

## **Negotiating language policies in the linguistic landscape: A comparison of two rural case studies in South Africa**

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### **Abstract**

The enactment of language policies is determined by adherence to and interpretation of official policies, as well as localised conventions regarding language use. These factors are manifested in the linguistic landscape (LL) through language choices displayed on public signage. Choices are made by a myriad of LL actors (individuals, groups and institutions) who compete for participation in the public discourse. As such, the LL is a platform on which language attitudes and ideologies are practiced; and whereby language policies are continuously negotiated within a given legal framework. Such studies are especially interesting in a multilingual country such as South Africa with its complex language policy arrangement and its history of colonialism and apartheid that are still shaping languages, language attitudes and language policies.

This paper presents a comparison of two empirical case studies of rural LLs, the one conducted in the Free State Province and the other in the North-West Province. The analysis explores patterns of language use on public government signs and the adherence of those language choices to policy stipulations. Through this comparison we hope to develop a better understanding of how official language policies are negotiated through the linguistic landscape, and what similar patterns and unique aspects influence and shape the public LL between those two case study areas. Given the lack of rural research in LL studies generally, we expect that our findings might challenge some existing theoretical notions regarding the interplay between official policy and LL, specifically for rural areas in South Africa, but also beyond. This research also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the linguistic realities of multilingual South Africa, helping to overcome the existing research gap for rural areas and its underlying bias towards LL.

**Keywords:** Linguistic landscape; Language policy; Rural South Africa