

Planning the Linguistic Landscape

**A Comparative Survey of the Use of Minority Languages in the
Road Signage of Norway, Scotland and Italy**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the controversial nature of current policies on the use of minority language place-names on official signage in Norway, Scotland and in Italy.

Following a survey of recent developments in the study of multilingual environmental text and an analysis of the functions of place-names, these controversies are investigated in detail, with reference to legislation and reactions from the public and the media. The formats of the signs themselves are also the subject of close examination.

Selected municipalities in northern Norway have, in recent years, erected signs in Sámi and Kven, but some of these signs have been a target for vandals. In Italy, the Lega Nord (Northern League), a right-wing separatist party, has long campaigned for dialect place-names to appear on signs. New regulations now allow this, but it remains a contentious topic. Meanwhile, in Scotland, the recent introduction of bilingual Gaelic and English signs in areas that previously only had English signs is considered by some to be costly tokenism.

The principal function of road signs is to direct travellers, however they can also act as markers of boundaries, including linguistic boundaries. In addition, signs provide visual evidence of place-names in the landscape. The study of place-names on signs is still developing, but such investigations can shed new light on the symbolic importance of place-names for identity.

4 Scotland

4.1 Linguistic situation	-	-	-	-	-	-	47
4.1.1 Gaelic	-	-	-	-	-	-	47
4.1.2 Scots	-	-	-	-	-	-	48
4.2 Road signs	-	-	-	-	-	-	49
4.2.1 Campaigning in Wales and Scotland	-	-	-	-	-	-	49
4.2.2 Developments	-	-	-	-	-	-	53
4.2.3 Sign design: The Executive learns from Wales	-	-	-	-	-	-	56
4.2.3.1 <i>Reading times, road safety and order of languages</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	56
4.2.3.2 <i>Differentiation between names</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	60
4.2.3.3 <i>Environmental concerns</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	63
4.2.3.4 <i>Financial concerns</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	65
4.2.3.5 <i>Cultural correctness</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	67
4.3 Sign survey of the A835 Tore-Maryburgh-Tore	-	-	-	-	-	-	69
4.4 Dingwall: A Gaelic town?	-	-	-	-	-	-	71
4.5 Shetland	-	-	-	-	-	-	81
4.6 Allochtonous minority languages on official signs in the UK	-	-	-	-	-	-	83

5 Italy

5.1 Linguistic situation	-	-	-	-	-	-	84
5.1.1 Minority languages in Italy	-	-	-	-	-	-	84
5.1.2 Minority 'languages' in Italy: Dialects	-	-	-	-	-	-	86
5.2 The Lega Nord and linguistic/cultural identity	-	-	-	-	-	-	87
5.3 Political graffiti	-	-	-	-	-	-	97
5.4 Road sign graffiti: Place-names as party symbols	-	-	-	-	-	-	100
5.5 The official use of dialectal place-names	-	-	-	-	-	-	107

6 Conclusion

6.1 Comparative reflections	-	-	-	-	-	-	117
6.2 The value of minority language road signs	-	-	-	-	-	-	118

Bibliography

-	-	-	-	-	-	-	121
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Note

Where quotations are translated, the translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

Photographs and diagrams shown are also my own unless otherwise stated.

When referring to two languages displayed together on a sign or elsewhere, a hyphen (e.g. Norwegian-Sámi) is occasionally used to indicate approximate parity in their representation, while an oblique stroke shows that the first language is given prominence over the other (e.g. Norwegian/Sámi). The same principle is applied to multilingual place-names. The official names of institutions and political parties, when these are shown in languages other than English, have not been italicised.

Places of publication in the list of references are spelt as shown in the publications themselves. Where a recognised alternative English form exists, this is shown in square brackets. The names of Norwegian authors in the list of references follow Norwegian alphabetic order (*æ, ø* and *å/aa* follow *z*).

1 Introduction

This study will compare different minority language contexts in Norway, Scotland and Italy, focussing on the policies and controversies behind the official use of minority languages on signs, particularly road and street signs. The signage debate in each of the three cases examined has its own complex background, and each can present a slightly alternative dimension to the discussion of minority languages in general, as well as to our understanding of the linguistic landscape.

There are currently no linguistic landscape studies that have analysed the effect of language as it is used in public spaces on 'actual language behaviour' or on 'de facto language practice' (Shohamy 2006: 128). The present study, however, will show clearly that reactions to changes in official language use in public spaces can occasionally be very strong.

In Chapter 3, the introduction of Sámi and Kven place-names on signs in northern Norway will be discussed with reference to the research that has already been carried out on this matter. Here, emphasis will be placed on the conflicts that have arisen from the implementation of the Sámi Act 1987 and the Place-Name Act 1990. A qualitative survey of Sámi as used on signs in the city of Tromsø will also be presented.

Chapter 4 will report on the campaigns that led to the introduction of bilingual Gaelic-English direction signs in Scotland. There will be extensive consideration of the design of bilingual signs. A first sign survey will demonstrate how bilingual signs are used on a stretch of trunk road, and a second will examine the presence of Gaelic text in public spaces in the town of Dingwall.

In Chapter 5, the use of Italian dialectal place-names on signs will be dealt with. These signs have been promoted by the separatist Lega Nord, so the importance of language (or dialect), and of road signs, for nationalism and irredentism will be considered.

Multilingual road signs are often employed symbolically to represent the entire concept of plurilingual societies. This can be seen on book covers and illustrations for articles on multilingualism, minority languages, language conflict, and on the connections between language and nationalism. Their use in this way is perhaps to be expected. Road signs are commonplace graphic items that easily lend themselves to photographic reproduction. As signs in the wider sense, as they are understood in the field of semiotics, they are also intended to indicate or refer to another object or concept (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 3). Their popular symbolic use for purposes not connected to road travel is an indication of their effectiveness as signs. They are intended to be conspicuous and easy to read, and this makes them especially suited to, for example, book covers or advertising.

The true political nature of road signs and other similar signs has, however, only recently begun to be fully appreciated by linguists. As Andersen (2004: 123) remarked, '[r]oad signs can be seen as kinds of markers in what can be conceptualised as political landscapes'.

The first road signs in Europe were probably in the form of distance markers. In Britain, for example, the Romans used stones known as milliaries to mark distances along their celebrated roads. Some of these stones were intricate columns which would also display the name of the emperor of the time (Department of Transport Traffic Signs Branch 1991: 4). This demonstrates that the potential of road signs for the presentation of political information or ideology – whether this is done explicitly or implicitly – was realised very early. More crucially for this study, the use or exclusion of specific languages on road signs, and on official signs in general, can reflect the relative status, or aspired status, of these languages in the territory concerned, and hence reveal much about implicit language policy.

Phil Baines and Catherine Dixon identify two main categories of road signs: 'informatory' and 'regulatory' signs (Baines and Dixon 2003: 12). Although the group of

regulatory signs – including warning, mandatory and prohibition signs – is important due to its safety value as well as for its legal status, it is certainly less connected with textual language and therefore possibly less relevant to the identity dimension. These signs serve a universal purpose, and in recent times they have become increasingly pictographic, with less reliance on text to convey their message, the meaning of internationally recognised pictograms supposedly transcending linguistic barriers. Text is indispensable, on the other hand, in most directional signs and location signs, which come under the ‘informatory’ group of signs.

Article 10.2.g of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages instructs signatories to ‘allow and/or encourage [...] the use or adoption, if necessary, in conjunction with the name in the official language(s), of traditional and correct forms of place names in regional or minority languages’. This has been taken to be extendable to the use of signs and the names of public buildings (Woehrling 2005: 192-193). In Norway and the United Kingdom, the Charter has been ratified and has entered into force on 1 March 1998 and 1 July 2001 respectively. Italy signed the Charter on 27 June 2000, but it is still awaiting ratification (Council of Europe 2007a).

In all three cases to be analysed here, the main multilingual content of the signs installed or proposed is indeed limited to place-names. An introduction to the functions of place-names, together with some background on recent developments in the field of linguistic landscape studies, is therefore deemed essential for the purposes of this study, and this follows in Chapter 2.

2 Linguistic landscape and place-names

2.1 Linguistic landscape

Although the term *linguistic landscape* had originally been used to refer to the more general linguistic situation or ‘linguistic mosaic’ of a particular area, more concentrated studies on specific aspects of linguistic situations have led to the development of a new application for the term, implying the range of languages apparent, in textual form, in the surroundings (Gorter 2006b: 1-2).

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 25)

While this definition by Rodrigue Landry and Richard Bourhis has become accepted by many researchers as standard, others have preferred to describe the term differently. Davyth Hicks, in what is possibly the only current work on the Scottish linguistic situation to use the term linguistic landscape in this way, decided to interpret the concept more broadly, moving away from the territorial constraints imposed in Landry and Bourhis’s definition – a step he deemed necessary owing to the lack of clear borders for the Gaelic language – and adding place-names to the physical occurrence of text (Hicks 2002: para. 6-7).

The concept of the linguistic landscape first came to prominence within the discipline of language planning, and particularly with reference to the linguistic situations of multilingual societies: those of Québec and, chiefly, Belgium. The implementation of a ‘territorial solution’ to the linguistic conflict between the French and Flemish communities in

Belgium, with clear boundaries between the two principal linguistic regions, was supported by a clear policy of monolingual signs in each main region, and bilingual signs in the capital Brussels. This policy meant that political-linguistic boundaries were made clear when travelling between the regions (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 24).

Firstly, Landry and Bourhis argue that the linguistic landscape has an informational function. Insofar as public signs are concerned, the use of a given language could indicate that a person can expect to use that language in the region's public institutions, although the use of a given language on signage will not necessarily coincide with the right to use it in communications with the authorities – or indeed the actual possibility of finding someone able to communicate in that language. The linguistic landscape, as in Belgium, can also indicate the boundaries of a linguistic region, when such boundaries exist (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 25). In fact, as will be seen below, boundary signs are often among the first road signs on which authorities choose to use more than one language.

Another feature of an area that its linguistic landscape can represent particularly well is linguistic diversity. While this could arguably be part of the informational function, the fact that the 'official' linguistic landscape is rarely an accurate reflection of the truly diverse linguistic composition of society means that this aspect is more closely connected to the second function of the linguistic landscape: the symbolic function. The widespread use of a language in public signage can, according to Landry and Bourhis, symbolise the strength of that language, thus contributing to the language's 'subjective ethnolinguistic vitality' (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 27-30). And while the linguistic landscape can attempt to reflect the sociolinguistic situation, it can also manipulate an individual's assessment of the status of languages, and this could in turn affect that individual's linguistic behaviour (Cenoz and Gorter 2006: 67-68). The relationship between linguistic landscape and sociolinguistic context is therefore 'bidirectional' (Cenoz and Gorter 2006: 67).

Private signs can also constitute a part of the linguistic landscape, and these may indeed 'most realistically reflect the multilingual nature of a particular territory, region or urban agglomeration' (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 27). It is through the medium of private signs that many allochthonous minority languages can make their presence visible in the landscape. A comparison of public and private environmental text, including spontaneous inscriptions such as graffiti or spray murals, can in fact be indicative of the relative status of different linguistic codes, be they languages, dialects or sociolects.

One study based in Israel and East Jerusalem (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006) compared 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' signs – those produced by the authorities and by individuals respectively – and demonstrated in no uncertain terms how effective the linguistic landscape can be as a sociological tool. It was shown that, despite the official status of Arabic in Israel, the language's presence was considerably less in the top-down signs of Jewish communities than it was in Israeli-Palestinian communities or in East Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Hebrew text was less common in bottom-up signs in East Jerusalem than it was in top-down signs, and the use of bilingual Arabic/English signs was in fact preferred by individuals (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 19-21).

Other recent studies on the linguistic landscape have focused on the multilingualism brought about by globalisation, such as Thom Huebner's article (2006) on the effect of globalisation – i.e. the increased influence of English – on the linguistic landscape of Bangkok, or the work by Peter Backhaus (2006; 2007) on non-Japanese signs in Tokyo. A comprehensive overview of linguistic landscape studies can be found in Backhaus (2007: 12-63).

Jasone Cenoz and Durk Gorter (2006) provided a valuable model framework for those conducting similar empirical research on minority languages in their paper concerned with the linguistic landscapes of the Basque Country and Friesland. This included the

formulation of two research questions to determine which languages are displayed in the two urban streets selected for study, and what form bilingual and multilingual signs take (Cenoz and Gorter 2006: 70). Limiting the area to be studied to two 600 m streets – one in Donostia–San Sebastian and one in Ljouwert–Leeuwarden – meant that the level of detail could be enhanced, and the researchers successfully compiled comprehensive photographic inventories of all the environmental text they could identify. Cenoz and Gorter also developed an effective method of codifying the ‘unit of analysis’, considering for example each business establishment as ‘one single sign’ (Cenoz and Gorter 2006: 71). However, some shortfalls of such a codification do exist. For example, this would mean that the use of one Polish poster in the window of a British high street bank would render the entire bank, as a unit of analysis, bilingual, when it may be the only sign there not in English.

Cenoz and Gorter’s findings show that the proactive language policy of the Basque Autonomous Community appears to have had a positive effect on both top-down and bottom-up signs in Donostia, as Basque is the second most prominent language after Spanish, whereas Frisian comes third to Dutch and English in Ljouwert. On the other hand, the authors note that Frisian enjoys greater vitality as a spoken language than Basque does (Cenoz and Gorter 2006: 78).

The use of more than one language in modern signage has been dismissed by some as tokenism. Richard Cox (1998) tackles this issue in provocative style, but appears to recognise that the purpose of Gaelic signs is not primarily to ‘incite or trigger’ spoken Gaelic (Cox 1998: 72). While it may be true in some cases that the will or pressure to include other languages on signs may exceed both the capabilities of sign-makers to accurately render multilingual text and the levels of comprehension among the population, many researchers have supported the claim that the linguistic tokens that make up the linguistic landscape have an important role in outlining geographical and social borders (Huebner 2006: 32).

Others have gone so far as to declare that 'the linguistic landscape or parts of the linguistic landscape can have an influence on language use' (Cenoz and Gorter 2006: 68). Furthermore, the importance of the linguistic landscape from the standpoint of cultural heritage is not to be underestimated (Gorter 2006a: 88).

2.2 Place-names as part of the linguistic landscape

To the informational and symbolic functions of the linguistic landscape proposed by Landry and Bourhis (1997), Hicks (2002) added a mythological or folkloric function that is certainly more relevant to long-established toponyms than to signage in itself, which has only truly become a widespread feature of the European landscape over the past century or so. To support this suggestion, Hicks cites examples of folk etymology that show how central place-names can be to local folkloric traditions, by providing a 'trigger' for story-telling.

In addition to indicating the limits of current linguistic territories, place-names can also reveal past cultural-linguistic borders (Hicks 2002: para. 20). Compared to the value of folk tales, this is perhaps more fundamental to the importance of place-names for minority languages. Evidence of previous borders can, however, lead to problems in situations, such as that of Gaelic in Scotland, where a language could become compartmentalised.

2.3 The functions of place-names

In order to find a stronger link between place-names and the linguistic landscape, an analysis of the wider functions of place-names would be beneficial. According to Henri Dorion, it would seem that one of the principal functions of toponomastics (the study of

place-names) itself is broadly similar to the study of the linguistic landscape as it is seen by

Landry and Bourhis (1997):

[La toponymie peut fonctionner] non seulement comme une méthode permettant de reconstituer des schémas évolutifs des éléments d'une langue, mais comme une science dont l'objet est le nom de lieu en tant que produit – et partant reflet – d'un milieu social, historique, politique, ethnique, dont il demeure ensuite le témoin. (Dorion 1972b: 1)

The linguistic landscape, like place-names, is a product of a social context, and can therefore be seen as a reflection of it. If we are to consider the toponym as part of the linguistic landscape, as Hicks (2002) did, then it must represent the major historic element within the vernacular landscape. Most of the linguistic landscape is, after all, concerned with features that are physically present in the here and now: signs and other texts. The cultural-historical function of place-names is, on the other hand, a central theme in toponomastics, and place-names can tell us much about the past (Hallaråker 1997: 166-167). This is, however, but one function performed by place-names.

Since every human society needs a code with which to refer to its members and to its environment, personal names (anthroponyms) and place-names (toponyms) are an integral part of any language. Names do not need to carry a clear meaning, however, as their primary purpose is to refer to people or places.

Perhaps what could most closely bind toponomastics to linguistic landscape studies is the identity function of place-names, which is an amalgam of the cultural-historical, social and psychological functions.

If an attempt were made to divide up a place-name into different functions or components, it could be said that it contains a communication component, a linguistic component, a topographical component, a cultural-historical component, a social component and a psychological component, perhaps also a creative component. [...] The cultural-historical, social and psychological component together form what could be called the identity function. (Hallaråker 1997: 162)

While place-names are, of course, primarily tools for communication, the strong reactions different groups have displayed towards place-name issues show that place-names also have a wider social function, and can be closely linked to local and personal identity (Hallaråker 1997: 162). The social and psychological function is concerned with attitudes towards place-names: whether they are pleasant or ugly, right or wrong (Hallaråker 1997: 167-173). The reactions provoked in certain place-name debates often seem to centre on signage, as will be demonstrated in this study. It may be possible to infer through the nature of these debates that there also exists a political function of place-names.

The addition of place-names to the study of the linguistic landscape would certainly amplify both the scope and value of research in the field, as well as boosting interest within the academic community. Perhaps its inclusion would be more feasible if some of the alternative terminology proposed by Gorter were to be adopted. A term he suggests is 'multilingual cityscape', and this is perhaps better suited to the majority of what have until now been called linguistic landscape studies, these being generally focused on urban areas. The word *landscape* does, after all, invoke the countryside, where there are fewer signs (Gorter 2006a: 83). Alternatively, the more broadly applicable term 'language visibility' could be used.

2.4 Multilingual place-names

Place-names, like all names, are often deemed to occupy peripheral territory in the lexicon (Crystal 2003: 122). It can be difficult to ascribe 'possession' of names to any individual

language, and the mere knowledge of names such as *François Mitterand* or *Madrid* is not usually seen in itself as a sign of competence in French or Spanish.

In a world with increasing geographical knowledge and awareness, backed up by frequent international travel, place-names such as *New York* will have meaning for people speaking any multitude of languages. Many names, however, may take on different forms in different languages. The form, or forms, of a place-name used in the place itself can be termed *endonyms*, while other forms used elsewhere are *exonyms*. By way of example, the English name of Scotland's capital *Edinburgh* becomes *Edimbourg* in its Frenchified form and *Edimburgo* in Italian. The classifying element *burgh* has effectively been translated to the French and Italian equivalents. Meanwhile, the specific element – which is of uncertain origin (Everett-Heath 2005: 149) but appears to have been a proper name in itself (Harris 1996: 254) – mutates from *Edin* to *Edim* in these two Romance languages. This innovation would appear to have been made for phonetic reasons, as the bilabial *m* makes a more logical partner, according to Romance phonetic logic, for the bilabial *b* to follow. Indeed, in the city itself, the *n* in *Edinburgh* is often pronounced as *m*. Latin forms demonstrate that the *nb* consonant grouping was of little concern for those merely writing in a Romance language, as shown in the University's Latin name *Universitas academica Edinburgensis*.

Apart from these and other exonyms, Edinburgh also has another name in a language that is geographically closer. The Gaelic name *Dùn Èideann* shows inverted specific and generic elements compared to the English name, in line with the standard for Gaelic names. The generic *dùn* is from a different root than the previous examples. Whether or not this is an endonym on an equal footing with the English name is debatable, as historical linguistic boundaries in this area are contested.

There are many different multilingual naming patterns that may occur, and there will be a different assortment of patterns in each individual linguistic situation. One of the

most common patterns is that of translated names similar to the Gaelic example above. With a name like *Dùn Èideann*, in which the meaning of the specific element is unclear, it would perhaps be difficult to determine which name came first, and how much of the name has been translated rather than merely adapted to the language in question. There are other cases in which it can be problematic to say which name was translated from which, when the two forms have precisely the same meaning, such as the town of *Vadsø* in Finnmark, Norway. The name of this town indicates an island where sea travellers could find drinking water (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1990: 331), and its name in Sámi is *Čáhcesuolo*, from *čácci* ‘water’ and *suolo* ‘island’ (Frette 1975: 111).

In other names, only the generic element is translated, while the specific element is adapted to the conventions of the other language. *Ifjord* < *Iddjavuodna* is one such example of a translation of the generic from Sámi to Norwegian accompanied by adaptation of the specific (Frette 1990: 170). *Fálásuolo*, the Sámi name for the island of *Kvaløya*, on which the town of Hammerfest is to be found, is one instance in which the same process took place in the translation from Norwegian to Sámi (Frette 1975: 113). *Edimbourg* and *Edimburgo*, already mentioned, are other examples of this development.

Other names merely transplant an entire name in its original form, and many such names may thus preserve an ancient name for a longer period than the source language itself does. *Siev’jo*, the Sámi name for an island in Western Finnmark, would appear to have preserved a proto-Scandinavian name **Sæ-aujo* ‘sea-island’ better than the modern Norwegian name *Seiland* has (Frette 1975: 113).

Dorion (1972a: 34-36) devised a table with forty separate classifications of place-names in Québec according to the language of their toponymical components: English, French or Native Canadian. Although the Canadian place-name inventory is quite complex – not least in scale – compared to those of some other nations, such a comprehensive

classification could be a useful tool for future studies comparing the names of Québec with those in other multilingual environments.

Generally speaking, the place-names of lower-status languages tend to suffer in the wake of cartographers and authorities, as the official use of names is often interpreted as the official sanctioning of a 'correct' form. The town of *Kautokeino* – in Sámi *Guovdageaidnu* – was probably first written in its more widely recognised form by Finnish-speaking Swedish administration before the area became part of Norway in 1751 (Frette 1975: 117-118).

A simple solution for a bilingual region would be to have separate sets of equally legitimate and 'official' place-names for each language. But even where two languages utilise different alphabets, this is almost impossible to follow through completely, as at least some names will be translations or adaptations of others, or some languages may lack a name for certain places.

3 Norway



Figure 3.1 A Norwegian/Sámi sign to the Sámi literature section in the University of Tromsø library. The sign also bears an image of the Sámi flag. Tromsø, April 2007.

3.1 Linguistic situation

3.1.1 Bokmål and Nynorsk

The most widely spoken language in Norway is Norwegian, a North Germanic language that shares many features with Danish and Swedish. Like most other languages, spoken Norwegian is by no means a monolithic unit. There are numerous dialects of Norwegian, which remain relatively strong compared to those of most other European languages. Unlike most other languages, however, Norwegian also has different written varieties. Bokmål (the 'book language') and Nynorsk (New Norwegian) are two distinct written standards that theoretically have equal status. While they do indeed allow for mutual comprehension, they

are arguably at least as different from each other as they are from the other Scandinavian languages.

Despite the official parity of the two standards, Bokmål is generally used more than Nynorsk. The Nynorsk-writing population is – on the national scale – a minority, with approximately 600,000 users among Norway's population of 4,681,100 (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2007a), and the language is also regionally concentrated in rural western Norway (Grepstad 2006: 8).

The division of the linguistic landscape between Bokmål and Nynorsk would be a fruitful area for future research, but the present study will concentrate on Sámi and, to a lesser extent, Kven.

3.1.2 Sámi

Sámi¹ is in fact not one language, but a group of ten Finno-Ugric languages spoken in a vast area that extends over the borders of Norway into Sweden, Finland and Russia. The ten languages, or variants, of Sámi are generally given as: South Sámi, Ume Sámi, Pite Sámi, Lule Sámi, North Sámi, Anár/Inari Sámi, Skolt Sámi, Áhkkil/Akkala/Babinsk Sámi, Kildin Sámi and Ter Sámi (Sammallahti 1998: 1; Helander 1997: 148).

Although non-adjacent varieties may not be entirely mutually comprehensible, the existence of separate written standards for six of these languages is the usual justification for their status as languages rather than dialects. Indeed, while South, Lule, North, Inari and Skolt Sámi written standards use variations of the Latin alphabet, Kildin has adopted an alphabet based on the Cyrillic (Sammallahti 1998: 1-2). These Sámi standards can therefore be considered to be languages according to Heinz Kloss' *Ausbau* definition as well as, to a certain extent, under his *Abstand* definition. In a fine treatment of Kloss' models, Robert

¹ The word Sámi is occasionally spelt Sami or Saami, however these descriptors are now much more widely accepted than the somewhat outdated 'Lapp'.

McCull Millar describes an Ausbau language (language by development) as '[e]ssentially [...] one which develops through language planning' and Abstand languages as 'languages believed by speakers to be distant because of inherent linguistic distance' (Millar 2005: 46).

People may identify themselves as Sámi on many different grounds, including linguistic competence, ancestry and ethnic definitions, place of residence and profession. Sometimes there may even be divisions within a family as to whether people define themselves as Sámi or not. Susann Funderud Skogvang, for example, is one of eight siblings, of whom two define themselves as Sámi, and six as Norwegian (*Brennpunkt* 2001). It cannot be known with any certainty how many Sámi live in Norway, but estimations of the number of Sámi speakers in Norway range from 10,000 to 20,000 (Kulbrandstad 2003: 19).

3.1.3 Finnish/Kven

The Finnish dialect-speaking Kven population of Norway first arrived in the northern part of Troms county from Finland in the eighteenth century, and more came to eastern Finnmark in the following century. Others came through Sweden to the so-called *Finnskogene* ('Finn forests') further south, but the Finnish language did not endure for long in this area. It was in the town of Vadsø that the Finnish language became strongest, and even temporarily acquired a higher prestige than Norwegian at the end of the 1800s. Finnish also had an effect on the Finnmark dialect, leading to a certain levelling of genders (Venås 1991: 51-54).

Although there are thought to be from 10,000 to 15,000 descendants of the original Finnish migrants, approximately 2,000 in Norway are thought to speak Finnish/Kven as an 'everyday language' (Kulbrandstad 2003: 19).

3.2 Official Sámi language policy

From the late nineteenth century, the position of the Norwegian state towards the Sámi was based, either openly or implicitly, on a *fornorskningspolitikk*, that is to say a policy designed to lead to the integration of the Sámi people into Norwegian society. In 1898, the use of Sámi languages in school was forbidden (Venås 1991: 52).

Now, however, the situation has changed. Sámi is taught in some schools, having first been taught in parts of Finnmark in 1967 (Andersen 2004: 125). Since 1988, section 110a of the Norwegian Constitution has instructed state authorities to facilitate the protection and development of the Sámi language, culture and society. Sámi medium school education is now available to all pupils in the Sámi municipalities, as well as to groups of at least ten pupils who may request it in other municipalities.

Although there is no separate Sámi Language Act, the all-encompassing *samelov* (Sámi Act), which originally came in 1989, was amended in 1990 to include sections on language use. These regulations concerning language, which came into force in 1992, are popularly known as *språkløva* (the [Sámi] Language Act). The *samelov* established Sámi as an official language, although most measures introduced by this law only apply in a limited area, the *forvaltningsområde for samisk språk* (Sámi Language Administrative Area) (Skogvang 2002: 134). In the municipalities in this area, rules include that municipal publications must be bilingual; when replying to letters, the municipality will use whichever of the two languages was used by the initiator, and health and social services will be in whichever of the two languages requested by the client (Hovland 1999: 135).

The problem of determining which Sámi language was implied in the Norwegian Sámi Language Act was eventually solved by specifying that in the North Sámi recognised area, the North Sámi language was to be inferred (Aarseth 2006: 415). Although all currently

recognised Sámi municipalities are in the North Sámi area, this does not rule out the use of, for example, South Sámi as and when municipalities in that area are assigned recognised status.

3.3 Place-name standardisation

In Norway, the official use of place-names is subject to a great deal of regulation, especially compared with the other two countries featured in this investigation.² The modern standardisation of place-names in Norway has its roots in the early nineteenth century, when there was some pressure to Norwegianise place-names as part of the drive to gradually move away from Danish spellings throughout the language in general. Some name changes in this period, such as *Christiania* > *Kristiania* > *Oslo* and *Trondhjem* > *Trondheim* were extremely controversial. In 1912-1913, the principle was introduced that the spelling of names on maps would primarily adhere to the local dialectal articulation, or they would alternatively follow Nynorsk spelling (Helleland 2002: 344-345).

The Place-Name Act 1990, while retaining the main reliance on dialectal pronunciation, introduced equal status for Bokmål and Nynorsk as secondary sources of spelling convention for place-names. This act established a system of place-name consultants across Norway in addition to setting out that the three levels of governance – state, county and municipality – were to deal with spellings according to which body had authority over the place in question. The law also instructed that Sámi and Kven names should be written according to the spelling rules of their respective languages (Helleland 2002: 345-346).

² In the United Kingdom, for example, the names adopted by Ordnance Survey have no prescriptive status (NOU 1983: 111).

The Act stated in section 3 – now in section 9 – that Sámi and Kven names are to be used together with the Norwegian name ‘for example on maps, signs, [and] in registers’. This raises the problem that the Norwegian name is seen to be the default and most authoritative name, with the Sámi or Finnish names somehow subordinate. Furthermore, this requirement also presupposes that there must be a Norwegian name for every place in Norway (Rautio Helander 2004: 116). In fact there are many natural landscape features that have Sámi names but no Norwegian names.

Where places have names in more than one language, the Norwegian name is often younger, and in many cases it is a translation or adaptation of the Sámi or Kven name, and therefore it could be seen as subordinate. An example in which the Norwegian name is tertiary is in *Kautokeino* (Norwegian) < *Koutokeino* (Kven) < *Guovdageaidnu* (Sámi) (Rautio Helander 1994: 124). Where Sámi names are used, however, they are used above Norwegian names on maps and signs, as well as in multilingual municipality names.

The Place-Name Act’s insistence on Sámi and Finnish names ‘which are used among people who permanently live in or have an occupational attachment to the place’ (Place-Name Act 1990: section 9) neglects the fact that Sámi farm names in Finnmark had been ‘expressly prohibited’ by the Land Purchasing Act 1902 (Rautio Helander 2004: 116). This act required that property be given a Norwegian name and this became the official name of the land. It was also a requirement to note buyers’ Norwegian language ability as well as details concerning their nationality and citizenship (Rautio Helander 2004: 110). Sámi farm names were not allowed until 1965 (Rautio Helander 2004: 114).

From the end of the nineteenth century, attempts were made to avoid the use of Sámi and Kven place-names on official maps, and many were translated into Norwegian. The preference for translated names ended in 1960, and by the time the Place-Name Act was

introduced, many Sámi names were already present on maps, although often with outdated spellings (Pedersen 2007).³

Kven names, on the other hand, were almost entirely absent on maps before the Place-Name Act. The first official map with trilingual – Sámi, Norwegian and Kven – names came in 1994 for part of Porsáŋgu-Porsanger-Porsanki municipality in Finnmark. The second such map, however, was rejected by the military geographic service (Forsvarets militærgeografiske teneste) and, since then, separate editions of maps have been produced for civil and military use, with the military maps having been granted an exemption from the section of the Place-Name Act on the use of multilingual names. It was said that the armed forces needed maps that were unambiguous and could be clearly read, even in poor conditions. Concern was also raised about the confusion these maps could cause for NATO allies using them. Yet many places in Norway, for example mountains, have two names even in Norwegian, which have long been shown together on maps, and the military had never complained about this before (Karikoski and Pedersen 1996: 32-34; Pedersen 2007). It must also be questioned whether members of allied forces on exercise in Norway are more likely to recognise the Norwegian name than the Sámi or Kven name. Besides, military exercises and operations often entail the adoption of alternative place-names.

In 2006, the Place-Name Act was revised, and now includes a section on place-name care or conservation (*'namnevern'*). This reinforces the perceived importance of place-names for cultural heritage. The requirement for Norwegian names to always be used still remains, however (Pedersen 2007). This condition is seen by some to be problematic when the Norwegian names are essentially loans from Sámi or Kven, as it raises the question as to whether these names are really 'Norwegian name forms, or [whether they are] maybe just

³ Publication of this report by Aud-Kirsti Pedersen is expected in late 2007. The document quoted is a provisional draft kindly supplied by Pedersen, so precise page numbers cannot yet be given.

Norwegian pronunciation variants of the original place-names' (Rautio Helander 1994: 130). In most cases, however, Norwegian names will also have a worth of their own in terms of cultural heritage.

The third report of the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts considers Norway's undertaking of article 10.2.g of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages on the 'use and adoption [...] of correct forms of place names in regional or minority languages' to be 'fulfilled' (Council of Europe 2007b: 25). This goal was, in fact, deemed to have been fulfilled already in the first report (Council of Europe 2001: 22).

3.4 Territorial and political divisions: The Sámi *forvaltningsområde*

When proposals were made in Norway for the protection and support of the Sámi languages, there was little, if any, negative reaction. There were no press campaigns against Sámi, and it did not generate the same opposition as earlier proposals for Sámi rights in other sectors had (Aarseth 2006: 392). The county doctor for Finnmark even said that, since a positive self-image can favour general wellbeing and good health, the promotion of the Sámi language and culture would have 'an unquestionable positive effect on health' (*'utvilsom helsefremmende virkning'*) for future generations (Ot.prp. nr. 60 [1989-1990] Samisk språk: 13, cited in Aarseth 2006: 393). Despite this, there has been some localised resistance to the official use of Sámi language, and road signs displaying Sámi place-names have borne the brunt of this hostility.

The Samekulturutvalget (Sámi Culture Committee), which put forward the language regulations in 1985, initially proposed that the *forvaltningsområde* should consist of five municipalities in Finnmark county – Kárásjohka-Karasjok, Guovdageaidnu-Kautokeino,

Unjárga-Nesseby, Porsángu-Porsanger-Porsanki and Deatnu-Tana – and one in Troms county, Gáivuotna-Kåfjord.⁴ While Kárašjohka-Karasjok and Guovdageaidnu-Kautokeino agreed with this suggestion from the start, Unjárga-Nesseby and Deatnu-Tana wanted municipalities themselves to be able to choose whether to participate, and Porsángu-Porsanger-Porsanki did not wish to be part of the area at all. By the time this proposal was officially put forward, however, the Sameting (Sámi Parliament) had been opened and it supported the inclusion of all six municipalities. In Porsángu-Porsanger-Porsanki, the municipal council voted 16 to 9 in favour of joining the Sámi area. The Ministry of Culture then proposed that Gáivuotna-Kåfjord would not join the area initially, as it was in another county and had relatively few Sámi inhabitants (Aarseth 2006: 394). It was thought that the Sámi area would be stronger if it was a contiguous area within one county (Skogvang 2002: 135). However, the parliamentary church and education committee once again put forward the inclusion of Gáivuotna-Kåfjord, stressing the special importance of language development in this particular municipality. It was hoped that this municipality's inclusion would prevent further erosion of its Sámi identity (Aarseth 2006: 416).

Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25) argue that clear territorial limitations such as these can stabilise relationships between linguistic communities, and that the linguistic landscape can reveal the 'linguistic characteristics, territorial limits, and language boundaries' of such a region, especially to visitors. As will be shown here, however, problems of linguistic identity can occur even within clearly defined areas like the Sámi area, and these may come to light as disputes concerning the demarcation of the boundaries of that area. Problems arise particularly at the extreme peripheries of these areas, or in places that may lie outwith them,

⁴ The *forvaltningsområde* now consists of these six municipalities and, since 2006, Divtasvuodna-Tysfjord in Nordland. Storfjord in Troms may also apply to become part of the area (Pedersen 2007). Although the different names of these municipalities are now of equal status, and can be used separately without the hyphen, there is no official English form, so the hyphenated name will be used here.

but serve as power-bases for their administration: good examples of each, in the case of the Sámi area, are Gáivuotna-Kåfjord and Tromsø respectively, and these will be examined below.

In terms of party political divisions, the opposition to the official use of Sámi that is found in some municipalities seems to have been taken up primarily by the right, especially Høyre (the Conservative Party) and Fremskrittspartiet (Fr.p. – the right-wing ‘Progress Party’). During the Odelsting debate on the Sámi Language Act on 20 November 1990, Svein Ludvigsen, Høyre member for Troms, was quick to highlight the disagreement in Porsángu-Porsanger-Porsanki, where a petition against the Language Act had collected 850 signatures. Although he had acknowledged the importance of Sámi rights, Ludvigsen went on to demonstrate how disproportionate this figure was to the Sámi population of the municipality. Out of 189 registered Sámi inhabitants, 124 voted in the 1989 elections to the Sameting (Aarseth 2006: 425). In the same debate concern was expressed by, among others, Fr.p. member for Rogaland Jan Simonsen and Høyre member for Vestfold Ingrid I. Willoch, about forcing a Sámi education on non-speakers of Sámi (Aarseth 2006: 421, 426-427).

3.5 Sámi conceptualisation of the landscape

The Sámi and Norwegian populations have very different understandings of their landscape, and this may be a contributory factor in the debate concerning the application of rules in favour of Sámi. First and foremost, national borders are a relatively new concept in the Northern Calotte region, and this is not least the case for the Sámi, whose presence

crosses the borders of four states. If the Sámi are to be assigned to one nation, then it can only be their own, Sápmi.⁵

For the Sámi, many places have special religious or magic associations. These may be artificial places of worship or burial grounds, but they may also be naturally occurring features such as mountains or boulders. The same was indeed true of the Norwegian perception of a mythical landscape, but this changed with industrialisation. Although industrialisation has come to Sápmi as well, a large proportion of the Sámi will have a history of reindeer-rearing in their family from at most two generations ago, and will therefore still be familiar with the traditional experience of the landscape. Owing to their dependence on reindeer, the Sámi had to follow them across the land, and this has perhaps contributed to a less anthropocentric perception of the landscape (Grønningsæter 1997). What Norwegians see as a natural landscape could be perceived as a cultural landscape by Sámi (Jones 1991: 232).

Before the full reaction to the official use of Sámi place-names could be known, Øystein Steinlien stated at a seminar in 1989 that place-names, even if they are Sámi, can be made 'harmless' simply by saying that the names were coined long ago. For this reason, he believed, perhaps a little ingenuously, that the use of place-names by a movement calling for greater recognition of an autochthonous minority could help to encourage support from larger sections of the community that see place-names as uncontroversial. He based this assessment on his experience in the Sameforening (Sámi Association) in Gáivuotna-Kåfjord, in which he said that people could see the potential benefits of the society's activities through projects such as those connected to place-names (Steinlien 1991: 68).

⁵ This is not dissimilar to the Scottish Gaelic *Gàidhealtachd*, which is often translated as 'the Highlands', but this neglects its reference to 'Gaeldom' in Scotland. Although the *Gàidhealtachd*, unlike Sápmi, is entirely within one state, its borders do not coincide with established sub-national political divisions.

3.6 Road signs

3.6.1 Deployment

As stated above, section 9 (previously 3) of the Place-Name Act 1990 instructed that, for official purposes, Sámi and Kven place-names that are used by the local people are normally to be used in conjunction with the Norwegian name, and this also applies to road signs. The normal order is Norwegian/Sámi/Finnish, but in the Sámi *forvaltningsområde* the order is Sámi/Norwegian/Finnish (Helleland 1993: 159). The first signs with Sámi place-names, however, were installed in the 1980s in Guovdageaidnu-Kautokeino and Kárášjohka-Karasjok. As more municipalities were given bilingual names, more bilingual signs were introduced (Kaisa Rautio Helander, personal communication, 20 March 2007).

The agency that installs road signs on county and state roads in Norway, Statens vegvesen, has often appeared reluctant to erect multilingual signage, except in the Sámi municipalities of inner Finnmark, i.e. Guovdageaidnu-Kautokeino and Kárášjohka-Karasjok (Pedersen 2007; Rautio Helander 1994). It can take a long time from the initial request from the municipality before such signs are erected. Furthermore, signs will only be erected if there is already an officially adopted spelling of the place-name in question. Statens vegvesen also endeavours to limit multilingual directional signs as much as possible, seeing their commitments in bilingual signing to apply primarily to their sign '712 *Stadnamnskilt*' ('Place-Name Sign') (Pedersen 2007).

Aud-Kirsti Pedersen contacted a total of 90 municipalities with Sámi and Kven names with a questionnaire concerning the official use of minority place-names, and received 38 replies. Some, such as Hammerfest and Nordkapp, seemed to think that they did not need to deal with Sámi names as they were not in the Sámi *forvaltningsområde*. This is, however, a misunderstanding. It is the Place-Name Act that regulates the official use of

place-names, and this covers the whole of Norway (Pedersen 2007). This demonstrates how territorial limitations for some minority language policies can sometimes cause confusion.

There are currently trilingual signs for six hamlets – with a seventh in preparation – in Porsáŋgu-Porsanger-Porsanki, in addition to the municipal boundary signs themselves (Pedersen 2007). This municipality is part of the Sámi *forvaltningsområde*, and despite the language order that should be followed there, as detailed above, the actual order on these signs is Norwegian/Sámi/Finnish.

At the entrance to the town – not the municipal boundary – of Vadsø, Finnmark, a trilingual Norwegian/Sámi/Finnish sign (Vadsø/Čáhcesuolu/Vesisaari) can be seen. The Sámi plate on this sign has been removed twice – and was on one occasion found by schoolchildren, who were rewarded – but the Norwegian and Kven place-names have not been touched. This clearly demonstrates ‘an ethnical hierarchy and negative attitudes towards the [Sámi]’ (Rautio Helander 2005: 56).

Skånland municipality, in Troms county, refused in 1992 to adopt its Sámi name, Skánik, which was in use, on an equal footing with the Norwegian name. Although a municipal committee, the Culture Ministry and the chief administrative officer (*Fylkesmann*) of Troms all concluded that this was against the Place-Name Act, and Sámi names have now been adopted for two hamlets in Skånland, the municipality still does not use Sámi on its signs (Andersen 2004 127-129; Pedersen 2007).

According to Pedersen (2007), there are presently no Kven signs outside Finnmark and only two municipalities with Sámi signs outside of Finnmark: Gáivuotna-Kåfjord and Lavangen, both in Troms.⁶

⁶ Storfjord municipality (Troms) decided in 2001 to have trilingual boundary signs, as part of an attempt to create a stronger local identity that could encourage young people to settle there (Ingebrigtsen 2001). These signs have been the target of vandalism (Pedersen 2003). I have been unable to verify whether they are currently in place.

3.6.2 Gáivuotna-Kåfjord: Norway's road sign flashpoint

Gáivuotna-Kåfjord, in Troms, is the only municipality outside Finnmark in the Sámi *forvaltningsområde*. It has a population of 2,220 (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2007b). This is also one of only two – or three⁷ – municipalities outside Finnmark with Sámi road signs. The signs in Gáivuotna-Kåfjord are limited to the municipal boundary signs and two tunnel names. The only other Sámi road sign outside Finnmark is the bilingual hamlet name Spansdalen/Ruŋgu in Lavangen municipality, also in Troms (Pedersen 2007).

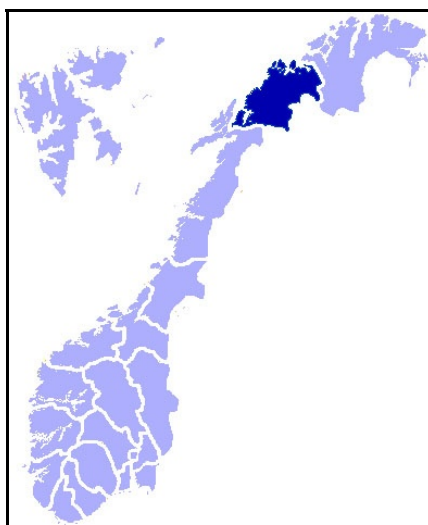


Figure 3.2 The location of Troms in Norway. Public domain image from Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Troms_kart.png> [accessed 27 August 2007].

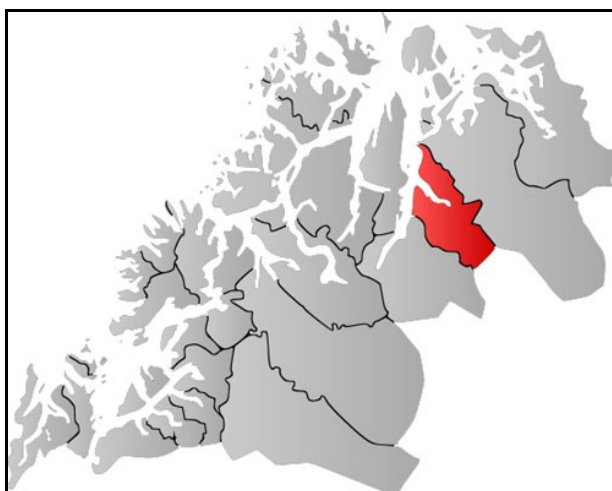


Figure 3.3 The location of Gáivuotna-Kåfjord in Troms county. Public domain image from Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:NO_1940_K%C3%A5fjord.svg> [accessed 27 August 2007].

⁷ See note 6 above.

There has been a certain amount of opposition to the application of the Sámi Act in Gáivuotna-Kåfjord, with strong feelings on both sides. Some parents have kept their children home from school when there have been Sámi events or activities (Skogvang 2002: 136).⁸ The Sámi part of the bilingual boundary sign has been destroyed or removed at least five times, but it is currently back in place after a long period of absence, and the situation seems to have calmed (Pedersen 2007). Within the municipality, bilingual signs at the school in Djupvik have also been targeted (Enoksen 1999).

The nature of the attacks against the boundary sign has occasionally been violent, with the Sámi place-name being shot at, while other times it has been painted over or simply removed. When replacement signs are installed, they are often destroyed or removed very soon afterwards. On one occasion, bilingual signs in the south of Gáivuotna-Kåfjord did not last longer than ten days. In the north of the municipality, where the Norwegian language and population are strongest, a bilingual sign lasted only four days (*Brennpunkt* 2001). At one time, the roads authority placed 10 mm thick Plexiglass over the sign, but this was not enough (Solvang 2001). Tromsprodukt AS, a company that manufactures road signs for northern Norway, also investigated the feasibility of steel-plated 'bullet-proof' signs (Pellicer 2001: 14). The bilingual tunnel signs have not been a target (Pedersen 2007).

The sign has become a symbol for the animosity between the two cultures and 'of the consequences of the assimilation politics' (Andersen 2004: 127). One of the destroyed signs is now displayed in Tromsø University Museum (see Figure 3.4).

⁸ The same has happened in Deatnu-Tana (Gaarder 2004).



Figure 3.4 A bilingual municipal boundary sign from Gáivuotna-Kåfjord (Troms). The Sámi text ‘Gáivuona suohkan’ has been obliterated using firearms and paint. Tromsø University Museum, April 2007.

That the situation has now calmed may be connected to local politics. Former mayor Kristin Vatnelid Johansen of the Sosialistisk Venstreparti (Socialist Left Party) was elected with her policy to take the municipality out of the *forvaltningsområde* (Brennpunkt 2001). A new mayor Bjørn Inge Mo of Arbeiderpartiet (the Labour Party) was elected in 2003, and the Sámi Act seems to be gaining wider acceptance in Gáivuotna-Kåfjord. In 2005, a local hotel was given 25,000 Kr from municipal funds towards erecting Sámi signs, and was the first private business in the municipality to do so (Enoksen 2005).

Although the conflict may appear primarily ethnic, Arild Hovland (1999: 152) also explains the conflict, or ‘disagreement’ (*uoverensstemmelse*) in Gáivuotna-Kåfjord by the fact that, in terms of settlement, ‘[Gáivuotna-]Kåfjord is not one place, but many.’ The municipality encompasses many small hamlets, and hence many local identities, which are stronger than the municipal identity. Feelings appear much stronger about what some

perceive to be the establishment of a Sámi hegemony than they are about simple municipal identity. Hovland claims that the local 'Sámi elite' have, through their interpretation of Sámi history, 'created another [different] narrative home' (Hovland 1999: 153).

People's family histories and personal histories, their narratives, are woven together with the collective history in countless ways. Therefore, when the [Sámi] activists write the collective history of [Gáivuotna-]Kåfjord anew, they also go after every single Kåfjording's personal understanding of themselves. (Hovland 1999: 154)

The view that the recognition of Sámi identity can have an impact on the identity of others is supported by the comments of one local opponent of the Sámi Act, Jens Ivar Simonsen, interviewed on an NRK TV documentary:

It's clear that we are being branded. We are. There is so much focus on Kåfjord and the Sámi Language Act that there... outside the area people say that there are only Sámi in Kåfjord: that is so terribly wrong. [...] There is after all a very large majority against the Sámi Language Act, and I think that should be respected. Definitely. [...] We are going to continue the fight against the Sámi Language Act. We are going to do that. I don't think there are many signs that we will be left in peace until... until the Language Act is withdrawn. (Jens Ivar Simonsen, interviewed in *Brennpunkt* 2001).

Shortly after this documentary was broadcast, regional newspaper *Nordlys* spoke with an anonymous 'sign crusher' ('*skiltknuser*') from Gáivuotna-Kåfjord. He said that he knew seven or eight other people who carried out the same actions against road signs in the municipality. He said, however, that it would be better if Sámi signs were also erected in other neighbouring municipalities, as then Gáivuotna-Kåfjord would no longer appear so different (Enoksen 2001).

Other specific motivations for anti-Sámi attitudes could include resentment over more generous hunting and fishing rights now granted to the Sámi.

Some, however, believe that those behind the destruction of Sámi signs in Gáivuotna-Kåfjord could actually be people with a Sámi background who wish to conceal their Sámi identity (Pedersen 2007). Alternatively, there could be some who wish to call

attention to the suppression that the Sámi have lived through, showing that bilingual signs alone cannot reverse the results of the assimilation policy.

3.6.3 Sámi reactions to signs

Attitudes towards Sámi signs among the Sámi themselves are complex and not exclusively positive, but are certainly affected by previous policies of Norwegianisation:

For some, such a sign can be seen as another humiliation, while for others it can be a kind of vindication for racism and other kinds of stigmatising attitudes, since a visible Saami place name is a kind of official acceptance of the Saami language as equal to the language of the majority population. (Andersen 2004: 129)

Children can often appear to have difficulties relating to Sámi questions. Nevertheless, during Geir Grenersen's participatory fieldwork, in which he taught at a school in Trøsse-mark, on the border between Troms and Nordland, it became clear that the pupils could engage in vigorous debate when talking about certain aspects of Sámi culture. The parents of many of these children still spoke Sámi at home, at least part of the time. One of the pupils, who had earlier said, in her local Norwegian dialect, '*Samisk e ikkje fint*' ('Sámi is not fine' [*fint* in this context covers such concepts as beautiful, refined, cultivated, fashionable]), corrected Grenersen's pronunciation of local Sámi place-names and began to recite them according to the pronunciation with which she was obviously quite used to hearing them uttered (Grenersen 1995: 175-178). Another day, the pupils began a discussion about wearing the traditional Sámi *kofte* and the road sign debate:

The debate about Sámi road signs had its origin when one of the Sámi associations had adopted it as a matter they wished to follow through. Most of the pupils were against Sámi road signs and said they would move away if any were to arrive.

'Tenk hva finfolkan fra Harstad ville tru når de kjører forbi og ser de skiltan' ('Think what the sophisticated people from Harstad would think when they drive by and see those signs'), said Marie.

Tor said, as usual, that [the] Sámi [language] was ugly. Nobody thought positively of the idea of Sámi road signs. (Grenersen 1995: 179)

It seems that, for these children, ‘invisibility’ was part of the Sámi identity, and was almost a way of protecting them and avoiding conflict. It may also be a way to commemorate previous subjugation of minorities:

If Sámi language road signs were put up, everyone who drove along the main road would see the signs with Sámi text. The invisible *markesamisk* society, shielded by hills and ridges, would be uncovered. The road signs would call out to the world: Sámi live here – and we are in the best of health! The teasing and bullying in Norwegian society, which several grandparents told they had been subjected to, but which has not been evident in recent years, could flare up. This was what the pupils were thinking of when they were against Sámi road signs.

[...] The pupils knew that Sámi road signs could be a hazardous venture, an undertaking that could unexpectedly hit them hardest, as they would be bussed down to the central school in the morning and back again in the afternoon every day for a year. Think what an excuse that could give them down by the coast. Freed from their own *samiskhet* [‘Sámi-ness’], they would now feel the threat of Vuobmegiecce, Hoantas, Snoalta, Heallo-Niárga and other peculiar places. (Grenersen 1995: 181)

Similar cultural attitudes are also expressed among people of other minorised cultures. It is essentially ‘what [Scots] call the Scottish Cringe and the Catalans call the slave mentality – the “haudin doun” mind set of people whose cultures have been marginalised’ (Kay 1995: 307). Compared to the case of Sámi, however, the ethnic dimension of Gaelic culture is much less significant.

In some places, Sámi have erected their own unofficial wooden signs with Sámi place-names to show that they believe Sámi names should have equal official recognition to Norwegian names. No Norwegian signs have been damaged, in stark contrast to the anti-Sámi actions reported in Gáivuotna-Kåfjord (Rautio Helander 2005: 56).

The use of signs may be essential for the effective conservation of Sámi place-names. In Gáivuotna-Kåfjord, for example, where there are many Sámi names, these are mainly only known by older people, who do not necessarily pass them on. Younger people have difficulties remembering them, as they may not know their meanings, or may not be as

familiar with the territory (Hovland 1999: 146). Therefore, the names' associative value is diminished. Signs, placed in the environmental context of these places, would provide a permanent reminder of Sámi names.

3.7 Tromsø: A Sámi city?

Tromsø is the largest settlement in northern Norway and the northernmost city in the world. It has a population of 64,492 (Statistisk sentralbyrå 2007c). Although Tromsø is not part of the Sámi *forvaltningsområde*, it is the administrative seat of Troms county and, as a regional centre, it serves an even wider area, including all municipalities covered by the Sámi Act. A qualitative survey was made of Sámi signage in public places in the city, and the findings are presented here.

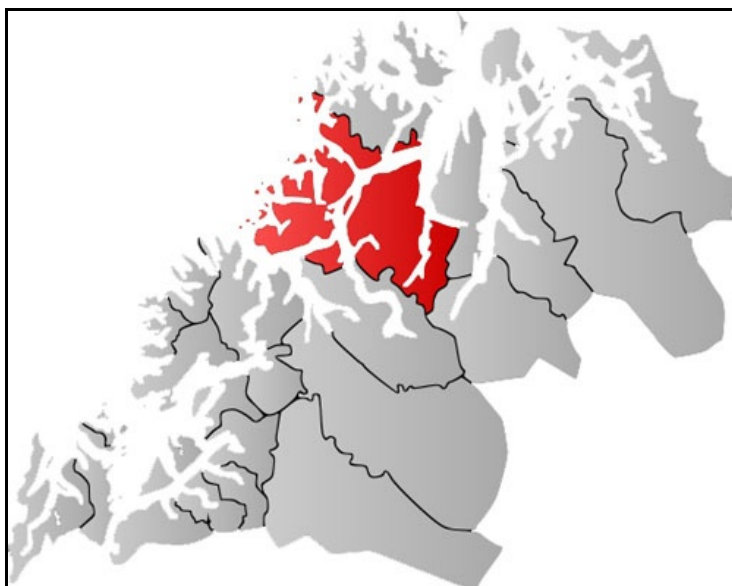


Figure 3.5 The location of Tromsø in Troms county. The city of Tromsø itself is on an island in the approximate geographic centre of the municipality. Public domain image from Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:NO_1902_Troms%C3%B8.svg> [accessed 27 August 2007].

Troms fylkeskommune (Troms County Council) was recently given an official alternative Sámi name, Romssa fylkkasuohkan, and this mainly used as part of the county logo or identity, not unlike the identity of Highland Council in Scotland (see Section 4.4 below, pp. 76-77). Sámi text can therefore be seen on some signs on county buildings such as schools (see Figure 3.6). Currently relatively few instances of the county logo are accompanied by such text, but this could be explained by the recent nature of this name change.



Figure 3.6 This sign at an upper secondary school in the city shows the bilingual name of the council as well as a bilingual name for the school itself. Part of the rationale behind bilingual high school signs in Troms was that it would ‘take away some of the pressure’ from Gáivuotna-Kåfjord (Sætra 2001). Tromsø, April 2007.

Tromsø municipality itself is not officially bilingual. In 2001, mayor Herman Kristoffersen expressed a desire for Sámi road signs in the municipality (Glosemeyer 2001). This comment came less than a week after the broadcast of the *Brennpunkt* documentary on the signs in Kåfjord, which seems to have enlivened the debate across Norway. Following the mayor’s statement in support of such a scheme, Culture Ministry undersecretary Roger Ingebrigtsen of Arbeiderpartiet (the Labour Party) came out strongly against the idea, saying that it would be ‘ludicrous’ (Lillebo 2001). It seems that Ingebrigtsen gave journalists to

believe that, in addition to the criterion of usage specified in the Place-Name Act, there was a further question of minority place-names only being used 'where appropriate' (Lillebo 2001).

There is a municipal project to encourage the official use of Sámi in Tromsø, especially with regard to building and place-names (Olset 2005). Some new signs erected inside municipal buildings accordingly feature Sámi text (see Figures 3.7-8), as does at least one municipal sign in an out-of-doors public place (Figure 3.9).



Figures 3.7-8 Signs in the Fokuskvartalet complex – which houses the public library, the city hall and the cinema – showing the Sámi for 'city hall' and 'library'. Tromsø, April 2007.



Figure 3.9 There are several trilingual Norwegian-Sámi-English signs with this identical message outside the cathedral in Richard Withs plass. These are erected by Tromsø municipality's park and roads service. Tromsø, April 2007.

Some of the largest institutions in Tromsø use at least some bilingual signs. These include Universitetssykehuset Nord-Norge (the University Hospital of Northern Norway, UNN). Chapter 3 of the Sámi Act includes the right to local and regional health services in Sámi in the Sámi *forvaltningsområde*, and UNN is the regional hospital for residents of that area. The hospital, which used to be known as Regionsykehuset i Tromsø⁹ (Tromsø Regional Hospital, RiTø), was the first large public building in northern Norway to use systematically bilingual signs. These were installed apparently without any pressure from Sámi activists. A typograph was involved in the production of Sámi characters especially for the project, and Harald Gaski and Nils Jernsletten, the first professor of Sámi language at the University of

⁹ The original naming of this building itself was not without controversy. The Name Consultant Service (Namnekonulenttenesta) recommended the spelling 'Regionsjukehuset i Tromsø', as this better reflects local pronunciation. The county refused to change the name as it was informed by the Culture Ministry that this was not a place-name according to the Place-Name Act. The Act actually leaves the matter of which names it deals with quite open (Pedersen 1994).

Tromsø, translated the Norwegian medical terminology for the signs, devising new words and trying to avoid loans from Latin as much as possible. The only cases in which words were not translated were in abbreviations such as 'Lab.' (Pollestad 1991). This has, however, led to some inconsistencies (see Figure 3.11).



Figure 3.10 The installation of bilingual signage at the hospital was certainly a thorough initiative: not even the Sámi Parliament had Norwegian-Sámi emergency exit signs (Pollestad 1991). In fact, many public buildings in Norway use the English word 'exit' in this context. These signs are, however, now obsolete. Regulations require emergency exit signs to be pictorial in nature, and the bilingual exit signs, given in *Bladet Tromsø* to be approximately one thousand in number, will have to be replaced (Vik 2007). Tromsø, April 2007.



Figure 3.11 This sign includes directions to the Ear, Nose and Throat Department offices. The Norwegian abbreviation (the equivalent to ENT) is ØNH, and this abbreviation has been repeated in the Sámi text. However, the correct Sámi abbreviation BNC appears in a smaller sign on the door. Tromsø, April 2007.



Figure 3.12 The bilingual signage in the hospital even extends to the affiliated pharmacy. Tromsø, April 2007.

The University of Tromsø has strong Sámi credentials, with a centre for Sámi studies and even a *goahti*, or *gamme*, a traditional Sámi turf hut, on its campus. The University also uses some bilingual signs, but these are not used as thoroughly as at the hospital (see Figures 3.14-15).



Figure 3.13 A bilingual sign in the University Library, asking for quiet in both Norwegian and Sámi. Tromsø, April 2007.



Figures 3.14-15 While most university departmental or institutional names are given in both Norwegian and Sámi, many building names themselves, such as *Farmasibygget* are monolingual. The difference between institutional and building names is not always this clear (Pedersen 1994: 60). The sign at the entrance to the library is solely in Norwegian. Tromsø, April 2007.



Figure 3.16 The most extensive use of Sámi at the university is probably in the building where the Centre for Sámi Studies is based. This building does have a bilingual name. Tromsø, April 2007.

Tromsø is bidding to host the XXIII Olympic Winter Games in 2018. Sámi identity is an important component of the city's candidacy, and this is reflected in the current candidacy logo (see Figure 3.17).¹⁰ Tromsø 2018 has the support of the international Sámi Parliamentary Council, although Johan Mikkel Sara, Vice-President of the Sámi Parliament, is against the bid (Olaussen 2007).

Tromsø's current bid document states that 'it is an important aim to use the Games to preserve and develop Sámi culture, history and surroundings for the future' (Tromsø 2018 AS 2007a: 4). The Sámi 'resource group' for Tromsø 2018 has made specific recommendations for increasing the visibility of Sámi design and language through a design programme, including 'signage of arenas, buildings and transport arteries' (Tromsø 2018 AS 2007b: 13). The group also recommends bilingual naming of the sports arenas and, interestingly, sees Sámi 'words and place-names' as a 'visual resource' that could inspire the design of the Games (Tromsø 2018 AS 2007b: 13-14). However, present plans for the arenas show only Norwegian names (Tromsø 2018 AS 2007c).



Figure 3.17 The bilingual logo of Tromsø 2018 AS, outside its offices. Tromsø, April 2007.

¹⁰ Sámi culture was represented in the opening ceremony of the Lillehammer Olympic Winter Games in 1994, when Nils Aslak Valkepää sang a traditional Sámi *joik*. One Norwegian priest reacted strongly to this, as well as to the use of trolls in the ceremony, which he deemed to be 'anti-Christian' (Puijk 1999: 112-113).

4 Scotland



Figure 4.1 *The Dingwall Marker* by Gerald Laing. This monument, which stands on the former site of the livestock mart, features historic names of the town in Old Norse (*Þingvöllr*, ‘field of the Thing or Parliament’) – including in futhark – and in Gaelic. Dingwall (Highland), November 2006.

4.1 Linguistic situation

4.1.1 Gaelic

Scots Gaelic is a Celtic language closely related to Irish. According to the 2001 Census, there were 58,652 Gaelic speakers in Scotland, but 92,396 people could speak, read, write or understand the language. Although Gaelic has a history of extensive use in most parts of Scotland, the highest concentrations of Gaelic speakers today are in the Comhairle nan

Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) area and in parts of the Highland and Argyll and Bute council areas. The only places where a majority speak Gaelic are the Western Isles and parts of Skye, although Gaelic speakers now only account for 59.66% of the Western Isles population. The demography of Gaelic is changing, however, with 45% of Gaelic speakers now living in outside the Highlands and Islands, mainly in cities where they represent much smaller sections of the overall population (Dunbar 2006: 3).

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 established Bòrd na Gàidhlig, an organisation tasked with the promotion of Gaelic and advising other institutions on Gaelic matters. The Bòrd is also responsible for preparing the National Plan for Gaelic, the first edition of which was published in 2007, and it may also instruct individual Scottish public authorities to prepare Gaelic language plans, although the Scottish Ministers have the ultimate say on these plans.

Gaelic is currently gaining greater recognition in education and broadcasting. Gaelic-medium education began in 1985, and has now spread to 62 primary schools, with a total of 2,092 pupils in 2006-2007 (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2007a). The much delayed launch of a Gaelic television channel is expected soon.

4.1.2 Scots

Scots is a Germanic language that lies on a continuum of mutual intelligibility with English and Scottish English. Although there is currently no formal policy in relation to Scots, there has been some unease among Scots language activists over the apparent tendency for governments to perceive Scots as a 'less important "patois" which has lesser credentials than Gaelic' (Horsburgh and Murdoch 1998: 1). In fact, in the United Kingdom's second submission to the Council of Europe on its progress with regard to meeting the requirements of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Scottish Executive tended

to include information about Scots under a 'Scots Gaelic' heading and, on at least one occasion, referred to Scots as 'Scottish-English (Scots)' (Council of Europe 2005: 7).

Recent campaigns have attempted to encourage the inclusion of a question on Scots in the census as a first step towards greater recognition of the status of Scots. Campaigners suggest that this would help to ease the prejudices against the Scots language, and could even pave the way for the inclusion of Scots in school curricula and broadcasting in Scots (Horsburgh and Murdoch 1998: 16-17).

As yet, there has not been the same call for Scots place-names to be legitimised on signs, maps, etc. as there has for Gaelic place-names, but this may indeed happen in the future.

4.2 Road signs

4.2.1 Campaigning in Wales and Scotland

In the 1960s, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society) began a campaign of direct action against monolingual signs, and this came to a head in 1969, the same year as Prince Charles' investiture as Prince of Wales. The campaign involved painting over signs, but activists avoided 'the kind of obliteration that would cause a hazard' (Thomas 1978: 86). The campaign later escalated to include the physical removal of signs (Thomas 1978: 88).

Normally, any signs that deviate from the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions need special authorisation from the responsible minister. In August 1969, the Secretary of State for Wales announced proposals that led to the possibility for local authorities to install some informational and boundary signs in English and Welsh with tacit consent. The exclusion of warning and destination signs, on a safety basis, was challenged

by a petition in 1970 that called for all signs in Wales to be bilingual. Following the petition, the Committee of Inquiry into Bilingual Traffic Signs, chaired by Roderic Bowen, was set up, and the committee concluded that bilingual signs should be set up across Wales (Ryder 1980: 3-4).

The defacement of some monolingual English and English-over-Welsh signs in Wales did continue after the introduction of bilingual signs began, but this caused few problems apart from the difficulty of enforcing waiting restrictions in some towns. Interestingly, Gwent county also reported some damage to the Welsh parts of bilingual signs (Ryder 1980: 65-67).

Against the background of the Welsh campaign, the Gaelic Society of London began to address the issue of Gaelic signs as it lobbied politicians and public bodies. The Scottish Office claimed in 1969 that this was a matter for local authorities, but the Scottish Home and Health Department stated the next year that the Secretary of State for Scotland could authorise such signs 'if a good case can be made out by a local authority' (cited in MacKinnon 1991: 109). When, in 1970, the Gaelic Society of London contacted authorities across the Highlands and Islands, bilingual signage was found to be existing policy in Stornoway, and was adopted as policy in seven districts, and apparently implemented in some in Sutherlandshire. The most unenthusiastic replies came from Inverness-shire district authorities, which appeared to have 'some measure of co-ordinated policy' (MacKinnon 1991: 109-110). It seemed that signs were 'of even more totemic importance to anglophone councillors and council officials than they had ever been to Gaelic activists' (Hutchinson 2005: 115).

In the early 1970s, Inverness-shire County Council asked the prominent pro-Gaelic landowner and businessman Iain Noble to sell the Council a small section of roadside land south of Portree for planned improvements to the road. He offered the land for free, on the

condition that three bilingual signs would be installed there, indicating Viewfield Road, the High School and Portree itself, with the Gaelic name *Port Rìgh* in larger text than the English name. Although two councillors from Barra and North Uist agreed with Noble's proposal, the Roads Committee chairman, Lord Burton of Dochfour, was against the suggestion, and he was supported by the county surveyor Keith MacFarlane. Noble organised a petition in April 1973 in favour of bilingual signs that was signed by many community leaders, from church ministers and headmasters to the procurator fiscal. Not all of the community were supportive of the petition, and many were sceptical of Noble for his social status as a landowner.¹¹ Nevertheless, the petition made an impact on the Council, and it was decided in May 1973 that 'Portree' would be accompanied by 'Port Rìgh' and 'Viewfield Road' would also be signed as 'Goirtean na Creige'. Noble's appeal for bilingual signs to the school was withdrawn, but a single sign for Broadford was also supplemented with 'An t-Ath Leathann' (Hutchinson 2005: 115-117).

Following the reorganisation of local government in 1974, the new Comhairle nan Eilean (Western Isles Islands Council) adopted a bilingual policy and signs with monolingual Gaelic place-names were installed in that administrative area (MacKinnon 1991: 110-111).

When the campaign group Ceartas ('Justice') was set up in 1981, some of its founding members carried out graffiti action against road signs and wrote slogans on carriageways, beginning at Pitagowan near Bruar on the arterial A9. Iain Taylor – the then director of the Gaelic college Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and a Ceartas member – remembers that the action was 'amateurish' and that the group 'didn't know what [they] were doing' (cited in

¹¹ Noble did, however, have the support of the Skye Crofters' Union (McIntosh 1973). Also, an opinion poll carried out by secondary school pupils found that 77% of locals and 70% of visitors in the parishes of Strath, Snizort and Duirinish were in favour of Gaelic signs (*West Highland Free Press* 1973).

Hutchinson 2005: 147). The action intensified during a weekend conference at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in May 1981, and was noticed by police. In fact, Taylor has said that he and others had been 'giving hints to the police', including painting a red arrow outside Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, hoping for a trial that would confirm the validity of Gaelic (Hutchinson 2005: 147-148). In a police raid on Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, '25 pots of paint, six used paintbrushes, 796 Ceartas badges, a wooden stick, a postcard, and a piece of cardboard' were removed (*West Highland Free Press* 1981). Iain Taylor was later arrested and charged for painting '*Port Adhair*' over the English legend on the sign at the airport at Ashaig (MacKinnon 1991: 112).

Despite previous assurances that Gaelic could be used in court, when Iain Taylor spoke in Gaelic at Portree Sheriff Court on 14 April 1982 (*Taylor v. Haughney* 1982), Sheriff Scott Robinson ordered the trial to continue in English (MacKinnon 1991: 113-114). An appeal to the Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh over this matter was unsuccessful. Lord Justice Clerk Wheatley, together with Lords Hunter and Dunpark, based their decision on the case of Alexander McRae (1841), who was denied a request to present evidence in Gaelic as he was deemed equally proficient in English (McLeod 1997: 100; MacKinnon 1991: 113-114; Hutchinson 2005: 150). This is essentially the same status as any other language than English has in Scottish courts (McLeod 1997: 105). Since 2001, oral evidence can be given in sheriff courts in the districts of Portree, Lochmaddy and Stornoway, as well as in appeals originating from these courts, but this is limited to civil proceedings (Dunbar 2006: 11).

Taylor was found not guilty as the Sheriff believed that the fingerprints of the accused were not obtained with his consent in specific connection to the airport sign incident (*West Highland Free Press* 1982).

4.2.2 Developments

Over the next decades, more bilingual signs appeared in Scotland, especially town centre street signs. Such signs were even erected in Inverness (see Figure 4.2), where the old County Council had been so hostile to Gaelic signs in the 1970s. Authorisations were made for bilingual signs on the A87 through Skye in 1984 and for the western part of the A830 in 1996, without specifying the order of languages and with inconsistent design styles (Moore 2000: 2; Howison 2001: 1-2). Highland Council adopted a 'Gaelic Signposting Policy' in 1996, by which bilingual place-names – and monolingual Gaelic names where these were deemed to be 'virtually identical' to the English names – could be used on signs on roads controlled by the Council, subject to consultation with the Council's area committees, together with community councils (Highland Council 1996).



Figure 4.2 A bilingual street sign. Here, a smaller, 'Celtic' typeface is used for the Gaelic name, in stark contrast to the modern sans serif upper-case English text. Inverness (Highland), August 2007.

In October 1999 the Scottish Minister for Transport 'agreed in principle' to the request put forward by Highland Council for blanket authorisation of Gaelic and English signs 'on all local roads in their area' as well as on the A87 trunk road between Kyle of Lochalsh and Uig and on the A830 from Mallaig to Fort William (Moore 2000: 1-2). There

was some disagreement between the Council and the Executive about the precise design of these signs:

At official level the Executive had agreed in March with the Council a format which showed Gaelic names in italics, in a contrasting colour, and beneath the corresponding English place name, which was in the 'standard' colour [...]. Highland Council's subsequent formal proposal to us [the Scottish Executive] essentially reversed these three features [...]. Mr Moore's [of the Executive] submission [...] suggested an alternative in which Gaelic was in the contrasting colour to English, but neither language was in italics and the Gaelic name was above the English name. (Rennie 2000: 3-4)

There was also concern about the financial impact on the tourist industry of bilingual tourist signs, as businesses pay for these signs themselves. The Executive was sensitive about the criticism that denial of this request would bring, but individual politicians had varying views on the matter. The Deputy Minister for Enterprise in the Highlands and Islands and Gaelic said that it was 'essential' for the Executive to 'sort out this straightforward issue once and for all', yet the late First Minister Donald Dewar had seen it as a 'sensitive issue' (cited in Rennie 2000: 2). Once a design had been agreed upon, the Minister for Transport eventually authorised the Highland Council's request on 27 February 2001 (Howison 2001: 1).

The Executive began to investigate proactively which other trunk roads should have bilingual signs installed, but this delay was misconstrued by some councillors as obstruction (Macdonald 2002). Following a feasibility study carried out by Scott Wilson Consultants, the Executive announced in January 2003 that it would install bilingual signs along seven trunk roads, in addition to the two already authorised (Scottish Executive 2003). The roads in question were 'all the trunk roads north of the Clyde that pass through west coast settlements where Gaelic is spoken or which lead to western isles ferry ports', and it was thought that signs here would 'heighten the sense of community' and 'reinforce a

marketable tourist message about local culture and thereby provide a benefit to the economy' (Howison 2001: 2).

It was thought, however, that the deployment of these signs 'on high speed roads such as the A9 and A82' was 'impractical' (Howison 2001: 3). The A82, between Tarbet and Inverness, was later included as Deputy Minister Lewis Macdonald considered the trunk roads west of the A82 as 'side roads', with the A82 being 'the real trunk road' (Wands 2002).

The Executive's policy was later defined as 'where a road travels through a significant Gaelic Community [*sic*], or leads to a west coast ferry terminal, the Executive will examine the case and the funding required to display road signage with English and Gaelic place names and information' (Peacock 2004). It is believed that Gaelic speakers must be at least 10% of an area's population to merit bilingual trunk road signs. The policy is, however, often quoted in a misleading, simplified version, for example that roads 'must pass through communities where Gaelic is spoken' (Scottish Executive Enterprise, Transport & Lifelong Learning Department 2005). Neglecting to specify specific criteria on the number of Gaelic speakers would see bilingual signs erected across most of the country.

In the second report of the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on the UK's implementation of the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Highland Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar were commended for their policies on bilingual signage. The Committee considers the Scottish Executive's undertaking as only 'partly fulfilled', and requests clarification of their position on bilingual signs in the Highlands in their next submission (Council of Europe 2007c: 42). In its response to the Committee's report, Bòrd na Gàidhlig expressed clear concern over the Executive's refusal to bilingualise signs on the A9 (Council of Europe 2007c: 78).

4.2.3 Sign design: The Executive learns from Wales

In 2000, a literature review was prepared for the Scottish Executive by Pat Baguley and Bryan Cooper of TRL Limited.¹² The brief tasked the authors with indicating ‘the likely effects on road safety of the introduction of bilingual (English/Gaelic) direction signs in the Highland Council area of Scotland and the likely relative impact of the order of the two languages’ (Baguley and Cooper 2000: 1). The authors’ conclusions were principally based on work on Welsh-English bilingual signs by their company’s predecessor, the Transport and Road Research Laboratory (Baguley and Cooper 2000: 2). These conclusions will be detailed below. The following five subsections each begin with extracts from readers’ letters to local newspaper *The Inverness Courier* criticising bilingual signs. These letters reflect the most common perceived concerns raised about bilingual signs.¹³

4.2.3.1 Reading times, road safety and order of languages

Road signs are meant to be read quickly and easily, and the last thing a driver needs to flash through his or her mind is: ‘Omgoshwhatwasthat?’ (Benyon 2005)

The first conclusion of the TRL report for the Scottish Executive was that bilingual signs do take longer to read than monolingual signs, and that this could affect road safety. This finding drew on the 1972 investigation by Keith Rutley, of TRL’s predecessor TRRL, for the Bowen Committee (Baguley and Cooper 2000: 2-3). Rutley’s investigation consisted of three parts. There was a projection experiment, in which subjects viewed 120 slides showing both direction signs and warning or regulatory signs with supplementary plates, and two track experiments, which involved subjects driving past direction signs and finding specific place-

¹² This confidential report, together other Scottish Executive documents referred to here, was released to Wilson McLeod under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

¹³ It should be noted that there are also many readers’ letters in favour of bilingual signs. Letters against signs are cited, however, as they raise precisely the supposed potential problems of bilingual signs that are examined below.

names. The first track experiment featured a supplementary task of reading out numbers as they appeared on a head-up display in order to time the pause between these readings while subjects read the signs, while subjects in the second track experiment wore eye mark recorders (Rutley 1972: 2-3). Together, these experiments showed that all the bilingual signs tested showed increased reading times compared to the monolingual signs, with the exception of primary route crossroads signs with three destinations showing English names over Welsh names (Rutley 1972: 8).

Backing up this finding, the TRL report also mentioned a study (Lesage 1978; Lesage 1981) on French-English signs in Canada which showed that, in terms of 'glance legibility', bilingual signs had longer reading times than monolingual signs. The Canadian study also demonstrated that the 'difference was greater for monolingual drivers than for bilingual drivers' (Baguley and Cooper 2000: 3).

The TRL report's second conclusion was that the languages should be used in the same order on all signs, and that, in the authors' opinion, this order should be English before Gaelic. This would establish consistency and therefore 'minimise confusion and so keep the increase in reading times to a minimum' (Baguley and Cooper 2000: 4). This argument was also supported with reference to Rutley's and Lesage's investigations.

In Rutley's 1972 experiments, there were greater reading times for all signs with Welsh names above English names than for signs in which English was the dominant language, and the same applied to supplementary plates for warning and regulatory signs (Rutley 1972: 8-9). Nevertheless, the Bowen Committee found these differences to be too minor, and it advocated the installation of bilingual signs in Wales with Welsh text above English text:

[...] a number of the advocates of bilingual signs attach great importance to placing the Welsh first because it is the indigenous language of Wales. We believe that this

view carries excessively strong emotional overtones, but its existence has to be recognised. When two languages are used together, with equal validity accorded to each, it is inevitable for one to be placed before the other, and we are in agreement that whatever the order may be it ought not to be interpreted as reflecting any difference in their importance or status. We gave close consideration to the question whether Welsh or English should be first and were divided on it, but finally decided by a substantial majority to *recommend* that the Welsh wording should be shown first on all bilingual traffic signs. The majority of place-names in Wales are already in Welsh and the proportion may well be increased by the adoption of correct Welsh versions in place of corrupted forms now in use. (Bowen Committee 1972: 72, italics as in original)

The Secretary of State for Wales accepted the Committee's recommendation that there should be bilingual signs across Wales but requested further research into the safety implications of placing Welsh text above English text. This was the basis for Rutley's second investigation, which replicated the first two of his previous experiments with a greater number of participants, who belonged to three clear groupings: drivers residing in Wales 'who normally speak Welsh at home', drivers residing in Wales 'who normally speak English', and 'English-speaking drivers living in England' (Rutley 1974: 2). Subjects were given the choice whether to read the English or the Welsh names. It was again found that signs with English text above Welsh gave the shorter reading times, with the only exceptions being in the laboratory projection experiments (Rutley 1974: 6).

It is worthy of observation that Welsh speakers, who were presumably bilingual, had shorter mean reading times than English speakers for all signs in the projection experiment. The Welsh-speaking Welsh people who chose to read Welsh (WWW) achieved the fastest time when looking at Welsh-first signs, with the Welsh-speaking Welsh people who chose to read English (WWE) obtaining the second best score. These groups also performed well with the English-first signs, with WWE outperforming WWW by an average of only 0.07 ± 0.07 seconds (Rutley 1974: 7).

Despite the results of Rutley's second investigation, it was eventually decided that individual local authorities in Wales can choose which language should have the prominent place. Those which have chosen English above Welsh are Flintshire and Wrexham in North Wales and all of South Wales from Monmouth to Swansea. As a result, variations in the order when driving through Wales are minimal (Morris 2006).

Despite Baguley and Cooper's preference for an English-first order, the Scottish Executive has opted for consistently Gaelic-first signs, apparently as a compromise following pressure from Highland Council's Road and Transportation Committee, which had in April 2000 requested Gaelic-first signs with English names in italics and a contrasting colour (Moore 2000: 2).

A 1980 report on bilingual signs in Wales, requested by the Welsh Office, found that, although there were differences between the accident rates of Wales and the rest of Great Britain, this difference did not increase during the period when bilingual signs were introduced, and so it was deemed 'unlikely that there have been any general adverse effects resulting from the existing policy for bilingual traffic signs' (Ryder 1980: 74). Welsh county councils were also asked if they knew of any traffic accidents in which signs had been a contributory factor. Only one incident was reported, involving a monolingual sign in Dyfed that neglected to show a bend ahead, and even then there was no conclusive proof that this was a factor (Ryder 1980: 59).

The Scottish Executive's feasibility study on bilingual signs concluded that, taking into account the 'temporary reduction in safety during construction', the replacement of outdated signs with consistent bilingual signs complete with the proper safety fencing would actually 'have a slight beneficial impact on safety' (Scottish Executive Development Department 2002: 22).

4.2.3.2 Differentiation between names

So how can we be expected to take in six place names, and their Gaelic meaning, while keeping an eye on the mirror, listen to wee brat or granny in the back while concentrating on what the navigator is saying? (MacGregor 2006)

Language differentiation is a central issue in bilingual sign design. On bilingual signs in Saudi Arabia, the visual difference between the Latin and Arabic scripts is enough to separate the two languages, whereas in Greece there is less divergence between the Greek alphabet and the Roman alphabet used with English inscriptions, so the principal 'mechanism of differentiation' used is colour (Baines and Dixon 2003: 34). The problem lies in that differentiation generally leads to preference of one language over another:

When a text is in multiple codes (two or three or more languages such as English and Chinese) or multiple orthographies there is a system of preference. The mere fact that these items cannot be located simultaneously in the same place produces a choice system. [...] The preferred code is on the top, on the left, or in the center and the marginalized code is on the bottom, on the right, or in the margins. (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 120)

The final conclusions of the TRL report concerned factors that would affect differentiation between the two languages on the signs. In the authors' opinion, English place-names on bilingual signs should conform to the standard font, sizes and colours that they would have on a monolingual sign (Baguley and Cooper 2000: 4). It was advised that Gaelic place-names, on the other hand, should contrast in colour to the English place-names, but should still use the same lettering and be the same size as the English names.

Baguley and Cooper cite (2000: 5) Rutley's investigation, which had shown shorter reading times for green-backed primary route signs with Welsh place-names in yellow, in contrast to the white English names. However, these shorter times were only obtained for English-first signs, and the difference was slight. The results of the laboratory projection experiment showed only a difference of 0.09 ± 0.065 seconds. In the first track experiment,

the difference was only 0.02 seconds, and in the second track experiment, the reading time of the 'Welsh coloured' sign was actually greater by 0.10 ± 0.28 seconds. For Welsh-first signs, the reading times were usually greater with colour differentiation than without (Rutley 1972: 11-13). The results are therefore inconclusive, however the discrepancies in the reading times could be explained by the inconsistency of differentiating methods used in the experiments. For example, while yellow text was trialled on green-backed signs, non-primary route (white) signs used white text on a brown background, to somewhat inelegant effect. Godfrey Harrison and G. W. Evans, who produced reports commenting on these experiments, criticised the tests for not taking into account psychological matters such as driver attitudes, hazard anticipation or slight speed alterations (cited in Ryder 1980: 12-13).

The Bowen Committee chose not to use a distinctive colour for Welsh names, mainly because the most favourable colour combinations were already in use, and other colours, such as yellow, would be ineffective if used on signs with light backgrounds. The Committee also found the use of different lettering, such as a Celtic script or upper-case lettering to present problems of clarity as well as being aesthetically unacceptable, and also decided against using left square brackets to link pairs of names. It was instead chosen to use spacing and arrangement of pairs of names as mechanisms of differentiation (Bowen Committee 1972: 68-70).

Greater spacing between pairs of bilingual names than between the names within the pair was also recommended to the Scottish Executive in the TRL report (Baguley and Cooper 2000: 5). This recommendation has become practice in Scotland, although it is not always followed (see Figure 4.3). For colour differentiation, Baguley and Cooper suggested a system whereby different colours would be used for Gaelic lettering depending on the background colour of the sign or panel in question, 'e.g., yellow on a green background and green on a white background' (Baguley and Cooper 2000: 5). This system has been adopted

for bilingual signs in Scotland, and seems to be effective. In fact, the balance of placing Gaelic names above English ones while having English names in the standard, and slightly more prominent, colour is a remarkable step towards achieving equal status on signs. As for consistency, drivers presumably do not actively search for the colour of 'their language' on a sign, but will instead read that which is more evident, so consistency of prominence and language order is perhaps more important than the consistent use of one colour.



Figure 4.3 On this sign on the A82, better use could have been made of spacing between bilingual pairs. It is also interesting to note the inconsistent spelling of *Glenurquhart* in English. While the name of this glen is perhaps most commonly written as one word, as in the name of the primary school, it has traditionally been two words (as in Gaelic) in the name of the high school. Drumnadrochit (Highland), August 2007.

It is vital that signs showing minority language names 'avoid any inconsistency or folksiness which would achieve the opposite of enhancing the dignity and legitimacy of the particular language' (Woehrling 2005: 194). It could be argued that the use of green text for Gaelic names on white-backed signs can create a subconscious image of the language as inherently rural. This is, however, certainly better than the use of, for example, white on

brown text as used on tourist signposting. The pseudo-Celtic italic text used for Irish legends on bilingual signs in Ireland perhaps creates a greater disparity between the languages, as it is considerably less legible than the accompanying English text.

Irish signs, like the new Gaelic signs in Scotland, put the minority language above the more prominent English lettering, showing that ‘code preference’, the favouring of one particular language or script, ‘can be played off against salience’ (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 125). In other multilingual contexts, code preference can be enacted in space-time, as in the case of Ontario, where separate English and French road signs are used, but the first of the two signs that drivers meet is always the English sign, with the French sign following a short distance later (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 124).

4.2.3.3 Environmental concerns

I always thought main road signs were to be read clearly and speedily, but these are a total eyesore in the countryside, and are verging on being equivalent of [*sic*] those on motorways. (Matthew 2005)

The Executive’s feasibility study considered that there was ‘potential for minor adverse impacts on biodiversity (by disturbing verges and cutting back vegetation), water quality (by pollution of watercourses during construction) and cultural heritage (by disturbing buried artefacts or by visual impacts)’, but the greatest negative impact of the signs would be on ‘landscape and visual amenity’ (Scottish Executive Development Department 2002: 23).

The more information a sign contains, the larger the sign will be, and hence its visual impact will also be greater. The bilingualisation of signs could potentially double the amount of text present, although road numbers and distances expressed in numerals do not need to be translated into Gaelic.

The direction signs created for Rutley's first investigation were between 57% and 85% larger in area than their monolingual counterparts (Rutley 1972: 8). The Bowen Committee did 'not regard any objection on landscape and amenity grounds as being overwhelming', and in fact accepted 'that the appearance of the Welsh language on signs would give satisfaction on aesthetic grounds' (Bowen Committee 1972: 60).

Gaelic-English signs are, at least for now, confined to some of the most rural regions of Scotland, which are indeed among the most wild parts of Europe. All signs on these roads are particularly noticeable, being surrounded as they are by predominantly natural settings, and concern about visual intrusion is also greater in an area of such environmental beauty and where tourism is so important. In addition, many of the mainland roads with bilingual signs, especially some of the trunk roads managed by the Scottish Executive, have relatively high average vehicle speeds, and the signs must therefore be larger than they would otherwise be.

Recently, work has been carried out for Transport Scotland on how to reduce the impact of 'road furniture' on rural landscapes. In the agency's guidance document on *Road Furniture in the Countryside*, it is demonstrated that the area of bilingual signs can be reduced by careful design. A route confirmatory sign on the A830 is shown that has now been replaced by a bilingual sign which is 90% larger than the original. The first step is to reduce the height of the text, within the boundaries allowed by regulations. Also, English place-names that are similar to the Gaelic names, such as 'Arisaig' for *Arasaig* or 'Mallaig' for *Malaig*, can be removed. If both these steps were carried out on the sign in question, the area increase would have been restricted to 35% (Transport Scotland 2006: 44). It would appear, however, that the artists have neglected to keep the additional spacing between pairs. Also, there are potential problems when removing the English names. The English spellings of names like these remain widely recognised, not least by Ordnance Survey, and this could

cause confusion. The sole use of the Gaelic names, in their distinct colours, also means that these destinations become less prominent on the sign than the bilingual pairs.

4.2.3.4 Financial concerns

The very last thought that occurred as I arrived back at An Todhar was to wonder who had paid for all this. Was it CNAG [Comunn na Gàidhlig], VisitScotland or folk like you and me? Don't misunderstand me; I have great feeling for Gaelic and went to Gaelic classes as a boy. It is just the bilingual roads signs that get up my nose. (Paterson 2007)

A Scottish Executive minute from 2000 stated that a 'relatively standard English only sign could cost in the region of £2,500 to manufacture and erect; the equivalent bilingual sign would cost approximately £8,500' (Moore 2000: 4).

The 2002 feasibility study on bilingual signs gave approximate costs for the introduction of bilingual signs to some trunk roads in the Highlands. The total projected cost, if the pre-existing letter sizes were retained, was £3,107,250 (Scottish Executive Development Department 2002: 20). The average cost per sign, taken across the projected 1,073 signs needed for the ten routes detailed in the report, would be £2,896. If the letter sizes were minimised, the total projected cost would have been reduced to approximately £2,200,000 (Scottish Executive Development Department 2002: 20), an average of £2,050 per sign. If these figures are accurate, the earlier quoted cost of £8,500 is not for an average sign.

The signs to be replaced by the Executive did not all require replacement and had a 'residual value' of £750,000. Some in the Executive thought that 'it should be for Tourism, Culture & Sport to justify [bilingual signs] – and pay for [them]' ([Conlong] 2002).

There may be a comprehensive change in road signs across the UK in the not too distant future, as the UK was in fact obliged by Council Directive 89/617/EEC to decide on a timescale for the full conversion of traffic signs to the metric system, as was Ireland (Paice 2006: 25). Ireland made the transition in 2005, and it had little impact on the bilingual nature

of road signs there, as the *km/h* symbol is the international symbol for kilometres per hour (Paice 2006: 52). The UK is yet to formulate a timetable for this change, but there is no reason why, if this were to happen, a more extensive programme of bilingualisation of signs could take place simultaneously, hence minimising costs.

Some argue that there may be a net economic benefit from bilingual signs.¹⁴ Tourism is one of Scotland's most important industries, and attempts have been made to promote 'Gaelic tourism' as a more specific and active form of 'Celtic tourism'. It has been said that this could 'give Scottish tourism a new quality edge' (Pedersen 1995: 291).

Visual evidence of the existence of Gaelic is an important part of the process of affirming the distinctiveness of the Highlands and Islands to visitors (especially from the continent) as well as to residents. A major, and relatively inexpensive aid to creating this "Gaelic Face" to the product is the provision of Gaelic or bi-lingual signage and written information, including street signs, shop fronts, logos etc. especially in tourist hubs such as Inverness, Oban, Portree, and Fort William. Initiatives to bring this about should be done in discussion with local authorities, chambers of commerce and possibly common good funds. (Pedersen 1995: 293)

In the *Gaelic Language and Culture Plan for Inverness and Nairn* prepared by Pedersen Consulting and Hecla Consulting (2004: 10), the idea was even put forward of developing an 'iconic' bilingual street sign format for the city, replicas of which could, according to the authors, become popular souvenirs for tourists, along the same lines of London street signs.

For bodies that find signs too costly, however, Bòrd na Gàidhlig has access to a 'ring-fenced Gaelic Language Plan Implementation Fund', which can be used to assist organisations that incur one-off costs when putting their statutory Gaelic Language Plans into action. This can include the installation of new signs (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2007b: 32).

The use of Gaelic on signs forms part of the priority area recognised in *The National Plan for Gaelic 2007-2012* concerning the 'increased visibility and audibility of Gaelic in

¹⁴ There is more on the worth of bilingual signs in Section 6.2 below, p. 119

Scotland'. It is said that the 'increased presence of Gaelic in signage and audible discourse confirms not only that Gaelic is intimately linked to Scottish heritage and geography but also that Gaelic is a feature of contemporary Scottish public life' (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2007b: 33). All public bodies in Scotland are 'strongly encouraged' by Bòrd na Gàidhlig 'to use Gaelic in signage, corporate identity, and correspondence and on their websites' (Bòrd na Gàidhlig 2007b: 41).

4.2.3.5 Cultural correctness

[... T]he rate at which the culture of the Highlands and Islands is being destroyed under the euphemism of change make those permanent, pseudocultural, kitschy, Red-Indian reservation-style Gaelic signposts seem like the ultimate red herring and height of patronising. (Stephenson 2006)

The Caithness Area has currently opted out of bilingual council signage as the majority of members in the Area Committee incorrectly believed that there 'was no cultural history of Gaelic in Caithness' (Highland Council 2005). In fact the language was spoken in the western part of the area. The Inverness Area has also limited its signs to the city centre (Ross 2005: 19). This policy may be changing though, as bilingual signs are now to be found by Dalcross Airport and in Drumnadrochit (see Figure 4.3), although the bilingual signs in Drumnadrochit may be the responsibility of the Executive, as they stand beside the A82 trunk road.

Like in Caithness, the Gaelic heritage of Berwickshire, in south-east Scotland, has also been brought into question in a matter related to road signs. East Berwickshire Councillor Michael Cook felt that a new sign on the border with England, proclaiming 'Welcome to Scotland' in English and Gaelic, was 'wholly inappropriate'. He claimed that this was 'cod Highlandism', promoting 'the American view that we all wear kilts and speak Gaelic.' Cook was aware, however, of the area's Gaelic place-names, but he believed that 'the

identity of this area was forged in circumstances very different to the frame of reference which applies in the Highlands or other parts of Scotland' (*Berwickshire Advertiser* 2007).

The sign's design was influenced by the 2005 'First Impressions of Scotland' Report, which had recommended to Scottish Ministers that, at international gateways¹⁵ to Scotland, '[b]ilingual English and Gaelic signs should be used where appropriate to emphasise the sense of place' (Scottish Executive 2005). Referring to signs in the broader, semiotic sense, John Urry argues that signs are crucial to tourist perceptions.

The [tourist] gaze is constructed through signs, and tourism involves the connection of signs. When tourists see two people kissing in Paris what they capture in the gaze is 'timeless romantic Paris'. When a small village in England is seen, what they gaze upon is the 'real olde England'. (Urry 1990: 3)

Then, could it also be that, when tourists see a Gaelic sign, they see, or rather hear, 'Scotland the Brave'? A survey of tourists' views on Gaelic, including Gaelic signs, would indeed be most valuable.

Some 'controversies' regarding Gaelic road signs concern the spelling or the meaning of the words used. An Executive spokeswoman blamed the contractors Bear Scotland for the sign for Tore on the Black Isle that reads '*An Todhar*', which can mean 'the dung' (Davies 2004). While this is one possible meaning, it is also the correct Gaelic spelling of this place-name, and means 'the bleaching spot' (Watson 1904: 143).

The forms of names used on Gaelic signs are now provided by a new partnership, *Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba* (Gaelic Place-Names of Scotland), which comprises Ordnance Survey, Highland Council, Argyll and Bute Council, *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar*, the Scottish

¹⁵ The new sign in question is, of course, at the English border, which the new Scottish National Party administration would call an 'international gateway', but which their Labour predecessors would presumably not have. It is, however, not the first bilingual sign to be erected at the border.

Place-Name Society, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Comunn na Gàidhlig, CLÌ and the UHI Millennium Institute.

4.3 Sign survey of the A835 Tore-Maryburgh-Tore

In order to ascertain the nature of Gaelic signposting on trunk roads, a survey was carried out of signs along a stretch of the A835 on the Black Isle between the Tore and Maryburgh roundabouts (approximately 8.3 km) in November 2006. The results of this survey, showing the language of signs facing in both directions, are presented in Table 4.1.

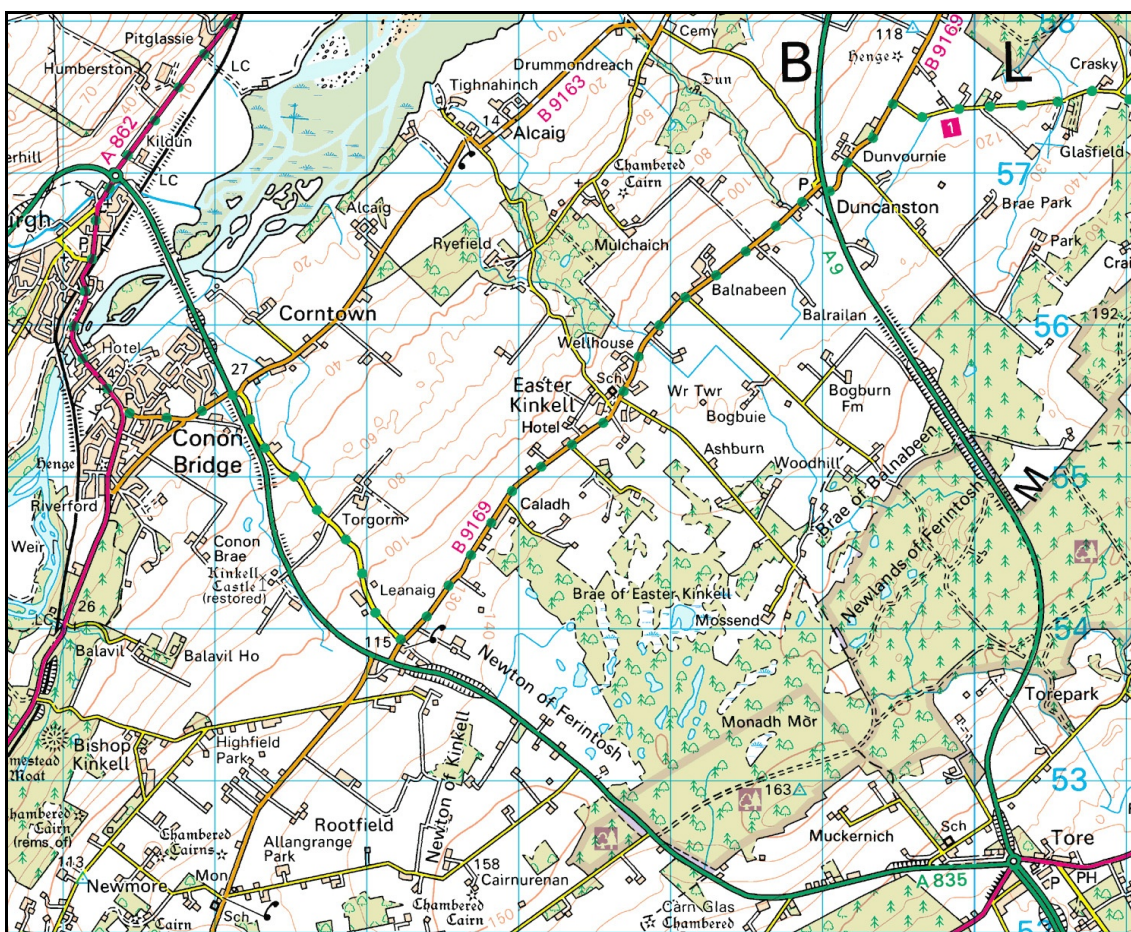


Figure 4.4 A map from the Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 series of the stretch of the A835 surveyed. The Tore roundabout is at the junction with the A9 in the southeast, and the Maryburgh roundabout is to the northwest. © Crown Copyright/database right 2007. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service.

Table 4.1 Languages on the signs on the A835 Tore-Maryburgh

<i>Type</i>	<i>Number of signs</i>	<i>% of total</i>
English	31	22.3
English/Gaelic	53	38.1
Purely pictorial/symbolic	54	38.8
Variable	1	0.7
Total	139	100.0

The greatest single share is composed of signs that are purely pictorial or symbolic. This includes text that is understood across linguistic boundaries, such as the 'P' for car parking. There was also one variable message sign. Almost all directional and place-name signs were bilingual, with the exception of tourist signs and a sign for the roads depot. One place-name was monolingual (see Figure 4.5), and at least one place-name seems to have been corrected (see Figure 4.6). All text on other signs, for example 'No overnight parking' or 'End [of restriction]' was in English. Most of the larger signs made good use of spacing between pairs of names, but some non-primary route signs did not.



Figure 4.5 'Alcaig' here is the same in both English and Gaelic. Watson (1904: 115) ascribes its origin to the Norse *Alka-vík*, 'auk's bay'. Although Gaelic text is placed above English, Alcaig here has defaulted to the standard, 'English' colour. A835 (Highland), November 2006.



Figure 4.6 Here, a plate has been affixed to the sign, possibly to correct a misspelling. A835 (Highland), November 2006.

4.4 Dingwall: A Gaelic town?

The Royal Burgh of Dingwall, in the Highland Council administrative area, has a long history as a centre of regional power, from its time as the seat of the Mormaers of Ross and Viking jarls. The town, which is also said to be the place of Macbeth's birth, currently has a population of 5,026 (GROS 2003: Table KS01). Gaelic is understood by 7.17% of Dingwall residents born in Scotland (GROS 2003: Table KS06).

For the purposes of this dissertation, and as an example of a linguistic landscape study, a survey was made of Gaelic on signs in the town centre of Dingwall. The area surveyed was the part of the town lying south of the River Peffery, and the fieldwork was carried out in November 2006.

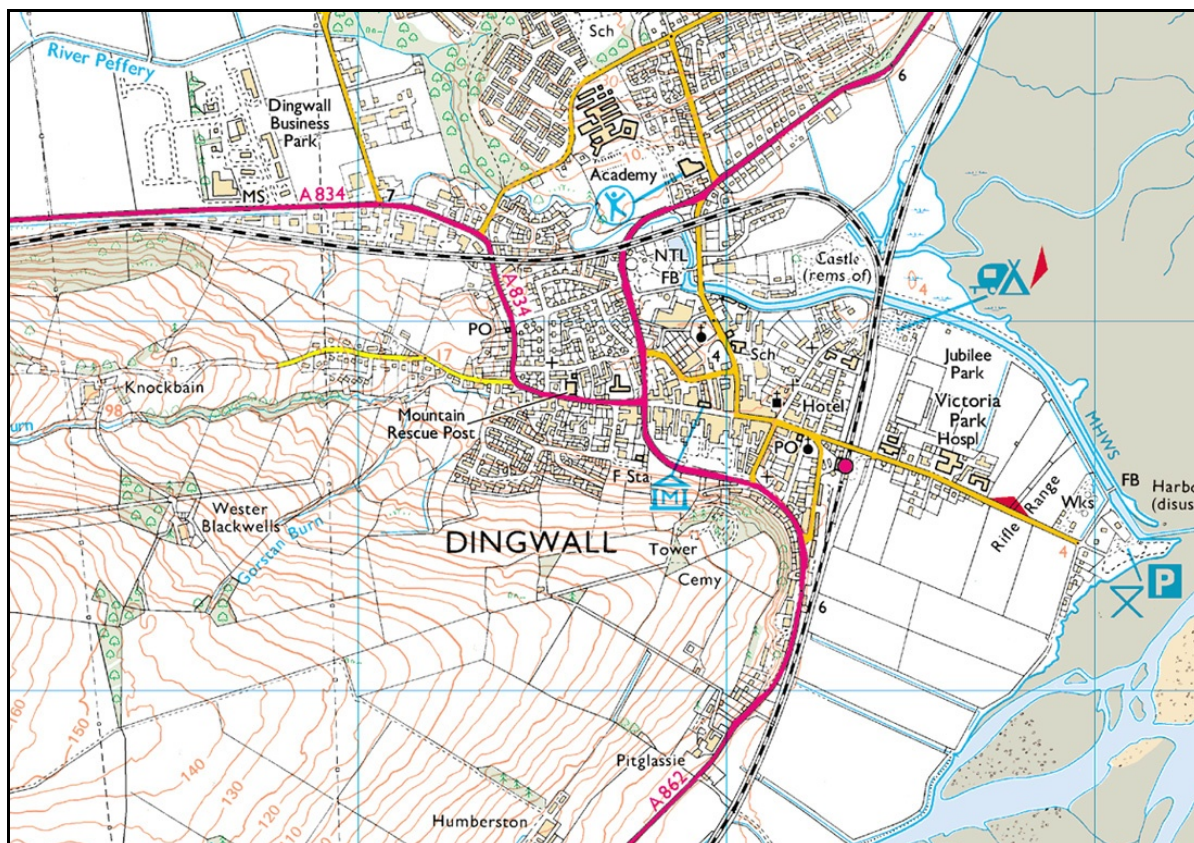


Figure 4.7 Dingwall from the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 map series. The area surveyed is visible on this map, apart from a small stretch of the A862 a little further south. The River Peffery can be seen flowing from west to east. © Crown Copyright/database right 2007. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service.

The sheer number of signs of different sorts meant that counting the total number of all signs would have been complex, and perhaps of little worth as by far the majority of signs were monolingual English signs. Instead it was decided to focus the quantitative investigation on street signs. A street sign was taken to be a sign, in an outdoor public place, which shows the name of its specific urban location. Signs that only showed directions to other streets were not included, and each separate sign was taken to be one unit for this investigation. The results of this survey are presented in Table 4.2. Since many streets have more than one sign, it is also important to consider the number of separate urban spaces and their respective signage. These figures can be seen in Table 4.3.

Table 4.2 Languages of street signs in Dingwall as percentages of all street signs

Languages	Instances	% of total
English only	123	76.4
English/Gaelic	37	23.0
Other (Ledvargid)	1	0.6
Total	161	100.0

Table 4.3 Languages present on street signs of individual streets/squares in Dingwall

Types of signs on street/square	Number of streets	% of total
Monolingual English only	52	64.2
Bilingual English/Gaelic only	16	19.8
Both monolingual and bilingual	12	14.8
Other (Ledvargid)	1	1.2
Total	81	100.0

The majority of street signs in Dingwall are clearly monolingual: that is to say that the generics used, such as 'street' or 'road', were in English and there was no translation (see Figure 4.8). Only one sign had a name, *Ledvargid*, without a transparent generic, and that can therefore not easily be classified as either Gaelic or English¹⁶. 37 signs were bilingual English/Gaelic (see Figures 4.9-10). The Gaelic names on these 'heritage'-styled signs was the result of consultation between the Highland Council and members of the Scottish Place-Name Society, principally Peadar Morgan who was invited to the Highland Council's sub-committee dealing with the matter. One point in particular that had to be decided was the translation of *Place*. As the traditional *Ionad* is now also used for 'Centre', the adoption of the

¹⁶ *Ledvargid* could not be found in Watson's *Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty* (1904), but Wilson McLeod has suggested that its origin could lie in the Gaelic *Leathad a' Mhargaid*, 'market slope'. This would appear to be a most reasonable suggestion, as *Ledvargid* is on the slope leading down to the former site of the market.

Irish *Plàs* was suggested (Morgan 1999). The final decision was evidently in favour of *Ionad* (see Figure 4.9).

In October 2004, a local group concerned with the development and promotion of Dingwall, the Dingwall Initiative, published an *Audit of Signs* by engineer William Robins. This made recommendations regarding the updating and rationalisation of signing in the town, but made no specific suggestions for new bilingual signs in the town.



Figure 4.8 Although this street name features a specific of Gaelic origin, 'Bailechaul', its generic 'Road' is definitely English. '*Bail' a' chàil*', kail-town, is a name traditionally associated with the town (Watson 1904: 93). Dingwall (Highland), November 2006.



Figure 4.9 One of the new bilingual street signs in Dingwall. The black cast iron with the gold lettering and border creates a ‘heritage’ effect. The innovative Gaelic name *Ionad Bhatarlù* is unlikely to have been in common use in the past. Dingwall (Highland), November 2006.



Figure 4.10 Some of the bilingual signs feature the Burgh Arms, which include the Latin motto ‘*Salve corona*’. Dingwall (Highland), November 2006.

Aside from street signs, there are other examples of Gaelic on signs in Dingwall, but any Gaelic text is usually only part of a bilingual sign. Significantly, many localities in the Highlands display Gaelic welcome messages on their boundary signs, and Dingwall is no exception. On the approaches from Maryburgh to the south and Strathpeffer to the west, there are a total of four different sign designs welcoming drivers to Dingwall, three of which feature Gaelic (see Figures 4.11-13).



Figures 4.11-13 Some of the welcome signs in Dingwall with Gaelic text. There is considerable tolerance in Britain of such local initiative in welcome signs (Baines and Dixon 2003: 115). The first is the newest of the three, and arguably the best designed, as a complete message can easily be read in each language. The second appears to mix the two languages and the third sign's 'Ceud mìle fàilte gu' is entirely tokenistic as no reference is made to Dingwall's modern Gaelic name *Inbhir Pheofharain*, 'mouth of the River Peffery'. Dingwall (Highland), November 2006.

The Highland Council logo, or corporate identity, features integral Gaelic text, and can be seen on many signs in the town. Apart from council buildings – some of which have bilingual names (see Figure 4.14) – it is also in evidence on signs warning of penalties in 'alcohol free zones' and for irresponsible dog owners, and can also be seen on more mobile objects such as bins and council vehicles. Some newer council notices such as no smoking

signs and bus timetables are also at least partly bilingual. The only Gaelic text on the bus timetables, however, is *'Busaichean on stad seo'* ('Buses from this stop').



Figure 4.14 This sign features the Highland Council identity, with the Council's Gaelic name, and the Gaelic name of the institution. According to the Council's new draft *Gaelic Language Plan*, external signs on Council buildings 'shall have Gaelic placed above English', while the order will be reversed on internal signs (Highland Council 2007: 32). Dingwall (Highland), November 2006.

Signs outside many educational establishments in Dingwall are bilingual. These include signs at the Highland Theological College (*'Colaisde Diadhairesachd na Gaidhealtachd'*), signs at Dingwall Primary School (*'Bun-sgoil Inbhir Pheofharain'*) and at the construction site of the new Dingwall Academy (*'Acadamaidh Inbhir Pheofharain'*), although these last two institutions lie on the other side of the River Peffery from the area investigated. One would perhaps expect to find the greatest concentration of Gaelic signs around An Taigh Gàidhlig, the Gaelic Community & Resource Centre, and this is in fact the case (see Figures 4.15-16).



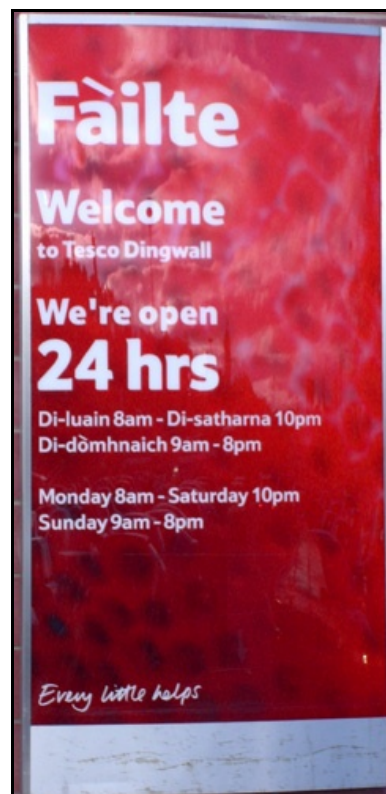
Figure 4.15 Gaelic is even used before English on this sign at the public library, which is next to the Gaelic Centre. This sign would be entirely bilingual if it were not for the contact details and the words 'Serving the Highland Community' within the Council's corporate identity. Dingwall (Highland), November 2006.



Figure 4.16 Cròileagan Inbhir Pheofharain (Dingwall Gaelic Playgroup) has several signs in its windows that convey a sense of how Gaelic institutions deal with a largely monolingual society. Next to drawings depicting ‘*earrach*’ (‘spring’) and ‘*geamhradh*’ (‘winter’) are signs addressed to the public in English. Dingwall (Highland), November 2006.

An increasing number of businesses – including First ScotRail, the three main Scottish banks and some high-profile supermarket chains (see Figures 4.17-20) – now use bilingual signs, although mainly only in parts of the Highlands and Islands. Comunn na Gàidhlig (CnaG) supports such initiatives by offering translation advice as well as 50% grants of up to £700 for internal or external signs, and the promotion of bilingual signs comes under both the ‘Community’ and ‘Business’ development areas of the organisation.

CnaG claims that a Gaelic sign 'attracts attention', 'establishes your Scottish identity' and 'boosts recall levels' (Comunn na Gàidhlig [2006]). In the case of many businesses, however, the use of signs is the only recognition given to Gaelic. As shown by Wilson McLeod (2001), much more action is needed to promote Gaelic in Scottish business.



Figures 4.17-4.20 Partially bilingual signs at the Tesco supermarket. Dingwall (Highland), November 2006.



Figure 4.21 Another company to use some bilingual signage is First ScotRail. It is interesting to note the inconsistency in the spelling of *Inbhir Pheofharain*, the correct form of which is two separate words. Here it is spelt as one word, and it is hyphenated in Figures 4.11-12. Dingwall (Highland), November 2006.

Small amounts of Gaelic were also to be seen as mottos on war memorials (the Seaforth Highlanders' motto '*Cuidich 'n Rìgh*'), on a sign at the Army Cadet Force buildings (the same motto for the now defunct Highlanders regiment), at the Air Training Corps ('*Amais àrd*') and at the Police Station (the Northern Constabulary's motto '*Dion is cuidich*').

4.5 Shetland

Shetland has a history of Norse settlement that is testified most clearly in its place-names. The Shetland Place-Names Action Group has advocated the use of Old Norse names on road signs, and this has enjoyed the support of the Council, which believes these signs can 'emphasise Shetland's cultural heritage and the close relationship that exists with our Scandinavian neighbours' (Shetland Islands Council 2002).

Shetland Islands Council uses Old Norse place-names on some of its 'village gateway' and district boundary signs. Unusually, these signs often include the meaning of the place-name. Local community councils are given the choice between the Old Norse

'historical phrase' or a road safety message, for example 'Please drive carefully' (Shetland Islands Council, personal communication from Head of Roads, 4 January 2007).¹⁷ The combination of speed restrictions or road safety messages with village entry signs could intimate that the place in question 'is little more than a hindrance to traffic', as well as being 'a sad indictment of driver standards and attitudes', while more locally specific signs can be more welcoming (Baines and Dixon 2003: 116).

In 2002, following the precedent for authorisation of bilingual signs in the case of Highland Council, Shetland Islands Council requested further authorisation from the Scottish Executive to use Old Norse place-names on direction signs at minor junctions. Having considered 'such matters as the extent to which the Old Norse language is in everyday use, including the number of Old Norse speakers and readers, their [the signs'] value in terms of traffic management, and the views of other interested policy areas', ministers refused this request (Scottish Executive Development Department Transport Division 3 2002).



Figure 4.22 An existing Shetland 'village gateway' sign, based on drawings provided by Shetland Islands Council Infrastructure Services Department.

¹⁷ The documents referred to in the section on Shetland were obtained from Shetland Islands Council under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

4.6 Allochthonous minority languages on official signs in the UK

Although the area of prime concern in this dissertation is autochthonous minority languages, two recent developments regarding signage for allochthonous languages in the United Kingdom deserve mention.

In 2001, Glasgow City Council carried out a trial of Punjabi and Urdu signs. These were not directional or locational signs like in the cases above – rather they were signs warning of roadworks and other similar hazards. The project was conceived as part of the Council's Anti-Racism Action Plan. The Land Services Convener of the council ruled out, however, the use of Gaelic signs (Dalton 2001).

In England, Cheshire County Council requested that contractors working on the A49 near Whitchurch erect eight temporary diversion signs in English and Polish. The rationale behind this scheme was that Polish-speaking HGV drivers had misunderstood similar monolingual diversion signs a few months previously, leading to congestion. Conservative MP Philip Davies was needlessly angered by this, saying that '[i]t's absolutely bonkers but what worries me is that once one council starts, others follow' (cited in Bale 2007).

The fact that these signs are warning signs shows that it is not a case of pure symbolism or 'political correctness', as the Conservative MP mistakenly believes. These signs have been used or trialled for necessity's sake and to prevent accidents. The new bilingual Gaelic-English signs are purely informational, more specifically directional and locational, which does mean that they identify a clear link between language and place. They would, however, appear to be deemed unnecessary for regulatory signs. Welsh signs have managed to become bilingual across the board, but their success may be connected to the demand there was for them (Grin and Vaillancourt 1999: 28), even if this demand was primarily identity-based.

5 Italy



Figure 5.1 A selection of Leghist paraphernalia in public spaces. Clockwise from top left: 'Devolution Referendum Yes'; advertising 'Radio Padania Libera'; generic LN stickers; advertising the local *Festa della Lega Nord*; two stickers advertising the newspaper *La Padania*. Gemonio (Varese), January 2007.

5.1 Linguistic situation

5.1.1 Minority languages in Italy

Article 6 of the Italian Constitution of 1948 tasks the state with safeguarding linguistic minorities. This desire for linguistic pluralism represented a significant departure from the traditional Italian nationalist concept of the absolute state. Other parts of the Constitution were also of importance for plurilingualism. Article 9, for example, entrusts the state with safeguarding historical and artistic heritage, and article 21 confers on citizens the right of free expression of thought (Pagliai 1981-1982: 296).

Five of Italy's twenty regions have special statutes that give them a greater degree of autonomy: Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Sicily, Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol and Valle

d'Aosta. In the cases of Friuli, Südtirol and Valle d'Aosta, this is largely due to their linguistic or ethno-linguistic situations. Protection of the linguistic minorities of these areas was indeed a condition of their inclusion in Italian territory after the Second World War (Iannàccaro and Dell'Aquila 2001: 89). The autonomy these regions enjoy is particularly evident in regional language legislation.

At the national level, however, Law 482/1999 on the 'protection of historical linguistic minorities' was the first law since the Constitution to deal with the problems of linguistic minorities in any detail. Despite neglecting to provide a definition of a historical linguistic minority, article 2 of the above mentioned law specifically lists twelve minorities: Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovene, Croatian, French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan/Provençal and Sardinian/Sard/Sardu.¹⁸ These are estimated to be spoken by approximately 2 million people, or less than 5% of the Italian population (Coluzzi 2004: 6). This law has been criticised for listing the minorities it is intended to protect, as this inherently limits its applicability. Some linguistic groups that were not included, such as Venetan, might arguably have had at least as strong a case for inclusion as Ladin. By limiting itself to 'historical' and 'territorial' minorities, the law also neglects newer minorities and travelling minorities (Toso 2002: 1064-1065). An earlier proposal had included Romany, but this did not remain in the final law (Savoia 2001: 15).

¹⁸ The exact wording is: *'In attuazione all'articolo 6 della Costituzione e in armonia con i principi generali stabiliti dagli organismi europei e internazionali, la Repubblica tutela la lingua e la cultura delle popolazioni albanesi, catalane, germaniche, greche, slovene e croate e di quelle parlanti il francese, il franco-provenzale, il friulano, il ladino, l'occitano e il sardo.'* It is interesting to note that the law seems to differentiate between two types of minority: ethnic groups (Albanian, Catalan, German [it is unclear why the word 'germaniche' was used instead of the more common 'tedesche'], Greek, Slovene and Croat) and linguistic groups (French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan/Provençal and Sardinian/Sard/Sardu) (Iannàccaro and Dell'Aquila 2001: 95). All the listed groups are, however, accorded the same importance.

5.1.2 Minority 'languages' in Italy: Dialects

The word dialect is derived from the Ancient Greek *διάλεκτος*, which before acquiring the meaning of 'the language of a given people' had meant 'conversation'. Upon the word's adoption into Latin, it came to refer to a local language used for literary production (Marcato 2002: 13). The localisation of dialects implied by this Latin definition lives on in the modern principal meaning of the word. The distinction between dialect and language is, however, not merely geographical. The principal distinction between dialects and languages seems to be that dialects are seen as subordinate to languages (Haugen 1966: 923). If labelling a given idiom a dialect rather than a language is to classify it as inferior *vis-à-vis* another, then political motivations could be of great significance for making these determinations.

As for the distinction between dialects and minority languages, article 1 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages explicitly excludes 'dialects of the official language(s) of the State' from its definition of regional or minority languages. It is difficult to ascertain, however, whether Italian dialects are dialects of Italian or dialects of Italy (Toso 2002: 1065-1066). The ECRML definition also assumes that states must have official languages, and this is not always the case, as in the UK and, until recently, in Italy. Although article 1 of Law 482/1999 had already declared Italian to be the official language of the Republic, a succession of constitutional bills have been presented in the Chamber of Deputies to include another reference to Italian as the official language in article 12 of the Constitution. The first of these proposals, Chamber Bill 648, put forward by Angela Napoli (of the right-wing party Alleanza Nazionale, AN) was passed by the Chamber of Deputies in March 2007 and has been passed to the Senate. In April 2007, Marco Airaghi (AN) introduced Chamber Bill 2485, which would add to article 6 of the Constitution the protection of 'the Italian linguistic cultural patrimony, respecting and protecting historical languages and local idioms'.

There are many regional laws concerning dialects, but they are primarily concerned with dialects as cultural heritage rather than with the official recognition or institutional use of dialects. Some, for example, encourage programmes to introduce dialect projects in schools, while others offer financial support for researchers, publishers or theatrical groups (Toso 2002: 1068-1069).

The main geographical area considered in this study is the Province of Varese in north-western Lombardy. In the dialect continuum, the dialects of Varese are close to those of the neighbouring Lombard provinces of Milan and Como, most of the province of Sondrio and the northern part of the province of Pavia. They also share common features with the dialects of the eastern part of Novara province in Piedmont and, not least, with the southern part of the Swiss canton Ticino. These dialects constitute the Western Lombard group of Italo-Romance dialects (Lurati 2002: 226). As for how many in Lombardy speak dialect, statistics from a 2000 survey by the Italian national statistics institute show that, even if the categories of those who speak 'only or mostly dialect' and those who speak 'both Italian and dialect' with other family members are combined, only 38.6% of the population regularly uses dialect (Valdoni 2002: 105).

5.2 The Lega Nord and linguistic/cultural identity

The Northern autonomist-separatist movement has been central to the debate concerning the use of dialects on road signs. Since the movement's first successes in the 1985 local and provincial elections, it has radically altered the political scene in the areas where it has found most support, not least in the Province of Varese in Lombardy. After all, it was here that the Lega Autonoma Lombarda won its first provincial and local council seats. The party soon

became associated with the use of dialects when its first members elected to the municipal assemblies of Varese and Gallarate chose to use the local dialect in their inaugural speeches (Costantini 1994: 38). This caused some provincial representatives to leave the assembly in protest (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001: 9).

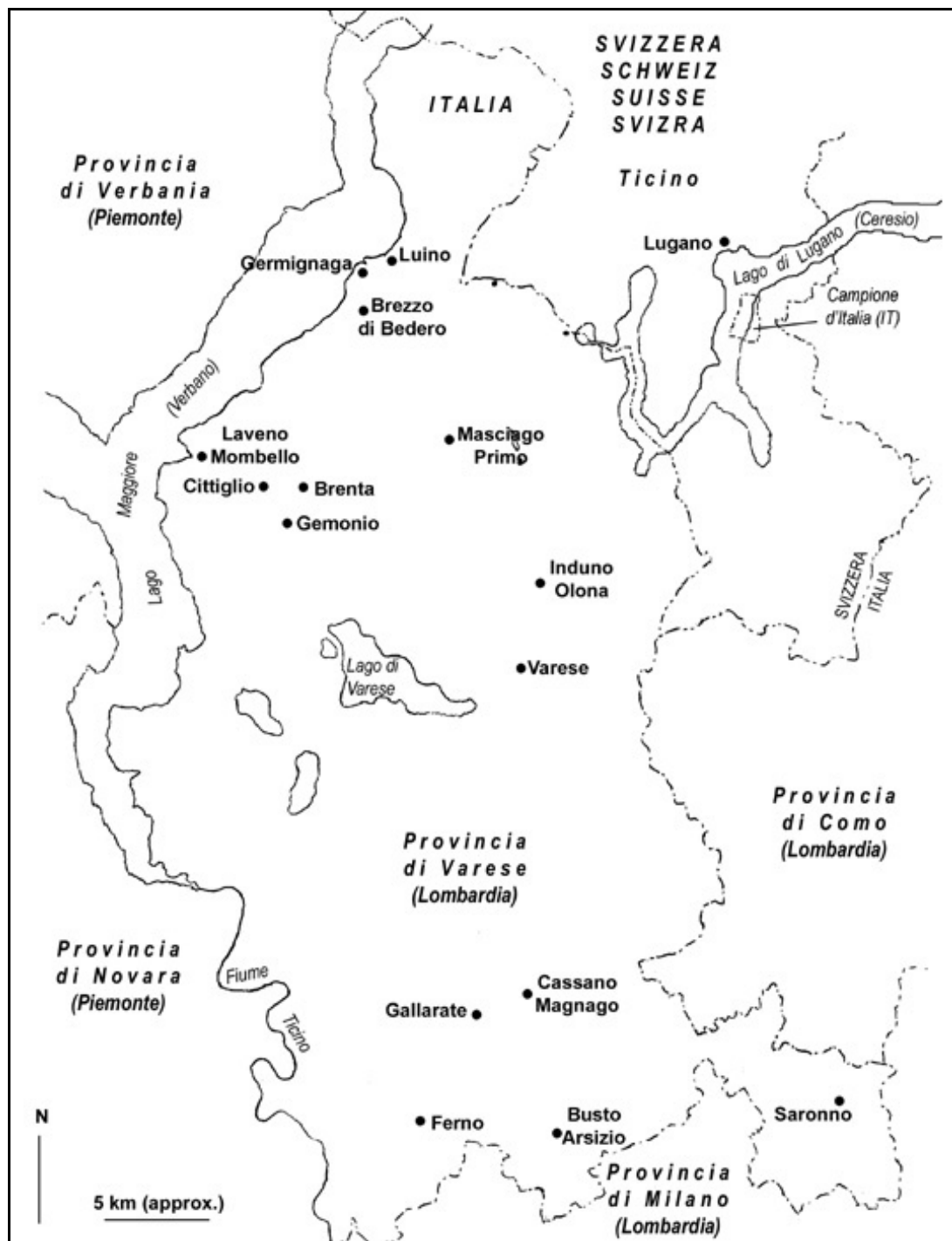


Figure 5.2 A map of the Province of Varese showing some places mentioned in the main text.

An assortment of regional Northern autonomist *leghe* (leagues) including the Lega Lombarda and the Liga Veneta amalgamated in 1991 to form the Lega Nord (LN). The Lombard elements of the new party would remain dominant, especially since the principal architect of the Lega Lombarda, Umberto Bossi, was made the Federal Secretary of the LN at its inception (Gold 2003: 86-87). His command was strengthened as he isolated former leaders of regional *leghe* from Piedmont and Veneto (Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 110), and he has retained his post to this day. The party has enjoyed varying levels of electoral success over the years, but its new influence was demonstrated most dramatically in December 1994, when the party, which was a key component of the leading coalition during Silvio Berlusconi's first '*discesa in campo*' ('entry onto the pitch' – Berlusconi's own description of his entry to the political scene), played a significant role in the government's fall.

In the second half of the 1990s, the party changed its autonomist policy, moving away from the promotion of federalism towards outright secession to form their own nation. Bossi proclaimed the independence of the 'Republic of Padania' at a ritual held at the mouth of the River Po in Venice in September 1996. This new approach signified another change: having initially attacked the Italian state, the Lega had now begun to attack the idea of the Italian nation (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001: 112-113). All of the efforts the various *leghe* have made to construct a 'national' identity through cultivating dialects and folkloric traditions makes them, in the eyes of many, essentially nationalist parties. However, apart from the invented Padania, the Lega's nationalism remains a 'nationalism without a nation' (Allievi 1992: 76).

In analysing the Lega, it is essential to understand where its separatist sentiment originates. Traditionally, widespread separatist feeling has been generated by many

different factors, including a historical background of nationhood or specific ethnicity; differing levels of development; discontent with bureaucracy or anti-colonialism (Smith 1979). The principal *raison d'être* of the Lega lies in its perception of northern Italy's alleged common differences from the rest of the country: in particular, Leghists bemoaned what they saw as high taxes imposed by the central government in Rome, and that northern Italy was subsidising the rest of the country. In building the idea of Padania, the Lega had no history of common borders on which to construct a separatist-nationalist identity, and dubious grounds for ethnic difference.

The movement attempted to establish other grounds for shared ethnic identity. This required the creation of symbolic boundaries. According to anthropological and sociological boundary theories, collective identities can be tailored or manipulated by actors, in this case the Lega, selecting 'criteria of inclusion and exclusion' that they see as important in the definition of their claimed space, in this case Padania. Such criteria often result in these symbolic boundaries differing considerably from actual political or administrative boundaries. For the Lega, these boundaries are primarily defined by 'sets of polar oppositions' that constitute 'criteria of purity' (Tambini 2001: 18-19). These boundaries helped to establish what the Lega perceives as the 'otherness' of the North (Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 117).

Dialectal differences were initially a core element of the attempts by the *leghe* to disrupt national linguistic unity and establish symbolic boundaries between the north of Italy and the remainder of the country. In the case of the Lega Lombarda, dialects were seen to be particularly useful in the face of a lack of clear ethnic, racial or religious differences on which to base national-regional identity. However, such a clear and unified regional linguistic identity may not exist either. Despite a distinguished written tradition, Milanese is now only used by a small minority in Milan and its suburbs, and it is in the more peripheral

provinces, such as Varese and Sondrio, where Lombard dialects are strongest today. In these areas, the dialects in question are often more akin to those of neighbouring areas – the Varese dialect is for example very similar to that of the adjoining Swiss canton Ticino – than they are to other Lombard dialects. Even amongst the Lega's members and supporters, only slightly over half speak dialect regularly (Biorcio 1991: 67-68). There is also no agreed standard grammar for Lombard dialects (Tambini 2001: 116). However, Bossi believed that the Lombard dialects, as a group, could be traced back to a common 'matrix', and therefore the Lombard koinè was a language in its own right (Costantini 1994: 47).

Dialect speakers usually define the boundaries of their dialects at a very local level. Most dialect speakers in the Province of Varese would be unlikely to say they speak *dialetto lombardo* or *lingua lombarda*. They would be much more likely to say they speak, for example, *dialetto bustocco* (the dialect of Busto Arsizio), *dialetto luinese* (the dialect of Luino and its surrounding area) or *dialetto varesino* (the dialect of Varese, province or town), or they may possibly use the latter's nickname *bosino*. Although all these dialects are indeed part of the Western Lombard dialect group, their speakers can easily discern differences between the dialect of one village and that of the next. This level of local identity, the truly local level of the micro-community, is largely absent from Leghist rhetoric, which tends to focus on the regional or multi-regional 'Padanian' level (Mannheimer 1991: 141). Out of all of the federated *leghe*, the leaders of the Lega Lombarda were especially critical of the attempt to make dialects central to Leghist identity, since it was seen by many to be irrelevant for a multi-dialectal region like Lombardy. One leader said that the cultivation of dialects in Lombardy would only have been productive in a few mountain valleys, and certainly not in the Padanian plain (Rovati 1993: 54-55).

Furthermore, the Lega's Padania could include many distinctive recognised linguistic minority regions, not least Valle d'Aosta and Südtirol. Roland Riz, the former

president of the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP), said at a party conference in 1992 that they ‘do not like the Lega Nord’. The SVP, according to Riz, did not like the idea of becoming part of a Padanian nation state and seeing Rome-based centralisation replaced with control from Milan (Visentini 1993: 76). Both Valle d’Aosta and Südtirol are indeed already semi-autonomous regions within Italy, a status many Leghisti would like to achieve for the rest of the North, particularly for Lombardy and Veneto.

The linguistic culture of Veneto is perhaps more developed than that of Lombardy. Members of the Liga Veneta generally see their dialect as a language, and as an integral part of their regional – or national – identity. As Fabrizio Comencini, secretary of the Liga Veneta, said:

We claim it to be a fact that Venetan [i.e. *veneto*: the regional dialect of Veneto as opposed to the dialect of Venice *veneziano*, Venetian] is not a dialect but a language. We have proposed a law to normalise the regional spelling. The Venetian Republic lasted c. 1,000 years – Venetian has been used in diplomacy, in economics, in jurisprudence, and in other circumstances... If we have a look, after all, Venetian is used at all levels. It’s inter-classist, it isn’t the language of the lower class [*popolano*], it’s the language of everyone. University professors speak Venetian. In fact, my friends from Bologna said to me: ‘Are these really university professors?’ [...] And we can’t say that Venetian is a dialect of [the] Tuscan [language], because Tuscan came after Venetian. Where we live, normally people speak both Venetian and Italian. (Cited in Biorcio 1997: 116)

In the first years of the movement, the party network relied on pre-existing dialect groups, as well as informal circles of friends, for its organisation (Tambini 2001: 41). This was particularly true of the Liga Veneta, the founders of which had been members of the Società Filologica Veneta (Biorcio 1997: 43). Also in Lombardy, however, Bossi approached dialectal writers:

In the first months of my relationship with Bruno Salvatori [leader of the Union Valdôtaine], following the trail he had traced – which was the classic trail of all autonomist movements until then – I approached a group of dialectal poets and

writers from Varese, convinced that it was necessary to pass through the conquest of one's own linguistic identity before obtaining autonomy. (Cited in Biorcio 1997: 191)

The Lega has made use of dialect in some of its posters. One version of a famous poster that depicts Lombardy as a hen that lays golden eggs contains the assertion regarding the Italian flag: '*El tricolor che vörom minga!*' (The Tricolore that we don't want!) (Biorcio 1997: 118). The letters column of the old party newspaper *Lombardia Autonomista* was called *La vüs de tucc* (The Voice [i.e. opinion] of Everybody), but this was eventually changed to *La vos de tucc*, demonstrating the uncertainty with which many write in dialect (Allievi 1992: 19). In the mid-1980s, the Lega Lombarda, the Liga Veneta and the Union Piemonteisa proposed teaching in dialect in schools, proclaiming '*Scuola coloniale basta!*' ('That's enough of colonial schooling!') (Biorcio 1997: 43).

The importance of dialect for the Leghist cause has, however, diminished over the years. Bossi had decided by 1989 that dialect would cease to be an essential component of symbolic inclusion in the Lega, having come to the conclusion that 'the dialect mobilisation had become a liability for the movement', and that the Lega did not exist solely to defend the dialect (Tambini 2001: 21). By the early 1990s the campaign for teaching dialect had vanished from the Lega's programme, apart from a vague reference to adapting the curriculum to suit the pupils' local environment (Allievi 1992: 59). While the dialect would temporarily not feature in the party's main policies, historical and folkloric references would continue to appear in the Lega's discourse (Tambini 2001: 54).

As already stated, many Lega members have held speeches in dialect in municipal or regional assemblies. Even when they are not speaking in dialect, however, Leghist politicians often choose typically Northern phrases or words of dialectal origin (Biorcio 1997: 195). Their accent is also usually northern, and their regional provenance is therefore easily recognised by most Italians. When the shift from federalism to secession began in the mid-

1990s, there was a renewed emphasis on ethnic identity to combat '*colonialismo romano*'. The Lega once again put forward the idea of using dialect in schools (Biorcio 1997: 88). Bossi has shown great interest in the Scuola Bosina in Varese, a school that dedicates large parts of its curriculum to teaching dialect and local traditions. Speaking at a Lega meeting on education in 2001, Bossi said that the dialect was not dead. He cautioned that 'sometimes what seems to have disappeared is just in hibernation: the dead can always come back, because you never die completely' (cited in Rotondo 2001).

In addition to using dialects, the Lega has attempted another break with linguistic norms. It has made a conscious effort to move away from speaking '*politichese*' ('politicianese') to use everyday language. This does not imply dialects, the traditional vernacular, but rather using a *linguaggio popolare* that all voters can easily understand instead of the jargon voters had come to expect in political discourse:

In the in-depth interviews we carried out, many opinions were expressed along the lines of: 'When Bossi speaks, it's as if it were me speaking'; 'The speeches that the Lega makes are [the same as] those you have in the bar, on the commuter train, at the workplace'; 'Bossi says to politicians' faces what we say among us'; 'The Lega says and thinks what Lombards say and think'. (Biorcio 1991: 70)

This has often meant using particularly blunt or crude language. The most famous example of this is when Bossi first said in 1991 what would become a common Leghist slogan; that due to its electoral success, '*la Lega ce l'ha duro*' ('the Lega has a hard-on') (Visentini 1993: 92). When Berlusconi first came into Italian politics in 1994, his rhetoric contrasted with Bossi's. While they both used very direct language – as opposed to the vague ideological *politichese* of the previous four decades of Italian politics, which were dominated by Democrazia Cristiana and the Partito Comunista Italiano – Berlusconi's tone was, at this time, considerably calmer than that of Bossi (Biorcio 1997: 77).

In addition to linguistic differences, the Lega has frequently endeavoured to reinforce regional stereotypes in order to highlight the differences it perceives between North and South. This has been achieved through its communications: in posters, newspapers, speeches and graffiti. In the party's propaganda, the North is rich and the South poor; Northern Italians have a more diligent work ethic than Southern Italians; and the inhabitants of Padania are descended from Celts, whereas Southern Italians are described as 'Africans' (Tambini 2001: 19).

In recent years, the Celtic mythic image has achieved almost the same importance for the movement's identity as dialects once had.¹⁹ Bossi is often referred to as *il Senatür* – although *Senatür* would be a more phonetically accurate transcription in the man's own dialect – and this dialectal epithet has endured despite his departure from the Senate in 1992 (Pozzato 2001: 298). In March 2005, however, another nickname was used on the occasion of Bossi's first public appearance in almost a year, following a lengthy hospitalisation. Secretary of the Sindacato Padano (Padanian Trade Union) Rosi Mauro said: '*Bossi è immortale, è un highlander*' ('Bossi is immortal, he's a Highlander') (Lucchi 2005: 3). The LN seems to aspire to foster links with what it sees as fellow 'Celtic' nations, such as Scotland. Many Lega militants wave Scottish Saltires in parades and Mel Gibson's film *Braveheart* is quoted extensively by party members, especially among the youth section Movimento Giovani Padani. Those in the party who are especially interested in federalism often cite the Scottish Parliament as a model the north of Italy could aspire to, while those who favour Padanian independence feel solidarity with, for example, the Scottish National Party or the Basque separatist movement. In fact, the Lega supported the idea of uniting autonomist parties from across Europe to form a 'Democratic Party of European Peoples' grouping in

¹⁹ This could be seen as part of a more general reverence for medieval symbols. Since the 1980s, one nickname for the Lega has been '*il Carroccio*', after 'a standard-bearing wagon towed into battle by the armies of medieval city states' (Tambini 2001: 158).

the European Parliament (Biorcio 1997: 275). However, the party is currently part of the 'Union for Europe of the Nations' grouping together with, for example, Fianna Fáil and the Dansk Folkeparti.

For all the emphasis the Lega puts on its regional identity, its political identity is indistinct. This is in part deliberate, as the party aimed to appeal to those who felt disillusioned by the traditional bipartisanship of Italian politics. Political distinctions have been portrayed by the Lega as a way in which Italian parties have endeavoured to split the 'Lombard people' (Biorcio 1991: 78-79). The Leghist stance towards the traditional political order was made quite clear in a *spot elettorale* that was broadcast during the 1994 election campaign, in which Umberto Bossi stood in front of a picture of the Chamber of Deputies, talking of the 'enormous amount of confusion' caused when the traditional parties – 'the swindlers' – change their names and images (Pezzini 2001: 190). Despite this, the Lega would now appear to have firmly established a far-right position, not least due to its ethnocentrism and its extreme anti-immigration views. Its cultural references are themselves significant contributors to objective analysis of the party's political alignment, especially with regard to *Braveheart*. This film, which has been described as 'the modern "Ur-Fascist" text par excellence', is popular with the extreme right-wing across the world, from the Ku Klux Klan to German neo-Nazi rockers. The Scottish National Party is thought to regret having taken advantage of the film's popularity (McArthur 2003: 192-208).

Furthermore, the nature of the party's organisation also contributes to the Lega's placement on the political spectrum, with its unusual separate categories of membership, probation periods and rites of passage (Tacchi 1993: 158-159). The position of party leader in the LN may even become the only hereditary position in Italian politics, as Bossi has frequently expressed a desire to pass on leadership to one of his sons (Roselli 2007: 10).

5.3 Political graffiti

In Italy, political communication in public spaces is commonplace, especially through the use of posters. In spite of modern communications, this particular propaganda method seems destined to endure, not least due to the eternal vitality of Italian street life (Cheles 2001: 171). The importance of the visibility of party symbols in public spaces, in the form of posters, was stressed by Leghist politician Marco Reguzzoni, currently President of the Province of Varese. When describing the evolution of the Varese section of the LN, Reguzzoni concluded by saying: ‘and of course, we have all the walls of Varese covered with our posters’, as if this were the crowning achievement of his section (cited in Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 149).



Figure 5.3 Recent Lega poster regarding local issues: ‘SICK HOSPITAL? – WE’RE CURING IT! – UPGRADING WORKS BEGUN – THANK YOU LEGA!’ Luino (Varese), December 2006.

Although it is illegal to do so, many political placards are defaced either by individuals or more systematically by members of other parties, and many of these

additional messages act as rebuttals to statements made in the poster. Some 'fulfil a function not unlike that of the Pompeian city walls, on which the citizens aired their political views' (Cheles 2001: 125). Political commentary through graffiti is by no means restricted to defacing posters, however. The political engagement of much Italian graffiti lies in stark contrast to the phenomenon of tagging, which is so widespread in many cities worldwide. Armando Petrucci noted that the mural writing of 'the Italian subproletariat' is very different from, for example, that found in New York. The Italian variety, while often lacking in aesthetic or artistic features, tends towards a greater use of the verbal message. While the tags found on walls in many cities across the world are essentially little more than individual signatures, Italian mural inscriptions are often produced by groups of people and derive from political messages, particularly those of the Fascist era (Petrucci 1993: 128).



Figure 5.4 Traditional style Italian graffiti with a political message. This would appear to be a comment on the transport of US armed forces on the Italian railways: 'INTELLIGENCE TRAVELS ON FOOT – DEATH ON THE RAILS – TRENITALIA COMPLICIT – NO TO WAR'. Laveno Mombello FS Station (Varese), December 2006.

Graffiti has long been an important part of the Lega's communication strategy, and indeed most of the Lega's posters reflect this in their crude style, which has been described as a 'printed equivalent of graffiti' (Cheles 2001: 161). The movement first made extensive use of graffiti in the early 1980s:

Firstly I used, from the beginning, the squares, the walls, that is to say the oldest tools of communication. Through posters and mural writing spoke the very same popular spirit of the Lega. (Bossi 1996: ix)

Mural writing can recreate the oral style of discourse so closely associated with the Lega, while at the same time affording a certain degree of longevity and durability of message that is lost in, for example, a speech. The words scrawled on the walls of northern Italy can remain there for many years, even decades, while speeches are generally fleeting declarations, unless they are picked up by the media. Additionally, by positioning these messages carefully, the visibility factor can be maximised.

The inherent disobedient nature of the production of graffiti is another aspect that can make it a particularly suitable means of expression for groups wishing to contest the political or social status quo. One way in which the statement being made by Leghist graffiti was made stronger, was by targeting state property. Road signs were and, as will be shown, still are altered in order to 'dialectise' place-names.

The walls of Varese, then Bergamo and other medium-sized Lombard towns, were nocturnally splattered with slogans such as '*Roma Ladrona*' (Thieving Rome) and '*Lombardia Libera*' (Free Lombardy). Place names on road signs were translated overnight into dialect. Bossi himself was not afraid to pick up a paintbrush, it is said, and he regarded it as essential that his early followers be prepared to dirty their hands doing such jobs. (Tambini 2001: 40)

When asked about his own personal involvement in writing graffiti and altering road signs, Bossi has said:

Walls are the 'book of peoples' [*sic* – '*il libro dei popoli*']. And now the Lega has the duty to write 'Republic of the North'. Walls are absolutely indispensable for revolutionary forces like ours. People read the walls better than they read the newspapers. (Bossi interviewed on 12 June 1992, in Costantini 1994: 216)

This kind of non-violent civil disobedience is reminiscent of the early days of the Lega, when the party was almost pacifist: Bossi has in the past expressed a high regard for the form of direct action employed by Gandhi (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001: 126). The party also opposed using revolutionary violence, preferring a gradual electoral 'revolution' (Allievi 1992: 12-13). Since 2000, however, the Lega's even tougher stance on immigration would seem to indicate that the party no longer repudiates violence.

5.4 Road sign graffiti: Place-names as party symbols

In the early years of the movement, before Bossi decided that the dialect campaign would no longer be one of the Lega's central crusades, municipal councillors from the Lega pressured administrations to respect Council of Europe Recommendation 928 (1981), which, they claimed, advocated the protection of minority languages through bilingual road signage. Lega militants had already been implementing this directive for themselves, by personally altering place-names on road signs. The Lega apparently even attempted to appeal to the European Parliament to confirm that the sole use of what they described as the '*lingua mandarino-romana*' was unlawful (Costantini 1994: 47, 64). The European political dimension, and in particular personal interpretation of European legislation, is in fact often used by Leghists to legitimise their requests. In an interview, one young Lega member said that he wanted to speak dialect 'because even the European Parliament provides for dialect to be taught in schools' (cited in Costantini 1994: 208).

Bossi made it clear in a speech at the Lega Lombarda congress in 1989 that, in his opinion, it was impossible for Lombardy to become autonomous on the grounds of being a linguistic minority. Having contrasted the Lombard situation to that of other linguistic minorities in Italy, he felt that, whereas Valle d'Aosta and Südtirol shared borders with French- and German-speaking linguistic majorities, Lombardy's lack of 'allies' in neighbouring countries meant that it was impossible for the region to push for autonomy on this basis. In the wake of this announcement, the prominence of dialect in Leghist propaganda decreased substantially. The only activity in which dialect continued to be used regularly by members of the movement was in the defacing of road signs, although with a reduced fervour and, at least temporarily, without the support of Bossi (Tambini 2001: 115).

The standard strategy employed to translate place-names on signs into dialect is to remove the vowel endings of the Italian names. The Leghist mayor of Varese, Aldo Fumagalli, said himself that 'it is very easy to dialectise toponyms in the Varesotto [the Varese area]' (cited in Giovana 2003). This is usually achieved by covering the relevant characters with paint, or by affixing stickers over them. The political affiliation of those who have carried out these acts can typically be seen either from the colour of paint used, which is usually the LN's own green, or by the stickers themselves, which are usually – although not always (see Figure 5.6) – LN or Lega Lombarda party symbols. Some colours have traditional significance for political blocs: '[b]lack or blue is usually found in right-wing inscriptions, red or red and black for left wing, but this rule is not always respected' (Petrucci 1993: 121). According to Toni Visentini (1993: 5), Liga Veneta graffiti in the early 1980s was to be found in red or black. Now, the vast majority of Leghist graffiti, at least around Varese, is in green. The move away from red may be representative of a shift from an earlier left-leaning standpoint to a more ethnocentric one, where green is the 'national'

colour of Padania. Occasionally, different colours are used for practical reasons (see Figure 5.7).



Figure 5.5 Here, *Varese* and *Milano* have been translated into dialect by covering the vowel endings with Lega Lombarda stickers. This would appear to have been carried out some time ago, as the stickers are old, and the newer signs to Brezzo di Bedero and Laveno Mombello have not been touched. Germignaga (Varese), December 2006.



Figure 5.6 In this case, four place-names have been daubed with Leghist green paint to create dialectal equivalents. The 'o' of *Lugano* has also been covered with the label from a bottle of Heineken beer. Luino (Varese), December 2006.



Figure 5.7 On this sign, indicating a municipal boundary outwith a built-up area, brown paint has been used to obscure the final vowel. Leghist stickers are also in evidence, but this is clearly an area with a variety of activists from different political backgrounds. The upper sticker, portraying the '*sole delle alpi*' (Alpine sun), the symbol of Padania, lies on top of another identical sticker that had been painted over with black paint. The lower sticker – a 'PDN' (Padania) car sticker – was removed before the black paint was applied. Masciago Primo (Varese), December 2006.

On some occasions, more elaborate efforts are made, which may include Leghist symbols such as the Alpine sun – a purportedly Celtic symbol that the Lega has adopted as the symbol of Padania – or phrases such as '*Padania libera*' (see Figure 5.8). Meanwhile, some place-names are the same in both Italian and dialect, but this is not always enough to deter Lega activists from reforming them, thereby creating hypercorrect dialect names (see Figure 5.9).



Figure 5.8 The person behind this particular work has deleted the vowel ending of *Luino* with an Alpine sun, and has gone so far as to rewrite the name in dialect – apparently even including the umlaut on the ‘u’. A Lega Nord sticker is on one of the supports below the sign. Luino (Varese), December 2006.



Figure 5.9 Most local dialect speakers would ascribe *Germignaga* the same name in dialect as in Italian, but on this sign it has been reduced, with green paint, to *Germigna*. Luino (Varese), December 2006.

It is not surprising that the Lega has always invested so much in accoutrements such as stickers and t-shirts, which can be used by individuals as expression of belonging to the movement (Allievi 1992: 8). Their stickers can be found on road signs not only with the intention of changing place-names, but also of promoting the Lega's policies (see 5.10), or even as a form of tagging. This form of territorial demarcation, of which the place-name amendments are perhaps the clearest illustration, can sometimes be a representation of the strength of Lega support. It is not surprising, for example, that a disproportionate number of Lega symbols can be found on the signs in the centre of Gemonio (see Figure 5.1), where Bossi has his family home. The only other party symbol to be found on lamp-posts in the centre of that particular municipality was that of Alessandra Mussolini's Alternativa Sociale.



Figure 5.10 The sticker on this sign, found next to a filling station, bears the text: 'PETROL DISCOUNT – THANK YOU LEGA NORD'.²⁰ Luino (Varese), December 2006.

²⁰ In many policy areas, the Lega is well known for addressing populist concerns, and transport is no exception. Its transport policy has for many years been aimed at pleasing the frustrated motorist. For example, the Lega proposed making motorway circulation free, and have opposed closing many city centres to traffic (Allievi 1992: 56).

While the Lega's promotion of dialect was seen by many as ridiculous, in the same way as its own currency and identity cards were, such initiatives undoubtedly helped the party achieve a certain notoriety due to the countless small articles that appeared in the press (Tambini 2001: 48). These campaigns therefore succeeded in garnering free publicity for the party. Bossi himself has said that the party used dialects 'to create a bit of hype' (Tambini 2001: 99). It could be argued that the fact that dialects are no longer so important to the movement is due to the media: Leghist politicians making speeches in dialect is old news, and the media has continually demanded more and more outrageous behaviour from the movement (Tambini 2001: 102). Such behaviour is epitomised by the anti-immigration, anti-moderate Mario Borghezio, who is a target for many anti-Lega commentators, for example in Claudio Lazzaro's 2006 film *Camicie verdi*.

Attempts by authorities to eradicate graffiti either through regulations or physical action can often lead to an increased public perception of the phenomenon. This was certainly the case when Italian universities removed mural writing from their buildings between 1977 and 1978, and in New York when legislation was introduced against graffiti in 1972. In both these instances, the actions of the authorities only served to highlight the themes of social rebellion and opposition that commonly feature in graffiti (Petrucci 1993: 122). As it happens, very little action seems to be taken to halt the defilement of road signs in northern Italy, with most counteractions carried out by private individuals. This may involve re-painting missing letters or the removal of stickers (see Figure 5.7). As shall be seen, official attempts to use dialectal place-names have attracted more concerted opposition.

5.5 The official use of dialectal place-names

From the late 1990s, some municipal administrations with strong Leghist representation, particularly in Lombardy, began to take the campaign one step further, erecting official municipal boundary signs in dialect. It is disputed between Lazzate (Province of Milan),²¹ Dalmine and Trescore Balneario (both Province of Bergamo) as to which municipality was first to install them, but by July 2002 they were to be found in almost one hundred municipalities in northern Italy (Pacchioni 2002).

Another municipality in the first wave of those erecting dialect signs was Vertova (Bergamo). Mayor Giampietro Testa put up signs for *Erfa* in addition to the Italian *Vertova*, and *Smut* for the settlement known as *Semonte* in Italian. The Carabinieri ordered him to remove them and gave him two fines. He appealed against this decision in the magistrate's court, and won. The piece of legislation at the centre of this controversy was the Italian equivalent of the Road Traffic Act, the Codice della Strada (CdS). Although it did not allow for inscriptions in languages other than Italian on normal signs outside officially bilingual areas, the judge Paola Gargantini ruled that these were signs for tourism – identifiable by their brown backgrounds, shared with the signs for municipal boundaries outside built-up areas. In such signs, municipalities can include references to local folklore, so dialectal toponyms were considered admissible (Mattei 1999).

This decision was to provide encouragement for other Leghist administrations, or at least this was the hope expressed in an article in the Lega's newspaper *La Padania*:

The most hesitant Leghist mayors, of whom there are unfortunately still many, have no more excuses now: the signs [...] are prescribed, so any resistance can only be political. (Belotti 1999b)

²¹ The mayor of Lazzate, Cesarino Monti, later a senator, was so determined to keep one of 'his' dialect signs that he chained himself to it (Giovana 2003).

In fact, other municipalities around Bergamo, such as Urgnano, did agree to invest in dialect signs soon after this (Belotti 1999a).

In July 2002, the administrators of the city of Bergamo itself were intent on erecting signs welcoming visitors to *Bèrghem*. This case encountered more bureaucratic opposition than most smaller municipalities had. LN Deputy Giacomo Stucchi exerted pressure on the government and a public demonstration was held in favour of the recognition of 'cultural and historical identity' (*La Padania* 2002). The government then accepted an amendment to the Codice della Strada, proposed by the LN, that would allow greater local choice over the use of place-names on tourist signposts. Just as Leghist supporters had justified their calls for the use of dialect with reference to European legislation, so did the Infrastructure Ministry claim that the denial of dialect use was connected to the application of European and international directives on 'criteria of uniformity for the interpretation of road signs and symbols' (Pacchioni 2002). The new Codice della Strada was approved by the Chamber of Deputies in July 2003 and included, in a subparagraph of its article 37, the provision for road managing authorities to use 'regional languages or local idioms present in the area referred to, in addition to the designation in the Italian language' on municipal boundary signs.



Figure 5.11 Driving from Brenta to Cittiglio, drivers first see the brown signs, purely for informational purposes, at the border between the two municipalities. The sign for Cittiglio bears a 'Padania' sticker, announcing another unofficial boundary: Brenta has a centre-left administration while Cittiglio's centre-right administration is supported by the LN. Brenta/Cittiglio (Varese), January 2007.



Figure 5.12 Further along from the signs in Figure 5.11, a white-background sign announces the beginning of the built-up part of Cittiglio. This sign itself prescribes a speed limit of 50 km/h, so the circular 50 km/h sign, which has a Lega sticker on it, is therefore an unnecessary but sensible precaution. Below is the dialectal name *Sti* along with the municipal crest. The sign announcing the end of Brenta is redundant as the boundary has already been passed. Cittiglio (Varese), December 2006.



Figures 5.13-14 At the boundary between Cittiglio and Gemonio, it can be seen that the protocol for dialect signs is still inconsistent. Heading south, both the sign for entering Gemonio and the sign for exiting Cittiglio are bilingual. Facing the other way, Gemonio is monolingual while Cittiglio is still bilingual. In another sign in Figure 5.11, Cittiglio is monolingual. Cittiglio/Gemonio (Varese), December 2006.

Leghist councillors in the municipality of Varese originally proposed dialect signs – bilingual municipal and neighbourhood boundary signs, as well as street signs – in 2000. The council approved an allocation of 21 million lire for this project, out of a total budget of 700 million for the reorganisation of signs in the municipality. However, it was not until two years later that the council voted for the actual erection of these signs, even though the motion passed relatively easily (Gerletti 2002).



Figure 5.15 An incorrectly spelt dialectal welcome to Varese. Varese, October 2002. (Photograph from *Varese News* 2002b, used with permission).

In October 2002, LN local representative Sergio Terzaghi announced that bilingual signs would be introduced at the entrances to Varese municipality. The very next day, luminous variable message signs in the town displayed ‘*Benvenu a’ Vares*’ (*Varese News* 2002b). The accuracy of these signs was brought into question. To begin with, the spelling of the message was soon changed to read ‘*Cumun da Vares: Benvegnuu*’ (Municipality of Varese: Welcome), but some wondered whether it was possible at all to translate *benvenuto* into dialect satisfactorily. The whole debate, even though the place-name itself was not a subject of disagreement, led to calls for the establishment of a place-name survey (Maggiora 2002, Speroni 2002).

The signs also provoked a response from opposition parties, with Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) calling it ‘ludicrous and offensive’. In an open letter, the local section of the PRC said it was ridiculous to put up these signs that so few visitors would be able to understand. They went on to say that, while there might be ‘serious doubts over the dialectal accuracy of the expression, there are on the other hand no uncertainties about its aim: to assert the “Padanianness” and the provincial narrow-mindedness of Varese’ (Circolo di Varese di Rifondazione Comunista 2002).



Figure 5.16 The municipal boundary of Varese, with corresponding dialect plate and the contact details of the local traffic police. Varese, December 2006.



Figure 5.17 This bilingual boundary sign has an extremely rare feature: a further historical reference to the name as described in the thirteenth century. As an affirmation of the proclaimed Celtic roots of Padania, Leghists have often claimed that 'Lombard dialects and place names [...] have Gaelic [or Celtic] roots, which signal the existence of a "sostrato celtico" (Celtic substratum)' (Tambini 2001: 111). One of the few municipality names in the Varesotto that could have a Celtic origin is *Induno Olona*. There is medieval Latin evidence of the name as '*In loco* [in the place of] *Duno*', and *Duno* could suggest a root similar to the Gaulish *dunum* (rock, fort). The specific *Olona* was added in 1863 and is the name of the river on which the town is situated (Ambrogio 2006: 318). Induno Olona (Varese), December 2006.

In Cassano Magnago (Varese), the municipal council erected boundary signs with the town's name in both Italian and dialect. Within a very short time, the dialect name *Casan Magnag* had been altered with red spray paint to read '*Casano Magnago*' (Varese News 2002a). This 'Italianisation' – imperfect due to having neglected to add a second 's' – is a reversal of the Leghist practice of 'dialectisation'. While it is quite rare, it is a clear indication that the installation of dialect signs is not universally welcomed (see Figures 5.18-19). This was not, however, the only dispute to arise concerning the official toponymy of Cassano Magnago. The local administration had changed the name of *Via Salvador Allende* to *Via Vecchia Villa* (Old Villa Street) and, more controversially, the former *Piazza Palmiro Togliatti*, named after the former leader of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI),²² had become *Piazza Lega Lombarda*. This was even the subject of a written question to the Prime Minister, Regional Affairs Minister and Interior Minister by senators Gianfranco Pagliarulo (Partito dei Comunisti Italiani, PdCI), Luigi Marino (PdCI) and Angelo Muzio (Verdi – l'Ulivo). They requested that the prefectures, and if necessary the courts, become involved. They described this, along with other incidents such as the enforced display of crucifixes in classrooms, also in Cassano Magnago, as 'a symptom and a symbol' of a 'climate of intolerance' (Pagliarulo, Marino and Muzio 2002: 22).

²² Togliatti has been commemorated in place-names even outside of Italy. Upon his death in 1964, the town of Stavropol'-na-Volge in Samara Oblast, Russia, was renamed in his honour. Since 1991, it has been spelt Tol'yatti (Тольятти) (Everett-Heath 2005: 526).



Figure 5.18 Italianisation of a dialect sign. Cassano Magnago (Varese), March 2002. (Photograph from *Varese News* 2002a, used with permission).



Figure 5.19 This sign, originally identical to the one in Figure 5.17, has had its dialect plate and Latin attestation covered with black spray paint. Induno Olona (Varese), December 2006.

In some places, civic administrations have renamed roads or other public spaces with dialectal names. In Ferno, in the south of the Province of Varese, *Piazza del lavatoio* was given the dialectal name *Piazza dul lavatoi* in June 2001. This name change seems to have been motivated by the strong historical significance of the square, where the public washhouses were located (*Varese News* 2001).

In Saronno, in the southeast of the Province, Lega Nord councillors put forward a motion to introduce brown-coloured tourist signs showing the dialect names of streets in the older parts of the town along with the current Italian names, for example '[v]ia Padre Monti, *ona voeulta via Comm'* ('Via Padre Monti, once [in dialect] via Comm' [the dialect name for the town of Como]). This motion was rejected by the council majority, who said that they were already working to build a *percorso storico* (heritage walk). The mayor Pierluigi Gilli also said that he was against the particular kind of sign that the Lega proposed, as he felt that brown signs were not easy to read. He also denied the existence of a Lombard language, saying that there were 'too many different dialects in the area' (Sgarella 2002).

Dialect signs, in their role as a symbol of the LN, can sometimes become part of surreal power struggles between parties. In 2002, the municipal administration of Varese made the highly controversial decision to decorate the flowerbeds in the town's iconic Piazza Monte Grappa with Alpine suns.²³ As a reaction to this, an Alleanza Nazionale (AN) councillor suggested planting a flowerbed in his town of Gallarate to depict a tricoloured flame, one of his party's symbols. After councillors voted decidedly against the proposal, LN representatives chose the moment to announce that they would soon submit a motion requesting signs in dialect (Rotondo 2002). When this motion was presented, the AN group put forward their own motion to rename the street currently called largo Togliatti, named after former Communist Party leader Palmiro Togliatti. The proposal was to rededicate it to the 'Martyrs of Istria and Dalmatia', in commemoration of the *foibe* mass killings (Rotondo 2003a). These were killings of Italians carried out by Yugoslav partisans in the 1940s, which were for many years largely ignored by the Italian left. Presumably this particular name change was an attempt to both unsettle the left wing opposition and to disrupt and delay the

²³ These flowerbeds in Varese have been the subject of protests from many different groups, such as Varese Social Forum and Azione Giovani, the youth wing of Alleanza Nazionale (*Varese News* 2005).

LN proposal, while at the same time reasserting AN's position in the municipal coalition majority with LN. As it happens the matter was repeatedly postponed until June 2003. During the discussion, councillors from both the majority and the opposition spoke against the suggestion. Fabio Castano of AN said that, while dialect should be preserved, it was not on the same level as Catalanian, Basque or Welsh; rather it was a matter of 'personal expression', and that dialects are 'the sum of a language'. The motion failed (Virzi 2003).



Figures 5.20-21 A recently reconstructed road running between Germignaga and Luino has been named, at least on the Luinese side, *via del Bricc*, in imitation of its traditional dialectal name. The orthography is questionable, as '-cc' usually stands for /tʃ/, but the name is pronounced /brik/. Towards the Germignaghese end of the road, another new sign shows the Italian name *via ponte Bricco*. Luino/Germignaga (Varese), December 2006.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Comparative reflections

An ideal language policy would ‘draw out a degree of expertise in its formulation and application comparable to what you would expect and demand in any other aspect of management’ (Gardner [1991]: 2). It is therefore important that authorities implementing multilingual signage schemes – especially if these involve minority languages – plan carefully, learning from the experience of other countries.

The Bowen Committee considered evidence on bilingual signs in eleven countries.²⁴

Out of these, committee members made visits to Belgium, Finland, Ireland and Switzerland.

There, they found that:

Bilingual traffic signs are accepted as a normal feature of daily life, and do not attract undue comment or attention. No doubt they entail some additional administrative work and expense, but on the whole they are not a source of difficulty or controversy. (Bowen Committee 1972: 48)

Multilingualism is, however, part of the national fabric of Belgium and Switzerland, while Swedish is relatively strong in Finland – its main vulnerability being that the principle difference between the Swedish minority and Finnish majority is the language alone (Tandefelt 1998: 103). In Ireland, meanwhile, Irish has a special status as the ‘national’ language. In contrast to these countries, multilingual signs have been a source of great controversy in Norway, Italy and, to a lesser extent, Scotland.

²⁴ These were Belgium, Canada (Province of Québec), Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Israel, South Africa, Switzerland, the USSR and Yugoslavia (Bowen Committee 1972: 16).

The three road sign debates examined in this study have entirely different characteristics, which appear to reflect the political-linguistic realities of the areas and languages studied. As has been seen, the disputes that have arisen over Sámi signs in Norway appear to be largely rooted in questions of ethnicity, territory and local identity, and the signs have become the focal point for opponents to the application of the Sámi Act in specific municipalities. Although the recent increase in bilingual Gaelic-English direction signs on the mainland has been the subject of some criticism, it has not been as controversial as Sámi signs, possibly precisely because Gaelic does not have the same ethnic dimension as Sámi.

Despite the history of campaigning for Gaelic signs, which seems to have been inspired by Welsh language activism, neither Gaelic nor Sámi have particular party political associations. The debate about signs using local dialects in Italy, on the other hand, is entirely party political, and that, together with questions over the distinctions between language and dialect, is what has made the Italian case so controversial.

6.2 The value of minority language road signs

Language visibility can be very important for young learners of lesser used languages. Exposure to Gaelic, for example, outside the school and home can 'contribute to ensuring that the child uses his or her Gaelic spontaneously and proactively in a variety of settings and not just in the Gaelic-medium classroom' (MacNeil and Stradling 2001: 29). Road signs also have an important didactic role in relation to language, in that they may also be among the very first texts children learn to read.

François Grin and François Vaillancourt calculated that, at 1996 prices, the cost of bilingual signs in Wales per person-hour of Welsh usage was €1.98 (Grin and Vaillancourt 1999: 24). This was found to be the 'least useful' of four policies, having the highest cost per person-hour of language use and the lowest impact. The others policies were, in descending order of their 'best practice index', Basque education, Welsh-medium television and Irish business signs (Grin and Vaillancourt 1999: 95-96). Grin and Vaillancourt (1999: 97) warned that these figures must be treated with caution. They pointed out that their cost effectiveness evaluation did not consider such factors as 'the relegitimation of the language and the subsequent positive image change' (Grin and Vaillancourt 1999: 24). They consider their estimation of the share of travel time spent reading traffic signs at 2% 'a reasonable upper bound' (Grin and Vaillancourt 1999: 24). This may, however, be an underestimation of the longer-term impact of these signs, as they make the whole roadside environment into a bilingual space.

Interestingly, however, the lowest cost of the four policies they consider is Irish private business signs, at €0.0182 per person-hour of 'shopping [...] that can take place through Irish' (Grin and Vaillancourt 1999: 90). This policy itself may be influenced by bilingual road signs in Ireland.

The importance of language visibility for the relegitimation of minority languages should not be underestimated. As well as reflecting linguistic attitudes, language visibility can also influence the development of these attitudes and increase linguistic awareness, as it can lead to such fierce debate as in the cases presented. Even if this debate concerns the merits of different methods of achieving language revitalisation, and it is decided that there are better ways of promoting a language, at least bilingual signs can act as a catalyst for greater changes. If minority languages do not have prominent visibility, they can be out of sight and out of mind for most people.

Road signs are designed with the primary aim of communicating a given message.

The cases analysed here have shown that they are not only used for linguistic communication, and that they can be interpreted at a deeper level, with repercussions for politics and identity. In this, they are like language as a whole, which is so much more than 'just' for communication. Languages are, after all, a series of signs themselves.

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