse of reason and the discourse of threat, which are not mutually exclusive. The former refers to the desired action and the consequences of complying or not with a sign while the latter relies on legal rules and regulation in order to enforce the desired behavior.

- Instrumentalities: Register and Code

In the LLs field, register comprises choice of lexicon, orthography, and syntax. For instance, Myers (1994) points out that advertisements do not normally include politeness markers and qualifications but with respect to syntax they contain parallel structures, ellipsis, and incomplete sentences. Register refers to the level of formality of the language, as well. As for orthography, digraphia and translanguaging may be observed particularly in graffiti and street art. Also, a large number of studies analyzing LLs in multilingual contexts are by their nature concerned with code selection.

- Norms and Regulations

Hymes (1972) distinguishes between norms of interaction and norms of interpretations. When adapted to LLs, norms of interaction can be defined as particular behaviors and properties that characterize written language but they may differ across social class, age, ethnicity, or speech communities (Morgan 2004). Those norms and regulations designed by policy makers determine the language used in signs. On the other hand, norms of interpretation refer to how behavior and properties are understood. Since they involve the system of beliefs of a community, they also may vary across communities (Smith 2007).

- Genre

Genres found in the LLs have been generally based on the ones proposed by Landry and Bourhis (1997), although Huebner (2009) argues that the researchers in the field have not reached an agreement on what constitutes a public object or a sign and that identifying a unit of analysis is problematic due to enormous variety of signage. For the purposes of the present study, I adopt Sloboda's (2009:181) definition of genres as "relatively stabilized types of LL signs characterized by the following combination of features: communicative function, placement, size, design (composition, typeface, color, material, etc.), language style". This approach will facilitate a discussion on whether there are the same or country-specific genres containing the language of the pandemic, what we may call "locally accommodated global signs".

Finally, I apply multimodal theories to my study of LLs according to which multiple modes are involved in the process of meaning-making which is conveyed not only by language but also by visual aspects and kinetic arrangements (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996; Van Leeuwen 2005). Moreover, the view that, due to the great flow of people and the

creation of a global community and global contexts, languages are perceived as flexible, fluid, and as a means of negotiation of meanings and identities has influenced the way we study multilingual signs. Those translanguaging practices (cf. Garcia 2009) have resulted in language systems consisting of "mixes, hybrids, varieties, fusions, 'meshes' and multi-coded languages" (Shohamy & Waksman 2009: 319).

2.2 Why a comparative case study?

The aim of the present paper is to offer instances of linguistic landscapes of the pandemic by comparing three very different cities: a provincial Greek town (Komotini), a developing city in Serbia (Niš), and a world metropolis in the U.S. (Chicago). Komotini is a town in the north-west of Greece, the administrative center of the Rhodope region, with a population of 50,990 (2011 census) and a sizeable Muslim minority. It is a university town hosting thousands of students from all over Greece and, at the same time, it is multilingual and multicultural with the population comprising speakers of Greek, Turkish, Romani, Russian, etc. Niš is the third largest city in Serbia and the administrative center of the south-eastern Serbia district. According to the 2011 census, the city proper had a population of 183,164, while its administrative area, the City of Niš, had a population of 260,237 inhabitants. It is an industrial city and the commercial center of the region with Serbs as the vast majority and Roma as the second largest ethnic group. Chicago is the third most populous city in the U.S. As of the 2019 census, the city of Chicago and its suburbs (the Chicago metropolitan area) had an estimated population of 9.83 million people. Aside from English, the most common languages spoken in Chicago are Spanish, Polish, Arabic, Tagalog, and Chinese.[3] This apparent difference in size among the three cities is accompanied by inevitable numerous political, socio-economic, and cultural variations as well as historical developments that mark the people who live there.

Due to the special circumstances which have restricted mobility and limited the possibilities to carry out fieldwork by the researcher herself, the photographic data has mainly been collected by contacts/trained informants, followed by the interviews of the study participants about their opinions and impressions of Covid-19 related language in public spaces they come into contact with in their daily lives. This particular approach to data collection can be a very useful resource for understanding how language in public spaces reflects the pandemic both globally and locally and how different communities respond to it.

The informants were given specific instructions inspired by H-ANN POst (Douglas 2020)[4] which, among others, include guidelines for taking photographs: the location should be where you live at the moment; the photos can be taken during a trip to buy essential groceries, during a safe walk or going to work; safety should be prioritized; photos should be taken while respecting all required or desirable health requirements (social distancing; protective equipment if necessary; one-walk a day where allowed,

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[3] See https://acutrans.com/the-many-languages-of-chicago
[4] Call to Contribute to a Visual Ethnography of Covid-19 pandemic-mapping project. Retrieved from https://networks.h-net.org/node/4879599/discussions/6158276/h-ann-post-call-contribute-visual-ethnography-covid-19-pandemic-%E2%80%93

etc.). As for the content, it should reflect the language of your community responses to Covid-19 in public signage; photographs should be accompanied by a short description; all photographs should be dated in the description of the photo.

3. Methodology of the study

The data were collected from December 2020 to February 2021 and include photographs taken by the researcher and a graduate student from the shopping district, administrative buildings, and different neighborhoods of Komotini. Also, locally trained field assistants/informants[5] were asked to photograph tokens of Covid-19 related language found in the public domain including signs, notices, banners, street art, graffiti, etc. in Niš and Chicago. They documented what they believed reflected the language of the pandemic and what they noticed and paid attention to in order to examine the relative prominence or salience of the language displayed. Data from Niš include pictures taken in the main shopping district of the city but also in medical institutions and local government buildings. In the case of Chicago, they come from commercial and official buildings in the city as well as in the suburbs (local shops, places of worship, parks, retail stores, etc.).

In order to triangulate the findings, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the informants with the aim to record their insights, impressions, and opinions about the language of the pandemic in public spaces. The particular approach has been advocated since "understanding the norms of interpretation of inhabitants of a given LL requires the researcher to move beyond the quantification of linguistic artifacts and to collect qualitative data from those inhabitants" (Huebner 2009: 84).

The informants were asked the following questions:

1. What Covid-19 related language (signs, notices, posters, graffiti, etc.) do you see in public spaces?

2. What are the different purposes of the Covid-19 language that you come across during your daily activities?

3. Do you rely on language in public spaces to get information about Covid-19? Why or why not?

4. How do you feel when you read those signs, notices, etc. (worried, reassured, indifferent, etc.) and why?

5. In what instances are Covid-19 related signs, notices, etc. bi-/multilingual and why?

6. How much has the linguistic landscape changed in your city/town due to the pandemic?

Their responses are grouped and discussed for each question.

4. Findings and discussion

A comparative analysis of selected signs from Chicago, Niš and Komotini is carried out, having as a starting point the theme they negotiate, followed by a brief discussion of

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[5] A professional photographer/cinematographer and a business owner from Chicago, as well as an interpreter/translator and a translator/creative writer from Niš.

multilingual and translanguaging practices found in Covid-19 related language signs. Next, I focus on a couple of examples of how particular discourse features are reflected in the language of the pandemic and the messages that authorities wish to convey. The section ends with comments on the excerpts from the interviews and how they relate to the photographic data and the overall discussion.

4.1 The thematic study
4.1.1 Theme 1: Signs showing appreciation and recognition of the contribution to the fight against the pandemic by healthcare workers

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1. (a) a banner outside a retirement home in Chicago, (b) a graffiti on the wall of a house in Komotini, and (c) a mural on the wall of a building opposite a main hospital at a central intersection in Niš

One of the most common themes of the pandemic is paying tribute to healthcare workers who are at the frontline of the "fight" against coronavirus *qua* "invisible enemy". Their selfless efforts are recognized by the general public all over the world and various manifestations of that appreciation have taken form in LLs. In the case of Chicago (see

1(a)), we see a commissioned banner by an institutional agency, the Senior lifestyle community administration, informing the general public, the retirement home residents, and their families that they recognize those efforts, giving the banner an expressive function (see Kelly-Holmes 2005). The Komotini graffiti (see 1(b)), on the other hand, employs "transgressive discourse" by which it challenges social authority and commonly held expectations (Scollon & Scollon 2003) as it passes social criticism, stating "*Cops everywhere doctors nowhere*". It also serves an expressive function but this time we do not know who the creator is, except for the international symbol tagging anarchy. The example from Niš is a mural of a renown surgeon, Dr. Lazić, who died of coronavirus in spring 2020 (see 1(c)). He was held a hero since he had served in the Kosovo conflict and had survived but was "defeated" by Covid-19 in the hospital –his "battleground". Not all the participants in the communication act are identified here because we cannot tell whether the mural has been commissioned by a public authority or whether it is the result of personal initiative, but its primarily function is, like in the other two examples, to express and provoke emotions.

Although the above signs share a common purpose, they belong to different genres and as such do not share a common form. The Chicago banner "*Super heroes work here*" is commercially designed, probably ordered online. With respect to salience, all features (size, color contrast, font type and style, limited amount of text, etc.) point to a commercial product which, at the same time, contains cultural symbolism associated with the superhero narrative in American popular culture, national identity, and American notions of heroism (Dubois 2019) –in this case healthcare workers fighting against Covid-19. The Komotini graffiti, on the other hand, is indicative of its genre with its specific use of modes within a specific community of practice (Shohamy & Waksman 2009: 317). It is a spray-painted slogan in black capitalized handwritten script against the whiteness of a wall in a quiet residential area of the town. Its political and social message is powerful in its simplicity of form and explicitness –Greece is a police state that does not invest in its healthcare system. Last, the mural in Niš contains no direct reference to the pandemic. The text accompanying it reads: "*Dr. Laza, the surgeon of the suffering Serbian people!*" The text is in Serbian Cyrillic, one of the two official scripts in Serbia, in a Byzantine font, with an exclamation mark. Canakis (2018: 233) reminds us that "…the Cyrillic alphabet seems to be the favorite carrier of signs relating to religious life or nationalist mottos and its indexical relations to Serbian national identity". With respect to its key (Hymes 1972), the mural clearly uses a specific amount of text with a specific reference not recognizable by outsiders aiming at arousing patriotic (nationalistic?) emotions by linking the suffering of Covid-19 patients with that of the Serbian nation and its turbulent modern as well as more distant past.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Prohibition and warning signs in shop windows

The signs in this thematic group share the same informational purpose; their main function is to inform, report, describe or assert (see Kelly-Holmes 2005) but there are also instances of an interactional or phatic function, e.g., in the case of the last sign where the addresser engages in creating and maintaining contact with the addressee by stating "*ENTRY ONLY WITH A MASK applies to EVERYBODY*" (see 2 (c)).

Generally, the prohibition and warning signs about the pandemic involve the same agents and audience, are "top-down" (since they are ultimately ordered by the authorities, even when they do not bear the relevant insignia) and under the control of local and governmental authorities or individuals, and use the language of prohibition, strong advice, necessity, and vocabulary related to respecting Covid-19 regulations (Chicago, Niš and Komotini) (see 2 (a)(b)(c)). Unlike the previous group of artifacts, these all belong to the same genre of regulatory signs and contain both discourses of authority (cf. Malinowski (2003) on the discourse of reason: "*protect yourself and others"* and "*it is necessary to sanitize your hands before entering the shop*") and the discourse of threat ("*no mask no entry*" and "*it is forbidden to enter without a mask"*). With respect to register, we notice striking similarities in all three cities. The use of ellipsis, incomplete sentences, noun phrases, impersonal constructions all help maintain a distance between the sign creator and the audience, thus shifting responsibility for the prohibition and threat from the individual to collective authority.

A

B

C

2. (a) posters and stickers on a pizzeria window in the Chicago suburbia, (b) handwritten notices and printouts in the windows of locally owned grocery stores and a bookshop in a Niš neighborhood, and (c) A4 photocopied sheets of paper and printouts in the windows of a pharmacy and a clothes repair shop in Komotini

4.1.3 Theme 3: Signs offering explanation and detailed information

A particularly interesting group of signs, typical of the pandemic discourse with long narratives and unusually large amount of text with unexpected features, are documented here. In the case of Chicago (see 3(a)), there is the example of a detailed note, probably written by a pet grooming shop owner, listing possible symptoms of the coronavirus such as "*coughing*", "*fever*" or a "*sore throat*" and politely asking the customer not to enter if infected. It is handwritten, in colored pencils, and each symptom is preceded by an asterisk, clearly expressing genuine concern and fear of possible contamination with the virus. Another such example are the detailed safety instructions in a gym window using

vocabulary on the same topic (*"fever", "temperature checks", "washing hands"*) alongside regulatory signs described in the previous thematic group.

A similar pattern is present in the Komotini signs as well (see 3. (b)). The owner of a silk scarf shop engages in a direct exchange with the customers giving them detailed information about ordering during lockdown, while the Chinese shop owner apparently resorts to an online multilingual translation service in order to apologize for wearing a mask and explain that the reason is "*to prevent the virus from spreading"* while it is "*incubating*", "*to resist successfully*" –the message is difficult to follow as there is no punctuation and the translation is problematic.

The poster from Niš (see 3(c)) can easily be recognized for its purpose but also for its content in various parts of the world, albeit written in Serbian. The reason is that the worldwide spread of the Covid-19 phenomenon has led to producing signs with textual and visual features depicting the necessary health and safety measures to prevent the pandemic, which are shared across the globe (cf. Canakis 2020 & in this volume) and are examples of what I refer to here as a *locally accommodated globality.*
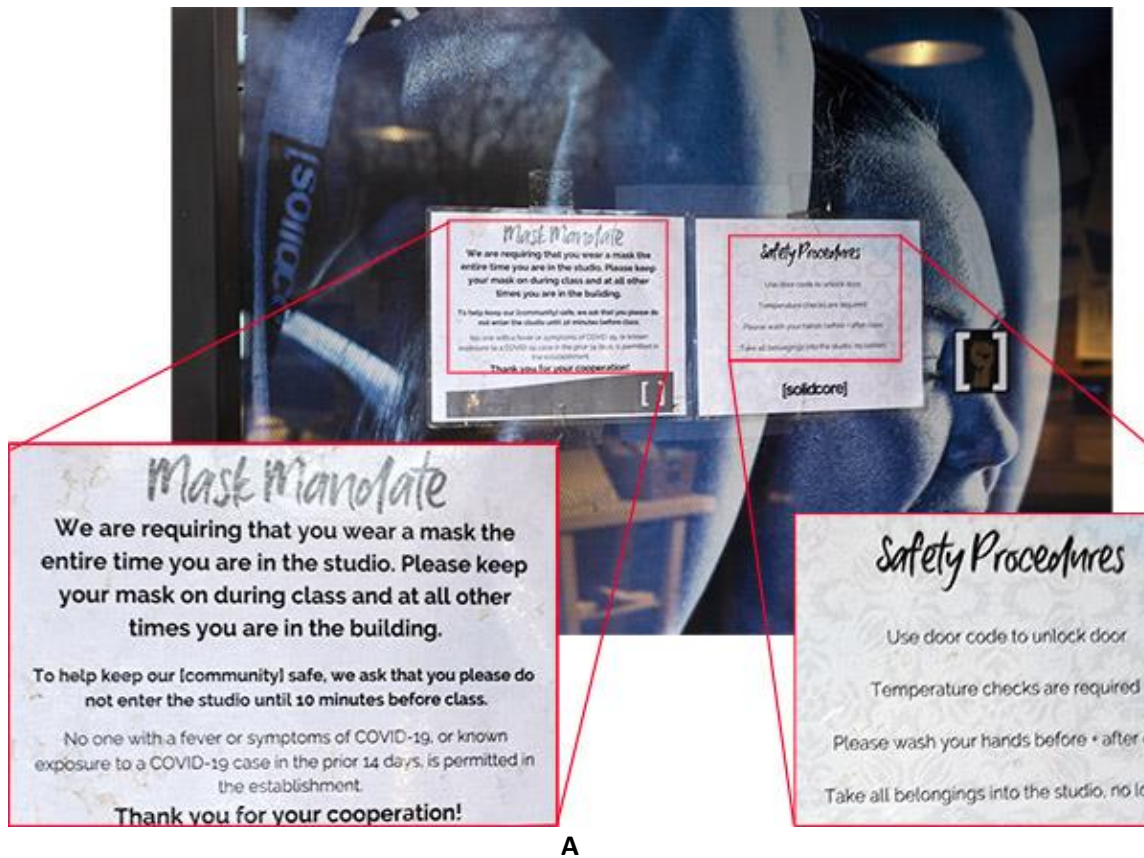
A
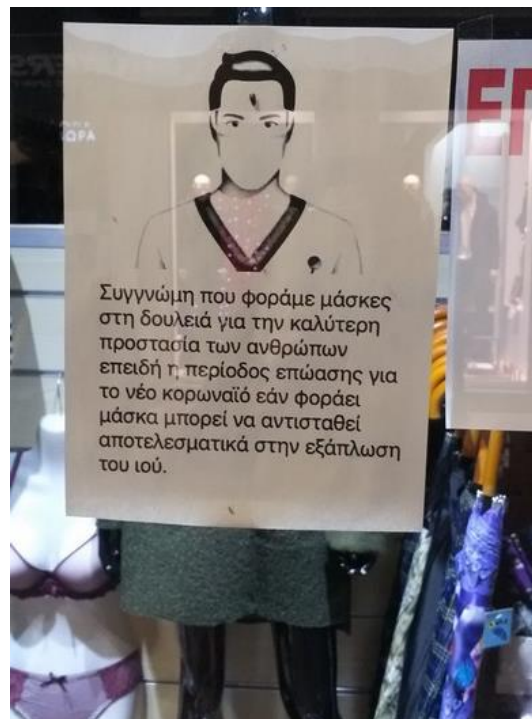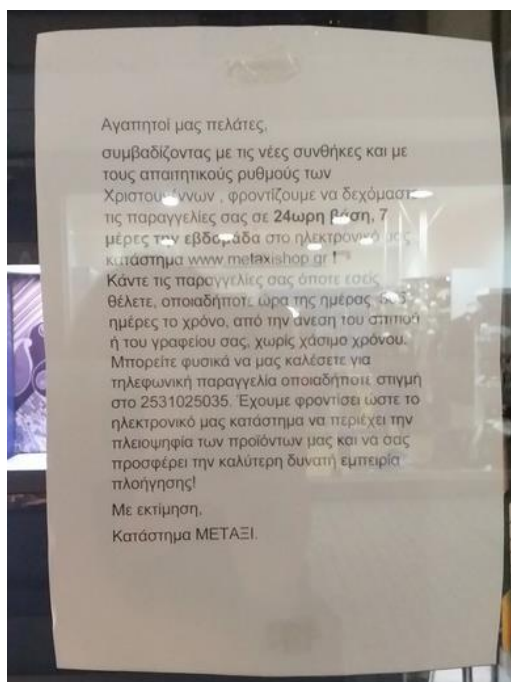
B

C

3. (a) a handwritten notice in a pet groomer's and laminated guidelines in a gym window in the wider Chicago area, (b) photocopied A4 sheets of paper in the window of a silk scarf shop (left) and a Chinese-owned clothes shop (right) in Komotini, (c) and a government poster in a bookshop in Niš

4.1.4 Theme 4: "Keeping the distance" signs

This is a large category of artifacts. They seem to share certain characteristics in all three cities but, at the same time, illustrate different social practices in each of them with a most obvious difference in the case of Chicago (see 4(a)). The banner outside a church invites the congregation to join a mass by staying safe in their car. The coined expression *"Stay in your car" Mass* is an example of how language has changed to accommodate this new reality. Generally, the particular group of signs addresses our sense of responsibility to ourselves and others ("*respect the distances" and "respect one another"*), employ politeness words ("*please"*) or opt for flat directives ("*keep the distance"*), and exhortatives ("*let us…"*). They may use the design features like the notice in a shop window in Niš with non-threatening –indeed, playful– cartoonlike figures of a man and a woman patiently waiting at a safe distance (see 4(c)). Another interesting feature with respect to register is the use of the collective pronoun (*we*) (cf. Canakis in this volume) and first-person plural verb forms to set up a relationship between the reader and the sign creator which helps establish a shared reality of the pandemic (see 4(b)).

Overall, the particular signs belong to a relatively stabilized type of LL or a genre (Sloboda 2009: 181), with the exception of the banner from Chicago which does not share the same placement, size, and design features with the rest of the signs in this category. However, it definitely has the same communicative function and shares the same norms of interpretation resulting from similar experience with Covid-19.
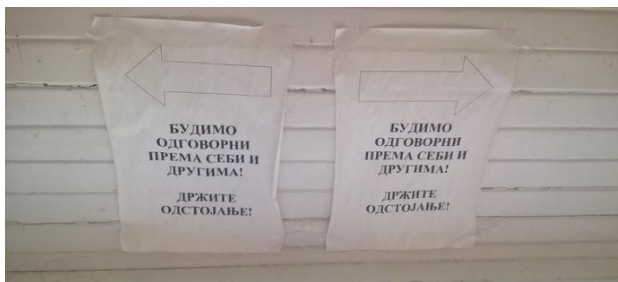
4. (a) a billboard outside a church in a Chicago area suburban town, (b) a sticker on the floor of a university hall in Komotini, and (c) photocopied A4 sheets of paper taped to a bench in a waiting room of a medical institution and a notice in a shop window in Niš

4.1.5 Theme 5: Encouraging and reassuring signs and messages

A

B   C

5. (a) a framed poster in the hall of an office building, a handwritten note on the door of a school, billboards outside a church, a synagogue, and an apartment building in Chicago, (b) an A3 sheet of paper taped on a clothes shop window in Komotini, and (c) a handwritten piece of cardboard placed next to a food stand in Niš

The language of the pandemic in LLs has yet another unique trait. The agents involved in the negotiation of meaning communicate, in some instances, on a very personal level, which result in artifacts only to be found in public spaces: placed on a lawn outside a place of worship, or an apartment building, on a school door, next to a stand selling chocolate and spices or in a clothes shop window in front of a dress. What is interesting about them is that, although there is no literal connection to Covid-19, the reference is understood by all participants. These signs exemplify the language of encouragement and reassurance such as "*Spread cheer!", "Stay connected!" and "Don't give up!"*. They are very emotional, "*I miss you all!*" (probably a teacher to their students) and a handwritten "*Thank you!",* as opposed to a professionally designed banner discussed in Theme 1. All of the above, however, are found only in the Chicago area (see 5(a)). Clearly, they represent instances of cultural ethos, a particular cultural expression of politeness, which is conceptualized and manifested differently in different societies (see Sifianou 1999).

An example of a sign in Komotini (see 5(b)), which I include in the same thematic category as the Chicago signs of encouragement, is a discount poster in a clothes shop window. Its aim is obviously to attract customers but the wider context of the pandemic has shifted the narrative from strictly economic to philosophical –"*Life is short".* Obviously, we now live in a very threatening environment, the possibility of dying is very realistic and the answer the sign offers is to consume products. Not just any product, though. The use of the determiner "*the"* in "*Buy the dress"* is a direct call for immediate action. Equally emotionally charged and reassuring is the notice from Niš (see 5(a)), handwritten in the Latin alphabet, saying "*Nobody without a mask can enter the shop!!! Not even A. Vučić!!!"* (the reference here is to the Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić whose regime has been widely criticized, particularly in the social media as, at least, antidemocratic). The sign creator reassures the potential customer that their shop is safe since they would not yield even to the greatest political pressure. What I find fascinating is how all of the above illustrate the intricate interplay of beliefs, views, social and political practices, and stances directly influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic and so subtly manifested in the language of public spaces.

4.2 Bilingual signs and translanguaging

Conveying information about the pandemic to people who live and work in a city directly and accurately is of utmost importance for their safety. The first bilingual sign has this particular function with what we may call a typical display and placement of the two languages of different status, English and Spanish, with the former coming first and containing all the information and the latter second with only the required information (see 6(a)). The present is a typical example of how issues of language ideology and power relate to the positioning of languages on a public sign (e.g. Landry & Bourhis 1997; Shohamy 2006; Lanza & Woldemariam 2009).

The graffiti from Serbia (see 6(b)), though, is an example of translanguaging. It uses a popular culture context and a play on words to produce "*TVENTIN KARANTINO 2020"* in the Cyrillic alphabet obviously referring to the famous American film director Quentin Tarantino, *TVENTIN* probably refereeing to *twenty (twenty)* –the year or twenty days in quarantine, and the word *quarantine* which has marked our present reality since 2020.

Again, we see the use of the Cyrillic and not the Latin alphabet as a choice. Canakis (2018: 223) describes digraphia "…as a particularity of the Serbian LL –indeed as a dominant characteristic of Serbian sociolinguistic reality…" which "…permeates linguistic ideologies in Serbia while also emerging as a theme in other aspects of sociopolitical life."[6]

Last, the bilingual signs from Komotini (see 6(c)) do not reflect the town's multicultural and multilingual structure as there are no instances of the Turkish language in its LL. The language other than Greek is mainly English. It is found embedded in advertisements and contains an interesting lexical phenomenon which has appeared during the pandemic and has to do with the introduction of false borrowings and the creation of verb phrases such as *"click inside", "click away", "click in shop"*, etc. (for a detailed analysis see Fliatouras in this volume). Also, another instance of English is *"CORONAVIRUS ALERT!"* found next to *"REKZO, PORKY!"* and other tags familiar in the genre of graffiti.

A

B

C

6. (a) an English and Spanish signboard outside a home improvement chain store in Chicago, (b) instance of translanguaging in graffiti in a Serbian city (unidentified),[7] and (c) Greek and English stickers in a clothes shop window and graffiti in the shopping district of Komotini

4.3 Covid-19 discourse in signs found in public (and cyber) spaces

The following signs are selected for analysis because, in my opinion, they are representative of how the language of the pandemic has adopted certain features with the aim to moderate the message and diminish the face-threat of the devastating consequences of the coronavirus. First of all, the pseudo-inclusive first-person plural pronoun and verb forms marked for first plural ("*we wash our hands", "we keep the distances", "we wear a mask, if we want to protect ourselves…"*) show how the pronominal choice impacts solidarity enhancing effect and mitigation of "top-down" speech acts. According to Wilson (2019), by including themselves in the recipients of the message, the sign creators (in our case the state authorities) can attenuate the illocutionary force of speech acts such as directives. The imperative verb form is used as well ("*shy away from the bear hug", "zoom in the new year"*, etc.); however, the use of mitigating devices like politeness markers alongside imperatives adds to maximizing their directness (ibid.). At the same time, in the Komotini banners (see 7(a)), the lexical choices contain war metaphors ("*battle"," invisible enemy"*) (for a detailed analysis see Gavriilidou & Mitsiaki in this volume), while in the case of Chicago (see 7(b)) the reference

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[7] Source:
https://www.google.com/search?q=tventin+karantino&client=firefox-b-d&sxsrf=ALeKk00q_pw8CBtYdhjgua1ZQFMzOGd_XA:1620564104484&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=pXx3REuFYfL5TM%252C-fEQ2C72oANm3M%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kRm918Hmh6mvoUuJm4MIujoftelAg&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwirl5zez7zwAhWRlIsKHduWBaIQ9QF6BAgMEAE#imgrc=pXx3REuFYfL5TM

is to Christmas carols and tales ("*jingle all the way but ride your own sleigh*", "*deck the halls with sanitizers*", "*please don't be a Scrooge, wear a mask in public*", etc.).

A
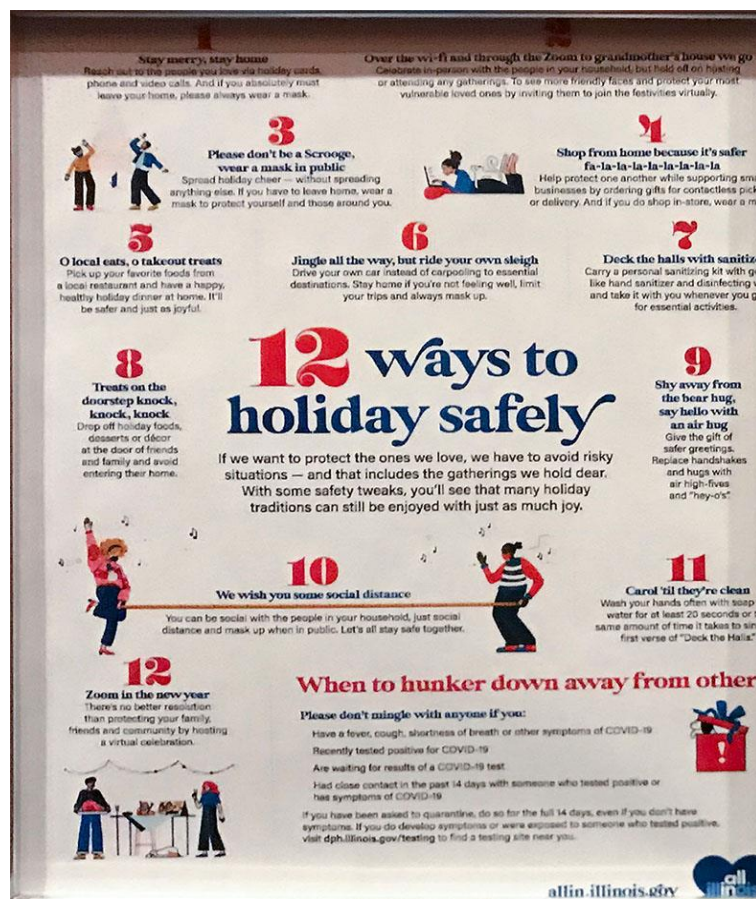
B

C

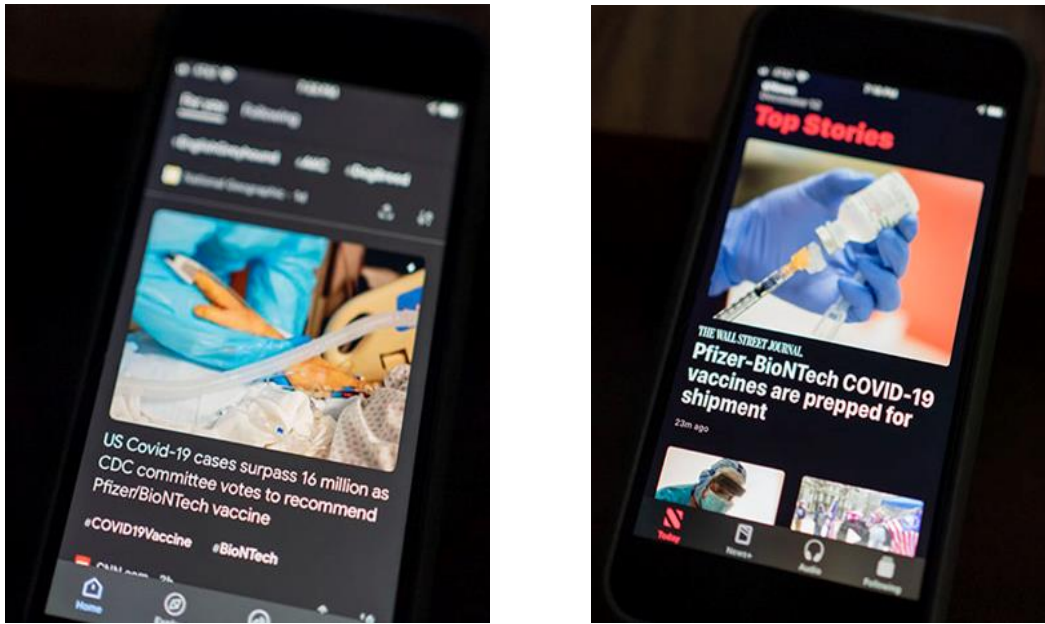*7. (a) banners from the 'Stay home' campaign by the Greek Ministry of Health in the central area of Komotini, (b) a poster from the Illinois state initiative to fight Covid-19 called 'All in Illinois' and (c) snapshots from online newspapers*

Apart from register, the multimodality of the two signs reveals common characteristics. The multiple modes involved in the process of creating meaning, besides language, include visual aspects (Van Leeuwen 2005) such as color, fonts, special organization of information, etc. We see that in the Komotini banners the characters are cartoonlike, the colors are non-threatening, and the fonts remind us of black and white Greek comedies from the 50s and 60s. Similarly, the characters in the Chicago poster are having fun and the selection of colors and fonts is reminiscent of the Christmas holiday season. Although it is not the aim of the present paper, it would be naïve to ignore how the same information is conveyed via other visual media such as the Internet (see 7(c)). The contrast is striking. We see images of real people on respirators in ICUs, real syringes and vaccine bottles and the shocking numbers of Covid-19 cases reported every day. In the next section we will see that the interviewees in this study point out how they experience the two public spaces –the physical and the virtual.

4.4 Interview results
Chicago, Komotini and Niš are very different places. However, seen through the eyes of their residents, regarding the language of the pandemic in the lingusitic landscapes they are surrounded by, they reveal some striking similarities. The following excerpts from interviews with residents help further document and confirm the photographic data findings about the contact with Covid-19 related language in the linguistic landscapes of the three cities. Moreover, there are far more similarities than differences in their views, opinions and experiences. There is one pervading statement expressed by all –they use language in public spaces to get very specific practical information or simply ignore most

of it while, at the same time, they rely almost exclusively on the media (TV, Internet, etc.) to follow the fast-changing reality of the pandemic.

Q1. What Covid-19 related language (signs, notices, posters, graffiti, etc.) do you see in public spaces?

Mostly advice and guidelines on specific topics about the pandemic. (T. K. from Komotini)
I have not seen any large signs, graffiti or billboards in open public spaces in Serbia recently. There were some billboards last spring at the beginning of the pandemic. They were all made as a tribute to the frontline healthcare workers who were fighting against the Covid-19 pandemic. There were usually just a few words: "we thank our medical staff", "doctors are our heroes", etc. Maybe, there are still some of them there, but there is no mass production of such outdoor health & safety pandemic campaign. On the other hand, there is not a single closed public space (community offices, markets, malls, pubs, museums, theatres, various institutions, schools, colleges, universities, government buildings…) that is not bedecked with one or multiple Covid-19 related door signs and notices explaining what you "must" or "must not" do if you want to enter. (S. F. from Niš)

Q2. What are the different purposes of the Covid-19 language that you come across during your daily activities?

They usually have to do with social distancing, being safe, wearing a mask. Others are to inform whether a given business is open, or perhaps the limitations of a business or institution at this time… (C. M. from Chicago)
Encouraging people to wear masks and wash hands. Also, reassuring people that precautions are being taken in order to protect the general public from Covid-19. (A. M. from Chicago)
Information about hand hygiene, mask usage, distance keeping, number of people allowed in a store/office. (T. K. from Komotini)
There are not many different purposes … orders (Keep your distance!), prohibitions (You must not enter if you do not wear a mask!), restrictions (Only one person at a time is allowed to be inside!), and rarely appeals (Please, follow the protection measures.)… (S. F. from Niš)
I usually focus on the comic purposes …because I find it easier to cope with the situation with a little bit of laughter. (K. N. from Niš)

Q3. Do you rely on language in public spaces to get information about Covid-19? Why or why not?

Not particularly … unless you consider news updates via media. (C. M. from Chicago)
I mostly rely on the internet to get information about Covid-19. The information in public spaces is basic and doesn't usually present any new information. The internet can be updated instantly. (A. M. from Chicago)
The only information I need to get from such places is related to the number of people allowed in a store/office... I get informed about Covid-19 mostly through the internet and television. (T. K. from Komotini)
Not really, because there are not many of them … except for the signs or notices on shop doors or windows, entrances to public offices, customer services, restaurants, pharmacies and hospitals, which pop up in front of you when you want to go in. We are informed about the coronavirus through the media (mainly TV and internet, but also radio and newspapers). We do not get vital information about coronavirus in public spaces … Given that the

pandemic is among us for so many months, people do not even read the notices on doors anymore. They got used to the measures, and there is nothing new they can find out there ... (S. F. from Niš)
Only when it comes to service information ... because it makes me anxious and scared. (K. N. from Niš)

Q4. How do you feel when you read those signs, notices, etc. (worried, reassured, indifferent, etc.) and why?
I find the signs ... a positive thing because they are encouraging behavior that will help mitigate the pandemic. (C. M. from Chicago)
I feel indifferent because I already know what they're trying to convey. It is reassuring to see the signs, though. It makes me feel safer in public. (A. M. from Chicago)
Such signs are indifferent to me, because, although they provide people with essential information, they're more like a reminder of the pandemic. They inform about topics that can be reached directly from your laptop screen ... (T. K. from Komotini)
I am used to it. I do not have any special immediate feeling when I read it. It is just a temporary rule, I must follow ... (S. F. from Niš)
It makes me scared and sad, because we don't know when our lives will continue ... Those signs just remind me of the situation we're in - unable to spend time with people we love and travel the world. (K. N. from Niš)

Q5. In what instances are Covid-19 related signs, notices, etc. bi-/multilingual and why?
In some areas they are ... especially Chicago City signs and public transportation signs. Because we have many non-english speakers here. (C. M. from Chicago)
In government spaces, Spanish and English are used the most often. On billboards, the city of Chicago has conveyed Covid-19 vaccine information in both English and Spanish ... (A. M. from Chicago)
Although I live in ... a multilingual town, these signs are written in Greek. (T. K. from Komotini)
I have not seen many of them in any other language, but Serbian ... there were no tourists in Serbia in general. I am sure there were/are Covid-19 protection measures, i.e. the bilingual/multilingual notices/signs provided and presented at the border crossings, airports, bus stations, and some hotels which were/are operating. Many hotels were closed. Some of them are still closed. Furthermore, there are bilingual protection measures notices in restaurants and cafes. (S. F. from Niš)
I haven't seen much of bi-/multilingual signs in my town ... I don't go out that much ... (K. N. from Niš)

Q6. How much has the linguistic landscape changed in your city/town due to the pandemic?
It has changed a lot as almost every business and public institution has signage posted related to the pandemic. Usually in the form of social distancing guidelines. There are also changes in some advertising whether directly (as in the case of a hospital billboard advertisement) or something more commercial. (C. M. from Chicago)
The most noticeable change has been the posting of signs on the doors of virtually every commercial building informing customers that they must wear a mask to enter. (A. M. from Chicago)

It hasn't changed dramatically. The signs are usually small and sparsely placed. (T. K. from Komotini)
Actually, except from the entrance doors into closed public spaces, there is nothing else visually different comparing to what was "normality" before Covid-19 pandemic. (S. F. from Niš)
I'd say not that much, except the signs on all the shops and pictures with people wearing masks, and similar warnings. (K. N. from Niš)

5. Conclusion

The linguistic landscapes in our cities have rapidly been changing and adapting to the new normalcy. Covid-19 language has become a part of our daily lives whether we choose to notice or ignore it. It has particular characteristics and serves specialized discourse functions that make it universally recognizable. The locally accommodated globality of the pandemic has led to a creation of signs in public spaces which bear striking resemblances with respect to their setting, participants, commonality of form, key, register, and norms and regulations, albeit they may belong to different genres and be subject to prevailing social and cultural practices of each of the cities under scrutiny. As we walk along the streets alone, shying away from other passers-by and nervously looking at our phones for guidance on how to go on with our new lives, the linguistic landscapes around us change. The study of linguistic landscapes offers insights into how different people, groups, official agencies, international bodies, and global phenomena such as a deadly pandemic negotiate, participate in, and contest public space.

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