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The linguistic landscape in Rome: Aspects of multilingualism and diversity

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**THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE IN ROME:
ASPECTS OF MULTILINGUALISM AND
DIVERSITY**

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1. Introduction: the study of the linguistic landscape

The linguistic landscape is around us all the time, but we are usually not fully aware of it. Then all of a sudden we may notice a sign in the street that was there all the time, but taken for granted. We notice what language(s) have been used, we may also become aware of the linguistic characteristics or we may wonder who put the sign there or why – as in this case of the mailbox (see picture 1) – both Italian and English were used, but with different size fonts. This report is about an inquiry into the diversity of languages one comes upon in the streets of the city of Rome.



Picture 1. Post-box in Rome: usage of Italian and English

The diversity of languages displayed in the linguistic landscape does not stand on its own. Multilingualism is a common phenomenon. The diversity of languages in the world and the different vitality of the languages has important implications for individuals and societies. Most of the world's population speaks more than one language but the majority of the inhabitants in Western Europe are monolingual in one of the state languages although most European inhabitants are exposed to other languages during (secondary) school.

Multilingualism can be defined in different ways but basically refers to the ability to use more than two languages. A basic distinction when discussing bilingualism and multilingualism is between the individual and societal level. At the individual level,

bilingualism and multilingualism refer to the speaker's competence to use two or more languages. At the societal level the terms bilingualism and multilingualism refer to the use of two or more languages in a speech community and it does not necessary imply that all the speakers in that community are competent in more than one language. Multilingualism at the societal level is more widespread than multilingualism at the individual level but even in this case it is extremely common.

Multilingualism can be the result of different factors, including the following:

- Historical or political movements such as imperialism or colonialism. In this case the spread of some languages, such as Spanish to Latin America, results in the coexistence of different languages.
- Economic movements in the case of migration. The weak economies of some areas and countries results in movements of the population to other countries and to the development of multilingual and multicultural communities in the host countries.
- Increased communication among different parts of the world and the spread of languages of wider communication. This is the case with the development of new technologies and also with science. English is the main language of wider communication and it is used by millions of people who use other languages as well.
- Social and cultural identity and interest in the maintenance and revival of minority languages. This interest creates situations in which two or more languages co-exist and are necessary in everyday communication.
- Education: Second and foreign languages are part of the curriculum in almost every country.
- Religious movements that result in people moving to a new country.

English is the most important language of wider communication in the world as the result of British colonial power in the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century and the leadership of the US in the twentieth century. English is also the main language of science and technology in the world and its spread is advancing in many countries and regions where English has not been traditionally spoken. English is also the main language of popular culture and globalization as can be seen in

advertising. Nowadays multilingualism usually implies English and other languages. English has also been considered a threat to linguistic diversity because it takes predominance to the detriment of the use of other languages (Phillipson, 1992).

Due to the influx of migrants and refugees from all over the world, Europe has become increasingly multilingual. Most larger cities, particularly in Western Europe, easily have over 50 different languages spoken as a mother tongue by their primary school populations (Extra & Yagmur, 2004: 119). The most important immigrant languages include Arabic, Berber, Turkish, Kurdish, Hindi, Punjabi, and Chinese.

Multilingualism is thus a common phenomenon in Europe even though the linguistic diversity of Europe is not as rich as in other continents. Only 3.5 percent of the world's total number of languages are indigenous to Europe. Still, Europeans often feel that their continent has an exceptional number of languages, especially when compared to North America or Australia which they mistakenly think to be monolingual English-speaking countries.

The linguistic landscape defined

One possibility for analyzing languages contextually is to focus on the written information that is available on language signs in a specific city, neighbourhood or area. This perspective is known as the study of the '*linguistic landscape*', which has been defined as follows:

‘The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 25)’

This report focuses on the last point, the relationship between linguistic landscape and multilingualism in one specific sociolinguistic context, the centre of the city of Rome. This relationship is bidirectional. On the one hand, the linguistic landscape reflects the relative power and status of the different languages in a specific sociolinguistic context. In this sense, it is the product of a specific situation and it can be considered as an

additional source of information about the sociolinguistic context along with censuses, surveys or interviews. In most cases the dominant language of a community is likely to be used more often in place names or commercial signs while other languages will not be as common (see for example Ramamoorthy, 2002; Xiao, 1998). At the same time the signs can be a display of identity by certain language groups and the use of several languages in the linguistic landscape can contribute to its linguistic diversity. In a way the linguistic landscape reflects the composition of the inhabitants of a certain area and can serve as an indicator of diversity.

On the other hand, the linguistic landscape contributes to the construction of the sociolinguistic context because people process the visual information that comes to them, and the language in which signs are written can certainly influence their perception of the status of the different languages and even affect their own linguistic behaviour. The linguistic landscape could even influence language use. For example, the presence of the English language in the linguistic landscape of the city of Rome may influence the popularity or acceptability and thus the oral use of English in Roman and Italian society.

It may seem that the study of the linguistic landscape is mainly interesting in bilingual or multilingual contexts, but this is only true to a limited extent. Large cities, such as Rome, may look homogeneous or monolingual, but these metropolises have a long history of mixing different population groups. Thus different languages are used by those groups as mother tongues. These languages are commonly used as a spoken means of communication but may also be used in their written form in public space. In such a way the linguistic landscape can provide information about the sociolinguistic context.

The study of the linguistic landscape can also be interesting because it can analyze the differences between the official language policy that can be reflected in official (top-down) signs and the impact of that policy on individuals as reflected in private (bottom-up) signs. The two terms distinguish between what is written by the authorities (e.g., traffic signs, street names, public notices, warnings) and what is written by the citizens (e.g., shop signs, advertisements, graffiti). The two types of signs are two different ways of marking the territory, two inscriptions into the urban space. Usually the official signs

are under strict regulation by the government, whereas there is more freedom within legal boundaries for private signs. The distinction is important because it relates both to who has power or legitimacy over the use of public space and to formal language policy.

The linguistic landscape is also deeply rooted in the cultural diversity of a city or area. Thus, the study of the linguistic landscape can contribute to the understanding of cultural diversity as it reflects the population of the city, either the languages in use among the permanent inhabitants and immigrants or the way information is provided to visitors or tourists. In this way, the linguistic landscape can reflect the main features of a city's linguistic and cultural diversity.

Several languages can be found on buildings in city streets. The visible coexistence of different languages (and sometimes different scripts) can be explained by the different functions each may have. The dominant state language is the language for communicating official messages. Other languages, such as English, may also have a communicative function but with foreigners, whether visitors or immigrants. Still other languages may have less of an informative function and more of a symbolic function. Often it is not so much the content of the message, but the visibility of a specific language or a different script that is of importance because it stands out as being more conspicuous.

Earlier studies

An early example of the study of the linguistic landscape was reported by Rosenbaum et al (1977). Their study analyzed the signs of a single street along with transactions, planted encounters and interviews in Keren Kayemet Street in Jerusalem. Their study of language signs was limited to analyzing the use of Roman and Hebrew script on the signs. The results of the analysis indicate that Roman script is more common on bottom-up than top-down signs and show the differences between official language policy supporting the use of Hebrew-only signs and the most common use of other languages (mainly English) in commercial signs.

Another study was carried out by Schlick (2003) who compared the linguistic landscape in central shopping streets in eight European cities in Austria, Great Britain, Italy and

Slovenia with four different state languages: German in Vienna and Leoben in Austria , Italian in Trieste and Pordenone in Italy, Slovenian in Ljubljana and Kranj in Slovenia, and English in London and Nuneaton in Great Britain. A relatively small number of store signs and advertisements were analyzed (less than 100 each) in each city. The results, however, are interesting despite the limited sample: the lowest share of monolingual signs in the state language was in Ljubljana with 47 percent, the highest was Nuneaton with 89 percent in English only (the local language). Pordenone also scores high with monolingualism in the state language (72 percent in Italian) and Trieste is similar to Vienna with around 57 percent in the local language. This difference between the larger city (with fewer monolingual signs) and the provincial town is evident in Great Britain and Italy, but less so in Austria and Slovenia. It turns out that after the official state language, English is the predominant language in all cases. In Trieste some 25 percent of all mono- or multilingual signs contain English.

Edelman (2006) studied part of 'Kalverstraat', the main shopping street of Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands. She found that the official state language, Dutch, was the only language on only 35 percent of all the signs. Dutch was present in another 16 percent of all signs alongside with another language, mainly English. The English language was present on 49 percent of all signs, either on its own or with one or more other languages. She concluded that the state language Dutch was used even less in Amsterdam than German in Vienna or Slovenian in Ljubljana.

In a similar study of the linguistic landscape of two streets in the Swedish town of Malmö Hult (2006) found differences between the pedestrian shopping area of Gågatan and the marketplace of Möllevången. In the pedestrian shopping area English was used on its own in 16 percent of the signs, another 19 percent were bilingual signs with a combination of English and Swedish. English was used in combination with another language in only 3 percent of the signs. Thus English was used in a total of 39 percent of all signs in the shopping area, which is less than the shopping street in Amsterdam, but more than the total for Trieste. In contrast to the shopping area, English is used less frequently in the market in Malmö. English on its own is present on 13 percent of all signs, on 4 percent in combination with Swedish and on 6 percent with other languages, for a total of 22 percent of all signs.

Huebner (2006) explored the linguistic landscape of Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. The official language policy of the country has Thai as the national state language while English is the language typically used for wider communication. To encourage the use of Thai, the government provides a tax incentive for including that language on commercial signs in Bangkok. However, not all businesses take advantage of this, and when they do, they often put Thai in small print in a corner of the sign, which shows the popularity and importance of English. Less than half of all signs (45 percent) contain only one script. The majority of those signs (57 percent) is written in the Thai script, with 38 percent in Roman script and 5 percent in other scripts, such as Chinese. A majority of the signs (55 percent) contains multiple scripts, either in Thai and Roman script together or in the three scripts Thai, Roman and Chinese. Government signs in Bangkok are quite similar all over the city, but privately posted signs display considerable variation across neighbourhoods. In most of the fifteen neighbourhoods that were studied the signs are either monolingual Thai, or bilingual Thai-English signs; however Thai-Chinese multilingual signs dominate in two neighbourhoods and languages other than Thai are dominant in four other neighbourhoods.

As Piller (2001, 2003) points out the use of English in commercial signs does not seem to be intended to transmit factual information but is often used for its connotation value. According to her studies the audience can recognize that the message is in English and this activates values such as international orientation, future orientation, success, sophistication or fun orientation.

Backhaus (2006) analyzes multilingual signs in Tokyo, the capital of Japan. This country is known to be highly homogeneous in Japanese. In this study, a sign was considered to be any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame. He counted almost 12,000 signs of which 19.6 percent are classified as multilingual, which means that they contain at least one language in addition to, or instead of, Japanese. These 'multilingual' signs were analyzed in more detail. It turns out that 98 percent of the multilingual signs include English, 72 percent have Japanese, 3 percent Chinese, and 2 percent Korean. Moreover, eleven other languages are displayed on less than one percent of the multilingual signs. Almost two thirds of the signs are non-official.

Cenoz and Gorter (2006) carried out another study of a city that differs in certain respects in terms of its findings. When the study of two streets in San Sebastian/Donostia in the Basque Country is compared to the one reported by Rosenbaum et al (1977) on one street in Jerusalem the following differences can be observed: i) Basque and Spanish, the two main languages, are both official languages; ii) there are no specific districts in the city of San Sebastian/Donostia that can be considered Basque or Spanish in the sense of being inhabited predominantly by Basque or Spanish speakers. This implies that more official equality between the two languages is aimed for than in the Israeli case and it shows a different demographic composition of the city.

This study builds on those former studies summarized above. The report tries to describe and analyze the basic aspects of the linguistic landscape in the city of Rome, mainly in its central urban context. This study highlights the importance of collecting empirical data for the analysis of the linguistic landscape and the contribution it can make to the understanding of multilingual situations, as well as understanding the cultural diversity in the city of Rome. At the same time it will become clear that the linguistic landscape is but one factor in the development of the language relationships in a specific metropolitan context, referring to multiculturalism and the sustainability of cultural diversity

The city of Rome and languages

Since ancient times, Rome has been providing hospitality to many foreigners (pilgrims, explorers, artists, and scholars), but it is only within the past few years that the city has acquired the consciousness of being the permanent home of people with diverse geographical, historical and cultural origins. Indeed, Rome has become a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural city (Eckert Coen and Rossi 2004: 8; see also Appendix 2 for some basic facts on Rome).

The diversity stems from its attraction to tourists as well as people seeking to make Rome their home, whether temporarily or permanently. In fact, Rome is the third most visited city by tourists in Europe after London and Paris. Around 6 million tourists visit the holy city every year, of whom 3.5 million come from outside of Italy (and thus do not speak Italian in most cases). The city of Rome has approximately 2.8 million

inhabitants; about 9.5 percent (roughly 250,000 people) are legally registered foreign minorities from a country outside the European Union, including Romania (one fifth of all immigrants in Rome), the Philippines, Albania, Poland, North America, China, Korea, Sri Lanka, Bangla Desh and India. As Eckert Coen and Rossi (2004: 4) say, “Rome has evolved from a city of transit into a permanent home for immigrants”.

English is becoming part of the linguistic landscape all around Europe as was seen in the studies mentioned above. The increased used of English in Europe in general is also evident in Rome. The knowledge and use of English in the city of Rome is probably more limited when compared to other regions in Central and Northern Europe (see also Cenoz & Jessner, 2000). The Eurobarometer (2005) survey reports that in Italy 29 percent of the population, excluding mother tongue English speakers, can speak English. According to the same survey 97 percent of the population in Italy mentions Italian as its mother tongue. The average for all 25 European Union member states was 34 percent; in Sweden it was 85 percent and in The Netherlands 87 percent.

The data from this study show that the City of Rome has a policy on the use of Italian on signs in the public sphere. It is the Ufficio per il Decoro Urbano (Office of Urban Décor), which is a part of the Cabinet of the Mayor (www.comune.roma.it), that is responsible for the implementation of the policy. The policy includes specifications for the placement of official signs (see Picture 2). The Ufficio, however, (according to the website) seems mainly concerned with the cleanliness of the ‘urban furniture’. For instance, the Ufficio runs campaigns such as ‘Mura pulite’ (‘Clean City Walls’), to clean the walls of the city of the abundant appearance of graffiti, posters and similar visual pollution. Picture 3 for example is a potential target of the ‘Mura pulite’ campaign, which illustrates at the same time the peculiarity of some of the signs that can be found around the city.

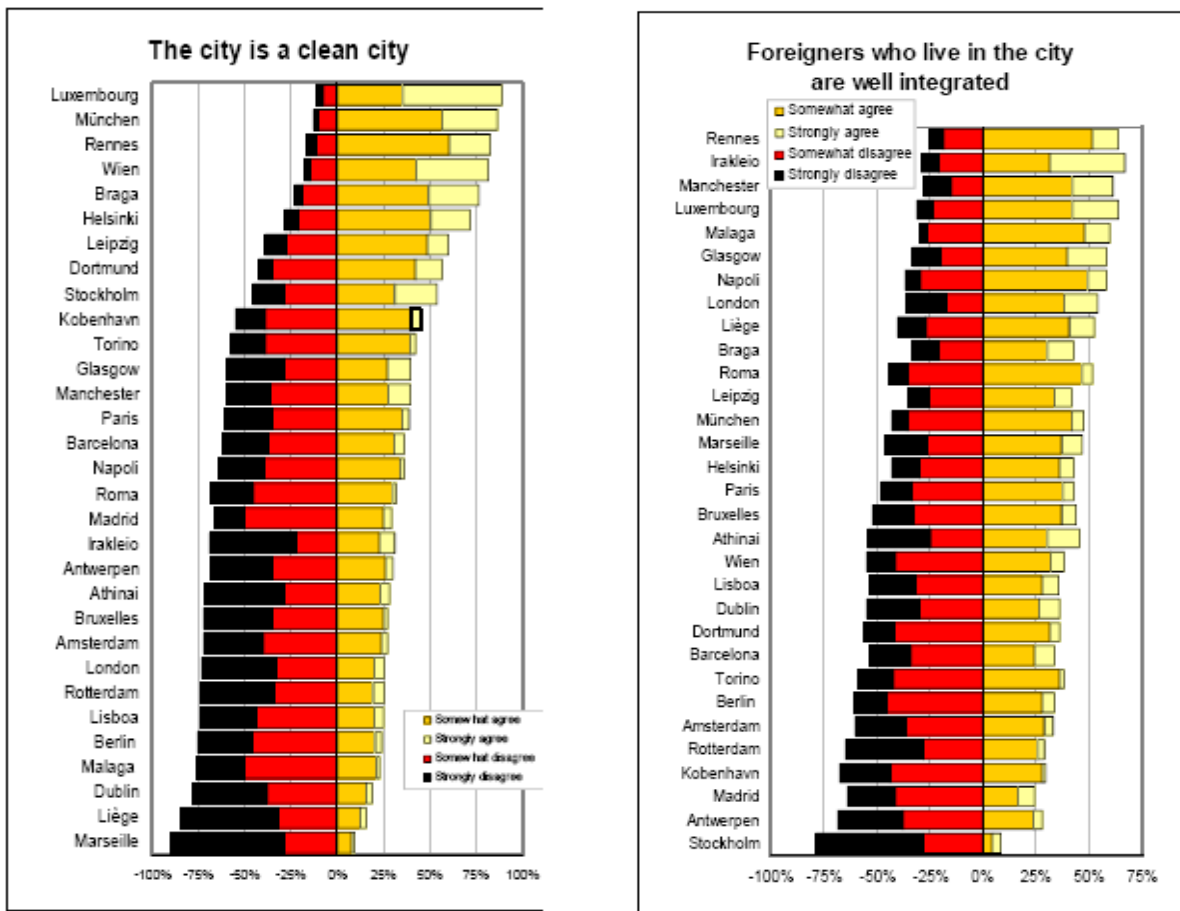


Picture 2: Official sign (top-down)

Picture 3: English only sign (bottom-up, private)

As an aside it is interesting to note that the European Commission has done a study on city inhabitants' perception of their own city in 31 major cities in Europe (Flash Eurobarometer, 2005). Two questions are of relevance for the study here. The inhabitants were asked about how clean they think their city is and how well immigrants are integrated.

The question about cleanliness can be related to the presence of graffiti, which by most people will be perceived as 'not clean'. Most city residents in Europe think that they do not live in a clean city. In fact, 57 percent of those polled thought their city was not clean. In this survey Rome ranks 17th out of 31 major European cities. Of the Rome inhabitants 32 percent agree that their city is clean, but 68 percent disagree.



Graph 1: Results for the question: “The city is a clean city”

Graph 2: Results for the question: “Foreigners who live in the city are well integrated”

The question on integration of immigrants relates to the presence of immigrant languages in the linguistic landscape and the possible acceptance thereof (although, of course, that issue was not studied here). In terms of the integration of immigrants the inhabitants of Rome are in 11th place out of 31 cities. Fifty-two percent of the inhabitants of Rome think foreigners are well integrated and 44 percent disagree (4 percent “don’t know” or did not answer).

There does not seem to be a full-fledged or holistic policy by the city of Rome that takes the total linguistic landscape as such into account. It is therefore important to obtain a better view of the distribution of Italian, English and other languages in the linguistic landscape. For (language) policy a study such as the current one may lead to greater awareness of the diversity of the languages on the streets of the city. The ad hoc policy measures may be developed into a coherent overall policy. Some guidelines can be developed on the basis of the results, not only very general or abstract guidelines, but also more specific rules. In turn this may help to implement a holistic policy at the municipal level.

2. Research Questions and Methodology

The specific research questions of this descriptive study are the following:

- i. What languages are displayed in the linguistic landscape of four different neighbourhoods (with 12 different streets) in Rome?
- ii. What are the main differences between those neighbourhoods?
- iii. Are there differences in the languages used when top-down and bottom up signs are compared?
- iv. What are the characteristics of bilingual and multilingual signs?

The corpus of this study includes an inventory of the linguistic landscape of a limited number of neighbourhoods, based on the example of the use of English in Keren

Kayemet Street (Rosenbaum et al., 1977) and the use of Basque, Spanish and English in San Sebastian/Donostia (Cenoz and Gorter, 2006).

In this report the focus is on the use of different languages in the linguistic landscape in the city of Rome. To be precise, the sample comprises four different neighbourhoods with a total of 12 different streets. This is not a random sample of all possible streets in Rome, but a “purposeful sample” where those neighbourhoods were selected based on their characteristics in order to reflect a certain degree of variation and diversity. All neighbourhoods are located fairly centrally in the city. The first neighbourhood is the city-centre itself; the streets selected are: Via del Corso, Via del Leoncino, Piazza di Monte d’Oro and a part of Lungotevere along the Tiber river. The centre houses Rome's busy thoroughfare, Via del Corso and a number of the major tourist attractions. The second neighbourhood and street at the same time is Trastevere (i.e., Viale Trastevere). The name of Trastevere derives from Latin "Trans Tiber" (across the Tiber). It is a very Roman neighbourhood and its residents call themselves the "real Romans". This characteristic part of the city has many restaurants, bars, art shops and bookshops. The third is the neighbourhood of Esquilino¹, south and west of the Termini station, which was built in the 1870s. An influx of immigrants in the 1980s has made this Rome's most colourful ethnic area. Today it is full of immigrants with the streets of Via Ricasoli, Via Lamar Mora, Via Mamiani, Via Napoleone III and Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. The fourth and final neighbourhood selected are the surroundings of the train and metro station Termini, which is the main transportation hub for trains, trams, buses, and the metro. It is the place where most tourists arrive into the city-centre. The area around the station tends to be busy and is not particularly nice, although it has been improving. This and adjacent areas, particularly via del Corso, are close to the heart of ancient Rome. Some of the remnants are still evident in the ruins, obelisks, columns, and buildings that remain. Thus, part of the linguistic landscape that we see today dates back to an earlier civilization.

¹ Barni (2006) did another study of the linguistic landscape of the neighborhood of Esquilino in Rome which was published after the fieldwork for this study was concluded. Her paper is part of a larger study conducted by researchers at the Università per Stranieri di Siena where the main focus is to use new methodology and technology for mapping linguistic diversity in a specific territory (Toscane, Monterotondo, and Esquilino). In Esquilino the aim is to create digital maps to present the distribution of immigrant languages.

The methodological approach selected for this study required taking digital pictures of *all* texts to be seen on the street. This resulted in a total of 1,427 pictures. In many cases more than one picture was taken of the same text or sign or combination of signs. In the end a total of 1,365 separate signs were distinguished for the descriptive analysis.

The codification of the different pictures presents some difficulties and some decisions had to be made. The methodological problem of the unit of analysis is not always easy to resolve. It has been defined differently in some of the studies mentioned before where the unit of analysis could be the shop as a whole. This lack of consistency across studies can make the comparison between studies difficult and is a factor that must be kept in mind in the presentation and discussion of the results. For the purposes of this study, the unit of analysis is the separate unit of a sign. This means that a shop window that has a sign with the store name as well as advertising would have more than one sign with each separately distinguishable sign comprising one unit. The advantage of this is that the signs are clearly countable because they are in 'a frame'. This method also relates to what a passer-by probably perceives as different units. The selection criteria also included small texts (e.g., a brand name written on the side of a sunshade, which would hardly be noticed by someone passing by) since the goal of the research was to capture the entire linguistic landscape within a set area.

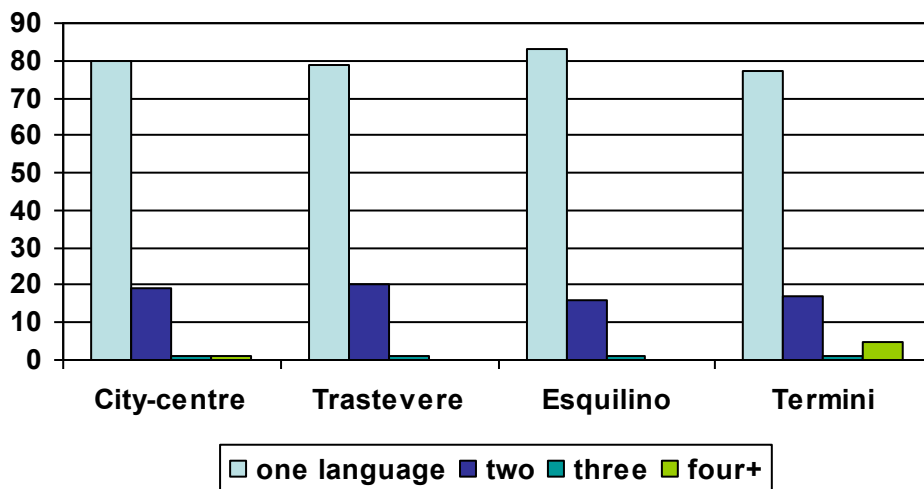
A coding scheme was developed on the basis of the criteria used in Israel by Ben Rafael et al (2001) and applied again in the Basque Country (Gorter and Cenoz, 2006). The scheme includes variables such as the type of sign (a name, a display, or both) and the number of languages on the sign. Different types of monolingual, bilingual and multilingual signs were distinguished according to factors such as the relative prominence of the languages, the fonts, the amount of information in each language; the most important ones are referred to in this report. The results include: the number of languages on the signs, the different languages encountered, the frequency of each language on the sign, top-down versus bottom up signs, the composition of bilingual signs, and the size of the languages on bilingual and multilingual signs. These results will be discussed in the following section.

3. Results

This chapter presents the results of the fieldwork. The number of languages on a sign, the different languages encountered and the relative frequency of each language are presented in Section 3.1. Section 3.2 deals with the characteristics of official signs (top-down) versus those placed there by private initiative (bottom-up) and finally Section 3.3 looks at the characteristics of bilingual and multilingual signs.

3.1. The languages displayed

The first question about the linguistic landscape concerns the number of languages used on each sign in the streets of Rome. Graph 3 gives the results, presenting the breakdown in percent of the number of languages found on each sign in the four research areas.



Graph 3 Number of languages on the signs in each area (percentages)

It can be observed that according to the criteria used, the overall impression at first seems one of a rather homogeneous linguistic landscape. In all four neighbourhoods the vast majority of the signs have just one language (around 80 percent) and around one in every five signs (20 percent) has two or more languages. Two languages in one sign is still rather common, while more than two languages is exceptional. This is also related to the way the signs were counted and coded as was explained in Section 2 on the

research questions and methodology; although the overall results would not change much with a different coding system.

Still, there are some differences between the four neighbourhoods. The area around Termini Station has more heterogeneity in the signs. This is especially true in regards to the relatively high number of signs with four or more languages, which stands out in comparison with the other three neighbourhoods. The other differences are very small and could be caused by chance in the samples.

Table 1. List of the different languages found on the signs

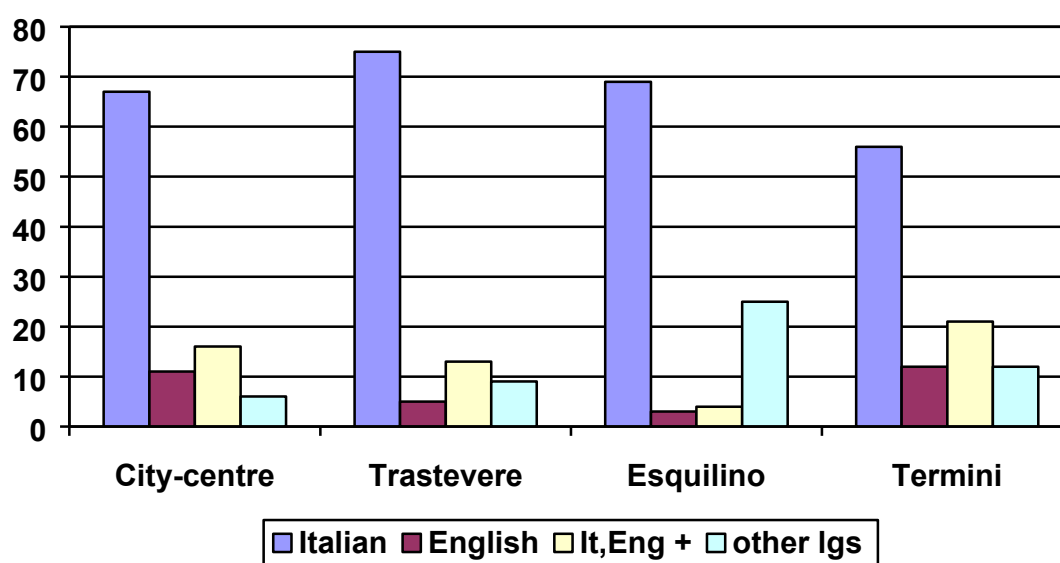
1. Italian	8. Portuguese	15. Arabic
2. Spanish	9. Russian	16. Tamil*
3. English	10. Greek	17. Bengali*
4. Latin	11. Hebrew	18. Hindi*
5. French	12. Chinese	19. `Graffiti` / fantasy
6. German	13. Korean	20. (Italian) Braille
7. Rumanian	14. Japanese	

*Hindi, Bengali and Tamil are taken together in the text as ‘Indic scripts’.

The next question concerns the different languages that were found. Table 1 lists all of the languages that could be distinguished. There are a total of 18 different languages that were found on the signs (graffiti and Italian braille are different scripts, but are more difficult to count as languages). Most of them are European languages, but there are also languages with a different script system (e.g., Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, Bengali), which stand out from the Roman script and are more conspicuous. A good deal of graffiti or the use of a kind of fantasy ‘language’ was also found. The few instances that included the use of the Roman dialect were coded under Italian.

The first results (in Graph 3 and Table 1) just give a general idea of the linguistic landscape of Rome and the diversity to be encountered there. The fact that most signs are only in one language and the fact that 18 different languages could be distinguished does not tell anything yet about the *frequency* of each language or the *distribution* of the different languages across the signs. It also says little about differences between the

neighbourhoods. All monolingual signs are not necessarily in Italian and the use of other languages is not necessarily limited to bilingual or multilingual signs. The next question therefore is *which* languages are being used *where*. Graph 4 presents the numbers for the different neighbourhoods (the exact number are given in Table B in Appendix 1). It is clear that Italian, the official state language, will be predominant. Next to it, English is relatively common as an international language of wider communication. A range of other languages have also gained a certain presence in this city, particularly in certain neighbourhoods



Graph 4. Languages on the signs (percentages)

Graph 4 provides a good overview of the diversity displayed in the linguistic landscape of Rome. Italian is, as expected, the language that is used most often and dominates the linguistic landscape in a general way. It is also clear that, Italian is used relatively less frequently in the areas with more visitors or tourists, such as the city-centre and the area around Termini Station. In contrast, English, on its own or in combination with Italian, is used relatively more often in those tourist areas. Taking all signs together, English is used on about one quarter of all signs, except in Esquilino.

The neighbourhood of Esquilino is clearly the most diverse of the four neighbourhoods that have been studied with relatively many signs in Chinese (either on its own (4 percent) or in combination with Italian or English or another language (6 percent), see

also table B in appendix 1) and signs in different Indic scripts (6 percent on their own, 4 percent in combination with one or more languages). There is a difference in the sense that Chinese signs are mainly found on shops and the Indic scripts are found on fewer shops and more often on posters or political advertisements. In Esquilino also most often ‘other’ languages are observed, more frequently than elsewhere and some were only found in the sample in this neighbourhood. It is worth mentioning that the same number of monolingual Spanish and English signs was encountered. However, this is probably related to chance because a poster of a Spanish musical performance was spread widely over the neighbourhood only days before the fieldwork.

Latin is present in a number of commemorative inscriptions, either on its own or in combination with Italian. In cases where the letter word ‘SPQR’ (‘Senatus Populusque Romanus’, the emblem of the city of Rome) or Latin numerals (e.g., MDCCXL) were used in combination with Italian, the sign was not coded as containing Latin, but as Italian only. If such signs are coded as including Latin and Italian, then the percentage of bilingual Latin-Italian signs rises to nearly 4 percent.

3.2. Differences in top-down and bottom-up signs

This section will deal with the differences between the signs placed by the authorities and those put in the linguistic landscape by private initiative. The results for the use of the languages in top-down and bottom-up signs are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Languages on signs: Categorisation as top-down (T) or bottom-up (B) (percentages)

	City-centre N = 279 T / B	Trastevere N = 374 T / B	Esquilino N = 460 T / B	Termini N = 167 T / B
Italian	85 / 57	92 / 67	96 / 63	59 / 52
English	0 / 17	1 / 6	0 / 4	2 / 23
Italian and English	12 / 16	3 / 16	2 / 4	30 / 0
Italian + English +other	0 / 2	1 / 2	1 / 1	9 / 0
Chinese	-	0 / 2	0 / 10	-
Indic scripts	-	-	0 / 10	-

Other languages	4 / 0 Latin 0 / 6 Graffiti 0 / 3 various	3 / 0 Latin 0 / 5 Graffiti 1 / 2 various	0 / 4 Spanish 0 / 1 various 0 / 4 Graffiti	0 / 18 Graffiti 0 / 8 various
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Looking at the top-down (T) signs in Table 2 it is clear that Italian, as would be expected, is mainly used as the official language. The other languages, including English, are rarely used as a top-down language on their own in monolingual signs. The exception here is Latin, which can be found on its own in a few signs. Bilingual Italian-English signs are relatively common in some of the neighborhoods, although there are vast differences in terms of the placement of bottom-up and top-down signs. Bottom-up signs predominate in all of the areas except for that surround Termini Station. This reflects the role of private initiative in bringing English into the linguistic landscape. The importance of tourism for the city, however, is made clear by the fact that all of the Italian-English signs near Termini Station are top-down. As would be expected, languages such as Chinese are almost entirely dependent on private initiative for inclusion in the linguistic landscape.

3.3. The nature of bilingual and multilingual signs

In this section a closer look is taken at the composition of the bilingual and multilingual signs. Those signs are analyzed according to the distribution and frequency of the languages. The way the languages are displayed vis-à-vis each other gives further information on the relative importance given to each language. An example of the different distribution between Italian and English is given in the following sign in the Termini Station.



Picture 4: Example of relative place of languages:
Italian and English at Termini Station

Table 3. The combination of languages on bilingual signs (percentages)

Bi-multilingual signs	City-centre N = 56	Trastevere N = 77	Esquilino N = 75	Termini N = 37
Italian + English	70	57	23	73
Italian + Latin	20	6	15	-
Other bilingual	1	9	13	3
Italian + English + others	9	5	5	22
Chinese + Italian	-	-	28	-
Indic script + Italian	-	-	11	-
Other combinations			5 (English + Indic script)	5 (English + German)

We will first look at the combinations of languages on the sign and then the size of the lettering of the language. About 20 percent of this sample consists of bi- or multilingual signs.

Table 3 compares the combinations of the different languages in the four neighbourhoods. The bilingual signs are unequally distributed over the different neighbourhoods. In the city centre and near the station by far the highest frequency of bilingual Italian/English signs are noticed. The other two neighbourhoods have fewer bilingual signs with English; Esquilino has the fewest—Italian/English signs represent only 23 percent of all signs in that neighbourhood compared to more than 50 percent in the other three areas. In Esquilino we find quite a few bilingual signs that are Italian-Chinese or Italian-Bengali or any other language from Bangla Desh or the Indian continent. The difference between these signs is that the Italian-Chinese are more ‘fixed’ on shops and the other are more in posters, leaflets or other objects that will change or can be replaced. Bilingualism of Italian in combination with other languages than English is only common in Esquilino, where the greatest linguistic diversity of all neighbourhoods is observed. The other bilingual signs are not very common, but, when they are present, always have English as one of the languages. This shows once more the importance of that global language in the linguistic landscape of the city of Rome.

Overall, multilingual signs are quite rare; as a rule they include either Italian or English. By far the most multilingual signs were encountered in the neighbourhood near the

station: 22 percent of all signs were either the bi- or multilingual making it a significant category. In the city-centre they may be in 5 languages for the tourists (see Appendix 3 for an example of a hairdresser in 6 languages).

Table 4. Size of bi- and multilingual signs

Bi-multilingual signs	City-centre N = 56	Trastevere N = 79	Esquilino N = 76	Termini N = 38	Average N = 249
All languages the same	29	41	38	76	43
Italian bigger	52	30	30	18	33
Other bigger	18	29	32	5	24
Different	2	-	-	-	0.5

Table 4 shows the size of the different languages on bi- and multilingual signs. The table displays again a rather diverse picture when the size of the fonts used for the different languages is taken into consideration. The average for all the neighbourhoods has been added in the last column and less than half of the time (43 percent) the size of the languages on the bi- or multilingual signs is the same. In the other cases there are different sizes for the different languages. It turns out that Italian has a bigger font more frequently than all the other languages taken together.

There are some interesting differences between the neighbourhoods. As previously mentioned, most bilingual Italian/English signs are in the area around the station. Looking at the analysis in Table 6 we see that these signs are ‘balanced’ most of the time, because three-quarters have the same size for each language. In the streets of the city-centre however, it appears that Italian stands out most of the time. Only in a minority of all cases is the language other than Italian bigger. This happens most frequently in the neighbourhood of Esquilino, where most overall diversity is observed, with the presence of languages like Chinese, Tamil, Bengali, Spanish and English, next to Italian.

4. Discussion of the results

This report addresses four different research questions related to the linguistic landscape of four neighbourhoods in the Italian capital of Rome. The discussion will be arranged according to these four questions.

Regarding the first question on the languages displayed in the linguistic landscape of the city of Rome, the conclusion is that the first impression is one of a rather homogeneous linguistic landscape. By far most signs have one language (around 80 percent) and only one in five (20 percent) has two or more languages on the sign. Whereas two languages on one sign is still rather frequent, to have more languages on one sign is the exception. A total of 18 different languages were found on the signs of this sample (where Braille and graffiti are not included in that count). Italian is, as expected, clearly the language that is used most often and thus dominates the linguistic landscape. Most other languages are also European, but languages that have another script, such as Chinese, Hindi or Bengali, are more conspicuous in the general surroundings of Roman script even if they are less common. There are not many multilingual signs overall and as a rule they include at least Italian and English.

The second question concerns the main differences between the four different neighbourhoods, and the following was found. The area around Termini Station has more heterogeneity in the signs than other areas and has a relative high number of signs with three or more languages compared to the other three neighbourhoods. There are interesting differences between the neighbourhoods. However, the neighbourhood of Esquilino is clearly the most linguistically diverse of the four neighbourhoods with several signs in Chinese and signs in an Indic script of Bengali, Tamil or Hindi; it also has the most signs with other languages.

The bi- and multilingual signs are unequally spread over the neighbourhoods. By far the highest frequency of bilingual Italian/English signs was encountered in the streets of the city centre and near Termini Station. The other two neighbourhoods have less bilingual signs with English, and least in Esquilino. The presence of English in Rome can be compared to other European cities mentioned in the introduction. In the city-centre we found 27 percent English either in combination with Italian, on its own or in combination with other languages, the area around Termini station was even a bit higher with 33 percent (see Graph 4 and Table B in Appendix 1). This figure compares well with the 25 percent that was found as the total for English in Trieste by Schlick, but is much less than the 39 percent for the shopping street in Malmö or the 49 percent in the main shopping street of Amsterdam.

As we observed before the city centre and the area around the station differ from the other two neighbourhoods. It is clear that the relatively frequent use of English is aimed at the tourists from many different countries around the world that visit Rome every year. The distribution shows that the extent to which English is used as a language of wider communication or lingua franca in a tourist city like Rome is geographically limited.

Bilingual signs which use languages other than English in combination with Italian is only common in Esquilino. It makes clear that the languages of immigrants are confined to those neighbourhoods where we find the highest concentrations of newcomers. The visibility of those languages gives also visibility to those groups. The signs can be an expression of their identity as well as make others more aware of their presence.

The third research question concerns the differences between the languages used when they are official (top-down) and private (bottom up) signs. The top-down signs mainly have Italian, the official language, on them; this is not unexpected of course. Other languages, including English, are rarely used as top-down languages on their own in monolingual signs. Both the government and the private initiative put up signs with a combination of Italian and English, most of all in the area around Termini Station and the streets in the city-centre. It seems that the City of Rome does a relatively good job of including other languages in high tourist areas. It could be recommended to the City authorities to systematically review its policy and develop further measures to make sure that language signs are designed and used in a coherent and comprehensive way. The linguistic landscape is after all contributing to the overall image the tourists have of the city in terms of hospitality, relevant information and communication.

Other languages than English, such as Chinese, Bengali, Hindi, Spanish or Rumanian (or graffiti), are only placed by private initiative. There is thus greater linguistic diversity in private initiative. Part of this use of multiple languages in bottom-up signs is a reflection of the presence of different population groups. At the same time it is clear that the linguistic landscape is not representative of all the different groups that live in a specific street. English has a special place as it is accepted equally by the authorities as by private initiative to communicate across different groups, either tourists or immigrants in the city. Whether the authorities want to acknowledge the presence of

different groups by placing (top-down) signs in those respective languages seems a matter of the further development of language policy. So far the City seems to have been reluctant to do so or not have been aware of the symbolic importance the placement of a number of strategically placed signs can have.

The fourth and final research question looked at the characteristics of bilingual and multilingual signs. In terms of the size of the languages used on the signs it turned out that most of the Italian/English signs are 'balanced' in the size of the letters used. In the streets of the city-centre however, the letters for Italian were bigger most of the time. Only in a small number of all cases was a language other than Italian bigger on bilingual signs. For the authorities it could make sense to reflect upon the way signs are designed and how the languages are placed on bilingual signs. The overall image of a balanced and well thought out and consistent policy can be given through the signs in the linguistic landscape.

In the neighbourhood of Esquilino the linguistic diversity and the inequality in the size of the languages happened mainly with Chinese or languages from Bangla Desh or the Indian continent. There is an interesting difference that the Chinese signs are more fixed as part of the shop-front or the shop-window, where the Bengali, Hindi, etc signs are more often temporary because they are posters, flyers or political pamphlets. If and how much this is related to a different socio-economic situation of both groups, for example, whether or not there are more shop-owners, is a matter that needs to be investigated further.

It is obvious that the overall impression that such language usage gives of a neighborhood may also vary when you go from the individual sign to considering the entire visual field. After all our impression of an area is not limited to individual signs, but to the broader visual space because we also observe how the signs fit into the environment.

This study of four neighbourhoods in the city of Rome could be a step towards a more encompassing study of the linguistic landscape of the city as a whole or perhaps even of other cities in Italy. In the past Schlick (2003) has conducted limited studies of Trieste and Pordenone and researchers at the Università per Stranieri di Siena are working on a

larger project on mapping linguistic diversity (Esquilino is one of the neighbourhoods), in which the linguistic landscape takes an important place (Barni 2006). Moreover this study has raised a number of questions about the spread and diversity of different languages in the capital of Italy. For instance the growing presence of English and the differences in the visibility of the languages of different immigrant groups deserve further study.

The descriptive approach to the linguistic landscape as was used in this study is an additional tool to measure the diversity of languages in the sociolinguistic context. As compared to other tools (surveys, censuses, interviews) which are product-oriented, the linguistic landscape has an added value because of the impact it can have on the people who see the signs. The linguistic landscape can affect the perception and attitudes people have about languages and influence the use of languages in society (Gorter and Cenoz, to appear). A study among a sample of the inhabitants could possibly confirm this assumption. It would also be interesting to do interviews among local as well as immigrant shop-owners who are the authors of the signs to discover their intentions and why they are using specific languages in their signs and not others.

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APPENDIX 1 : the detailed tables of the graphs 3 and 4 in the text

Table A. Number of languages on the signs in each area (percentages)

Number of languages	City-centre N = 279	Trastevere N = 374	Esquilino N = 462	Termini N = 167
1	80	79	83	77
2	19	20	16	17
3	1	1	1	1
4 or more	1	0.2	0.2	5

See graph 3.

Table B. Languages on sign (percentages)

	City-centre N = 279	Trastevere N = 374	Esquilino N = 460	Termini N = 167
Italian	67	75	69	56
English	11	5	3	12
Italian and English	14	12	4	16
Italian + English +other	2	1	1	5
Chinese +	-	1	10 (4+6)	-
Indic scripts +	-	-	8 (6+2)	-
Other languages	1 Latin 4 Graffiti 1 various	1 Latin 1 Greek 4 Graffiti 2 various	3 Spanish 3 Graffiti 2 various	8 Graffiti 4 various

Note: Chinese appears on 10 percent of the signs in Esquilino, of those signs 4 percent are monolingual and 6 percent are bi- or multilingual. The same notation is used for Indic scripts (which include Bengali, Hindi and Tamil).

See graph 4.

APPENDIX 2: A few basic facts about Rome

From: www.alberghi-a.roma.it/info.htm [May 2006]

ROME

SURFACE AND PEOPLE

Area: **1.285,306 Km²** Citizens: **2.823.201** (2004) Density: **2.197/Km²**

Female: **52,3 percent** , Male: **47,7 percent** Citizens growth rate: **0.3 percent**

Foreigners as a percentage: **7.9-8,5 percent** (= 224.000 city; 309,000 Province; registered)

of which

- from Europe: **38 percent**
- from America: **15 percent**
- from Asia: **30 percent**
- from Africa: **16 percent**
- other: **1 percent**

TOURISM (2004): Arrivals: **5.937.234** *of which* Italian tourists: **2.390.535** Foreign tourists: **3.546.699**

LINKS:

Comune di Roma : www.comune.roma.it/

Stazione di Roma: www.romatermini.it/

Statistics www.istat.it/dati/catalogo/20040621_01/

Links to data about immigrants: www.cestim.org/index01dati.htm