

# Signs of De-territorialization? Linguistic Landscape at the German-Polish Border

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine whether we can find signs of sociolinguistic transition in the case of the German-Polish border, and if yes, what kind of transition. It discusses aspects of transition at the border region from the viewpoint of the linguistic landscape. First, the significance of language for border studies is discussed. Second, the linguistic landscape approach is introduced as the means to focus on the visibility of a certain language, more precisely its graphic representation, in a given place. Third, an attempt is made to characterize the German-Polish border from a sociolinguistic point of view. Then we have a closer look at the current state of the linguistic landscape at the German-Polish border. The paper concludes that the question “Transition or not?” could be answered as “transition and not.” On the one hand, linguistic de-territorialization has led to increased permeability and liminality, although in an asymmetrical manner. On the other hand, this tendency has not yet surpassed the durability of territoriality, and a border demarking distinct language territories still endures. Time will tell whether the process of transition will continue.

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine whether we can find signs of transition in the case of the German-Polish border, and if yes, what kind of transition.<sup>1</sup> For this purpose, the paper discusses aspects of transition at the German-Polish border region from the viewpoint of the linguistic landscape. In short, the focus is on sociolinguistic transition. A sociolinguistic transition can be defined as “a change in a language regime accompanying an overall political, social and economic transformation.”<sup>2</sup> The sociolinguistic transition, however, is not only a part of the overall phenomenon of transition. I will claim that due to the pervasive nature of language, being involved in

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<sup>2</sup> Petteri Laihonen, Anastassia Zabrodskaja and Marián Sloboda, “What Transition, Which Sociolinguistics?” in *Sociolinguistic Transition in Former Eastern Bloc Countries: Two Decades after the Regime Change*, eds. P. Laihonen, A. Zabrodskaja and M. Sloboda (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016), 13–25.

almost every domain of human social activity, sociolinguistic aspects will provide insight into political, social and economic aspects as well.

First, the significance of language for border studies is discussed. Second, the linguistic landscape approach is introduced as a way to focus on the visibility of a certain language, more precisely its graphic representation, in a given place. Third, it attempts to characterize the German-Polish border from a sociolinguistic point of view. Then we will have a closer look at the current state of the linguistic landscape at the German-Polish border, before coming to a conclusion.

### **The Relevance of Language for Border Studies**

Language has a special affinity with border studies, whether in the narrow sense of physical/material borders or in a wider understanding including conceptual/mental borders. When speaking, we always display closeness and distance to different languages or language varieties, which the hearer interprets as one's identification with one or another human group characterized by the language (variety) they use. Thus, language is one of the basic elements dividing and linking human beings. As human beings usually relate to each other through language, it can be supposed that language is involved in any border situation where people are interacting. The social and political significance of language and its relation to political borders, though, varies greatly across different eras and regions. In some cases, as in twentieth century Central Europe, language has been heavily politicized for building, legitimizing and maintaining nation states. In other cases, language may have its primary relevance just as a tool to communicate within or across borders that do not correspond to ethnolinguistic distribution.

When language is mentioned in current border studies, its noticeable that the focus is mostly on its role for the demarcation of borders. For example, in the first issue of *Eurasia Border Review*, the two papers presenting current trends in border analysis in America and Europe both mention language in this manner (emphasis added by KGC):

Scholarship on borders also focuses on the culture of local borderland communities. The literature often describes how these communities may either enhance the effect of dividing territory and communities when their culture, that is, their **language**, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and place of belonging, differs, or bridge an international boundary when they share the same culture.<sup>3</sup>

[T]here is an obvious need to study in specific historical contexts the extent to which borders are being defined in national terms as **demarcations** based on ethnicity, **language** and culture, and to what extent they are understood in broader supra-national/transnational terms.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, "The State of Borders and Borderlands Studies 2009: A Historical View and a View from the Journal of Borderlands Studies," *Eurasia Border Review* 1:1 (2010): 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ilkka Liikanen, "From Post-Modern Visions to Multi-Scale Study of Bordering: Recent Trends in European Study of Borders and Border Areas," *Eurasia Border Review* 1:1 (2010): 28.

Lundrén, who includes communication as one of the eight factors influencing boundary behavior, dedicates most of a chapter dealing with communication to language, thus paying due attention to the basic relevance of language to border issues.<sup>5</sup> Here too, the bulk of the mentioned cases focus on the dividing role of language. Also, two papers in journals published by the Slavic-Eurasian Research Center at Hokkaido University dealing with language both focus on the relation between national borders and the concept of separate languages.<sup>6</sup> This focus is reasonable, when we consider the central role language played in the modern era in Eurasia, especially in Central European ethnolinguistic nationalism.

However, this is but one aspect of the role language can play in border issues. Custred, who considers language contact in border studies, referred to patterns of bilingualism and diglossia across the border in South America.<sup>7</sup> Also with regard to Central Europe, Mitani points out that historically languages were not only used to mark borders, but that there existed a culture to make use of various languages mutually in a multilingual environment.<sup>8</sup>

To draw attention also to these border-crossing aspects of language in a systematic way, the framework of three dimensions of borders developed at the research center B/ORDERS IN MOTION at European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder) (see Figure 1) is useful. The three dimensions are differentiation, transgression and formation of border zones, corresponding to the three concepts *durability*, *permeability* and *liminality*.<sup>9</sup> In short, the use of language may contribute not only to maintain, but also to transcend and obscure border lines.

These three dimensions of language can be linked to a central focus of border studies: territoriality and de-territorialization. According to Paasi, territoriality is “an ideological practice and discourse that transforms national spaces and histories, cultures, economic success and resources into bounded spaces.”<sup>10</sup> In sociolinguistics, linguistic territoriality has been used to denote the linkage of a language with a certain territory where the language has acknowledged status. In modern states, languages have often come to be associated with a territory where they have or are claimed to have

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Lundrén, *On the Boundary: About Humans at the End of Territory* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2004), 97–111.

<sup>6</sup> Takuya Nakazawa, “<Montenegurogo> no Kyokai: Yugosuravia Kaitai Ikou no Gengoideorogi Niokeru ‘Gengo’ no Saihen (2007–2011) [The Internal and External Borders of the “Montenegrin Language”: Language Ideology after the Collapse of Yugoslavia (2007–2011)],” *Kyōkaikenkyū* [*Japan Border Review*] 4 (2013): 15–30; Tomasz Kamusella and Motoki Nomachi, “The Long Shadow of Borders: The Cases of Kashubian and Silesian in Poland,” *Eurasia Border Review* 5:1 (2014): 35–59. The former mainly deals with the creation of a separate language in independent Montenegro, and the latter with the effect of the state border on whether or not to recognize regional languages in Poland.

<sup>7</sup> Glynn Custred, “Language Boundaries in South America,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 10:1 (1995): 69–83.

<sup>8</sup> Keiko Mitani, “‘Kyōkai’ to ‘Baitai’ – Gengo kara mita Chuou [‘Border’ and ‘Media’: Central Europe seen from Language],” *Shisō* [*Thought*] 4 (2012): 73–91.

<sup>9</sup> These three dimensions are already utilized in linguistic analysis of language borders. See Dagna Zinkhahn Rhobodes, “Crossing and Blurring the Language Borders: The Example of German-Polish Language Contact,” in *Beyond Language Boundaries*, eds. Marta Fernández-Villanueva and Konstanze Jungbluth (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 200–220.

<sup>10</sup> Anssi Paasi, “A Border Theory: An Unattainable Dream or a Realistic Aim for Border Scholars?” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, ed. Doris Wastl-Walter (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 14.

official status. In such cases, the contribution of language to the durability of borders can be seen in reinforcing the territoriality of language. On the other hand, permeability and liminality across borders can be linked to the de-territorialization of language. In border studies, de-territorialization has “referred to the purported situation characterized by the disappearance of borders in the globalizing world, or at times to the need to deconstruct their fixed or apparent meanings.”<sup>11</sup> De-territorialization of language means that languages are coming to be used outside the territory assigned to them.<sup>12</sup> To come back to our theme, transition of a language regime in border areas can be measured by the shift among the three dimensions. For example, when there is a clear-cut linguistic territoriality (as in our case, see below), we can comprehend de-territorialization as a sign of transition.



**Figure 1: Research Areas and Projects (Viadrina Center B/ORDERS IN MOTION)<sup>13</sup>**

### **Linguistic Landscape as an Index and Component of Border Phenomena**

An approach that focusses on language directly in relation to space or territory is research into the “linguistic landscape” (LL). LL as “the study of writing on display in the public sphere”<sup>14</sup> has developed in recent years to a rapidly evolving subfield of sociolinguistics. Coulmas has noted that due to its adherence to vernacular speech as the most genuine form of language use, “sociolinguistics has not been very interested in or accommodating to writing.”<sup>15</sup> However, it has become clear, that “[t]he communicatively relevant parts of social environments can no longer be adequately described and analysed unless writing is recognized as a crucial component of linguistic ecology,”<sup>16</sup> especially in countries with advanced literacy. LL research is one response to this recognition of writing as a

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>12</sup> Maria Carme Junyent, ed., *La Territorialitat Lingüística* (Barcelona: Horsori Editorial, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Accessed November 20, 2016: <https://www.borders-in-motion.de/projekte>

<sup>14</sup> Florian Coulmas, *Writing and Society: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 37.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

socially relevant subsystem of language. As Backhaus states: “The linguistic landscape is the focal point of two of the most essential markers of ethnic identity, language and place.”<sup>17</sup>

In an influential paper on the development on LL research, Landry and Bourhis describe the target of LL research as follows:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs of government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region or urban agglomeration.<sup>18</sup>

According to Landry and Bourhis, the LL of a territory can serve two basic functions: the informational function and the symbolic function. The former function concerns LL as a marker of the geographical territory: “[T]he linguistic landscape serves to inform in-group and out-group members of the linguistic characteristics, territorial limits, and language boundaries of the region they have entered.”<sup>19</sup> The latter function is about the effect of LL. Landry and Bourhis note, for example, that “the presence of the in-group language in the linguistic landscape can contribute most directly to the positive social identity of ethnolinguistic groups.”<sup>20</sup>

We can understand the former as the reflexive function of the political, social and economic situation of a given territory, the latter as the creative function contributing to the formation of social identity. With regard to our interest in borders, LL can thus be regarded as an index as well as component of the durability, permeability and liminality of borders. It is a constituent of the border landscapes, reflecting as well as creating transborder relations.<sup>21</sup>

Let us now consider the question of classifying LL items. In the study of LL there is sometimes applied a dichotomous distinction. Calvet proposed the distinction between “in vitro” and “in vivo.”<sup>22</sup> According to Calvet, there are two different ways to mark a territory: one is a sign written by power [in vitro] and the other by the citizens [in vivo].<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Ben-Rafael et al. distinguish between “top-down” and “bottom-up” flows of linguistic landscape items.<sup>24</sup> Further research on LL,

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Backhaus, *Linguistic Landscapes: A Comparative Study of Urban Multilingualism in Tokyo* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007), 55.

<sup>18</sup> Rodrigue Landry and Richard Y. Bourhis, “Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality: An Empirical Study,” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 16:1 (1997): 23–49.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> In this context, the chapter by Lundrén dealing with language (see footnote 5) emphasizes the importance of place names and linguistic signs in the real landscape.

<sup>22</sup> Louis-Jean Calvet, “Des mots sur les murs: une comparaison entre Paris et Dakar,” in *Actes du Colloque international. Des langues et des villes*, organisé conjointement par le CERPL (Paris V) et le CLAD (Dakar) à Dakar, du 15 au 17 décembre 1990 (Paris: Agence de coopération culturelle et technique: Diffusion, Didier erudition, 1991), 73–79.

<sup>23</sup> “qui est écrit par le pouvoir [in vitro] (...) et ce qui est écrit par les citoyens [in vivo] (...). Il y a là deux façons différentes de **marquer le territoire**.” *Ibid.*, 75, emphasis in the original.

<sup>24</sup> Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Elana Shohamy, Muhammad H. Amara and Nira Trumper-Hecht, “Linguistic Landscape as Symbolic Construction of the Public Space: The Case of Israel,” in *Linguistic Landscape: A New*

however, has questioned this kind of dichotomy. Huebner notes, that “[t]his dichotomy appears useful until it is applied to real data,”<sup>25</sup> and Dal Negro also confirms that this distinction proved ineffective because of too many border-line cases.<sup>26</sup> Kallen concludes that “the increasing amount of data on linguistic landscape suggests that this dichotomous spatial metaphor is too simple.”<sup>27</sup> When we acknowledge the reality as a continuum of different levels, we realize that the terms “in vitro” vs. “in vivo” or “top-down” vs. “bottom-up” are too simplistic.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, by suggesting that some phenomena are more natural than others, they are more misleading than helpful.<sup>29</sup>

To avoid such a problematic view, we follow the classification provided by Scollon and Scollon,<sup>30</sup> who found four distinct discourses of sign common to street corners in different cities: regulatory, infrastructural, commercial and transgressive. By “regulatory” and “infrastructural” they mean municipal signs that regulate traffic or provide information. “Commercial” signs are those set up with commercial purpose. A transgressive sign means “a sign which violates (intentionally or accidentally) the conventional semiotics at that place such as a discarded snack food wrapper or graffiti; any sign in the ‘wrong place’.”<sup>31</sup> To fit with the data found in our case, we have modified and specified these categories. First, we redivided municipal signs into general road signs and information on the one hand and those related to public transportation on the other. The latter deserves special attention as public transportation has become a special focal point in transborder cooperation at the research site. Further, we added “signage of events” as a non-negligible part of the LL and “memorial inscriptions” referring to the history of the region as two separate categories.

- a. public road signs and information
- b. public transportation
- c. signage of events
- d. advertising billboards and commercial shop signs

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*Approach to Multilingualism*, ed. Durk Gorter (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006), 14; Eliezer Ben-Rafael, “A Sociological Approach to the Study of Linguistic Landscapes,” in *Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery*, eds. Elena Shohamy and Durk Gorter (New York: Routledge, 2009), 49.

<sup>25</sup> Thom Huebner, “A Framework for the Linguistic Analysis of Linguistic Landscapes,” in Shohamy and Gorter, 74.

<sup>26</sup> Silvia Dal Negro, “Local Policy Modeling the Linguistic Landscape,” in Shohamy and Gorter, 211–212.

<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Kallen, “Tourism and Representation in the Irish Linguistic Landscape,” in Shohamy and Gorter, 273.

<sup>28</sup> Goro Christoph Kimura, “Spracherhalt als Prozess: Elemente des kirchlichen Sprachmanagements bei den katholischen Sorben,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 232 (2015): 13–32.

<sup>29</sup> Goro Christoph Kimura, “Gengoseisaku Kenkyu no Gengokan wo Tou – Gengokeikaku/Gengotaido no Nibunhou kara Gengokanri no Riron e [How Do Researchers on Language Policy Perceive Language? – From the Language Planning / Language Attitude Dichotomy to Language Management Theory],” *Gengoseisaku [Language Policy]* 1 (2015): 1–13. English version available at:

[http://languagemanagement.ff.cuni.cz/en/system/files/documents/kimura\\_JALP1\\_eng.pdf](http://languagemanagement.ff.cuni.cz/en/system/files/documents/kimura_JALP1_eng.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Discourses in Place: Language in the material world* (London: Routledge, 2003), 181.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

- e. transgressive signs
- f. memorial inscriptions

Previous research on LL at the German-Polish border has been concerned with the different actors or the bridging role of the Slavic Sorbian language in Germany.<sup>32</sup> In order to get data to gauge sociolinguistic transition, in the following we will focus on the use of the neighbor's language in the LL on both sides of the border as an index and component of de-territorialization. Concretely: how far and how the Polish language is used on the German side and the German language on the Polish side in the visual mode in publicly accessible spaces. As our interest here is in the distribution of the two languages in their graphic representation, further aspects on writing as orthography, typography and so on are omitted.<sup>33</sup>

### Sociolinguistic Characteristics of the German-Polish Border Region

Before discussing the data on LL, we will briefly outline the sociolinguistic characteristics of our case, the German-Polish border, which seems to be especially suited to examine the question of transition from a sociolinguistic viewpoint. Let us first situate the border within the typology of language borders. Décsy distinguishes between three types of language borders:

1. Very contrast-poor language borders with mutual understanding to a large extent (for example Russian-Ukrainian, Czech-Slovakian, Spanish-Portuguese)
2. Contrast-poor language borders with mutual understanding to a less significant extent (Russian-Polish, French-Spanish, German-Dutch)
3. Contrast-rich language borders without mutual understanding, which according to Décsy cover most language borders in Europe<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Maria Klessmann and Dominik Gerst, "Wegweiser durch die Grenzlandschaft. Sprache im öffentlichen Raum der Doppelstadt Frankfurt (Oder) / Ślubiце," *Wir im Quartier* 12 (2015): 20–21; Goro Christoph Kimura, "'Deterritorialització' a la regió fronterera germano-pòlonesa i la seva importància per al sòrab com a llengua minoritària: des del punt de vista del paisatge lingüístic (Traducció de l'esperanto: Josep Maria Milla) / 'Deteritoriigo' êe la german-pola landlima regiono kaj ĝia signifo por la malplimulta soraba lingvo: el vidpunkto de lingva pejzaĝo," in ed. Junyent, 49–62, 113–125.

<sup>33</sup> As both languages are written using Latin alphabet, the matter of different script, often an important topic in writing, is not relevant here. Literacy of the population sufficient to distinguish between the two (or three, including English) languages can be presupposed, so that this issue will not be discussed, either.

<sup>34</sup> Gyula Décsy, *Die linguistische Struktur Europas. Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, Zukunft* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973), 155. This classification concerns primarily the oral mode of language. While contrast-poor from the viewpoint of language typology, Russian and Polish put in the second type here are contrast rich at the level of script.

The German-Polish border belongs to the third type. The use of the same Latin script itself does not help much to understand the other language across the border. In a more detailed classification, Lundrén proposes the following typology:

1. Language is the same on both sides and is official in both countries
2. Language is the same, but on one side it has a lower status, either as a so called wild dialect without proper teaching in schools etc., or it is a weak minority language
3. Language is the same, but on one side it is not recognised as a state language
4. Languages are officially different but mutually intelligible
5. Languages are both officially different and mutually unintelligible
6. Official languages are different, mutually unintelligible, but along both sides of the border there is a third language group<sup>35</sup>

When we take the wider border area including the German minority in Poland and the Sorbian minority in Germany, we have type 6 here, but in this paper, we will limit our attention to the narrower, immediate border area, which belongs to type 5. This border has been called one of the sharpest language borders in Europe, due to the shift of the border after 1945 and the accompanying radical population transfer. Kamusella and Nomachi characterize these changes as follows:

A traditional zone of multilingual communication, between Germanic and Slavic speakers, was turned, between 1918 and 1950, into a line of sharp linguistic discontinuity coinciding with the German-Polish frontier that until 1990 was the most notorious and disputed cleavage in Cold War Europe. For all practical purposes, after 1945, this border was sealed and became an impenetrable barrier isolating the increasingly monolingual nations, that is, the German-speaking Germans (or East Germany) and the Polish-speaking Poles, on their respective sides of the frontier. Between 1945 and 2007, when Poland (...) joined the Schengen Area of borderless travel, three generations of Germans and Poles had already been born and come of age within view of one another across the frontier, but with no meaningful interaction, out of one another's earshot.<sup>36</sup>

In recent years, however, the gradual opening of the border in the course of the European Integration has led to a rapid increase in cross-border contacts.<sup>37</sup> Using the models of borderlands interaction by Martínez,<sup>38</sup> this border seems to evolve from a "coexistent borderland" to an

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<sup>35</sup> Lundrén, *On the Boundary*, 101.

<sup>36</sup> Kamusella and Nomachi, "The Long Shadow of Borders," 38.

<sup>37</sup> See Jajeśniak-Quast, this volume.

<sup>38</sup> Oscar J. Martínez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 7.

“interdependent borderland”. In this social context, the issue of language has gained significance as a prerequisite for trans-border cooperation.<sup>39</sup>

### Linguistic Landscape at the German-Polish Border

Here I will present the case of Frankfurt/Oder (Germany) and Słubice (Poland), neighboring cities situated directly at the border. The analysis of photos of the LL taken in these cities during fieldwork conducted between 2012–2017 reveals the following.

#### *Public Road Signs and Information*

As seen in photo 1 and 2, public road signs and public information boards are basically bi- or trilingual on both sides of the border. The use of the neighbors language reflects the increase of transborder visitors from both sides of the border after the joining of Poland to the Schengen area.<sup>40</sup> A difference in language policy can be seen in the more extensive use of English in Frankfurt. When English is included, Polish is situated visually after English. This can be interpreted as reflecting the weaker position of Polish on the German side. A gradually realized common signage policy tries to enhance bi- or trilingual public signage to provide better orientation for tourists and business people. This common signage has also a symbolic/creative function to show the twin city as a place with a shared identity (see photo 3 and 4).



**Photo 1 : Public Information Sign in Frankfurt**



**Photo 2 : Public Information Sign in Słubice**

<sup>39</sup> Goro Christoph Kimura, “Arbeitnehmerfreizügigkeit und Sprache - mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutsch-polnischen Grenzregion / Swoboda przepływu pracowników a znajomość języka - ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem polsko-niemieckiego regionu przygranicznego,” in *Swobodny przepływ pracowników między Polską i Niemcami - próba bilansu z różnych perspektyw / Arbeitnehmerfreizügigkeit zwischen Deutschland und Polen - eine Zwischenbilanz aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven*, eds. Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, Laura Kiel and Marek Kłodnicki (Berlin: Epubli, 2014), 103–122, 249–267.

<sup>40</sup> Stadt Frankfurt an der Oder, *Frankfurt-Słubicer Handlungsplan 2010–2020*, Anhang B, S.14. Accessed November 20, 2016: [http://www.frankfurt-slubice.eu/Files/files/frankfurt-slubicer\\_handlungsplan\\_ii.pdf](http://www.frankfurt-slubice.eu/Files/files/frankfurt-slubicer_handlungsplan_ii.pdf)



**Photo 3 : Information Board at the Bridge in Frankfurt**



**Photo 4 : Information Board in Słubice**

### *Public Transportation*

The transportation infrastructure has developed separately in both cities. While Frankfurt has its municipal public traffic system, in Słubice there existed only private sector transportation like taxis. But recently there has been progress in transborder networking, most significantly demonstrated by the beginning of a bus route in 2012 crossing the border bridge and providing direct access from the railway station in Frankfurt to the city area of Słubice. The “international” bus line is referred to as a model of the cooperation of the two cities.<sup>41</sup> There is almost constant multi- and bilingual information in buses and trams (except for old wagons) (photo 5). We notice with regard to soundscape that announcements are also in both languages, even in bus lines circulating only within Frankfurt. Another soundscape, the frequently heard Polish conversations in public transportation in Frankfurt confirm that this public bilingualism to some extent reflects the constitution of the passengers. The bilingualism in public transport is also



**Photo 5 : Bilingual Ticket Machine in the Bus**

<sup>41</sup> Frankfurt-Słubicer Kooperationszentrum, “Buslinie 983 verkehrt zwischen Frankfurt (Oder) und Słubice” (2012). Accessed November 20, 2016: [http://www.frankfurt-slubice.eu/article,de,29,offentlicher\\_personennahverkehr.html](http://www.frankfurt-slubice.eu/article,de,29,offentlicher_personennahverkehr.html)



**Photo 6 : German Language Bus Stop in Slubice**

symbolic of the daily cross-border movements of the citizens. On the other hand, German language bus stop signs in Slubice show that buses are operated for the German side (photo 6: H stands for *Haltestelle* in German, in Polish it would be *przystanek*), weakening the shared character of the line.

### *Signage of Events*

Following the policy of being a “twin city,” official festivals are generally jointly organized transborderly, accompanied by bilingual signage. With regard to citizens’ activities, they are often promoted bilingually, and not confined to explicitly German-Polish activities. Here also, the bilingual signage reflects as well as creates the transnational character of the events. The symbolic aspect is especially evident in cases where bilingualism itself is promoted, as for example in a road painting organized by a local transborder NPO displaying words in German and Polish (photo 7).



**Photo 7 : “Road Dictionary” at an Event Organized by a Local NPO**

*Advertising Billboards and Commercial Shop Signs*

Bilingualism is also promoted commercially. On both sides of the border we can find restaurants and shops with bilingual information—in Frankfurt sporadically, in Słubice constantly, at least in the central area. In addition, there are even monolingual signs in the neighboring language. The agents and contents, however, differ. In Frankfurt, Polish signage is used in advertising for consultation (working and living) and housing services, including monolingual information created for Polish clients (photo 8). There are also Polish signs by Polish owners of shops. In Słubice, on the other hand, typically shops selling alcohol, cigarettes, fireworks, or medical services have signage including German or even only in German (photo 9). In particular, the bazaar near the border appears to be a quasi-monolingual German language territory (except for some non-commercial Polish-only domains such as toilets). These differences indicate that in Frankfurt, Poles are active in business as well as living, while the Germans on the Polish side are mostly consumers, coming only for shopping. The almost exclusively German language signage of the bazaar may symbolize the economical asymmetry between Germany and Poland, being an evident part of this asymmetry.



**Photo 8 : Advertisement of Housing in Frankfurt Specially for Poles**



**Photo 9 : German Monolingual Shop Sign in Słubice**

*Transgressive Signs*

The last two categories are types of signs that can be found only on one side of the border. In parks in Frankfurt, a careful look will find Polish graffiti or scribbling, indicating Polish visitors or inhabitants (photo 10). A more prevalent appearance of the Polish language in Frankfurt are the empty cigarette cases found on streets (photo 11). Reflecting the shopping behavior of the Germans in Słubice, their frequency proves that German commercial signage in Słubice is rewarding. As transgressive signs do not get much public attention, we can assume that the symbolic function is rather marginal.



**Photo 10 : Playground Equipment in Frankfurt  
Where Polish Scriblings Could be Found**



**Photo 11 : Cigarette Case in Polish**

### *Memorial Inscriptions*

A specialty on the Polish side is the monuments with German inscription (photo 12). Mostly placed rather recently, these German inscriptions indicate the German past of the east side of the river until 1945. In contrast to the transgressive signs, these inscriptions bear a high symbolical value manifesting the reconciliation of the two nations.

**Photo 12 : Bilingual Inscription on a  
Memorial Board near Słubice**



### **Conclusions**

Let us come to some final remarks. First, there are signs of de-territorialization in the sense that use of the neighbor's language is already a normal constituent of the LL in the two towns at the border. Users of both languages, German and Polish, can orient themselves and get information from the signage on the other side of the border. Compared to the monolingual territories that emerged after 1945, this can be understood as a sociolinguistic transition. From the viewpoint of the informative (i.e. reflexive) function of LL, the German-Polish border region is no longer a region divided by strictly monolingual territories. The bilingual signage also symbolizes and creates the visual image of a common bilingual space. Although it is still too early to speak of a common transborder identity, the newly developed common signage policy could contribute at least to the possibility of such an identification. The new information board in Słubice using the common logo of both cities and still showing "welcome" in the native language (photo 4) can be regarded as a model case toward a common identity that does not relinquish differences. This kind of symbolic, i.e. creative potential of LL, could be further exploited in the future.

These apparent images of advancing de-territorialization have to be relativized, however. The prevalence of practical information on both sides suggests a lack of bilingualism among the population.<sup>42</sup> For instance, it is striking that the Polish word “*papierosy*” for cigarettes is almost constantly missing in shop signs in Słubice, indicating that this would not be understood by German clients. To continue with cigarettes, (un)fortunately the Germans are surely not annoyed by the warning phrases in Polish on cigarette packs (on photo 11 the warning reads “smoking kills”). In this sense, a real sociolinguistic transition has not yet happened.

Further, there is an asymmetry between the German and Polish side. In Frankfurt, Polish is an additional language and only exceptionally used monolingually. On the other hand, the use of German is quite common in Słubice, even with areas with mostly monolingual German signage. In this way, the LL indicates and constitutes the asymmetry between the German and Polish side. It should be noted, however, that the asymmetry reflects the economic imbalance between Germany and Poland. The Polish signs in Frankfurt, especially for Polish clients as well those by Polish shop owners, indicate the economic and social activities and potential of Polish people. The Polish graffiti in Frankfurt also testify to Polish life. The declining tendency of the monolingual German area in Słubice, the bazaar,<sup>43</sup> may also indicate the decrease of the economic gap between the two countries.

The initial question “Transition or not?” could be answered as “Transition and not.” To use the terms presented at the beginning of this paper, de-territorialization has led, on the one hand to increased permeability and liminality, although in an asymmetrical manner. On the other hand, this tendency has not yet surpassed the durability of the language territoriality. In order to investigate the question of transition or not from a sociolinguistic point of view, it would be necessary to include data on actual language use as well as metalinguistic accounts of the users. This will be a task for further research.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> About language skills on both sides of the border see Kimura, “Arbeitnehmerfreizügigkeit und Sprache.”

<sup>43</sup> On my visit in March 2014, a considerable number of shops were closed during the day.

<sup>44</sup> An overview of the various interlingual strategies, including the use of English or other alternatives as receptive bilingualism was presented in Goro Christoph Kimura, “Grundzüge interlingualer Kommunikationsstrategien – dargestellt am Beispiel der deutsch-polnischen Grenzregion, ” *Sophia Journal of European Studies* 7 (2015): 59–88. Papers dealing with each strategy in more detail are in preparation.