

VISIBILITY, ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF ITALIAN IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF ZADAR, CROATIA

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1. INTRODUCTION²

The first decade of the 21st century brought significant changes to the economy of Zadar (*Zara* in Italian). The town became an extremely popular tourist destination for people from all around the world, especially in the warmer half of the calendar year, from April to October. In the final decades of the 20th century the Zadar area was a preferred destination for mostly European tourists, following similar patterns seen elsewhere along the Croatian coast. However, the arrival of low-budget airlines to Zadar Airport and an increase in the number of cruise ships in the Port of Zadar resulted in an increasing number of visitors from other continents. One of significant features of that new form of tourism, which is visible not only in Zadar, but in many other international tourist destinations as well, is the presence of an increased number of texts in various languages in the public space, in other words, a more dynamic and diverse linguistic landscape (LL). Most of those signs are targeted at tourists and other visitors and have diverse functions in the public space. The linguistic landscape of Zadar today includes signs in various languages of the world, but those passers-by who perceive the written texts around them will soon observe that Croatian and English are the most common languages in the LL (Oštarić, 2020). However, that phenomenon is not something observable only in Zadar – the combination of the main official language of a country and English is probably the most common language pair in many tourist destinations around the world (cf. Backhaus, 2007; Blackwood, Johannessen, Mendisu, 2022; Bruyèl-Olmedo, Juan-Garau, 2009; Cenoz, Gorter, 2006; Coluzzi, 2012; Gradečak-Erdeljić, Zlomislíć, 2014; Grbavac, 2013, 2015; Huebner, 2006; Kasanga, 2012; Stolac, 2018; Taylor-Leech, 2012).

Nevertheless, local inhabitants and returning tourists in Zadar would probably recall times when tourist signage in the public space was almost exclusively in Croatian, German, and Italian, sporadically even in Slovene, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, or sometimes French. Those languages catered for most of the tourists who visited the Croatian coast in the summer holiday season.

The change from a European-oriented to a globally oriented type of tourism resulted in the changed practices of using foreign languages on written forms in the public space, due to which many traditional languages of tourism simply disappeared and were substituted by English, the present-day universal and ubiquitous language of tourism (Oštarić, 2020).

¹ University of Zadar, Croatia. This is an updated and rewritten version of the paper published as Oštarić (2022). The earlier version was written in Croatian and thus it was largely unavailable to readers outside of the Croatian-speaking areas.

² The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

However, in the centuries before the onset of that change, other languages had been used in the public space of Zadar, depending on who ruled the area. Thus, even today we can observe many epigraphic inscriptions in Latin or Italian in numerous town centres of the Croatian coast, sometimes even in other languages. Those signs are reminders of earlier times, as well as of other language policies and practices in the region.

The aim of this study is to provide an insight into the roles and functions the Italian language has in contemporary LL of Zadar, as well as into the patterns of its visibility. The study aims to answer the following research questions: 1) How frequently does Italian occur on LL signs in Zadar? 2) In which niches of the LL of Zadar can Italian be found? 3) What are the roles and functions of Italian in the LL of Zadar? 4) What are the visibility patterns of Italian in the LL of Zadar? 5) What changes may be identified in the visibility of Italian in the LL of Zadar in the studied period?

The article starts with an overview of earlier historical periods, the traces of which can still be observed in the LL. It is based on data collected in three sampling periods, from 2011 to mid-2025. Some of the data were collected for an unpublished doctoral work on the language ecology of Zadar (Oštarić, 2020), while some were collected specifically for this study in the first half of 2025. Since the data used for the analysis span over a period of around fourteen years and were collected on several occasions, the study also identifies the trends and changes in the usage of Italian in the linguistic landscape of Zadar.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

From a historical perspective, the geographical position of Zadar made it a strategically important town in the mid-Adriatic. In ancient times, when most of seafaring was done only during the day, it was important to have a safe port halfway to the north or south in the Adriatic Sea. That position made the town valuable to various peoples and cultures. Romans conquered it very early and settled their citizens there, thus bringing Latin into the area (Novak, 1965), both in its official and vulgar forms (Brozović, 1976). At the beginning of the 7th century, Zadar became the administrative centre of the Byzantine theme of Dalmatia, at which time most of its inhabitants were of Romance origin (Katičić, 1998). Historical name studies show that the 9th and 10th centuries were marked by an intensification of Slavic-Romance relations, and consequently ethnic mixing, which must have been completed by the 12th century, when Slavic names appear to have become predominant (Jakić-Cestarić, 1972; Katičić, 1998). At that time, the Romance population in Zadar spoke Dalmatian, a language that evolved from vulgar Latin on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, which later disappeared and became substituted by the Venetian vernacular. The time Zadar spent under the rule of the Venetian Republic, from 1403 to 1797, was certainly the period that had the greatest influence on cultural and linguistic components of its history. During the Venetian, and later Austrian rule, Zadar experienced significant flows of population from present-day Italy and other regions under the Venetian rule, mostly due to wars and various plagues, which would periodically decimate the town's population (Klaić, Petricoli, 1976; Raukar, 1977; Raukar *et al.*, 1987). Although Italian was not an official language in the Venetian period, a great number of immigrants to Zadar spoke Italian; schoolteachers spoke Italian, Italian was taught in junior classes, and Italian culture generally had a significant influence on the

urban life of Zadar (Raukar *et al.*, 1987). As a result, Italian gradually became the primary language of written communication of the period (Brozović, 1976).

The significant role of Italian continued even during the French Napoleonic rule (1806-1813), when it was used as the language of instruction in schools, as well as during the Austrian rule (1797-1805 and 1813-1918), when it was the major language of administration. During the Italian rule between the two world wars (1918-1947), Italian was the only official language in Zadar, while Croatian, the most widely spread vernacular, was banned from the press and public usage (Begonja, 2001). The process of Italianisation in that period was so intense that before the onset of World War II almost three quarters of the population of the province of Zadar (18 533 people) also spoke Italian (Istituto Centrale di Statistica, Venezia Giulia, 1939, as cited in Begonja, 2001: 193). As a result of severe Allied bombing during World War II, as well as of the transfer of Zadar to Yugoslavia, both of which led to drastic population changes, only a handful of pre-war inhabitants remained in Zadar until the 1950s. From a linguistic point of view, according to Brozović (1976), the post-war decades were marked by a widespread Croatian/Italian bilingualism in Zadar, by an Arbanasi/Croatian/Italian³ trilingualism in the Arbanasi⁴ neighbourhood, as well as by the disappearance of the local variety of Venetian, called *Zaratino*. Towards the end of the 20th century, the linguistic situation in Zadar manifested convergence towards one main language, Croatian (Brozović, 1976), *Zaratino* is spoken by a handful of mostly older speakers (Šimičić, Škevin, Vuletić, 2018; Škevin, Jazidžija, 2015, 2017; Škevin Rajko, Šimičić, 2019), and Arbanasi is not as vital as it used to be, despite some community efforts to save it (Šimičić, Bilić Meštrić, 2018).

3. LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE STUDIES IN CROATIA

Although Croatia is not as linguistically diverse as some of the countries that have been studied in early LL studies, linguistic landscape has become a popular topic for Croatian sociolinguists. Two main foci have been present in the study of Croatian linguistic landscapes until the present time: the presence of foreign languages in LL, particularly English (Gradečak-Erdeljić, Zlomislić, 2014; Stolac, 2018), as well as the diachronicity of the LL of cities that belonged to different political systems in different historical periods, thus having undergone different practices of using written language in the public space (Oštarić, 2020, 2022, 2024; Rončević, 2019).

The LL of Zadar has been analysed to some extent even before the emergence of the field itself (Ćosić, Mahnić-Ćosić, 2001), but the authors involved had not based their study on the seminal works (cf. Landry, Bourhis, 1997; Spolsky, Cooper, 1991) that later led to LL studies – they conducted an analysis of naming practices in the companies within the Zadar County, documenting the onomastic material by observing the text on tables that companies are required to install on the facade of their seat. In a repeated study ten years later, the authors changed the focus on the increasing visibility of non-Croatian elements in company names

³ The label *Italian* in both mentioned situations can refer to standard Italian and/or Venetian.

⁴ *Arbanasi* is the name of a neighbourhood in Zadar, where in 1726 a group of Albanian Catholic refugees settled, fleeing the Ottoman incursions around the territory of Lake Shkodra. For centuries the community has used the *Arbanasi* vernacular, a Gheg-based Albanian variety, which today has a relatively small number of speakers and is slowly dying out in the community.

(Ćosić, 2013). Bilandžija (2023) conducted a similar study, investigating the naming practices of accommodation establishments and eateries in the LL of Zadar. Oštarić (2020) conducted a comprehensive study of the linguistic landscape of Zadar, focusing on its significance in the overall language ecology of the city. Several other studies by the same author focused on different aspects of the linguistic landscape of Zadar, such as the presence of the Glagolitic script⁵ in the LL (Oštarić, 2018, 2025), the presence of Italian in contemporary LL of Zadar (Oštarić, 2022), as well as the differences between written language practices and spoken language practices in the LL of Zadar (Oštarić, 2024).

Most of the early Croatian LL studies were conducted in urban environments where Italian had not been historically relevant, such as in the city of Osijek (Gradečak-Erdeljić, Zlomislić, 2014; Gradečak-Erdeljić, Zlomislić, Kružić, 2018; Kordić, Čuljak, Bionda, 2014), whereas several more recent studies investigated the LL of coastal cities where Italian had been used in the past, for instance in Šibenik (Baraka, 2022) or in Split (Perkov, 2024). Finally, two LL studies provided analyses⁶ of the linguistic landscape of the city of Rijeka, and they additionally focused on the use of Italian (Rončević, 2019; Stolac, Hlavač, 2021).

A common denominator of those earlier Croatian LL studies is the recognition of an increased visibility and presence of English in the LL, as a language whose main purpose is communication with foreigners and tourists, but also a language that sometimes has a significant symbolic value for local people – this is in line with many international contexts where a similar situation has been identified (Backhaus, 2007; Blackwood, Johannessen, Mendisu, 2022; Bruyèl-Olmedo, Juan-Garau, 2009; Coluzzi, 2012; Grbavac, 2013; Huebner, 2006; Kasanga, 2012; Taylor-Leech, 2012). The second common feature of those studies is the finding that Croatian is everywhere the most frequently used language on signs in the public space. This study draws on the cited studies of the LL of Zadar and complements them by providing an overview of the visibility, roles and functions of Italian in the contemporary linguistic landscape of Zadar.

4. ITALIAN IN LLS AROUND THE WORLD

The presence of Italian in the linguistic landscape of Zadar is not something unexpected – Italian has been there for centuries. However, it can also be found all around the world, even in those linguistic landscapes where historically it had not been used as a language of communication. Italy today holds a very prominent position in the world of gastronomy, culture, fashion, tourism, automobilism, and in many other areas, thus endowing the Italian language with a symbolic value that facilitates its use in many linguistic landscapes of the world. In many such international contexts, Italian in the linguistic landscape or on objects of material culture provides an additional symbolic value that resonates the mentioned prominence of Italy in numerous fields of human activity, as manifested in various linguistic landscapes in diverse ways (Bagna, Barni, 2007; Bagna, Machetti, 2012; Bombi, 2017; Dalla Libera, 2024; Gallina, 2016; Vedovelli, 2006).

⁵ *Glagolitic script* was the first script Slavic peoples used for writing in their languages. Although most Slavic peoples switched early to Cyrillic or Latin scripts, Glagolitic was used in the coastal part of present-day Croatia until the 20th century, mostly for religious purposes within the Roman Catholic Church.

⁶ One provides a diachronic overview, while the other focuses on the contemporary linguistic landscape of Rijeka.

Numerous authors have already studied the roles and functions of Italian in various linguistic landscapes across the planet, and for illustrative purposes several of such cases will be mentioned here. For instance, in the linguistic landscape of Tanzania (Gallina, 2016) Italian has a twofold pattern of use: in the continental part of Tanzania its function is symbolic, and it is used for the promotion of positive values, catering for all visitors. In the insular part of Tanzania, on the island of Zanzibar, Italian in the linguistic landscape does not manifest a symbolic value, it is used as a communication tool needed to cater for Italian tourists, who are apparently notorious for their poor foreign language speaking skills (Gallina, 2016).

In the context of gastronomy, Italian is a frequent language on menus around the world, given that Italian cuisine is universally popular, so that local eateries often combine local and Italian cuisine (Bagna, Machetti, 2012). Apart from menus, Italian is also present in numerous other text genres of the linguistic landscape (Bagna, Barni, 2007; Coluzzi, 2016), such as on commercial signs that often include trademarks that are based on the Italian language or derive from Italy.

Italian is present around the world in the context of enjoying beverages based on coffee – it is impossible not to find it in a coffee shop or a bar anywhere in the world, even if the shop does not serve *espresso* coffee. For example, Italian is omnipresent in tens of thousands U.S. coffee shops (Lanzilotta, 2014), as the entire terminology for coffee-based beverages derives from Italian (for instance, *espresso*, *latte*, *macchiato*, *ristretto*, *lungo*, etc.). Similarly, Italian is very common on LL signs in Malaysia and only English occurs more frequently in the Malaysian LL in comparison to other foreign languages; yet, Malaysia historically did not have political connections with Italy, nor did it take in a great number of Italian immigrants (Coluzzi, 2016). In the Canadian province of Ontario, particularly in Toronto, Italian is very frequently used in the LL, especially in the context of food and drinks production and serving, where it has a major symbolic value (Casini, 2017).

Furthermore, in Serbia Italian also has a significant position in the LL, as it is very popular to use Italian words, as well as pseudo-Italianisms, as names of various shops, bars, and restaurants in which the Italian or pseudo-Italian name evokes elements of Italian style, quality and merchandise origin (Moderc, 2012). In a similar way, Italian has been used in the LL of Moscow, both before and after the recent war in the Ukraine. In that specific context, Italian is positively appraised and is used in domains that are particularly important for Russians, for instance in art, music, fashion and gastronomy (Dalla Libera, 2024).

Moving from the physical into the virtual linguistic landscape (Ivkovic, Lotherington, 2009), Italian is similarly present on various websites in the previously mentioned contexts of fashion, music, automobilism and gastronomy. To illustrate that with one selected example, several U.S. websites related to *Eataly* from New York and Chicago display a heavy use of Italian used in the promotion of their products, creating an effect of the prestige the language has in the world of gastronomy and oenology (Bombi, 2017).

From all the cited examples of the use of Italian in LL it is obvious that Italian brings prestige and significant economic and symbolic value to those respective linguistic landscapes. Although the previous passages cite only a handful of published studies, most globetrotters and cybernauts will certainly encounter Italian in those contexts everywhere: if they decide to have a slice of pizza, if they are in need of their morning double espresso, if they like to grate some parmesan on their pasta, if they like to have a glass of prosecco while they watch fast car or motorcycle races, or if they like to attend fashion shows or opera performances. In those contexts, Italian brand names and other words are simply unavoidable.

5. ITALIAN IN THE LL OF ZADAR – A DIACHRONIC PERSPECTIVE

To understand the roles of Italian in the contemporary LL of Zadar, it is essential that we also consider the historical perspective contained in other niches of the linguistic landscape, such as the inscriptions in the Municipal cemetery or the old postcards and photographs of Zadar, which are frequently reproduced on magnets and other souvenirs as reminders of previous historical periods. There are several private collectors of old postcards and photographs of Zadar and there is a rich collection of old postcards (ca. 30,000) available in the University of Zadar Research Library (Znanstvena knjižnica Zadar, 2025). These additional examples give us an insight into the historical aspect of the LL of Zadar. By comparing the present-day LL with the historical one on postcards and photographs, we can identify the differences and make conclusions about the changes that led to the contemporary linguistic landscape.

The photographs of inscriptions from the Municipal cemetery (Figure 1), whose oldest section includes numerous gravestones with texts in Italian and is the most diverse part of the cemetery in terms of languages and traditions, enables us to grasp the historical context of the use of languages in the public space of Zadar, as it contains tombstones in various languages used in Zadar in the last two centuries (Oštarić, 2020).

Figure 1. *A commemorative inscription for the victims of World War I (Zadar cemetery)*



While the cemetery still preserves gravestones with inscriptions in Italian, in the rest of the city the historical LL signs in Italian have almost completely disappeared. What is left from those periods are the manhole covers (Figure 8) and a few metal plates of insurance companies (Figure 2) that had been installed on the facades of insured buildings. The latter have been painted over or covered by rust over time and are not clearly visible from the street level. Other LL signs in Italian that also remained are those that were not easily visible to

passers-by and thus did not stand out. Sometimes signs in Italian remained, but the text was destroyed or covered with a layer of paint (Figures 3 and 4).

Apart from the cemetery inscriptions that withstood the historical events, we know from the available historical postcards and photographs that Italian was widely used on public signage in Zadar in the period before World War II (Oštarić, 2022). However, some of those signs were erased from the public space after World War II, while most of them probably did not survive the heavy bombardment of Zadar by the Allied Forces in 1943 and 1944.

Figure 2. Home insurance plate “*Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà Trieste*”



The process of removing LL signs that include languages of former rulers or regimes (labelled in literature as *language erasure* or *language removal*) is a common phenomenon that has been described in the LL literature (Du Plessis, 2011; Marten, 2010; Pavlenko, 2008, 2009, 2010). An idiosyncrasy of the LL of Zadar is that all LL signs in Italian on facades that survived the bombing were removed after the war, while the metal manholes with Italian text were retained. It is difficult to find an explanation for the different treatment of LL signs in this example, as the people who were involved in the process are not among us anymore. Some of the possible reasons might be the unavailability of iron and other metals in the post-war period, or too expensive costs of substituting them with those with Croatian text, or it may be that those covers on the ground did not stand out being out of sight for most passers-by. However, this phenomenon points to a necessity of methodological distinguishing between the *vertical linguistic landscape* and the *horizontal linguistic landscape* (Oštarić, 2020). The vertical linguistic landscape includes all the signs on the facades and vertical sign carriers, while the horizontal linguistic landscape includes all the signs on the ground, on streets, on the floor, etc. The vertical linguistic landscape stands out as it is directly at the level of the passer-by's view, it is conspicuous and thus may trigger an affective response in passers-by. The horizontal linguistic landscape is below one's feet and is mostly inconspicuous, which is why it probably does not attract attention of passers-by.

Figure 3. The sign “*Strada comunale*” covered with paint



Figure 4. Street name tablet from the Italian period – the street name was removed



6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a mixed-method approach and combines the use of a quantitative and a qualitative research methodology. Many early LL studies used only quantitative methodologies, thereby making conclusions on language diversity, language practices, or relations between different ethnolinguistic groups just basing their findings on the enumeration of signs in specific languages in a public space. However, as the field developed, the shortcomings of such a practice were identified – the earlier approaches did not consider numerous key elements, which are significantly important for making correct and valid conclusions about the linguistic landscape. One of the most salient shortcomings of the early LL studies was the lack of an insight into various components and stages of creation of an LL sign (Blommaert, 2016; Oštarić, 2020; Spolsky, 2009). Such studies lacked information on the motivation, ideas, reasons, processes, and people behind the LL sign creation.

The methodological approach adopted in this study allows for the use of complementary research methods (cf. Blackwood, 2015; Thistlethwaite, Sebba, 2015; Troyer, Cáceda, Giménez Eguibar, 2015). The quantitative method was used with the aim of determining the

total number of signs and the number of signs in specific languages, as well as the number of signs that contain text in multiple languages. Consequently, the purpose of the method was to investigate where Italian stands as one of the languages used in the LL. That information is important in the historical context as well, such as when we want to observe diachronic trends in the use of a language. The qualitative method was based on ethnography, and its purpose was to analyse the processes of devising, designing, producing and installing an LL sign, as well as to explore the effects such signs have on passers-by, the consumers of signs in the linguistic landscape. Using such a holistic approach that takes into account the complex and dynamic nature of the linguistic landscape should result in valid and meaningful findings and conclusions.

For the purpose of the quantitative part of the study, I photographed and/or recorded all signs in the linguistic landscape of Zadar in a determined geographical area on several occasions and in a determined period. An LL sign was defined according to Backhaus' methodology (Backhaus, 2007) as a text in a visible frame, whose size can vary from a small sticker to a huge billboard. The geographical sampling area covered the neighbourhood of the Zadar Peninsula (in Croatian: *Poluotok*). That is the neighbourhood in which most of the educational, religious, judicial, financial and commercial institutions are located, and where most tourists find accommodation or spend time sightseeing (Oštarić, 2020). The first sampling was done in September 2011, when I documented all the LL signs in the public space of the mentioned neighbourhood, either through photography or in the form of written field notes. In the first sampling period I took 883 photographs, with total 3,502 LL signs. The second sampling took place in October/November 2018, when I again documented all LL signs in the Peninsula, producing 1,586 photographs and recording 4,862 LL signs. The third sampling took place in April/May 2025, when I documented only the changes in the LL of the Zadar Peninsula (i.e. new signs installed in the period 2019-2025), again using photography or taking field notes. These three sampling stages, spanning over the period of fourteen years, provided an opportunity for a longitudinal study of changes in the LL of Zadar (Table 1).

Table 1. *Number of photographs and LL signs in three sampling periods*

Sampling year	Number of photographs	Number of LL signs
2011	883	3,502
2018	1,586	4,862
2025	60	91

Regarding positionality, I must point out that I am a long-term resident of Zadar, having lived there continuously since 2005. I also participate in these processes of meaning-making and creating signs in the linguistic landscape, because I sometimes translate Croatian texts into English, and vice versa, for the local concert office, and my translations sometimes end up in the LL on posters, advertisements, banners and printed materials. I also see myself as a *consumer* of LL, as I regularly walk in the Zadar Peninsula and observe texts on signage, probably more than an average passer-by, as this characteristic may be quite obsessive for a professional sociolinguist. Being a participant in these described processes, I am obliged to

put extra effort into attempting to provide an objective view of the linguistic landscape of Zadar. In addition, being a participant also allows me to observe different processes in the LL as they happen, because every day I spend a certain amount of time in the public space of Zadar.

The qualitative methodology was based on ethnography and included interviews, informal conversations, participant observation, collecting old photographs and postcards, photographic documentation, following media communications on languages and naming practices in the LL of Zadar. I conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with various participants, grouped into three categories: (1) passers-by, (2) business owners or managers, and (3) decision makers. Passers-by were the so-called *consumers* of the linguistic landscape; they are people who have lived in Zadar or have resided in Zadar for a period longer than one year. They walk the streets of Zadar daily and possibly consume the signs in the linguistic landscape. Business owners and/or managers are entrepreneurs or employees of entrepreneurs who manage various shops and businesses. They are people who decide on installing, creating and designing LL signs on the facades or in the windows of their shops. Finally, decision makers are representatives of two local institutions that have a direct influence on municipal regulations and restrictions in installing (especially top-down) LL signs in the public space. In this particular case, they were two employees of the local municipality and tourist association, respectively. In total, there were twenty interviews with passers-by, eighteen interviews with shop owners or managers, and two interviews with decision makers. For each of the three groups I used specially tailored interview protocols. All interviews were conducted in Zadar in 2019, mostly in Croatian, but several were conducted in English and Italian, as the interviewees were not speakers of Croatian⁷.

In addition to interviews, for the qualitative part of the study I also had a number of informal conversations, I used other collected materials that helped me to understand the diachronic aspect of the development of the linguistic landscape of Zadar, such as the evidence of LL signs from earlier historical periods – for instance, old photographs and postcards of Zadar, and photographs of LL inscriptions from the Municipal cemetery in Zadar. Finally, I also followed the local media in Zadar and noted whenever there was a topic related to the use of languages in the public space.

6.1. *Findings of the quantitative part*

The following features of LL signs have been analysed for this study (Table 2): the function of signs, languages on signs, the number of languages used, their order and/or prominence, the LL sign genre, the type of activity of the sign-holder. The function of an LL sign, from one perspective, can be determined as informative or symbolic (Landry, Bourhis, 1997). The purpose of an informative sign is to provide the reader with a piece of information, for instance the opening hours of a shop or the name of the street. The purpose of a symbolic sign is not to provide the reader with a specific piece of information derived from the text on the sign, but to create an impression of the symbolic value of what is behind the LL sign. An example of a symbolic function of a sign in the LL of Zadar would be a football club fan slogan written in the ancient Glagolitic script, which can be read and understood by only a

⁷ All interview transcript excerpts used in this study have been translated into English by the author.

handful of passers-by – to most consumers of such a sign, Glagolitic would be symbolic, as it evokes a number of characteristics related to the Croatian national identity and belongingness to cultural traditions (Oštarić, 2018, 2025). In some situations, LL signs may have both an informative and symbolic function, as they can provide information, as well as symbolic value (Blackwood, Johannessen, Mendisu, 2022; Leeman, Modan, 2009). Languages on the signs were identified according to their vertical order and/or their prominence. The sign genre was identified according to the type of the text-carrier, based on Spolsky and Cooper's classification (Spolsky, Cooper, 1991) with two additional categories: street name signs, commercial signs, warnings and prohibitions, company name signs, informative signs, commemorative signs, three-dimensional objects (e.g. ATM machines, telephone booths, statues, manhole covers, etc.), graffiti, trademarks, and traffic signs. Finally, the type of activity of the sign-holder included 36 different types of activities, such as shops, cosmetic services, real estate, financial institutions, food delivery, municipal infrastructure, bars and restaurants, accommodation services, medical services, religious institutions, etc.

Table 2. *Features of LL signs analysed in the study*

Function	Authorship	Language(s)	Genre	Business activity
Informative or symbolic	Official or private	Croatian, English, Italian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Korean, Mandarin, Japanese, Russian, Albanian, Czech, Latin, Thai, Slovene, Hungarian, Swedish, Dutch, Finnish, Serbian, Hindi	Street name signs, commercial signs, warnings and prohibitions, company name signs, informative signs, commemorative signs, 3-D objects, graffiti, trademarks, traffic signs	Shops, cosmetic services, real estate, rentals, financial institutions, telecommunications, food delivery, infrastructural, bars and restaurants, accommodation services, IT services, printing and graphical services, betting shops, maintenance services, insurance, bakeries, tourism, intellectual services, construction and architecture, legal services, medical services, government and municipal institutions, traditional workshops, children's entertainment, sports, religious institutions, postal services, libraries and bookshops, jewellery shops, press and publishing, education, commemorative, transport, cultural institutions, Zadar-related, unknown

The research findings indicate that in 2011 Croatian was the most frequent first or only language on LL signs (Table 3), immediately followed by English as the most common foreign language, and Italian in the third place. Croatian and English were frequently used together. In addition to those two languages, the LL of Zadar also included signs in German, Italian and French, mostly in situations when these three languages served as auxiliary languages of tourism. Regarding the genre of LL signs, Italian was mostly present in advertisements and informative signs, but it must be emphasized that those informative signs were not of contemporary origin, they were signs that had remained in the public space from the time when Italian had been the official language – the group mostly included the metal manhole covers from the periods of Italian rule or Austrian rule. Regarding the type of sign-holder activity, Italian was mostly present on signs in commerce, bars and restaurants, medicine, finance, and infrastructure.

Table 3. *Number of LL signs with three most frequent languages in 2011*

Language	Number of LL signs	Percentage of LL signs
Croatian	2,740	78,24 %
English	504	14,39 %
Italian	148	4,23 %

In the second sampling period, in 2018 (Table 4), there has been an increase in the total number of signs in the linguistic landscape, as well as an increase in language diversity – more signs and more languages were identified in the LL. If we observe the criterion of the number of signs where a language is the first or the only language of the sign, Croatian was still the first language (73,49%), English was the second most frequent (20,88%); however, there has also been a significant doubling in the total number of LL signs in English (from 504 signs in 2011, to 1015 signs in 2018). Italian still held the third position (2,92%). As the first language of an LL sign, Italian was present mainly on advertisements (in commerce and bars and restaurants), on trademarks (in commerce), as well as on infrastructural objects (on manhole covers). That means that, apart from Italian on manhole covers (e.g. *Canalizzazione comunale di Zara, Acquedotto comunale*), most of Italian found in the LL was used in commercial trademarks (such as *Intimissimi, Dolce & Gabbana, Scuderia Ferrari, Francesca*) or Italian names of shops and restaurants (for instance *Salsa Rossa, La Famiglia, Groppo, Il Padrino*). What is more, in most situations where Italian was used in naming restaurants or shops, the name was usually accompanied by additional text from another language, predominantly English, that described the type of business activity or provided additional information (e.g. *Francesca Shoes, Restaurant Groppo, Teatro Verdi – Boutique Hotel, Salsa Rossa – Italian Restaurant, La Famiglia – Since 1964, Be pasta – Fast, fresh and fun, Accommodation Piazzetta Marina*). In most eateries with Italian names, outdoor menus and advertisements were almost entirely in English, even when the name was Italian and the Italian national flag colours were used on decorations and printed materials (such as on the LL signs in Figure 5). Almost all those Italian-named eateries offer food that would not be accepted under the label ‘Italian cuisine’ – they offer a mixture of various dishes that are not typically Italian (e.g. hamburgers or dishes from Croatian traditional cuisine) and dishes that could be labelled Italian (e.g. various *pasta* dishes, *pizzas* and *risottos*). Since an Italian name on these eateries obviously does not tell the customers that

Italian cuisine is what they offer, these findings point to the conclusion that the function of Italian in the linguistic landscape of the Zadar Peninsula is generally not used to transmit information – its function is mainly symbolic and it attempts to connect the particular eatery with the symbolic values attached to Italian in the world of gastronomy.

Figure 5. *Be pasta bistro in Zadar*



Table 4. *Number of LL signs with the three most frequent languages in 2018*

Language	Number of LL signs	Percentage of LL signs
Croatian	3,573	73,49 %
English	1,015	20,88 %
Italian	142	2,92 %

If we compare the changes emerged in the linguistic landscape of the Peninsula in the period 2011-2018, Italian remained the third language by the number of LL signs, but the total number of signs in Italian (summing up signs where Italian is the first or the only language with those where Italian is the second, third, fourth, or fifth language of the sign) decreased from 268 (in 2011) to 215 signs (in 2018). One of the causes of the decrease was a project by Zadar Tourist Board, who modernized their informative posters nearby important cultural sights – in 2011, those posters included texts in five languages (Croatian, English, German, Italian and French), while in 2018 the posters were bilingual (Croatian and English).

Several rare informative LL signs in Italian included two signs installed on the building where the Zadar Italian Community have their headquarters, as well as a few signs in the window of Dante Alighieri Cultural Association seat. There the information is delivered in both Italian and Croatian (Figure 7). Additional informative LL signs in Italian can be found on exchange offices (e.g. *Cambio valute*), bakeries (*Pasticceria*), or notifications in front of the national ferry company office (Figure 6), which sells ferry tickets for the international ferry line Zadar (Cro)-Ancona (It). In neither of the two sampling periods were LL signs in Venetian or *Zaratino* found in Zadar.

Figure 6. *A notification in Croatian, English and Italian*



Figure 7. *Tablet installed on the facade of the offices of the Italian Community in Zadar*



Most LL signs in Italian were found on infrastructural objects – numerous metal manhole covers of sewage and aqueduct piping, which have been present on the streets of Zadar since the time of either Austrian or Italian rule from the first half of the 20th century (Figure 8).

Figure 8. *A manhole cover with Italian and German text*



In the third sampling period (April/May 2025), I identified and noted a number of new businesses in the public space of the Zadar Peninsula, which bear an Italian name and thus have added more Italian to the LL of Zadar. Some of those LL signs in Italian include signs for accommodation services (e.g. Figure 9) or advertisements of eateries which bear Italian names but do not offer strictly Italian cuisine (Figures 11-13).

In addition to the examples visible on the provided photographs, there are also a few hotels or apartments that bear an Italian name, such as the hotel *Teatro Verdi*, named after the Zadar theatre from the Italian period, destroyed in the World War II bombing, and a few that were named *Zara*, after the Italian name for Zadar. Other eateries with Italian names (advertised on various placards and posters in the LL) are restaurants *Groppo*, *Salsa Rossa*, *Tramonto*, *Intermezzo*, *Teatro*, *L' Osteria*, *Il Padrino*, *Trattoria Mediterraneo*, *Bello*, *Corte*, *Bella Italia*, *Rosmarino*, *La Baia*, *La Famiglia*, a bakery named *Torrente*, and an ice cream shop *Michelangelo*.

From the provided examples, it is obvious that Italian is the preferred language of restaurants and ice cream shops, which is in line with the previously cited studies, in which gastronomy is linked with Italian cuisine through naming practices.

Occasionally it is also possible to find pseudo-Italianisms in the LL of Zadar, that is names or other words that appear to be Italian, but do not have standard Italian morphology or spelling. One such example is *Trattoria Canzona* (Figure 12), where the name ends in *-a* instead of *-e* (as in standard Italian *canzone*), which must have been influenced by Croatian *kancona*, an Italian loanword used for some specific types of ‘a song’.

Figure 9. *Accommodation services with an Italian name*



Figure 10. *Ice cream shop Mammamia*



Figure 11. *Bistro ‘La Famiglia’ in the centre of the Zadar Peninsula*



Figure 12. *Trattoria Canzona in Zadar*



Figure 13. *Trattoria Terracotta in Zadar*



6.2. Findings of the qualitative part

The qualitative data collected through interviewing indicated poor visibility of Italian in the present-day LL, as only a few interviewees reported having perceived Italian on LL signs. Most people do not look down when they walk in the streets, so they probably do not notice the text on manhole covers – this was confirmed by my interviewees, since none of them reported having seen the Italian text on manhole covers in Zadar.

When asked about the visibility of foreign languages in the linguistic landscape, some interviewees believed that Italian should be used on signs for tourism purposes, in line with those who believed that Croatian/English bilingualism on signage is not sufficient. Two interviewees thought that Italian should be used more on LL signs, because they had witnessed situations in which Croatian and English on LL signs proved to be insufficient for Italian tourists and they remembered that Italian tourists were usually pleased when addressed in Italian.

Perhaps for some older tourists it would be useful to have more texts in Italian because they don't understand English. But it would be important to have those texts written in good Italian to make sense, because otherwise they wouldn't be useful. Once we were in an ice cream shop that boasts with their Italian ice cream, we entered the shop and asked for pistachio flavour. The person who worked there kept using the local pronunciation of the word '*pistačo*', and my wife told him that the word is properly pronounced '*pistachio*' in Italian, thinking that he would like to know, but he just said, 'I don't care'. So, you have an ice cream shop that is advertised as an Italian ice cream shop while its workers are not interested in how the flavours are properly pronounced in Italian (Interview 4, September 2019).

No, I am very sceptical about that because I think all that is actually – let's sound exotic; so, the name is one thing and the other is... I think that in the background there is actually the wish to attract more customers, so that is why they try being slightly different from the others, but I have seen, besides restaurants and all those catering places, that there are also many apartments that bear Italian names (Interview 1, July 2019).

From the perspective of language repertoires, owners and managers of various businesses who were interviewed in this study claimed that they expected from their employees to be proficient in Croatian and English, although during the tourist season the ability to speak Italian is frequently needed. However, when owners and managers conduct job interviews with candidates for employees, being able to speak Italian and German is certainly treated as an additional value, but not a crucial one, since the ability of speaking English satisfies almost all communication needs.

When we employ staff, we always require from them to know English, it's simply like that. Just to illustrate, years ago when we printed our menus they were in four languages, Italian was one of them; but this year we printed the menu in just two languages, English and Croatian. It is clearer that way. We assume that many people can understand English, and those who don't, we help them with the translation. If I had to use more languages, I would definitely use French, Italian,

German, English, Croatian, and Spanish, of course; so, six languages! Do you know what that means when you have to change your menu? If you want to regularly update your menu, that would be a huge logistic enterprise (Interview 2, August 2019).

Regarding the visibility of languages used on advertisements, most business owners stated that they would be happy to use more foreign languages on their signage in storefronts and outside their shops, but that would be aesthetically challenging. Too many texts in various languages in storefronts and on building facades leads to saturation and such a saturated space, according to the owners, is not appealing. Moreover, that is why many of them have texts in Italian and other foreign languages on their business websites, where software and web-design solutions can help avoid the multilingual noise in the public space.

I think Italian should also be on the tourist info boards because our history has been closely connected to Italians, even since the Venetian times, and because we have been entwined with them in the past, so I think every Italian would find it interesting to read about that, I think they would find it more interesting. It seems to me that tourists who come from Germany or Italy, if they can't understand English, they will be deprived of that information. I think it would be ok to have the text translated into more languages (Interview 3, August 2019).

One of newcomers in Zadar in this context is the ice cream shop *Aroma*, which belongs to a recently established and quickly-growing chain of ice cream shops on the Croatian coast, whose name at the first sight might appear to be Italian, because visually it could also be read as 'A Roma', when one sees the name on the shop window (Figure 14). When I asked one of the company representatives how they chose the name for the business, they told me that «the owners wanted the name to sound Italian and have a connection with tasty food», and the word 'aroma' satisfied both those criteria (*Informal conversation*, June 2025).

Figure 14. *Gelato shop 'Aroma' in Zadar*



Two interviewees from the group of decision makers expressed their opinion that Italian was sufficiently present in the LL and that it, from the perspective of societal relevance, follows Croatian and English. This is in line with the finding that all official LL signs in Zadar are exclusively in Croatian, although in some situations, according to several of my interviewees, it would be practical to have them in foreign languages, considering the importance of tourism in the economy of Zadar.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The presented analysis shows that the linguistic landscape of Zadar is in an ongoing flux and that the present moment has been strongly influenced by tourism as the most important economic activity in the area, in line with the previous studies (Oštarić, 2020, 2022, 2024). Tourism is still the main driving force in the linguistic landscape of Zadar; therefore, the inhabitants of Zadar have adapted to that situation and on their LL signs they use Croatian and/or English, since those two languages are at the moment the two most useful languages in economic terms, allowing effective communication with the highest number of visitors. Since English has become the most important resource among all foreign languages, those other languages, and especially traditional languages of tourism in Croatia (German and Italian), were demoted and are not used in the linguistic landscape as they used to be in the 20th century. The cause of these changes is not tourism itself, but the transformation of the type of tourism. From a European-based phenomenon, the tourism in Zadar has become global; for such a tourism, traditional European languages have no use and thus are less used in the linguistic landscape.

Italian is still present in the LL of Zadar; in terms of the number of LL signs, it holds the third position, following Croatian and English. However, when we analyse the LL signs in Italian, we can conclude that the purpose of Italian on those signs is not to inform passers-by; on contrary, it is generally symbolic – Italian is present on advertisements and in trademarks, where it has the function of endowing the sign-holder with the positive symbolic values attached to Italian origin. Informative signs in Italian are present in front of the building where the Italian Community in Zadar has their seat, and on notifications and posters of Dante Alighieri Cultural Association, both catering for Italians who reside in Zadar. In the context of bars and restaurants, Italian is expected to link the local offer with the globally recognized Italian cuisine, while in trademarks, especially in clothing, the use of Italian evokes the distinguished style and elegance. One domain in which an increase in the use of Italian has been noted since 2018 is the food and beverage sector – many recently open restaurants and ice cream shops bear Italian names and there have been signs that the trend will continue in the future. This is in line with a previous study, which identified a quarter of restaurants and bars bearing Italian names in Zadar, with many others bearing a Croatian dialectal name that has Romance etymology (Bilandžija, 2023). However, those entities use Italian only in their names – their advertisements and other LL signs on storefronts are usually in English, or Croatian.

Furthermore, the interviewees' accounts point to the conclusion that Italian holds a specific position in the LL of Zadar, especially because of Italian tourists who, according to interviewees, sometimes experience difficulties in communicating in other languages. Italian certainly is an important language of tourism in Zadar, and it would be even more visible in

the LL but based on the presented data it is clear that English has pushed it out of the linguistic landscape, together with German and other European languages. Likewise, one could hypothesise that Italian may return to the linguistic landscape in a possible future in which Italian tourists would once again become economically more significant for tourism in Zadar. Indeed, economic reasons drive the changes in the linguistic landscape and presently English is economically the most useful resource in this global type of tourism.

Finally, considering the research findings in relation to the overall diachronic picture of the presence of Italian in the linguistic landscape of Zadar, we can conclude that Italian has become a significant source of names for restaurants and bars. However, it has almost entirely lost its informative function in written communication with Italian tourists. As times change, so do the written language practices in the public space, creating a diverse linguistic landscape.

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