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From Linguistic Landscape to Semiotic Assemblages in a Local Market

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Abstract. Landscape can be seen as a set of signs, landscape is foreground rather than background, and signs are semiotic items rather than just forms of public signage (Pennycook 2021), therefore the present research moves away from the traditional, text-centred approach of landscape analysis in order to examine not only the linguistic signs but the non-linguistic elements as artefacts, which take place in the brand identity construction of a local small and medium-sized enterprise (SME). The article argues that these elements as assembling artefacts become parts of semiotic assemblages inhabiting the space and represent a key feature of brand identity construction with a focus on the commodification of languages, cultures, and identities. The data consist of observation notes, photographs, and interviews obtained from an ethnographic fieldwork in Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania. The analysis presents a case study based on the concept of semiotic assemblages. The assemblage of linguistic and other resources, such as the smell of smoked meat products, the tune of Szekler folk songs, together with assembling artefacts such as sausages and other Szekler products attract customers to participate in meaning making. The effects generated by an assemblage have the ability to make something happen, in our case attract customers to SMEs.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, semiotic assemblages, brand identity, bilingualism

1. Introduction

The visual and material representation of languages in public space has become an object of linguistic and sociological studies during the last three decades since the well-known study of Landry and Bourhis (1997). Linguistic landscape studies now focus also on the analysis of signs, cultural symbols, and notices found in public spaces. Traditionally, linguistic landscapes mirror the language situation of a certain area and involve questions of multilingualism, dominance of languages, and language policies (cf. Scollon–Scollon 2003, Shohamy–Gorter

2009, Blommaert 2013, Laihonen 2015, Gorter 2019). Most importantly for this paper, signs convey not only linguistic but sociocultural meanings, connecting a sign to a particular sociocultural and historical context.

The field of linguistic landscape studies is rapidly expanding, and new studies on different "scapes" have appeared. Landscape in general is a way of the external world and constructs "a visual ideology" (Jaworski–Thurlow 2010). It serves also as a context for human action and socio-political activity, and, as mentioned by Gorter (2006), it becomes a symbolic system of signifiers. Landscape is part of the regional and national identity building, which takes place through semioticizing processes (Jaworski–Thurlow 2010). In brief, landscape generates meaning, which is always constructed in the act of socio-cultural interpretation.

Linguistic landscape studies cover different segments from statistical analysis of identifiable languages in the public space to qualitative studies regarding the semiotics of the space, where texts may not even play a role. Although linguistic landscape studies are still mainly concerned with signage containing written text, there is a "holistic view that goes beyond the analysis of individual signs as monolingual or multilingual" (Gorter–Cenoz 2015: 65). This view moves the focus beyond identifying languages and shifts the attention onto the landscapes per se, "asking how such material spaces can be viewed in semiotic terms" (Pennycook 2021: 113). This, according to Pennycook (2021), does not mean eliminating the analysis of written texts, but it needs to be decided what we include as language; therefore, the focus can be "concerned with the landscape as a set of signs, where landscape is foreground, rather than background, signs are semiotic items, rather than forms of public signage" (Pennycook 2021: 113), and the term "language" is used as an umbrella term, where language does not refer to a particular linguistic variety.

The present research therefore departs from the traditional, text-centred approach of landscape analysis in order to examine not only the linguistic signs but the non-linguistic elements as well which inhabit the space of a local small and medium-sized enterprise (SME), in the process of brand identity construction. The medium-sized enterprise in the analysis is located in Szeklerland (in Hungarian: Székelyföld), a historic and ethnographic area in Transylvania, Romania, inhabited mainly by the Szeklers, a subgroup of Hungarians. Originally, in the Middle Ages, the Szeklers (in Hungarian: Székelys) were mostly free warriors and guards of the kingdom's borders and enjoyed administrative, judicial, and fiscal rights. With the Treaty of Trianon of 1920, Transylvania, including Szeklerland, became part of Romania. Today, Szeklerland mostly corresponds to the counties of Harghita, Covasna, and central and eastern Mureș.

Hungarians make up nearly 80% of the population of Szeklerland. According to the Romanian census, the remaining 20% consists of Romanians, Roma, and a tiny minority of Germans.

Table 1. *Population distribution by ethnicity in Szeklerland, 2011 Census*[1]

Romanian ethnicity	Hungarian ethnicity	Roma ethnicity	German ethnicity	Other	Total number of population
84,217	408,175	13,593	184	326	521,044

The investigation of identity markers, semiotic elements are significant in this region. "The use of ethnic identity markers strengthens the contrast between Szeklerland and the rest of the country, in terms of regional identity, thus emphasizing the symbolic birth of a new region in Europe" (Dragoman et al. 2020: 37).

The article presents the semiotic landscape elements as assembling artefacts, which represent a key feature of brand identity construction with a focus on the commodification of languages, cultures, and identities. Data collection was based on observation notes and photographs taken in the commercial units of the SME as ethnographic fieldwork in Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania, completed by an interview conducted with an SME owner. The commercial units were visited over a three-week period, in April 2022. During this fieldwork, over 120 photos were taken, focusing on the presence of languages and on the presence of products with commodification of languages and Hungarian or Szekler identities. Data was categorized according to linguistic and other semiotic resources. From this point of view, all the Szekler symbolic constructions and signs can be considered as semiotic resources. They altogether may participate in the brand identity construction of the SME. This brand identity, however, is constructed in a bilingual, minority background, where the social, linguistic, and political factors may also impact the brand identity elements. The interaction of the elements, interlocutors, and meaning making are considered as semiotic assemblages, and, as such, the paper argues that semiotic resources as part of semiotic assemblages inhabiting the space represent a key feature of brand identity construction.

In the first part, the paper introduces the concept of ethnic market in Transylvania and localizes the Szekler symbols, followed by a brief exploration of the trending main concept of semiotic assemblages, while departing from the initial term of the linguistic landscape and the more recent term of the semiotic landscape. The connection between semiotic assemblages and brand identity is further examined, followed by the presentation of data collection and data analysis. Finally, as an extension to this present research, a semi-structured interview was conducted with one of the owners of a local SME, which shed light on the construction and use of linguistic and semiotic resources in their brand identity, from the perspective of a local entrepreneur.

1 http://statisztikak.erdelystat.ro/adatlapok/szekelyfold/3284 / (Last accessed: 20 March 2022).

2. The emergence of an ethnic market

Today's business environment is competitive. New brands emerge day by day, and the identity of a brand has become a vital issue for any company. Broadly said, brands include elements that are unique aspects of that particular brand such as name, logo, colour schemes, tone and voice, jingle, etc. – they together create the recognizable image for the business. These elements are essential because they develop the brand identity, which helps to identify and distinguish the brand in the consumers' minds. Therefore, constructing the brand identity is about the differentiation of their brands from the competitors', and it refers to the collection of tangible brand elements that together create one brand image. Brands convey ideas, emotions, and desires by using meaningful systems of signs. Customers can identify themselves with the meanings that brands communicate, and this can have an influence on whether they purchase products or services. The effort of the local brands may target the differentiation of the local aspects from the global ones (Csata 2019).

Economy in modern capitalism is not independent of social conditions or of ethnic relations, and the ethnic aspect appears in economic decisions, interactions, and processes (Csata 2019). In the last decade, in Transylvania, businesses have emerged that offer products and services specifically targeted at Hungarian minority consumers, and their business discourse is embedded in a Hungarian-speaking context. In Romania, following the EU accession, government regulations have become looser, hence ethnic markets have been created and ethnic products have gone through "commodification processes" (Csata 2019: 42). We can now witness the emergence of local and regional identities in the branding industry as well, which were unthinkable before 1990 in Transylvania and Romania in general. Due to economic decentralization, local brands have appeared in Szeklerland, and even a trademark, *Székely Termék* [Szekler Product], advertises the products of local Szekler/Hungarian minority entrepreneurs. The segment of consumers looking for local products is steadily growing, and entrepreneurs have begun to recognize the potential of the local ethnic market. More and more regional products are appearing that commodify the positive meanings that are constructed around the adjective "Szekler", based on a commonly shared and shaped historical experience (Csata 2019: 43). The ethnic, cultural market is emerging in the heart of Transylvania, built on prominent visual symbols of the Szekler identity. Although from a different point of view, Laihonen and Tódor (2017) analysed the Szekler symbols in the linguistic landscape of schools. These identity symbols have a mobilizing power not only in Szeklerland but also among the Hungarians in Romania and in the whole Hungarian ethno-cultural community. There is a social interest in thematizing "Szeklerism"; it is able to address the community and is no longer

seen as a regional attachment but as an essential part of the Hungarian minority and the Hungarian national collective identity.

However, these processes have their not so hidden economic dangers as well because ethnic markets are limited, and this may hinder the effectiveness of ethnic marketing and the development of ethnic businesses and may also risk ethnic isolation and "economic enclavization" (Csata 2019: 43). The real objective from the point of view of ethnic markets and local brands would be the achievement of a balanced combination of bridging and bonding type of relationships (see Putnam 2000), the former relationship experienced between different social groups or communities and the latter within a single community, also investigated by Laihonen on the practices of Hungarian entrepreneurs in Slovakia (2015) and by Laihonen and Csernicskó on the semiotics of tourism among Hungarians in Ukraine (2019).

It is also relevant that by localizing semiotic artefacts, we can come closer to identifying the strengths of a particular landscape, be it a particular image, colour, smell, tune, touch, or taste, which emphasizes the role of semiotic resources in the meaning-making potential of a local brand identity. As Pennycook claims (2021), there is a "current push to reconfigure what counts as language and how social, spatial and material worlds interact" (2021: 113), and he particularly explores how to bring smells together into a broader semiotic assemblage (see Pennycook 2017). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, a brief questionnaire was designed to identify those artefacts that may potentially become elements of semiotic assemblages.

3. From linguistic landscapes to semiotic assemblages

With the current need to refrain from the term "linguistic landscape", the term "semiotic landscape" (Jaworski–Thurlow 2010), or "semioscape" (Thurlow–Aiello 2007) has recently gained interest. According to Thurlow and Aiello (2007), semiotic landscape refers to "the globalizing circulation of symbols, sign systems, and meaning-making practices", which could work as "more accurate descriptors to highlight the role played by all forms of semiosis in public spaces, where by language (as one semiotic system) may or may not play a prominent role" (Thurlow–Aiello 2007: 308), while the authors consider all landscapes being semiotic (Jaworski–Thurlow 2010). Therefore, from the visual and material display of languages, the focus has moved onto other discursive modalities, including visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory sensory aspects as semiotic resources (see Pennycook 2019). It has also become inevitable that the descriptions of space are not just about language, image, and space but more so about how interlocutors engage with any semiotic material in the space.

The engagement with a holistic concept of landscape requires a new approach, of which the semiotic assemblage was chosen for this study. The concept of assemblages goes back to Bennett's approach, where she refers to "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts" (Bennett 2010: 23). When the focus is on assemblages, the objective of the research may move away from the exclusivity of language use and choice in order to consider a more holistic view of all semiotic resources. The idea of semiotic assemblages is developed in the studies by Pennycook and Otsuji (2017) and Pennycook (2019), where the authors address the complexity of interacting factors. Hence, they arrive at the conclusion that in order to better understand the multilingual, multimodal, and multisensory interactions in space, for example, in Bangladeshi-owned corner shops in Tokyo and Sydney, language is only part of "a set of distributed resources that come together in particular and momentary constellations" (Pennycook 2021: 114). The authors observed the linguistic and other semiotic consequences of particular material objects, such as fish and phone cards, and they developed the notions of assembling artefacts and semiotic assemblages to consider the relations these objects take part in and the effects they produce while coming together in particular assemblages, "as customers, goods and languages assemble and dissemble at particular moments" (Pennycook–Otsuji 2017). Pennycook (2019) also mentions that there is no need to map languages against other semiotic resources, but the approach of networks of semiotic relations between agents, objects, and symbols should be reconsidered.

In this view, there is no more constraining that demands the investigation of linguistic signs exclusively. The complex study of linguistic and non-linguistic artefacts requires more than the semiotic landscape analysis of the space. Therefore, in our case, the focus of the analysis shifts to the interaction of the linguistic and non-linguistic assembling artefacts as part of semiotic assemblages to describe the way they come together in the process of brand identity construction. In marketing, the concept of assemblage related to the brand and brand identity is not a new phenomenon (see Lury 2009).

Assemblages are seen as systems of various components that interact with one another. These components can include both people and the physical elements of the product itself, and consumers actively participate in the brand assemblage.

Based on Pennycook's (2019) concept of semiotic assemblages, I focus not only on the Hungarian-Romanian linguistic resources but also on other "assembling artefacts" (Pennycook–Otsuji 2017). The complex, non-hierarchical, and flexible framework of the assemblage lends itself to underscore a conception of language/languaging that accommodates the connection of different kinds of entities to produce situations, events, and possibilities (Buchanan 2017).

In my data, there were many instances where text inscriptions, linguistic resources constructed the characteristics of the material object – for example,

the smoked sausages. The material object and bilingual textual inscriptions embedded within it collectively invite multisensory actions from customers. Overall, a detailed examination of the artefacts and inscriptions reveals that the semiotic assemblages function as materials for building rapport with brand identity. The ultimate goal of the material object and accompanying inscriptions is to build interpersonal rapport with customers and, as a result, to invoke a particular form of activity on the interlocutors – buying the products. This is built on very prominent symbols and symbolic constructions of Szekler identity, which, however, is not deliberately chosen as a constructive element of their brand identity. Still, Szekler artefacts become inevitable in semiotic assemblages.

These assembling artefacts, such as smoked sausages, homemade bread, or the image of a bear come together as part of semiotic assemblages of material and semiotic resources, which can be strategically used to construct brand identity. Moreover, assemblages can bring together elements that may otherwise be separated. As Pennycook (2021) claims, this approach accomplishes more complete linguistic ethnographies and also draws attention to the physical senses such as touches, sights, smells, movements, and material artefacts. Assemblages are interpretations, how things are brought together and function in a new way – in this case, they function as constructive elements of a brand. The small and medium enterprise owners have an abundance of cultural and semiotic artefacts in time and space to draw from, as well as ethnic and local values as semiotic resources, and they may also come up with novel concepts, ideas to construct the identity of their brands.

4. Local brand identity construction. Data collection and analysis

Data collection was based on observation notes and photographs taken in the commercial units of the SME as ethnographic fieldwork in Sfântu Gheorghe (in Hungarian: Sepsiszentgyörgy), Romania, completed by an interview obtained from one of the SME owners and by a Google Forms questionnaire to collect the most frequent Szekler symbolic items as semiotic resources.

4.1. Semiotic resources questionnaire. The Szekler sensory elements

In March 2022, an online Google Form questionnaire was created and filled in by 81 anonymous respondents, aged 18–59. All participants stated that they were members of the Hungarian ethnic minority living in Romania, 64 of them living in Szeklerland. 67% of them were undergraduate university students, and 33% were university graduates. The questionnaire included five questions that asked

respondents to name at least five characteristic elements or artefacts they could associate with the Szeklers regarding the auditory, gustatory, olfactory, tactile, and visual sensory categories. Although it was a non-representative survey, diverse answers were recorded, with some overlapping items. The following table (*Table 2*) represents the most popular answers, grouped according to the sensory categories.

Table 2. *Most frequent items per sensory categories delivered by the respondents*

Sensory categories	Most frequent items
Visual images	– **folk costume** – **pine forest** – penknife – the Szekler flag – headboard [HU: kopjafa] – the Szekler gate – bear – tulip – old man with moustache – painted furniture – church – broidery
Sense of taste	– **kürtőskalács [chimney cake, a sweet pastry]** – **homemade bread** – **stuffed cabbage [HU: töltött káposzta]** – **pálinka [a kind of plum brandy]** – red onion – **smoked** sausage – **garlic** – **sauerkraut** – honey – curd – salt
Sense of smell	– **kürtőskalács** – **homemade bread** – **stuffed cabbage** – **pálinka** – **pine** – **hay** – **smoked** products – **sauerkraut** – garlic

Sounds	**– pine forest** – **folk** songs – **folk** dances – the Szekler anthem – water sound – bird song – church bell
Tactile senses	**– folk costume** – **hay** – pottery – textiles – carved wood – sheepskin – wooden board – untouched nature

Among the most frequently mentioned artefacts as Szekler identity symbols, there are items which fit more than one sensory category; these could represent core elements of the Szekler identity descriptors. The highlighted elements in *Table 2*, such as the sweet chimney cake, called in Hungarian *kürtőskalács*, or smoked products, such as *sausages*, create the knots in the web of semiotic artefacts, therefore these elements should be present in the brand identity construction as part of the semiotic assemblages of the SME. *Kürtőskalács* is a good example of an item widespread internationally, which can be associated with the Szeklers, being one of the most significant symbolic artefacts (*Figure 1*). Kürtőskalács is a sweet spit cake specific to the Szeklers in Transylvania; the first written record dates back to the 17th century.[2] Its name refers to the stovepipe, as the cone shape of the cake resembles a chimney, and when the cake is fresh, it is still steaming.



Figure 1. *Kürtőskalács [chimney cake]*[3]

2 http://kurtos.eu/dl/SzaboT_1971.pdf (Last accessed: 20 March 2022).

3 File:Kürtőskalács, 2.jpg - Wikimedia Commons/ (Last accessed: 25 March 2022).

Another item, the stuffed cabbage, or *töltött káposzta* in Hungarian, is a cabbage roll consisting of cooked cabbage leaves wrapped around minced meat filling. The dish is not particularly a Szekler one, as it is common to many cuisines; however, the seasoned filling and style of wrapping is specific to the Szeklers. Also, probably less known, is the Szekler headboard (*Figure 2*), which is usually used as a memorial: it is a man-high carved wooden column with a sophisticated harmony and design.[4] Its use goes back to an old Szekler custom. At the time of a burial, the coffin was carried to the cemetery on two of these poles, which were placed in the ground at either end of the grave.



Figure 2. *Kopjafa [headboard]*

The Szekler gate is also specific to this region. These gates are richly carved (and painted) wooden works of art (*Figure 3*). All over Szeklerland, such ornate, carved gates adorn the entrances to walled churches and cemeteries. The ornamentation of the Székely gate is rooted in the lore of the peoples of Inner Asia. It is very likely that the Székely Gate is a legacy of the Huns.[5]

4 http://www.kopjafa.hu/fuzet.php/ (Last accessed: 20 March 2022).
5 http://www.kjnt.ro/ertektar/ertek/a-szekelykapuk-1/ (Last accessed: 20 April 2022).



Figure 3. *Székely kapu [Szekler gate]*

The second phase of data collection involved on-site ethnographic note taking and photo taking during several visits to the supermarkets of the brand in April–May 2022. The linguistic and other semiotic consequences of a particular material object were analysed, where linguistic and other semiotic resources constructed the characteristics of the material object, namely sausages. Data collection was completed by a semi-structured interview carried out with one of the owners, in the third phase of the research, in May 2022. This interview was based on questions referring to the use of the Szekler symbols in the brand construction of the company, to how much awareness accompanies the presence or the lack of these symbols while constructing the identity of the brand.

4.2. The local SME: Bertis

The "Bertis" company is based in Sfântu Gheorghe (in Hungarian: Sepsiszentgyörgy), which is the capital city of Covasna County, located in the central part of Romania. In the census of 2011, 74% of the city's inhabitants categorized themselves as ethnic Hungarians, 21% as Romanians, 0.7% as Roma,

and 2,562 as other ethnicities,[6] and 74% marked Hungarian and 21% Romanian as their first language in the Romanian census. Bertis was founded as a business in the early 90s by a Hungarian family. It operates mainly in the meat industry, food marketing, and catering. They have a team of over 500 employees. The company has opened nine food stores in the south-eastern part of Szeklerland, Covasna County. It also operates five restaurants and a ballroom in Sfântu Gheorghe, plus an industrial kitchen, catering, and home delivery services. Another important area of activity is the wholesale trade. They distribute their products with their own refrigerator cars to over 1,500 reselling companies and organizations.

The linguistic landscape of the commercial spaces of the company reflects the diversity of languages, the power relations between speakers of minority and majority languages. The majority of the linguistic signs are Romanian-only; however, the pastry, bakery, and meat products are provided with bilingual signage or label, with Romanian displayed on top (*Figure 4*).



Figure 4. *Romanian–Hungarian bilingual signage in the Bertis supermarket*

The company responds to local demands by selling typical local products such as homemade bread, kürtőskalács, pálinka, and smoked products at any time of the day.

4.3. Semiotic assemblages and the sausage

The role of materials becomes inevitable when interpreting semiotic resources; these material objects can shape language practices and contribute to meaning making within and across various social contexts (Sharma 2019). The semiotic assemblages may take into account the multisensory resources deployed in accomplishing the brand's communicative activities.

6 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sf%C3%A2ntu_Gheorghe.

I analysed the role of *sausage* as a semiotic artefact in the construction of semiotic assemblages which in their turn may contribute to the construction of brand identity as well, based on "the existence of interaction, interrelationship between objects and beliefs, objects and ways of life, objects and human behaviour, objects and identity" (Aronin–Laoire 2013: 4). Entering any store of the company, a large signage with bilingual inscription advertises the brand's signature sausages (*Figure 5*) while inviting customers to enjoy some barbecue time.



Figure 5. *Bilingual signage indoors with sausages in the foreground, inviting for a barbecue*

These objects, such as the sausage, have the potential to make activities and practices happen in a socio-material space (Sharma 2019). While bilingual linguistic resources call the attention of both the Hungarian- and Romanian-speaking community in the city, the photo in the ad connects the customers with one of the Szekler symbols, smoked sausage. It takes but two steps to get to the meat product counter, where one can choose from the various smoked meat products. The typical smoke smell as a semiotic resource takes an active role in assembling other objects and resources.

Usually, bilingual labels offer the names of these products. Among these products, as a further linguistic resource, the product name Székelyszalámi (Szekler salami) can also be found, indicating the Hungarian identity (*Figure 6*). This product is one of the main products of the company; however, the interview with the owner reveals that this is only an occasional identity element of their brand identity:

Interview excerpt 1: "Occasionally, the Székely name appears in the name of the product (such as Székely szalámi) or the use of Székely symbols on the product label (such as on the label of Téliszalámi), but these are only occasional motifs that can be identified by looking at the brand, i.e. they are not defining elements of the brand identity."



Figure 6. *Salami product with Szekler name and with the Hungarian national colours*[7]

Nonetheless, the sausage as an assembling artefact draws on several other Szekler and other semiotic resources and builds rapport between other artefacts, customers, and the brand identity. As revealed by the interviewee, in the past few years, the shops used to entertain customers with Hungarian folk songs as background music. The song as a semiotic resource was thus part of the semiotic assemblage in their stores.

The owner's declaration regarding the company's brand identity is reflected in *Interview excerpt 2*, which supports Csata's (2019) claims, namely that ethnic markets are restricted, and this may hinder the effectiveness of ethnic marketing and the development of ethnic businesses (Csata 2019).

Interview excerpt 2: "During the brand-building process, Szekler symbols played no role in the life of the brand. The Bertis brand is based on principles that allow consumers, regardless of their national identity, to identify with the messages conveyed by the brand. During the brand-building process, two important characteristics emerged that still represent the Bertis brand identity today: quality and family style."

Perhaps these ideas can be interpreted in such a way that local business owners build their brands so that they contain both local/ethnic belonging and more global attraction at the same time (see Laihonen 2015).

Another artefact that is strongly connected to the sausage is a plastic shopping bag (*Figure 7*), which can interact with all the assembling elements of the semiotic assemblage. The plastic bag reinforces brand identity by highlighting the brand's iconic products, among them the sausages.

7 www.bertis.ro/ (Last accessed: 18 April 2022).



Figure 7. *Shopping bag as assembling artefact*

The shopping bag as another assembling artefact comes together with all the previous elements. The visual image of the sausages, smoked meat products, and wooden barrels may connect together as core Szekler symbols, which were frequently mentioned by the participants in the Google Form survey. All these assembling artefacts are flexible enough to be used in different contexts by different customers, locals or non-locals; still, they can be recognized as things that go together. They become part of a larger semiotic assemblage that can deliver different economic, social, or cultural-ethnic interpretations in different contexts.

Bilingual linguistic resources are part of the brand identity, as shown in *Interview excerpt 3*; the company's main goal is to reach as many customers as possible, regardless of their linguistic or ethnic background.

Interview excerpt 3: "Our corporate communications are multilingual (Hungarian and Romanian), as we believe it is important to get our message across to all potential audiences in the areas where our products are known and consumed. We want to reach and engage customers and potential customers, regardless of politics, nationality, or language."

The corporate communication style shows commitment to bilingual signage and, at the same time, can serve the Hungarian consumers as well. Once again, although the SME's marketing communication is different, the semiotic assemblages, happening at a given place and time, provide a way of thinking which definitely includes connections with local, ethnic identity. Sausages have the assembling power to relate the local, minority values and also to work as assembling artefact at the core of the spatial organization of the stores and of the brand identity.

5. Conclusions

In Transylvania, those businesses have emerged that offer products and services specifically targeted at Szekler minority consumers, which is indicated by the bilingual signage, including Hungarian, and their marketing communication is rooted in Hungarian or Szekler context. The ethnic market builds on the symbolic constructions of the Szekler identity, and local brands use these as semiotic resources to construct their brand identities. However, it is too early to jump to the conclusion that all local brands heavily invest in the use of these linguistic and non-linguistic resources in order to connect with the target market. The risk of isolation probably seems too high a price to be paid. The brand in the present analysis prefers quality and family style to Szekler semiotic resources when constructing brand identity. Moreover, the Bertis brand is constantly trying to reach out for a broader segment of customers.

The concept of semiotic assemblages helps us to appreciate a much wider range of linguistic, artefactual, historical, and spatial resources brought together in particular combinations and in particular moments of time and space (Blommaert–Huang 2010). These combinations are both linguistic and non-linguistic, influenced by social, cultural, ethnic interactions and relations.

The linguistic and other resources, such as the bilingual signage, the smell of smoked meat products, the tune of Szekler folk song, together with the assembling artefacts, such as sausages and other Szekler products, attract various people as customers, and they participate in meaning making, in new assemblages. My interest here was not focused on the identification of an assemblage, although Szekler identity assemblage seems very promising, but on understanding that material and semiotic resources intersect at a given place and time, and they bring a diversity of elements, ideological and ethnic routes together at one intersection of time and place, be it a store in a bilingual community in Romania. The effects generated by an assemblage have the ability to make something happen, in our case a viable market. If this is true, the examined SME may avoid the hidden economic dangers of an ethnic market and achieve a balanced combination of intra- and interrelations. Brand identity construction with a focus on the commodification of languages, cultures, and identities can be delivered via semiotic assemblages, where senses, materials, and languages as different semiotic resources interact with and intersect each other.

Results show that, in addition to linguistic cues, semiotic elements that are part of marketing messages are consciously created and used by businesses to mark locality and ethnicity. However, this is carefully constructed in order to attract a diverse target group of consumers in local and national markets.

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