Linguistic landscapes in Southern Carinthia (Austria)

This paper explores the linguistic landscape (LL) in the southern Austrian province of Carinthia, which is home to an autochthonous Slovene minority. Following several decades of political and legal debate known as the *Ortstafelstreit* ('dispute of topographic signs'), recent legislation has strengthened the status of Slovene by requiring municipalities with a considerable Slovene population to set up bilingual German-Slovene topographic signs marking their municipal boundaries. However, this is juxtaposed with a longstanding decline in use of the Slovene language amongst the autochthonous Slovene population. This qualitative analysis of the LL of three frames, the civic, the commercial, and the church, shows a heterogeneous picture, but one that is generally strongly skewed towards monolingual German. It suggests that Slovene is assigned a comparatively low sociosymbolic value. This can, at least in part, attributed to the selective manner in which municipalities are awarded legal bilingual status, leading to a lack of linguistic cohesion in the area and its LL. A marked exception to this is the church frame, whose linguistic landscape is characterised by a relatively balanced use of both German and Slovene.

Keywords: linguistic landscapes; Slovene; Carinthia; Austria; autochthonous; minority

# 1. Introduction

This paper explores the linguistic landscape (henceforth LL) in the province of Carinthia in the south of Austria, which is home to an autochthonous minority of Slovenes. In front of a backdrop of long-standing social and political tensions with regard to the linguistic situation in the area, as well as recent changes in legislation, this study focuses on how the LL in three different frames reflects the bilingual character of the region.

The study of LLs, 'the visibility and salience of language on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region' (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 23) has seen an increase in popularity over the last decade. In their 1997 paper which is often considered the starting point of LL research, Landry and Bourhis set out the argument that signs function as both information and symbolic markers; and they are among the first to propose the symbolic function the LL plays in multilingual settings, suggesting that the visual presence of a language positively contributes to the perception of the ethnolinguistic vitality of its group of speakers (Landry and Bourhis 1997). In the context of minority languages, Cenoz and Gorter (2006) put forward the idea that LLs and sociolinguistic context are in a bidirectional relationship to each other, whereby LLs reflect power and status but also contribute to the construction of it; and idea also supported Ben-Rafael et al. (2006). They suggest that LLs have 'crucial sociosymbolic importance as it actually identifies - and thus serves as the emblem of societies, communities and regions' (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 8).

The current study surveys an area whose linguistic landscape has not previously been under investigation, and also expands the field of LL by moving from an urban to a rural setting, which poses particular methodological challenges.

# 2. Historic, demographic and linguistic background

The geographic focus of this study is the *Rosental* (‘Valley of Roses’, Slovene *Rož*) in the southernmost part of Carinthia, running in parallel to the Karavanke mountains, which form the physical border between the Republic of Austria in the north, and the Republic of Slovenia to the south. Around 40 kilometres in length, the Rosental is one of the three main settlements areas of Carinthia’s Slovenes, the others being the *Gailtal* (‘Valley of the river Gail'; Slov. *Ziljska dolina*) in the West, and the *Jauntal* (Slov. *Podjuna*, from the ancient Roman settlement of *juenna*, see Schroll (1870)) to the East.

With the origin of the Slovene settlement in the province tracing back to the sixth and seventh centuries (Priestly 1997), the social and political situation of Carinthia's Slovenes has historically been a problematic one: 'Intra-national exclusion inside state boundaries – in this case towards the Slovene minority – has a long tradition in Carinthia' (Wodak and De Cillia 2009: 82-83), with fault lines running along ethnic, but also linguistic boundaries. According to Bruckmüller, in today’s Austria, notions and perceptions of regional and provincial identities are strong and have preceded those of the nation state (Bruckmüller 1996), with language playing a crucial role in the process of identity creation (Wodak and De Cillia 2009).

The Carinthian plebiscite (*Volksabstimmung*) on 10 October 1920 saw the province being made part of the Republic of Austria, as opposed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, with severe consequences for the autochthonous Slovenes: 'after 1920 [Carinthia's autochthonous Slovenes] were politically separated from the other Slovenes by the border between the First Austrian Republic and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes' (Priestly 1997: 76). Fiddler (2005) refers to the 'extremely fraught nature of the history of cultural conflict and differentiation in the region' (2005: 196) and suggests that 'there can be no doubt that 10 October 1920 continues to function as part of the "narrative" of Carinthia’s *regional* and Austria’s *national* identity' (ibid: 197, original emphasis).

On the surface, the Slovene minority is embedded in what appears to be a supportive environment (Priestly 1999): article 7 of the Austrian State Treaty from 1955 provides substantial minority rights for both autochthonous Slovene and Croat minorities in the Austrian provinces of Carinthia, Burgenland and Styria:

1. Austrian nationals of the Slovene [...] minorities in Carinthia [...] shall enjoy the same rights on equal terms as all other Austrian nationals, including the right to their own organizations, meetings and press in their own language.

2. They are entitled to elementary instruction in the Slovene [...] language and to a proportional number of their own secondary schools; [...]

3. In the administrative and judicial districts of Carinthia [...] where there are Slovene, Croat or mixed populations, the Slovene or Croat language shall be accepted as an official language in addition to German. In such districts topographical terminology and inscriptions shall be in the Slovene or Croat language as well as in German.

4. Austrian nationals of the Slovene and Croat minorities in Carinthia [...] shall participate in the cultural, administrative and judicial systems in these territories on equal terms with other Austrian nationals.

5. The activity of organizations whose aim is to deprive the Croat or Slovene population of their minority character or rights shall be prohibited.

(Volksgruppengesetz 1955)

It is to note here that Giles et al.’s concept of ethnolinguistic vitality, which underpins much of the earlier work on LLs, identifies institutional support and status as two of the key factors in determining the ethnolinguistic vitality of a group, together with demographic factors (Giles et al. 1977); Bratt Paulston et al. (2007) suggest relatively good institutional support mechanisms, particularly in the area of education and the church. As such, the constitutionally anchored status and support which the Slovene minority receives would suggest a positive effect on ethnolinguistic vitality. Grin and Moring (2002) in their study of minority languages within the EU assign Slovenian in Austria a GIDS score[[1]](#endnote-1) (Fishman 1991) of 4, indicating that ‘at this point the minority language gains some official recognition and becomes part of mainstream formal education’ (Nic Craith 2006: 70).

It is, of course, the rights pertaining to language that are of key interest for this paper. The linguistic situation in Carinthia is a complex one, with four linguistic varieties existing in parallel: Standard (Austrian) German, Dialect German (*Kärtnerdeutsch*/'Carinthian German’), as well as Standard and Dialect Slovene (Priestly 2003), whereby the latter is characterised by extreme dialect diversity (Priestly 1988). Varying levels of Slovene language use, and indeed proficiency, add to the heterogeneity of the situation.

The number of Slovene speakers in Carinthia has seen a dramatic decline since the 19th century 'from more than 100,000 in 1880 to approximately 82,000 in 1910' (Smejkalová 2007: 35). According to the 2001 census, 14,010 people reported to use Slovene as their 'habitual' or 'vernacular language' (*'Umgangsprache'*), a proportion of 2.50% of the entire Carinthian population; of those, 12,554 (2.38%) are Austrian citizens (Statistik Austria 2003). On the surface, it seems reasonable to assume that these Slovene-speaking Austrians constitute the autochthonous group of Slovenes. Yet, those declaring Slovene as their habitual language and who fall within the 'Austrian' category in terms of nationality may also include Slovenia-born Slovenes who acquired Austrian citizenship later in life. The assumption that those Austrians declaring Slovene as their habitual language are autochthonous Slovenes is a reasonable one, given the geographic and socio-historic context, but there are inevitably issues with regard to accuracy of data.

This problem has been widely acknowledged: since their introduction in the late nineteenth century, census questions and subsequent figures regarding the number of speakers of a particular language have been subject to considerable debate, as discussed comprehensively by Arel (2002). Reiterer (2004) suggests that any attempt to count speakers of a language is inadequate as it reveals little about actual language use; rather, according to Reiterer, questions about language are often understood as questions pertaining to ethnic affiliation and are hence questions of loyalty and solidarity towards (the own) ethnic group. Within the Carinthian context, this plays an important role, as will be discussed below. The Association of Carinthian Slovenes suggests that in 'South Carinthia there are more than 40,000 inhabitants who speak fluently or have a basic knowledge of the spoken or written Slovenian language.' (<http://www.mzz.gov.si/en/slovenian_minorities/association_of_carinthian_slovenians/>; accessed 19/11/2013). Reiterer, based on a representative survey, proposes that up to 60,000 speakers may have some level of proficiency in the Slovene language, but also unearths a marked degree of age-grading: ‘[t]he competence in Slovene decreases considerably if we go from the older people to the younger ones’ (Reiterer 2003: 7). Other sources report similar numbers (Istenič 2013), although the distinction between autochthonous (ethnic) Slovenes and those who simply speak the language to some extent is blurred at best.

As is discussed later on in this paper, language policy in Austria is largely driven by official census data, and the implementation of policies pertaining to linguistic minorities, in this case bilingual signage, is determined by speaker numbers: a community is considered 'bilingual' once a certain number of speakers has been reached. As such, accuracy of data, or lack thereof, can result in severe consequences for the minority affected, and Reiterer claims that language censuses are not mere administrative but also political acts which, in the worst case, can be used as 'weapons' (2004: 26).

Linguistic heterogeneity occurs in the geographic dimension also; Priestly suggests that ‘Cities vary markedly from villages; some districts are much more Germanized than others; [...] Moreover, some localities are linguistically much more stable than others’ (Priestly 1989: 80). Yet, research over the last decades has repeatedly shown decreasing levels of Slovene use and proficiency, and Busch reports that ‘language shift from Slovenian to German in Carinthia occurred with surprising speed’ (Busch 2001: 121), with large parts of the settlement areas being almost completely Germanized by the late 1990s (Priestly 1999). Almost twenty years ago, Maurer-Lausegger (1995) in her study on the habitual language use of Carinthian Slovenes concluded that ‘the social communicative function of Slovene has decreased sharply in most villages, leading to a massive decline in linguistic competence among adolescence and children in particular’ and Slovene ‘at best can only be used by identity-conscious bilingual speakers in closed circles’ (Maurer-Lausegger 1995: 91); and most other studies have suggested that Slovene-use takes place predominantly within the family domain and activities associated with the church – an aspect that will be discussed later on in this paper. Similarly, Reiterer's more recent data indicates that even ethnic Slovene are likely to be more proficient in German than in the language of their ethnic group (2003.). This very limited use of Slovene suggests the relatively low ‘market value’ (Busch 2001: 122) the language has as a symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1991) within the region, and this is in stark contrast the constitutionally enshrined position of the language. Yet, in a more recent paper, Busch and Doleschal (2008: 9-10) observe a development whereby increasing numbers of non-Slovenes (learn to) speak Slovene, indicating a change in attitudes towards the language in Carinthia; and increasing border-crossing mobility after Slovenia's EU accession in 2004 has led to Slovenian Slovenes commute to work to Carinthia, or settle there for work or education. Within this context, Busch and Doleschal suggest an increase in the attraction of the Slovene language as a 'bridge to other Slavic languages'[[2]](#endnote-2) (2008: 19) and the expanding economic area of Southern Europe. Similarly, Bratt Paulston et al. argue that

 'Slovenia’s entrance in the EU in 2004 may buttress the symbolic and communicative value of the Slovene language in the region, and thus positively contribute to the long-standing Slovene battle for language maintenance in Austria.' (2007: 396)

The fact that language and ethnic identity are closely linked has been well documented in sociolinguistic research (Fishman and García 2010; Fought 2006; Gumperz 1982; Omoniyi and White 2006; *inter alia*), and this relationship carries considerable importance in the Carinthian context. The link between language – both Austrian German and Slovene – and their respective ethnic and regional identities is well pronounced (Busch 2001), so much so that ‘language is *unquestionably* assumes to symbolise ethnicity’ (Priestly 1989: 79, original emphasis). Barbour (2000) and Wodak and De Cillia (2009) suggest that this link is particularly strong with reference to Austrian German as an indicator of Austrian, but in particular *Carinthian* identity (Flaschberger and Reiterer 1980; Reiterer 2003), whereby for German Carinthians (the *Deutschkärntner*)*,* being a native speaker of German indexes Carinthian-ness, hence placing considerable emphasis on regional identity. Interestingly, Wodak and De Cillia illustrate how some Carinthian Slovenes consider themselves *Austrian* but ‘non-genuine *Carinthians*’ (2009: 177, my emphasis), inidacting a division between a regional identity based on cultural (and linguistic) heritage, and national identity based on citizenship. Analogously, amongst the German speaking population, there are strongly negative attitudes to speakers of other languages, including indigenous Slovenes (Barbour 2000).

This demarcation between ethnic/regional and linguistic communities points to the ethnosymbolic value in particular the German language holds in this process of establishing boundaries between groups occupying the same territory. Nowhere has this become more evident than in what has become known as the *Ortstafelstreit* (‘dispute of topographic signs’). The *Volksgruppengesetz* (see above) holds that in districts with autochthonous Slovene (or in case of the Burgenland, Croat) minorities, ‘topographical terminology and inscriptions shall be in the Slovene [...] as well as in German’. This in particular pertains to the *Ortstafeln*, topographic signs that mark the beginning and end of a municipality. The forceful taking down of those bilingual German/Slovene *Ortstafeln* in 1972 by those German Austrians opposed to bilingual signage, known as *Ortstafelsturm* (‘assault on the topographic signs’), triggered what has become known as the *Ortstafelfrage* (‘question of the topographic signs’), which remained a contentious issue in Carinthia’s political and social life for more than three decades (Gully 2011): should topographic signs marking municipal boundaries be monolingual German, or bilingual German/Slovene? The debate escalated when in 2001 Austria’s Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional a threshold according to which the minority group needed to constitute at least 25 per cent of the population to warrant bilingual signage (Reiterer 2003), leading to a fierce public debate around minority rights, fuelled by the then provincial government surrounding the right-wing provincial governor Jörg Haider. In addition, the creation of the Republic of Slovenia in 1991 and its accession of the European Union in 2004 saw ‘skirmishes on the level of symbolic representation’ (Fiddler 2005: 202) – an escalation of the issue of topographic signage, but also minority language issues in general – and patriotic organisation such as the *Kärntner Heimatdienst* promoting fear against migration post-EU accession (ibid.) – with the Slovene minority as a key target.

Following a range of developments in the first decade of this millennium, in 2011 the provincial government signed a memorandum – followed by a plebiscite – which saw bilingual signs installed in 164 municipalities and their constituent cadastral communities where the proportion of the Slovene minority is considered significant (Landesregierung Kärnten 2011) and constitutes around 17.5% of the overall population. It also assigns Slovene the status of official language, besides German, in some municipalities in the area, and, in an effort to support the Slovene cultural life, highlights the 'central importance' of the Slovene music school (*Glasbena Šola*), which, in part, is financed by the provincial government (ibid.)

# 3. Methodological considerations

The most striking difference between the current and most of the previous studies on LLs is its rural setting: the urban environment is, by default, one that is characterised by a high density of linguistic and other signs, from advertisements to road signs to graffiti, and the linguistic landscape is an integral part of the modern cityscape, as illustrated so well in the chapters in Shohamy, Ben-Rafael and Barni’s (2010) volume. The rural environment of this study means that the number of signs is considerably lower: even in the centres of the municipalities under investigation here, sign density bears no resemblance to that of large cities such as Tokyo (Backhaus 2006, 2007), Jerusalem (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006), Hong Kong (Lai 2013), or Bangkok (Huebner 2006). Kallen and Ni Dhonnacha (2010) argue with reference to a comparison between urban and rural LLs that 'urban environments [...] are especially conducive to the development of signage that reflects debates of nationhood and national identity' (Kallen and Ni Dhonnacha 2010: 22). Yet, the rural LL of this study exists in front of a backdrop where, as outlined above, language and regional/national and ethnic identity seem intrinsically linked, and strongly so; as such, one would assume that issues of national, ethnic, or indeed ethnolinguistic identity are observable in the LL of the current context, too, albeit less pronounced as a result of generally more sparse signage.

The current study does not claim to be a comprehensive discussion of Carinthia's linguistic landscape; rather, it is a snapshot of a particular area: one where the proportion of Slovene speakers is markedly higher than in the rest of the province. Assuming that the linguistic landscape is at least in part influenced by the number of speakers of Slovene, and the low absolute number of speakers overall in general, again a problem that arises from the rural setting, three municipalities in the Rosental with the highest proportion of Slovene speakers and which are legally defined as bilingual communities were selected for the core sample; as discussed above, census data allows for the separation of nationality and vernacular language and hence, to an extent, the identification of autochthonous Slovenes, as opposed to Slovenes from Slovenia. In reality, the difference between autochthonous and other Slovenes is marginal.

Across the three municipalities surveyed in this study, there are 1227 Slovene speakers, 1163 of them autochthonous (based on the assumptions laid out above), amounting to around 10% of all Carinthian Slovenes. The three municipalities selected have by no means the highest absolute number of Slovene speakers: the district of Völkermarkt with its 13 constituent municipalities contains the largest number of Slovene speakers (5920/13.59% Slovene speakers, 5742/13.18% autochthonous) of any administrative districts, while the largest number of Slovene speakers in an individual municipality lives in the city of Klagenfurt (Slov. *Celovec*) with 1722/1.91% (1303/1.45%) speakers. However, with a mean proportion of Slovene speakers of 14.08% (13.38% autochthonous), the proportion of Slovene speakers in the selected municipalities is markedly higher than elsewhere in the province (see appendix for overview). In demographic terms, they are the most 'Slovenian'.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Location | All inhabitants | all Slovene speakers | autochthonous Slovenespeakers |
| Feistritz (Slovene *Bistrica v Rožu*) | 2707 | 360(13.3%) | 339(12.52%) |
| St. Jakob (*Šentjakob v Rožu*) | 4467 | 733(16.41%) | 694(15.54%) |
| St Margareten (*Šmarjeta v Rožu*) | 1133 | 134(11.83%) | 130(11.47%) |
| Total | 8307 | 1227 | 1163 |
| Mean |  | 14.08% | 13.38% |

Table 1: distribution of population (Source: Census 2001)

Using a digital camera and a mobile phone with an inbuilt camera, as well as field notes, data was collected over the period of three days in June 2013. Due to the relatively wide geographic spread of the fieldwork area, data collection focused on sites that showed a higher density of signs, such as village squares, the areas around the church and village hall but also included examples away from the centres. Kaučič-Baša’s study on the autochthonous Slovene minority in the province of Trieste in northern Italy found a distinct lack of linguistic signs in Slovene, ‘the area is almost totally unequipped with written notices (place-names and traffic signs, public notices of any kind, and other types of written public communication) in Slovene.’ (Kaučič-Baša 1997: 55). Topographic signs, discussed below, aside, the situation was not dissimilar in the Rosental.

An initial screening of the area showed the highest proportion of signs in the municipality of St. Jakob/ Šentjakob and its cadastral communities (German *Kastralgemeinden*: smaller villages and hamlets that make up larger municipal units), one of the largest of the official bilingual municipalities in the Rosental, with a comparatively large number of signs, and a large part of the data discussed here comes from St. Jakob/ Šentjakob. The low overall number of signs rules out a quantitative analysis, and like Kallen's Dublin study (Kallen 2010), the aim here is not to provide a comprehensive picture but one that highlights the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the LL across a variety of domains or frames.

While earlier work on LLs has often employed directional, spatial or hierarchical metaphors to describe relationships within LLs - 'top-down/official' versus 'bottom-up/private' (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006) being the most frequent one - I will adopt the notion of frames in this paper. Based in the tradition of Symbolic Interactionism, which considers social life as 'the interaction of humans via the use of symbols' (Jones, Le Boutillier and Bradbury 2011: 105), signs within the linguistic landscape, and their interpretation, are in a relationship that is bidirectional: signs are made by users (or at least by some of them) but also shape users' experience of the world. The notion of frames, as developed by Goffman refers to how 'definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events [...] and our subjective involvement in them' (1986: 10-11). Such principles of organization may be hierarchical top-down/bottom-up (and in particular with reference to topographic signs, this is undoubtedly the case in the Carinthian context) but are not necessarily, let alone conclusively though. Rather, like Kallen, I consider the LL as a 'confluence of systems' (Kallen 2010: 42) where individual frames operate with some degree of autonomy but also interdependence.

In adaptation of Kallen's (2010) analytic framework, the discussion of the LL that follows will focus on three distinct frames: the civic frame, which most closely relates to the top-down/official approach; the commercial frame, referring to those parts of the physical and linguistic landscape where goods are exchanged; and, as a sub-category of Kallen's community frame, the frame of the church, which, as will be shown, plays a particular role in the current context.

# 4. Linguistic landscapes

## 4.1 Civic frame: Topographic and official road signs

Two years after the passing of the new legislation, the installation of bilingual signs has been fully implemented: along the Rosental, topographic signs marking boundaries (sign type 17a and 17b of the Austrian Highway Code, *'Strassenverkehrsordnung' StVO*) of the 164 municipalities listed in the memorandum and the law show both the German and Slovene names, with the former being on top of the other, but in equal font type and size (figures 1 and 2). Where a municipality is sub-divided into smaller villages or hamlets (cadastral communities, as is common in Austria), topographic signs demarking those are bilingual, too, if the village is listed as bilingual (see fig. 3). As such, the bilingual nature of these communities becomes visible from the point of entering them, and the visual and linguistic representation of the name of a community becomes emblematic for its bilingual character (Sloboda et al. 2012: 10). Jordan refers to the symbolic value of bilingual signs as a visual indicator for the presence of a linguistic group, and the impact this cultural (and linguistic) landscape has on the creation of group identity (Jordan 2004: 216); considering the historic development in the current context as discussed above, this visual indication of the presence of the Slovene minority plays a crucial role in the creation and perception of identity both minority and majority group. However, notably, the strap line of the sign in figure 1 (*gesunde gemeinde*, ‘healthy community’) appears in German only: the bilingual character of this two-sign unit only applies to the toponym and hence the 'official' part of the sign, not to the character of the entire sign. As a result, the unit indexes the bilinguality of the community only from a legislative point of view (the civic frame), but does not include the more advertising-oriented self-portrayal of it (the commercial frame). As such, this sign illustrates the confluence of two frames (civic and commercial), with each constituent part (and frame) demonstrating different linguistic practices.

The legal complexities surrounding bilingual signage is mirrored by signage giving directions, where we find considerable diversity: the sign in figure 4 provides directions (type 13a of the highway code), but only those communities listed as the official 164 bilingual communities are referred to bilingually: *St. Jakob/Šentjakob* and *St.Peter/ Šentpeter* appear in both German and Slovene,while *Ferlach* (Slov. *Borovlje*)*,* the largest town in the Rosental with a Slovene minority of around 8%, is not considered bilingual community by law and accordingly appears in monolingual German only - both on the directional sign and the topographic sign marking its borders (figures 4 and 5). However, some of Ferlach's cadastral communities which are classified as bilingual are marked by bilingual signage.

Within communities, signs pointing to public institutions, such as schools, hospitals or police stations, where one would assume another top-down approach, vary, and the picture is one of heterogeneity, albeit one skewed strongly towards the use of German. Signs pointing to religious institutions, that is, the local Catholic parish church and parish office, are almost exclusively bilingual; I will discuss the close link between the church and the Slovene language in section 4.3. Signs pointing to the municipal office (‘*Gemeindeamt’*/ ’*Občinski urad*’) may but more often than not do not appear bilingually, as illustrated in figure 6, which jointly points to the municipal office as well as the local cultural centre ('*Kulturhaus*') and bowling alley ('Kegelbahn'). With reference to the support of the Slovene cultural life laid out in the memorandum, as discussed above, it is noticeable that despite being a 'public' sign to a municipal cultural institution, it remains in monolingual German. That is, the civic frame with regard to signposting is not a homogeneous one: bilingual is only what is legally defined and required, that is, toponyms on topographic signs indicating municipal boundaries as well as those on main directional signs (types 13a and b, and 17 of the highway code; figures 1-5), but does not extend to other parts of the frame such as signs to destinations within a community (type 13d; figures 6 and 7), despite the fact that all are governed by the highway code and are hence 'top-down' signs - as opposed to, for examples, signs to commercial enterprises as discussed below.

 A similarly striking example also comes from St. Jakob/Šentjakob, where a monolingual German sign points to the local public/state secondary school (‘Hauptschule’; figure 7), although the school itself prides itself to have a focus on language education and includes the Slovene language as a compulsory subject (Hauptschule St. Jakob, http://www.hs-st-jakob.ksn.at/, accessed 05/01/2014). As such, there is a marked contrast in the way different frames and associated linguistic practices affect the same institution. In addition, these examples demonstrate the interaction - or competition - of separate frames operating within the same sign: official road signs (as opposed to signpost of a private nature, as discussed below) belong firmly in the civic frame, that is, are state-regulated, yet point to institutions that could broadly be defined as falling into the community frame - those supporting a variety of communities of practice in the community (Kallen 2010). Their monolingual German character, however, targets and indexes a particular part of the community only, even if the institution itself, as is explicitly the case in the example of the school, adopts a bilingual character.

The above is well within the legal framework: the legislation pertaining to bilingual topographic signs ‘concerns only official place-name signs and signposts’ (Parlamentskorrespondenz Nr. 693. 2011, my translation), that is, type 13a, b and 17 signs, but ‘[n]ot included are references to the municipal office, maps, street names and trail signage’ (ibid.).[[3]](#endnote-3) Yet, the law grants municipalities the right to extend the use of bilingual signs beyond these requirements (ibid.).[[4]](#endnote-4) The current context here, however, only shows a minimal implementation of the law – bilingual is only what legally must be bilingual, the remainder remains monolingual German only.

All other road (traffic) signs, for example those indicating road works (‘*Baustelle’*), damaged roads (‘*Strassenschäden’*) or those giving instructions (*'Abschleppzone'*, 'tow-away zone') appear exclusively in monolingual German. Unlike contexts such as the Welsh, where all road signs appear bilingually, be they topographic markers, warnings or other signs, the situation here is one of specific political selection.

This complex situation whereby bilingual status is negotiated and politically (and legally) agreed upon, and, ultimately, visually reflected and indicated, demonstrates a ‘top-down’ approach whereby the LL is determined by the state . The Slovene minority is indicated not because of its mere presence, but because of the result of protracted political tug-of-war spanning several decades. This is, of course, by no means unusual, but here, as a result, the situation within a comparatively small geographic area is one of great heterogeneity, whereby neighbouring villages may have different signage, and where even constituent parts of a larger municipality may show differences in signage based on whether or not they are classified bilingual. Within municipalities, there is little evidence of an institutionalised bilingualism of the LL beyond the minimum legal requirements. The superficially supportive picture that is painted by both the Volksgruppengesetz and the law on topographic signs is not one that creates coherence but fragmentation.

## 4.2 Commercial frame

The second domain identified here can be broadly defined as ‘commercial’ and includes those activities and institutions where the transfer of (material) goods takes place: shops, restaurants, service providers etc. The commercial frame is a potentially interesting one, as it marks the convergence of both linguistic-symbolic and actual capital: Rosendal's study on language use in advertising in Rwanda has shown clear linguistic preferences with regard to language choice (Rosendal 2009); and having analysed the language used in commercial signs in Senegal, Shiohata (2012) concludes that shopkeepers increasingly use the indigenous language in favour of French as 'they wanted their potential patrons to understand the messages they sent by using a language more familiar to them' (Shiohata 2012: 282). In the context of the Rosental, unlike the civic-topographic frame, there is no legislation with regard to the linguistic appearance of signs, so it would not be unreasonable to assume that it is, at least in part, market-driven. Yet, here the analysis of the LL of the commercial frame shows one of comparative homogeneity: the vast majority of signs are monolingual German. This includes signs on shops and in shop windows as well as signposts to shops, supermarkets and local farmers markets (figure 8).

A marked exception are signs pertaining to the local branches of the *Kreditbank/Posojilnica* bank (a financial institution based on a traditional rural credit cooperative of the *Raiffeisen* type), whose buildings are labelled in both German and Slovene, as are the signs pointing towards its branches, reflecting the bilingual character of the organisation (figures 9a and 9b), which is also mirrored on their associated websites (http://www.pobo.at/). Other banks appear in monolingual German only.

Within the commercial frame, there are instances of signage that is not only bi- but multilingual: the signpost to a local veterinary surgery (figure 10) appears in German (*Tierärztin*, typographically the most dominant), but also Slovene (*zivinozdravnica*) and Italian (*veterinario*). The sign pointing to the local human physician some 200 metres up the road, however, appears in monolingual German (*Arzt*) only (figure 11).

Similarly, several advertisements for a local restaurant (in a non-listed municipality) appear in trilingual German, Slovene and Italian (figure 12a); the restaurant's menu is quadrilingual and also includes English (figure 12b). Large hotels aside, the majority of small establishments and other commercial organisations are characterised by monolingual German signs.

At the intersection between the civic and the commercial frame lies the *ÖBB Postbus* - the public bus services owned and operated by Austria's national rail service *ÖBB* (*Österreichische Bundesbahn*, 'Austrian Federal Railways'). Legislation explicitly excludes the ÖBB from the bilingual requirement, but, as with topographic signs, allows for the option (Parlamentskorrespondenz Nr. 693. 2011). However, all public documentation, such as timetables (figure 13), appear in monolingual German throughout the region; and this includes all toponyms even for officially bilingual communities. As with signs discussed under the civic frame, bilingualism is not supported unless legally required - which in this case it is explicitly not.

## 4.3 Community frame: The Church

Across the literature, the role the Slovene language plays in the Catholic Church and religious practice in the region has been discussed extensively, with Busch (2001: 122) summarising that ‘A domain in which Slovenian is still functional to a high degree is the [Catholic] church with its related social activities’. My own unsystematic observations of religious services in the region – funerals and masses – show a relatively balanced use of both German and Slovene as the languages of liturgy, with those attending moving between the two languages throughout the service; and it seems that this is true across different age groups. Williams reports that ‘[i]n around 80 per cent of the parishes, both German and Slovene are used side by side (2005: 115). That is, the congregation takes the form of a Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), 'an aggregate of people who, united by a common enterprise, develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, and values – in short, practices' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999: 186).

The bilingual nature of the church is reflected in the LL, too: signs within the church frame are almost always bilingual German/Slovene, and more often than not showing duplication (Reh 2005) - identical messages being displayed in both languages. This includes signposts towards local churches (*Pfarrkirche*/*Farna cerkev*; figure 9a) and parish offices (*Pfarramt*/župnišče; figure 14) as well as signs displayed on church institutions (figure 15). The church frame is also the only one in which the order of languages on bilingual signs appears randomly: whereas in the civic and the commercial frame, German is the predominant one, appearing always first, within the church frame either Slovene or German can appear first.

A display board at the local parish church of St. Jakob/Šentjakob shows announcements in monolingual German, monolingual Slovene, as well as bilingual announcements (figures 16 a and b). Announcements of mass and other services are almost always bilingual across the area. Another brief detour into the digital landscape of the internet mirrors this picture: websites of dioceses and parishes with a large Slovene minority appear in bilingual German and Slovene, those without appear in monolingual German (Katholische Kirche Kärnten, http://www.kath-kirche-kaernten.at/pfarren; accessed 06/01/2014).

Therefore, it could be argued that with the comparative homogeneity of linguistic practices, in the form of an institutionalised (in the non-legal but practice-based sense) bilingualism, the church frame functions somewhat independently from the other frames: neither based on legal obligations nor commercial interest, it operates as a self-regulating entity that gives equal treatment to both languages.

# 5. Conclusions

This study set out to explore the linguistic landscape in the bilingual German/Slovene region of Carinthia in southern Austria. One of the main aims was to establish how the LL is shaped, following several decades of social and political debate on the issue of bilingualism in the area, comparatively recent legislation with regard to the status and visible presence of the Slovene language, but also a continuing shift away from Slovene amongst its own autochthonous speakers.

The picture that emerged is one in which the Slovene language, at least with reference to its visible presence in the LL, plays a minor role. While the area has seen the full implementation of the legislation pertaining to bilingual topographic signs of a particular type (namely those marking municipal boundaries and main directional signs), outside this frame - or sub-frame rather - Slovene has little visible presence, even though the legal framework allows for it. This is, in part, an artefact of the geographic context and the low density of signs in the first instance, compared to studies investigating urban environments: a low overall number of signs results in a lower probability for signs in the minority language to be present. Yet, the findings raise interesting issues: based on the assumption that the visible presence of a language contributes positively to its ethnolinguistic vitality (Landry and Bourhis 1997) and the bidirectional relationship between LL and sociolinguistic context (Cenoz and Gorter 2006), what we find here is not only the low sociosymbolic value Slovene seems to be assigned. With institutional support being one key factor in the framework of ethnolinguistic vitality, this would suggest a low ethnolinguistic vitality of Slovene in particular when taking into account a general shift away from the language amongst its autochthonous speakers, as discussed above. More recent developments may indicate trends that point towards an increase in Slovene use and more positive perception, yet, this is generally not reflected in the LL.

This is in marked opposition to the frame of the church: operating as what seems an independent frame, both languages are assigned equal status in both outward practices, in the form of signs, but also inward, in the form of linguistic practices during liturgy. Along similar lines, within the commercial frame, it is only the *Kreditbank/Posojilnica* that operates bilingually. Within the concept of framing, this suggests a clear 'enactment of spatialized practices' (Collins and Slembrouck 2007: 5) within both institutions.

I would argue that the LL in the civic and commercial frames is in part a result of the selective assignment of status the legislative framework employs: the fact that only selected municipalities (or communities within larger municipalities) are assigned bilingual status leads to a lack of cohesion in the LL. As LLs are about 'the visibility and salience of language on public and commercial signs in a given territory of region' (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 23), the low overall sign density and geographic fragmentation through legislation leads to a lack of both visibility and salience. The church, working 'outside' these processes, shows a different picture altogether, forming an independent frame characterised by bilingual practices.

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# List of figure captions

Figure 1 Bilingual topographic sign marking municipal boundary

Figure 2 Bilingual topographic sign marking municipal boundary

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Figure 4 Directional sign

Figure 5 Monolingual German topographic sign marking municipal boundary

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Figure 7 Monolingual signpost to bilingual school

Figure 8 Monolingual signpost to market

Figure 9a Signpost displaying both mono- and bilingual signs

Figure 9b Bilingual signage on bank building

Figure 10 Trilingual signpost

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Figure 15 Bilingual sign on building: Slovene fronted

Figure 16a Monolingual (left) and bilingual (right) advertisements

Figure 16b Monolingual advertisements

1. Graded intergenerational disruption scale [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. 'Slowenisch wird zunehmend als eine Bruecke zu anderen slawischen Sprachen gesehen.' [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. ‘Die Verpflichtung zu zweisprachigen topographischen Bezeichnungen in den im Gesetz festgelegten Gebieten Kärntens und des Burgenlands betrifft ausschließlich Ortstafeln und offizielle Wegweiser betrifft. Nicht umfasst sind demnach etwa Hinweise auf das Gemeindeamt, Landkarten, Straßennamen und Wanderweg-Beschilderungen.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. ‘Gemeinden haben allerdings das Recht, über die Vorgaben des Volksgruppengesetzes hinaus auch weitere zweisprachige Ortsbezeichnungen bzw. andere topographische Aufschriften anzubringen.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-4)