ARTICLES

RECLAIMING MULTILINGUALISM: AFRICAN LANGUAGES IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF CAPE TOWN (OBSERVATORY, SALT RIVER AND WOODSTOCK)

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This article studies the visibility of African languages (official/statal and non-official/non-statal as well as autochthonous/traditional and migrant/new) in the linguistic landscape (LL) of three neighborhoods in Cape Town (South Africa): Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock. The empirical evidence demonstrates that African languages are highly visible in the signage, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Signs with African languages are frequent and constitute the second most common signage type after English. African signage draws on a diversified range of Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic languages, exploits various kinds of supports, pertains to different domains of use, and attests to several manners of multilingual coexistence, with African linguistic elements ranging from simple to complex. The presence of non-South-African African languages in the signage is attributed to migratory pressures or the religion-related identity of a local ethnic group. As most such signs are bottom-up, the visibility of African languages in the signage and its profoundly multilingual character stem from (the agency of) the local communities themselves. Members of the autochthonous and migrant groups reclaim the landscape of the area in which they live by marking it with the linguistic material that reflects their own linguistic repertoires. Overall, the LL of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock closely matches the neighborhoods' soundscape – a phenomenon that is relatively rare in LLs across Africa.

Keywords: Linguistic landscape, Africa, multilingualism, African languages

1. Introduction

One of the phenomena that have always fascinated me is the multilingualism inherent to Africa and its peoples, as well as their passion for journeys. I have lived in Africa for fifteen years; mostly in South Africa but also in the western part of the continent – in Ghana, Gambia, and Senegal – and in the Maghreb. I have learned a number of African languages, specifically Lingala, Kituba, Arabic, Mandinka, and isiXhosa as well as several others – Akan, Kikongo, Oromo, Maasai, Sango, and Swahili, to name a few – even if to a less fluent degree. I also speak the (post)colonial languages, i.e., English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and German, which continue to be widely used across Africa. I have gradually embraced a multilingual migrant me and have learned to celebrate the boundlessness and fluidity that are inherent to my quasi-nomadic polyglotism. The present research emerges from this linguistic and spatial freedom – whether granted or (re)claimed – which I have had the opportunity both to admire in the people of Africa and instantiate in my own life: I am interested in African multilingualism, including the part thereof that is attributed to migratory drifts.

My study of African multilingualism pertains to linguistic landscapes (LLs), that is, dynamic systems of linguistic signs that are displayed publicly (cf. Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Van Mensel et al., 2016; Shohamy, 2019; Gorter & Cenoz, 2024). I analyze the visibility of African languages, both autochthonous/traditional and migrant/new, in the LL of three neighborhoods in Cape Town (South Africa): Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock. To be exact, I examine whether African languages are present in the signage, which in South Africa tends to be dominated by English and Afrikaans (Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009, 2010, 2012; Du Plessis, 2011; Kayam et al., 2012; Peck & Banda, 2014; Adekunle et al., 2019) and, should this be the case, determine the following landscape properties: the extent of the visibility of African languages, the types of languages attested, the manners of their manifestation in the signage, and the socio-cultural phenomena that this language display reveals.

The choice of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock – which cover an adjacent space within the 'Mother City' – is deliberate. The three neighborhoods are culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse; popularly viewed as hospitable towards national and transnational mobility; and overall characterized as "African" and "cosmopolitan" (see Peck & Banda, 2014, pp. 2-3, 6) – the "melting pot[s] of […] cultures" (Cape Town Tourism, 2015). This means that the signage of the selected area is likely – at least in theory – to draw on African linguistic elements. The study is developed within a mixed (quantitative-qualitative) approach to LLs where both physical and functional characteristics of signage are taken into consideration. This includes the analysis of signs, their supports and frames, the ways in which the various languages coexist (lexico-grammatically) within the signage, as well as the origin/authorship and purpose/readership thereof (see section 2 for detail).

The text is organized as follows: in section 2, I familiarize the reader with the background of my research: I provide the necessary information regarding the geography and socio-ethnic composition of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock, review the relevant scholarly literature on LLs and African languages, and explain my framework and methodology. In section 3, I introduce my data and describe the physical and functional characteristics of the LL of the three neighborhoods. In section 4, I evaluate this evidence within the adopted framework and answer the research questions. In section 5, I conclude my study.

2. Background

2.1. The research site

As I mentioned in the introduction, the neighborhoods of Cape Town that constitute my research site are adjacent. They span from the west (Woodstock) to the east (Observatory), occupying positions that are increasingly more remote from what is currently considered the city center (see Figure 1 below). The three neighborhoods are similar in the size of the areas they cover (Observatory – 3.1 km^2, Salt River – 2.7 km^2, and Woodstock – 3.1 km^2) and the populations that inhabit them (9.200, 6.500, and 9.300, respectively) (Frith, 2011; STATSSA, 2011).

As I also mentioned in section 1 above, Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock are diverse racially, ethno-culturally (including religion), and linguistically. Table 1 below captures the diversity in terms of race according to the 2011 census (Frith, 2011; STATSSA 2011), using the categories constructed for and commonly employed in South Africa (i.e., Black, Colored, Indian/Asian, and White). As is evident, the Black and Colored groups predominate.

As far as religion is concerned, Christianity and Islam are the prevalent faith communities. Apart from several Protestant, Anglican, Catholic, and Greek Orthodox churches and places of worship, the three neighborhoods host 4 large mosques, which respond to the needs of a robust Muslim (so-called Cape Ma-

Figure 1: Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock

Table 1: Racial diversity of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock

Observatory	Salt River	Woodstock	Total
Black – 40%	Colored – 45%	Colored – 51%	Colored – 38%
White – 34%	Black – 40%	Black – 29%	Black – 36%
Colored – 19%	White – 7%	White – 12%	White – 18%
Indian/Asian – 4%	Other – 5%	Other – 6%	Other – 5%
Other – 4%	Indian/Asian – 4%	Indian/Asian – 3%	Indian/Asian – 4%

lay) community:[1] one in Observatory (Masjid Ibaadur-Raghmaan) and Woodstock each (Sulaimania Masjid) and two in Salt River (Nurul Islam Masjid and Mughammadiyyah Masjid).

The three neighborhoods also reveal a considerable linguistic diversity. However, the only data I have access to concerns first language instead of the holistic linguistic repertoires of the inhabitants (see Table 2).[2] According to the 2011 census, English is the most common L1, although Afrikaans and isiXhosa are also well represented. The other important factor is the potential visibility of non-South-African languages. Given the large population of Black people in the three neighborhoods (see Table 1 above), it is probable that a significant portion of the varieties labeled as 'other' in the census (i.e., not recognized in the South Africa constitution) are indeed African languages. If this is the case, African languages could constitute up to 23% of L1s.

The racial, ethno-cultural, and linguistic diversity described above reflects the history of the three neighborhoods, especially their formation and growth in the previous century. By the mid-20th c., Observatory comprised of not only the British, who predominated, but also the migrants of other European origins (e.g., Lithuanians and East-European Jews) and people racialized as Indian and Colored (Young, 1998; Peck & Banda, 2014). Gradually, Apartheid policies made the presence of non-Whites (and thus Indians and Coloreds who had lived there) more difficult with the area being eventually declared 'white' and associated with the English population in the second half of the 20th c. (Peck & Banda, 2014)

[1] The term 'Cape Malay' is often used to designate South African Muslims. Some members of this community use this label, while others find it offensive and prefer Cape Muslim instead. The South African Muslim community includes two main groups, one group whose home language is Afrikaans, and the other whose home language is English (some of whom are classified as Indian). For both of them, Arabic plays a critical role in religious practices (Haron, 2002, 2011-2020, 2015).

[2] The 2011 census only recorded the first and the second language of a household and the languages recognized as official in the South African constitution.

Table 2: Linguistic diversity of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock

Observatory	**Salt River**	**Woodstock**	**Total**
English – 66%	English – 57%	English – 64%	English – 62%
Afrikaans – 11%	Afrikaans – 16%	Afrikaans – 18%	Afrikaans – 15%
Other – 11%	Other – 11%	Other – 14%	Other – 12%
isiXhosa – 6%	isiXhosa – 10%	isiXhosa – 2%	isiXhosa – 6%
Remaining SA – 6%	Remaining SA – 6%	Remaining SA – 2%	Remaining SA – 5%

– a tendency that was reversed after the fall of the Apartheid regime in 1994. (Although in 2001, Whites were indeed still in the majority (57.42%), the Black (20.28%) and Colored (19.87%) communities were considerable too (Peck and Banda, 2014). As is evident in Table 2, this 'reversing' trend intensified in the 21st c. with Blacks constituting the largest racial group currently.) Salt River was even more diverse in the mid-20th c. The neighborhood was predominately populated by Colored communities – Cape Malays (Muslims) and Coloreds *sensu stricto* (mostly Christians) – a part of whom were resettled there from District 6 before and during the forced removals in the late 60s. Woodstock also comprised of a large Colored community complemented with Greek, Irish, Italian, East-European (especially Jewish), and particularly numerous Portuguese (including Madeiran) migrants (Machado, 1992, p. 19). As a result, it was considered a "mixed area" (p. 22). It was exactly because of this mixed character that Portuguese and South European migrants preferred Woodstock as their home: the area hosted groups that were viewed as, more or less, marginal to Afrikaners and the English (p. 21). Overall, both in the past and presently, Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock have constituted some of the most preferred hubs for migrants and have generally been characterized by positive attuites towards migration.[3]

2.2. Literature review

The available literature reveals a considerable misalignment between African LLs and the soundscapes that underlie them, in particular, the underrepresentation

[3] My daily life provides an anecdotal yet highly illustrative example of this (positive) migrative character of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock. The fishmonger shop, renowned in the neighbourhood, is run by the descendants of Portuguese migrants; the two vegetable and fruit stores in my street are owned by migrants from Nigeria and Congo; all my barbers are Congolese and Pakistanis; and the local supermarket regularly promotes activities organized by Muslims, a number of whom have relocated from other countries.

of local multilingualism in signage (cf. Mc Laughlin 2015). Colonial languages (e.g., English, French, and Portuguese) dominate LLs across Africa; statal/official African languages (e.g., Swahili in Tanzania and Kenia, Hausa in parts of Nigeria, or Akan in Ghana) are (increasingly more) prevalent without usually reaching the visibility typifying colonial languages; and non-statal/non-official African languages (i.e., local, ethnic, and/or minority varieties) are generally absent in the signage or feature in it minimally. The two hotspots of LL research in Africa – Ethiopia and Tanzania – illustrate these tendencies unambiguously. In Ethiopia, English is more visible in signage than Amharic, which is in turn more visible than local languages such as Oromo, Harari, Gedeo and several others (Lanza & Woldemariam, 2009, 2011, 2014; Raga, 2012; Fekede & Gemechu, 2016; Yigezu & Blackwood, 2016; Blackwood et al., 2021). Similarly, in Tanzania, English and Swahili are significantly more common in signage than any of the other local languages (Mdukula, 2017, 2022; Lusekelo & Alphonse, 2018; Lusekelo, 2019; Benedicto & Tibategeza, 2021; Kimambo & Mdukula, 2024; Andrason & Karani, forthcoming), with the presence of English being more noticeable than that of Swahili at most sites (Bwenge, 2009, 2012; Chul-joon, 2014; Peterson, 2014; Mdukula, 2017; Ilonga, 2023). Analogous patterns can be recognized in other countries, whether in the west (e.g., Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, and Mali) (Juffermans, 2015; Mc Laughlin, 2015; Diao-Klaeger & Zongo, 2019; Anderson et al., 2020; Pütz, 2020) or the east (e.g., Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) (Reh, 2004; Guissemo, 2018; Legère & Rosendal, 2019; Ndlovu, 2021; Jenjekwa, 2022) of the African continent.

LLs in South Africa largely comply with the above-mentioned tendencies. The (post)colonial languages – i.e., English and, albeit less so, Afrikaans – predominate in LLs; the visibility of the official/statal African languages recognized in the constitution – i.e., isiNdebele, seSotho, sePedi, siSwati, xiTsonga, seTswana, tshiVenda, isiXhosa, and isiZulu – is significantly more constrained; lastly, non-official/non-statal languages – as well as languages that although recognized in the constitution are not official in a particular province – are absent in signage and/or their presence has not been reported in scholarly literature (see Du Plessis, 2011; Kayam et al., 2012; Peck & Banda, 2014; Adekunle et al., 2019; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009, 2010, 2012). The only article that analyzes the area selected as the research site for this study – specifically, one of two the main streets in Observatory (see Peck & Banda, 2014) – also suggests the dominant position of English in signage. Curiously, while the study recognizes the Africanness, cosmopolitanism, and diversity of this neighborhood and correctly views its LL as a manner of recontextualizing/reinventing and reclaiming/reappropriating the space, it does not examine the presence of African languages in that area's landscape. In fact, apart from English, the authors focus on Thai and Chinese. IsiXhosa is the only African language that is mentioned – although highly superficially – in this study.

Other African languages, especially the languages of the African migrant community and Arabic, which form a salient element in Observatory's (as well as Woodstock and Salt River's) soundscapes, are unreported.[4]

The underrepresentation of non-statal/non-official African languages in LLs emerging from scholarly literature may be related to the scarcity of studies dedicated to the presence of transnational African migrant languages in African LLs, i.e., languages that are unrecognized at an institutional level in a given area but are still present there due to mobility or other "foreign" influences. This contrasts with the fact that migration has constituted one of the central topics in LL scholarship and has been recognized as an instrumental element in shaping the multilingual landscapes of neighborhoods, towns, cities, and even larger areas (cf. Van Mensel et al., 2016; Shohamy, 2019).[5] Indeed, except for Arabic (see below), I am unaware of any (more or less systematic) research of this type. The only exceptions, as stated above, are very few analyses dedicated to Arabic in cases where Arabic functions as a minority language, i.e., when it is used outside of Arab countries (in which it entertains the status of the main/dominant official/national language). Regarding this class of studies, the following should be noted: Although minimally, Arabic is visible in LLs in Tanzania and Rwanda. This presence is attributed to (labor) migration and mainly transpires through the names of buildings in the areas surrounding mosques (Legère & Rosendal, 2019, p. 174). In South Africa, minor Arabic elements featured in the LL of the Malay community of Stellenbosch in the 1950s, mostly in the local mosque and madrassa (Greeff, 1955). Lastly, in north-eastern Mali, Arabic (and Al-Abjadiyah script) competes in LLs with French (Roman script) and Tamasheq (Tifinagh script). Arabic is favored by Islamists who employ it in signs together with French; in the signage produced by Tuareg independentists, Arabic coexists with Tamasheq in addition to French; in contrast, Arabic tends to be erased in pro-France governmental signage (Mc Laughlin, 2015).[6]

Studies devoted to the presence of Arabic in LLs outside of the Arab countries and located on the continents other than Africa are significantly more numerous –

[4] This study records, however, the phenomenon of "brand anonymity". This strategy renders the LL of an establishment ethnically neutral in order to appeal to a wider range of customers and/or avoid xenophobic attacks (Peck & Banda, 2014, pp. 18-19).

[5] This interest in migration seen in LL studies is related to the recognition of mobility (Van Mensel et al., 2016) – national or transnational and individual or collective – as a crucial force for the development of linguistic repertoires (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Blommaert & Backus, 2013; Mohr & Ferrara, 2024; Andrason, 2024).

[6] To be precise, in Mali, Arabic – specifically its Hassaniyya variety – is one of the many "national" languages recognized as official (JORM 2017, p. 1528). Nevertheless, Hassaniyya remains a minority language being native to some 100.000 speakers who reside in the north-west of the country (Eberhard et al., 2025).

hence their inclusion in the present section. In Europe, Arabic is visible residually, mostly in shops situated in the areas inhabited by migrants. In such areas, Arabic signage has decorative and exoticizing function for the so-called "non-knowledgeable" public, whereas for a "knowledgeable" public, signs are used to convey specific messages, mark identity, and ultimately reappropriate space (Bogatto & Hélot, 2010, pp. 286-287). In countries where the connection with Arabic has an established historical tradition (e.g., Spain), the presence of Arabic in LLs seems more diversified (Said & Rohmah, 2018). In addition to "commercial sign" contexts (see the commodification and tokenization of Arabic heritage in touristic and commercial industries) and "collective identity" contexts (functioning as an identity marker, e.g., in mosques), Arabic transpires in "state discourse" contexts, e.g., via the Latinized version of Arabic proper names placed on road signs (Leeman & Modan, 2010; Said & Rohmah, 2018). In the selected areas of some non-Arab countries in Asia, the visibility of Arabic seems even greater. Such areas include, *inter alia*, the metropolitan hubs of Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Guangzhou (China), and Bangkok (Thailand). Despite being denied an official status as well as lacking a (robust) native-speaker community and (often) experiencing unfavorable governmental policies, Arabic exists in diverse forms and spaces and serves a wide range of functions, catering to Muslims, Arabs, and many other customer groups. These functions range from religious to marketing (as a tool used to target customers and visitors in shops' facades and printed menus), from symbolic to communicative, and from emblematic to "authentic" (Bhatt, 2023; Gu, 2024; Gu & Coluzzi, 2024; Gu & Bhatt, 2024). In some places, Arabic may even be more visible than the official language(s) of the country (see the situation in Bangkok reported by Gu & Bhatt, 2024). Overall, both in Europe and Asia, Arabic appears in bottom-up rather than top-down signage and features in multilingual (with other languages, national or international, especially, English) rather than monolingual signs (Gu & Bhatt, 2024).[7]

[7] The largest number of studies dedicated to the presence of Arabic in LLs pertains to Israel. However, the status of Arabic in this country is complex oscillating between co-official (even if more theoretically than in praxis) to non-official (the language lost its official status in 2018). Overall, the use of Arabic in signage became a tool for contestation against exclusion and Israeli oppression (Suleiman, 2019). Before 2018, Arabic was well represented in signage in areas with a predominant Arab population, attesting to considerable vitality and functionality. However, in mixed Arab-Jewish neighborhoods as well as in Jewish-mostly zones, the visibility of Arabic was minimal (Trumper-Hecht, 2009, 2010; Shohamy & Ghazaleh-Mahajneh, 2012). In the latter case, Arabic was present only in signs containing street names in agreement with the 2002 Supreme Court's decision. In signs not overtly named in the court statement (e.g., names of buildings, stores or shops' facades, and public notices), Arabic was poorly represented (Waksman & Shohamy, 2010). After the loss of its official status, the visibility of Arabic in signage worsened substantially

2.3. Framework

Similar to my previous studies on LLs in African (see Andrason, forthcoming; Andrason & Karani, forthcoming), the LL framework used in this article exploits (and thus analyzes) two main aspects of signage: physical (its structure) and functional (its meaning). Below, I provide the definitions of the key physical and functional concepts following scholarly tradition. These definitions should be viewed as operationalized into prototypes and thus unavoidably simplified. More precisely, all the concepts explained here are scalar and must therefore "be understood in terms of a gradual approximation to the prototype rather than a binary operation of its fulfillment or the tack thereof" (Andrason & Karani, forthcoming, p. 6).

Regarding 'physicality', three concepts are essential: sign, support, and frame. In this study, a sign is defined as "a message conveyed via an orthographic text", which can (although need not) be accompanied by other, especially visual, semiotic codes (Andrason & Karani, forthcoming, p. 5, drawing on Backhaus, 2007; Van Mensel et al., 2016; Cocq et al., 2020). Differently put, while signs may draw on varied modalities (e.g., visual, auditory, somatosensory, olfactory, and gustatory), these will not form part of the present research. A support refers to "a material on which a sign is placed" (Andrason & Karani, forthcoming, p. 5). Such material may range from permanent to ephemeral, from physical to digital, from static to movable (dynamic), and from organic/somatic (e.g., part of the body) to less organic/somatic (see *inter alia* Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Marten et al., 2012; Van Mensel et al., 2016; Pütz & Mundt, 2019; Shohamy, 2019; Gorter & Cenoz, 2024). Lastly, a frame is "the conceptual and/or physical boundary to which a sign is confined" (Andrason & Karani, forthcoming, p. 5). A frame may range from being fine-grained to coarse-grained and thus include an increasingly larger number of individual signs that coexist discursively; graffiti walls are an excellent illustration of this (cf. Cocq et al., 2020).

The functional facet of a LL refers to the "environmental print" of signage within the community and its members (Huebner, 2006, p. 31). This mainly involves three phenomena. First, the identification (of the characteristics) of the creators/authors of signage and the motivations for the presence of determined signs, especially their top-down (produced by or under the mandate of some authorities) or bottom-up character (produced by individuals or their groups) (Marten et. al., 2012; Pütz & Mundt, 2019; Shohamy, 2019). Second, the environmental print concerns the determination of the recipients/readers of signage and the influence signs have on human behavior and social practices. Third, the environmental

(Suleiman, 2019). (Regarding the role of Arabic in LLs in occupied territories consult Farram and Hortobágyi (2020) for Ramallah and Ujvari (2022) for West Bank.)

print pertains to the examination of the ways in which the two groups of actors mentioned above are structurally and discursively related. For instance, whether certain properties of signs – or the signage in its entirety – are comprehensible to everyone or a few persons only? (for detail, see Marten et al., 2012; Van Mensel et al., 2016; Pütz and Mundt, 2019; Shohamy, 2019).

One of the central topics within LL scholarship pertains to multilingualism (Gorter, 2013; Van Mensel et al., 2016; Pütz &Mundt, 2019), i.e., the coexistence of various languages in signage, especially those that are found in the soundscape of the area (and that soundscape's larger regional/national/global embedding). Languages can cohabit their LL in three ways. A particular language, i.e., l_0, is the only one appearing in a sign; l_0 shares a sign with other languages (l_1, l_2… l_n); l_0 is absent in (or erased from) signage (Reh, 2004; Gorter & Cenoz, 2015; Van Mensel et al., 2016). When different languages appear together, four main strategies can be distinguished within a single sign: full, partial, and overlapping translation as well as the use of complementary texts (Reh, 2004). That is, the entire and identical message is conveyed in all the languages that feature in a sign; the message written in one language is conveyed in other languages only partly; languages featuring in the sign share parts of the message but none of them conveys the message in its totality; or alternatively, each of the languages used conveys a different message (even if these individual messages form an additive whole). The actual coexistence of languages can of course be messier and fuzzier by exploiting (in themselves, gradient) phenomena of code-switching (whether insertional, alternational, or congruent), borrowing (whether matter or pattern), language mixing (of any type of "split") (Meakins, 2013), and translanguaging. Lastly, with regard to migration-related multilingualism, one of the principal distinctions made in LL scholarship concerns the classification of a variety as "autochthonous" or "traditional" on the one hand versus "migrant" or "new" on the other (Marten et al., 2012, p. 6). The concepts of being autochthonous/traditional and migrant/new are also relative and often depend on the span time considered.

2.4. Data collection method and database structure

The present article draws on a database compiled in the course of fieldwork activities spanning over 15 months, from January 2024 till March 2025. To collect my empirical evidence, I repeatedly walked through the three neighborhoods and took pictures of all signs that contained any text in an African language. As far as Woodstock and Salt River are concerned, I explored the area that extends south from the rail tracks, thus leaving the industrial zone outside of my research. In Observatory, I recorded the signage of the area ranging from the western borders to the Liesbeek River and Liesbeek Park. This means that I collected data from

the parts of the neighborhoods which host the main bulk of shops, bars, and services and in which the majority of the population lives. Overall, I took some 300 pictures which documented 126 signs. From a diachronic perspective, during the 15 months of my fieldwork, the LL of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock changed minimally. These changes are principally attributable to the genocide perpetrated in Gaza and the support of Capetonians to the Palestinian people (see footnote 23). Concurrently, I also took note of signs in other languages, especially English and Afrikaans.[8]

For the purpose of my research, and as is customary in South African linguistic scholarship and language-policy documents developed by the South African government, I define an African language as a language historically indigenous to Africa. Accordingly, I do not treat colonial Indo-European languages (French, Dutch, English, German, and Portuguese) and their postcolonial variations (Afrikaans) as African even though they currently have native African speakers. In contrast, I do consider Arabic an African language. Of course, Arabic originated from the Arabian Peninsula in Asia. Nevertheless, Semitic languages form part of the Afroasiatic language family whose historical homeland was located in Africa. In other words, proto/ancestral varieties from which Arabic emerged were (at some point) indigenous to Africa – which was never the case of the Indo-European language family. This is consistent with the usual scholarly practice since (variants of) Arabic – as part of Afro-Asiatic family – tend to be included into the class of African languages, while (post)colonial languages do not (see Heine & Nurse, 2008; Heine & Leyev, 2008; Güldemann, 2018).[9]

[8] The data spreadsheet underlying my evidence section (see section 3) is structured as follows: first, it contains a link to the picture(s) documenting each sign and that sign's token identification number; second, it specifies the African languages and other languages used, the types of scripts in which the text is written (this is especially relevant for Arabic), the English translation of a non-English text, the bottom-up or top-down origin of a sign, its support type, and frame, as well as the manner in which the languages appearing in a sign coexist with each other (including code-mixing) and the general function of a sign. It should be noted that to identify suitable signs and analyze data collected I drew on my own linguistic competence, especially isiXhosa (and related Nguni languages), Lingala (and several other Bantu languages), Arabic (and a few other Semitic languages), as well as varieties of a broader Niger-Congo phylum (e.g., Akan).

[9] The families usually included into the reviews of African languages range from more coarse-grained, i.e., Niger-Congo (or Kongo-Kordofanian), Nilo-Saharan, Afroasiatic, and 'Khoisan' (Childs 2003; Heine & Leyev, 2008; Heine & Nurse, 2008; see also Greenberg 1949, 1955, 1963) to more fine-grained, i.e., Khoi-and-San-and-satellites, Nilo-Saharan, Afroasiatic, Kordofanian, Ubangi, Adamawa, Gur, Mande, Dogon, Atlantic, Ijoid, Kru, Benue-Kwa, and Dakoid (Güldemann 2018a).

3. Evidence

3.1. African languages of South-African

There are 40 signs that contain text in an African language officially recognized in the South African constitution. This language is almost always isiXhosa – one of the three official languages of the province of Western Cape, of which the city of Cape Town is the capital.[10] In a few instances, a form used in a sign is a pan-Nguism (henceforth referred to as isiNguni): even though primarily employed in isiZulu, this word/expression is known to the speakers of other Nguni languages, including non-standard dialects of isiXhosa or the urban varieties developed in the Greater Cape Town area.

Within these 40 signs, the text of four tokens is entirely written in isiXhosa (or isiNguni). The first three examples are names of private business. **Intsangu** is a street-clothing brand meaning 'marijuana, dagga'. The sign that contains it appears on a wall inside another establishment, a coffeeshop, making a playful reference to the trade and consumption of cannabis products, which openly take place there (Figure 2.a). **Indawo** is the name of a building restoration company that means 'place, area' in isiXhosa and other Nguni languages. The sign is placed on a company car and, within this frame, coexists with a few other signs – all of them in English. The third example is the word **Shosholoza** that signifies 'advance, move, push forward' in isiZulu (2.b). Its standard isiXhosa equivalent is **tshotsholoza**. However, featuring in the title of a popular song (the origin of which is attributed to South African Nguni miners), the form **shosholoza** is widely known and employed in isiXhosa too. This song and the term **(t)sho(t)sholoza** is used to demonstrate support to and solidarity with the working class, as well as people engaged in other struggles, including sport competitions. The **Shosholoza** sign appears on the outside window of a company bearing the same name. However, similar to **indawo** discussed above, if a broader frame is considered, this sign forms part of a larger mosaic of windows some of which contain signs with English inscriptions. The last example is **sthandwa sam** 'my darling / my loved one' – a colloquial spelling of the standard expression **isithandwa sam**. This text appears on the metal wall of a bus stop (2.c). The four monolingual isiXhosa/isiNguni signs discussed in this paragraph are bottom-up having been put by shop/company owners or written by anonymous commuters.

In the remaining 36 signs, isiXhosa/isiNguni coexists with texts written in other languages: English, French, or English and Afrikaans at the same time. This means that there are no cases where an isiXhosa inscription would only be accom-

[10] The other two official languages of Western Cape are English and Afrikaans.

Figure 2: Monolingual isiXhosa signs

panied by Afrikaans – as I explained, the third official language of the Western Cape province.

IsiXhosa appears together with English in 20 signs. As was the case of the monolingual isiXhosa signage, all these bilingual examples are bottom-up and have thus been placed by the owners of establishments or composed by anonymous individuals. The purpose of several isiXhosa-English bilingual signs is to make the company name known to potential clients: **Shosholoza finance**, **Intsangu African boutique** (these two Xhosa terms were both mentioned in the paragraph above), and **Netshomi zam** (lit. 'with my friends') **Contemporary**

Figure 3: Bilingual isiXhosa-English signs (a)

wire art (See Figure 3.a). Another large class of isiXhosa-English signs is related to food/beverages, both in retail and the hospitality industry. The isiXhosa expressions used in these signs are often labels designating specific products such as **magwinya**, **uchithibunga**, **imphepo** (3.b), **inyama yentloko yenkomo** 'beef head meet' and **intloko yegusha** 'sheep head' (3.d). IsiXhosa-English signs are also used to advertise cultural events. In such instances, isiXhosa transpires in the proper names of music groups or performers (e.g., **Thabiso**, **Boshate**, **Nkosi**; see next paragraph). Sometimes, isiXhosa-English signs are employed for political purposes. For instance, to support a political party through the overt use of the proper name of its members (**Mangaliso Sobukwe**) or to challenge South-Afri-

can socio-political reality through ironic expressions (**ungenaphi** 'where do you come in?) (see 3.c). One bilingual example is a complex emotions-related discourse found on a bus-stop graffiti wall (3.e). It consists of two parts separated topographically: **mna ndandisithi for ever wena my love** 'I was saying it forever, you, my love' and **sohlezi sisonke ke soka lam** 'we will be together my man' (as well as **wam** 'my' following a word that was erased). Lastly, one sign advertises a competition – referred to as **amawina** 'winners' (see 4.a below) – that promotes the use of mobile-phone networks.

IsiXhosa-English signs are placed on varied types of supports. In the case of signs containing establishment names, facade windows and outside walls predominate (3.a), although the same supports equally often inform the passerby about products sold inside. Nevertheless, most food-related signs as well as signs promoting (cultural) events appear on less permanent supports, especially paper (see 3.b). Occasionally, signs are placed on inside walls, movable wooden boards, and plastic fabric (see 4.a further below). The graffiti sign is written on metal walls at bus stops (3.e). Two signs appear on movable supports worn by people, i.e., T-shirts (3.c).

In most cases, the contribution of isiXhosa to isiXhosa-English signs is minimal both quantitatively and qualitatively. The main bulk of the text appears in English (see Figure 4.a), while isiXhosa (or, very rarely, isiNguni) is reduced to one or two words, typically a noun and a noun phrase (4.a-c). Three types of nouns or noun phrases predominate: proper names (i.e., names of persons or groups of people, e.g. **Thabiso**, **Nkosi**, and **Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe PAC**), common nouns used as proper names referring to a specific company, business, or event (**Endladleni** lit. 'at home' in 4.a), and nouns referring to food types (**imphepho** in 3.b and **inyama**, **intloko**, and **inkomo** forming a fixed expression **inyama yentloko yenkomo** in 3.d, as well as **magwinya** from the standard form **amagwinya** – a local variety of doughnut). Occasionally, isiXhosa contributes with a pronoun (**eyethu** 'our(s)'), a verbal root (see **khataza** 'revolt' used as part of proper names: **Farrah Khataza presents Operation Khataza A live musical experience**), and a verb-noun compound (**Papa Ron's shisha nyama** 'Papa Ron's barbeque meat').[11] As is evident from the above, in several instances, isiXhosa terms (whether proper or common) are themselves employed as part of the name of an establishment. Most examples attest to insertional code-switching with English as the matrix code. There is one case of a hybrid form. The word **amaWinna** is composed of the isiXhosa plural prefix **ama-** and the noun **winna** an adaptation of **winner** in English.

[11] **Shisa nyama**, is originally an isiZulu expression signifying 'burnt meat'; however, the term is widely used in townships and among amaXhosa who live there to describe places where people make and serve barbecue meat.

Figure 4: Bilingual isiXhosa-English signs (b)

There are only two examples of more elaborated uses of isiXhosa. The phrase **Ungenaphi?** (literal gloss: **u-ngena-phi** 2ndSA-come-where) 'where are you coming in?' appears in an alternational code-switching type being followed by the English utterance **An African proverb** (see Figure 3.c). The other example constitutes the only case where isiXhosa functions as the matrix code, hosting an English adverb (**for ever**) and vocative (**my love**): **mna ndandisithi for ever wena my love** 'I was saying it forever, you, my love' accompanied by **sohlezi sisonke ke soka lam** 'we will be together my man' (as well as **xxxx wam** with the erased proper name of the addressee of the inscription and the recipient of the affection; see 3.d above).[12]

One token attests to isiXhosa-French bilingualism. In (5), the isiXhosa/isiNguni term **shishanyama** (see the discussion above) coexists with the French preposition **chez** 'at (the place / home of)'. The sign advertises a place serving food and beverages (see section 3.2.1) and appears on a permanent metallic support – part of the building where the pub is located.

[12] The form **sohlezi** 'we will stay' is either isiZulu or a dialectal isiXhosa variant. The standard form is **sohlala** – a contraction from **siza kuhlala**.

Figure 5: Bilingual isiXhosa-French sign

Figure 6: A fuzzy top-down/bottom-up example of trilingual isiXhosa-English-Afrikaans signs

There are 12 instances of trilingual signs that draw on isiXhosa. In all of them an isiXhosa inscription is accompanied by texts in Afrikaans and English. Contrary to monolingual and bilingual isiXhosa signs, trilingual signs are almost always of a top-down type and the pertinent isiXhosa expressions invariably spelled according to the literary standard. These signs have been put up by authorities or by others in order to comply with official (regional or national) directives and policies. One case, however, attests to a fuzzy situation. The sign in (6) contains a trilingual expression in isiXhosa (**isixeko saseKapa**), English (**city of Cape Town**), and Afrikaans (**stad Kaapstad**). This text features on a wall painting that was sup-

Figure 7: Trilingual signs: full translation

ported by the municipal government (as well as private donors) but developed creatively in the community by a local artist.[13] In other words, while the trilingual acknowledgement of the city of Cape Town instantiates a top-down power, the rest of this artistic graffiti is more of a bottom-up kind.

Except for the above example, trilingual sings appear on governmental buildings, amenities, properties, and land, or inform about such properties in some way. These include healthcare institutions (7.a), electricity amenities (7.b), public construction sites (7.c), emergency meeting points (see 8.a below), and notices confirming the compliance of private establishments with national or regional laws. Trilingual signs are typically informative instead of advertising or publicizing sales and events. They usually appear on permanent supports, mostly metal or plastic boards placed outside and attached to concrete walls or iron fences. Only in one instance does a sign appear on paper attached to the wall inside a shop.

In most cases, texts in isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans constitute full (or nearly full) translations with each language conveying (approximately) the same information (see 7.a and 7.b). English generally appears as the first language in trilingual signs. IsiXhosa and Afrikaans follow and may occupy either the second or the third position with no noticeable tendency (compare again 7.a-b with 7.c).

[13] The author of this graffiti is Kilford Cement – an artist of Zimbabwean-Malawian origin.

Figure 8: Topographic distinction of English versus isiXhosa and Afrikaans

Even within the same frame, some signs exhibit isiXhosa-Afrikaans order while in others the arrangement is reverse, i.e., Afrikaans precedes isiXhosa (7.c). In some instances, English is made more prominent through other visual means, e.g., by separating it topographically from isiXhosa and Afrikaans as in (8.a). In other cases, this prominence is achieved by the larger size of the font and/or their bold typeface (7.c and 8.b). Contrary to English, isiXhosa and Afrikaans are never differentiated from each other via color or font size and type. In some instances, texts in isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans yield a circle surrounding the provincial or municipal logo such that no sequence of the languages – or the order in which they appear – can be determined (8.c). Nevertheless, even in these examples, a trilingual sign is usually accompanied by an additional English sign – part of the same frame – which is written with larger fonts. Such cases may, in fact, be analyzed as partial translations of the entire frame: two signs are translated fully into isiXhosa and Afrikaans while one sign is left untranslated and only appears in English. Another example of this type could be the wall painting discussed above (see Figure 6). While most of the text is monolingual in English, one element is trilingual: the city's logo that contains not only an inscription in English but also the equivalent translations in Xhosa and Afrikaans.

In a further contrast with bilingual isiXhosa-English signs, trilingual signs contain both simple phrases (e.g., an imperative verb **ngena** 'enter!' or a noun phrase **isixeko saseKapa** 'city of Cape Town') and more complex sentences with inflected verbs and their complements, both arguments and adjuncts. See **ugesi –**

Figure 9: The multilingual graffiti wall

aku ngengwa lapha ngaphandhle kwemvume yabapati 'electricity – no person may enter without authority/permission' in (7.b) and **ongene apha ngaphandle kwemvume angakutshutshiswa** 'trespassers (lit. anyone who enters here without permission) may be prosecuted' in (7.c).

Lastly, in one sign, an isiXhosa clause **ndibhalele ngesiXhosa!** 'write to me in isiXhosa' appears within a multilingual maze of inscriptions. The vast majority of these texts are written in English, although a few ones draw on other languages: Afrikaans, Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish (see Figure 9). All these signs belong to the shared frame of a graffiti wall located in a gay bathhouse and yield a complex discourse collaboratively composed by (more or less) anonymous visitors. Although English is by far the most common language used on this graffiti wall – as is the case of the entire LL of the bathhouse (Andrason, forthcoming) – English texts are not profiled with regard to the size or color of the fonts. This type of signage is bottom-top: spontaneous and, to some extent, ephemeral. Indeed, similar to several other inscriptions on this graffiti which have been erased and/or written on top of each other, the isiXhosa text has been corrected and partially covered by other inscriptions.

Figure 10: Monolingual non-South-African Niger-Congo signs

3.2. Non-South-African African languages

There are 86 signs that contain texts written (fully or partially) in an African language that is not recognized in the South African constitution as official. Two groups of such signs can be distinguished: those that draw on Niger-Congo languages (similar to the official South-African African languages) and those that draw on Afro-Asiatic languages.

3.2.1. Niger-Congo

24 signs contain texts in Niger-Congo languages. This linguistic phylum is highly heterogenous, and the phylogenetic position of several branches remains a contested issue (see Güldemann, 2018; Good, 2020). Out of these signs, only two are unquestionably monolingual.[14] One sign is written in Shona – a Southern Bantu language (closely related to Nguni languages) spoken in Zimbabwe. The Shona word **chimurenga** signifies 'struggle' and 'uprising' as well as, because of the history of the African continent, 'collective liberation fight'. The sign appears on a building wall above the outside entrance to a well-known pan-Africanist radio station that bears the same name (10.a). The other sign, written on carton, is found in a food shop and identifies a specific fish type, i.e., **mangala** (10.b). This word derives from Igbo – the language of the author of the sign and the owner of the shop – although it is used in many other languages across Nigeria, not only Benue-Congo (Yoruba and Edo) but also Chadic (Hausa).

There are 16 bilingual signs. In all of them, a non-South-African Niger-Congo language co-occurs with English. As one of the monolingual signs discussed above (see 10.b), these signs are found in establishments related to the retail and hospitality industries: shops (groceries and mini-markets) and eateries (restaurants, bars, or street-food stands). This is unsurprising as most of the signs refer to

[14] The mono- or multilingualism of a few other signs depends on the extent of the frame. That is, although several individual signs may theoretically be viewed as monolingual, their close discursive coexistence with other signs renders the entire frame multilingual.

Figure 11: Bilingual Niger-Congo and English signs (a)

specific food and beverage types and identify them by their original names. Three sources of such food names – both geographical and linguistic – are the most noticeable. First, several signs draw on foods popular in Congo and typically known by their Lingala names, even though many of them are also employed in other

Figure 12: Bilingual Niger-Congo and English sign (b)

Congolese languages, e.g., Kituba and Kikongo. For example, (11.a) enumerates the foods served at a Congolese eatery by their original Lingala names: **loso**, **madesu**, **pondu**, **kwanga**, **makayabo**, **fumbwa makoso**, **ngai ngai**, **bitekuteku**, **lenga lenaa**, **mbisi ya mayi**, **mabundu**, **matebele**. (Other common Lingala words are fish species such as **mongusu**, **mboto**, and **ngolo**.) Another common source of bilingual signs are Nigerian languages, especially Igbo and Yoruba, which dominate the linguistic landscape of the south of the country. For instance, (11.b) lists foods known by their Igbo (**ogbono**), Yoruba (**eg(g)usi**), and Ibibio/Efik (**afang**) names, which are commonly used across the entire Nigeria and incorporated into the vocabulary of several languages as well. (Further examples of such pan-Nigerian terms are **garri**, **pepe soup**, and **jellof rice**.) The third – somewhat less visible – source is Ghana and the Akan language. The typical Akan food-related words (also known across the whole of Ghana) are **waakye**, **jollof** (cf. **jellof** mentioned above), **fufu**, and **banku** (11.c).

Apart from featuring in menus or boards informing about the meals being sold, the original names of foods also appear on the products themselves. For instance, (12) is a label that identifies **chinchin** – a fried snack that is consumed across Nigeria and known under its Igbo and Yoruba name in many other languages.[15] Another label is **nkota-nkota** – an herb from Malawi – signifying 'zigzag' in Chichewa.

Additionally, non-South-African Niger-Congo languages feature in the names of establishments. In such cases, the Niger-Congo term tends to modify a generic English word. See, for example, the Lingala nouns **elubu** 'meal' and **malewa** 'pop-

[15] It is also popular in Ghana, Togo, Benin and Cameroun although often known under other names.

Figure 13: Trilingual Niger-Congo, English, and French signs

ular bean dish' in **African elubu restaurant** and **Malewa African food** in Figure (11.a) above. The establishment's name **boumboum Africa restaurant bar** draws on the French spelling of a common Lingala (and Congolese) onomatopoeia imitating drums – **boum-boum**. **Chi-chi Afrikan taste restaurant** and **Chris Ukachukwa furniture** exploit proper names of Igbo persons.[16]

Four signs containing non-South-African Niger-Congo languages are trilingual. Three of them combine Lingala with English and French. In (13.a), the proper name of a Lingala speaker **Kamu** accompanies the French expression **la fraicheur** 'freshness', the English acronyms **(PTY) LTD** and the mixed French-English noun phrase **Africain food**. In (13.b), the Lingala-English name of the establishment **boumboum Africa restaurant** is accompanied by the expression **chez LK** drawing on the French preposition 'at (the place owned by)' and the acronym of the owner. In (13.c), the Lingala phrase **nzete ya mboka**, lit. 'village/country tree' is the name of an "energy" drink. It appears within the dominant French and Eng-

[16] **Ukachukwa** literally means 'it's God's decision and/or concern'.

Figure 14: Quadrilingual signs with Niger-Congo languages

lish texts that specify the usage and dosage. The last example of trilingualism is the signage that combines within the same frame French and English texts with **adja** – the name of seasoning powder widely used across central and west Africa, not only in Congo and Nigeria, but also Gambia, Ghana, and Senegal. It should be noted that the use of French, pervasive in trilingual signs (although also found in bilingual ones including isiXhosa) itself constitutes the marker of Central (Congo, Cameroun, Central African Republic) and Western Africa (Mali, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal), where French is commonly spoken.

Two signs that draw on non-South-African Niger-Congo languages are quadrilingual. The first of them informs costumers about meals available at an eatery and contains texts in Lingala, English, and French – as is common of trilingual signs – as well as scientific Latin terminology (14.a). The second one is a T-shirt commemorating the 6th meeting of Pan African Congress that took place in 1974 – the first to be held in Africa. This sign contains an inscription in Swahili – the national (Eastern Bantu) language of Tanzania and Kenia – accompanied by English, French and Arabic texts (14.b).

Nearly all trilingual and quadrilingual signs pertain to the food-related retail or hospitality industry: eateries, restaurants, bars, and pubs (cf. the discussion of bilingual signage above). The only exception is one of the two quadrilingual signs, which concerns a political domain (14.b).

All signs containing non-South-African Niger-Congo languages are bottom-up. Most of the signs are placed on permanent supports, especially walls and window facades, or semi-permanent movable boards. A few are printed or hand-written paper labels that are put on products. Only one is genuinely movable – the T-shirt discussed above (14.b). Except for this same sign, in which nearly the entire message is repeated in four languages, no examples of translations are attested: full, partial, or overlapping. Overall, the presence of Niger-Congo languages in signs tends to be limited to mono-lexical, typically nouns and noun phrases referring to food terms and proper names of people. Nouns may feature alone, form lists, or constitute part of proper names of the establishments. Most signs attest to insertional code-switching. Niger-Congo insertions appear within the matrix code provided by English and are thus embedded within English syntax.

3.2.2. Afro-Asiatic

There are 63 signs that draw on Afro-Asiatic languages – all of them, members of the Semitic linguistic family. 60 of these signs contain Arabic text. Arabic is typically written in the Fuṣḥā variety, i.e., Modern Standard Arabic. However, if an inscription consists of a single word and/or does not make use of the Arabic script but resorts to romanizations – transliteration or transcription – the determination of an Arabic register is not always possible.[17]

Out of all Arabic signs, 9 are monolingual and are thus composed entirely in Arabic. Nearly all of them make use of the Arabic script – Al-Abjadiyah. In most cases, only Arabic characters are present (15.a). However, in one sign, the Arabic word **حلال** is accompanied by its Roman transcription **halal** (15.b);[18] in another one, the sign contains two complementary messages: one in Al-Abjadiyah (i.e., the Shahada: **لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا ٱللَّٰهُ** 'There is no god but Allah' and **مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ ٱللَّٰهِ** 'Muhammad

[17] Transliteration is a scholarly convention of representing one script in another in which every character from language/script A is represented by a specific character in language/script B. Transcription is a less scientific representation of one script in another which focuses on the rending the original text pronounceable by the speakers of the other language.

[18] Because of its frequency, the Romanization **hala(a)l** could also be regarded as an Arabic loanword borrowed into several South African local languages. In this interpretation, this sign would be categorized as bilingual (i.e., Arabic and English). The accurate transliteration of **حلال** would be **ḥalāl**.

Figure 15: Monolingual Arabic signs (a)

is the Messenger of Allah') and the other that is transcribed (**Labaik ya 'Gaza** 'Gaza, here we are at your service' for the original **لبيك يا غزّة**) (15.c); in yet another one, the whole text – presumably **سليمانية** and **مسجد** – is written in the Roman script (15.d).

Monolingual texts mostly pertain to a religious domain. They convey the name of God (**الله**) and the prophet Muhammad (**محمد**) (16.a), denote the names of mosques (15.d above), or reproduce passages from the Qur'an. An example of such a Qur'anic quote is **كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ** 'every soul will taste death' extracted from Sura 29 (16.b). The only exception is the **حلال** sign which concerns food (although its presence is dictated by religious practices too). While some texts are simple and consist of one or two nouns, typically names (see again **الله** 'God', **محمد** 'Muhammad', and **حلال** 'halal'), others are complex sentences and larger passages (see 15.a, 15.c and 16.b).

Monolingual Arabic signs appear on both static and movable (dynamic) supports. Static supports include walls and window facades as well as boards placed

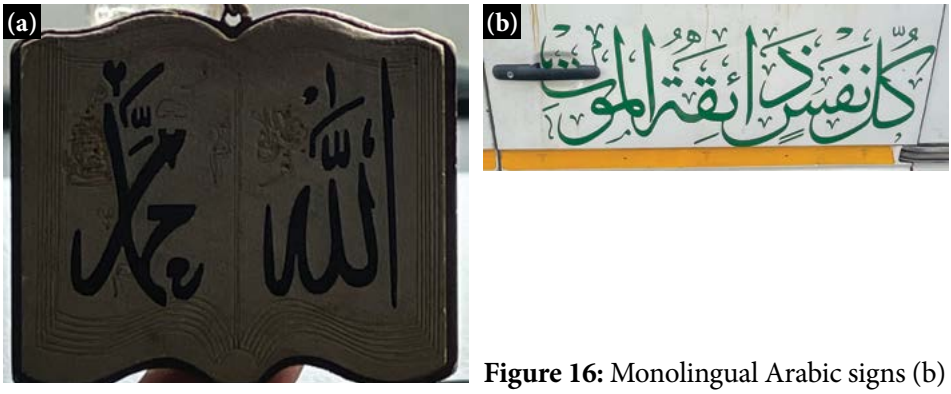

Figure 16: Monolingual Arabic signs (b)

permanently on a building structure. Primary movable supports are vehicles. An Arabic text is either painted on a car's body or appears on objects placed inside the car (which could be analyzed as a semi-static/semi-dynamic support type). Most monolingual signs are written on permanent material, i.e., concrete, metal sheets, and boards, rather than ephemeral material such as paper. However, one sign is a book cover put in the window of a second-hand shop.[19] All monolingual Arabic signs are bottom-up: they were placed by proprietors of establishments, cars' owners, or (leaders of) local faith communities instead of complying with governmental policies. Nevertheless, the **حلال / hala(a)l** sign is a certified packaging symbol issued by the South African National Halaal Authority – a non-profit organization that represents and defends the Muslim values of the Islamic community (Ummah). Its placement on foods targeting Muslims can thus be seen as to some extent regulated and top-down. The name of the mosque could also be analyzed as a fuzzy and intermediate bottom-up/top-down type of signage.

There are 50 bilingual signs. In all of them, Arabic cooccurs with English. An Arabic text is usually written in Al-Abjadiyah. In 9 cases within this group of signs, Al-Abjadiyah is the only script used to codify the Arabic text, which implies some knowledge of the Arabic language on the part of the author and the reader (see 17.a-b). This also pertains to the expressions commonly used in the spoken language. While Anglicized phrases such as **merhaba** 'hello' or **mashalla(h)** '(as) God has wished (it)' may be understood by community members who do not know Arabic, the ability to decipher the meaning of these expressions when written in Al-Abjadiyah, i.e., **مَا شَاءَ ٱللَّهُ** (17.c) and **مَرْحَبًا** (17.e) respectively, requires a degree of familiarity with the Arabic language. In contrast, the sign indicating

[19] This sign coexists with many other book-signs within the frame yielding a carefully designed mosaic of signs.

Figure 17: Bilingual Arabic-English signs – Al-Abjadiyah

halal food is recognizable even by those who are not fluent in Al-Abjadiyah (see 17.d).

In some signs, the Arabic script is accompanied by its Romanized equivalents. This helps the readers who are not familiar with Al-Abjadiyah to pronounce the text (more) accurately. As explained above, such Romanization strategies may involve transliteration or transcription. Transliteration may itself be more (see 18.a) or less (19.b) complete. In the latter case, while some symbols indeed reflect scholarly transliteration practices (e.g., **ẖ** for ح [ħ]),[20] other symbols are not typically

[20] In fact, the more accurate transliteration of ح is **ḥ**.

Figure 18: Bilingual Arabic-English signs – Al-Abjadiyah and transliteration

used in scholarship but are rather tailored for recipients of the signs who speak English (e.g., **ee** for **ī** [iː] ي and **oo** for **ū** [uː] و). Interestingly, the so-called nunnation is not represented in Romanizations, see **Madrasah** instead of **madrasat-un** and **Ibn** instead of **ibn-u** in (18.a).

In several cases, a Romanized text resorts to transcription – more accessible to speakers who are not familiar with Arabic linguistic tradition: **leen** [liːn] **لين** (in 19.a) and **ummah** [ʔmmat-u(n)] **أُمَّة** (in 19.b). As some transliterations are incomplete (see the previous paragraph), the line demarcating transcriptions from transliterations is sometimes fuzzy. Occasionally, Al-Abjadiyah coexists with both transliteration (**ʻabī**)[21] and transcription (**Latief**) (19.c). In a few examples, the transcribed text is stylized to visually approximate Al-Abjadiyah script (see the graphic representation of the word **leen** – a transcription of Arabic **لين** (in 19.a).

While in most examples, Romanizations restate the message conveyed in Al-Abjadiyah (see 18.a-b and 19.a), in a few others, the two scripts are not fully equivalent but convey, at least, partly different messages. For instance, in (20), **عِبَادُ ٱلرَّحْمَـٰنِ** 'the servants of the Most Compassionate' written in Al-Abjadiyah is accompanied by the Romanized text **masjied ibaadurraghmaan**. While **ibaad-**

[21] A more correct transliteration would be **ʾabī**.

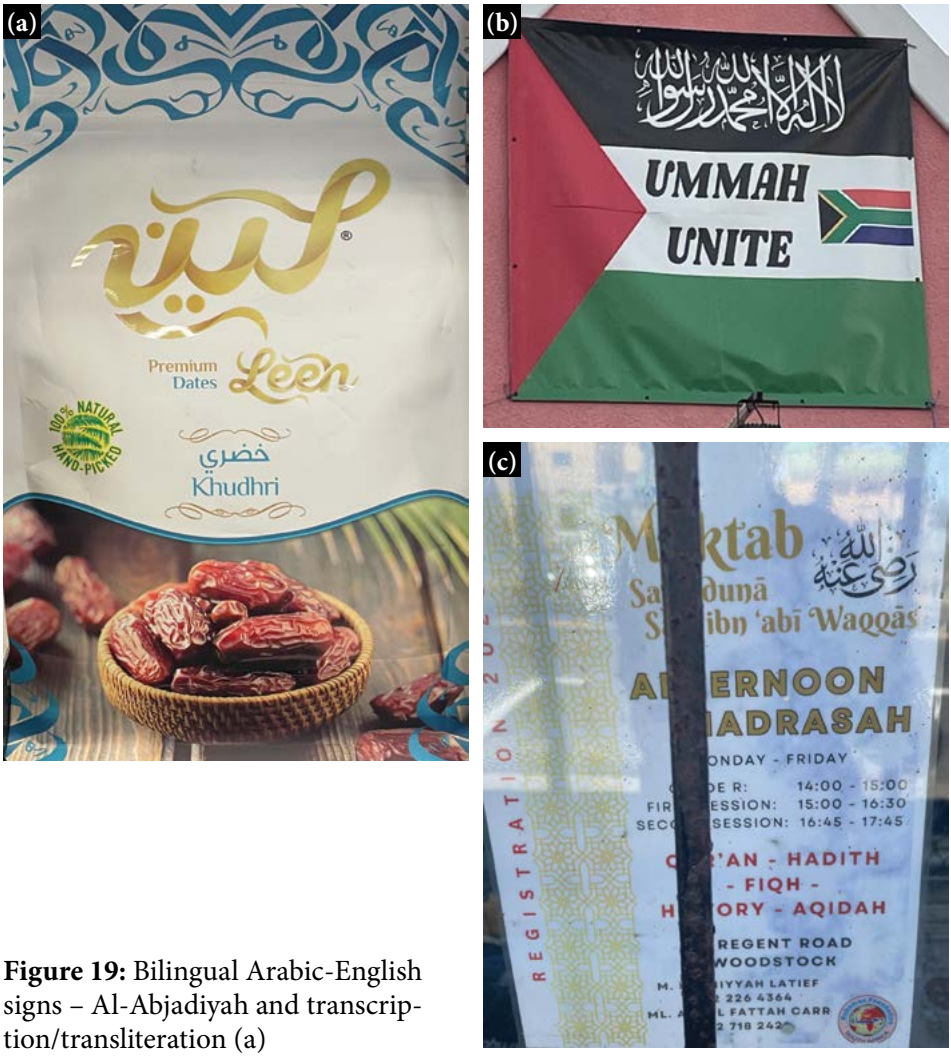

Figure 19: Bilingual Arabic-English signs – Al-Abjadiyah and transcription/transliteration (a)

urraghmaan is indeed a transcription of **عِبَادُ ٱلرَّحْمَـٰنِ**, **masjied** 'mosque' (for **مسجد**) only features in the Romanized text (see also 19.b and 19.c above).[22]

Infrequently, an Arabic text is not written in the original Arabic script but is instead codified entirely with Romanization strategies, transcriptions (as **Khenai-**

[22] The concept of a mosque is rendered symbolically by the shape of the top of a minaret containing **عِبَادُ ٱلرَّحْمَـٰنِ** written in Al-Abjadiyah.

Figure 20: Bilingual Arabic-English signs – Al-Abjadiyah and transcription/transliteration (b)

zi for **خنيزي** and **Khalas** for **خلاص** in 21.a), more or less accurate transliterations, or blends of both (as in 21.b).

Arabic can coexist with English in bilingual signs in a variety of manners. In a number of cases, English provides a full translation of the Arabic text, whether this original is codified in Al-Abjadiyah or is transcribed/transliterated (see 17.a, 18.b and 21.b above). Nevertheless, in several signs, English functions independently from Arabic (see 17.c, 17.d, and 17.e as well as 19.b and 19.c). In such instances, English may serve as the introduction or heading of a larger Arabic fragment (see 22.a below) or, on the contrary, constitutes the body of the sign, providing the main bulk of the information (22.b). Arabic may either constitute the principal part of the message (see again 22.a), convey the text of prayers that accompany the main information (22.d), or is used emblematically as a symbol (see the **حلال halaal** sign in 22.c). Alternatively, the quantitative contribution of the two languages is relatively equal. In general, bilingual Arabic-English signs tend to attest to alternational code-switching where different parts of the message are expressed in two different matrix codes: Arabic and English. In contrast, insertional code-switching is less common. For instance, in (17.e), the Arabic phatic interjection of welcoming **مَرْحَبًا** appears at the end of the English inscription which provides the grammatical (syntactic) matrix of the entire text. Some cases of insertional code-switching pertain to proper names embedded within the frame of the English language structure. See, for instance, **Lameez Superette Store** where a local variation of the Arabic proper name **لميس lamīs** [lamiːs] (originally signifying 'soft' and 'delicate') is used as the modifier of the generic English term. In the case of **حلال**, which may also be embedded within an English matrix (22.c), such insertions may be viewed as emblematic and semiotic rather than strictly linguistic. That is, a whole symbol is incorporated within an English text

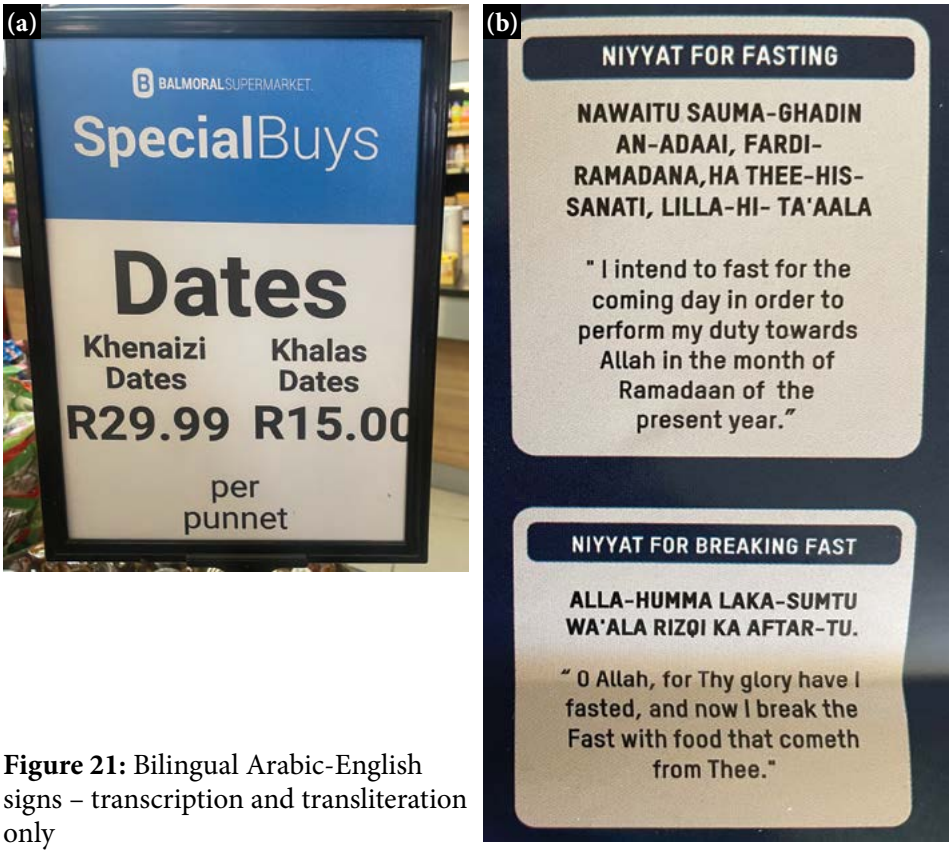

Figure 21: Bilingual Arabic-English signs – transcription and transliteration only

and recognized as such by non-Arabic speakers, including those who are unfamiliar with Al-Abjadiyah script (see the discussion above). Overall, the contribution of Arabic ranges from mono-lexical and, as I explained above, even tokenistic insertions to long fragments of literary texts with complex sentences and all type of sophisticate vocabulary.

Bilingual Arabic-English signs exhibit a great variety of supports which, as in the case of monolingual signs discussed above, can be static or movable (dynamic). Typical static supports involve external walls well as wooden, plastic, and glass boards placed on walls. Movable supports are mostly portable wooden boards and, especially commonly, cars. Signs can be imprinted on the body of the vehicle (lateral panels, bonnet, trunk, and back window) or appear on objects placed inside it. Similarly, signs can range from more permanent, e.g., those that are placed on supports that are robust (plastic, metal, concrete) to, equally common, more

Figure 22: Bilingual Arabic-English signs – manners of coexistence

Figure 23: Ethio-Semitic (Tigrinya) sign

ephemeral, e.g., those inscribed on paper (adverts, flyers, information printed on food products and labels). None of the above-mentioned support types is prevalent. Rather, all of them jointly attest to a remarkable diversity of Arabic signs in the landscape. This, in turn, reflects the variety of domains and functions in which Arabic appears in the signage.

Similar to monolingual Arabic signs, the majority of bilingual signs with Arabic are bottom-up. They have been written or placed by individuals – typically, owners of private shops, eateries, businesses, and services, as well as car drivers – because of their own decision and volition. However, the status of some signs may be regarded as fuzzy. Although their placement is not required by South African law – whether municipal, provincial or national – they have been put by leaders of certain organizations and reflect these authorities' mandates. This applies to mosques, madrasas, as well as halal associations. In doing so, these signs do not comply with local governmental policies but follow the directives of their own powers, catering to a particular community of users. Bilingual Arabic signs typically pertain to religion – either the message is extracted from religious texts such as the Qur'an or the information is related to places of worship and religious education (madrasas) – and the retail and hospitality industries (especially, food).[23]

There are no trilingual signs involving the Arabic language. The only quadrilingual sign is the sign in figure (14.b) above. As I explained in section 3.2.1, this sign, appearing on a T-shirt, contains equivalent texts in English, French, Swahili, and Arabic.

Additionally, there are 3 signs that potentially draw on the linguistic repertoire of another branch within the Semitic (Afro-Asiatic) family, namely, Ethio-Semitic languages. All these signs are bilingual. They consist of an English text which constitutes the matrix code and conveys the main bulk of the message and a Ro-

[23] After my fieldwork concluded, I noticed several new imported goods sold at the local supermarket that contained bilingual Arabic-English texts. This is the only aspect of the Arabic LL of the area that can be regarded as changeable. Nevertheless, the presence of Arabic-English signs in this establishment can itself be viewed as permanent. In other words, specific products may change, but the bilingualism of food-related signage persists.

manized Ethio-Semitic name of the city of Massawa in Eritrea (see 23). This word can be regarded as pan-Eritrean. Although it primarily reflects the form ምጽዋዕ **Meṣewāʿ(e) / Məṣṣəwaʿ** in Tigrinya, which is the most common language of the country (compare with ባጸዕ **Baṣäʿ** in Tigre, closely related to Tigrinya), highly similar variants of this name are found in other languages across Eritrea and Ethiopia as well, e.g., in Amharic (ምጽዋ **məṣəwa**) and (the local variety of) Arabic (مَصَّوَع **Maṣṣawaʿ**).[24] The Massawa signs pertain to the hospitality industry (restaurants) and appear on a permanent and static supports.

4. Discussion

The data presented in the previous section reveal the following picture: African languages recognized in the South African constitution constitute 32% of all signs collected. The languages attested are isiXhosa and occasionally other Nguni varieties (isiZulu) as well as non-standard urban varieties of isiXhosa – jointly referred to as isiNguni. Monolingual isiXhosa signs are few and always bottom-up. Nearly all bilingual signs involve English, which is one of the three official languages of the Western Cape province. The contribution of isiXhosa to isiXhosa-English signs is minimal both quantitatively and qualitatively, although examples of a more complex isiXhosa language use as well as isiXhosa-English hybrids are also found. Most bilingual signs attest to insertional code-switching with English constituting the matrix code and isiXhosa, the embedded code. While there are no bilingual signs in which isiXhosa would be accompanied by Afrikaans (the third official language of the province), there is one case of bilingualism with French. Similar to monolingual signs, bilingual signs are bottom-up. They mostly pertain to retail, hospitality, and service domains (shops, eateries, foods, and events) although some convey political messages or are used to express emotions and establish communication (graffiti). Bilingual signs involve all types of supports, i.e., both static and movable and both permanent and ephemeral. Trilingual signs, in which isiXhosa (invariably spelled according to the standard variant) cooccurs with Afrikaans and English are less common than bilingual signs, although they are well repressed too. Nearly all of them are top-down: they appear on governmental properties or inform about governmental policies instead of advertising or publicizing products and events as is typical of bilingual signs. Most trilingual sings appear on permanent and static supports. Usually, isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans texts constitute full translations (or nearly full within larger frames) with English being

[24] **Massawa** is widely used in English to refer to the city of ምጽዋዕ / ባጸዕ / مَصَّوَع and therefore could in fact be regarded as borrowing. In such a case, these examples would only be Afro-Asiatic indirectly.

the first language used in the sign and the most prominent topographically. This also means that most trilingual signs attest to alternational code switching. Overall, isiXhosa linguistic elements range from simple (mono-lexical) to complex (multiclausal sentences and their sequences).

African languages that are not recognized in the South African constitution amount to 68% of all signs. The languages of this class that are attested in signage are not native in the South African territory but emerged in the local landscape because of various migratory or (at least initially) external pressures. Two main linguistic groups of such signs have been distinguished: those that draw on Niger-Congo and those that draw on Afro-Asiatic languages.

Languages of the Niger-Congo phylum constitute 19% of signs and involve South Bantu (Shona), East Bantu (Chichewa and Swahili) and, especially prominently, Bantu languages of Congo (in particular, Lingala), as well as non-Bantu languages of West-Africa (Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio/Efik spoken in Nigeria and Akan spoken in Ghana). Bilingual signs – all of them involving English as the other language – predominate. There are very few monolingual (Igbo and Shona), trilingual (Lingala, English and French), and quadrilingual signs (Lingala, English, French, Latin and Swahili, English, French Arabic). All such mono-, bi- and trilingual signs typically pertain to the retail and hospitality domains (shops and eateries) with Niger-Congo elements referring to food names (often known in many African countries far beyond the original languages and their territories, e.g., across the entire Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ghana or West Africa more generally) and the names of establishments. Very few signs convey political messages. All signs are bottom-up. Signs may appear on both permanent and ephemeral supports; however, most of them are featured on static and semi-movable (portable boards) supports rather than properly movable ones. Except for the quadrilingual political sign on a T-shirt, no examples of translations are attested. The presence of Niger-Congo languages in signs is mostly limited to mono-lexical elements, typically nouns and noun phrases. The vast majority of signs attest to the insertional code-switching of Niger-Congo matter within the English matrix.

Afro-Asiatic signs constitute 50% of all signs. Almost all of them involve Arabic (Fuṣḥā), a member of the West/Central Semitic linguistic branch. These signs can be monolingual or, much more commonly, bilingual. The only sign involving more than two languages is the T-shirt mentioned in the previous paragraph. Arabic may appear in Al-Abjadiyah; alternatively, although less frequently, it can be rendered with Romanization strategies: transliteration or transcription. Usually, Romanization is employed to restate the text conveyed in Al-Abjadiyah, rendering the message more accessible to non-Arabic speakers. Less often, Arabic is entirely codified through Romanization. Arabic signs mostly pertain to a religious domain: the text is either religious, informs about religion-related practices, or

appears on places of worship. Somewhat less often, Arabic signs concern food and politics. The majority of monolingual and bilingual signs are bottom-up, although some exhibit a fuzzy status: while not required by municipal, regional and national policies, they are put up by the leaders of Muslim organizations and reflect these authorities' mandates. Arabic signs appear on a great variety of supports – both static and movable and both permanent and ephemeral. In bilingual texts, English may translate Arabic or both languages function independently. In the latter case, Arabic may provide the main bulk of information (both qualitatively and quantitatively) or act as a heading and an emblem. Conversely, English introduces a larger fragment written in Arabic or, on the contrary, constitutes the main bulk of a text. Arabic and English may also contribute to a sign equally. Alternational code-switching is more common than insertional code-switching. The contribution of Arabic ranges from mono-lexical and even tokenistic to long literary fragments with complex sentences and sophisticated vocabulary. Additionally, a few signs draw on an Ethio-Semitic linguistic element (most likely Tigrinya). As is typical of Arabic signs, these signs are bilingual, pertain to the hospitality (food) industry, and appear on a static permanent support. However, they instantiate an insertional code-switching type, with a Romanized Ethio-Semitic proper name embedded within the English matrix.

The evidence presented demonstrates that African languages are highly visible in the LL of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock and this visibility is patent both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Quantitatively, the number of signs collected (i.e., 126) and the number of languages involved (i.e., 12) are clear manifestations of the relevance of African languages in the LL of the area. Qualitatively, African languages featuring in the signage are varied and include Niger-Congo (from the several dialectal zones of the Bantu family as well as outside of it) – and Afro-Asiatic languages. The most common in the LL are isiXhosa (as far as South-African languages are concerned), Lingala (as far non-South-African Niger-Congo languages are concerned) and Arabic (as far as Afro-Asiatic languages are concerned). The signage that draws on African languages also exhibits a remarkable variety of physical properties. Supports are both static and movable, and both permanent and ephemeral.[25] Similarly, the signage attests to a diversity of domains and functions: the retail and hospitality industries, religion and places of worship, governmental public buildings, institutions, and amenities, as well as various services and transportation (cars). Except for trilingual signs with isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans which are top-down and some Arabic signs of mixed bottom-up/top-down nature, the signage is mostly bottom-up. Correspondingly, while in several cases, African linguistic material tends to be simple (e.g., being limited to nouns and proper names), trilingual signs with isiXhosa, English and

[25] In contrast, I was unable to document signs placed on digital and somatic supports.

Afrikaans as well as many signs drawing on Arabic exhibit complex African elements (e.g., sophisticated vocabulary, words from all lexical classes, and elaborate syntax). African languages coexist with other languages in signs of two main types: insertional code-switching and alternational code-switching. The only common instances of translations are trilingual isiXhosa-English-Afrikaans signs.

The above findings indicate that the LL of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock instantiates the LL-related trends identified across the African continent including South Africa only partially. As explained in section 2, African and South African LLs tend to be dominated by colonial languages and, as far South Africa is concerned, exhibit African linguistic elements minimally (Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009, 2010, 2012; Du Plessis, 2011; Kayam et al., 2012; Peck & Banda, 2014; Adekunle et al., 2019). Certainly, English remains the most prominent language in the signage of the three neighborhoods analyzed in my study. Signs with English texts including monolingual ones are conspicuous and prevail in all streets, buildings, shops, restaurants, cars – everywhere. In fact, the prominence of English is evident in the own data reported in section 3 as bilingual signs with English are far more common than any other types of signs – especially monolingual ones. Nevertheless, as I explained above, the presence of African languages in signage is substantial both quantitatively and qualitatively. By contrast, signs in the other colonial language, namely Afrikaans, are significantly less common that those in African languages. In addition to the trilingual isiXhosa-English-Afrikaans signs, I was only able to document less than ten monolingual Afrikaans tokens. (Pertinently, there are no bilingual isiXhosa-Afrikaans signs in my database.) Another difference concerns the types of African languages used in the signage. Contrary to other LLs in South African and Africa, the official/statal African languages, i.e., those recognized in the constitution of the country, are less visible than non-official/non-statal ones. Indeed, more than two thirds of signs draw on African languages ignored in the South African constitution. Overall, my study reveals the following hierarchy of decreasing linguistic visibility in signage: Colonial (English) → non-official/non-statal African → official/statal African → Colonial (Afrikaans).

This conspicuousness of non-official/non-statal African languages stems in large part from migratory phenomena. That is, African languages present in the LL of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock have been brought to Cape Town from other countries. This is particularly evident in the case of Niger-Congo languages. The signs written in these languages had generally been placed by first-generation migrants and their descendants. Signs containing languages spoken in Congo and Nigeria demonstrate this clearly. These signs are the most common ones among all non-South-African Niger-Congo signs. This is consistent with the fact that the two most prominent groups of migrants in South Africa originate from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria. A number of Afro-Asiatic signs (both

Ethio-Semitic and Arabic) are also attributable to migration from Eritrea/Ethiopia and Arab countries (i.e., their authors are indeed migrants or their descendants).[26] All of this is congruent with both strong and positive migration tendencies described in section 2 and the instrumental position of migration in shaping the multilingual landscapes fully recognized in LL scholarship (cf. Van Mensel et al., 2016; Shohamy, 2019).

While Arabic is a language foreign to South Africa and its presence may sometimes stem from migration, the main *raison d'être* of Arabic signage seems to be religion – the critical identity element of the Cape Maalay community. That is, in most cases, the authors and especially (targeted) recipients of Arabic signs are not migrants but rather South African Muslim citizens. Nevertheless, although Islaam is (tautologically) the foundation of the use of Arabic in the local Muslim community, the function of Arabic in the signage documented in my study is far more diverse and ranges from religious to marketing, from symbolic to communicative, and from emblematic to "authentic" (cf. Bhatt, 2023; Gu, 2024; Gu & Coluzzi, 2024; Gu & Bhatt, 2024). This diversity is attested despite the fact that Arabic lacks an official status and a (robust) native-speakers community.

The Arabic signage of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock exbibits both similarities and differences with the tendencies observed in other Arabic LLs located outside of the Arab countries. In comparison to other African countries, the use of Arabic in political signs is marginal even though attested (cf. the LL in Northern Mali where Arabic (Al-Abjadiyah) is favored by the Islamists and Tuareg independentists; Mc Laughlin, 2015). Moreover, in contrast to the LLs containing Arabic in Tanzania and Rwanda (Legère & Rosendal, 2019; see also Greeff, 1955 discussing the LL of Stellenbosch in South Africa itself), the Arabic signage of Cape Town expands far beyond areas surrounding mosques, labor migration, and strictly religious domains. As I explained above, Arabic is found in most parts of the three neighborhoods, pertains to food, retail, service, education, and culture (even if religion constitutes the foundation of such uses) and is often placed by and for local autochthonous/traditional population. Furthermore, apart from Al-Abjadiyah – present in other LLs in Africa – there are various cases of Romanization, which renders the language more accessible to non-Arabic speakers. In comparison with LLs in European and Asian countries, the Arabic signage of the three neighborhoods is mainly directed to the public who are familiar with the Muslim religion and culture (if not the Arabic language), conveying specific messages, marking identity, and reappropriating space. The relationship with "non-knowledgeable" public (especially other non-Muslim inhabitants of the area

[26] Some authors of Arabic signs originate from Arab countries located in Asia (e.g., Yemen and United Arab Emirates) as well Asiatic countries that are not Arab (Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan).

and tourists) and the use of signage for decorative and exoticizing purposes are much less relevant (compare with most LLs in Europe and Asia where the presence of Arabic targets not only the public that is familiar with the language but also that is unfamiliar with it; see *inter alia* Bogatto & Hélot, 2010). Contrary to Arabic signage present in countries with centuries-long tradition of Arabic, there are no signs that could be classified as instantiation of a "state discourse" context (Said & Rohmah, 2018). Instead, Arabic signs only attest to the "collective identity" and "commercial sign" contexts (cf. Leeman & Modan, 2010; Said & Rohmah, 2018) although, as I mentioned above, religion and identity are primary factors in commercial signage as well. However, similar to Europe and Asia, Arabic signage tends to be bottom-up rather than top-down and features significantly more often together with other languages (especially, English) than alone (cf. Gu & Bhatt, 2024). Lastly, although in none of the neighborhoods is Arabic more visible than English (compare with Gu & Bhatt, 2024), Arabic is the second-most frequent language attested in signage, employed more commonly than the two other official languages of the Western Cape province, isiXhosa and Afrikaans.

Given that except for trilingual isiXhosa-English-Afrikaans signs and a few fuzzy (bottom-up/top-down) Arabic signs, signs containing African languages are bottom-up (see above), the visibility of African languages in the signage and its highly multilingual character principally stem from (the agency of) the local communities themselves. That is, members of the various autochthonous and migrant groups reclaim the landscape of the area in which they live by marking it with linguistic material that reflects their own linguistic repertoires. Overall, the LL of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock largely coincides with the neighborhoods' soundscape – a phenomenon that is relatively uncommon in LLs across Africa.

5. Conclusion

This article studied the visibility of African languages (official/statal and non-official/non-statal as well as autochthonous/traditional and migrant/new) in the LL of three neighborhoods in Cape Town, South Africa: Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock. The empirical data presented demonstrate that African languages are highly visible in the signage of the research area, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Signs with African languages are frequent and constitute the second most common signage type after English. African signage draws on a diversified range of Niger-Congo (both Bantu and non-Bantu) and Afro-Asiatic languages, exploits various kinds of supports (both static and movable and both permanent and ephemeral), pertains to different usage domains (retail, hospitality, service and transportation industries, religion and places of worship, governmental pub-

lic buildings, institutions, and amenities) and attests to several manners of multilingual coexistence (insertional and alternational code-switching; independent texts and translations) with African linguistic elements ranging from simple to complex. The presence of non-South-African African languages in the signage is attributed to migratory pressures or has foundation in the religion-related identity of a local ethnic group. As most signs are bottom-up rather than top-down, the visibility of African languages in the signage and its distinctly multilingual character principally stem from (the agency of) the local communities themselves. Members of the autochthonous and migrant groups reclaim the landscape of the area in which they live by marking it with the linguistic material that reflects their own linguistic repertoires. Overall, the LL of Observatory, Salt River and Woodstock closely matches the neighborhoods' soundscape – a phenomenon that is quite exceptional in African LLs.

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