POSTSOVET MAQOMDAGI HUDUDDA LINGVISTIK IDENTIFIKATSIYA VA KO'P TILLILIK

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Abstract.*This study explores the complex relationship between linguistic identity, multilingualism, and post-Soviet transformation through a literature-based analysis of recent sociolinguistic research. Drawing on works by Katliarou (2024) and Zoumpalidis and Şimşek (2025), it examines how language policies, urban linguistic landscapes, and power hierarchies shape post-Soviet identity formation. The findings reveal enduring contradictions between ethnolinguistic nationalism and lived multilingual realities, highlighting how Russian maintains symbolic dominance while English and minority languages negotiate new meanings in urban spaces. By integrating linguistic landscape theory with historical perspectives, the study emphasizes how language visibility, inclusion, and policy continue to define belonging and identity across the post-Soviet space.*

Key words: *linguistic identity, multilingualism, post-Soviet space, linguistic landscape, Russian language, identity politics, language policy*

Introduction

The post-Soviet linguistic landscape remains a dynamic site of identity construction, negotiation, and contestation. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, newly independent states sought to define nationhood through ethnolinguistic terms—treating language as both a symbol of sovereignty and a tool of differentiation. Yet the multilingual realities of these societies often challenge such monolingual ideals. As Katliarou (2024) argues, the Soviet legacy of linguistic policy created enduring contradictions between official narratives of ethnic-linguistic unity and lived practices of bilingualism and Russification. Russian continues to serve as a lingua franca across much of the region, reflecting both historical continuity and pragmatic adaptation. At the same time, global and minority languages—English, Uzbek, Tajik, or Ukrainian—carry new symbolic meanings associated with globalization, identity politics, and migration.

Within this complex environment, linguistic landscapes (LL) offer a tangible way to observe how identity and power relations are inscribed into public space. Cities such as Moscow, Astana, Tashkent, and Riga reveal the competing semiotic hierarchies that define post-Soviet multilingualism: Russian as the institutional norm, English as the emblem of modernity, and minority languages as markers of marginality or resistance. Building on Katliarou's historical framework and recent LL

studies by Zoumpalidis and Şimşek (2025), this paper explores how linguistic identity is constructed through visibility, hierarchy, and symbolic capital in Moscow's urban environment, and how this reflects broader post-Soviet sociolinguistic trends.

Methodology

This study is based on a comprehensive literature review of recent scholarship on linguistic identity and multilingualism in the post-Soviet space. The primary sources include Katliarou (2024), who offers a historical and theoretical examination of Soviet and post-Soviet language ideologies, and Zoumpalidis and Şimşek (2025), whose empirical analysis of Moscow's linguistic landscape provides insight into contemporary multilingual practices. Supplementary references include key works in sociolinguistics, linguistic landscape theory, and postcolonial studies [Blommaert, 2013; Pavlenko, 2017; Vertovec, 2007; Grenoble, 2020]. The approach synthesizes findings across these studies to identify recurring patterns and contradictions in how languages function as symbols of power, belonging, and modernity in post-Soviet urban contexts.

Results

The study by Zoumpalidis and Şimşek provides a revealing lens into how multilingualism in Moscow reflects broader post-Soviet negotiations of linguistic identity and power. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, cities like Moscow became linguistic battlegrounds where Russian retained institutional dominance while new global and migrant languages gained symbolic visibility [Pavlenko, 2017; Pütz, 2020]. This shift created a tension that is visually mapped onto the city's public spaces.

The linguistic landscape (LL) of Moscow thus mirrors the fundamental tensions between a largely monolingual state ideology and the observable multilingual urban reality [Pavlenko, 2017; Pütz, 2020]. This duality is a defining feature of post-Soviet identity formation. Russian remains a marker of state continuity and authority, yet the rising visibility of English and minority languages signals the city's participation in global flows and new forms of cultural belonging, challenging the old linguistic order.

As Blommaert emphasized, physical spaces are never "no-man's-land," but are historically layered zones of power and meaning [Blommaert, 2013]. In Moscow, these historical, social, and economic layers manifest visually in public signage. Russian's institutional dominance is now subtly—or sometimes overtly—challenged by the global prestige of English and the increasing, though often marginalized,

presence of Central Asian languages, which reflect ongoing migration and rapid socio-economic transformation.

Moscow's current sociolinguistic complexity stems from what Vertovec termed superdiversity, a condition of unprecedented population heterogeneity [Vertovec, 2007]. Zoumpalidis and Şimşek (2025, p. 634) trace this directly to the post-1989 geopolitical shifts and the mass migration that has occurred from former Soviet republics. This influx fundamentally altered the city's linguistic fabric, making it a hub of diverse languages and identities.

Fedorova and Baranova similarly documented how Central Asian migrants—who are key agents of Moscow's superdiversity—remain symbolically and linguistically marginalized despite their demographic visibility [Fedorova and Baranova, 2017]. Their study noted a crucial institutional dissonance: even governmental websites intended for non-Russian speakers often exist solely in Russian, which powerfully reinforces the symbolic exclusion of migrant identities.

This dissonance highlights a core paradox: Moscow's lived multilingualism clashes sharply with its monolingual official image. Linguistic identity in the post-Soviet space is therefore not simply a matter of language use but intrinsically tied to access, visibility, and power. Census data confirms this paradox: although Moscow's residents represent 174 ethnicities and speak 237 languages, Russian remains the lingua franca and default medium of public authority, underscoring a structural hierarchy inherited from the Soviet model [Census, 2021].

A key insight from Zoumpalidis and Şimşek's analysis is the commodified role of English as both a linguistic resource and an identity marker. English holds a dual role—both functional and symbolic—often serving as an emblem of cosmopolitanism and modernity rather than simply a communicative medium [Zoumpalidis and Şimşek, 2025]. Its presence signals the city's aspiration toward global status.

For example, the temporary introduction of extensive bilingual signage during the 2018 FIFA World Cup briefly redefined Moscow as a globalized, tourist-friendly space. However, the retraction of English announcements during the COVID-19 pandemic [Baranova, 2023] starkly symbolized the inherent fragility of this global openness under crisis conditions and the readiness to revert to monolingual norms.

Yet, in the private sector, English persists as an essential commercial asset. Shop names like SO FAR KEBAB or the signage of global brands in prime commercial locations illustrate its use as a marker of prestige and cultural sophistication. This aligns with Blommaert and Maly's framework of ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis (ELLA), which interprets signage as a dynamic semiotic field reflecting

economic forces [Blommaert and Maly, 2016]. English, therefore, performs identity work, indexing participation in global capitalism.

In sharp contrast to English's hypervisibility, minority languages—especially those of Central Asian and Caucasian migrants—remain largely invisible in Moscow's LL. Zoumpalidis and Şimşek observed that their presence is tightly coupled with the socio-economic function of specific spaces: ethnic restaurants or markets might display fragments of Uzbek, Tajik, or Azerbaijani, but these uses are often ornamental rather than broadly communicative.

This selective visibility exemplifies what Ben-Rafael calls the "power principle" of linguistic landscapes, where the dominant groups effectively control which languages are permitted to occupy public space [Ben-Rafael, 2009]. The resulting asymmetry reveals deeper identity politics: migrant communities may contribute materially to the city's economy, but their languages occupy a precarious symbolic position, underscoring their marginalization.

Through ELLA, Zoumpalidis and Şimşek [2025, pp. 635–640] conceptualize Moscow's LL as a stratified semiotic system, where signs simultaneously point to the past, present, and future [Blommaert & Maly, 2016]. Soviet-era Cyrillic signs on state institutions symbolize continuity and authority, while new commercial English signage indexes modernity and market openness.

Between these extremes lie multilingual hybrid signs—like the trilingual SO FAR KEBAB storefront (mixing English, Russian, Hebrew, and Arabic)—which physically embody the negotiation of belonging in a globalized city. However, as the authors note, even these multilingual expressions often reproduce linguistic hierarchies: Russian remains the functional code, while English and other languages serve primarily symbolic or decorative roles.

The Moscow case exemplifies how linguistic identity in the post-Soviet world is constructed through visible and invisible language hierarchies. Multilingualism is not an equal field of coexistence but a layered terrain of symbolic capital, where English commodifies global identity, Russian enforces national unity, and minority languages mark the boundaries of inclusion [Pavlenko, 2013].

Moscow's LL thus encapsulates the broader post-Soviet trajectory: from Soviet linguistic unification to neoliberal multilingualism and selective globalization. The interplay between top-down policy (official Russian dominance) and bottom-up practice (grassroots multilingual creativity) reveals the evolving, and often contested, nature of linguistic identity across the post-Soviet space, suggesting a journey toward true linguistic pluralism that is far from complete.Discussion

The literature demonstrates that linguistic identity in the post-Soviet space is shaped by overlapping forces of continuity and change. Katliarou (2024) shows that the Soviet project institutionalized a model of linguistic centralization that persists today, while Zoumpalidis and Şimşek (2025) reveal how global and migrant languages now challenge this hegemony in urban environments. The coexistence of Russian dominance with the symbolic use of English and the limited visibility of minority languages reflects a layered linguistic economy. In this system, language functions not only as communication but also as an index of prestige, mobility, and inclusion. Russian ensures bureaucratic and social access, English grants cosmopolitan legitimacy, and migrant languages signal localized, often stigmatized, community identities.

A key insight emerging from these findings is the semiotic continuity of Soviet-era linguistic hierarchies, which remain embedded in post-Soviet societies despite ideological transformations. Even as states adopt policies promoting titular languages, Russian continues to dominate official communication and education. Simultaneously, English has been commodified as a linguistic symbol of global belonging, not as a medium of equality. This duality—state-driven monolingualism versus market-driven multilingualism—creates what Pavlenko (2013) terms an "ideological tug-of-war," where language choice becomes both a political and personal act of identity negotiation. The LL of Moscow exemplifies this, visually representing power asymmetries through selective inclusion or exclusion of languages.

The discussion also reveals a geopolitical dimension to linguistic identity: the politicization of "Russian speakers" across the region mirrors broader conflicts over national loyalty, historical memory, and post-imperial influence. As Katliarou (2024) observes, language has become a proxy for geopolitical allegiance. In Ukraine, for instance, linguistic policy reform has been read as both decolonization and exclusion. In Russia itself, multilingualism is tolerated only insofar as it reinforces central authority. Thus, linguistic identity is a field of both symbolic resistance and institutional control—shaped by history, reinforced by policy, and contested in everyday urban spaces.

Conclusion

The synthesis of Katliarou (2024) and Zoumpalidis and Şimşek (2025) underscores that multilingualism in the post-Soviet world cannot be understood solely through linguistic diversity; it must also be analyzed through the lenses of power, visibility, and ideology. Moscow's linguistic landscape demonstrates how languages operate as both semiotic resources and social boundaries. Russian, English,

and minority languages coexist in a stratified hierarchy that reproduces the region's historical and socio-economic inequalities. True linguistic pluralism remains limited as long as visibility and institutional legitimacy are distributed unevenly among languages.

For Uzbekistan, these insights hold particular relevance. Like many post-Soviet states, Uzbekistan navigates the dual legacy of Soviet Russification and the aspirations of national language revival. While Uzbek has gained prominence as the state language, Russian retains practical dominance in business, higher education, and interethnic communication. At the same time, English is increasingly embraced as a vehicle for internationalization and modernization. Thus, Uzbekistan's linguistic future—much like Moscow's present—depends on how effectively it can balance symbolic sovereignty with inclusive multilingualism, ensuring that linguistic identity reflects not hierarchy but diversity.

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