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Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian: Inherent Translanguaging in the Linguistic Landscape of Sarajevo

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Abstract: Language in the Balkan region of Southeastern Europe has a complex and turbulent history, acutely embodied in the tripartite and trilingual state of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in which Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs all make claim to their own mutually-intelligible varieties of local “languages”. This study utilizes a linguistic landscape methodology to consider language use in Sarajevo, the capital of BiH, approximately 20 years after a brutal war that led to the establishment of the country. Data originate from three municipalities within the Sarajevo Canton – namely, Old Town, Center, and Ilidža – because of their representation of the region’s diversity and history. Signs were classified according to the three primary language varieties, i.e., Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian; BCS, representing a common core among the three varieties, as well as English, other languages, and mixed languages. The application of BCS uniquely positions the present research in comparison to other studies of language use in the region and allows for a more nuanced, less politically and ethnolinguistically fraught analysis of the communicative tendencies of users. More specifically, data indicate that actors in the linguistic landscape transcend the boundaries of their national, ethnic, and religious identities by tending towards the more neutral BCS, suggesting an orientation towards more translingual dispositions than previous variety-bound approaches have indicated. Thus, instead of the divisiveness of linguistic identity politics, the linguistic landscape of Sarajevo indicates a tendency toward inclusion and linguistic egalitarianism.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscape, translanguaging, language ideologies, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian

Zusammenfassung: Eine komplexe und turbulente Geschichte der Sprachen der Südosteuropäischen Balkanregion, die im dreigliedrigen und dreisprachigen

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Staat Bosnien-Herzegowina akut verkörpert wird, in dem Bosniaken, Kroaten und Serben sich für ihre Sprachvarianten der lokalen „Sprachen“ zu eigen machen. Diese Studie untersucht den Sprachgebrauch in Sarajevo durch eine Methode der „linguistic landscape“. Sarajevo ist die Hauptstadt von Bosnien-Herzegowina, die etwa 20 Jahre zuvor einen brutalen Krieg erlebte, der zur Gründung des Landes führte. Die Daten stammen aus drei Gemeinden des Kantons Sarajevo namentlich Altstadt, Zentrum und Ilidža, die die Vielfalt und Geschichte der Region darstellen. Die Schilder wurden nach den drei Hauptsprachen (d.h., Bosnisch, Kroatisch, Serbisch) klassifiziert, sowie BKS, welches einen gemeinsamen Kern von den drei Sprachvarianten darstellt. Englisch, andere Sprachen, und gemischte Sprachen wurden auch betrachtet. Die Anwendung von BKS positioniert die vorliegende Forschung einzigartig im Vergleich zu vorherigen Studien des Sprachgebrauches in der Region und ermöglicht eine mehr nuancierte, weniger politische und ethnolinguistische belastete Analyse der Kommunikationstendenzen von Nutzern. Die Daten weisen darauf hin, dass Akteure in der Sprachlandschaft die Grenzen ihrer nationalen, ethnischen und religiösen Identität überschreiten, indem sie zu dem neutraleren BKS tendieren und die Orientierung an mehr translinguale Neigungen vorschlagen, als frühere Zugänge vorgeschlagen haben. Anstatt der Spaltung der linguistischen Identitätspolitik weist die Sprachlandschaft von Sarajevo also auf Tendenzen der Inklusion und des Sprachegalitarismus hin.

Stichwörter: Sprachlandschaft, Translingualismus, Sprachideologie, Bosnisch Kroatisch Serbisch

1 Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a small country located within the Balkan peninsula. It is surrounded by Croatia in the north and west, Serbia in the east, and Montenegro in the southeast, a positioning that provides the country with the benefits and challenges of its distinctive multinational and multilinguistic character. The Balkan region has a turbulent history of subjugation by various empires, most recently culminating in the almost four-year war that occurred between 1992–95, the conclusion of which established BiH in its modern form in 1995 through the Dayton Accords. BiH is a multiethnic nation that is home for Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs, each of whom claim to speak their own distinct language even though each of the varieties are mutually intelligible and are frequently indistinguishable in pronunciation, orthography, or other features. In fact, prior to the break-up of Yugoslavia, the varieties of language spoken in modern-day BiH, Croatia and Serbia were uniformly referred to as Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian.

Associating one's self with a specific variety in BiH is an ethnic as well as political statement. BiH's constitution, the Dayton Accords, recognizes the equality of each of the three language varieties, but does not provide guidance on how this equality is to be acknowledged. This article uses a linguistic landscaping approach to investigate how the varieties are represented in Sarajevo, the capital of BiH. The researchers utilized a series of official language resources published by the corresponding national organizations for each of the ethnic groups, as well as an international academic resource (Alexander 2006), to categorize signs according to language variety. The use of Alexander (2006) is unique in that it provides the basis for introducing a fourth, non-ethnically marked variety of regional languages into the analysis, which previous linguistic landscape studies of the region (e.g., Canakis 2018; Gradečak-Erdeljić and Zlomisljić 2014; Grbavac 2013 and Grbavac 2015; Vuković 2012, among others) have not considered. Results indicate that this more ethnically neutral variety dominates the linguistic landscape of Sarajevo, providing a transethnic, translingual communicative resource that seems to be preferred by local actors. Therefore, the study argues against linguistic separation in BiH, and notions of plurilingualism driven by national, ethnic, and religious ideologies, while suggesting a more appropriate and flexible emerging approach in language studies – translanguaging.

The following section presents an overview of the political context of BiH, followed by a description of language use in the region and how it reflects translingual dispositions. The subsequent sections position the study within linguistic landscapes research, present the data, and then conclude with an analysis of the results.

2 Historical and current political context of BiH

BiH operates as a tripartite state in terms of ethnicity, religion, and language, all of which are assumed to correlate (Kapidžić 2019). For example, results from the most recent census for the Sarajevo Canton (Institute for Statistics of Federation of BiH 2016) demonstrates that the number of individuals identifying as Bosniaks (83.8%) correlates strongly with followers of Islam (84.8%), as does the number of individuals identifying Croats (4.2%) and Catholics (4%), and the number of those identifying as Serbs (3.2%) and Christian Orthodox (3.3%). These ethnic/religious allegiances also play out in the linguistic realm, with Bosniaks claiming to speak Bosnian, Croats claiming to speak Croatian, and Serbs claiming to speak Serbian, even though each of these varieties are mutually – and effortlessly – intelligible. The linguistic allegiance, however, is

less robust, as evidenced in Table 1 (below) showing that more individuals claim to speak Bosnian (91.4%) than do Croats who claim to speak Croatian and Serbs who claim to speak Serbian. In other words, census respondents crossed ethnic-linguistic boundaries more frequently than ethnic-religious boundaries. Moreover, 0.5% of the population in BiH opted for some form of a combination of the three language varieties, which were presented on the census as three separate columns, each presenting the three varieties in a different order¹. These options are combined under the acronym *BCS* in column four. Ethnic affiliation and religion were not obligatory questions on the census, but language was.

Table 1: Snapshot of results from the 2013 Census showing native language, ethnic affiliation, and religion of people for the Sarajevo Canton

<i>Sarajevo Canton – 413,593 citizens</i>				
<i>Native Language</i>	Bosnian 91.4 %	Croatian 2.8 %	Serbian 2.2 %	BCS 0.5 %
<i>Ethnic/National Affiliation</i>	Bosniak 83.8 %	Croat 4.2 %	Serb 3.2 %	
<i>Religion</i>	Islam 84.8 %	Catholicism 4 %	Orthodoxy 3.3 %	

After World War II, BiH became one of the six republics of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFR Yugoslavia), with the other five nations being Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Montenegro. During the Yugoslav period, the country was secular and religion was scarcely practiced, lending the population a strong collective identity and sense of national responsibility. Nationalism was portrayed as a whole of the Yugoslav people rather than along national borders. Official languages became recognized as Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian, Macedonian, and Slovenian, with each republic choosing their own “standard linguistic expression” (Alexander 2006: 358). The region of modern BiH named their variety Croato-Serbian/Serbo-Croatian, but added the concept of “Bosno-Herzegovinian standard linguistic expression” (Alexander 2006: 356) which would later become an important component for the revival of the Bosnian language in an independent BiH.

¹ Actual census results for the variety combinations were: Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (1136) 0.3%; Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian (536) 0.13%; and Serbian-Croatian-Bosnian (228) 0.05%. Instances of Croato-Serbian, Bosnian-Croatian, etc were also reported, but such responses were relatively insignificant.

This independence was gained in 1992, which, at the same time, led to a four-year war. The war heightened and emphasized the distinctive vitality of the three ethnic groups, having a pronounced impact on the social, political, and linguistic realities of BiH. Present day BiH is geographically and politically divided into two entities – specifically, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska – as well as one autonomous district, Brčko, although the Federation and the Republic of Srpska are the main policy makers, each having their own president and prime minister. The primary reason for the division is ethnic, as the Federation is home mainly to Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats and the Republic of Srpska is home mainly to Bosnian Serbs. The Federation is comprised of 10 cantons, each of which has autonomy in many aspects of life but share decisions regarding education, healthcare, and ecological issues. Religion and ethnic affiliation are embedded into the lives of people in BiH – Kapidžić (2019) notes that among BiH citizens, religious institutions are more trusted (55.4%) than NGOs and humanitarian organizations (50.6%), with political parties, perhaps unsurprisingly, only gaining 14.1% of the public trust.

BiH maintains a complex political framework with a tripartite presidency, and each house of the Parliamentary Assembly – that is, the House of Peoples and the National House of Representatives – is composed of an equal number of citizens from each of the three main ethnicities. The constitution of BiH was prescribed by the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, the text of which was developed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, United States, where the members of the Contact Group nations met with leaders of the three warring sides. The agreement states that all people of BiH – that is, Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats – have an equal right to “sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status” (Annex 6: Human Right, Article 1, paragraph 14) (Dayton Peace Accords 1995). The constitution of BiH was drafted and adopted in English, although the original page signed by representatives of the three ethnic groups contained translation into Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian – an action that adheres to the spirit of the Dayton Agreement but also suggests official recognition of each variety as distinct.

2.1 “Our language”: One language, three systems

In the modern Balkans, the region around BiH promotes the use of a range of languages: Croatian in Croatia, Serbian in Serbia, Montenegrin in Montenegro, and Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian in BiH – all of which are mutually intelligible

varieties based on the Štokavian dialect. Yet even within these language varieties, dialectal differences often cause speakers to understand their neighbors across the national border better than other speakers of the same variety who are on geographically opposite sides of the same state (Alexander 2006). Indeed, differentiation among varieties in the Balkans often relates more to national identity than linguistic features. Following the Dayton Accords, inhabitants of BiH designated Bosnian as one of the official languages that could be chosen alongside Croatian and Serbian. Nevertheless, the three varieties may still be considered as a single language with two – Eastern and Western – variants (Alexander 2006). Bosnian and Croatian utilize the Latin alphabet and Serbian using Cyrillic; this orthographic division corresponds to the division between Eastern (Serbian) and Western (Bosnian and Croatian) variants. Alexander (2006) uses the umbrella term *Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian*, or BCS, to refer to the language of BiH, while at the same time recognizing that slight differences exist between grammar and phonology of the varieties. The acronym BCS recognizes the common linguistic core and denotes a supposedly ethnically and religiously non-distinct combination of the varieties used within the region of BiH. The alphabetical ordering of the acronym, according to Alexander, is most neutral.

Nevertheless, foreign and local linguists agree that the question of language in the Balkan region is integrally connected to ethnicity (Bugarski 2004) and politics (Pupavac 2012). Bugarski (2004) describes the codification process for Bosnian as maintaining an “overwhelmingly Oriental/Islamic bias” because “it is the only way possible to make Bosnian different from Serbian and Croatian” (p. 194). This bias, however, gives the impression of being intended for the Bosniak peoples and makes it an unattractive alternative for many ethnic Serbs and Croats. Yet in politics, individuals have opted to change their linguistic affiliation only to be able to gain favor of a specific ethnic group or join a particular party (Memić 2016), and websites for the Presidency of BiH and other official government agencies in the country offer visitors the choice to browse in the variety they prefer, although the differences between the Bosnian and Croatian versions are minimal and Serbian is only rarely presented in Cyrillic. A peak into the online linguistic landscape of governmental organizations shows that despite availability in all three varieties, the “translations” are far from uniform. For example, the official website of the City of Sarajevo (2019) offers the selection between Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, but the latter two lack some information found in the Bosnian version. Similarly, the official website of the Government of the Sarajevo Canton (2019) does not offer a language option. Since the Sarajevo Canton is part of the Federation of BiH which would exclusively use only Bosnian and Croatian, developers perhaps saw little need to “translate” between the varieties. Yet at the same time, this act also embo-

dies the omnipresent idea that everyone can understand the various varieties, so why bother “translating”.

Language policy is particularly convoluted in education, where curricula vary according to the dominant ethnolinguistic group of the region, and language arts courses do not provide clear distinctions between varieties. The fluidity of rules is evidenced by an updated version of a Bosnian literacy rule book (Halilović 2018a), which reintroduces the previously removed Bosnian spelling *kafa* (‘coffee’) alongside *kahva* since both – regardless of the supposed correctness – were in use among populations who identified as Bosnian speaking. Anecdotes abound about cities and towns hosting “two schools under one roof.” Surk (2018) reports in *The New York Times* on two high schools in the cities of Travnik and Mostar with striking divisions between Bosniak and Croat pupils. In Travnik, children from Croat families attend school in the right side of building, while children from Bosniak families attend school in the left side. In Mostar, both Bosniak and Croat students attended classes on two separate floors of the same building, and the third floor of the building was for integrated students from various regions of BiH. In both cases, the Bosniak and Croat schools had different curricula, textbooks, and language arts programming depending on the ethnolinguistic population being served, even though all children and faculty could communicate effortlessly with one another outside of classes.

BCS has frequently been referred to as a pluricentric language, which, according to Clyne (1992), can simultaneously unify and divide people. A pluricentric language has several standard forms – in this case, Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian – and is symbolic of “suppressed potential language conflict” (Clyne 1992: 1). Bilbija and Osmankadić (2016) note how scholars from the former SFR Yugoslavia generally consider BCS as three distinct languages, or, according to Riđanović (2009), distinct variants of Serbo-Croatian. Conversely, foreign scholars tend to compare the differences among the systems that comprise BCS to the differences between British and US English (Levinger 1998). Pupavac (2012) explains that attempts to separate the varieties into three languages have been unsuccessful because the distinction is more symbolic than authentic. Halilović (2018b) describes Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian as a single language but with four names (including Montenegrin) and which speakers have a right to use and refer to as desired. The tripartite linguistic system of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian is acknowledged in the colloquial expressions of “three-humped camel” and “Siamese triplets” (Bulić 2013). To avoid labelling a variety and potentially offending an interlocutor, speakers often make reference to speaking “our language” (Kelly and Baker 2013), a turn of phrase that acknowledges the sociolinguistic realities of the context. Indeed, first language users of BCS mix, mesh, and blend varieties when they speak, without concern

for dictated linguistic boundaries and are generally unaware that they are even doing so.

In BiH, regardless of whether the varieties being spoken are one or multiple languages, linguistic affiliation in BiH carries political and symbolic importance (Bugarski 2004). However, concepts frequently used to describe the linguistic context of the region (e.g., *pluricentricity*, *universalism* and *pluralism*) reify linguistic boundaries without acknowledging how these boundaries are continually crossed. Canagarajah (2013) criticizes these terms as “superficial in quality and realization” (p. 195) because of how they simultaneously encourage communities to find similarities and common values while also accentuating differences “in inter-group relations for purposes of identity.” Indeed, models which are based on fixed, uniform communities and systems are inappropriate for discussions of multicultural and linguistically diverse regions because they fail to recognize how speakers actually communicate. A *translingual* orientation, on the other hand, acknowledges the fluidity of shared communicative practices and allows for a refocusing on practice and interactions rather than on grammar, lexicon, and rules. A central tenet of this approach is the idea of *linguaging* – recognition that “language is not merely codes, tools, or idealized and standardized structures and forms” but rather “the interaction-level act of reshaping thoughts and texts for relevant and particular use” (Anya 2017: 25, citing Becker 1995). According to Canagarajah (2013), communication “transcends words and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances” (p. 6–7); meaning-making is “a social practice that engages holistically with ecological and contextual affordance” (p. 10). Quite simply, communication utilizes the entirety of interactants’ available meaning-making repertoire.

Translingual practices are not a novel product of the modern era. For example, Canagarajah (2013) describes how monolingual ideologies increasingly suppressed the traditional translingual practices and cosmopolitanism of numerous South Asia regions, and Anya (2017) recalls “communicating across language and cultural boundaries fluidly in conversations” (p. 24) during her childhood in Nigeria. Similarly, the Balkan region has been recognized for its multilingual and multiethnic composition for centuries (Kordić 2010). In fact, until the 19th century, the language of Croats, Dalmatians, Bosniaks, Dubrovnicans, and Serbs was generally uniformly referred to by the single term *lingua illyrica*, or the Illyrian language (Kordić 2010). Thus, a translingual approach more appropriately addresses the realities of communicative practice in BiH than previous perspectives that force static notions of culture-language, culture-nation, and nation-language.

This assertion is borne out in the data presented below, which indicate a tendency toward translingual dispositions of actors within the linguistic landscape of Sarajevo. The following section provides a brief overview of relevant linguistic

landscapes research, followed by a presentation of data from an empirical study in Sarajevo contending that the linguistic landscape of the city demonstrates translanguaging in action.

3 Linguistic landscape

A primary focus of linguistic landscape research is the semiotics of signs. Linguistic landscape studies offer perspective into the informational and symbolic function of visible language in a city or area (Landry and Bourhis 1997) – namely, the people who live there, their geographic boundaries, the competing nature of languages, and the ethnolinguistic vitality of a region. Landry and Bourhis (1997) provide one of the most frequently cited definitions of linguistic landscapes:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings [that] combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration (p. 25).

The authors distinguish between *private* and *public* signs. Private signs are created, designed, and placed by non-official entities, such as advertising or billboards for shops, cafés, restaurants, or other non-official service providers. Because these types of signs are placed by civilians, private signs are a valuable lens into the socioeconomic, ethnolinguistic, and sociolinguistic situation of an area. Public signs, on the other hand, are placed by local or national government entities and include “road signs, place names, street names, and inscription on government buildings including ministries, hospitals, universities, town halls, schools, metro stations, and public parks” (p. 26). While private signs tend to be more flexible with linguistic representations, public signs generally display language in accordance to government regulation or expectation.

Private and public signage may also be classified as *top-down* (that is, created by authority) or *bottom-up* (that is, created by citizens) (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, and Trumper-Hecht 2006). According to Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), top-down signs belong to “national or local, cultural, social, educational, medical or legal institutions,” while bottom-up signs may be organized based on the domains such as “professional (legal, medical, consulting), ... commercial (and subsequently, according to branches like food, clothing, furniture etc.) and ... services (agencies like real estate, translation or manpower)” (p. 11). Bottom-up signs are presumed to represent the ethnolinguistic vitality of a region – that is, the expression of a linguacultural group’s emotional attachment to their collective identity and language (Ehala 2015). The language of a public space represents the indivi-

dual, collective, and national identities of people in a region (Shohamy and Gorter 2009). The language on signs is not arbitrary, but rather is designed for a “presumed reader” (Spolsky and Cooper 1991), a condition that may be used to explain sign content, design, and placement that target specific audiences.

Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) describe the linguistic landscape as portraying a “décor of public life [that] carries emblematic significance” (p. 10). People are ideological beings who desire to claim a membership to a group whose members share certain features, opinions, beliefs, ideologies, and interests. This social identity reveals the “part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his [sic] knowledge of his [sic] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1978: 63). The linguistic landscape is one means for individuals to demonstrate their membership in a particular group, and when the importance or value of a language in the landscape is diminished, social unrest may follow. Riots, for instance, resulted from the use of Cyrillic script on signs in Vukovar, Croatia (24 sata 2013) and from the fascist message *Nož, žica, Srebrenica* (‘The knife, the wire, Srebrenica’), which was used against Bosniaks during the 2006 World Cup (AlJazeera 2016).

Despite the rich yet turbulent history of BiH that has embedded elements of linguistic identity in almost every aspect of life, the linguistic landscape of the region has been scarcely researched. Grbavac (2013, 2015) are the primary exceptions; both contributions investigate the linguistic landscape of Mostar, the so called “capital” of the Herzegovina region of BiH and an area that, like numerous others in country, is linguistically contested. While both of Grbavac’s contributions apparently utilize the same set of data, Grbavac (2013) focuses more specifically on top-down implementations of language policy while Grbavac (2015) considers bottom-up examples. Grbavac (2013) – which unfortunately uses the somewhat ethnically-loaded term “Bosniak” to refer to the non-Serbian and non-Croatian variety rather than the more neutral designation of “Bosnian” – found that “official language policy was dormant, since ... the official languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina are not equally represented on the government signs” (p. 513). More specifically, very little Serbian was observed in either the eastern or western part of Mostar, but language representation was clearly divided: extensively more Bosnian than Croatian was identified in the eastern part of the city, and the opposite – Croatian far outweighing Bosnian – in the western part. Grbavac’s (2015) bottom-up analysis describes rather similar results, but focuses more intently upon the presence of English, which is the second most common language on signage in each part of the city after the respective predominant variety. According to Grbavac, the high percentage of English indicates the importance ascribed to it as a “way out” (p. 104) of the ethnolinguistic and sociopolitical con-

flicts imposed by the local varieties. Grbavac (2015) concludes that “the divisions the war created are more kept up by the government than by the people themselves ... people living in the city ... are fed up with politics, divisions and political demagoguery” (p. 106).

While the studies by Grbavac are the only published linguistic landscape research to have taken place in BiH, additional research has considered other regions of the Balkans. Canakis (2018) investigated digraphia in Belgrade – the capital of Serbia – and found indications of a preference for Cyrillic on official public signage. Canakis suggests that the use of Cyrillic in Belgrade is a sign of strong Serbian identity and therefore highly promoted. In contrast, Vuković (2012) identified a predominance of signs utilizing the Latin alphabet in Subotica, Serbia, a city with a prominent multi-ethnic population of Hungarians (38.47%), Serbs (24.14%), Croats (11.25%), and Bunjevci (10.95%). Vuković suggests that the strong presence of the Latin alphabet in a Serbia, where one would expect to find more Cyrillic, was likely an attempt to foster greater inclusivity in the multi-ethnic city. Comparing his results to the most recent census data at the time, Vuković’s study found that the number of respondents who selected Serbian (46.60%) as their native language was almost double the number of ethnic Serbs in that region. Thus, similar to the census data for Sarajevo presented at the beginning of this article, linguistic divisions in Subotica did not align with ethnic identity because at least some Croats and Hungarians must have selected Serbian as their primary linguistic affiliation. Finally, Gradečak-Erdeljić and Zlomislić (2014) explored the linguistic landscape in the city of Osijek, Croatia, focusing primarily on the presence of English on signs within a Croatian speech community. Their analysis makes no mention of either Bosnian or Serbian varieties on signs, most likely because the national language is Croatian and the researchers saw little need to consider other regional varieties. This oversight is not uncommon for linguistic research in the Balkans; even if non-national varieties could be identified, tokens are not labelled as such. Considering their historical, regional and political affiliations, it seems unlikely that non-national varieties would not be present in these areas.

The omission of any mention of linguistic differentiation in these studies attests to the similarity and mutual intelligibility of the varieties of the Balkan region. BCS represents this lack of linguistic differentiation, or the *translingual core* of Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. Thus, the inclusion of BCS as a layer of analysis in addition to the specific regional varieties strengthens research on linguistic practices in the Balkans by not only looking at the individual varieties but also their shared translingual core. The present study considers the representation of this shared core in the linguistic landscape of Sarajevo as compared to the individual varieties.

4 Methodology

Sarajevo, located in Sarajevo Canton, is the capital of BiH as well as its largest city. It has been a prominent cultural center since the Ottoman conquest and frequently has been referred to as the “Jerusalem of Europe.” Three municipalities within the Sarajevo Canton – namely, Old Town, Center, and Ilidža (Figure 1) – were selected for this study because they are primary representatives of the region’s diversity and history. The Center and the Old Town represent the downtown commercial areas. The Old Town was built during Ottoman Era, while Center was built during Austro-Hungarian rule. The specific streets in these municipalities selected for data collection are major pedestrian areas that represent the so-called “heart” of Sarajevo because of their national monuments and historical buildings. Furthermore, they are occupied by a large number of shops, cafes, and restaurants which increase the potential sample size of the data. Moreover, these streets are representative of certain eras in the history of Sarajevo which might affect the language variety on signs in the linguistic landscape. The third municipality, Ilidža, was selected due to its rich history and important archaeological findings indicating that the location has been inhabited since Neolithic times. This municipality and the selected streets represent a mixed commercial/residential area, included in the data as a counterbalance for the other two more touristic areas; assumedly, this region would more accurately demonstrate the preferred variety of the population.

The original data set included 960 signs; the final sample consisted of 793 signs. Items that displayed only proper nouns – including those of chain businesses such as banks – were eliminated, as these could not be consistently categorized according to language. This study focused only on signs which could be read from the street, so signs with small font or those that were otherwise illegible were eliminated from the final sample. Other signs were eliminated because they were either acronyms or they were blends (e.g., *Manolo*, a proper noun blend) that could not be ascribed to a specific variety. Items with signs from the same actor and of the same content – i.e., they were repeated at the same site or within the same location – were also eliminated. However, a single sign would often contain clearly distinct instances of different regional varieties (e.g., Bosnian or Croatian) or languages (e.g., English or Arabic), so the total number of language instances in the data is greater than the number of signs. This process is explicated below.

Alexander (2006) provides the core basis for the linguistic analysis of the data, supported by recent literacy books and dictionaries of each of the varieties, namely: *Halilović* (2018a), *Institut za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje* (2019), and *Pešikan, Jerković, and Pižurica* (2010). Using these resources, orthographical and lexical markers were used to categorize data according to one of the three languages of the region. For example, if an item had an orthographic feature for a specific variety, such as an

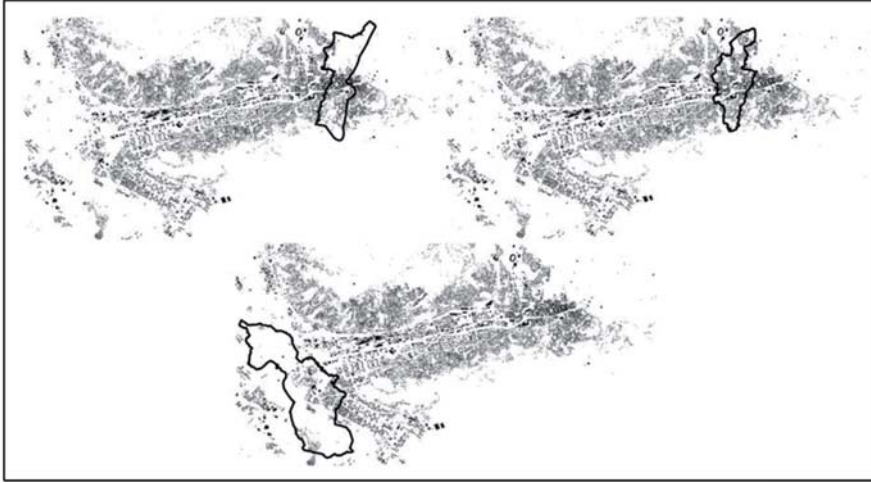


Figure 1: Maps of municipalities, from left to right: Old Town, Center, and Ilidža

‘h’ (e.g., coffee – *kahva*) or Turkish cognates in Bosnian, the item was categorized for that variety. This approach was also applied for Croatian (e.g., October – *listopad*) and Serbian (e.g., watchmaker – *časovničar*), the latter of which could also be identified, at times, via the Cyrillic alphabet, although this occurred only infrequently. Texts that are orthographically represented the same for all three varieties (e.g., table – *stol*) and could not be specifically affiliated to any of the three varieties, even if another possible form was acceptable in that variety (e.g., music – *muzika* [BCS] and *glazba* [Croatian]), were classified as BCS because they represented a combination of the three varieties and thus could not be specifically marked for any of them.

Data were classified according to the following categories: *Bosnian (B)*, *Croatian (C)*, *Serbian (S)*, *BCS, mixed varieties*, *English*, and *other*. For the purposes of this research, *BCS* could essentially be interpreted as representing the common core of the three varieties – that is, signs that could not be reliably classified as belonging to one of the three traditional varieties and exhibiting elements shared by all. Figure 2 (below) demonstrates how this classification system was applied. This example was classified as Bosnian-only because of its use of the Turkish borrowing *burek*, which in Bosnian specifically represents ‘meat pie’, but in Croatian and Serbian can indicate any type of pie (e.g., cheese, spinach, etc.). The addition of *i ostalih pita* (‘and other pies’), however, suggests that the creator of the sign was most likely considering Bosnian, as clarification of the type of pies only becomes necessary if the more specific Bosnian meaning is applied. Three other instances of *burek* in the data were classified as BCS because no additional



Figure 2: Sign in Bosnian located in the Old Town Municipality (“Shop of Sarajevo’s meat pie, and other pies”)

indicators were used. Nevertheless, despite attempts to maintain distinctions between the varieties, the boundaries are dynamic and occasionally vary between the literacy and dictionary references.

The category of *mixed varieties* included signs that contained any combination of at least two of the three local varieties. It focused on the simultaneous appearance of Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian on a single instance of signage rather than on the translingual BCS core, although BCS may also have been present. Signs in this category were not translated but rather contained just a single word of one variety interspersed within the text of a different variety – in other words, a mix of words representing two varieties from Bosnian, Croatian, or Serbian as well as BCS, as represented in Figure 3: *kafa i kolači* (‘coffee and cakes’) represented as *kafa* (Bosnian and Serbian – BS) and *kolači* (BCS), while Croatian version would be *kava i kolači*. Considering that one word on a sign belonged to a mixed variety of BS, the entire sign was classified as a mixed variety (BS).

In addition to categorization according to variety, data also were categorized as bottom-up (i.e., commercial and religious domains) or top-down (i.e., cultural, education, and governmental), following Ben-Rafael et al. (2006).



Figure 3: Mixed variety *kafa i kolači* (BS) ('coffee and cakes')

5 Data analysis

Results for the location-based analysis indicate an overwhelming majority of BCS (38.2%), followed by English (34.3%). Individual national varieties were identified infrequently. Bosnian (2.6 %) was most common, an observation that aligns with conclusions of the census data (Institute for Statistics of Federation of BiH 2016); Croatian and Serbian signs were identified 1.6 % and 0.4 %, respectively. Bosnian was evidenced primarily in the Old Town and Ilidža municipalities, and Serbian was present in the Center and Ilidža municipalities. Croatian was most common in the Center, but not identified at all in Ilidža. BCS was most common in Old Town and Ilidža, but less common than English in the Center municipality. The dominance of BCS in these two regions of the linguistic landscape contrasts with the census results for Sarajevo Canton presented earlier (Table 1), which indicated that Bosnian – not BCS – was the preferred language option. This difference likely arises from the lack of BCS as option on the census form, as well as from a lack of awareness among speakers of the possibility of an unmarked variety.

Table 2 (below) presents linguistic varieties from each municipality. Percentages (rounded to the nearest 10th) are provided in order to account for differences of sample sizes between the three areas. Multiple varieties on a single sign (*Mixed varieties*) accounted for 10.8 % of the data, almost three times more than the number of signs displaying only one individual variety. Signs displaying only Bosnian

represented only 2.6 % of the data, Croatian only 1.6 %, and Serbian 0.4 %. Yet even the combined total of the above categories (i.e., *Mixed varieties* and each of the individual varieties) were explicitly less common than English (34.3 %) or BCS (38.2 %) in all three municipalities. In other words, a “foreign” language – English – and the unmarked BCS were more present than any of the individual ethnic varieties or any combination of them in all municipalities. Not displayed in the table are signs that contained exact translations into two or more of the local varieties, as these are represented as instances in the totals for each of the varieties. Nevertheless, such translations were comparatively rare, with only one sign displaying Bosnian-Serbian, one sign displaying Bosnian-Croatian, one sign displaying Croatian-Serbian, and one displaying Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, although Bosnian and Croatian were represented via the same text and Serbian was in Cyrillic. English and other languages appeared on signs individually as well as with native varieties. Languages represented by the *Other* category include Arabic, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, and Turkish; the most common of these being Arabic, Turkish, German, and Italian, with the remainder primarily appearing on the signage of monetary exchange offices. No individual language was observed more than 3.3 % (Arabic); even though this percentage is higher than that observed for some of the local varieties (i.e., Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian), the focus of this study was on the interaction of the local varieties rather than non-domestic languages, so the former are reported individually while the latter are combined.

Table 2: General location-based analysis

		Center	Ilidža	Old Town	Total
Bosnian	# (% of total)	11 (0.9 %)	6 (0.5 %)	13 (1.2 %)	30 (2.6 %)
Croatian	# (% of total)	13 (1.2 %)	0 (0.0 %)	4 (0.4 %)	17 (1.6 %)
Serbian	# (% of total)	2 (0.2 %)	2 (0.2 %)	0 (0.0 %)	4 (0.4 %)
BCS	# (% of total)	213 (18.9 %)	110 (9.8 %)	107 (9.5 %)	430 (38.2 %)
Mixed varieties	# (% of total)	74 (6.6 %)	25 (2.2 %)	23 (2.0 %)	122 (10.8 %)
English	# (% of total)	239 (21.2 %)	82 (7.3 %)	66 (5.8 %)	387 (34.3 %)
Other	# (% of total)	66 (5.8 %)	31 (2.7 %)	40 (3.6 %)	137 (12.1 %)
Total	# (% of total)	618 (54.8 %)	256 (22.7 %)	253 (22.5 %)	1127 (100.0 %)

Table 3 (below) shows results for the bottom-up/top-down analyses, which demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of signs were bottom-up (94.1 %) compared to top-down (5.9 %). This finding is similar to that of Grbavac (2013, 2015) who describes a ratio of roughly 9:1 for bottom-up:top-down signage in Mostar. Of

the local varieties, BCS was most commonly identified in both bottom-up and top-down classifications at 36.3 % and 1.9 %, respectively. English was the second most frequent language, patterning similarly to BCS, representing 32.5 % in the bottom-up classification and 1.8 % in the top-down classification. While signs representing individual regional varieties consisted of less than 5 % of the data (not represented in the table), non-translated signs (*Mixed varieties*) represented 9.9 % in the bottom-up and 0.9 % in the top-down classifications.

Focusing specifically on representation of individual varieties, Bosnian was represented merely 2.3 % in the bottom-up data and 0.3 % in the top-down data; Croatian represented 1.4 % and 0.2 % in each category, respectively, and Serbian represented 0.3 % and 0.1 %. Despite the limited representation of the individual varieties in the entirety of the data set, Bosnian was clearly preferred in both bottom-up and top-down categorizations. In the bottom-up category, the majority of the single-variety signs were almost exclusively commercial in nature; the business owners may simply be unaware of the subtle differences between the varieties, or they were utilizing the signs as a manner of expressing their ethnolinguistic identity. BCS was more common than any single variety as were signs with mixed varieties in both bottom-up and top-down categories – indeed, there seems to be little top-down effort to actually display each of the varieties as distinct entities.

Table 3: Bottom-up/top-down analysis

		Bottom-up	Top-down	Total
Bosnian	# (% of total)	27 (2.3 %)	3 (0.3 %)	30 (2.6 %)
Croatian	# (% of total)	15 (1.4 %)	2 (0.2 %)	17 (1.6 %)
Serbian	# (% of total)	3 (0.3 %)	1 (0.1 %)	4 (0.4 %)
BCS	# (% of total)	409 (36.3 %)	21 (1.9 %)	430 (38.2 %)
Mixed varieties	# (% of total)	111 (9.9 %)	11 (0.9 %)	122 (10.8 %)
English	# (% of total)	367 (32.5 %)	20 (1.8 %)	387 (34.3 %)
Other	# (% of total)	128 (11.4 %)	9 (0.7 %)	137 (12.1 %)
Total	# (% of total)	1060 (94.1 %)	67 (5.9 %)	1127 (100.0 %)

As described above in the location-based analysis, a mere four signs demonstrated some form of translation into two or more of the local varieties; three of these were distributed within the bottom-up category and only was distributed within the top-down category (Figure 4). The sign in Figure 4 was supported by the Old Town municipality, the city of Sarajevo, and the Federation – as



Figure 4: Native translation (Bosnian/Croatian and Serbian)

indicated by the logos on the bottom – and was centrally located in a touristic center where the Old Town ends and Center begins. It emphasizes the cultural and religious diversity of the region as well as the different historical eras of BiH, distinguishing between the East and the West. The heading of the sign – “Sarajevo meeting of cultures” – is presented in English and then repeated as a translation into Bosnian/Croatian, Serbian, German, French, Spanish, and Russian in the left column and English, Turkish, Italian, Arabic, Hebrew, and Japanese in the right column. The translated heading is accompanied with the statement “Marks the space of peace, coexistence and tolerance”. Images and text across the bottom of the sign highlight Sarajevo’s religious and cultural diversity and are only in Eng-

lish. The dominance of English on a sign intended for tourists is perhaps unsurprising considering its status as a global language, but it also offers a form of local linguistic neutrality, or as Grbavac (2015) describes, a “way out” of positioning any single local variety as dominant. Latin script was used to represent both Bosnian and Croatian as a single unit at the top of the left column; Cyrillic was used to represent Serbian immediately below that. The alphabet was the only distinctive feature, as the texts are otherwise syntactically and lexically identical.

Overall, the three regional varieties that constitute BCS were seldom identified together on either bottom-up or top-down signage. Rather, tendencies indicate favorability toward the more socio-politically and ethnically neutral BCS in both top-down and bottom-up categories. While bottom-up did show some favor towards Bosnian, BCS was overwhelming dominant.

The religious domain, which was part of the bottom-up category and could serve as a potential area of linguistic distinction because of the relationship of the varieties with ethnic and religious identity, was unfortunately poorly represented in the data. In one of the few religious domain examples, the Gazi Husrev Bey Mosque (Figure 5) in the Old Town municipality displayed content in Arabic as well as in Bosnian/Serbian; Croatian was clearly excluded from the text because of the inclusion of the word *opravka* (‘repair’), which is lexically differentiated in that variety. The upper part of the sign displayed a prayer, while the bottom part displayed information that the mosque was renovated in 1998 by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This plaque was installed in 1998, only a few years after the end of the war in BiH and only two years after the first book on literacy rules of Bosnian was published, so although the sign was likely created with “Serbo-Croatian” in mind, it may also represent an early post-war attempt to position Bosnian within the region.



Figure 5: Religious sign on the outer wall of the Gazi Husrev Bey Mosque (BS (left) and Arabic (right))

6 Discussion: Towards a translingual approach

The issue of language in BiH and in the western Balkan region is intimately intertwined with ethnic, religious, and national affiliation, yet the linguistic landscape of Sarajevo seldom evidenced the use of single, identifiable linguistic varieties – a finding that emphasizes the similarities and mutual intelligibility of the varieties. Despite a national level persistence to use three “languages” in the official documents, the linguistic landscape indicates an extremely limited presence of signs with content in each of the three varieties. Signage in the region seems to follow anecdotal descriptions of a mixing and meshing of varieties without a recognizable consideration of boundaries. Indeed, the ethnolinguistically neutral BCS was the predominant code on a majority of signs in the data, indicating a disjuncture between the ideological separation of “languages” and practice. Thus, in the time since Bugarski (2004) wondered how “this symmetrical and theoretically ideal model [of three languages] can be put into operation”, the linguistic landscape of Sarajevo has instead coalesced around the ethnic, religious, and nationally neutral core of BCS.

This study considered the data from two primary perspectives: location (Center, Ilidža, and Old Town) and origin (top-down or bottom up). The location-based analysis demonstrated little difference among the varieties regardless of location in the city, with the unmarked BCS being the primary variety in each section, followed closely by English. Nevertheless, Bosnian was most frequently observed among the three ethnic and national varieties, which is perhaps unsurprising because of the high number of ethnic Bosniaks in the regions, and the likely influence of nationalism in promoting the new, national variety of Bosnian. The Center demonstrated almost three times more English than the other two sections of Sarajevo, most likely because of its status as a major touristic destination that is western-oriented and serves as a major area for international business and brands.

Bottom-up signs represented a significant portion of the data in the linguistic landscape of Sarajevo. The bottom-up actors show a strong preference for both the BCS core as well as English over any of the other local varieties. BCS and English represent a form of both local and international linguistic neutrality. For instance, in the commercial realm, BCS allows actors to acknowledge a wider base of local customers, as does English for most international customers. Local commercial actors, in other words, seem to be more meaning-oriented than politically-oriented when it comes to business. In fact, the almost equal representation of English on signage highlights the importance ascribed to the language in BiH (Grbavac 2015) and suggests that the “situation on language use seems to be larger than the weight of any language policy ... the extensive use of English ... offers a way out of the conflict” (p. 105). Nevertheless, the fact that the Bosnian

variety was identified at all suggests that at least some actors are attempting to fortify the new national variety.

BCS and English were also the most frequent items in the top-down domain, far out-weighting any attempts at tri-lingual representation. Indeed, the single sign demonstrating all three varieties – with Bosnian and Croatian varieties using apparently carefully selected vocabulary so that a single text suffices to represent both, and the Serbian represented in Cyrillic – is a largely symbolic attempt by a government actor to affirm national language policy (see Grbavac 2013). BCS has the advantage of promoting language economy – that is, the golden rule that less is more – by allowing actors to say what they want in limited space in a variety that may be more readily understood by a majority of the local population. Indeed, BCS is the translanguing core of the individual varieties of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, allowing speakers to move across perceived boundaries without concern of violating one's ethnic or national affiliation. The inclusion of BCS as a linguistic unit along with the three individual varieties demonstrates how this core operates within the sociological, sociopolitical, and sociohistorical realities of the region while avoiding the ethnic or religious connotations of the varieties which can complicate interactional synergies. Research that does not acknowledge BCS and instead assigns instances of use to one of the three varieties is less adept at identifying such trends.

A translanguing approach questions the idea of communities as “bounded, territorial, and homogeneous”, while at the same time allowing actors to maintain the “symbolic and ideological resources” that connect their communities (Canagarajah 2013: 16). The language policies and dominant ideologies in BiH insist upon boundaries, yet they seem to have only minimal impact upon actual language use. The diverse local communities in Sarajevo utilize their language resources to develop “translocal cosmopolitan identities” (Canagarajah 2013: 16). BiH is a contact zone – a place where the three constitutive peoples of the region create “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt 1991: 34). This contact zone contradicts the ideological construct of *one-community:one-language* and instead demonstrates translanguaging in practice: a community of multiple peoples who communicate via a common repertoire embodied in the core that is BCS. BCS, founded upon a set of language resources common for the western Balkan region (Alexander 2006), allows speakers to negotiate meaning and successfully communicate across the top-down and ethnically- and religiously-aligned linguistic boundaries of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian; differences are not neglected but negotiated, as demonstrated via the translanguing disposition of the euphemism “our language”.

The national languages of the Balkan nation-states are largely nationalistic constructions (Škiljan 2002) that encourage comparison and competition between

communities (Makoni and Pennycook 2007). This divisiveness is enacted with intent to promote linguistic distinction as a divisive sociocultural construct among peoples. Yet the linguistic landscape of Sarajevo is a semiotic space of the shared understanding that exemplifies transcendent and translingual communication beyond the named languages. Busch and Schick (2006) describe a noteworthy project in BiH in which school children were provided with multilingual manuals of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian (as well as German and English) texts that “allowed pupils and teachers to recognize themselves and their linguistic practices in at least some of the texts” and relieved them of “the pressure of a single prescribed standard” (p. 217). While, on the one hand, this approach encourages students to “find out for themselves that variation and difference is not necessarily a question of ethnicity or nationality ... and does not necessarily hinder communication and understanding” (p. 229), on the other hand, it relies on the same boundaries it seeks to overcome. The present study is no different in that it also utilizes ideologically prescribed boundaries to differentiate and count varieties, but at the same time this approach has demonstrated how, at least in the linguistic landscape, both top-down and bottom-up actors infrequently use identifiable ethnolinguistic varieties. Thus, while ethnolinguistic identity and politics may prescribe the use of specific linguistic forms, the prescribed forms do not, as Canagarajah (2013) states, “determine or limit our identities, but provide creative resources to construct new and revised identities through reconstructed forms and meaning of new indexicalities” (p. 199). Indeed, the linguistic landscape of Sarajevo demonstrates how the actors transcend their national, ethnic, or religious language boundaries and identify by sharing “our language”.

7 Conclusion

This analysis provides insight into linguistic representations in the cityscape of Sarajevo, the capital of BiH, a religiously and ethnically segmented country in the Balkan region of eastern Europe. While the arguably “distinct” varieties of language used by the local community could certainly become more perceptibly unique over time, the current snapshot suggests that most actors within the linguistic landscape prefer the ethnolinguistically neutral BCS despite national political conversations promulgating a trilingual state. Nevertheless, at least some level of distinctive nationalism may be evidenced by the fact that Bosnian was the most commonly observed among the three individual national varieties whenever one was present. Such nationalism, however, seems muted compared to the prevalence of not only BCS but also English, which together indicate a desire to escape the contentious identity politics of the official languages.

This paper transcends concepts such as pluricentricity, pluralism, and universalism, whose frequent utilization to describe the linguistic context of the region reifies linguistic boundaries without acknowledging how these boundaries are continually crossed. Instead it argues that the flexible nature of a translingual approach allows for the inclusion of a translingual core that shifts the focus from languages as ideological constructs to the negotiating practices of a core in which the three native varieties mix and mesh, blurring their differences while simultaneously displaying the true, diverse nature of the region. Quite simply, the linguistic landscape of Sarajevo suggests a community whose translingual dispositions transcend ethnic and religious differences. If the almost quarter century since the foundation of BiH as an independent nation-state is any indication of the future, it seems likely that linguistic differences may continue to become less rather than more pronounced.

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