

## **Linguistic Landscapes: Ojibwe Signage in Northern Minnesota**

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The subfield of linguistics focused on “linguistic landscapes” seeks to describe dynamics between languages through their physical appearance in public spaces. Somewhat surprisingly, there is almost no study of rural linguistic landscapes (with the important exceptions of Carmen (2019) and Lu et al. (2019), which inform much of the research presented here). As one can imagine, this has left some indigenous languages particularly underrepresented in this field of literature. In the case of Ojibwe, there has been a great push for public signage in the language, but there has never been an organized effort to document and analyze this signage.

Throughout the summer of 2020, I photographed a number of publicly-accessible road signs in and around Cass Lake, Minnesota, and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation. Special attention was given to signs containing Ojibwe language text. These photos were placed on a digital map and the signs were analyzed for patterns. A number of variables (intended audience, language, size, spelling, production, semiotics, etc.) play into this analysis.

My research suggests that the Ojibwe language plays a mediating role in the balance between local interests and outsider tourism. At times, the language can function simultaneously as a sign of togetherness and as a layer of opacity; Ojibwe signs aesthetically appeal to tourists, but offer them little access to the sign’s actual content, all while bolstering local language revitalization projects. Moreover, public signage may reflect the spheres in which Ojibwe is more commonly used--a great tool for understanding the language’s vitality.

While further research is still needed more broadly in the study of rural indigenous linguistic landscapes, hopefully this work can provide a template for similar studies in other language communities.

### **References**

Carmen, F. J. (2019). Paisaje lingüístico urbano y rural: parámetros de caracterización. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación*, 21, 39-54. <https://doi.org/10.6035/clr.2019.21.3>

Lu, S., Li, G., & Xu, M. (2019). The linguistic landscape in rural destinations: A case study of Hongcun Village in China. *Tourism Management*, 77, 104005. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.104005>