

Between the East and the West: Alphabets, language choice and politics in the virtual linguistic landscape of Serbia

Abstract

In some speech communities, including their digital discourses, not only language presence but also script choice is a semiotic marker, indexical of ideologies and sociopolitical relations. This paper reports on a study of the presence of Cyrillic and Latin alphabets as well as English, Russian and minority languages on the websites of Serbia's political parties. A case study of virtual linguistic landscape (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009), the paper harnesses virtual linguistic ethnography (Lenihan & Kelly-Holmes, 2016) and multimodal screen analysis in synchronic and diachronic perspectives to account for the connections between the deployment of various linguistic and other semiotic resources, on the one hand, and ideological positions and shifts, on the other. The study shows that script choice is not arbitrary but rather motivated by pragmatic considerations as well as ideological leanings of the 'sign maker' (website owner); while Cyrillic tends to be aligned with tradition, nation-oriented politics and the political East, Latin alphabet is mainly coupled with Europeanism, regionalism and the political West.

References:

- Ivkovic, D., & Lotherington, H. (2009). Multilingualism in cyberspace: Conceptualising the virtual linguistic landscape. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 6(1), 17-36.
- Lenihan, A., & Kelly-Holmes, H. (2016). Virtual Ethnography. *Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide*, 255-267.