

Commercial Signage and the Linguistic Landscape of a Major City in Central Israel: The Case of Petah Tikva

The linguistic landscape of Petah Tikva—a strategic industrial, high-tech, and medical hub—mirrors complex sociolinguistic processes. Its population of 284,000 includes Russian- and Amharic-speaking immigrants, Ukrainian refugees, and foreign workers. Drawing on "bottom-up" language policy theory (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy, 2006), this study examined the motivations behind language selection. Data collection included statistical analysis, interviews with municipal officials, business owners, and sellers, as well as photo-documentation across the city's largest mall and two central shopping and market streets.

The balance between languages varies by zone. In the locally oriented market area, Hebrew dominates, English is minimal, and Russian is absent. Here, the minimal presence of Amharic reflects the successful integration of second- and third-generation migrants into the Hebrew-speaking space. While national identity is preserved via visual symbols like the Ethiopian flag, the functional sphere of the ethnic language shrinks due to intergenerational language shift and language attrition (Polinsky, 2018). In the city center, serving locals, foreign workers, and tourists, Hebrew prevails alongside bilingual and English-only signage featuring transliterated Hebrew names. Conversely, the mall is dominated by English as a prestige language, with less Hebrew and no other languages. Hebrew acts as the overarching national *lingua franca*, serving as the essential frame for a "layered cake" model that avoids direct competition with English or Russian, which serve specialized functions. Internal diglossia occurs within English: it serves as a survival tool for low-skilled laborers from Asian and African countries and as a prestige tool for high-tech professionals and doctors. Russian operates as a supranational integration tool for individuals from across the entire post-Soviet space. Ultimately, the urban landscape demonstrates linguistic freedom and economic pragmatism, where owners align language choices with product specifics, customer demographics, and personal proficiency, effectively replacing state regulation with market expectations.

References

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