

# Concerning Phenomenon of Westernizing Linguistic Landscapes and Its Correlation between House Prices in Astana, Kazakhstan

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## Abstract

By conducting research in Astana, Kazakhstan, as an example of a non-Western country, this paper seeks to demonstrate the Westernization of linguistic landscapes in Astana, Kazakhstan, and its correlation with house prices, while also discussing the meaning of the phenomenon and what actions Kazakhstan people should take.

Throughout the process, the researcher gathered data on 166 houses to determine the average house prices per square meter of two groups of adjacent residential blocks, as well as 257 photographs of linguistic landscapes to determine the extent of Westernization in both groups. Subsequently, the data from the two groups would be compared to determine whether there is a correlation between house prices and the Westernization of language landscapes.

The findings revealed that linguistic landscapes in Astana are undoubtedly Westernizing and that there is a strong correlation between house prices and linguistic landscape Westernization, with one group having higher house prices per square meter and the extent of Westernization than the other at the same time.

The researcher believes that this phenomenon is caused by various factors, including the similar social context of high-income individuals in Astana and the majority of the West (e.g., both predominantly work in the service industry), higher exposure to the internet, etc. While the limitedness of the data resulted in a barely fruitful finding in this research, it is safe to say that this article contributed to the study of linguistic landscapes' Westernization and the correlation between high income and Westernization in Astana.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, Westernization

## Introduction

Before starting the article, it is important to clarify the three main concepts below:

Firstly, Westernization refers to a process whereby societies come under or adopt what is considered to be the culture of the Western country in areas such as industry, technology, science, education, politics, economics, lifestyle, law, norms, customs, traditions, values, mentality, perceptions, diet, clothing, language, writing systems, religion, and philosophy. It has a lasting effect on many countries worldwide.

Secondly, linguistic landscapes refer to the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

Thirdly, in this study, the term "Western country" will only be used to refer to the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Andorra, Monaco, Vatican City, San Marino, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Belgium, Liechtenstein, and the Netherlands.

The root of Westernization can be traced back to the times of ancient Greco-Roman civilization. Following the massive expansion of the Roman Empire, the culture of Rome spread to many non-Western countries (Eckhardt, 2016), which could be considered the earliest example of Westernization.

However, the process of Westernization mainly began in the Age of Discovery, as Western colonizers started to enforce indigenous people around the globe to adopt Westernized social norms, attire, culture, and so on.

Then, Westernization reached its zenith in the Age of Imperialism as this movement transformed into a fully global tendency, influencing countries including China, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, et cetera.

However, this period of direct colonization would not last long as the rule of the major European powers started to crumble while being replaced by the orders of the USA and USSR.

In the Cold War, despite the fact that the major European powers were not eligible to play a role in global politics, by the uprising soft power of the USA, Westernization continued, but in a more subtle way to this day.

## *Study Rationale*

Here comes a question: Are the linguistic landscapes in non-Western countries being Westernized? That is exactly the main topic of this research article.

This research paper aims to study the Westernization of linguistic landscapes in Astana, Kazakhstan and its correlation between house prices, with further development on the results at the end of the article. Throughout the process, this research strives to answer *four main questions*: Are linguistic landscapes in Astana being Westernized? Are the linguistic landscapes' Westernization correlated with house prices? What do the results show about Kazakhstani society? And how can Kazakhstani people take action on them?

This study collected information on 166 houses on sale and 176 units of Westernized linguistic landscapes from two groups of housing facilities consisting of 13 residential blocks to conduct this research in Astana, Kazakhstan, as an example of a non-Western country, to provide answers to the first two questions mentioned above. As regards the last two questions, this research would develop it further in the Discussion.

## Materials & Methods

The methodology of this study can be generalized by studying the house prices of two groups of residential blocks as the research objects, determining which of them is more expensive and which is more affordable, photographing linguistic landscapes in the research objects, measuring the extent of Westernization, and answering the first two main questions of the research paper.

The methodology of this research paper contained three procedures:

- I. Determining expensive and affordable housing.
- II. Measuring the extent of Westernization of linguistic landscapes.
- III. Answering the first two main questions of the paper.

### I. Determining expensive and affordable housing

There is a tremendous amount of information about house prices on a website called Krisha.kz (the most popular real estate agent website in Kazakhstan (Kolesa Group, n.d.)); thus, this research paper applied the data provided from this website. The researcher paper collected them by taking screenshots on Krisha.kz in order to ensure that the data would not be lost if the retailers retracted their house offers, which would be provided in the Appendix section.

This study opted for two groups of adjacent residential blocks as research objects. To prove the existence of the research objects, their sites

in 2gis.kz (a popular digital map available in 1462 cities and seven countries (2GIS, 2024)) were provided in the Results section.

Ultimately, the average house price per square meter of all houses on sale on Krisha.kz in each group of residential blocks was calculated and compared with each other, with this research paper identifying which group was more expensive and affordable. (The information collected by the researcher and the calculation results would be shown in the Results and Appendix.)

## II. Measuring the extent of Westernization of linguistic landscapes

First, there is a need to clarify what the words “Western alphabet, languages, and the local alphabet” are referring to in this research paper.

Western languages refer to languages spoken as official languages in any country in the Western world. For example, English, the official language of the U.K. and French, the official language of France. The Western alphabet meant the Latin alphabet.

Local languages included Kazakh and Russian, which are widely spoken by locals in Kazakhstan. Russian, as a local language, was an awkward choice since its popularity was the result of the Russian colonization of Central Asia (Galym Zhussipbek, 2017). However, Russia was not considered part of the Western world in this study. Therefore, the researcher of this paper considers the Russian language local. Local alphabets refer to Cyrillic and Arabic (traditionally used by the Kazakh people) (E-history.kz, 2017).

In this procedure, the researcher would photograph all linguistic landscapes of the research objects, excluding some unnecessary ones. Then score them in terms of Westernization to determine how Westernized were the linguistic landscapes there. (The pictures, list of collected Westernized linguistic landscapes would be provided in the appendix.)

Here is the list of principles the researcher followed during the process:

- 1) Linguistic landscapes are defined as the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).
- 2) A mere definition is not sufficient. It is important to substitute abstract words with definite objects in the research to help readers understand the content. The "given territory or region" would be sidewalks and walkable areas around the research objects in this research paper. "Visibility and salience of languages" would be any word that was visible from the "given

territory or region"; that meant all words were a single unit of linguistic landscape themselves, and a sentence was a combination of multiple linguistic landscapes in this research paper.

3) Some linguistic landscapes were excluded. Here is the list of linguistic landscapes that were excluded:

- a) Repetition of words from the same place; that is, if a shop owner wrote the shop's name five times, it was counted as one unit of the linguistic landscape.
- b) Codes: documents by governmental organizations; that is, if the government wrote some sort of codes on walls, the codes were excluded.
- c) Numbers.
- d) Easily erasable or changeable linguistic landscapes; that is, words in tiny advertisements on doors and electric screens were excluded.
- e) Brand name on air conditioners.
- f) All linguistic landscapes that were associated with banks. (This was excluded because their QR codes and brand names were flooded everywhere; therefore, it was preferable to exclude them.)
- g) Linguistic landscapes that were not mounted on residential blocks were to be studied.
- h) Linguistic landscapes that were visible to a limited number of people. For example, some blocks have locked areas only for residents. If there were any words visible in this area, they would be excluded.
- i) Certificates of surveillance.

4) Linguistic landscapes were categorized into three types:

Fully Westernized: if the word was written in the Western alphabet and Western languages.

Half-Westernized: If the word was written in the local alphabet and Western languages or written in the Western alphabet and local languages.

Not Westernized: if the word was written in local alphabets and local languages.

5) There were a variety of unclear situations. Here is a list of our solutions:

- a) There were words that are the same in both local and Western languages. If it were written in the Western alphabet, it would be fully Westernized. If it were written in local alphabets, it would not be Westernized.

b) The combination of local words or morphemes and Western words or morphemes should be split and treated as two words. In addition, any combination of words with no semantic meaning should be split too.

c) Some words can be interpreted in many languages. These were duplicated and treated as multiple words. Each duplication corresponded to one possible interpretation.

d) The extent of Westernization of words with no semantic meaning attached depends on their alphabet. If it were written in Western alphabet, it would be fully Westernized. If it were written in local alphabets, it would not be Westernized.

e) Some words were neither Western nor local. For example, doner (a Turkish word). If the word was written in the Latin alphabet, it was counted as half-Westernized. If the word was written in other writing systems, it was counted as not Westernized.

6) Scoring: After collecting all linguistic landscapes, they were scored in terms of Westernization, and every group of residential blocks obtained an accumulated score from their linguistic landscapes. The maximum score for one linguistic landscape was 10 (fully Westernized), and the minimum score was 0 (not Westernized). In addition, the half-Westernized score was 5. This score would be used to determine the extent of the linguistic landscape's Westernization, as shown in the Results section.

### III. Answering the first two main questions of the paper

Firstly, all information collected in the process would be provided in the Results section, with a summary table to showcase the data briefly.

The next step is to answer the first two main questions mentioned in the Introduction: Are the linguistic landscapes in Astana, Kazakhstan being Westernized? Are the linguistic landscapes' Westernization correlated with house prices?

As regards the first question, if the results showed there were linguistic landscapes being Westernized in the research objects, then yes. If the result showed no linguistic landscapes under the influence of Westernization, then no.

The second question is more complicated than the previous one. The researcher decided to utilize the ratio between the score of linguistic landscapes' Westernization and number of photographs of linguistic landscapes taken since the number of photographs roughly equated to the quantity of linguistic landscapes in a specific region overall, which prevented the difference in sizes and population to erode the accuracy.

While the ratio was calculated, the statistics of two groups of residential blocks would be compared to determine if there is any correlation between house prices and linguistic landscapes' Westernization. If the data showed one group being higher than the other one in house prices and the ratio mentioned above. Then, the correlation was considered to be established and proven.

## Results

### I. The chosen research objectives

The first group of residential blocks were: (Sat City блок А, жилой комплекс, улица Санжара Асфендиярова, 1 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020) and (Sat City блок А2, жилой комплекс, улица Санжара Асфендиярова, 2 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020).

The second group of residential blocks were: (Улица Алия Молдагулова, 20 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020); (Улица Григория Потанина, 2 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020); (Улица Григория Потанина, 4 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020); (Улица Григория Потанина, 4/2 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020); (Улица Григория Потанина, 4/1 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020); (Улица Григория Потанина, 6 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020); (Улица Григория Потанина, 6/1 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020); (Улица Григория Потанина, 6/2 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020); (Улица Григория Потанина, 8 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020); (Улица Маскеу, 27 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020) and (Улица Маскеу, 27/1 в Астане — 2ГИС, 2020).

The size of the first group was 24,653 square meters and 14,744 when excluding the blank spaces between the blocks, while the size of the second group was 40,269 square meters and 24,360 when excluding blank spaces between the blocks.

### II. Average house prices per square meter of two groups

According to Krisha.kz, on July 26, 2024, there were 28 houses on sale in the second group and 138 houses on sale in the first group. (Disclaimer: The number of houses was larger from the screenshots in the Appendix section.) This was because some retailers relisted their houses on Krisha.kz.

According to the data, the average house price per square meter in the first group was 570 thousand tenge, and the average house price per square meter in the second group was 365 thousand tenge. The first group was significantly higher than the second group. It is clear that the first group was more expensive, and the second group was more affordable.

### III. Scores

This study took around 121 photographs in the first group of residential blocks and 136 in the second group. The first group had 31 units of half-Westernized and 112 units of fully Westernized linguistic landscapes, for a total of 143. The second group had 13 units of half-Westernized and 20 units of fully Westernized linguistic landscapes, for a total of 33. The accumulated score for the first group was 1260 and 265 for the second group.

### IV. Assessing the results in terms of Westernization and correlation with house prices

The researcher captured 176 Westernized linguistic landscapes in two groups of residential blocks, which indicated that linguistic landscapes were being Westernized in Astana, Kazakhstan.

The ratio between the score of linguistic landscapes' Westernization and the number of photographs of linguistic landscapes taken was approximately 10.4 for the first group and 1.95 for the second group, while the average house price per square meter was 570 thousand tenge for the first group and 365 for the second group. The first group was higher than the second group in both figures, which clearly indicates that the correlation between house prices and linguistic landscapes is proven.



The research objects	The first group	The second group
Number of houses on sale according to krisha.kz	138	28
House prices per square meter (thousand tenge)	570	365
Number of half- and fully Westernized linguistic landscapes	143	33
Number of fully Westernized linguistic landscapes	112	20
Number of half-Westernized linguistic landscapes	31	13
Score based on the linguistic landscapes' Westernization	1260	265
Number of photographs taken in research	121	136
Area of residential blocks, excluding space between them (square meters)	14,744	24,360
Area of residential blocks (square meters)	24.653	40,269

FIGURE 1. A summary of research data stratified by housing and linguistic characteristics.

## Discussion

*In regard to the third main question in “Study Rationale”*

According to the results, linguistic landscapes in Astana, Kazakhstan, are being Westernized, and this phenomenon is correlated with house prices. This can be interpreted as high-income individuals being Westernized more than low-income individuals in Astana. This discovery can help people gain insight on the process of Westernization and Eurocentrism.

At first glance, this simply does not make sense since most of the locals in Astana, Kazakhstan, speak Kazakh and Russian. How could people dismiss the need of the majority and use the language the majority does not understand and is unfamiliar with? While it is yet too early to provide a sufficient answer, this research paper would provide some tentative explanations.

First, most successful corporations are from the West. Therefore, people may just wish their small businesses could develop like Starbucks, Dior, so they named their shops, restaurants, and others in a similar style. (From the photographs taken in the first group, it is obvious that informative texts (e.g., work schedules) tend to be written in Kazakh and Russian, while names of restaurants and shops tend to be written in English.)

Second, people in Astana may simply regard Western languages as superior to their mother tongue. This may be attributable to the lack of a strong culture industry and history of colonization in Kazakhstan.

One interesting finding is that this phenomenon is correlated with high income. There are several possible reasons for this finding. First, high-income individuals have better access to the internet (Use of the Internet in Higher-Income Households, 2010). Since Internet culture is dominated by the English language (Wolk, 2004), people may gradually accept values, culture, and inclinations from that English content. Second, high-income individuals have a better chance of interacting with foreigners because they have a sufficient budget to travel wherever they want. Third, the socioeconomic context of high-income individuals in Astana is similar to that of the majority of the West. For example, high-income people are more likely to work in the service industry since it contributes to more GDP growth (Gill, 2021), similar to the majority of the West (World Bank, 2019).

*In regard to the fourth main question in “Study Rationale”*

It is essential to clarify if the phenomenon observed in the research is negative or positive before considering what Kazakhstani people should do about it. From the perspective of the researcher, it is definitely unpleasant to see this happening in Astana. This may bring a multitude of negative impacts to Kazakhstani society. First, this causes numerous troubles for the majority of the country who do not speak English or any other Western language. Linguistic landscapes are supposed to convey meaningful information or embellish the unique cultural atmosphere of the city or the subjects they are expedient to. In most of the cases, English,

French, or Italian linguistic landscapes shown in the appendix do them worse than linguistic landscapes written in the locals' mother tongue. Second, this phenomenon may weaken the national identity of people in Astana. Therefore, it is totally safe to claim that the Westernization of linguistic landscapes in Astana is a negative process that needs to be treated seriously.

There are many ways to ameliorate this process. First, public awareness is key. It is safe to say that most of the people in Kazakhstan wish their country's culture to flourish. Many people in Kazakhstan are simply not aware of the Westernization of linguistic landscapes and its negative impact on the country. Thus, the first action that must be taken is to make the masses realize what is happening and why it must be treated seriously. Second, an environment that is friendly to the development of Kazakh people's mother tongue must be established. To achieve this, Kazakhstan must actively promote the use of the Kazakh language in both public and private spaces. The government, businesses, and local communities should encourage the widespread use of Kazakh in advertising, education, and media, making it visible and relevant in all areas of public life. This could involve incentivizing companies to use Kazakh alongside foreign languages on signage, packaging, and digital platforms.

The discussion on how Kazakhstani people should confront the Westernization of linguistic landscapes in Astana will now be concluded, and attention will shift to evaluating the realism of the proposed solutions. The researcher holds a positive view on the feasibility of the proposed solutions since promoting the use of Kazakh language is in the interest of Kazakhstan's government, and they have been doing so since the dissolution of the USSR.

*Acknowledgment of flaws and defense against possible skepticism*

The research article was completed by a high school student without any assistance. Thus, this article is destined to lack rigor and professionalism, which is one of the fundamental flaws of this work.

In defense against possible skepticism, some may contend that the number of houses on sale in the second group is almost five times lower than the number of houses on sale in the first group. This may indicate that the first group is larger than the second group in terms of population size and has more commercial activity; hence, it is normal for the first group to show more Westernization of linguistic landscapes than the second group. This view is valid since the population and commercial

activities of both groups are unknown. Thus, there may be differences between them, and the measurements in the research paper may be unjust.

However, this was controlled and prevented from reaching an absurd point. First, the second group was larger than the first group in size (as shown in the Appendix and Results sections). Second, the researcher took photographs of almost all linguistic landscapes, and the second group's photographs were more numerous (see the Appendix). Therefore, there is no possibility that differences in population or commercial activities can reach an absurd threshold and cause the sharp distinction between two groups as shown in the Results section.

#### *Contributions of this research article*

Due to the limitedness of the data, the research resulted in a barely fruitful finding. Any attempt to make claim on a broader context while relying on data limited to only one city is doomed to fail. However, this research article is not a complete failure. It still can contribute to its own respective field in a meaningful way: it evaluates the Westernization of linguistic landscapes and provides evidence that linguistic landscapes in expensive housings tend to be Westernized in Astana, which could be interpreted as high-income individuals in Astana are more Westernized Both of them are scarcely studied.

Other scholars that are interested in this topic can also conduct similar studies worldwide to redress the limited data of this research; then they can make claims in a broader context and bring meaningful results to the field of sociolinguistics.

If sufficient data is gathered around the world, this could reveal a lot about the non-Western world's society, including the reproduction of culture (Jameson, 1991), the history of colonization, and the conflation of modernization, globalization, and progress between Westernization (Stephen Chijioke Nwinya, 2019) and so on.

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## APPENDIX

First group's linguistic landscapes' photographs and its size:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CpY9gqpeePTaNtV6ZzxNSLUhQo\\_UobvK?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CpY9gqpeePTaNtV6ZzxNSLUhQo_UobvK?usp=sharing)

Second group's linguistic landscapes' photographs and its size:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10zckUBdQEklj\\_rdyKAL8AwBnIpL4RK9T?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10zckUBdQEklj_rdyKAL8AwBnIpL4RK9T?usp=sharing)

First group's house prices:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1iesBPJdL\\_ERkP00gv2pBtSFH1aRwWWig?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1iesBPJdL_ERkP00gv2pBtSFH1aRwWWig?usp=drive_link)

Second group's house prices:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LhigsF7\\_v4VtfEOEXHR\\_UeF6vcF9lCbP?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LhigsF7_v4VtfEOEXHR_UeF6vcF9lCbP?usp=drive_link)

List of Westernized or half Westernized linguistic landscapes and house prices collected:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18isKRlf9xyAXF0OPNopLtmzhcGOl5Nv/edit?usp=sharing&oid=116960310413607664687&rtpof=true&sd=true>