Linguistic landscapes in the Netherlands: a study of multilingualism in Amsterdam and Friesland

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2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The linguistic landscape is a relatively new subject of research, and before the late 1990s, it was paid little scholarly attention. Some early studies deserve mention, however. Rosenbaum et al. (1977) determined the prominence of Roman script on signs in a busy street in Jerusalem, Israel. Around the same time, Tulp (1978) investigated the geographic distribution of French and Dutch advertising billboards in the municipalities of greater Brussels, Belgium. About a decade later, Monnier (1989) conducted a survey of language use on shop signs in Montreal, Canada. In Quebec, the mainly francophone province in which Montreal is located, the Charter of the French Language (1977) prescribes the use of French, in the linguistic landscape as in other areas. At the time of Monnier’s study, public and commercial signs had to be written exclusively in French. Monnier investigated the extent to which language use was in line with the legal requirements (see also Backhaus (2007)). Calvet (1990) compared the linguistic landscapes of the French capital Paris and the Senegalese capital Dakar. He concluded that the languages on signs remained separated in Paris, while in Dakar there was more contact between them, and the relationship between language and script was less fixed. Spolsky & Cooper (1991), finally, examined language use on the signs of the Old City of Jerusalem and the motivations behind it. Spolsky & Cooper’s ideas are discussed in section 2.4.

After a seminal paper by Canadian researchers Landry & Bourhis (1997), more scholars became interested in the language use on signs in different multilingual contexts around the world. Today the linguistic landscape has been investigated from various perspectives, such as language policy, sociolinguistics, language contact and discourse analysis. Shohamy & Gorter (2009a) note that the linguistic landscape calls for multiple theories as it falls within a number of disciplines.

This chapter provides the conceptual framework for the empirical study conducted. First the concept of linguistic landscape is discussed in section 2.2. Then, in section 2.3, this concept is related to the taxonomy of ethnolinguistic vitality. Linguistic landscape actors are the people who give shape to the collection of texts in public space. Section 2.4 deals with this construction of the linguistic landscape. Several researchers have discussed the choice and placement of languages on signs,
and some of their ideas are explained in section 2.5. Proper names such as shop names and brand names form a special category of words in the linguistic landscape. They are discussed in section 2.6. After that, the research questions of the present study are specified in section 2.7. Finally, a summary of this chapter is given in section 2.8.

For a comprehensive overview of previous approaches to the linguistic landscape, the reader is referred to Backhaus (2007). The present chapter limits itself to those studies that are most relevant to the investigation described in later chapters.

2.2 The Concept of Linguistic Landscape

Landry & Bourhis (1997: 25) define the concept of linguistic landscape as follows: “The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration.” Or, in brief, linguistic landscape “refers to the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs” (Landry & Bourhis 1997: 23).

Although many authors quote the Landry & Bourhis definition, now well-known, the term ‘linguistic landscape’ varies in scope from researcher to researcher. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006: 14) define ‘linguistic landscape’ as: “any sign or announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location”. This definition goes beyond that given by Landry & Bourhis (1997) as it also encompasses signs inside buildings. For Dailey et al. (2005) the linguistic landscape is so comprehensive as to include not only signs outside and inside shops and businesses, but also a wide variety of other items such as advertisements sent to one’s home, the language heard when walking in one’s neighbourhood, the language one hears on television, and the language spoken by teachers in the classroom. Shohamy & Waksman (2009) are aware that their notion of linguistic landscape is somewhat radical. In their very broad view, it incorporates all possible ‘discourses’ that emerge in public spaces, including texts, images, objects, and placement in time and space as well as human beings. After all, they argue, meaning is constructed not only by language but also by other modalities. This dissertation limits its scope to the notion of linguistic landscape as defined by Landry & Bourhis (1997).

The term ‘linguistic landscape’ is often abbreviated as LL. Itagi & Singh (2002) distinguish between the noun ‘linguistic landscape’ and the gerund ‘linguistic
landscaping’. Backhaus (2007: 10) infers from Itagi & Singh that “the term in its
gerund form refers to the planning and implementation of actions pertaining to
language on signs [...], whereas the noun denotes the result of these actions”. Although the term ‘linguistic landscape’ is used more frequently than ‘linguistic
landscaping’, the latter term has also been taken up by some scholars, e.g. Backhaus
(2009), Barni & Bagna (2009) and Coulmas (2009). Backhaus and Coulmas use the
gerund in a way similar to Itagi & Singh, whereas Barni & Bagna appear to mean
‘studying the linguistic landscape’ by it.

Gorter (2006a) proposes the use of the term ‘multilingual cityscape’ instead of
‘linguistic landscape’, as the word ‘landscape’ relates to the countryside whereas
collections of signs with texts are encountered predominantly in urban areas. ‘Cityscape’ is indeed more precise than ‘landscape’, but ‘multilingual cityscape’
excludes the possibility of monolingualism in advance. Even in multilingual contexts it is an empirical question whether the linguistic landscape is monolingual
or multilingual. Moreover, this new term has not really caught on among researchers
in the field and ‘linguistic landscape’ is still very widespread (cf. Shohamy & Gorter
2009b). For these reasons this latter term is used in the present study.

In the linguistic literature, the term ‘linguistic landscape’ is also used in a
broader sense to refer to a language situation. In this sense Hagen (1989: 48), for
example, writes: “The ‘linguistic landscape’ of the Netherlands consists of a
relatively diverse range of dialects.” Still other uses of the term are discussed by
Gorter (2006c). In the present study the term is only used in the more specific sense
as explained above.

According to Landry & Bourhis, issues related to the notion of linguistic
landscape originated in the language-planning field. In Belgium the linguistic
landscape was first used to mark geographical territories, namely those inhabited by
the Dutch-speaking and the French-speaking communities. Also in the Canadian
province of Quebec the boundaries of linguistic territories were marked through the
regulation of language use on public signs. Following Leclerc (1989), Landry &
Bourhis make a distinction between signs placed by government agencies, for
example the city council, and by private initiative such as companies. The
authorities can regulate the linguistic landscape through their language policy for
government signs. The content and the language of private signs, in contrast, are
often seen as being part of an individual’s freedom of speech. Usually private signs
show more linguistic diversity than government signs (Leclerc 1989, referred to by
Landry & Bourhis 1997). However, as illustrated by the situation in Quebec
mentioned in section 2.1, some governments impose requirements for private signs
as well.
Landry & Bourhis note that the linguistic landscape has an informational and a symbolic function. As illustrated above with Belgium and Quebec, it can mark language boundaries between adjoining communities. Moreover, the prevalence of a particular language on signs indicates that this language can be used in public and private establishments. The diversity of languages present on signs can also give information about the sociolinguistic composition of a territory. This is the informational function of the linguistic landscape. The symbolic function implies that the presence of one’s own language on signs can contribute to the feeling that this language has value and status within the sociolinguistic setting. Landry & Bourhis show that the linguistic landscape is an important sociolinguistic factor—distinct from other types of language contacts—contributing to the vitality of competing ethnolinguistic groups in multilingual contexts.

Something that is important in a quantitative study of the linguistic landscape is the definition of what constitutes a sign. Backhaus (2006: 55) gives the following definition:

A sign was considered to be any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame. The underlying definition is rather broad, including anything from handwritten stickers to huge commercial billboards. Also such items as ‘push’ and ‘pull’ stickers at entrance doors, lettered foot mats or botanic explanation plates on trees were considered to be signs. Each sign was counted as one item, irrespective of its size.3 In many linguistic landscape studies a similar definition is used, be it explicitly or implicitly.

However, some researchers use a different definition, for example El-Yasin & Mahadin (1996: 409):

By ‘sign’ is meant all the linguistic material written to draw attention to a shop, be it on a typical sign, or on a shop window, or on a moving door. All that pertains to the same store or shop is seen as a single sign, even where it is written on different sides of the shop, such as in cases of shops at corners, shops with more than one sign, or shops with a sign and a shop window or door with something written on it.

Cenoz & Gorter (2006: 71) make a similar choice:

[I]n the case of shops and other businesses each establishment but not each sign was the unit of analysis, that is, it was considered ‘one single sign’ for the analysis. So, when a bank or a shop had its name on the front but also a number of advertising posters on the windows it was considered one sign.

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3 Although in the case of graffiti there often is no frame, this kind of text is usually also seen as a ‘sign’.
In the present study, Backhaus’ (2006) notion of sign is used as this enables more detailed analyses (see Chapter 5). However, each sign was coded on the basis of the establishment by which it was displayed, so it is possible to take all the signs of a shop together as well. This is done in section 5.8 in order to compare the outcomes to the results of previous research.

2.3 Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Linguistic landscapes do not occur in a social vacuum. Landry & Bourhis (1997) relate the notion of linguistic landscape to the concepts of objective and subjective ethnolinguistic vitality. In studies of societal multilingualism, the relative strength of different language communities is often an important factor influencing the use and maintenance of languages. Giles et al. (1977) propose a taxonomy of ethnolinguistic vitality, which originally forms part of a larger social psychological framework to explain the role of language in the relations of ethnic groups. The other components of that framework are Tajfel’s (1974; 1978) theory of intergroup relations and Giles’ (1973; Giles et al. 1977) theory of speech accommodation. Vitality has developed from a major concept of ethnolinguistic identity theory to an evolving theory in its own right (Abrams et al. 2009).

The vitality of an ethnolinguistic group is defined as “that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations” (Giles et al. 1977: 308). This ethnolinguistic vitality is influenced by political, historical, economic and linguistic variables. Giles et al. specify these variables in a taxonomy which can be used to describe the context of a particular intergroup situation. The relative vitality of an ethnolinguistic group can be determined by evaluating the effects of the three main structural factors:

1. Status variables: economic status, social status, sociohistorical status and language status.

2. Demographic variables: group distribution factors (national territory, concentration, proportion) and group numbers factors (absolute, birth rate, mixed marriages, immigration, emigration).

3. Institutional support variables: the extent to which a language receives formal and informal support in institutions such as the mass media, education, government services, industry, religion and culture.
These variables are derived from empirical literature on sociological factors influencing language maintenance and assimilation as reviewed in Giles et al. (1977). An ‘objective’ account of group vitality can be made using status, demographic and institutional support data from secondary sources. Giles et al. propose that the sociopsychological processes operating between groups in contact may vary based on whether these groups have a high, medium or low ethnolinguistic vitality.

Bourhis et al. (1981) point out that a group’s perceived vitality may be as important as the objective reality in determining intergroup behaviour, as group members may underestimate or exaggerate the ethnolinguistic vitality of their own group or other groups. Subjective ethnolinguistic vitality concerns how speakers perceive the relative vitality of their language community. Bourhis et al. designed a questionnaire to measure subjective vitality. This questionnaire includes all of the status, demographic and institutional support variables constituting the taxonomy of ethnolinguistic vitality. The authors argue that ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ vitality information should be combined to better account for the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations in multilingual settings.

The concept of ethnolinguistic vitality has been criticised by Husband & Saifullah Khan (1982), who warn against adopting ‘vitality’ too readily as a proven and unproblematic construct. They argue that the variables constituting ethnolinguistic vitality are not independent of one another. Rather, variables such as economic status and social status are complexly related, they maintain. Husband & Saifullah Khan regret that there is no theory with which to conceptually examine these variables. Furthermore, they claim that the variables are dominant-centric, as the recognition of status of an ethnolinguistic community is based on criteria of the dominant group. Another objection they raise is that the taxonomy assumes one language for one ethnic group, whereas many minority groups are in fact multilingual.

In reply, Johnson et al. (1983) recognise the possible existence of interdependences between and within the three dimensions. For example, the economic status of a group and its social status may influence each other. They admit that there is as yet no grand theory for the study of language, ethnicity and intergroup relations. However, they see a starting point in objective and subjective vitality which were in turn based on existing empirical literature. Johnson et al. refute the assertion that the variables are dominant-centric, stating that they take account of both the majority and the minority perspectives. Regarding the argument that many minority groups are multilingual, they point out that the subjective vitality questionnaire was presented as a tool that could be modified for use with
multilingual groups. Johnson et al. conclude that the value of their constructs and techniques remains to be established empirically.

Also Extra & Yağmur (2008) point to various shortcomings of the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality. They state that the proposed lists of factors are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive and that different factors contribute to (the lack of) vitality in different ways and may even neutralise each other. Extra & Yağmur further object to the fact that some of the factors are personal characteristics, whereas others are group characteristics. Finally, the authors consider the distinction that Bourhis et al. (1981) found between the objective status of the factors and their subjective perception by minority and/or majority groups, problematic. Extra et al.’s (2002) alternative language vitality index is discussed in subsection 3.2.3.

Landry & Bourhis (1997) show that the linguistic landscape can be seen not only as a marker of the vitality of the ethnolinguistic groups inhabiting a given area, but also as a factor that contributes to this vitality. They analysed data from several studies in which the same tests and questionnaires were used. The participants were 2,010 francophone students in Grade 11 and Grade 12 (the final years of secondary education) from more than fifty schools in different provinces across Canada. In a factor analysis the linguistic landscape emerged as an independent factor distinct from other contacts with the French language or francophones, grouped in the factors of French schooling, French media, social network, and family network. The four items that constitute the linguistic landscape factor are 1) signs outside stores and businesses; 2) road signs, place names, street names and so on; 3) signs inside stores and businesses; and 4) advertising by mail such as publicity flyers and government information and notifications. Thus, the linguistic landscape factor comprises more than just signs in public space. Landry & Bourhis (1997: 41) admit that advertising by mail is not as clearly related to the notion of linguistic landscape as the first three items, but argue that “its loading on this factor makes sense because its advertising and informational purposes are related to the same social dynamics as the other types of public posting, especially commercial signs”. Later, signs inside shops and businesses as well as advertisements sent to one’s home were included in Dailey et al.’s (2005) comprehensive notion of linguistic landscape. The results of Landry & Bourhis’ study show that the perceived presence or absence of French in the Canadian linguistic landscape is strongly related to subjective francophone vitality. Moreover, it is related to how much the respondents use French in different language use domains. This suggests a carryover effect of the linguistic landscape on language behaviour; the presence of private and government signs written in one’s own language may act as a stimulus for using that language and thus contribute to its vitality (Landry & Bourhis 1997).
Kallen (2009) points out a limitation in Landry & Bourhis’ focus on language and territory, as they do not take account of the transience and linguistic diversity of tourists as an essential part of the social environment. He notes that one can hardly speak of the ethnolinguistic vitality of tourists. Indeed, the linguistic landscape may not always be revealing of the ethnolinguistic vitality of groups inhabiting a given area. This is clearly shown by Leeman & Modan’s (2009) study in the United States. They examined the linguistic landscape of Washington DC’s Chinatown, a recently gentrified neighbourhood. Leeman & Modan found that the new commercial establishments, predominantly non-Chinese-owned chains, used Chinese on their signs solely for its aesthetic value, targeted at people who do not read the language. Even the Starbucks coffee shop appeared to display a Chinese translation of its name, in contrast to the chain’s outlets in China, which display the company name only in English. Both in Washington DC’s Chinatown and in China, the language of the Starbucks name signs has a primarily symbolic function (Leeman & Modan 2009). The use of languages which are not related to ethnolinguistic groups living in an area is overlooked in Landry & Bourhis’ approach. However, ethnolinguistic vitality certainly appears to have some explanatory power, and it seems useful to relate the composition of linguistic landscapes to the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups. Data on the vitality of language groups in the Netherlands is discussed in Chapter 3 in order to compare this data to the results of the present linguistic landscape study.

2.4 The Construction of the Linguistic Landscape

Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) criticise Landry & Bourhis for their view of the linguistic landscape as a given context of sociolinguistic processes and their lack of attention to the dynamics of the linguistic landscape and the factors which give it shape. Ben-Rafael et al. refer to the linguistic landscape’s composition as symbolic construction of the public space. They also take the ‘LL-actors’ into consideration, “who concretely participate in the shaping of LL by ordering from others or building by themselves LL elements according to preferential tendencies, deliberate choices or policies” (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 27). This section deals with these linguistic landscape actors and their tendencies, choices and policies.

Edelman & Gorter (2010) mention five categories of actors that play a role in the construction and perception of the linguistic landscape. The first category is formed by the businesses that put up signs and thus ‘furnish’ the linguistic landscape with linguistic items. People responsible for the design, production and sale of signs
also form a category of actors that contribute to the way signs appear in the linguistic landscape. Another category consists of private persons who put up signs, to make announcement of an event by means of posters, for example. This category of actors includes the creators of graffiti, a special type of sign that also impacts the linguistic landscape (see also Pennycook 2009). The authorities are also actors in the linguistic landscape. They place signs to inform the audience where public buildings such as the library are located, and may determine what is acceptable in the linguistic landscape and what is not. The final category of actors are the passers-by — all those who walk by or drive along the streets and observe the signs, be it consciously or unconsciously.

While Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) hint at the relative freeness and autonomy of private actors’ choices, Malinowski (2009) puts their intentionality into perspective, showing that signs may carry more or different meanings than the authors had in mind. He conducted interviews with Korean-American business owners in one neighbourhood in Oakland, California, where he aimed to uncover the owners’ involvement in creating their signs. Malinowski found that many of the current business owners had in fact played a minor or no role at all in this process. Some had purchased their businesses from others and continued to use the existing signs, and others indicated that local sign companies had played significant roles in designing the signs. Over half of the business owners who had designed their own signs explained their motivation to include English with the fact that “this is America”, indicating convention rather than choice. In Malinowski’s view, authorship in the linguistic landscape is constituted by social convention as well as individual intention.

Ben-Rafael (2009) provides a sociological framework for linguistic landscape research. In order to explain the diversity in the linguistic landscape and to challenge the impression of chaos that it may leave behind, he proposes four principles of structuration. These principles derive from more general sociological theories of social action. They are:

1. Presentation of self
2. Good reasons
3. Power relations
4. Collective identity

For the first three principles, Ben-Rafael draws on work of sociologists Erving Goffman, Raymond Boudon and Pierre Bourdieu, respectively. When describing the fourth principle, collective identity, Ben-Rafael refers to several researchers of
contemporary sociocultural communities (Calhoun, Hutchinson & Smith, and Ben-Rafael). The four principles lead to different hypotheses regarding the composition of the linguistic landscape. The first three of these structuration principles — presentation of self, good reasons and power relations — were applied in Ben-Rafael et al.’s (2006) study in Israel. The principle of collective identity is first described in Ben-Rafael (2009), and has not been applied to linguistic landscape data in previous research.

According to the principle of presentation of self, actors in social life try to reach their goals by expressing their identities, for example through their linguistic choices. In the linguistic landscape, signs compete with one another for the attention of passers-by. Actors try to win this struggle by presenting advantageous images of themselves and by showing their uniqueness. According to Ben-Rafael, presentation of self may constitute the major structuring principle. It leads to the hypothesis that languages carrying prestige in a particular setting will be present in the linguistic landscape.

As linguistic landscape actors try to influence the public, they adapt to the values of the audience and focus on the expected attractiveness of the signs. Because of these rational considerations, their choices converge. This is called the good reasons principle. This principle leads to the hypothesis that languages that in general are positively valued by the public are used in the linguistic landscape.

Power relations refer to the extent to which actors are able to impose patterns of behaviour on others. Dominant groups may impose the use of a given language on subordinate groups, for example, which is the case when an official language is prescribed for signs. Regarding the composition of the linguistic landscape, this principle leads to the hypothesis that the language of the dominant group is used more than the languages of subordinate groups.

Finally, the principle of collective identity implies that actors assert their particular identities, exhibiting a commitment to a given group within the general public. Examples of this are signs of food stores displaying the words *halal* or *kosher* to attract potential clients on the basis of common fellowship. This principle is of special interest in multicultural societies as it signals regional, ethnic or religious particularisms differing from the mainstream identity. The principle leads to the hypothesis that the languages of minority groups are present in the linguistic landscape. Ben-Rafael notes that the more tolerant of sociocultural differences and their institutionalisation a society is, the more the linguistic landscape should allow room for items to express particular identities.

Ben-Rafael (2009) emphasises the difference between the presentation of self and the collective identity principles, which both pertain to the identity of actors.
According to the principle of presentation of self, actors show their uniqueness, whereas according to the collective identity principle, actors show their likeness to a part of the public.

Ben-Rafael (2009: 47-48) notes that the four structuration principles are not evenly universal. He considers presentation of self and good reasons applicable to any present-day central urban area, whereas the extent to which collective identity and power relations influence the linguistic landscape remains an empirical question. All four principles are compatible and do not exclude one another, he observes.

Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) show how the linguistic landscape in Israel expresses the relations between the Jewish and the Arab population. Hebrew and Arabic are the official languages of Israel. Ben-Rafael et al. found empirical evidence for each of the structuration principles they applied: presentation of self, good reasons, and power relations. It appears that different pairs of languages prevail in different locations: Hebrew and English within the Jewish population, Hebrew and Arabic in localities populated by Israeli Palestinians, and Arabic and English in East-Jerusalem, where non-Israeli Palestinians live.

The fact that many Arabic markers were found in East-Jerusalem supports the principle of presentation of self, but benefit considerations also explain the choices of actors in the linguistic landscape. The good reasons principle accounts for the use of English because of the prestige attached to this language and its attractiveness to tourists. Another finding which supports this principle is the predominance of Hebrew in Palestinian-Israeli areas, probably because the actors are interested in attracting the Jewish public. The finding that Hebrew has a much stronger presence than Arabic in the localities populated by Jews and Palestinian Israelis is evidence for the principle of power relations (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006). The extent to which the four principles impact on the linguistic landscape and how they do so remains to be addressed.

Shohamy (2006), who also discusses this study in Israel, notes that the presence or absence of certain languages in the public space sends both direct and indirect messages with regard to the centrality or the marginality of those languages in society. When street names appear in Hebrew, Arabic and English this may provide some recognition that Arabs or Arabic speakers reside in the area, but when those in authority use only Hebrew on street signs, even in Arab neighbourhoods and towns, this may imply that the Arabs are being overlooked. In that case street names are, in Shohamy’s view, a form of colonialism through which domination of the space is established. She shows that it is not only through language choice that street names transmit messages, but also through their content. Names such as the Zionism
Boulevard represent Zionist Jewish ideology and ignore ideologies of other groups in society. The linguistic landscape may reaffirm power relations by marking who is dominant and who is not, but it may also upgrade the status of certain weaker language groups (Shohamy 2006). In terms of Giles et al.’s (1977) taxonomy of ethnolinguistic vitality, the content of street names may promote the sociohistorical status of a group. Trumper-Hecht (2009) discusses an example of how the linguistic landscape can improve the status of a subordinate language group. In 2002, the Supreme Court in Israel ordered five Jewish-Arab mixed cities to add Arabic to all their public signs within five years, thus recognizing the Arab residents’ language rights. However, one of these cities, Upper Nazareth, has not complied with this order.

Spolsky & Cooper (1991) also address the use of languages in the linguistic landscape. They formulate three conditions for language choice in public signage:

1. Sign-writer’s skill condition: Write signs in a language you know
2. Presumed reader condition: Prefer to write signs in the language or languages that intended readers are assumed to read
3. Symbolic value condition: Prefer to write signs in your own language or in a language with which you wish to be identified

Spolsky (2009) further elaborates on these rules. The ‘sign-writer’s skill condition’ accounts for the fact that a certain state of literacy in a language is necessary for that language to be represented in the linguistic landscape. The absence of signs in a particular language may simply be a result of the fact that the language has no writing system. Spolsky emphasises that distributions of languages in speech and writing may be quite different. Violation of this first rule may result in idiosyncratic uses of English in non-English-speaking countries, for instance. The ‘presumed reader condition’ captures the communicative goal of signs. Signs may include the dominant language of an area, the language of a literate minority, or the language of foreign tourists. The ‘symbolic value condition’ accounts for language choice on signs that assert ownership, such as a sign displaying the name of a building. It can explain the order of languages on multilingual signs. It also accounts for the use in advertisements of a language that calls up certain associations with stereotypes about its speakers or a country. By way of illustration Spolsky mentions the choice of French for perfumes and Italian for foodstuffs.

All three conditions may apply to any sign. The first is a necessary condition and applies to all signs. The second and third conditions are typical and graded; both
may apply to a single sign, but the weighting determines which has the main influence on the outcome. Either the ‘presumed reader condition’ or the ‘symbolic value condition’ will prevail. In multilingual signs the communicative goal may be reached by the choice of languages, whereas the order of the languages may be used to signal symbolic value (Spolsky 2009).

Sometimes linguistic landscape actors violate the first rule and write signs in a language they do not know. A funny example is a sign on the Beijing-Taiyuan expressway in China displaying the Chinese word for ‘dining hall’ on the left and on the right the words Translate server error. Apparently, the error message of a translation machine was taken to be the English equivalent (Mair 2008). On the Internet many such instances of ‘incorrect’ translations in the linguistic landscape can be found.

The great symbolic value that the presence of a particular language on signs may have as the recognition of an ethnolinguistic group also becomes clear when one considers the struggle of some groups for their language to be displayed at all. One example is the militant-activist group Stoumr ar Brezhoneg in the French region of Brittany, which has fought for French-Breton signage and thus has influenced the road signage policy of the French government (Slone 1993).

In many studies a distinction is made between signs placed by government agencies and signs placed by private persons. However, researchers differ in the terminology they use. Ben-Rafael et al. (2004; 2006) and Cenoz & Gorter (2006) differentiate between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ signs. Kallen (2009) criticises the use of this dichotomous spatial metaphor as being too simple. A government may communicate ‘top-down’ to ordinary citizens with a government notice, but a local shopkeeper does not necessarily communicate upwards to a government agency with a sign in the shop window. According to Kallen, such signs addressed to other private citizens are best described as horizontal. He stresses the importance of different power relations from that of state to citizen as well, such as the power exercised by a shopkeeper over the customers by putting a ‘NO ENTRANCE’ sign on the storeroom door. Moreover, whereas the vertical metaphor assumes consensus of all participants on who is at the ‘top’ and at the ‘bottom’, Kallen argues that authority may always be contested. Remarkably, Shohamy & Gorter (2009a) not only include signs placed by governments under the heading ‘top-down’, but also those placed by large corporations, which are private actors. Backhaus (2005b; 2007) prefers the terms ‘in vitro’ and ‘in vivo’ signs, following Calvet (1993). These Latin terms stem from the field of biology. In a linguistic landscape context, ‘in vitro’ relates to the somewhat artificial language use of the authorities while ‘in vivo’ indicates the lived multilingualism. In the present study this distinction is
referred to as ‘government’ versus ‘private’ signs, following Leclerc (1989) and Landry & Bourhis (1997). These terms were chosen as they seemed the most clear. Irrespective of the terms used, the boundaries between the public and the private can be blurred. This happens, for example, when a state-owned bank is privatised, or the other way around, when a private bank is nationalised.

Regulations concerning language on signs, such as a public ordinance in Bangkok, Thailand, which imposes a heavier tax on commercial signs that contain no Thai (Huebner 2009), often seem to be aimed at confining the use of English. The prevalent use of English as an international language, which has often been related to the process of globalisation, is strikingly similar across the results of linguistic landscape studies in different parts of the world. In Leeuwarden (Friesland, the Netherlands) and San Sebastian (Basque Country, Spain), English is the language of international communication, whereas languages such as German and French are found only marginally (Cenoz & Gorter 2006). That the process of globalisation does not promote the use of other languages is also obvious from Schlick’s (2003) findings in London, where the fact that English is the national language does not lead to larger shares of French or Italian on the signs, as compared to other European cities in her sample. Many scholars report phenomena of language contact between English and national languages. For example, Huebner (2006) notes that English influences the development of Thai on the levels of syntax, lexicon, phonology and orthography. In one instance, he shows that Thai modifier-head word order is affected by the use of English words.

In Chapters 5 and 6 it is shown how the ideas on linguistic landscape actors and their tendencies, choices and policies as discussed in this section apply to the data of the empirical study that was conducted.

### 2.5 Language Use on Individual Signs

Relationships between language groups may be expressed not only in the linguistic landscape as a whole, but also on individual signs. Several researchers have tried to characterise the choice and placement of languages on signs. The ideas of Reh (2004), Sebba (2007) and Scollon & Scollon (2003) are discussed here, respectively.

Reh (2004) gives a typology to facilitate the systematic documentation and analysis of multilingual writing as encountered in the streets. Of the three parameters that she proposes, the third is the most interesting in the context of the present study as it is helpful in the analysis of multilingual signs. This parameter relates to the way in which information is arranged in a multilingual text. Four main
types of arrangement are distinguished: duplicating, fragmentary, overlapping and complementary. Duplicating multilingual writing means that exactly the same text is presented in more than one language. Fragmentary multilingualism refers to multilingual texts in which the full information is given only in one language, but in which selected parts have been translated into one or more additional languages. The term ‘overlapping multilingual writing’ is used if part of the information is given in two or more languages, and in all the languages also different pieces of additional information are given. In this case the content of the texts in the different languages may simply overlap, or the content may be identical although the speech acts are not. Reh illustrates this latter type of overlapping multilingual writing with a pharmacy signpost that says *DRUG SHOP* in English and *WIL YAT* in the local language Lwo, meaning ‘Buy medicine’. Finally, texts in which different parts of the overall information are each rendered in a different language display complementary multilingualism. The last two types of multilingual text presuppose multilingual readers since knowledge of all the languages involved is necessary to understand the whole message. Reh found that in the case of English-Lwo inscriptions on buildings, signposts and posters in public places in Lira (Uganda), examples of complementary and overlapping multilingualism were much more frequent than those of duplicating or fragmentary multilingualism. According to Reh (2004: 38), the analysis of multilingual text types and their communicative functions enables conclusions to be drawn “regarding, among other factors, the social layering of the community, the relative status of the various societal segments, and the dominant cultural ideals of the community”.

Sebba (2007) also looks into multilingual texts. He distinguishes between ‘parallel’ and ‘complementary’ mixed-language texts. In parallel texts the same information is given in two or more languages, whereas in complementary texts two or more languages are used, but the texts are not translations of each other. Sebba’s notion of parallel mixed-language texts corresponds to Reh’s duplicating multilingual writing. They use the term ‘complementary’ in the same way. Sebba notes that some texts include both types as sub-texts. In these cases Reh refers to fragmentary or overlapping multilingual writing. According to Sebba, parallel multilingual texts often have a monolingual audience design, i.e., they are meant for monolingual readers, whereas complementary multilingual texts have a multilingual audience design; they are meant for multilingual readers. This idea is similar to Reh’s observation that overlapping and complementary multilingual texts presuppose multilingual readers. Sebba (2007) remarks that in mixed-language texts, the part of the text in one language is part of the context for the other language and vice versa.
Scollon & Scollon (2003) discuss the semiotics of signs. The fact that the texts in different languages on multilingual signs cannot be located simultaneously in the same place produces a system of preference. Scollon & Scollon observe that in the case of languages with a writing direction from left to right there are usually three possibilities. If the languages are aligned vertically, the preferred code is located above the secondary code. If they are aligned horizontally, the preferred code is located in the left position and the secondary code is placed in the right position. The third possibility is that the preferred code is located in the centre and the secondary code is placed on the margins of the sign. Scollon & Scollon note that this code-preference system can be played off against salience. This is the case when the language in the lower position is written in larger letters than the language in the upper position, for example. Similarly, Huebner (2006) remarks that determining language prominence in a sign can be problematic, as text placement and font size can be offset by other features, particularly colour, images and amount of text. Scollon & Scollon admit that they do not have solid evidence about placement of languages that are written from right to left such as Arabic, or about how code preference is shown when languages with opposite writing directions are involved, such as Arabic and English.

According to Scollon & Scollon (2003), the language on a sign can either index the community within which it is used, for example an Arabic-speaking community, or it can symbolise something about the product or business that has nothing to do with the place it is located, for example that a certain establishment is a Chinese restaurant because there is Chinese writing in the sign. Scollon & Scollon call the first case ‘geopolitical indexing’ and the second ‘symbolization based on sociocultural associations’. English can be used to symbolise foreign taste and manners, rather than to index an English-speaking community. Backhaus (2007: 58) remarks that all signs are in fact related to the circumstances of their emplacement through indexicality. Even if language use is symbolic, on a higher level it may index a preference for foreign language use by the non-foreign population.

Collins & Slembrouck (2004) illustrate the kind of social interpretations to which particular features of signs can lead. On a multilingual shop sign in an immigrant neighbourhood in the Belgian city of Ghent, Turkish text was in small letters and placed below Dutch text. A Flemish man interpreted this as an index of respect for Flemish society and of the successful assimilation of the immigrant who wrote it.

Haarmann (1986), in an early study of the functions of multilingual advertising, already notes that through the use of particular languages, advertised products may be associated with stereotypes of the corresponding groups of speakers. The
languages used in advertising may or may not reflect the languages spoken by the speech community for which it is intended. Haarmann observes that the use of English and other foreign languages in Japanese mass media does not reflect the everyday language use of the Japanese speech community, which is largely monolingual. He calls this phenomenon ‘impersonal multilingualism’. This use of foreign languages is often not intended as a means of verbal communication, but according to Haarmann (1986) it rather aims to appeal to people’s emotions.

The studies discussed in this section make it clear that — be it consciously or unconsciously on the part of the actors — the choice and placement of languages on individual signs produce meaning. Thus, it is worthwhile to investigate the ways in which languages are combined on multilingual signs in a particular area.

2.6 Proper Names in the Linguistic Landscape

Texts in the linguistic landscape often contain proper names such as the names of shops, brand and product names and the names of residents. An example of such texts that was discussed in section 2.3 was the signs displayed by the Starbucks coffee shops in Washington DC’s Chinatown and in China. Proper names (also called ‘proper nouns’) are a semantic category of nouns. Whereas common nouns distinguish one sort of being or thing from others, proper names distinguish individuals from each other; they identify someone or something. Proper names are especially found in reference to people, animals, geographical units, ships, aeroplanes, buildings, celestial bodies, periods of time, organizations and institutions. (Haeseryn et al. 1997). In many of the languages written in the Latin alphabet, proper names typically have an initial capital letter.

Studies into advertisements show that names play an important role. Many signs in the public space are in fact advertisements, comparable to those in newspapers, periodicals and on radio, television and the Internet. Advertisements generally contain one or more of the following elements: headline, illustration, body copy (main text), slogan, product name, and standing details such as the address of the firm (Piller 2003). In another paper, Piller (2000: 267) observes: “The brand name is arguably the most central linguistic item of an ad — it is what it is all about.” She investigated a sample of 658 advertising spots that were broadcast on German television. In 34 percent of the advertisements, only the brand name was in a language other than German, whereas the remainder of the ad used German. Furthermore, in another 6 percent of the advertisements the brand name, setting

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4 This section is based on Edelman (2009), pages 143-144.
and/or song were in another language. From work on language contact phenomena in advertising Piller (2003) infers that the product name is the element which is most frequently in a foreign language.

To discern the purpose behind the use of foreign names in Jordan, Salih & El-Yasin (1994) interviewed customers concerning their attitudes toward shop names in foreign languages. Although El-Yasin & Mahadin do not mention this, these customers are probably speakers of Arabic. When asked which of two clothing shops — one with an English name, the other with an Arabic name — they thought would be more expensive, 73 percent of the interviewees chose the shop with the English name, compared to 3 percent who chose the shop with the Arabic name. In answering a later question, 83 percent of the customers thought higher-quality clothes were more expensive, whereas no one said the opposite. From the answers to both questions the authors conclude that a large majority of customers associate foreign names with high-quality products. El-Yasin & Mahadin (1996: 415) argue:

> It is this association between what is foreign and what is good quality that businesses utilize by choosing a foreign name, or using foreign words in promoting their goods and services. They hope that a foreign sign will create this association in the customers’ minds and that the customers thus will be attracted to their shops.

Thus, the language of proper names may contribute in persuading customers to buy.

Proper names are particularly suitable for impersonal multilingualism. They do not have the purpose of transmitting factual information, but are rather used to appeal to emotions. In other words, the connotation is more important than the denotation. Schlick (2003) came across the shop names and after in the Italian city of Trieste. And and after are function words, which have little or no lexical meaning. She remarks that “[i]n the cases above, the language itself, English as the international language of trendiness, seems to carry enough additional meaning that shop-owners consider even function words appropriate as shop names” (Schlick 2003: 6). Thus, an important function of proper names is to convey an emotion. The shop names and after do not have much lexical meaning, but they appeal to customers’ emotions because they are in English.

## 2.7 Research Questions

In the preceding sections, the central concepts for this investigation were introduced. Often, the languages spoken by various groups in society are not represented
proportionally in the linguistic landscape. Several ideas that may help to account for the use of languages in the linguistic landscape were presented, and several of the factors at work were discussed. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the linguistic landscape in the Netherlands reflect the languages spoken by the speech community?
2. Which factors influence linguistic and semiotic properties of signs?

To find out which languages are present in the linguistic landscape in the Netherlands and how these are represented, linguistic and semiotic properties of signs were investigated. The linguistic features under study included the languages and scripts on the signs, as well as the presence of translations and language mixing. Apart from these linguistic properties, some features relating to the graphic design of the signs were also examined, namely some semiotic properties signalling code preference. They included the placement of languages in space and the relative font size of the texts in different languages. The investigation involved a detailed quantitative analysis of linguistic landscapes in the Netherlands, based on the approach developed by Ben-Rafael et al. (2004; 2006) and Cenoz & Gorter (2006). Sections of eight shopping centres served as survey areas. The study is of an exploratory character, given that the linguistic landscape is a relatively new subject of research. The research questions are answered in Chapter 5, on the basis of the results of this investigation.

2.8 Summary

In this chapter, an outline of the conceptual framework of the study was presented. The central notion was linguistic landscape, as defined by Landry & Bourhis (1997). While the languages on signs in the public sphere had received some scholarly attention before the late 1990s, the large majority of studies were conducted in the 21st century. The linguistic landscape has been related to several theoretical ideas. Landry & Bourhis show that the linguistic landscape is a marker of, and contributes to the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups in multilingual contexts. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) approach the linguistic landscape differently. They are particularly interested in its construction by different actors. Ben-Rafael (2009) elaborates on this by presenting four sociological principles of structuration. Spolsky & Cooper (1991) and Spolsky (2009) address the motivations behind choice of language on signs.
Relationships between language groups may be expressed in the linguistic landscape as a whole, but also on individual signs. Regarding the choice and placement of languages on signs, the ideas of Reh (2004), Sebba (2007) and Scollon & Scollon (2003) were introduced. In this chapter, the role of proper names on signs was also explicated. These nouns often appear in a foreign language. Finally, the research questions of the study were presented.