

THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AREAS IN CANCÚN, QUINTANA ROO (MÉXICO)

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Abstract: This contribution aims at analyzing social multilingualism on public space signage in transportation facilities in Cancún (Quintana Roo, Mexico), and pursues the questions, which languages shape the linguistic landscapes at the airport's terminal 2 and the centric ADO bus terminal, which functions do they fulfill symbolically or informatively, and how do 21th century Mexican linguistic policies manifest themselves in them. Finally, we identify convergences or divergences between the 'airportscape' and the 'bus terminalscape' in this both touristic and ethnical-diverse Mexican region. We created photo corpora of more than 350 top-down and bottom-up-initiated signs. The findings show an absolute invisibility of Mexican Indigenous languages in the linguistic landscape of Cancún's transportation facilities, with a very few bottom-up exceptions, due to commodification of authenticity, and a total domination of Spanish as the *de facto* national language of Mexico, and internationally dominant English.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscape; Multilingualism; Mexican Indigenous Languages; Language Policy; Mexican Spanish.

El paisaje lingüístico en el transporte público de Cancún, Quintana Roo (México)

Resumen: Esta contribución tiene como objetivo analizar el multilingüismo social en la señalización del espacio público de las infraestructuras de transporte de Cancún (Quintana Roo, México) y plantea las siguientes preguntas: ¿qué lenguas configuran los paisajes lingüísticos de la terminal 2 del aeropuerto y de la céntrica terminal de

autobuses ADO?, ¿qué funciones cumplen, ya sea de manera simbólica o informativa?, y ¿de qué modo se manifiestan en ellos las políticas lingüísticas mexicanas? Finalmente, identificamos convergencias y divergencias entre el “airportscape” y el “bus terminalscape” en esta región mexicana, caracterizada tanto por el turismo como por su diversidad étnica. Para ello, creamos corpus fotográficos compuestos por más de 350 rótulos y señales de iniciativa tanto top-down como bottom-up. Los resultados muestran una invisibilidad prácticamente absoluta de las lenguas indígenas mexicanas en el paisaje lingüístico de las infraestructuras de transporte de Cancún, con muy escasas excepciones de tipo bottom-up, vinculadas a la mercantilización de la autenticidad. Al mismo tiempo, se observa un dominio total del español como lengua nacional de facto de México, junto con el inglés, lengua franca internacional.

Palabras clave: Paisaje lingüístico; multilingüismo; lenguas indígenas de México; política lingüística; español de México.

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1. Introduction

With over 130 million inhabitants, Mexico is home to by far the largest number of Spanish speakers in the world, and with 15.00% ethnical Amerindian population, the largest number of Indigenous people in Latin America. Various relevant studies (e.g., Flores Farfán 2008; 2021; Klee/Lynch 2009; Michnowicz 2015) have already shown that this demographic force is accompanied by diverse linguistic variations. In addition, the high number of Spanish speakers is linked to various linguistic and cultural peculiarities of the communicative spaces of Mexico; through language contact between Spanish and numerous Indigenous languages, above all Nahuatl and Yucatec Mayan, or through the geographical proximity to the United States and the associated direct language border with globally dominant US English (Harjus, Rull García/Yoksulabakan-Harjus forthcoming). In some regions, like the high touristic Yucatan peninsula, the focus of this paper, other languages also reach Mexico and together with the multilingual contexts mentioned above, they make up Mexico’s “superdiversity” (Vertovec, 2007: 1024).

Despite the fact that there is a minimum of 50 Indigenous languages spoken within the national territory, Mexico hasn’t a *de jure* declared official

language (Zajícová 2022: 81). With the *Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas* of 2003, the Mexican government recognizes many uses of national languages, exactly 364 variants of Mexican Indigenous languages and Spanish, even without having declared officiality for Indigenous languages or Spanish. Initially, the founding of different intercultural institutions has *de facto* improved the situation, although the current issues of the Indigenous languages, especially in the Mexican education system, remains problematic as relevant work on the vitality of Indigenous languages in Mexico shows (e.g., Flores Farfán 2007; Montemayor Gracia 2017a). As a consequence of the recent advances in Indigenous languages policies, there may have been an increasing number of multilingual signs in Mexico, as researchers have shown for some touristic areas in Southern Mexico: “Los paisajes lingüísticos en México muestran una creciente visibilización de las lenguas indígenas” (Schrader-Kniffki 2017: 1058).

This contribution aims at analyzing societal multilingualism on public space signage in transportation facilities in Mexico, focusing on Cancún, Quintana Roo. Partly due to the high internal migration to the urban city center since the 1960s and 1970s, many Mexicans who can be classified as Indigenous have arrived in Cancún. According to the latest INEGI (2020) data, almost 200,000 Yucatec Mayan speakers still live throughout Quintana Roo, representing a “[...] relatively large percentage of the population that still speaks Mayan, including city dwellers” (Michnowicz 2015: 24), and characterized as “[...] the language of the peninsula of Yucatan” (Terborg/García Landa 2007: 127). The overall goal of our paper is to investigate the presence of different languages in the linguistic landscapes at the airport and the central bus terminal in this touristic and multicultural Mexican urban area. Although all displayed languages are relevant for our analysis, we mainly focus on the (co-)presence of the Indigenous languages, English, and Spanish in the ‘airportscape’ (cf. Wattanacharoensil/Fakfare/Graham, 2022) and ‘bus terminalscape’ of Cancún. We try to identify convergences or divergences between the used societal multilingualism on written language signs at the two main urban transportation hubs. Our hypothesis is that, on the one hand, a higher presence of Indigenous languages, here Yucatec Mayan, is assumed in the bottom-up area of the signage, this is the privately initiated signage, of all transportation systems; while Spanish and English, will dominate in the top-

down area, this is the institutional signage from local, regional or state authorities, or even displace Mexican Indigenous language altogether. On the other hand, we think that due to a mayor use of the bus system for traveling to rural areas of the Yucatan peninsula, the social actors will communicate more frequently in Yucatec Mayan on the bus terminal signage than in the ‘airportscape’.

This article makes an important contribution to the first investigation of ‘airportscares’ and ‘bus terminalscares’ in Latin America. The exemplary case study of Cancún’s transportation landscapes, and its displayed societal multilingualism, has not been considered by other (socio-) linguistic research projects – despite an excellent state of the art on societal multilingualism in Latin America as a whole and especially Mexico. The article is divided into five sections: first, we focus on the theoretical context of linguistic landscape research on Latin American societal multilingualism, of Mexican language policy and of transportation systems in the city of Cancún. Thus, we describe the conceptual framework of this study, followed by sections on the corpus, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusions.

2. Theoretical Context

2.1. Societal Multilingualism in Southeastern Mexico

The overall goal of the project is to investigate the presence of different languages in Cancún’s linguistic transportation landscape, and how these ‘airportscares’ and ‘bus terminalscares’ reflect the societal multilingualism and the language policies of Mexico toward societal multilingualism, especially with regard to the Indigenous languages. The term *societal multilingualism* refers to the use of more than one language within a particular social group (cf. Edwards 2023: 45). Members of such a group do not have the same level of language proficiency as their skills are located within a multilingual continuum (cf. Montrul 2013: 74). In the case of Mexico, whose language contact and societal multilingualism situation has already been exhaustively researched in relevant works (e.g., Montemayor Gracia/Mühlschlegel 2017), such a continuum ranges from a variety in its early stages under the strong influence of Indigenous languages, to a variety that approaches a possible national standard of Mexican Spanish (cf. Schrader-Kniffki 2021a: 229).

With the exception of Paraguay, the Latin American nation states have defined themselves as monolingual with Spanish as the only official language since the independence in the 19th century (cf. Zajícová 2017), despite the existence of several Indigenous languages in the national spaces. Since the end of the 20th century, many Latin American countries have changed their constitutions and declared themselves multilingual nations, e.g., Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, although there are major differences not only between the individual states, but also between a *de iure* claim and *de facto* implementation as various relevant studies have shown (Baldauf/Kaplan 2007; Zajícová 2021). Mexico has neither a *de jure* declared official language, despite having over 17 million ethnical Indigenous citizens, minimum 50 Indigenous languages – including widespread known and used Nahuatl, Yucatec Mayan, Zapotec, Mixtec or Otomi – and over 5 million speakers of all these languages (cf. Flores Farfán 2008). Relevant work has been conducted on language contact between Mexican Indigenous languages and Spanish (e.g., Flores Farfán 2008; Michnowicz 2015) as well as on the vitality of Indigenous languages in Mexico (e.g., Montemayor Gracia, 2021; Montemayor Gracia/Mühlschlegel 2017). With the *Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas* of 2003, the Mexican government recognizes many uses of national languages, exactly 364 variants of Indigenous languages of Mexico and Spanish, even without having declared officiality for Indigenous languages or Spanish. The founding of the *Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas* has *de facto* initially improved the situation, although the current issues of the Indigenous languages, especially in the Mexican education system, remains problematic as shown by relevant studies on the vitality of Indigenous languages in Mexico (e.g., Montemayor Gracia 2017a; Zajícová 2022). In Quintana Roo, there are governmental and civil initiatives aimed at preserving and revitalizing Yucatec Mayan (Uth/Vanrell Bosch 2023). At the institutional level, bilingual education initiatives, cultural institutions such as the *Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Cultura Maya del Estado de Yucatán*, and academies of Mayan language and culture, such as the *Academia de la Lengua y la Cultura Mayas de Quintana Roo*, stand out (Montemayor Gracia 2017a, p. 297). In addition, there has been a recent increase in non-institutional initiatives driven by Mayan-speaking activists that seek to strengthen the language (e.g., Cru 2015; Uth/Vanrell Bosch 2023; Michnowicz 2015; Montemayor Gracia 2021).

Schrader-Kniffki (2021a: 225) already points out that the numerous (officially recognized) Indigenous languages are distributed across different regions within multilingual Latin American nation states, and that the use of each of them is limited to regional areas that form so-called “sub-communities” (Romaine 2013: 448). Mexican societal multilingualism is thus a good example for Latin American fragmented multilingualism (cf. Schrader-Kniffki 2021a: 229). Although the status of the Indigenous languages has evolved, this has not necessarily been accompanied by changes in the prestige of these Indigenous languages in the speech communities. There are still complementary distributions of language use according to communicative situations, which in the context of Mexican multilingualism coincide with physical spaces as “domains of use” (cf. Fishman 1972). The distribution according to geographical areas is characterized by the use of Indigenous languages in rural areas, like Yucatec Mayan (cf. Montemayor Gracia 2017a), and Spanish in urban Mexican areas (Harjus/Rull García/Yoksulabakan-Harjus forthcoming). To date, there are still around 200,000 speakers of Yucatec Mayan in the state of Quintana Roo, which is about 10.00% of the population, and approximately 18.00% of the population of all the Yucatan peninsula speaks Yucatec Mayan, which makes it the major Indigenous language there (INEGI 2020). Nevertheless, Yucatec Mayan is at risk of extinction due to a drastic decrease in its intergenerational transmission in recent decades (cf. Montemayor Gracia 2017a; Uth/Vanrell Bosch 2023). Due to the increasing migration of the Indigenous population to urban centers like Cancún and the resulting ‘rurban’ neighborhoods formed by people of the same (rural) origin (Harjus/Peter/Yoksulabakan-Harjus 2025), the distribution between urban and rural areas in Mexican cities is reproduced in the distribution between the center and the periphery: the use of Indigenous languages is maintained in the peer group environment in the outskirts of the city, while outside these areas the use of Spanish predominates (cf. Harjus 2025c; Michnowicz, 2015). The domains and spaces of use are linked to an implicit social stratification that attributes the use of Spanish to the upper social classes, and the use of Indigenous languages to the lower social classes, regardless of the speakers’ Indigenous or non-Indigenous origins, as various works have shown for Mexican-Spanish and Indigenous Language Contact (cf. Córdova Hernández, López-Gopar/Sughrua 2017: 8; Harjus/Peter/Yoksulabakan-Harjus 2025: 16). In this way, the spaces of

Mexican Spanish use are spaces in which the upper social classes dominate alongside the use of the Spanish language. This aspect is further exacerbated by the rarer use of writing and the rarer written form of Indigenous languages in Latin America, which might be a hint for less use of Indigenous languages on advertising billboards in high-priced airports than in bus terminals, with more affordable bus ticket solutions for regional and national travels. This fact leads us to the hypothesis of this paper, that a higher presence of Indigenous languages, here Yucatec Mayan, is assumed in the bottom-up area of the signage of all transportation systems, and that on the bus terminal signage, the social actors will communicate more frequently in Yucatec Mayan than in the 'airportscape'.

2.2. *Linguistic Landscape Research in Multilingual Latin America*

The term 'linguistic landscape' (cf. Backhaus 2007; Landry/Bourhis 1997) refers to written language that appears in public spaces, e.g., on billboards, displays, or road signs. It focuses on the presence and representation of linguistic signs in (mainly urban) public spaces. This sort of sociolinguistic research has established an analytical framework for the empirical exploration of societal multilingualism, sociolinguistics, language contact research, and language ideologies (cf. Cruz Volio et al. 2024: 10).

The first contributions by Landry and Bourhis (1997), Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), Backhaus (2007), and Shohamy and Gorter (2009) are regarded as the fundamental theoretical starting points for linguistic landscape research. Landry and Bourhis attribute informative and symbolic functions to signs in the linguistic landscape: "The most basic informational function of the linguistic landscape is that it serves as a distinctive marker of the geographical territory inhabited by a given language community" (1997: 25). The authors locate the second function of linguistic landscapes, the symbolic function, primarily as a visual expression of identity as a member within a multilingual society (cf. Landry/Bourhis 1997: 28). The use of a certain language in the public sphere means a valorization of this language. In contrast, the absence of certain languages in a space can signify its lower status in the society (cf. Leimgruber/Fernández-Mallat 2021: 408). Linguistic landscape research, which focuses on these aspects, shows the desire of speakers to be present and represented in multilingual communities, and to help shape the multilingual space as social actors (cf. Blommaert 2013).

A further milestone in the development of the linguistic landscape research is the introduction of the distinction between a top-down and bottom-up perspective to distinguish between institutional-public and private-commercial signs (cf. Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 14). That linguistic landscape research represents a necessary object of sociolinguistics and the study of societal multilingualism is attested by relevant works, among others as well in sociolinguistic work related to Spanish (Castillo Lluch/Kailuweit/Pusch 2019; Castillo Lluch/Sáez Rivera 2013; Cruz Volio et al. 2024; Gubitosi/Ramos Pellicia 2021; Morant-Marco/Martín 2017). In recent years, many relevant works on societal multilingualism in Mexico (Flores Farfán 2021), also on the Yucatan Peninsula (Michnowicz 2015; Montemayor Gracia 2017a; 2017b), were published. There has also been an increasing focus on linguistic landscapes in Mexican Spanish linguistics in the last years. For example, relevant studies on societal multilingualism were conducted about the visibility of Italian in the linguistic landscape of Chipolo, Puebla (Sbrighi 2021), about English and Spanish in Ciudad de Juárez, Chihuahua (Mazzaro/Minjarez Oppenheimer/González de Anda 2024) or about the presence of Indigenous languages in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas (Schrader-Kniffki 2021b), Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca (Córdova Hernández/López-Gopar/Sughrua 2017; Harjus 2025c; Schrader-Kniffki 2014), and Mérida, Yucatán (Montemayor Gracia 2017a). To date, to our knowledge, there is just one work on linguistic landscapes about Cancún's Downtown and *Zona Hotelera* (Harjus/Peter/Yoksulabakan-Harjus 2025), but no sociolinguistic studies available about written signs in transportation facilities in Cancún, Mexico or Latin America as a whole. This is particularly surprising since the first studies on linguistic landscape were related to the interior of subway and train stations (Backhaus 2006), and now, there is a larger field of research on written multilingualism on signs in airports (Heinrich 2010; Woo/Riget 2022) or various transportation systems (Domke 2014).

2.3. *Public Transportation in Cancún, Quintana Roo*

The Yucatan peninsula has an area of about 150,000 km² and a population of about 4.5 million inhabitants. Of the three Mexican states on the peninsula, Quintana Roo is the one that receives the largest number of tourists, with an area of approximately 45,000 km² and a population of nearly 2.0 million inhabitants. This said, Quintana Roo receives every year over 20.00 million

tourists, being Cancún's *Zona Hotelera* the main destination. Naturally, Cancún, which grew out of a small Caribbean fishing village in the 1970s, has therefore developed an international transportation system for these tourists and the local population, which has now grown to around 650,000 inhabitants in 2024.

The city of Cancún has three main transportation hubs, being the *Aeropuerto Internacional de Cancún* the main entrance for visitors. Due to the large number of US, Canadian, European and domestic tourists, and with over 30.00 million passengers every year, the airport has become the second largest in Mexico after Mexico City's *Aeropuerto Internacional Benito Juárez*. The airport, run by the biggest private Mexican airport operator ASUR (*Grupo Aeroportuario del Sureste*), is approximately 15 kilometers south of the city center and has been in operation since 1975. It has four different passenger terminals and it is the largest airport in Latin America in terms of area. Terminal 2, whose linguistic landscape is in focus here, is the oldest of these four terminals. To date, it serves the most of the domestic flights of Mexican carriers like *Volaris* and *VivaAerobus*, and continental flights to other Latin American destinations operated by Latin American carriers like *Aerolíneas Argentinas*, *Avianca Costa Rica* or *LATAM Chile*.

Another Cancún transportation facility is the much-criticized *Tren Maya*, a railroad project which stops right next to the airport. It not only connects Cancún with other major cities on the Yucatan peninsula, such as Mérida or Valladolid, as well as Caribbean tourist beach resorts, such as Playa del Carmen or Tulum, but also makes accessible famous archaeological sites, such as Chichén Itzá or Palenque to tourists from the Cancún area. However, for this study, we decided to focus on the city's central bus terminal. We chose the private ADO (*Autobuses de Oriente*) bus terminal for several reasons. On the one hand, it is located in the central area of downtown Cancún (*Avenida Uxmal*) and, on the other hand, it serves the routes that are important for tourists and locals alike across the entire Yucatan peninsula, especially the bus routes to cities like Mérida, Valladolid, and Chetumal, but also the connections to smaller Yucatan towns. The private bus company ADO, founded in 1939, has to date, destinations throughout southern, central and eastern Mexico and now even reaches the US-Texan border region in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas from Cancún.

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3. Methods

3.1. Data Collection

We built the corpus for this research study in April 2024.¹ As in many works on linguistic landscapes (e.g., Backhaus 2006), we focus on signage in a specific area, here: the public transportation areas of Cancún, Quintana Roo, Mexico. In contrast to classic linguistic landscape research, we do not focus on outdoor street signs in a specific area. Mainly, we studied the inside areas of the airport's national terminal 2 and Cancun's main bus terminal (see geographical location within Cancún's urban limits on figure 1).

¹ We gratefully acknowledge the Faculty of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Innsbruck for providing a research grant.

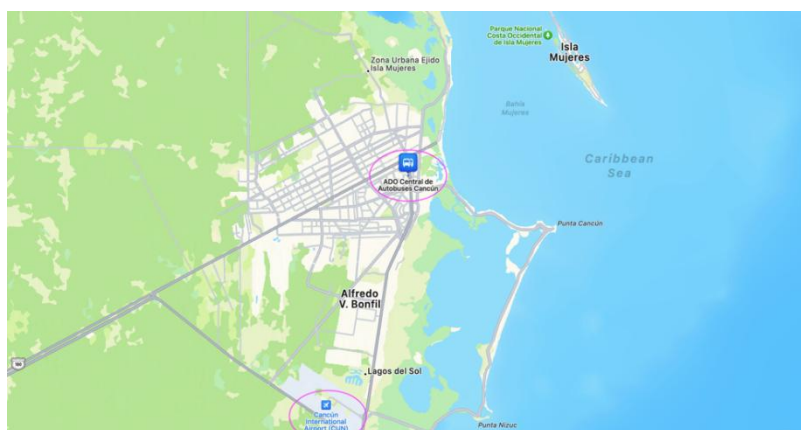


Figure 1: Data Formation in Cancún's urban area (Source: AppleMaps)

Overall, we photographed a total of 369 signs for the whole corpus with an *iPhone 11*, distributed by two specific points: terminal 2's departures hall of Cancún's international airport, where we took photos of 248 signs in the departure baggage drop-off zone before security lines and the zone of gates behind the security check point; and the *ADO* bus terminal in the city center, where we got a second corpus of 121 signs inside the building (see figure 2).

Corpus	Number of Signs
Cancún International Airport	248
<i>ADO</i> Bus Terminal Cancún	121
n = 369	

Figure 2: Number of Signs photographed in every transportation area of Cancún

Our approach is a holistic-exhaustive one, that means that we tried to photograph all of the signs within this given territory (cf. Cenoz/Gorter 2006: 70). We understand signs to be all elements of written language visible in the public transportation space in the specifically defined areas of Cancún international airport's terminal 2 and the *ADO* bus terminal at the time of data collection. For our work, we define 'public transportation space' as the entirety of indoor spaces that are accessible to all passengers like us at all (plane or bus boarding) times, and a 'linguistic landscape sign' as a visible specific medium, which means that the written element on the sign in

question can be read by passers-by from the transportation ground defined above (cf. Moser 2020: 80).

3.2. Categorization

The basis for the data analysis is an adapted analysis scheme according to Carr (2017; 2021) and Franco Rodríguez (2008; 2009), which has already been successfully applied in other Spanish research contexts on linguistic landscapes in multilingual settings, e.g., Galician and Spanish in A Coruña and Santiago in Spain (Harjus 2025a), Little Portugal in Toronto (Harjus 2025b) or Cancún's Downtown and *Zona Hotelera* (Harjus/Peter/Yoksulabakan-Harjus 2025). The quantitative analysis focuses on three different aspects: the type of the sign (top-down or bottom-up), the code of a sign (monolingual or multilingual), as well as the distribution by languages and types of establishments in the private sector (restaurant, clothes shop, etcetera) (see figure 3). The sign data material could be made analyzable and interpretable by coding and following categorization with the program MAXQDA (cf. Kuckartz 2016).

A	Type of Sign	top-down
		bottom-up
B	Code	monolingual
		multilingual
C	Type of Establishment	restaurant
		duty free shop
		...
D	Symbolic Function	Spanish monolingualism
		English monolingualism
		Yucatec Mayan monolingualism
		Multilingual Spanish-English
		Multilingual Spanish-Y. Mayan
E	Informative Function	Spanish monolingualism
		English monolingualism
		Yucatec Mayan monolingualism

	Multilingual Spanish-English
	Multilingual Spanish-Y. Mayan

Figure 3: Scheme of analysis and categorizations

Furthermore, we also look at elements of the corpus data from a qualitative perspective: namely, selected examples of signs in multilingual signage, which includes Mexican Indigenous languages parts, e.g., Yucatec Mayan, and thus shape the public transportation area in a specifically (multi)lingual way. We focus within the qualitative approach also on the signs' linguistic divisions into the main symbolic element, e.g., the specific name of a fast-food restaurant, and more informative elements, e.g., references to the items for sale in a duty-free store (cf. Landry/Bourhis 1997). In doing so, we are able to analyze the differences between a real informative component in the written communication, e.g., the opening hours of an establishment or the information about the service offered in a store like in *Perfumando a México* on the sign *Fraiche*. *Perfumando a México* (see image 15), and pure symbolic use of a certain language on a billboard, like *Fraiche*, in the 'airportscape' and 'bus terminalscape' of Cancún.

4. Results

4.1. 'Airportscapes'

The quantitative analysis of the signage in Terminal 2 of Cancún International Airport counted a total of 248 signs. These could initially be divided into 112 top-down signs (45.16%) and 136 bottom-up signs (54.84%). The large number of top-down signs compared to other linguistic landscape studies (e.g., Carr 2017), which include both aspects in the analysis, can be explained relatively simply by the necessary signage of the airport operator *ASUR*, which is private but subject to national legislation and international airport regulations. A total of 35.89% of these signs were monolingual, 62.90% bilingual and 1.21% trilingual.

Number of languages per sign	Number of signs	%
One language	89	35.89
Two different languages	156	62.90
Three or more languages	3	1.21

Figure 4: All signs by number of languages displayed (n=248)

The following data is available with regard to the specific languages used in the totality of the 'airportscape': Spanish is omnipresent (89.11%), both as the only language used monolingually on signage and in bilingual signage together with other languages, especially English. English is the second most frequently used language on signage in public spaces at Cancún Airport (54.11%), especially in the area of bilingual signs in combination with Spanish. However, the result regarding the use of Indigenous languages on signage in Terminal 2 is disillusioning: only two signs use an Indigenous language of Mexico, one Yucatec Mayan and one Nahuatl (0.81%).

Language	Appearances (n=248)	%
Spanish	221	89.11
English	135	54.44
Italian	4	1.61
French	2	0.81
Indigenous Languages	2	0.81

Figure 5: Languages on all signs in Terminal 2 of Cancún's international airport

The composition and position of different languages on top-down signs in Cancún's international airport follow a bilingual scheme with Spanish on top of English, usually displaying the Spanish part of the multilingual top-down signage by bold letters. As we see in this exemplary picture of a top-down informative sign (see figure 6), the governmental signage does not contain any written traces of Indigenous languages.

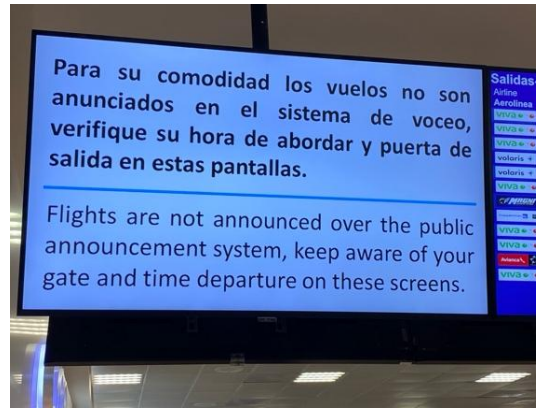


Figure 6: Top-Down multilingual sign at terminal 2 (Spanish on top and bold, followed by English)

All multilingual signs in the top-down area (90.18%) have a combination of Spanish and English (see figure 7). All monolingual top-down signs (9.82%) are written only in Spanish.

Number of languages per sign	Number of signs	%
One language	11	9.82
Two different languages	101	90.18
Three or more languages	0	0.00

Figure 7: Top-down signs by number of languages displayed (n=112)

For this paper, we have also classified switching digital displays as bilingual, some of which only display Spanish for a few seconds and then English for the same number of seconds (see figure 8).



Figure 8: Switching digital displays in English and (in the moment of this capture displayed) Spanish

In the bottom-up area, the signs are often also multilingual (40.44%), but in contrast to the top-down area, monolingual signs predominate (57.35%) here (see figure 9). At the same time, the languages used are somewhat more diverse. Although Spanish (e.g., *Cinco Soles*) and English (e.g., *Convenience Store*) also dominate in the bottom-up area, there are also signs that use French (e.g., *Cloe accessoires*) in the symbolic area of fashion or Italian in the informative area of certain restaurants (*le pizze*) in the terminal 2.

Number of languages per sign	Number of signs	%
One language	78	57.35
Two different languages	55	40.44
Three or more languages	3	2.21

Figure 9: Bottom-up signs by number of languages displayed (n=136)

Indigenous languages are found rarely in the terminal, and only in the symbolic area of the commodification of authenticity to offer tourists something 'authentic'. With the fashion label *Wayan*, there is a symbolic use of Yucatec Mayan in the branding name, which can be traduced by 'here we are' (see figure 10).



Figure 10: *Wayan* clothing store at Terminal 2

At the same time, there is a sole reference to the Mexican Indigenous language Nahuatl on a product wall in the terminal's duty-free store (see figure 11). For the commodification of authenticity, the product reference in the informative section is not only limited to the Spanish *chocolate*, but extended to Nahuatl *xocolatl*. We did not examine every smaller product from souvenir and convenience stores, such as *mezcal*, *alebrijes* etc., as these notices were all written far too small to meet our definition of a written sign that can be seen by every passenger as they walk past. The sign *xocolatl* is therefore already at the limit of legibility for everyone, but the information on the product packaging, for example, was not included in the corpus.



Figure 11: Chocolate *Xocolatl* by *María Tepoztlán* at the duty-free shop in Terminal 2

4.2. 'Bus terminalscape'

The quantitative analysis of the signage in the *ADO* bus terminal in Cancún counted a total of 121 signs (see figure 12). These could initially be divided into 35 top-down signs (28.93%) and 86 bottom-up signs (71.07%). Although there are fewer top-down signs than at the international airport, there is a relatively large number of top-down signs in the 'bus terminalscape' compared to other linguistic landscape studies that include top-down and bottom-up signs in the analysis (e.g., Franco Rodríguez 2008). In total, 61.15% of these signs were monolingual, 37.20% bilingual and 1.65% trilingual. In comparison with the 'airportscape' there are more monolingual signs in the 'bus terminalscape'.

Number of languages per sign	Number of signs	%
One language	74	61.15
Two different languages	45	37.20
Three or more languages	2	1.65

Figure 12: Signs by number of languages displayed (n=121)

The following data with regard to the specific languages used in the totality of the bus terminal signage (see figure 13): Spanish is omnipresent (98.35%), both as the only language used on signage and in bilingual contexts together with English. English is the second most frequently used language

on signage in public spaces at the *ADO* terminal (36.36%), especially in the area of bilingual signs in combination with Spanish. As in the ‘airportscape’, the result regarding the use of Indigenous languages on signage in Terminal 2 is sobering: there are nearly no traces of Mexican Indigenous languages (1.65%).

Language	Appearances (n=121)	%
Spanish	119	98.35
English	44	36.36
Yucatec Mayan	2	1.65
French	1	0.83

Figure 13: Languages on signs in Cancún’s *ADO* bus terminal

In the top-down area, there are a total of 35 signs in the bus station, the vast majority of which are monolingual (80.00%), namely in Spanish. Only a few signs are bilingual (20.00%) and when they are, they are always written in Spanish and English. There are no signs in other languages, including Mexican Indigenous languages (see figure 14).

Number of languages per sign	Number of signs	%
One language	28	80.00
Two different languages	7	20.00
Three or more languages	0	0.00

Figure 14: Top-down signs by number of languages displayed (n=35)

The composition of the signs in the top-down area is similar to those in the airport, as Spanish is basically the dominant language: either Spanish is positioned above English or is given priority over English by changing the color and, above all, the size of the letters as we see in the size difference between *salidas* and *departures* or *sala de espera* and *waiting room* on the following picture (see figure 15).



Figure 15: Top-down sign in the departure hall of Cancún's ADO bus terminal and bottom-up sign *Fraiche. Perfumando a México*

However, the vast majority of public signage in the top-down area is entirely in Spanish, as shown in the following picture (see figure 16), which shows a government sign banning smoking inside the bus station.



Figure 16: Top-down sign in the departure hall of Cancún's ADO bus terminal

The number of bilingual signs in the bus terminal's private signage is significantly more multilingual (44.19%) than in the top-down area of Cancún's bus station. Even in the bottom-up area of signage, there are still more monolingual (53.49%) than multilingual signs. Nevertheless, the number of bilingual signs, which are generally written in Spanish and English, is significantly higher than in the top-down area (see figure 17).

Number of languages per sign	Number of signs	%
One language	46	53.49
Two different languages	38	44.19
Three or more languages	2	2.33

Figure 17: Bottom-up signs by number of languages displayed (n=86)

This is mainly due to advertisements that are not only intended to appeal to Cancún's local Spanish-speaking population, but also, if not primarily, to attract Spanish or English-speaking tourists to a service. It is not for nothing that the informative part of the signage is written bilingually in Spanish and English as we see in the following picture (see figure 18):



Figure 18: Self-printed bilingual bottom-up sign of a private postal office in Cancún's bus terminal

Regarding Indigenous languages of Mexico, we can only give the following example for a bottom-up sign in the bus terminal: the branding name of a Mexican bus company – *Mayab* (see figure 19) – with two occurrences in the bus terminal corpus can be classified as a Yucatec Mayan name.



Figure 19: Bottom-up sign of bus company *Mayab*

However, the Yucatec Mayan can only be found in the symbolic area of the company's signs. In the informative area, every written part is in Spanish. With this, we pass to the discussion of our findings.

5. Discussion

Like many transportation facilities, airports and bus terminals are functionally traversed by travelers (cf. Woo/Riget 2022), so they are shaped in specific communicative ways by carrying advertising messages, cues for using the space or orientation signs within it. In other words, airports and bus terminals are characterized by publicly perceivable textual worlds (cf. Domke 2014: 20), the verbal portion of which – also in multilingual speech communities of Mexico – represents an interesting object of study for the use of language(s) in public space: this is because the (non)presence of certain languages convey symbolic messages about their meaning and prestige in speech communities (cf. Shohamy 2006), especially in diversely multilingual

ones like the Mexican. Heinrich (2010) states for Japanese Naha airport that it is a transportation facility in a multilingual space with a linguistic order that is guided only by power and prestige: “[...] only the powerful national languages of Japan, Taiwan, China and Korea are used, in addition to the most powerful international language in the world, English” (2010: 354). The local Indigenous languages of Ryukyu Islands are completely absent from the airport’s linguistic landscapes.

Our research focused on the visibility of languages in the public space of the transportation systems of Cancún, Mexico – a multilingual and touristic Mexican area on the Caribbean Sea. The findings of our analysis of the corpus show that there is no evidence at all of the written use of Yucatec Mayan in the linguistic landscape. Neither at the airport nor at the bus terminal, neither on bottom-up nor on top-down signage could we find traces of Indigenous Mexican languages, e.g., Yucatec Mayan, which is still spoken relatively widely in the Quintana Roo region (INEGI, 2020). These results partly complement earlier findings in work on linguistic landscapes of Mexican speech communities on the Yucatan Peninsula: Montemayor Gracia (2017a) also finds little evidence of the use of Yucatec Mayan in smaller towns of Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Yucatán. However, Montemayor Gracia (2017a: 532) still finds 7.2% written references to Yucatec Mayan on visualizations on bottom-up and top-down signs in smaller urban contexts. We found that neither in the top-down area at Cancún airport nor at the bus station in Cancún’s city center, a single sign makes written reference to Indigenous languages of Mexico. Instead of possible references to the Yucatec Mayan, on the top-down level priority is given to the *de facto* Mexican national language Spanish and the internationally powerful English: so, there is some monolingual Spanish signage in the top-down ‘transportscapes’, but it is mainly the bilingual solution with Spanish and English, whereby the bilingual Spanish-English solution is even more prominent at the ‘airportscape’ than at the ‘bus terminalscape’. At the same time, a dominant use of Spanish over English can also be seen on some top-down signs, in that the Spanish is bolder or highlighted in a different color. In any case, the non-presence of Indigenous languages, especially Yucatec Mayan, shows the limited effect of Mexican language policy on the top-down written use of Yucatec Mayan. As Haboud et al. (2016) have already noted for Mexican Indigenous languages as a whole, the case of Cancún’ trasportscares “[...] shows the limited effect of language

revitalization policies based on top-down initiatives such as language legislation, especially when laws have no binding force and stand in a subordinate position within the larger juridical framework of the nation-state" (2016: 214). In part, a lack of tradition of the written presence of Indigenous languages (Farfán 2010; Montemayor Gracia 2017b; Córdova Hernández/López-Gopar/Sughrua 2017) can be cited as a factor for their non-use in the public space of Cancún's transportation system. Nevertheless, the non-use in the top-down area of the transportation system, a vital public space for all groups within the Quintana Roo speech community, is another aspect of the disempowerment of Indigenous speech communities since colonization by Europeans and Spanish-only-policies in the course of Latin American national building since independence wars (cf. Gugenberger 2013). We therefore conclude that the results of our analysis on a top-down level are a clear indication of further loss of prestige of Yucatec Mayan in Mexico: „[...] las lenguas indígenas pierden terreno en el mercado lingüístico“ (Montemayor Gracia/Mühlschlegel 2017: 965).

These results contrast the efforts of the Mexican tourism industry to exploit cultural aspects and artifacts of Mexico's Indigenous cultures for tourism and economic purposes. Especially on the Yucatan Caribbean coast, a commodification of authenticity (cf. Heller 2014; Gorter, Marten/Van Mensel 2019) of certain aspects (peripherally) related to Mayan cultures is carried out. This process reaches its peak in the Mayan theme parks, e.g., *Xcaret*, located along the Quintana Roo coastline (Uth/Vanrell Bosch 2023: 111). In this context, the use of Yucatec Mayan also takes on a special significance in the bottom-up area, as uses of this Indigenous language or the use of Mayan (*mayab*, *wayan*) and Nahuatl lexemes (*xocolatl*) are intended to indicate services for touristic purposes on private signage (cf. Montemayor Gracia 2017a: 514). In such cases, the use is limited to the symbolic sphere and thus, according to Montemayor Gracia (2017b: 1031), represents a "folklorización" of the Indigenous language(s) and creates an artificial space for tourists. We believe that what is really interesting about our findings in the corpus is that nearly no signage in Yucatec Mayan was actually found on a symbolic sign level in the bottom-up level of either Terminal 2 of the international airport or inside the ADO bus station. We have pointed out a few exceptions in both transportation systems (*mayab*, *wayan*) in the chapter about our findings. This means that in these Mexican transportation areas, not even for the tourist

commodification of authenticity of certain stores or gastronomic areas, recourse is made to Indigenous languages. This result contrasts with data from other public spaces in Mexico and with Schrader-Kniffki's (2014: 128) thesis for the Oaxacan speech community as a 'superdiverse' linguistic landscape. The Cancún 'transportationscape' do not reflect a possible Mexican superdiversity, at least with regard to Mexican Indigenous languages, but constructs these transportation areas as pure spaces of national Spanish hegemony and English-speaking globalization. The result that there is no informative use of Yucatec Mayan underlines the lack of prestige and powerlessness of Indigenous languages in the public space of Cancún's transportation facilities.

6. Conclusion

This contribution aimed at analyzing societal multilingualism on public space signage in transportation facilities in Cancún, Mexico, and pursued the questions of which languages shape the linguistic landscapes at the airport and the main bus terminal, which functions do the used languages fulfill symbolically or informatively, and what is the relationship between the written languages and the Mexican linguistic policies? Finally, we tried to identify convergences and/or divergences between public signage in the airport and the bus terminal in Cancún. Hence, the paper contributed to an exhaustive linguistic examination of societal multilingualism in Mexican public transportation contexts, here for the first time 'airportscares' and 'bus terminalscares' and their sociolinguistic differences in Cancún, Quintana Roo.

We can summarize that there is no noteworthy use of Indigenous languages, not even the Yucatec Mayan orally still relatively widespread in the state of Quintana Roo (cf. Terborg/García Landa 2007: 204), on top-down or bottom-up signage for either informational or symbolic use. On the one hand, this result is surprising for the bus terminal, which is heavily used by indigenous speakers to go to rural areas of the Yucatan Peninsula. On the other hand, in contrast to other multiethnic and multicultural tourist areas in Mexico, such as Mérida, Oaxaca or Chiapas, there are nearly no attempts to a linguistic commodification of authenticity, either bottom-up or top-down, with written signage in Indigenous languages. The language choices we find at Cancún's linguistic transportation landscape index language prestige and

preferences within the Mexican society with a clearly national favorite, Mexican Spanish, and an international *lingua franca*, English.

In order to complete these findings and to see whether a commodification of authenticity has a stronger impact there, however, it would be helpful in the future to examine not only data from Cancún's national terminal, but also from other terminals, especially the international ones such as the airport's terminals 3 and 4 for flights to the United States or Europe. On the other hand, it seems important to us to interview passengers as passer-by and exhibitors as social agents in the future, in order to give a better understanding of language ideologies and linguistic attitudes behind the signs (e.g., Cenoz/Gorter 2019; Harjus 2025a).

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