

URBAN LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE ACTIVITIES – APPLIED LINGUISTIC AND EFL ASPECTS

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Abstract: *The article focuses on ULL activities meant for English and German philology students at Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen, Bulgaria. A number of studies on linguistic landscape have focused on the interdisciplinary character of this growing field of investigation. Social tendencies could be seen through the lenses of the cityscape and at the same time could be applied to EFL. Moreover, ULL studies and their application to EFL are particularly relevant in a multicultural or multilingual environment. While recording examples from the ULL, students act as detectives discovering different language inscriptions and combinations in the urban environment. Research shows that in a globalizing world English mixes with local languages. So, tendencies in the usage and development of language, interlanguage processes and specific foreign language influences could be traced. Neologisms and mixture of Cyrillic and Latin alphabets can be seen as a result of such linguistic interactions. The following are among the advantages of incorporating ULL activities in linguistic and EFL: 1. Learning the language can be combined with learning about the language through various exercises aimed at students of different levels. 2. Following the model developed by Sayer students are stimulated to analyse the reasons behind the choice of (a particular) language, such as ‘English is modern’, ‘English is being cool/prestigious’. 3. Students’ reactions to ULL activities are very positive as they are stimulated to think critically. They also report improvement of their productive skills and reflection on the cultural and linguistic environment they live in.*

Keywords: *English as a Lingua franca; Urban linguistic landscape ELT; sociolinguistic analysis; multilingualism.*

Urban linguistic landscape of a territory or region is defined as: “language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings” (Landry and Bouhris 1997: 25).

Another definition sums up the notion of the ULL, as follows: “...language in the environment, words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces” (Shohamy and Gorter 2009: 1).

The article is an attempt at bridging ULL studies, the presence of English as a lingua franca in the ULL with the way it could be used for research and ELT purposes. While ELF (English as a lingua franca) is important for intercultural communication between representatives of different cultures, EFL or ESL aim at complying with the language standards and the cultural aspects of the native speakers of English. Therefore, with ELF native speakers’ standards are of lesser importance as compared to EFL.

English as a Lingua franca is used for the purposes of global communication between communities of non-native speakers in “intercommunity communication” (Seidlhofer 2016: 20). Seidlhofer (Seidlhofer 2011) also focuses on two aspects of ELF in her book *Understanding English as a lingua franca*: It is used among speakers of different languages and secondly, it is the only medium of communication.

Lingua francas have been used for centuries. However, what makes ELF unique is the extent to which it is used by nonnative speakers in different contexts in written and oral communication worldwide. ELF research focuses on the pragmatic aspects of variation which is found in the uses of the resources of English. Such uses have numerous different purposes for both informal and formal communication. For example, ELF is used in important formal encounters such as business transactions, international diplomacy and conflict resolution, informal exchanges between international friends, computer and technology.

Due to the technological advances of the 21st century, instant global communication via internet and mobile phones has been thriving. The world is now an interconnected global system, which requires communication via a common language of communication. So, English naturally serves as global lingua franca (being the language of business and technology).

David Crystal estimates that the number of nonnative speakers of English is greater than native speakers (see <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/whats-future-english>). While 400 million people speak English as a native language 7-800 million speak English as a second language.

But once a language is used by new communities, it may be adapted and modified to their specific needs. (e.g. words can acquire new meanings new words are coined etc.) Consequently, the English language is undergoing change, including changes caused by non-native speakers. Among such changes are: mixing elements of different languages and scripts/alphabets that can be often found in the ULL (Urban linguistic landscape).

Multiple research projects on Urban linguistic landscape (ULL) lays stress on the interdisciplinary nature of this area of research. Social tendencies could be seen through the lenses of the ULL while the linguistic dimensions of the ULL could be applied to the study of English as a foreign language, too. Language learning could be combined with learning about the language. Moreover, the authentic ULL materials could be applied in ELT on different levels – from Elementary to Advanced and Proficiency. The present article will focus on how applied linguistic and ELT aspects of ULL studies can be combined and implemented.

The topic of combining education and language learning with linguistic landscape studies has been studied by Carr (Carr, 2019) and Gorter

(Gorter, 2018). Several edited books and numerous articles on the topic have been published, too (Krompák et al., 2022; Malinowski et al., 2020; Niedt & Seals, 2021; Solmaz & Przymus, 2021). Studying ULL and its application to language learning is especially relevant for multicultural and multilingual environment. It can facilitate building the linguistic and intercultural skills of the learners.

Research questions that will be discussed are: How can we apply ULL studies to ELT? What are the steps in data collection and analysis? What activities can be designed?

To begin with, English and local languages mix noticeably in the ULL. It is supported by both research and observations. Such examples are ubiquitous which makes the use of that sort of data easy and accessible to everyone, including researchers on applied linguistics, cultural studies and ELT. ULL can help in tracing tendencies in the development of the language, society, culture; intralinguistic and interlinguistic tendencies and this can well be integrated in ELT. This presupposes creating tasks for the learners that can develop their foreign language competence, active independent learning and critical thinking. Besides, working in a group on texts, gathered by the learners could encourage the development of their communication skills in the field of language and culture.

Cenoz and Gorter (2008) are the first to recognize the role of the ULL in language acquisition. According to Malinowski the research of the ULL can be used in teaching. The advantages of ULL research and its implementation in ELT are the authenticity of the materials, its implication for pragmatic competence, literacy skills, making conclusions about the symbolic use of languages Cenoz and Gorter (2008: 276).

In one of his projects, Sayer (2010: 147-150) uses a qualitative approach, applying descriptive and analytical methods in searching for the answer to the question of why English is used in the ULL in Oaxaca, Mexico. He derives several (social - my note) meanings of the English language and provides examples for them (Sayer, 2010: 147-150): 1. English is “advanced and sophisticated”. 2. English is “fashion”. 3. English is “being cool”. 4. English is “sexy”. 5. English for “expressions of love”. 6. English is used for “expressing subversive identities”.

Examples of the above meanings can be provided by the ULL in Bulgaria. The English language is associated with advance and sophistication in slogans like *back to school* in the context of advertisements for the start of the new school year in Bulgaria. The English language is associated with fashion and the word *fashion* often appears in the names of fashion businesses in Bulgaria. The same applies to the English words *cool* and *sexy*, which are present in ULL inscriptions, advertisements, etc. English is used in expressions of love. The merging of *Plovdiv* and *love* resulted in *Plovediv*

(instead of Plovdiv) in an advertisement in the central part of the city of Plovdiv related to its selection as European Capital of Culture in 2019. English is also used to express disagreement with the status quo, especially in graffiti, which are often controversial and remain off the focus of our attention.

Sayer's model emphasizes the social functions of the English language, but the author points out that it can be adapted to language study: vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical characteristics; task topics can be household appliances, clothing and accessories (T-shirts; backpacks; linguistic innovations – non-standard forms of the English language are used in public places, use of loanwords – sport, fashion, cool, express, extreme, relax, love, coffee (Sayer, 2010: 152-153).

Sayer's model can be successfully used in English language teaching for philology students (as well as for non-philologists), as it is increasingly relevant to language learning in connection with culture, and both components are reflected in ULL with the growing use of English as a lingua franca.

In addition, the work of learners with ULL supports incidental learning as a supportive method for language acquisition. Incidental learning boils down to laying emphasis on one stimulus while indirectly and unconsciously activating another stimulus. For example, by describing ULL, learners develop other skills too, apart from language development: communicative, critical thinking skills, and data analytical skills. In collecting and analyzing the data, new vocabulary is acquired and the subsequent discussions stimulate creativity, teamwork, and critical thinking. Such discussions can be directed towards qualitative and quantitative aspects of ULL, but also towards the analysis of the social meanings of the English language.

Some of the social meanings are referred to by Seyer as innovative and intralinguistic at the same time, i.e. the aim is not purely communication through the mediation of English as a lingua franca, but in a way, to emphasize something else through the use of English. It is appropriate to encourage students to distinguish innovative meanings from the use of English as a lingua franca. Among the innovative meanings, we can consider transliteration: Latinization of Bulgarian lexemes and Cyrillicization of English lexemes. Phenomena such as metaphorical use and wordplay in the ULL are also quite interesting.

The project tasks on ULL for philology students include the collection and analysis of inscriptions. **The steps (tasks) are the following:** 1. Students must independently collect photographic material from ULL – examples of combinations of English and other languages (5 examples for each student) from commercial areas. 2. The research questions that the teacher may propose to the students are: What languages and language combinations are observed in the context of multilingualism? To what extent is English as a modern lingua franca reflected in the ULL? To what extent do English words contribute to

different interpretations and meanings? Is there a play on words? How are different graphic systems (alphabets) combined, specifically Latin and Cyrillic? Are there examples of transliteration? Meanwhile, examples of the social meanings of the English language, according to Sayer's classification (which the lecturer should present to the students before their research) should be looked for. 2. The collected materials should be summarized, analyzed and presented in a PowerPoint presentation. 3. Students are invited to fill out a survey with pre-set questions from the lecturer regarding the students' opinions on the task. The questions are: Is studying ULL useful? Which part of your research was the most interesting? Should ULL be studied?

Examples from my research

The focus of interest is on commercial districts – business and shop names and some administrative buildings, as they are rich sources of data for multilingual inscriptions and English, used as a lingua franca or innovative meanings. The examples are from two towns in the North East of Bulgaria – Shumen and Dobrich.

Data about the ULL in Shumen (main street region, named Crystal Square)

The data can be categorized as follows. There are four language cases/combinations that can be found: 1. English + Bulgarian 2. English language only. 3. Another foreign language. Bulgarian + another foreign language.

English + Bulgarian are used in the following inscriptions:

Wedding Day – Сватбен ден; 21 Stop shop, non-stop, Стил и качество; StudioРози – mnogo Moderno.com online clothing store (transliteration); Style Bijou (spelled wrongly) медицинска стомана, Бижутерия; Mania GSM аксесоари; Българските обувки Bulgarian shoes.

Only English is used in: Crystal TIME (a watch shop); Obsession (clothes shop); Lilly; Meri Style (wrong spelling of the English proper name); Mona Lisa bags and accessories; Unicredit Bulbank; Arizona lounge; PG Fashion.

Another foreign language only is used in: Mondo del Bambini (Italian); MAVI (Turkish) – a café and a clothes shop; Pizza Duner; Tendenz; BILLA.

Bulgarian + Another language (or other languages) is used in: Механа Пекин + Beiging, written in Chinese; Verona – чанти, мода, стил; Baristo сърцето на доброто кафе.

The above categorization of observations of the inscriptions from the central street of Shumen show that Latin alphabet is preferred for the names of restaurants and shops. There is a marked tendency for the use of foreign languages. A possible reason behind this choice is the need for better communication, commercial reasons but also the desire to sound prestigious.

As this part of the town is visited by foreigners the use of English is quite dominant. Female personal names, such as *Lilly*; *Meri Style* (though with a wrong spelling of the English proper name); *Mona Lisa* are preferred for the fashion and cosmetics shops, partly motivated by the wish to be understood by foreigners, but also by the desire to sound modern. A number of variations can be found: non-equivalent messages in two languages in an inscription (e.g. Баристо сърцето на доброто кафе), messages with additional information in one language (Mania GSM аксесоари), literal translations in inscriptions (Българските обувки/ Bulgarian Shoes; Национална агенция по приходите/National Revenue Agency). The examples show high tolerance for the use of English in the ULL in the centre of Shumen. English/ Latin inscriptions precede Bulgarian ones in 35 cases of bilingual messages from the main street area in Shumen, while Bulgarian is dominant in 19 examples. Over 50 % of the examples have an English component. Italian and Turkish are also present in isolated cases related to specific goods that the particular shop sells. Italian is symbolically related to fashion and good food. The use of Chinese and Turkish in the names of restaurants/shops is associated with the origin of the food or goods sold there. Examples of wordplay and innovative meaning are: сладкартница, where the word art (written in Cyrilic - арт) is present in the neologism сладкартница, which is a blend between the Bulgarian word for coffee shop сладкарница and the English word art.

Data about the ULL in Dobrich

The same four language combinations were found in Dobrich, too: 1. English + Bulgarian; 2. English; 3. Another foreign language; 4. Bulgarian + another foreign language.

Examples of English + Bulgarian are: Pizza Menu / Меню; www.officev.bg/Офис В; Мъпет мар (transliteration); Салон „Prestige“; Зоомагазин и груминг салон Love Pets (transliteration + English words); Хиткар авточасти Autostar import and distribution IVECO (transliteration + English words); Аптека Pharmacy; Нещото Takeaway.com; Счетоводна кантора – accounting company; художествена галерия art gallery; Община Добрич Dobrich municipality; Вали компютърс (transliteration).

Examples of English are: OK office Muscle club Fitness club?

Examples of another foreign language are: Unicredit Bulbank; Fiat Iveco; Vivacom; Forneti

Examples of Bulgarian + a foreign language are: Пицария Уно (transliteration); Китайски ресторант (Фан Тай) + a text in Chinese; *Магазин ТОТО.

In the above categorization the dominant language combinations are English and Bulgarian. There are examples of transliteration in Cyrillic letters (Зоомагазин и груминг салон Love Pets; Хиткар авточасти Autostar import and distribution IVECO; Вали компютърс), examples in English only in the third group and examples of other foreign languages, transliterated in Cyrillic (Пицария Уно, Китайски ресторант Фан Тай + a text in Chinese). The example “Магазин ТОТО” can be interpreted either as a combination between Bulgarian and Latin script or only Bulgarian text, as the very word TOTO is spelled in the same way using both alphabets.

A number of language combinations have been observed: literal translation of a message into another language (художествена галерия art gallery; Община Добрич Dobrich municipality) or additional information in one of the languages (Нещото Takeaway.com). According to the use of alphabets, there are five options: Use of Latin alphabet only (Muscle club Fitness club); Use of Cyrillic only (магазин за мебели „Дървояд“); Combinations of two alphabets in a text (Зоомагазин и груминг салон Love Pets); Bulgarian text written with Latin letters (mnogo moderno); English (another FL text) written in Cyrillic (мъпет мар).

Based on the observations from the main streets in Shumen and Dobrich, we can conclude that English or other foreign names of shops/places are preferred in the central regions of Shumen and Dobrich, i.e. there is high tolerance to foreign language inscriptions and English in particular. The probable reason is the need for a better communication, commercial reasons and prestige seeking, as this part of the city is supposed to be visited by foreigners and English is considered a universal means of global communication or Lingua franca. Five types of combinations are used: Latin alphabet only, Cyrillic only, combinations of two (or more) alphabets in a text, Bulgarian text transliterated with Latin letters, English transliterated in Cyrillic. Some mistakes have also been found. The most common types of mistakes are: 1) spelling mistakes; 2) mistakes due to bad grammar and style. The errors are marked with an asterisk below. *Snacs* coffee* is an example of a spelling mistake; *Café Imperial. Coffee, latte, cappuccino chocolate, alcoholS** shows improper use of the plural; *Yomi cakes – cakes, pasteries** shows improper spelling.

There are four types of multilingual combinations, according to Reh: “duplicating”, “fragmentary”, “overlapping” and “complementary” (Reh: 8-15). Duplicating multilingual writing is referred to as full translation of a text into another language. It can be exemplified by inscriptions (gathered from the

central street of Shumen), such as *Българските обувки* -Bulgarian shoes; With fragmentary multilingualism there is full information in one language and some parts are translated into another language (e.g. *Pizza Menu/Меню*); Overlapping multilingualism means that information is translated into another language with additional part of the text (e.g. *Best in test. Hai-добрама мрежа. Тествано*); Complementary multilingual writing represents different parts of the message written in different languages. In the last case knowledge of all the languages is needed to comprehend the whole message (e.g. *Al Wallet. Плащаш с телефон. Получаваш пари. Изпращаш пари*.)

Most common types of combinations are overlapping and fragmentary multilingualism. An interesting example is “*Best in test. Hai-добрама мрежа. Тествано*.” The word best is deliberately written with umlaut (which is a mistake) to hint at the difference in quality of the service of the mobile operator advertised. The implication is that umlaut brings about difference in the sound just as the Umlaut company that certifies the quality of the mobile operator guarantees high standard. This is an example of playing with symbols. However, one needs to be competent in both English and German to comprehend the metaphor. What is more, the dots of the umlaut in the inscription are shaped as the logo of the Umlaut company. This implies that visual symbols can be just as important as the texts from the ULL, by reinforcing the impact of a message. Implications for further research and teaching practice can be collection of examples, including grammatical or lexical errors in the inscriptions or wordplay and idioms.

Examples from student research.

Here are some examples from research with students, guided by me – images collected and analyzed by students of Applied German Studies (studying English as a second foreign language – German being their major). The approach of the study carried out by students in terms of the steps of research is the same as the one done by researchers (in terms of gathering and analysis of data). Students of Applied German Studies also made some innovative observations regarding play of words and combination of different languages.

Fig. 1 Yettel (students' archive)



The photos from fig. 1, 2, and 3 were personally taken by Miglena Todorova - a student of Applied German Studies, while the photos from fig. 4, 5, and 6 were taken by Silvia Pandeleeva - a student of Applied German Studies. In Appendix 1 and 2, their feedback on the project is provided as appendix.

Does the picture involve a play on words? Students noticed the word *discount* combined with different geometric shapes (see Fig. 1). This challenged them to analyze the use of geometric shapes and seek more information about the reasons for this. They

found details about *Hello Brands Australia* (see <https://hellobrands.com.au/articles/the-influence-of-shapes-used-in-branding/>), which suggested that geometric shapes provide a sense of orientation, structure, and organization, i.e. presenting the business as reliable. Such shapes are used to communicate a specific message or evoke certain emotions. Triangles represent stability, while circles symbolize unity and security.

To what extent do English words contribute to interpretations and meanings? Among the students' comments is that *outlet* is a frequently used word by the younger generation, and its presence in ULL is a way to attract attention to something modern with better quality. In this case the social function “English is modern” is emphasized, combined with the ELF usage.

Fig. 2 La Pizzetta (students’ archive)



In the observations of the students, the Italian language is associated with positive vibes, with Rome, with wonderful food, unique experiences, pizza, and pasta. The students associate the logo “La Pizzeta” (Fig. 2) with Italy, but they note that the lexemes *pizza* and *pasta*, adopted in many languages, are accompanied by the English word *wine*. They define such language combinations as typical for tourist regions, where English is used as a lingua franca. The name *Pizzetta* indicates that Italian food is served in the restaurant. *La* is used with nouns in the feminine gender. The above

comment by students is an example of how an inscription from the ULL can further stimulate the development of language awareness and motivate them to inquire and recognize different languages, present in the ULL.

Fig. 3 X-body (students’ archive)



How are different graphic systems (alphabets) combined, specifically Latin and Cyrillic?

On the sign in front of a fitness studio, we can see the inscription 'X-Body ви очаква (meaning 'X-body is waiting for you', Fig. 3), where part of the message is in English and another part of it is written in Bulgarian (fragmentary multilingualism).

In fact, the name is in English 'Xbody & Ergoline Centre Varna' with the subsequent comment 'X-Body is waiting for you' (mentioned above). The symbol 'X' is used, phonetically representing the prefix 'ex-'.

To what extent do English words add to the meaning and specific

interpretation? X-Body means your previous body, hinting at the transformation that the fitness center offers. **Is there a play on words?** Yes – X Body. We can conclude that our body will be new, more beautiful after the procedures in the studio. The examples show complementary multilingualism, combining Bulgarian and English.

The following pictures and comments were made by a student who lived in Spain at the time she worked on the project tasks.

Fig. 4 Mystery camp (students' archive)

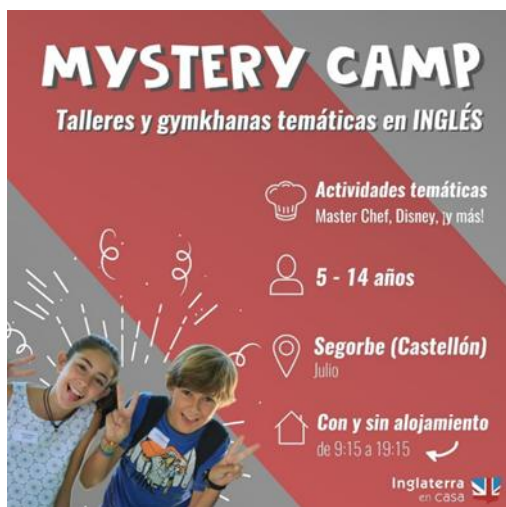


Fig. 4 is an advertisement for a language camp and a specifically created learning program. The texts combine inscriptions in English and Spanish. The English inscriptions correspond to the association of the English language with progress and education. That is why the texts combine two languages, and are not entirely in Spanish, even though the advertisement is located in Spain and is very likely to be addressed to Spanish children and their parents. The social function 'English is

advanced' is emphasized here.

Fig. 5 Magdalena Castellon (students' archive)



In Fig. 5, two languages are combined. The announcement is addressed to foreigners - the date is in English, while the image refers to the celebration of a specific Spanish holiday. The use of English is motivated by the fact that the region has tourist attractions. Therefore, English is used as a lingua franca.

Fig. 6 (students'archive)



In Fig. 6, two languages are combined – Spanish and English. The title RED, combined with the red color, attracts the visitors' attention. The association is between the language of the inscription in capital letters - English, and an establishment that is probably modern – i.e. the social meaning here is: English is modern/fashionable. Examples

from fig. 4-6 give evidence of complementary multilingualism with different parts of the message, written in English and Spanish.

We can summarize that the students' observations confirm the meanings in English, summarized by Sayer, namely: English is associated with progress, advance, education, being modern, and cool. In a number of occasions students identify the use of English as a lingua franca but also point to innovative uses of English (such as the abovementioned X-body, instead of ex-body). The surveyed students define the research topic of ULL as very interesting, worthy of investigation, something that they hadn't thought about before, and also as an enjoyable task. The fact that their opinions (see the appendix) were written in English, can be regarded as a further stimulus for the development of their writing and communication skills.

Rowland (2013: 496–497) applies the ideas of Cenoz and Gorter (2008: 257-276) to determine six pedagogical benefits of ULL research that can be summed up as follows: (1) raising awareness about the use of English in context; (2) supporting incidental learning; (3) being an important resource in teaching English; (4) enhancing literacy (including analysis of errors that may appear in some inscriptions - my note); (5) encouraging critical thinking; (6) providing an authentic environment for those learning English. It is no coincidence that the topic of ULL and its application in English language teaching and applied linguistics is the subject of an increasing number of university courses, articles, and projects.

Conclusion

The benefits of an ULL project with students are: 1. Students make connections between the content taught in the classroom and the reality outside the classroom by practically applying the theoretical foundations of research on ULL. 2. In addition, 21st century skills are stimulated, including

creativity, critical thinking, and analytical skills (applied to the use of language and its sociolinguistic aspects).

Working with authentic texts is motivating for students, who utilize their technological skills – working with digital cameras and PowerPoint. Speaking skills are developed as learners formulate and defend their ideas. It is particularly important that through ULL projects, students evolve from language learners into language researchers. In other words, the approach to gathering and analysing data and the methodology concerning the researched issues are the same as those applied by established researchers. ULL projects encourage students to view the world through the lenses of a sociolinguist, who asks questions about how and why people use language depending on their goals and social identity. Students are engaged in a specific learning process based on experience. This underpins approaches in English language teaching that support autonomy through the use of student/learner-focused tasks. All this, alongside with the 21st century skills, that an ULL project stimulates, makes its implementation in ELT attractive for both students and the teachers.

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Appendix 1

Students on a ULL project:

Miglena Todorova, a third-year student of Applied Germanistics shares her opinion on getting involved in a ULL Practical English project:

First of all, I would like to share my opinion about the overall idea of the study. I find the topic extremely interesting and fascinating, because in my observations, people do not pay much attention to the urban surroundings in their daily lives. The idea of the influence of languages on a subconscious level is an interesting subject that requires time to explore. I can certainly share from my own experience that unconsciously one succumbs to influence in some way and perhaps this is part of a good marketing strategy. A little background - I live in Varna - the sea capital of Bulgaria. The tourist flow here is high, especially during the summer season, because of the sea and the immediately nearby resorts such as Golden Sands, Kranevo and Albena. So, there are certainly plenty of signs around town, mostly written in English. We need to mention that the Bulgarian is considered as the most difficult second

language to learn due to its complex grammar and extensive vocabulary. More about it: <https://lingua.edu/the-most-difficult-languages-for-english-speakers-to-learn/>

Appendix 2

Students on a ULL project:

Silviya Pandelieva. a student of applied Germanistics /ULL English project

I would like to share my opinion on the topic and the very idea of the research. In my opinion the idea is extremely interesting and enjoyable, at the same time fun and makes you search for information and observe such signs. I think that most people don't pay attention to what is written, they don't pay attention to the urban environment unless it is necessary and urgent. Definitely, the idea of the influence of languages is a very fascinating and interesting topic that requires a lot of time to be researched, but people are subconsciously influenced by ULL because many of them have good ideas and marketing strategies for attracting customers.

I was born in Varna in Bulgaria, but currently I live in Spain. I think that Spain has a lot of tourists every year, as it is very warm here and offers great food, culture, the sea, dancing, and resorts near the cities.

There are many signs, posters, and labels in the city and at the resorts, but they are mostly in Spanish. However, English is also used especially in regions with many tourists.