# Polycentricity of Linguistic Landscape: The Case Study of a Northern Town in Kazakhstan

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### 1. Introduction

After the collapse of the USSR, fifteen newly established states initiated the process of nation-building that would honor their titular cultures and distance them from a Soviet past. Nation-building process has involved passing a number of major policies including language and education policies (e.g., Sarsembayev, 1999). In a post-Soviet Kazakhstan, the language policies have reflected the inconsistency of the nation-building process (Melich & Adibayeva, 2013). Thus, these policies have evolved from emphasizing nativization and derussification (i.e., upgrading the titular languages and introducing English, as opposed to Russian, as a new lingua franca) in the first decade of independence to recognizing Russian as local lingua franca in the second decade (Pavlenko, 2008). The major initial language and education policies (i.e., the resolution on Improving the Study of the Kazakh Language in 1987, Law on Languages in 1989, State Program on Development of the Kazakh Language and Other National Languages in 1990) emphasized the Kazakh language as a consolidating force for a multi-ethnic population via urging its mandatory use in the major public spheres on the entire territory of Kazakhstan along with improving the proficiency of all citizens. However, in 1997, The Language Law upgraded Russian to a language of interethnic communication (allowing it to be used along with Kazakh in the institutions) to maintain relations over a post-Soviet territory, and Trinity of the Languages added English as a language of business communication to better integrate into a globalized world in 2007 (e.g., Beisenova, 2013; Fierman, 1998; Matuszkiewicz, 2010; Melich & Adibayeva, 2013; Pavlenko, 2008; Smagulova, 2008;). These major language policies have impacted the education sphere a lot.

Currently, Kazakh and Russian have been approved to be the primary languages of instruction in secondary and higher education while instruction can be still offered in the titular languages of other ethnic minorities (e.g., Tajik, Tatar, Uyghur) in secondary education (e.g., Fierman, 2006; Smagulova, 2008). Students are required to learn Kazakh in Russian and other minority-language schools, and Russian is a mandatory second language in Kazakh-medium schools (Pavlenko, 2008). These policies resulted in a decline of Russian-medium schools from 73% in 1988 to 36% in 2004 and increase of the Kazakh-instructed school from 11% in 1988 to 28% in 2004 (Fierman, 2006).

Despite all these attempts to promote the influence of Kazakh, the presence of Russian is still very strong. Several major factors can account for this situation. First, even though the ethnic Kazakhs is the largest ethnic group (~65.5%), the Russians are still a well-represented ethnic minority (~21.5%) along with Germans, Tatars, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, and Uyghurs (the rest 13%) proficient in Russian (e.g., Jones, 2010; Rees 2015). This population situation is further complicated by a noticeable regional variation in ethnolinguistic composition of Kazakhstani population. Particularly, North (Uralsk, Akmola, Kokshetau oblasts) and North-East (Pavlodar, Semipalatinsk) are Russiandominated, while the South (Kyzylorda, Shimkent) are more Kazakh-dominated (Verschik, 2011). Second, the Kazakh population, especially the urban one, is lowproficient in their titular language and is highly russified interested more in Russian literature and culture (Suleimenova and Smugulova, 2005; Pavlenko, 2008, 2009). Additionally, highly russified urban Kazakhs resisted to a quick linguistic 'kazakification' by enrolling their children into Russian-instructed schools (Matuszkiewicz, 2010). Next, the rest approximately 130 ethnic groups residing in Kazakhstan use Russian as a lingua franca due to its low proficiency in Kazakh since they have better access to Russianlanguage teaching materials than to Kazakh and English textbooks (Bahry, Niyozov, & Shamatov, 2008; Fierman, 1998). In addition, the Russian-instructed schools have more established history and traditions, better qualified teachers and more diverse teaching materials (e.g., Fireman, 2006; Smagulova, 2008; Verschik, 2011). Not surprisingly, the graduates of Russian-instructed schools had higher achievement scores and Russian became associated with social mobility across Kazakhstan and the former USSR (e.g., Fireman, 2006; Verschik, 2011). The third crucial factor that contributes to the status of Russian as lingua franca is a failure to shift to English as lingua franca. The most updated statistics shows that 15.8% of the population can comprehend oral speech, 10.2% can read and 7.7% can write in English with only 4% of university faculty (mostly business majors) possessing high proficiency in this language (e.g., Oralova, 2012).

As it can be seen from the previously mentioned, there exists a gap between the ambitions of the Kazakhstani government to establish a new nationhood through language and education policies that promote Kazakh and a multilingual population that relies on Russian a lot as a lingua franca. This discrepancy is particularly noticeable in the linguistic landscape of all former Soviet republics including Kazakhstan (Pavelnko, 2009). However, there have been just a few attempts to systematically examine how the state language policies impact the public signage and how the individual social actors reacted to these changes in Kazakhstan (e.g., Akzhigitova and Zharkynbekova, 2014). Therefore, this study further extends this research by exploring the ideological makeup of public signage in a small northern town in Kazakhstan to understand how the nation-building language policies and daily practices of social actors (local businesses and individuals) follow or subvert the power hierarchy co-constructing the public space. To do so, I have examined how three officially approved languages (Kazakh, Russian, and English) were positioned on 345 signs in the top-down and bottom-up flows (Ben Rafael et al., 2006) following Scollon and Scollon's (2003) image coding system to reveal several major indexical orders at the level of a sign type and a sign group. Based on the observed *indexical orders* in each signage groups, I show existing ideological *polycentricity* (Blommaert, 2012) in the town pubic space, i.e., the orientation of the top-down signage to the official capital Astana and the orientation of the bottom-up signage towards Russia as authority centers (Bakhtin, 1986; Bloomaert, 2012), This finding help to uncover the ways a multilingual reality presents challenges to a nation-building process in a post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

### 2. Nation-building, Language Policy and Linguistic Landscape.

As stated above, language policy is one of the nation-building strategies in post-Soviet Kazakhstan (e.g., Matuszkiewicz, 2010; Melich & Adibayeva, 2013; Sarsembayev, 1999). There is a close relation between the state language policies and linguistic landscape that is a symbolic formation of the public space (Ben Rafel et al., 2006). Linguistic landscape is an important tool and major space for a government to promote certain group/national identity via promoting certain languages (e.g., Laundry & Bourhis, 1997; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006, 2009; Gorter, 2006; Pavlenko 2009). Specifically, the state regulates public signage by indicating what languages should be used (e.g., Laundry and Bourhis, 1997; Gorter, 2006). Thus, a certain language(s) may receive a privileged status by a more frequent appearance as well as better positioning in space, which in its turn would privilege a linguistic community speaking this language. Laundry and Bourhis (1997) explains this by pointing out at the two functions of signs: informative and symbolic. The first function serves as an indication of the borders of a linguistic group by pointing what languages are used for communication within that territory while the second one informs or send a meta-message about the status and values of the languages used on the signs. This symbolic function becomes very salient in the context, in which a language emerges as a crucial dimension of a group/nation identity (Sanchdev and Bourhis, 1990) like in a post-Soviet Kazakhstan where the state tries to promote the Kazakh language as a uniting element of a new Kazakhstani nation-building through its omnipresent visibility (e.g., Akzhigitova and Zharkynbekova, 2014).

As research shows, the state language policy can have significant impact on the configuration of the linguistic landscape via supporting certain language and thus a certain group/nation identity. For instance, Cenoz and Gorter (2006) has shown how intense state policy resulted in 50% of public/state and commercial signs produced solely in Basque or in combination with other languages with only 5% of signs using Frisian despite a high percentage of fluent speakers of Frisian. Gorter (2006) further adds that the usage of dominant state language(s) and minority language on the signs has been a constant point of contention in most bilingual countries, and the language activists often employ 'painting over' as a way to resist existing, often not inclusive, language policies (e.g., Pavlenko, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial to examine everyday practices of people, i.e., the ways they support or subvert the power hierarchy established by language policies, which allow us to better understand the complexity of public space signage and nation-building.

These complex relations between language policy and linguistic landscape have been attempted to be understood through a *top-down* vs. *bottom-up* approach. For instance, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) examined how three languages Israel-Hebrew, Arabic and English were visible in the *top-down* flow (i.e., linguistic landscape elements that are issued by the institutional agencies and act according to local or central policies) and the *bottom-up* flow (i.e., signs that are utilized by autonomous actors). They show that Israel-Hebrew is always present in top-down signage across all three major regions (Jewish Israeli-Palestine localities and East Jerusalem) while the bottom-up ones also incorporated other languages like Russian. Bakhaus (2008) similarly demonstrated that official signs, top-down ones, mostly reinforced existing power relations by producing signs in Japanese and English and much less in Chinese and Korean with 80% of the monolingual Japanese signs found in the center of Tokyo. The nonofficial signs incorporated eleven foreign languages to bring an overseas atmosphere and communicate solidarity with non-Japanese

populations. Lawrence (2012) observed the same power relations in Korean LL by revealing how Korean is a dominant code on the LL items in a government-regulated Insadong district in the capital Seoul, while English is taking a lead in the rest of capital districts.

### 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Analytical Framework.

Linguistic landscape has been attested as an arena, in which the interests of government entities and social actors can come into conflict (e.g., Ben Rafael et al., 2006; Bakhaus, 2008; Pavlenko, 2008). To better understand these complex relations, it is crucial to understand what their communicative goals or orientations are. Thus, I'm employing Blommaert's (2012) concept of *polycentricity* as a main analytical framework. Also, I used Ben Rafael et al.'s (2006) *top-down* vs. *bottom-up* approach and Scollon and Scollon's (2003) *system of image coding* as methodological tools.

The main premise of Blommaert's (2012) sociolinguistics of mobility is examining a language as a set of resources, their values, distributions, rights and effects. This is of particular necessity in the era of globalization when we have to deal with translocal and mobile markets with flexible and unsettled boundaries. Next, when individuals employ a language as set of resources to create meanings, they usually fulfil this in certain patterns or indexical orders, which gives the sense of similarity and stability with expectable orientations. This effect is achieved because individuals do this with an evaluative authority or 'super-addressee' (Bakhtin, 1986) in mind, i.e., with reference to centers of authority (real/immediate and/or imagined ones). Not surprisingly, in our communicative environment, we can orient towards more than one center of authority. This simultaneous orientation towards multiple authority centers is *polycentricity*, and social structures of power and inequality behind this 'polyphony' or 'mutivocality'. Since linguistic landscape is conceptualized as a symbolic construction of public space (Ben Rafael at al., 2006), its symbolic construction is communicative to a great extent and includes parties that shape it. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how the major parties construct their communicative messages, i.e., the *indexical orders* of their messages, because this inquiry allows to understand what centers of authority they orient themselves. This insight in its turn contributes to our better comprehension of a current socio-political situation in a certain community or region. In this case it is a small northern town in Kazakhstan, in a postsoviet time period.

To detect the major forces that shape a *linguistic landscape* of a town under examinant, I followed Ben Rafel's (2006) *top-down* vs. *bottom-up* approach to data categorization. Based on this approach, the *top-down* category is linguistic landscape (LL) elements that are exhibited by the institutional agencies acting according to local or central policies, while a *bottom-up* group is LL elements that are utilized by autonomous actors. This approach allows to analyzes LL data as the reflection of *dominant culture vs. individual strategies* or *state* vs. *social actors*. To detect the *indexical orders* within these two sign groups, I applied Scollon and Scollon's (2003) *system of image coding*. This system comprises of four major categories, out of which *code preferences*, i.e., analysis of a distribution of languages on a multilingual sign/image, has been employed in this analysis. It should be noted that a term *code* refers to a language used on a sign. In the most cases studied, the *preferred* code is placed above the *subordinate* code in a vertical

alignment while the *preferred* code is placed in the left site and the *marginal* code is placed in the right site in a horizontal alignment. A third option is when the *preferred* code is placed in the center and the *marginal* code is spread around the periphery (Scollon and Scollon, 2003, p. 120). Thus, this coding category has enabled to determine how three languages (Kazakh, Russian, and English) were placed on LL signs under examination to illustrate certain *indexical orders* that can point out to the *centers of authority* that the major parties (the state and social actors) orient themselves.

## 3.2. Data Collection and Analysis Process.

The study data consists of 260 photos of LL items collected in a small town founded by the Russian military troops in 1850 and located in a northern part of Kazakhstan, which is a 9 hours' drive from the border with Russia. Nowadays, it is the biggest town in the National Park Area, which is under review to be included into the heritage list of UNESCO. The area is famous for pine woods with their healing effects and beautiful lakes; thus, thousands of tourists from Russia and other former Soviet countries come every year. The town's population is around forty-seven thousand people. Unfortunately, there is no information regarding its ethnic composition. The collection period was in March 2015 by one of the researcher's family member who is also the native of the town and was instructed how and in what areas to take pictures. The data was collected in six major town areas: A railway residential area, the town railway station, a railway station/'smaller' market, a governmental sector and the main street, a town central/'bigger' market and a central shopping street.

All LL items were categorized into a 'top-down' (the state institutions issued) and a 'bottom-up' (produced by local businesses and individuals) groups (following Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). This resulted in 74 (21.5%) 'top-down' LL items (state institution entrance signs-19, school entrance signs-9, street name signs-20, railway station signs-24, monument signs and billboards-6) and 271 (78.5%) 'bottom-up' LL items (shops and malls entrance signs- 47, other businesses entrance signs- 32, business printed plastic posters- 88, business paper signs- 44, individual flyers- 60).

After categorization into two major subgroups, all LL items were grouped into monoand multilingual groups. The bilingual and trilingual signs were further analyzed for *code preferences* (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) to determine how the Kazakh, Russian and English languages were distributed on these signs (e.g., left-right, up-down). The data analysis was done independently by two coders (proficient in three languages) who regularly met to compare the coding results and reconcile any inter-rater discrepancies. In cases when a foreign or Kazakh/Russian word was used on sign but spelled in a different alphabet, the coders followed the alphabetic system. For instance, if English words on signs were transliterated in the Cyrillic alphabet, they were coded as Russian. This allowed us to be consistent in coding and rely on the linguistic evidences. Thus, the results will be presented in two parts: the descriptions of major types of signs with an example from each group (i.e., the top-down and bottom-up) and the calculations of their frequency.

#### 4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Major Types of Signs.

The analysis of LL items in the top-down and bottom-up groups revealed several major code presences types with a few interesting cases. The three major types of signs (with sub-types in each) of different frequencies were observed.

*Monolingual* signs (either Kazakh or Russian) are the first major type of signs observed. A welcoming sign in Kazakh ('Кел балалар, оқылық!') placed above the door of a Kazakh-instructed school, or a solo-Russian paper sign ('CAXAP оптом') that advertises a wholsale of sugar and placed on the window of a shop are the examples of this sign type.

Bilingual signs are the second major type. The first sub-type is horizontal bilingual Kazakh-Russian signs. In this combination, Kazakh is consistently placed on the left side of a sign that makes it a preferred/prestigious code (Scollon and Scollon, 2003). For instance, an entrance sign to the local state office (i.e., Akimat of Burabai region) has its name in Kazakh placed on the left ('Бурабай ауданының әкімдігі') and a Russian version ('Акимат Бурабайского района') placed next to a Kazakh version to the right. Regarding the bottom-up group example, it is a plastic printed sign that advertises a sale of fresh meat and placed under the window of a shop. A Kazakh version ('жас ет') is on the left side of the sign and a Russian version ('свежее мясо') is placed at the same level and on the right side of a sign. Interestingly, the only instance of Russian placed on the left/prestigious side of a sign is on an entrance sign of the Culture House, which is not surprising as this kind of organization was introduced and established by Russians during the Soviet colonization of Kazakhstan.

Another sub-type in the bilingual sign group is a *vertical bilingual* Kazakh-Russian signs. Kazakh is consistently located above Russian in the upper part on these signs that makes it a *preferred/prestigious code*. For instance, the sign on the WWII monument, which commemorate the lost lives of the countrymen ('To the countrymen built the victory in the frontline and backstage), has a Kazakh version (i.e., 'Maйдан мен тылда жеңіс үшін күрескен жерлестерімізге') on the top of the sign and a Russian version ('Землякам ковавшим победу на фронте и в тылду') right below it. In the bottom-up group, for instance, a plastic sign of a lawyer firm has a Kazakh version ('қорғаушы') on the top of the sign and a Russian version ('адвокат') right below it.



*Figure 1*. An entrance sign of a local daycare

Figure 2. An entrance sign of a local mall



The third and four sub-types are *centralized bilingual* Kazakh-Russian signs. This sub-type is mostly represented by the business entrance names that are found in the bottom-up group. They tend to have identifications of a business type (e.g., shop, dental service, lawyer firm, etc.) in both Kazakh and Russian and a primary business name either in Kazakh or Russian. For instance, an entrance sign of a local daycare (see Figure 1) has a business type in Kazakh ('балабақшасы') placed on the top and in Russian ('детский сад') placed at the bottom of the sign. The actual business name ('малыш' that means infant) is in Russian and centralized. 14). Another example is the sign for a local mall (see Figure 2). Similarly, it has an identification of a business ('mall') in Kazakh ('cayдa Yйi') placed on the left and in Russian placed on the right ('торговый дом') while the actual business name is in Kazakh ('Aқcopaң') and is centralized. It should be noted that the lexical/actual name of a business is much more important than identification of the business because it triggers the metaphorical associations among the consumers (Akzhigitova and Zharkynbekova, 2014); therefore, it involves a strategic choice regarding a language and placement on a sign.

Trilingual signs are the signs that included English. Most of the trilingual signs were vertically structured. For instance, an entrance sign above the door at the town railway station has a Kazakh version at the very top ('kipy'), a Russian version right below it ('BXOJ'), and an English version ('entrance') at the very bottom of the sign. It should be noted that not all trilingual signs included a standard English. These cases were identified as instances of glocalization (Gortner, 2006), but most of them were vertically structured. In the top-down group, for instance, the name of the support center for entrepreneurs 'DAMU' is actually a Kazakh word 'gamy' that means 'growth, development' spelled in the Latin alphabet ('DAMU') and placed in the center of the sign with a Kazakh version ('Кәсіпкерлікті қолдау орталығы') at the top of the sign and a Russian version ('Цент поддержки предпринимательства') at the bottom of the sign. Or, a plastic sign for local interior design company has its name 'Green-Plast' at the top of the sign and the rest of information (types of service and contact information) in Kazakh and Russian placed below. The sign of a funeral home, an elite service in a small town, has an English word 'help' as its name transliterated in the Cyrillic script ('хэлп') and placed in the center (while a Kazakh version of business identification 'жерлеу жоралары қысметін көрсету' above and a Russian version 'ритуальные услуги' bellow).

### 4.2. Distribution of Major Signs Types in the Top-down and Bottom-up Groups.

The quantitative analysis of the major sign types across the two LL sub-groups revealed the following tendencies. The bilingual Kazakh-Russian signs were dominated in both flows, but with a higher frequency in the top-down group than in the bottom-up group (72.9% and 59.4%). The most striking finding is the absence of monolingual Russian signs in the top-down flow and its high frequency in the bottom-up flow (36.1% vs. 0%). This group of signs mostly comprises of printed paper signs on windows and doors of the local businesses and flyers produced by individuals and placed on the community boards.

	Only	Only	Kazakh-	Kazakh-	Kazakh-	Russian-	Total
	Kazakh	Russian	Russian	Russian-	English	English	
				English			
Тор-	3		54	17			74

Table 1. Distribution of Major Sign Types in Two LL Categories

Down	(4.0%)		(72.9%)	(22.9%)			(100%)
Bottom- Up Group	1 (0.36%)	99 (36.1%)	161 (59.4%)	3 (1.1%)	2 (0.7%)	6 (2.2%)	271 (100%)
Group							345 (100%)

The next summary (Table 2) presents the analysis of observed *indexical orders* (Blommaert, 2012) on the multilingual signage through detecting the *code preferences* (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) of three major languages/codes (Kazakh, Russian, and English). First, Kazakh language is a *preferred* code in the top-down signage group as it appears significantly more on the left side of the signs (i.e., a horizontal Kazakh-Russian composition: 38.0%) than the Russian does (i.e., a horizontal Russian-Kazakh composition: 2.8%). Similarly, Kazakh is placed in the upper side of the signs much more frequently (i.e., a vertical Kazakh-Russian composition: 32.3%) than Russian is (i.e., a vertical Russian-Kazakh composition: 2.8%). Noteworthy, Russian does appear in the central position on the trilingual signs (i.e., vertical centralized Russian 22.5%) found at the railway station.

Table 2. Ratio of Multilingual Signs Based on Code Preferences in Two LL Categories

	Top-Down Group	Bottom-Up Group
Horizontal Kazakh-Russian	27(38.0%)	26 (15.1%)
Horizontal Russian-Kazakh	2 (2.8%)	0 (0%)
Vertical Kazakh-Russian	23 (32.3%)	57 (33.1%)
Vertical Russian-Kazakh	2 (2.8%)	0 (0%)
Horizontal Centralized Kazakh	0 (0%)	2 (1.1%)
Horizontal Centralized Russian	0 (0%)	40 (23.2%)
Vertical Centralized Kazakh	0 (0%)	3 (1.7%)
Vertical Centralized Russian (Bilingual)	0 (0%)	25 (14.5%)
Vertical Centralized Russian (Trilingual)	16 (22.5%)	0 (0%)
Others		11 (6.3%)
Total:	71	172

Regarding the bottom-up signage, Kazakh continues to possess its dominant status in as it rather frequently appears on the left side of sign (15.1%) while there is no instance of Russian in that privileged position (0%). Though use of Kazakh on the left side has dropped from 38% in the top-down flow to 15% in the bottom-up flow, it is still significant in contrast of 0% of signs with Russian used on the left. Nonetheless, Kazakh appears on the top of signs (33.1%) as frequently as it does in the top-down group. Again, there is no instance of Russian used at the top on the Kazakh-Russian bilingual signs. It does so only in combination with English (Others: 1.1%).

If we look at the group of bilingual signs with horizontal and vertical centralized alignment, we can notice that the status of Russian has upgraded. This group mostly comprises of the business entrance signs (i.e., signs that have an identifications of a business type like a shop, dental service, lawyer firm in Kazakh and Russian and a primary business name in either of them). Thus, a horizontal alignment of Kazakh-Kazakh-Russian makes up only 1.1% in the bottom-up group and 0% in the top-down group. Similarly, a vertical alignment of Kazakh-Kazakh-Russian makes up only 1.7% in the bottom-up

group and 0% in the top-down group. Strikingly different, a horizontal alignment of Kazakh-Russian-Russian goes up to 23.2% in the bottom-up signage and remains at 0% in the top-down one. Similarly, a vertical alignment of Kazakh-Russian-Russian reaches 14.5% in the bottom-up group and stays at 0% in the top-down group. Thus, an upgrade of Russian as a preferred code coming from the use of Russian for the business lexical name placed in the center of the signs. Noteworthy, in the top-down group, Russian does appear in the center on the trilingual signs found at the railway station, but it just repeats the same information presented via the Kazakh and English versions (e.g., 'kipy'-'BXOR'-entrance').

# 5. Conclusion.

Bloomaert (2010) suggests that "sociolinguistic phenomenon [including the linguistic landscape] in a globalized context needs to be understood as developing at several different scale-levels, where different orders of indexicality dominate, resulting in a polycentric 'context' where communicative behavior is simultaneously pushed and pulled in various directions" (p. 42). Relating to linguistic landscape research, such 'polycentric context' can be understood as the discrepancy or different orientations in the language strategies used in the top-down (i.e., state-building agencies) and bottom-up (i.e., individual social actors) flows (e.g., Ben Rafael et al., 2006; Gorter, 2006). Regarding a linguistic landscape in a post-Soviet territory, Pavlenko (2009) attests such differences in state language policies and daily practices of communities to a complex multilingual reality of the former Soviet republics (p. 267). This study further specifies how exactly this discrepancy exposes itself by precisely examining the *code preferences* (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) to detect major indexical orders (Blommaert, 2012) on public signage in a small northern town in Kazakhstan. Particularly, the top-down (i.e., pro-state agencies) signage comprised mostly of bilingual (Kazakh-Russian) and trilingual (Kazakh-Russian-English) signs with Kazakh being privileged through placement on the left and top parts of signs. Through these *indexical orders*, the top-down signage exhibit an orientation towards the official Astana as center of authority, which aims to create a new Kazakhstani national identity with Kazakh being a consolidating force while Russian and English additional means for interethnic communication. A more complex situation has found to exist in the bottom-up signage. This complexity reflected in a noticeable present of monolingual Russian signs (that were absent in the top-down group) and a high frequency of Russian placed in the privileged center part of bilingual Kazakh-Russian signs. In other words, the local business creatively used the choice of business names to subvert the power hierarchy of state language policies via naming businesses in Russian. These indexical orders reveal an orientation towards Russia and Russian as lingua franca as center of authority in the bottom-up flow. The study results illustrate how the social actors through the daily practices can subvert the power hierarchy enforced by the state language policies pointing at the challenges of nation building that are caused by a multilingual reality in a post-Soviet Kazakhstan and manifested and detected in the linguistic landscape of a small town.

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