

Reading the City: Linguistic landscape in Qr̥ metropolis

Golden Ekpo * and Esther Paul Johnson.

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Uyo, Uyo,

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic landscape of Qr̥ metropolis, focusing on the presence of the Qr̥ language in public spaces, and its strength in the speaker's community. Using Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory as the analytical framework, the research investigates how language use in public spaces reflects identity, power, and cultural continuity within a multilingual context. The approaches used in collecting the data were field work observation, and photography. Findings reveal that while English remains the dominant language in signage, the Qr̥ language appears in several contexts, often strategically placed before English, reflecting cultural pride and a deliberate effort to sustain indigenous identity. Code-mixing patterns also highlight the dynamic interplay between traditional and modern communicative needs. These results demonstrate that public signs are not just an informational medium but a symbolic arena where language vitality and identity are negotiated. This research draws attention to the relevance of linguistic landscape studies in understanding the sociolinguistic realities of minority language communities, and offers recommendations for policy and revitalization efforts to strengthen Qr̥ language visibility.

Keywords: Linguistic landscape; Qr̥; Linguistic creativity; Linguistic signs; Language vitality

1. Introduction

Language is more than a vehicle for communication; it indexes social identities, encodes cultural values, and signals the vitality and resilience of communities. Over the years Linguistic Landscape (LL) study has evolved into a central framework for examining how languages are made visible, valued, and contested in the public space. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), LL is "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings," whose aggregate presence forms "the linguistic landscape of a given territory." This emphasis on visibility and salience has since been expanded by scholarship that treats LL as a dynamic assemblage of texts, images, and spatial practices, Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, & Barni 2010).

In multilingual settings, inclusion or conspicuous absence of particular languages on signs mirrors broader sociolinguistic dynamics: language vitality, identity construction, prestige, and language shift, Landry & Bourhis (1997); Gorter, Marten, & Van Mensel (2012). The LL thus offers an accessible evidence base for assessing policy effects, community attitudes, and the negotiated value of minority or indigenous languages vis-à-vis dominant ones. In Nigeria, where English is the lingua franca, and functions primarily as the language of education and governance, its public prominence often coexists with, competes against, or eclipses local languages. Reading public space in such contexts requires attention not only to counts of languages but also to how signs are designed, placed, and interpreted.

Contemporary LL research underscores three complementary shifts. First is the ethnographic and mobility turn, which situates signs within flows of people, goods, and discourses—foregrounding superdiversity, layered audiences, and the lived uptake of signage (Blommaert, 2013; Lou, 2016). Second is the multimodal turn, treating written language as only

* Corresponding author: Golden Ekpo

one resource among images, typography, layout, and materiality; here, visual grammar (information value, salience, framing) sharpens analysis of how signs do ideological work (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Third is a broadened policy and governance lens: public signage can enact *de facto* language policy by promoting some languages while marginalizing others (Shohamy, 2006; Shohamy et al., 2010). Together, these perspectives extend the early informational/symbolic distinction toward a richer account of how, where, and for whom languages become visible.

The Ọrọ (Akpakip Ọrọ/Ọrọ Nation) community, situated primarily in the riverine areas of Akwa Ibom (and historically connected to parts of Cross River State), speaks Ọrọ, a Cross River language within the Benue–Congo family. Political-administrative restructuring has fragmented the Ọrọ Nation across state and local government boundaries, potentially affecting language visibility, institutional support, and intergenerational transmission. Against this backdrop, LL offers a timely lens to examine how Ọrọ is displayed, with what frequency and functions, and alongside which co-occurring codes (notably English). International research on minority-language visibility (Gorter et al., 2012), cityscapes under superdiversity (Blommaert, 2013; Lou, 2016), and African urban signage (e.g., Lanza & Woldemariam, 2014) suggests that the form, placement, and audience design of signs matter as much as their sheer presence.

This article investigates the linguistic landscape of Ọrọ by surveying public signs, billboards, commercial frontage, and institutional inscriptions. It integrates geosemiotic insights on emplacement (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), visual-design analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), and policy-sensitive readings of signage (Shohamy, 2006) to assess both informational (who uses what, where) and symbolic (what value and identity are indexed) functions. By examining the distribution, design, and co-occurrence of Ọrọ English in public space, the study evaluates language vitality and the symbolic capital of Ọrọ within an evolving sociopolitical ecology. Findings aim to contribute to debates on language maintenance and identity in multilingual Nigeria, while aligning with recent LL scholarship that treats signage as a site where policy, practice, and community meanings converge (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Shohamy et al., 2010; Gorter et al., 2012).

2. The Research Problem

Although LL study has attained significant traction over past two decades, a notable geographical and thematic gap persists. Existing LL research has largely concentrated on urban centers, metropolitan hubs, and highly multilingual spaces, where the interplay of global and local languages is most visible (Backhaus, 2007; Gorter et al., 2012; Blommaert, 2013). While this urban focus has generated valuable insights, it has also left smaller communities, rural towns, and semi-urban settings underexplored, despite the fact that these spaces often host languages that are far more vulnerable to endangerment, shift, or attrition. The sociolinguistic realities of such communities—where indigenous languages contend with dominant, often exoglossic codes like English—remain poorly documented.

This study addresses that gap by providing a first-level investigation of the linguistic landscape of Ọrọ, a riverine community in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, where the indigenous Ọrọ language coexists with English. Of particular significance is the scarcity and inconsistency of formal signage in the area. Preliminary observation suggests that the Ọrọ metropolis lacks standardized visible street and road signs, especially for major routes and intersections. From a functional perspective, this absence reduces the utility of public signage for navigation and orientation. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, it reflects limited institutional investment in language visibility, potentially erasing opportunities for both indigenous and official languages to assert presence and status in the public domain.

The problem, therefore, is not only about what is present in the LL but also about what is absent. As Shohamy (2006) and Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) argue, silence and erasure in public signage can be as telling as linguistic display, revealing policy decisions, power relations, and community priorities. The aim of this research is to analyze both the patterns of language use, and the gaps in visibility across the Ọrọ public sphere, examining billboards, institutional notices, commercial signs, and street labeling. By foregrounding the coexistence and competition between Ọrọ and English, the research seeks to throw more light on language vitality, symbolic capital, and identity in a non-urban Nigerian context.

3. Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are as followings:

- To document and classify ranges of public signage in the Ọrọ metropolis, creating a foundational inventory of the community's linguistic landscape.

- To examine the sociolinguistic implications of language choice on signage, particularly as they relate to community identity, language maintenance, and the perceived status of the Qr̥ language.
- To analyze both the informational and symbolic roles of languages in signage, with attention to how they communicate meaning beyond mere denotation.
- To assess the visibility and prominence of Qr̥ language use in public spaces, and in comparison to English, in order to evaluate its ethnolinguistic vitality.

4. Research Questions

The research questions outlined below serve as a guide for this study:

- What are the types of public signage found, and documented in the Qr̥ metropolis?
- How does the choice and use of language on signage reflect the linguistic identity and perceived status of the Qr̥-speaking community?
- To what extent do the signs fulfill informational and symbolic functions within the community?
- What does the visibility and relative prominence of the Qr̥ language on signage indicate about its vitality in a multilingual environment?

5. Significance of the Study

This research holds significant theoretical and methodological importance. On a theoretical level, it directly addresses a critical gap in the existing body of linguistic landscape studies. While most scholarship has been concentrated on large, multilingual urban centers, this study shifts the focus to a smaller, non-urban locality, providing a vital perspective on how indigenous languages assert themselves in a context where they coexist with a globally dominant language like English. By documenting the visual representation of both Qr̥ and English, this research will provide empirical data that enriches our understanding of ethnolinguistic vitality and language maintenance in under-documented communities. Methodologically, this work is unique in its deliberate attention to both the presence and, importantly, the absence of public linguistic signage. The observed lack of formalized street and road signs in the Qr̥ metropolis is not merely a logistical problem; it is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that this research will analyze to understand its implications for the functional use of language and its role in community navigation and identity.

The findings also carry significant practical implications. The data and analysis generated from this research can serve as a foundational resource for local and regional policymakers, urban planners, and cultural preservationists. By highlighting the ways in which language is used and the challenges related to linguistic visibility, this work provides a basis for informed decisions regarding language policy, signage standardization, and efforts to promote the Qr̥ language in public spaces. Ultimately, this research contributes to a broader understanding of language as a key factor in identity construction and community vitality, not just in the Qr̥ nation but in similar localities facing similar sociolinguistic dynamics globally.

6. Research Methodology

6.1. Research Design

A qualitative research design is employed in this study, utilizing an observational and descriptive approach, focused on the linguistic landscape of the Qr̥ metropolis. This design is optimal for analyzing the nuanced social and cultural dynamics embedded within public texts. The core of this research is a systematic, empirical collection of data to document and interpret language use in public spaces.

The primary data collection method is photographic documentation. A comprehensive corpus of public signage was systematically gathered through purposive street-by-street walks across key commercial, residential, and institutional areas of the Qr̥ metropolis. All signs were captured, including, but not limited to, commercial signs, street names, road signs, public notices on government buildings, and advertising billboards. Each photograph was meticulously tagged with contextual details such as location, sign type, and the languages present.

The analysis of this visual data will follow a descriptive framework. The photographs will be categorized according to the type of sign, and the language(s) displayed (Qr̥, English, or both). The analysis will then proceed in two main phases: a quantitative description of the frequency of each language and sign type, and a deeper qualitative analysis of the symbolic and informational functions of the signs. This analytical approach will allow for a thorough examination of

language choice and its implications for ethnolinguistic vitality, providing a rich, contextualized understanding of the sociolinguistic realities of the community.

6.2. Method and Tools of Data Collection

The method of data collection used in this work were the combination of systematic photographic documentation with qualitative semi-structured interviews. This dual approach was adopted to give a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic landscape, capturing both visual data of public signs and the sociolinguistic motivations behind the language choices.

The primary data corpus was a visual database of public signs, created through photographic documentation of the Orq metropolis. A systematic, street-by-street survey was conducted across key commercial, residential, and institutional areas to ensure a broad and representative sample of linguistic artifacts. Each photograph captured public texts, including but not limited to, road signs, billboards, commercial shop names, and public notices.

To supplement the visual data, this study made use of semi-structured interviews, conducted with a small, purposively selected group of locals, including business owners and residents. These interviews were designed to elicit contextual information and personal perspectives on language choice, providing insight into the symbolic and social functions of the languages used in the public space.

The instruments used for data collection included a digital camera for photographic documentation, a voice recorder to accurately transcribe interview data, and a pen and notepad for field notes and contextual observations.

6.3. Review of Related Literature

Linguistic Landscape (LL) has become a significant field in sociolinguistic research, with its origins traceable to the late 1970s. During this period, LL was largely conceived as a practical tool for mapping linguistic and geographical boundaries in multilingual societies. This was especially evident in contexts of sociopolitical tension, such as Belgium and the Canadian province of Quebec, where language policies on public signs became mechanisms for asserting identity and demarcating territorial claims. In these regions, the use of language observed in public spaces was not just functional but symbolic, reflecting underlying issues of power, status, and cultural negotiation. This initial emphasis on public signage and official notices situates LL squarely within the broader fields of language planning and policy, where regulation of language is tied to questions of governance and identity.

A critical turning point came with the work of Landry and Bourhis (1997), who are widely known as the pioneers of modern LL research. Their study offered what remains one of the most influential definitions of linguistic landscape, emphasizing the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs. They highlighted two complementary functions of LL. The informational function reveals the linguistic composition of a given environment, serving as a form of sociolinguistic mapping by displaying which languages are spoken and their relative vitality. On the other hand, the symbolic function captures psychological and social impact of the display of language, especially for the minority groups. The presence or absence of a language in the public sphere can strengthen feelings of belonging, identity, and power, or signal exclusion and marginalization respectively. This distinction has been central to subsequent studies seeking to understand the role of LL in shaping community dynamics.

As the field matured, scholars began to broaden the focus of LL beyond traditional, static signage. Dailey et al. (2005) argued for an expanded conceptualization that includes not only written signs but also oral and mediated language forms. They pointed out that the linguistic character of a neighborhood or city is also reflected in advertisements, television broadcasts, conversations in public spaces, and even classroom discourse, all of which contribute to the public linguistic environment. Similarly, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) refined the scope by emphasizing that LL encompasses signs inside buildings as well as those outside. Notices and directives within schools, hospitals, government offices, and corporate buildings form part of the linguistic ecology and should not be overlooked. Gorter (2006) advanced the field by arguing that LL should also be seen as a representation of broader social processes, including identity formation, globalization, and cultural revitalization. For example, English on a sign may not simply indicate language use but may symbolize global connectivity and modernity, while the reappearance of a minority language in public spaces can represent community resilience and pride.

The theoretical foundations of LL have also been enriched by approaches from semiotics and multimodal analysis. The concept of geosemiotics was introduced by Scollon (2003) which explores how meaning is created not just by language but by its physical placement and interaction with the environment. The geographic positioning of signs can index specific communities or evoke broader sociocultural meanings; for instance, a Japanese-language sign in New York City

might mark a local Japanese community or create a sense of authenticity or cultural taste for outsiders. Similarly, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) contributed the grammar of visual design, which moves the analysis beyond written language to the entire visual composition of a sign. They highlighted elements such as information value (e.g., left/right, top/bottom positioning conveys different meanings such as known vs. new), salience (elements made prominent through color, size, or placement), and framing (lines or borders grouping elements to indicate relationships). These perspectives allow LL studies to address not just what languages are visible but how they are visually and spatially represented.

The consolidation of LL as a scholarly field is marked by several key monographs. Backhaus (2007) produced the first book-length study dedicated exclusively to LL, presenting a general framework that considers who creates signs, who reads them, and how multiple languages interact within a single space. His work provides meaningful understanding of the dynamics of multilingualism and language contact in urban environments. Shohamy (2006) further broadened the significance of LL by linking it to language policy, arguing that public signage is not a neutral reflection of language use but often a deliberate tool of governance. Through official signs, governments and institutions can promote certain languages while marginalizing others, shaping not only linguistic practices but also social hierarchies and power structures.

6.4. Theoretical Framework: Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory

Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV) Theory offers a robust lens for understanding how languages survive, thrive, or decline in multilingual settings. Vitality refers to “that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinct and active collective entity in intergroup settings” (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977, p. 308). In other words, it describes the strength of an ethnolinguistic community’s ability to maintain its language and identity within a competitive linguistic environment.

The theory identifies three key socio-structural dimensions of objective vitality—demography, institutional support, and status—as well as a complementary dimension of subjective vitality, which relates to perceptions and attitudes (Bourhis, Giles, & Rosenthal, 1981; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Ehala, 2015). Together, these factors help to explain why some language communities are resilient, while others experience decline or shift.

6.4.1. Demographic Factors

Demography concerns the size, concentration, and distribution of a language community. Variables include population size, geographic spread, birth and death rates, migration patterns, and intermarriage (Moring, Viberg, & Hult, 2011). Generally, larger, more geographically concentrated communities enjoy stronger vitality, while those facing dispersal or significant outmigration are more vulnerable to language shift (Giles et al., 1977). Importantly, perceived demographic changes—such as the influx of outsiders or shrinking speaker populations—can also influence intergroup attitudes and policies (Ehala, 2010).

6.4.2. Institutional Support

The term institutional support relates to the level in which a language community is represented and empowered in societal structures (Harwood, Giles, & Bourhis, 1994). This encompasses both formal domains (e.g., government, education, media, religion, business, cultural organizations) and informal domains (e.g., grassroots activism, pressure groups, cultural networks). A language gains vitality when it has visibility and decision-making power within institutions, while lack of institutional recognition often correlates with linguistic marginalization (Hogan-Brun & O’Rourke, 2019).

6.4.3. Status

Status relates to the prestige, acceptability, and economic or cultural value of a language within and beyond its community (Giles et al., 1977). This includes sociohistorical factors (e.g., legacy of colonization), economic roles (e.g., access to employment), and cultural recognition. Languages perceived as low-status often suffer reduced intergenerational transmission, while high-status languages are more readily learned and maintained (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

6.4.4. Subjective Vitality

To complement these structural indicators, according to Bourhis et al. (1981), subjective vitality, refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and identities of speakers. Communities with strong group identity, pride in their language, and positive attitudes toward its use are more likely to maintain vitality, even when structural support is weak (Ehala, 2015). Conversely, negative attitudes or internalized stigma can accelerate language shift.

7. Data Presentation

7.1. Commercial Signage

These includes: shop names, market stalls and, business names/banners.

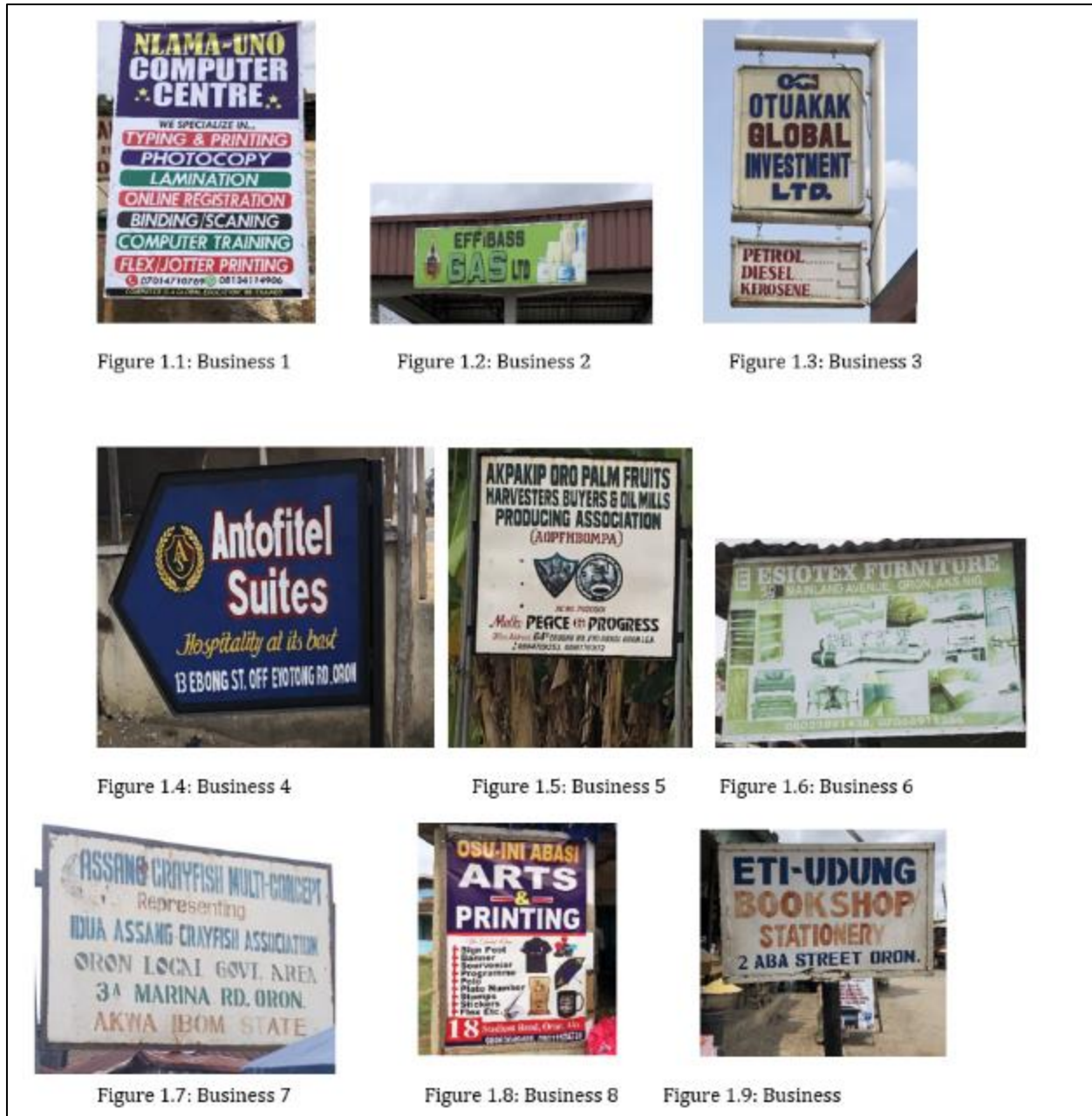


Figure 1 Business names/banners.

7.2. Institutional Signage

These includes: Schools, churches, and government offices/properties.



Figure 1.10: Institution 1



Figure 1.11: Institution 2



Figure 1.12: Institution 3



Figure 1.13: Institution 4



Figure 1.14: Institution 5



Figure 1.15: Institution 6



Figure 1.16: Institution 7



Figure 1.17: Institution 8



Figure 1.18: Institution 9



Figure 1.19: Institution 10

Figure 2 Institutions

7.3. Directional Signage

This includes: Street names, place names, and road signs.



Figure 1.20: Direction 1



Figure 1.21: Direction 2



Figure 1.22: Direction 3



Figure 1.23: Direction 4



Figure 1.24: Direction 5



Figure 1.25: Direction 6



Figure 1.26: Direction 7



Figure 1.27: Direction 8



Figure 1.28: Direction 9



Figure 1.29: Direction 10



Figure 1.30: Direction 11



Figure 1.31: Direction 12

Figure 3 Directions

8. Data Analysis

The linguistic landscape of Qr̩q metropolis presents a rich interplay between indigenous identity, modernization, and multilingual realities. Data collected from the field reveal a wide range of signage types, each reflecting different social, cultural, and functional purposes. These can be broadly classified as follows:

8.1. Commercial signs

Commercial signage in Qr̩q community serves as a rich linguistic evidence which reflect the intersection of language, culture, identity, and commerce in public space. These signs, which include shop names, market stall inscriptions, business banners, and branded labels, are more than just commercial markers—they are deeply embedded in the socio-linguistic fabric of the community. Their presence in retail spaces, open markets, and commercial hubs provides insight into how language is adapted and repurposed for local communication, identity expression, and economic engagement.

One of the most prominent linguistic patterns observed in these signs is the predominance of English. As Nigeria's official language, which is also the main medium of formal education, English is often used in signage to project professionalism, modernity, and broad accessibility. Business owners rely on its communicative power to attract customers across linguistic and ethnic divides, especially in urban and semi-urban areas where diverse groups interact. This functional use of English is evident in signs advertising services such as "typing," "photocopy," and "computer training," as seen in Figure 1.1 (MLAMA-UNO COMPUTER CENTRE). These terms are not only standardized and widely understood but also carry connotations of technical competence and educational value, which are highly prized in a community that is increasingly oriented toward digital literacy and entrepreneurship.

Despite the predominance of English, commercial signage in Qr̩q also displays a remarkable degree of linguistic creativity and localization. One striking feature is the use of blended or coined names that often incorporate personal or indigenous elements. For example, the name "Effibass" in Figure 1.2 (EFFIBASS GAS LTD) represents a fusion of two personal names—Effiong and Bassey—illustrating how entrepreneurs embed personal identity into their business branding. This practice not only reinforces ownership and authenticity but also resonates with local naming customs, where names often carry historical, familial, or ethnic significance. Similarly, names like "Esiotex" in Figure 1.6 (ESIOTEX FURNITURE) exhibit creative lexical formations, potentially drawing from local languages or invented structures that make the brand name distinctive while maintaining a modern or professional feel.

Another notable characteristic is the use of abbreviations and acronyms to denote place and national identity. In Figure 1.6, the abbreviations "AKS" (Akwa Ibom State) and "NIG" (Nigeria) appear to indicate business location, but also subtly assert regional and national belonging. These abbreviations, while rooted in formal postal or administrative usage, have become commonplace in commercial texts, pointing to a localized language economy where formal and informal linguistic registers blend seamlessly. This dual function—communicative and symbolic—demonstrates how public sign do not just serve as a tool for business visibility but as a medium for articulating place identity.

Furthermore, the content of these signs often goes beyond naming to include detailed lists of services. This points to a pragmatic communicative style aimed at informing and persuading potential customers. In Figure 1.1, for instance, services like lamination, printing, and computer training are explicitly listed. By clearly stating such offerings, business owners ensure clarity and transparency, especially in competitive market environments where visibility and service differentiation are crucial. This descriptive approach also reflects oral traditions of direct communication, repurposed in written form for the public space.

Therefore, the commercial signs of the Qr̩q community reflect a layered linguistic environment where global, national, and local influences converge. Through their textual content, stylistic choices, and naming practices, these signs contribute to the visual and linguistic identity of the community. They highlight how language in public space is not static but constantly evolving to reflect the cultural values, economic aspirations, and social dynamics of the people who produce and engage with it.

8.2. Institutional Signs

Institutional signs in the Qr̩q community have a major impact on the development of linguistic landscape, especially in how they convey identity, authority, and community values. These signs are commonly found on the premises of schools, churches, health centers, and government establishments. Characteristically, they display a formal tone and

predominantly make use of English, the official language of Nigeria. However, in some cases, elements of the indigenous Qr̩ language may appear to assert local ownership and cultural identity.

An analysis of the data reveals that institutional signages mostly favor English, reflecting both formality and a desire to be accessible to a broader audience. For example, Figure 1.10 features the sign for ONYIEME GROUP OF SCHOOLS, located at *ONYIEME CRESCENT, UYA-ORO, ORON, AKS*. The sign lists the tiers of education offered—*Nursery, Primary, and Secondary*—in a straightforward and hierarchical manner. Although the content is entirely in English, the inclusion of local toponyms such as *Uya-Oro* and *Oron* embeds the sign within its immediate cultural geography, subtly reflecting the school's rootedness in the local community.

Figure 1.12, which shows signage for ARITA JOHN EXCLUSIVE INT'L SCHOOLS, adds a promotional element through its branding. Phrases like "*Exclusive*" and "*Int'l*" (International) suggest prestige and global standards. The school's motto, *Knowledge is Life*, conveys a universal educational value, while the phrase *Government Approved* enhances the institution's legitimacy. This sign, like others, uses only English but is packed with indicators of status, approval, and aspiration, reflecting the community's engagement with modern education and its associated prestige.

Church signage also has a crucial part in the institutional linguistic landscape. In Figure 1.16, THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH sign includes a specific assembly name—*WONDERLAND ASSEMBLY*—and a detailed address: *11B ISANGEDIGHI LANE, ORON, AKS*. The naming convention here merges formal religious identity with a locally appealing and perhaps youth-oriented designation (*Wonderland*), which could reflect an effort to attract specific demographic groups. Again, the use of English dominates, although local names like *Isangedighi* situate the sign within the Qr̩ sociocultural space.

Figure 1.28 shows the signage for THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD, *Akwa Ibom Province 4, Garden of Peace Parish*. This sign includes a schedule of weekly activities—*Digging Deep, Faith Clinic, and Sunday Service*—which are common terms within Pentecostal Christian circles. These terms are metaphorical and spiritually evocative, reflecting the linguistic culture of the religious group. The entire sign is in English, which aligns with the church's broad reach and likely mixed congregation. However, local place references again anchor it within the community.

Across all these examples, a pattern emerges: English is the dominant medium of communication, chosen for its formal tone, wider communicability, and association with education and religion. The occasional appearance of local names (e.g., *Uya-Oro, Isangedighi*) demonstrates an underlying layer of local identity, though the indigenous Qr̩ language itself is notably absent from these particular signs. This suggests a tension—or perhaps a balancing act—between projecting modernity and maintaining local cultural roots.

In essence, institutional signs in the Qr̩ community reflect a complex interplay between formality, accessibility, identity, and aspiration. While English is for institutional communication by default, local names and references act as subtle markers of community ownership. The minimal presence of the Qr̩ language in these signs may point to broader sociolinguistic dynamics where English dominates formal domains, while indigenous languages are reserved for more intimate or informal contexts.

8.3. Directional signs

Directional signs serve as critical tools for spatial orientation, wayfinding, and territorial demarcation in public spaces. In the Qr̩ community, these signs include street names, place names, and institutional direction indicators such as those pointing to churches, hospitals, and motor parks. More than just navigation aids, these signs often function as markers of local heritage and collective memory, especially where indigenous names are preserved.

A key feature of directional signage in the Qr̩ context is the retention of indigenous toponyms. For instance, Figure 1.20, which displays OKPO ESUHUKOWU STREET, exemplifies the use of an indigenous name in a formal urban context. This naming practice serves not only a functional purpose but also an important cultural one—it preserves oral history and connects residents to ancestral lineage and traditional social structures. Similarly, Figure 1.24, showing NDUONYI EKANG STREET, ORON, continues this trend. The sign, mounted on an iron post with a pointed end indicating direction, visually emphasizes both purpose and location. The preservation of such indigenous names in official signage reinforces the visibility of Qr̩ linguistic and cultural identity in public space.

Figure 1.26 shows 1 ELEI STREET, another example of a name rooted in local language and history. While the sign is affixed to a private residence, its public-facing nature and function as an address marker make it part of the wider linguistic landscape. These kinds of street signs often function as micro-toponyms—place names that may hold

historical, social, or familial significance for local inhabitants, particularly in tightly-knit communities like those in the Qr̥ area.

In addition to street and place names, other directional signs serve broader institutional or civic functions. Figure 1.27, simply labeled Motor Park, marks the presence of a transport hub. Although it uses English, the sign is installed by the government and reflects the functional infrastructure of the community. The term “Motor Park” itself is a uniquely Nigerian English expression, signifying a localized variety of English used in signage and informal communication.

Figure 1.28 displays the sign IQUITA-ORO, situated at the entrance to the town. This sign serves as both a directional and identificatory marker, denoting the geographic boundary of the Iquita-Oro area. The use of the indigenous name in a government-sanctioned signpost emphasizes local identity and legitimizes the historical ownership of the space by its indigenous people.

Other directional signs point to essential public services and are often accompanied by symbolic imagery. For instance, Figure 1.30, marked CHURCH, is a government-installed signpost that includes an icon of a church building, providing both textual and visual direction to a place of worship. Similarly, Figure 1.32, labeled HOSPITAL, features the image of a hospital bed to indicate proximity to a medical facility. These signs, though brief and purely functional, are vital in assisting both locals and visitors with navigation. The use of English in these cases aligns with their public utility and is intended to ensure broad comprehension.

Across these examples, it is evident that directional signs in the Qr̥ community exhibit a dual linguistic character: while English is commonly used for accessibility, there is a strong and deliberate inclusion of indigenous place names. This incorporation of Qr̥ toponyms is a subtle but powerful assertion of local identity and cultural presence. These signs serve as everyday affirmations of heritage, embedding collective memory in the built environment.

8.4. Handwritten and informal notices

Handwritten and informal notices represent a distinct layer of the linguistic landscape, often overlooked due to their temporary and improvised nature. However, they offer valuable insight into spontaneous language practices, community-level communication, and grassroots entrepreneurship. In the Qr̥ community, such notices are typically found pasted on walls, scrawled on fences, or painted on pillars. Though informal, they are powerful indicators of localized language use, literacy practices, and socio-economic realities.

Figure 1.23 captures two such handwritten signs, each advertising services in the community. The first reads: “Plaztring House Co Ltd (and at the bottom come) Contact HERE 09044924402.” The second states: “Call Eng Solution for Both Electrical & Solar installation with maintenance 09165576901.” These notices are clearly informal, both in their visual presentation and linguistic structure. The use of handwriting (likely with marker or paint) and the placement of the signs in public spaces suggest a do-it-yourself approach to advertising, commonly used by small-scale service providers and tradespeople.

Linguistically, these notices reflect non-standard grammar and orthography. For example, the phrase “Plaztring House Co Ltd (and at the bottom come)” appears to be an attempt at branding or a company name, but the syntax and phrasing are unclear. Similarly, the word “Plaztring” may be a misspelling or localized variation of “Plastering,” and the phrase “at the bottom come” lacks grammatical clarity, possibly resulting from limited formal literacy or a direct translation from an indigenous language structure. Despite these irregularities, the core message is communicated effectively: services are available, and contact numbers are provided.

The second notice — “Call Eng Solution for Both Electrical & Solar installation with maintenance” — is more coherent but still reflects informal structuring. The abbreviation “Eng” for “Engineer” and the combination of “Electrical & Solar” installations signal technical services tailored to community needs. This sign, like the first, bypasses institutional channels and operates within the informal economy. The absence of punctuation and inconsistent capitalization are typical of grassroots signage, where the primary concern is immediacy and visibility rather than grammatical precision.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, such handwritten notices highlight the entrepreneurial spirit of individuals operating outside formal business frameworks. They also reveal adaptive language practices, where English is employed as a lingua franca despite evident variation in proficiency. These signs suggest that English maintains high functional value in the public domain, even when used informally or idiosyncratically. Furthermore, the strategic placement of such signs — in visible public spots — reflects an understanding of local communication networks, where visibility equates to outreach.

While Ọrọ language does not appear in these particular examples, the overall tone, structure, and even phrasing may be influenced by local speech patterns or direct translations from indigenous languages. These signs, therefore, occupy a hybrid linguistic space where informal English interacts with local communicative norms.

8.5. Demographic Factor in the Linguistic Landscape of Ọrọ Metropolis

The demographic composition of Ọrọ metropolis plays a pivotal role in shaping its linguistic landscape. As the third largest city in Akwa Ibom State after Uyo and Eket, Ọrọ holds historical and cultural significance, with a 2006 census population of approximately 156,461 and a landmass of about 70 km². Although the National Population Commission's 2022 projection estimates a decline to around 111,300 residents, likely due to demographic shifts such as migration and changes in fertility rates, the community remains linguistically cohesive. Ọrọ metropolis encompasses six distinct subgroups: Idua, Okobo, Effiat-Mbo, Ebughu, Enwang, and Ọrọ Ukpabang. Despite internal dialectal differences, the Ọrọ variety spoken in the metropolis—particularly in the urban center of Ọrọ—is regarded as the standard form. This linguistic centrality strengthens the role of Ọrọ as a cultural and communicative anchor in the city.

The demographic dominance of native Ọrọ speakers ensures the vitality and public visibility of the language, including signage. While some groups like the Idua (Assang) are bilingual in Efik, their smaller population size means that Ọrọ remains the predominant local language. The subtle presence of Efik contributes to a low-level multilingual atmosphere without threatening the dominance of Ọrọ. Consequently, signs in the metropolis often feature Ọrọ alongside English, reflecting a demographic landscape that supports bilingual signage rooted in both linguistic pride and practical communication. The population structure, therefore, not only reinforces the use of Ọrọ in everyday life but also ensures its continued presence in the semiotic fabric of the community.

8.6. Institutional Support and Language Visibility in Ọrọ

While Ọrọ maintains a strong presence within the community through interpersonal communication and cultural practices, it suffers from a notable lack of institutional support. Unlike major national or regional languages, there is no formal teaching of Ọrọ in schools, neither is it a language of instruction. Instead, English as the Nigeria's official language dominates formal domains such as education, governance, and mass media. This linguistic imbalance creates a generational shift, where younger Ọrọ speakers, particularly students, receives greater exposure to English literacy and its communication practices. The exclusion of Ọrọ in structured learning environments reduces opportunities for formal literacy in the language, weakening its long-term transmission.

Institutional use of Ọrọ remains minimal and largely symbolic, confined to oral contexts such as cultural festivals, traditional ceremonies, and informal community gatherings. Government communication, public announcements, and official signage are almost exclusively in English, further marginalizing Ọrọ in the public domains. Consequently, the visibility of Ọrọ in the linguistic landscape relies heavily on grassroots and community-led efforts. Signage, in particular, becomes a crucial site for symbolic resistance and identity affirmation, where the inclusion of Ọrọ—often alongside English—acts as a form of cultural assertion in the face of institutional neglect. Without formal recognition or policy backing, the survival and visibility of Ọrọ in public spaces rest on the resilience of its speakers and their deliberate use of the Ọrọ language in everyday life.

8.7. The Status of Ọrọ in Linguistic Landscape

The Ọrọ language status in the public sphere is best characterized as community-bound, identity-driven, and symbolically significant. While it does not enjoy official recognition or widespread institutional backing, Ọrọ remains deeply rooted in the cultural and linguistic consciousness of its speakers. Its primary function is intra-ethnic communication, serving as a vital tool for reinforcing community cohesion and expressing heritage. In linguistic landscape, Ọrọ performs informational as well as symbolic roles. Informationally, it appears in street names and place identifiers, such as *Elei Street*, *Okpo Esuhukowi Street*, and *Nduonyi Ekang Street*, helping to preserve indigenous nomenclature and anchor physical spaces in local cultural memory. Symbolically, its use in business signage and public displays asserts ownership, cultural pride, and identity.

In contrast, English dominates formal and official domains—government signage, institutional communication, education, and public services—highlighting a diglossic relationship between the two languages. English serves high-prestige, official functions, while Ọrọ maintains cultural relevance and social authenticity in informal and localized settings. This diglossia is not merely functional but also ideological, as the choice of language in signage often reflects deeper societal values and power structures.

Notable examples of Qr̥'s symbolic deployment include commercial and associative signage such as *Unwana-Qr̥ Christian Missionary Centre*, *Nlama-Uno Computer Center*, and *Otuakak Global Investment Ltd*. In these cases, the inclusion of Qr̥ not only marks geographical affiliation but also builds trust and cultural alignment with local clients. More striking are signs like *Assang Crayfish Multi-Concept* at the traditional beach market, which signals both economic specialization and cultural rootedness. Similarly, the lengthy indigenous name *Akpakip Qr̥ Palm Fruit Harvesters, Buyers, and Oil Mills Producing Association (AOPFHBOMPA)* reflects how Qr̥ is leveraged within local economic networks to signify exclusivity, cultural legitimacy, and community prestige.

These practices show that despite lacking formal status, Qr̥ maintains functional relevance and visible presence in the public sphere through community-led initiatives. By embedding the language into street signs, business names, and associative titles, the Qr̥ people actively sustain its presence in daily life. The language's symbolic capital ensures that it remains a meaningful part of the public semiotic landscape, even in a context where English holds institutional dominance.

8.8. Subjective Vitality of Qr̥ in the Linguistic Landscape

Despite its relatively limited institutional visibility, Qr̥ demonstrates strong subjective vitality, a measure of how speakers perceive the strength, relevance, and prestige pertaining to their language. The deliberate use of Qr̥ in signage reflects a conscious community effort to maintain cultural identity and affirm linguistic heritage within the urban environment. Even where English dominates formal signage, the presence of Qr̥ signals a deep-rooted sense of pride and belonging. This is evident in many bilingual signs where Qr̥ elements precede their English counterparts, suggesting not just linguistic coexistence but a symbolic assertion of precedence. Examples include *Eti-Udung Bookshop*, *Osu-ini Abasi Arts and Printing*, and *Etiedu International Schools*, where Qr̥ names or phrases form the primary identifiers, anchoring the businesses in the local linguistic and cultural context.

The Ethnologue (2025) classifies Qr̥ as a stable language, meaning that it remains widely spoken and transmitted across generations despite the dominance of English in official and educational settings. This classification aligns with observable linguistic practices in the Qr̥ metropolis, where the language maintains social prestige and is actively used in communal and commercial domains.

Additionally, Qr̥ signage often reflects linguistic creativity and innovation, as seen in modern coinages and hybrid brand names. For instance, *Esiotex Furniture* derives from the personal name *Esio*, merged with a stylized suffix to give it a commercial feel. *Antofitel Suites* blends *Anwana Ntofon* with an Englishized hotel suffix, while *EffiBass* compresses the names *Effiong Bassey* into a compact brand identity. These examples showcase the speakers' ability to adapt their language to modern economic and branding needs, blending tradition with contemporary expression. Such naming practices reflect not only linguistic vitality but also a cultural adaptability that allows Qr̥ to remain relevant in an increasingly globalized linguistic space.

9. Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study demonstrate that the practice of using Qr̥ in public signage within the Qr̥ metropolis is far from incidental. Rather, it is a deliberate and multidimensional strategy that reflects cultural identity, fosters language preservation, and navigates the pressures of modernization. In a context where English dominates institutional and formal communication, the visible presence of Qr̥—especially in business signage and place names—signals a community-led resistance to linguistic erosion and a proactive assertion of heritage.

One of the most striking patterns emerging from the data is the symbolic function of indigenous naming in the commercial sector. Business owners often choose Qr̥ names not merely as labels, but as carriers of meaning, cultural wisdom, and spiritual conviction. Names such as *Otuakak Global Investment Ltd* ("If it is difficult for man, it is not difficult for God") and *Osu-ini Abasi Arts and Printing* ("God's time has come") convey deeply rooted values of faith, patience, and divine providence. These linguistic choices are not only expressions of personal belief but also reflections of collective cultural philosophy. Similarly, *Unwana-Qr̥ Christian Missionary Centre* ("The light of Qr̥"), established in a location historically associated with darkness (*Ekim*), is a deliberate metaphor for spiritual and communal renewal. Even educational institutions, such as *Etiedu International School* ("Good behavior"), embed moral aspirations within their names, aligning academic identity with local ethical frameworks.

These examples show how the linguistic landscape becomes a space where Qr̥ speakers assert both economic agency and cultural identity. By inscribing Qr̥ on shopfronts, signboards, and organizational titles, community members participate in the preservation and normalization of their language in public space. This practice is particularly

significant in the face of growing language shift pressures, as younger generations are increasingly educated in English and exposed to external cultural influences. The visibility of Qr̥ in everyday environments acts as a counterbalance, reinforcing its relevance and keeping it in circulation not only among native speakers but also among non-indigenes who interact with these signs. Often, this interaction prompts curiosity, pronunciation attempts, and even informal learning, thereby extending the reach of the language beyond its core community.

Signage in the Qr̥ metropolis, therefore, serves a dual function: it facilitates economic communication and simultaneously acts as a vehicle for cultural transmission. Each indigenous name carries a narrative, a worldview, or a value that educates as much as it identifies. These semiotic elements, displayed in urban and semi-urban spaces, ensure that Qr̥ remains visible, meaningful, and influential, even in the absence of formal institutional support. In this way, business owners and community members become cultural ambassadors, using commercial platforms to perform acts of linguistic and cultural preservation.

10. Conclusion

Language visibility in public spaces, particularly through signage, provides a crucial lens for assessing the ethnolinguistic vitality of a community. It reflects more than communicative intent—it reveals underlying dynamics of identity, cultural prestige, power relations, and efforts toward heritage preservation. This study of the linguistic landscape in the Qr̥ metropolis demonstrates that, while English clearly dominates institutional and interethnic domains—as the language of education, governance, and official discourse—Qr̥ maintains a visible and symbolically charged presence. This presence is not incidental; it is the result of deliberate community-driven choices to assert cultural ownership, affirm identity, and resist linguistic homogenization.

A particularly significant finding is the pattern of code-mixing and hierarchical bilingualism on signage. In many cases, Qr̥ precedes English, positioning the indigenous language as the primary marker of meaning while English functions as a secondary, wider-access tool. This ordering reveals a subtle but meaningful assertion of linguistic pride and local precedence. Rather than passively succumbing to English dominance, speakers are actively negotiating space for Qr̥ within the semiotic landscape of modern urban life.

The use of Qr̥ in signage—across business names, street markers, institutional labels, and creative coinages—serves a dual communicative role. On one level, it conveys practical information; on another, it encodes cultural narratives, values, and worldviews. Names such as *Otuakak Global Investment Ltd* (“If it is difficult for man, it is not difficult for God”) and *Unwana-Qr̥ Christian Missionary Centre* (“The light of Qr̥”) not only identify locations or institutions but articulate spiritual beliefs, community aspirations, and collective memory. In this way, language becomes a powerful semiotic resource, projecting indigenous identity and connecting the past with the present.

Beyond its communicative and symbolic roles, signage in Qr̥ also serves a preservationist function. In an era where globalization, migration, and formal education systems increasingly promote English usage, the deliberate embedding of Qr̥ into everyday public contexts helps sustain its relevance. Signboards, shopfronts, and street names act as informal language tools—teaching pronunciation, meanings, and cultural references to younger generations and non-indigenous residents. This grassroots strategy contributes to informal language learning and helps extend Qr̥'s reach beyond its native speaker base.

However, the study also reveals a critical gap in institutional support for Qr̥. The language remains largely absent from formal education, official governance, and mainstream media. This institutional neglect renders Qr̥ vulnerable in the long term, making its visibility in public spaces largely dependent on community will and individual agency. While such grassroots efforts are admirable, they are insufficient on their own to guarantee intergenerational transmission. There is, therefore, a pressing need for language planning and policy interventions—including curriculum development, local media inclusion, and cultural promotion—to reinforce Qr̥'s vitality in both formal and informal domains.

In conclusion, public signage in Qr̥ metropolis operates as more than just directional or commercial markers—it is a symbolic arena where language ideologies, identity, and resistance are played out. While English remains the language of modernity and state function, the persistent, intentional appearance of Qr̥ reflects a living tradition and a community's resolve to remain visible, relevant, and proud. This study reaffirms that language use in public signage is not merely functional—it is ideological, strategic, and deeply rooted in the lived experiences of its speakers.

Compliance with ethical standards

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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