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# LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF ORENBURG OBLAST

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## **LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF ORENBURG OBLAST<sup>2</sup>**

The linguistic landscape (LL) of border regions has always attracted the attention of researchers, since linguistic diversity in these places can serve as an indicator of many processes occurring in the society. The regions where different cultures and languages are found are of particular interest, as well as places where the borders of states or administrative units are located. It is assumed that such context creates a certain language situation, which is reflected in the linguistic landscape.

This paper is dedicated to the linguistic landscape of Orenburg and its surroundings as an example of a borderland region with a large share of regional and linguistic minorities. According to the results, the LL in the region is almost exclusively Russian – there is almost no indication of its multiethnic composition and borderland location. It highlights the underrepresentation of minorities in the monolingual Russian environment and provides some insights on language ideologies and the way of life in the Russia-Kazakhstan borderland.

JEL Classification: Z.

Keywords: Linguistic landscape, Borderlands, Russia-Kazakhstan border, Orenburg, Orenburg Oblast, Russia.

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## Introduction

The linguistic landscape (LL) of border regions has always attracted the attention of researchers, since linguistic diversity in these places can serve as an indicator of many processes occurring in the society. The regions where different cultures and languages are found are of particular interest, as well as places where the borders of states or administrative units are located. This context creates a specific language situation and contributes to the formation of the linguistic landscape.

This study focuses on the linguistic landscape of Orenburg Oblast in the south of Russia in relation to its status as a borderland and a frontier territory with a significant share of ethnic and linguistic minorities in the population.

This study can be useful in planning and implementing language and social policies in Orenburg Oblast and other similar regions of Russia, such as Astrakhan Oblast and Samara Oblast. It also explores the method of LL and how it displays the state of things.

The **research question** of our study is: how do the proximity of the border and the presence of large regional minorities affect the linguistic landscape of the territory? The additional task: by mapping the linguistic landscape and the language situation, expand knowledge about the language situation and language ideologies in the region.

Previous similar studies usually focused on certain communities of Orenburg Oblast and aspects of their history or language – such as Tatars (Husainova 2021), for instance. Our study introduces a new perspective through the use of LL and interviews as methods of studying the language situation in this region.

## Theoretical Background

In the classic study by R. Landry and R. Bourhis, linguistic landscape is defined as “*the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region*” (Landry, Bourhis 1997). The authors argue that LL can provide valuable information about the ethnolinguistic vitality of a community. They suggest that the status and visibility of different language groups can be reflected in LL through the use of (or abstinence from using) certain languages and scripts. They also point out that language politicians can use LL as a way of monitoring the linguistic and ethnic composition of different areas and develop targeted policies to support linguistic minorities.

According to the definition of V. Baranova and K. Fedorova, “*linguistic landscape (LL) is a set of signs, outdoor advertising, private advertisements, graffiti and any other written texts in the urban environment*” (Baranova, Fedorova 2020). Their work examines the linguistic landscape in the context of Russian cities, in the environment of strict government regulations on official signage.

According to B. Spolsky, language policy can be divided into three independent but interrelated categories: *language practices, language beliefs and ideologies, and language management* (Spolsky 2004). Language practices have to do with linguistic behaviour and language choice; language ideologies – attitudes towards language and views on language in communities; language management refers to the conscious management of language policy, usually in the domain of official status. Within the framework of the traditional source classification model of language policy (bottom-up/top-down), LL shows the relationship within the linguistic community, as well as between the state and the linguistic community.

In this study, LL is considered a part of language policy and is perceived as the reflection of language policy and language ideologies.

Thus, linguistic landscaping can provide insights into the territorial distribution of certain ethnolinguistic groups, ethnolinguistic vitality of communities, attitudes of the majority community towards the visibility of minority languages, and much more. Other ethnographic studies that use LL as a method prove it. In his work, P. Backhaus confirms the importance of LL: “*the study of language on signs can provide valuable insights into the linguistic situation of a given place, including common patterns of language and script use, official language policies, prevalent language attitudes, power relations between different linguistic groups, and the long-term consequences of language and script contact, among others*” (Backhaus 2007). Another example is the work of J. Blommaert and I. Maly dedicated to multilingualism of Ghent, Belgium, where they use LL to identify social and linguistic changes (Blommaert, Maly 2014).

It should be noted that LL is only useful in urban environments, where there is an abundance of public signs (Blommaert, Maly 2014; Backhaus 2007). Rural areas tend to have less written public signs and are usually more sparsely populated.

Besides, the choice of language on public signs may have nothing to do with the ethnic or linguistic composition of the region. Some groups visually express their presence more than others (Calvet 1994). Often the choice of language is merely symbolic and has no instrumental

value (such as random hieroglyphics in a Chinese restaurant). R. Scollon titles such cases “*symbolic*” use of language and distinguishes them from “*indexical*” use (Scollon 2003). However, “*symbolic language use has indexical properties as well. It indexes a preference for foreign language use by the non-foreign population*” (Backhaus 2007). This is particularly evident in the context of the English language. (Backhaus 2007). In this study, *indexicality* will be referred to as the reason why a sign exists in this form, as to what it indicates.

## Methods and Data Collection

This study uses qualitative methods such as observation, interviews and qualitative analysis of signs in LL. As V. Baranova and K. Fedorova noted, in Russian conditions quantitative research is essentially ineffective due to the extremely monolingual Russian environment.

Field work was carried out in early Spring 2023 by the author as part of his Master’s thesis research. We collected 170 LL pictures and conducted 7 interviews with members of local minority communities and city inhabitants. There were Russian (1), Kazakh (1), Tatar (2) and Bashkir (3) people (Kuznetsov 2023).

V. Baranova and K. Fedorova divide non-Russian inscriptions into three categories:

- languages of regional minorities (regional, official languages);
- languages of labour migrants and ethnic minorities;
- languages of foreigners, most often tourists.

This framework is usable in the case of Orenburg, taking into account that “foreign” language in this case is definitely English. Orenburg is a borderland, thus Kazakh language, being both minority language and a foreign “across-the-border” language is of great interest.

In this study, LL is taken in a very broad sense, which significantly deviates from the theoretical framework of P. Backhaus. Expression of local identity in the linguistic landscape is also of interest – “our goods”, “our land”.

We developed a theoretical framework highly inspired by the one P. Backhaus used in his 2007 study. In order to analyse elements of LL, one has to ask questions regarding the nature of the element:

- LL by Whom? – origins of a sign
- LL for Whom? – assumed/intended viewer
- LL *Quo Vadis* – dynamic development and visual composition

We have used data from the 2020 Russian Census. This source is by any means not profound and complete. However, it provides some general information and certainly should not be ignored.

Orenburg and its suburbs were chosen due to the fact that large urban areas feature most public signs. Orenburg oblast as a region was chosen as a sample Kazakhstan-borderland region, similar to Astrakhan Oblast or Samara Oblast.

## **Language situation in Orenburg Oblast**

According to the 2020 census 1,862,767 people live in Orenburg oblast, 1,741,189 of them chose to specify their ethnicity. Of these are: 1,380,674 Russians, 116,605 Tatars, 107,734 Kazakhs, 36,181 Bashkirs, 18,300 ‘‘Mordvins’’<sup>3</sup>, 16 639 Ukrainians. At the same time, 65,975 speak Tatar, 38,046 speak Kazakh, 19,958 speak Bashkir, 10,661 speak ‘‘Mordvin’’ and 3,859 speak Ukrainian (Census 2020). There are several national societies and organisations of the largest minority communities (Kazakhs, Tatars and Bashkirs) in the Oblast, such as Tatar and Tatar-Bashkir cultural and community centres. The Tatar language is quite popular, it is taught in 83 schools of the Oblast. There is also a Tatar newspaper ‘‘Яна Вакыт’’ (New Time) (Husainova 2021). There is a Tatar Drama Theater named after M. Fayzi with plays in the Tatar language and the Library named after Kh. Yamashev, which also serves as a cultural centre for Tatars, Bashkirs and Kazakhs.

Orenburg has a Bashkir prayer house and a cultural centre ‘‘Caravanserai’’. According to our observations during the field trip and data from the interviews collected, minority communities actively interact with each other and hold common events. For example, a joint ‘‘ethnic culture’’ concert attended by representatives of all three communities. Also, according to local residents, there are large migrant communities of Uzbeks and Tajiks, as well as students from India (Kuznetsov 2023). The latter are not evident from the census, yet census data should be taken with a grain of salt, especially when considering groups of minorities and migrants.

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<sup>3</sup> ‘‘Mordva’’/‘‘Mordvin’’ is a common umbrella term for people of Moksha and Erzya origin. It is deemed questionable by some researchers and members of the respective communities.

**Tab. 1. Largest ethnicities of Orenburg Oblast with respective ethnic language competence (Census 2020)**

| <b>Ethnicity</b> | <b>Number of people</b> | <b>Number of people who can speak respective language</b> |
|------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Russian          | 1,380,674               | 1,785,876   |
| Tatar            | 116,605                 | 65,975  |
| Kazakh           | 107,734                 | 38,046  |
| Bashkir          | 36,181                  | 19,958  |
| ‘‘Mordva’’       | 18,300                  | 10,661  |
| Ukrainian        | 16 639                  | 3,859   |
| <i>All</i>       | 1,862,767               |   |

*Notes: Of those specified their ethnicity*

## **Linguistic Landscape of Orenburg**

Preliminary research showed that there are quite active communities of Kazakhs, Bashkirs and Tatars in Orenburg. However, *in vivo*, it turned out that these communities practically do not appear in the linguistic landscape. There were only several points of interest where minority languages could be seen in the city.

### **Ethnic village**

Judging by the interviews taken by the author, citizens feel the multi-ethnicity of the city and region. Our questions about ethnic communities were answered with “*We have a lot of Kazakhs/Tatars! Go out into the street and ask anyone.*” Some advised visiting the “Ethnic Village” (Национальная деревня) – a restaurant and hotel complex in the eastern part of the city. It is a large plot of land with “yards” located on it – establishments (hotels/restaurants with national cuisine + museum houses) stylized to resemble a specific ethnic community. There, we saw Tatar, Kazakh, Bashkir, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Armenian, Mordvin and Russian “yards”.

Non-Russian texts were found only on the buildings of the Tatar, Bashkir, Mordvin and Ukrainian yards.



Figure 1. Tatar signs in the Ethnic Village. (Kuznetsov 2023)

On the fence of the “Tatarstan” restaurant (the name is written in an “oriental” font) there are advertisements for business lunches and Chuvash beer (in Russian), and nearby there are two signs saying “House-Museum of Tatar Culture, Way of Life and Ethnography” in Russian and Tatar (Figure 1).



Figure 2. Bashkir signs in the Ethnic Village (Kuznetsov 2023)

On the fence of the Bashkir yard we see two similar signs, in Russian and Bashkir, respectively, saying “House-Museum of Bashkir National Culture, Way of Life and Ethnography.” There is also a Bashkir sign on the territory (Figure 2). All signs are green with a small ornament in the bottom.





Figure 3. Mordvin signs in the Ethnic Village (Kuznetsov 2023)

On the fence of the Mordvin yard there are two extremely faded signs. One features a flag of the Republic of Mordovia (Russia) and the Orenburg Oblast with the bilingual Russian and Erzya text “*Mordvin yard*”/”*Erzya-Moksha yard*” (Figure 3). Since the sign has faded to the point of being illegible, here is a photo of the same sign from 2014 (Figure 3, photo from foursquare.com). Here one can see that there used to be a Mordvin ornament on the sign. On the second sign on the right there is a text presumably in Erzya, but due to fading it is difficult to recognize.



Figure 4. Ukrainian signs in the Ethnic Village (Kuznetsov 2023)

On the building on the territory of the Ukrainian yard there are signs “House-Museum of Ukrainian Culture and Way of Life” – in Russian and Ukrainian (Figure 4). In the same photo there is a handwritten notice in a sheet protector, placed on the door. It provides some information on the work of the museum and is written in Russian. There is also a large bust of a great Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko in the yard, but the text is in Russian (Figure 4).

The rest of the establishments in the “Village” are managed exclusively in Russian. It is worth noting that many of them looked inactive or outright abandoned. For example, there should have been a Chuvash yard in the Village, but we could not find it. There were no signs on the territory of the Kazakh yard, but there were construction tools – as it was later revealed from one of the interviews, the territory of the restaurant was sold. Unfortunately, we were not able to visit any of the museums – they were closed. We probably visited the Village on a day

off, or perhaps they stopped working. Nevertheless, it is possible to establish the completely “exotic” nature of the minority language texts in the Village. Together with the positioning of the complex, it can be assumed that their purpose is to attract Russian-speaking visitors and residents of Orenburg. Nevertheless, according to the interviews, representatives of the corresponding communities work in the Village’s museums (at least in Tatar and Bashkir), so they can serve as cultural centres – however, operating in Russian.

## Tatar Library

There is a Library named after Kh. Yamashev (Библиотека им. Х. Ямашева), also known as the “Tatar Library”. As noted, it acts as a cultural and educational centre for the Tatar, Bashkir and Kazakh communities.



Figure 5. Kazakh, Bashkir, Tatar and Russian signs in the Tatar Library (Kuznetsov 2023)

This can also be seen inside the library. On the walls one can see the words “Joy” and “Knowledge” in 4 languages – Kazakh, Bashkir, Tatar and Russian, from bottom to top in that order (Figure 5). It is curious that Kazakh words are written in Latin script. Indexicality here is a mark of the territory, to increase their visibility for themselves. Functional signs inside the library are written in Russian.

## Tatar Theatre

The city operates the Orenburg State Tatar Drama Theater named after. M. Fayzi (Татарский Драматический Театр им. Файзи), also known as the “Tatar Theatre”. On its walls and nearby one can find perhaps the largest concentration of the Tatar language in the city – on posters (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Tatar Theater posters (Kuznetsov 2023)

Some of them are bilingual, others are completely Tatar. Several posters advertise Russian-language productions, so it makes sense that they are published in Russian. As for the duplicated names of plays, they do not always correspond to each other in the Tatar and Russian languages.

In this case, complex indexicality is present – Tatar posters mark the territory of the Tatar-speaking community, convey functional information as posters, while providing

exclusive information aimed at the Tatar-speaking intended viewer, even though most of the information still remains accessible to the Russian-speaking viewer.

## Mosques

The next place worthy of attention is the Bashkir cultural centre and prayer house “Caravanserai”. Outside the building there are several signs with Russian texts dedicated to the history of the place (Figure 7). One of them is duplicated in the Bashkir language.



Figure 7. Signs on Caravanserai (Kuznetsov 2023)

Inside the building there is a graphic exhibition about the history of Caravanserai and the Bashkir community of Orenburg, made in Russian and Bashkir (Figure 23).



Figure 8. Bilingual Bashkir-Russian stands inside Caravanserai (Kuznetsov 2023)

Despite the territory mark, we believe that the indexicality here is also symbolic. Most likely, the intended viewer is an ethnic Bashkir, since most of the inscriptions are located inside the Bashkir Muslim prayer house, however, they are also duplicated in Russian.

In the Tatar Husainia mosque (Хусаиния) there was only a bilingual Russian-Tatar calendar (Figure 9). However, there were also printouts with Muslim prayers in Arabic, written in Cyrillic phonetic notation (Figure 9).

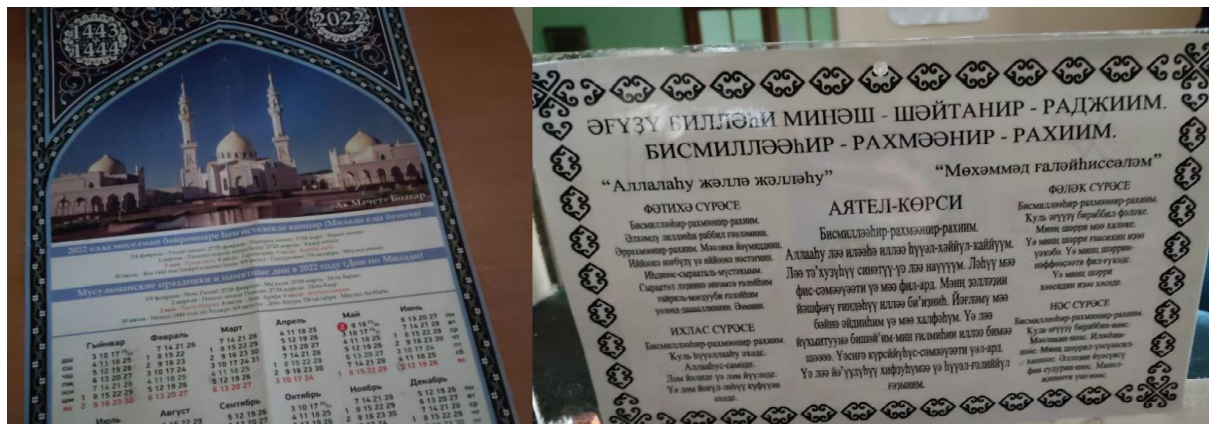


Figure 9. LL inside a Tatar mosque (Kuznetsov 2023)

In another Tatar mosque, Suleymaniya (Сулеймания), according to the deputy imam, “*the only non-Russian language thing is the Quran in Arabic*”. Interestingly, at the entrance there were Russian printed announcements about enrollment in Tatar language classes (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Tatar language classes advertisement (Kuznetsov 2023)

## Commemorative plaques

As for memorial plaques related to local minorities, there are several of them in the city. According to a respondent working at the Tatar Library, there are about 5-6 of them, dedicated

to Tatars and Kazakhs, however most of them contain exclusively Russian texts. According to her, there are just 2-3 bilingual historic plaques in Orenburg. We managed to find a bilingual plaque dedicated to the Orenburg local historian Madina Rakhimkulova in Russian and Tatar, as well as a bilingual Russian-Kazakh plaque dedicated to the All-Kazakh Congresses in Orenburg (Orenburg was the first capital of the Kirghiz SSR) (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Bilingual commemorative plaques (Kuznetsov 2023)

## Market

Some interviewees noted that one can meet Kazakhs and Uzbeks at the Orenburg market. We visited the market, but the linguistic landscape there was also almost entirely Russian. However, in the rows of shopping tents we came across a printed Muslim prayer in Tatar and Arabic, as well as a sign printed on a sheet of paper and hung on a door of a barbershop with the word for “*barbershop*” in Uzbek (in Latin script) (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Tatar and Uzbek at the market (Kuznetsov 2023)

In the first case, the author of the sign hung the prayer for themselves, being basically in a private space. The inscription “barbershop” with a telephone number in Uzbek is an appeal to the Uzbek-speaking intended viewer, a portal into a more closed, private community.

In general, the linguistic landscape of the market is also almost entirely Russian. However, in ethnic cuisine restaurants, “oriental” font and style are actively used in the names and designs (Figure 13). The same can be seen in eateries near the mosque (Figure 14).



Figure 13. “Oriental” fonts in the designs of Asian and Eastern cuisine restaurants (Kuznetsov 2023)



Figure 14. “Oriental” fonts on Eastern Cuisine eateries near the Suleymanya mosque (Kuznetsov 2023)

### Posters, announcements, graffiti

Notice boards, handwritten announcements, graffiti and unauthorised signs encountered by the author in Orenburg were entirely in Russian (except for the only one in Uzbek) (Figure 15). The announcements at the market pertaining bus transfers to Central Asia, targeted primarily at labour migrants were in Russian as well (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Unauthorised signs (Kuznetsov 2023)

### Use of English in LL

The only language that is truly present in the linguistic landscape, besides Russian, is English. However, its presence is always symbolic, usually in the names of establishments. For example, on the signs of barsbershops and bars (Figure 16).





Figure 16. Symbolic use of English in LL (Kuznetsov 2023)

Only once there was a sign with an intended foreign viewer – it was a souvenir shop (Figure 17). This may be due to the city's weak tourist capacity, especially for foreign tourists.



Figure 17. Souvenir shop – Instrumental use of English (Kuznetsov 2023)

All discovered examples of English signs were from the bottom-up category.

### Local element in LL

As for the local Orenburg brand, it is present in Orenburg, yet it is not frequent. Several times we came across titles that mentioned Orenburg (Orenmart, Oren aqua) or Ural (Ural aqua) (Figure 18).



Figure 18. The use of local brand (Kuznetsov 2023)

The borderland element and references to Kazakhstan, are practically absent – only twice did we come across shops with sweets from Kazakhstan (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Kazakhstani food shops (Kuznetsov 2023)

## Reflexion

From the data collected it seems that the border location and the presence of regional minorities have virtually no effect on the linguistic landscape. There are a lot of stylised “oriental” fonts in the design of ethnic cuisine restaurants, yet it is a common trend pretty much anywhere.

The LL of the Orenburg Oblast is almost entirely Russian. Despite the frequent symbolic use of English in titles and names, it is not used functionally almost anywhere.

Our observations are confirmed by data from conversations and interviews – all interlocutors note that “they don’t have this”, “I’ve never seen it here”, etc.

Tatars, Kazakhs and Bashkirs – large and vital communities of the Orenburg Oblast – are hardly expressed in the LL of the region. There is an almost complete absence of minority and borderland elements in the linguistic landscape.

What is the reason?

Firstly, the border with Kazakhstan is the border with a post-Soviet state, largely Russian-speaking (especially the northern part of the country). This eliminates the need to add a large number of English or Kazakh language signs for foreigners. English-language signs are also not required, since there are practically no foreign tourists in the region. At the same time, according to local residents, there are many Indians in the city, as well as students from Africa and the Middle East, who, in practice, have no influence on the LL (Kuznetsov 2023).

Secondly, all three significant minority groups in the region are Russian-speaking. Despite the presence of ethnic languages (which are also used in everyday life and taught in some schools), almost all members of the communities are native speakers of Russian. Accordingly, those few signs in their ethnic languages play a rather symbolic role. But why don't these communities “mark their territory”?

Based on an interview with a member of the Bashkir community, Bashkirs perceive the Orenburg Oblast as part of the common Bashkir space from Ufa to Orenburg. When asked “*why is there no Bashkir language around?*” she replied “*Why do we need to prove anything? We are already at home*” (Kuznetsov 2023). She sees no need to mark the territory.

A member of the Tatar community answered the same question about Tatar: “*There are many Tatar signs in Tatarstan. But not here – here is Russia.*” One way or another, communities do not seem to have the need for this – either because they already consider themselves visible enough, or because they believe that there is no need to be visible at all.

Meanwhile, real *linguistic* minorities – primarily migrants from Central Asian countries – are invisible in the LL, which is rather common for the rest of Russia (Kuznetsov 2023).

The local brand of the Orenburg Oblast (Ural, Orenburg) is present but is not popular with consumers, rather the opposite. Local residents use phrases such as “*dirty Southern Urals*” and “*dusty steppe.*” Low tourist flow in the Oblast does not help.

On the other hand, any evidence of the border at hand is also rare. Respondents note that personal contacts with Kazakhstan are not frequent; they go there mainly for gasoline and food – horse meat, sweets. An ice cream refrigerator with a Kazakh inscription (obviously from

Kazakhstan) was seen once in a halal food store (Figure 20). Two times, we saw Kazakhstani food shops.



Figure 20. A refrigerator from Kazakhstan (Kuznetsov 2023)

The interviewees claimed that it is possible to buy halal horse meat from the Kazakhs at the market. At the same time, interviewees believe that interstate contacts are strong – diplomats are travelling to each other’s countries, trade is going on.

Our interviewees, especially ethnic Kazakhs, Bashkirs and Tatars, expressed a positive, friendly attitude towards Kazakhstan. It was pointed out that it had recently become richer and more influential, and Kazakhstan’s standards of living had improved. They mentioned Kazakhstan’s successes in the domain of culture – in music and comedy. It is interesting that all our respondents (middle-aged and older) referred to the nearest large city in Kazakhstan as Aktyubinsk (Soviet name), not Aktobe. After research, our contact from Kazakhstan explained that this also occurs in Kazakhstan proper and depends precisely on the age of the speaker – older people tend to use old names.

It would be fair to emphasise that the research took place mainly in Orenburg and we do not discount the possibility of a larger minority language presence in ethnic Tatar or Kazakh villages (for example, in Tatarskaya Kargala) or more evidence of the border in border settlements. However, all respondents, including those who often visit the border, argued that

there too, “*everything is in Russian anyway*”. This is also confirmed by the data from Google Maps and Yandex Maps (Kuznetsov 2023). In addition, as follows from the theory, there will be less written signs in smaller settlements.

Data on the LL for the Orenburg Oblast can also be extrapolated to the Astrakhan region, as follows from communication with its residents and researchers from there, as well as data from Google Maps and Yandex Maps.

## Conclusion

According to the conducted research, regional and ethnic minorities, along with borderland position of a region can have almost no effect on the LL.

In terms of the aforementioned framework, we can answer some questions about the elements of LL:

- LL by Whom? – The most common sources of minority languages signs in Orenburg are government-affiliated public organisations, be it a library, cultural centre or theatre. Commemorative plaques were installed either by the administration, or with its permission and support. Thus, they rather fall into the top-down category. Pure unregistered bottom-up signs in minority languages were an even bigger rarity, almost insignificant overall.
- LL for Whom? – In most cases, the intended viewer of the signs in minority languages was a bilingual Russian/minority language speaker, or more precisely, a Russian-speaking regional minority.
- LL *Quo Vadis* – Despite the fact that there are certain changes in the ethnic and linguistic composition of the population, judging by the interviews, no dynamic changes have occurred in the Orenburg LL over the past few decades in terms of minority languages.

In the Kazakhstan border region there are very few prerequisites for multilingualism – all local minorities are Russian-speaking, and the border was internal a little more than 30 years ago. For many respondents, to this day it remains an imaginary line in a single cultural and linguistic space. The presence of large groups of migrants and regional minorities in the Orenburg Oblast is acknowledged, but practically no traces of them remain in the LL. Local regional minorities (Tatars, Bashkirs, Kazakhs) are also practically not represented in the LL of the region. As follows from the interviews, they explain this contradictorily – some feel at home and do not see the point in “marking the territory,” while others, on the contrary, believe

that since they are not in the respective national republic, they are not entitled to distinctive visibility. Ethnic minorities (language type 2 according to the classification of V. Baranova and K. Fedorova) remain invisible. English occurs mainly symbolically.

The fact that Orenburg Oblast is a borderland is weakly expressed in the LL – apparently, Kazakh goods are not widespread. However, some food products from Kazakhstan, namely meat and sweets are in demand. The local Orenburg brand is present but not extremely popular.

The concept of ethnolinguistic vitality is important for studies of the linguistic landscape. From our research it becomes clear that in the case of Russian border regions, the ethnolinguistic vitality of communities is expressed extremely weakly in the linguistic landscape. In general, here we confirm the statements of V. Baranova and K. Fedorova about the total dominance of Russian even in ethnically diverse regions (Baranova, Fedorova 2020).

To summarise: visible, large minorities may not appear in the linguistic landscape, or be overrepresented in it. Moreover, the invisibility of a community in the linguistic landscape can be explained by both the lack of opportunity and the lack of a real request for visibility in the community. Ethnolinguistic vitality may not be expressed through linguistic landscape, especially in Russian monolingual conditions.

From a linguistic landscape perspective, it appears that evidence of a border nearby in LL is more pronounced if the state beyond the border is more culturally and linguistically different from the border region, and vice versa.

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## **Appendix 1. Example of the Interview Guide**

1. How old are you? Where were you born? Where do you work? Where did you study? What is your ethnicity? What is your ethnicity? What languages do you speak? Where did you learn them? Where can you learn them in Orenburg/Orenburg Oblast?
2. What ethnic groups (nationalities/ethnicities) live in Orenburg? What ethnic groups (nationalities/ethnicities) live in the Orenburg Oblast? What languages do they speak?
3. Have you seen any written signs in languages other than Russian in Orenburg? Have you seen those in Tatar/Bashkir/Kazakh? Have you seen those in some specific places (market, mosques, schools, theatres, libraries etc.)? Have you seen those in the Orenburg Oblast? Where else can you see signs in those languages? Have there ever been signs in those languages in Orenburg?
4. Have you ever visited Kazakhstan? Do you know people who visit it often? Why do you/they go there? Are there goods from Kazakhstan in Orenburg?



## Appendix 2. List of Informants

| <b>№</b> | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Occupation</b> | <b>Ethnicity</b> |
|----------|---------------|------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1        | f             | 50-55      | Librarian         | Tatar            |
| 2        | f             | 50-55      | Accountant        | Russian          |
| 3        | f             | 65-70      | Museum Guide      | Bashkir          |
| 4        | f             | 55-60      | Social Volunteer  | Kazakh           |
| 5        | m             | 45-50      | Driver            | Bashkir          |
| 6        | m             | 40-45      | Imam              | Tatar            |
| 7        | f             | 40-45      | Librarian         | Bashkir          |