

Themes in Motion: Exploring the Linguistic Landscape of Kumasi with Cultural Spectacles

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ABSTRACT

Inscriptions on vehicles are common in Ghana. However, the themes dominating these inscriptions have received less attention in Ghana's linguistics literature. The present study explores the linguistic landscape of Ghana to elucidate how the Akan culture is reflected in the various themes that dominate in Akan monolingual signages on commercial vehicles. Photographic images of the texts were taken at different research locations within the Kumasi Metropolis. A total of 114 photos were taken, categorized, and qualitatively analysed. Drawing on Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory, the study demonstrates that there are a lot of Akan-only texts on commercial vehicles in the city, and the factors such as status, demography, and institutional support account for their presence. The inscriptions convey messages and themes that reflect the Akan people's culture. The themes highlighted include those connoting; religious belief, good morals/advice, innuendo, poverty, love, regret, and death. Inscriptions on religious belief constitute the highest with 19 percent. The study has implications for language maintenance.

Keywords: Culture, Linguistic landscape, Kumasi, themes, Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is how a group of people live. This entails how they eat, dress, behave, and express their thoughts and emotions. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another either consciously or unconsciously. Symbols, language, conventions, values, and artefacts are the major components of culture. Language facilitates efficient social interaction and shapes people's perceptions of concepts and objects. Backhaus (2006) posited that a city is a place of language contact. Throughout history, cities have drawn people of different ethnicities and linguistic backgrounds. This may be seen in ancient cities such as Rome, Athens, and Constantinople and post-modern metropolises like New York, London, Paris, and Tokyo (Backhaus, 2006; Keppie, 1991). Language is a vehicle through which humans communicate their experiences, thoughts, and emotions. The expressions come in the form of oral, written, and symbols. With the inception of literacy, they are expressed through writing. There are several Akan inscriptions in the linguistic landscape, especially in Kumasi. They can be seen in private signs alone or together with other languages in shop names, slogans on advertising boards, billboards, taglines, and names of buildings. Nevertheless, they are commonly found

on commercial vehicles, and such texts are written boldly in the front or at the back of the vehicles, mostly on the windscreens. Some are occasionally written on the bonnets, boots and sideways. Verdery (1999) stated that place names, iconic architecture, monuments, statues, and ceremonial events are avenues through which the city is occupied with political, cultural, and ideological values.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) defined linguistic landscape as “the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region” (p.23). They posited that linguistic landscape serves two primary roles: symbolic and informative functions. These functions are significant for linguistic landscape study. Informational function means the words or icons in the public space transmit vital information to the public, i.e., direct, inform, educate, warn, and express feelings or thoughts. The symbolic function accords us the opportunity to ascertain how the use of a language can reflect its social status and its impact on speakers of the language because it can reflect the social status, cultural status, and social power of the language speakers.

In a similar fashion, these functions are not uncommon in signages on vehicles in the Ghanaian context. Nonetheless, this aspect of the linguistic landscape is underexplored. Studies like Nyame & Tomekyin (2018), Anderson et al. (2020), and Akuamah (2022) have investigated this area and were centred on the languages present in the linguistic landscape. This study, therefore, seeks to explore Akan monolingual signages on commercial vehicles in Kumasi examining how themes indicated reflect the Akan cultural values. The study sought to answer the following questions: (i) What are the themes that run through the Akan monolingual writings on vehicles in the linguistic landscape? (ii) What informed these themes which reflect the culture of the Akan people in the linguistic landscape?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is a body of words understood by a community and used for communication. Landry and Bourhis (1997) first used the term linguistic landscape, drawing scholarly attention to language used in public space as a significant research domain. They asserted that the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to constitute the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. In a study conducted by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) on the linguistic landscape of Israel, they defined it as “any sign or announcement located outside or inside a public institution or private business in a given geographical location.” (p. 14) The inscriptions embossed on the facilities of these institutions make their identification and remembrance easy for readers and those who patronize the services of such institutions. When you juxtapose the above definitions given on the subject of the linguistic landscape by scholars, it is obvious that there is no mention of inscriptions on movable objects. In furtherance, Sebba (2010) argued that mobile and unfixed signs should be included in the study of the linguistic landscape. He claimed that signs on moving vehicles (such as buses), stickers, pamphlets, banknotes, and other similar items play a role in interpreting the world around us, just like the more fixed and stable signage.

Street signs, business names, sale signs, road signs (only if they contain text), posted flyers, government buildings, signs explaining monuments, no parking signs, and so on are all included in Scollon and Scollon’s (2003) linguistic landscape concept. The linguistic landscape includes

anything that can be read, including graffiti. Most people seldom pay attention to the linguistic landscape surrounding them (Gorter, 2006). It is either they read with little or no understanding or they decide not to read at all. As Pavlenko (2010) argued, modern language displays can never be comprehended and analysed without examining how it developed and came about. However, Amevuvor and Hafer (2019) studied the latrinalia linguistic landscape in schools in the United States. They postulated that the inscriptions on the latrinalia walls carry many messages and the themes in the inscriptions are those which exhibit religion, politics, culture, philosophy, sex, race, confession, and beauty. Their study informs us that not all inscriptions on walls or public spaces are written for mere fun, but some are targeted to send important messages to readers of such writings. This implies that the linguistic landscape is a place where people can display what they wish to say to the rest of the world. Some of the inscriptions are intriguing, motivational, and philosophical, while others are just for fun or hold no value. The scope of linguistic landscape is broad. Therefore, this research looks at the themes in the inscriptions embossed on commercial vehicles in Kumasi, drawing on Sebba (2010)'s inclusion of mobile and unfixed signs in the study of the linguistic landscape.

The writings and figures on vehicles are found in many countries. They are common in Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Haiti, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Philippines. Vehicle inscriptions are more rampant in Africa than elsewhere globally, and their developments began after colonialism (Eshun, 2018). In Armah (1974)'s view, inscriptions on vehicles are directly readable but enigmatic. Tourists may read but may not understand them, not even when written in English. As much as automobiles serve as a mode of transportation, Taluah and Musah (2015) argued that they also act as channels for transmitting or expressing knowledge, interests, attitudes, views, feelings, and ideas. In Ghana, vehicle inscriptions are responses to our fears and anxieties and act as reminders of our human nature. They offer precautionary advice and suggestions that may lead one to live a better-fulfilled life. (Taluah & Musah, 2015). Date-Bah (1980) hypothesizes in a study on the inscriptions on the cars of Ghanaian commercial drivers that passengers can distinguish one vehicle from another by using these clear and typically recalled inscriptions. Meanwhile, a highlife legend, the late Nana Kwame Ampadu's groundbreaking song entitled *Driver Adwuma* 'Driver's work' which centers on commercial vehicle inscriptions is worthy to mention in this context. He used 70 automotive signages from the various regions in Ghana to compose the song. The song touches on love, friendship, business, social life and innuendo. The aesthetic nature of the song makes it appealing to both the young and the old (Ampadu, 2018). The various inscriptions used for the composition of the song depicted that commercial vehicle owners have greatly embraced the culture of vehicular signage willing to live with it for a long time. Culture entails the behavior and norms of a people in a society and the knowledge, beliefs and laws that bind them together. Values are what make different cultures distinct. They are preferences that have been preserved and maintained over time. The Akan sees loyalty, humility, honesty, compassion, kindness, integrity, love, hard work and spiritual maturity as a hallmark of good breeding, so any member of the society who derails from these set standards is considered a misfit in the society. Value systems are pivotal in our development as a people; they mirror how we live our lives and what we consider useful in our day-to-day activities. As Purc and Laguna, (2018) affirm, personal values are considered to be the core of personality, affecting attitudes, evaluations and decisions of people. In the views of Long and Schiffman (2020), personal values are important in all spheres of life as they influence one's preferred choice of behavior in any given situation and are able to can direct actions, attitudes, judgments, and comparisons between particular objects and circumstances.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This study is underpinned by Giles, et. al (1977) Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory by integrating the role of socio-structural variables in intergroup relations, cross-cultural communication, second language learning, mother tongue maintenance, language shift, and loss. They define the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group as “that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and an active collective entity in intergroup situations.” (Giles, et. al. p. 308). The ethnolinguistic vitality theory is based on the assumption that “status, demographic, institutional support and control factors make up the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups” (Yamgur, 2011, p. 111). According to Yamgur (2011), high-vitality groups are likely to maintain their language and distinctive cultural traits in multilingual settings. As indicated, Ghana is a multilingual country with over 50 languages. Thus, for Akan to be the common language on vehicle signages in a multilingual society like Kumasi, it is a sign of its high ethnolinguistic vitality. The vitality of ethnolinguistic groups comprises indicators such as status, demographic and institutional support (Giles, et al 1977). Status includes the economic, social, socio-historical, and language status of the group within and out of the linguistic community. Demographic factors refer to the variables connected to the population and the distribution patterns of the ethnolinguistic group population living in a particular region or nation. Institutional variables are the level of formal and informal representation of the group enjoying from an institution like the mass media, education, government, industries, religion, and culture (Giles et al., 1977; Yagmur, 2011).

Yagmur (2011) opined that in ethnolinguistic groups with basic assessment, the strengths and weaknesses of each group can be ordered as low, medium, and high. He suggested that low and medium vitality are most likely to be assimilated and even ‘cease to exist as a collective’ (Yagmur, 2011, p.112). Whereas the high-vitality groups are most likely to maintain their language and uniqueness. Thus, the theory assumes that there is a relationship between social identity and language behavior. Accordingly, every society has some sociocultural factors that drive the ethnolinguistic groups in the society and these factors determine the survival of languages in a given society.

The researchers adopted this theory for the study arguing that education, institutional support, demographic, and some status factors like religion, historical consciousness, and solidarity might have influenced the vehicle owners’ and drivers’ (alike) perceptions of ethnolinguistic vitality because language is bound with the perception that language vitality determines whether people promote, maintain, or lose their distinctive identity or culture. Thus, due to the fact that Akan has higher vitality, the researchers postulate that it has an influence on the influx of Akan inscriptions in vehicular signages in the linguistic landscape. Each group has specific cultural values that are fundamental to its continued existence as a group and if its people’s language is held in high esteem (Smohicz, 1981). Nonetheless, Fishman (1985) pointed out that language attitudes do not always guarantee results in language maintenance. However, it is through language interwoven as a core value with other core values such as religion and historical consciousness that language maintenance can be achieved. This ethnolinguistic vitality has enormously influenced the use of Akan in the linguistic landscape of Kumasi (arguably the cultural capital of the Akan culture).

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive qualitative study that aims to describe a particular phenomenon. As Creswell (2012) posited, this approach is an interpretive study whereby the researchers are interested in the process, meaning and understanding obtained from words or pictures. In this study, the researchers are interested in understanding the themes embedded in the vehicular inscriptions used for the study. Hence, a descriptive qualitative research design was used for this study.

SETTING

Kumasi is the seat of the *Asantehene* (King of Asantes) and the administrative capital of the Ashanti Region. It is the second-largest city in Ghana, after the capital, Accra. The city's central business districts include Adum, Bantama, Pampaso, and Bompata. The human population of Kumasi is 3,490,030 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). The city is populous with Akans (Asantes), and the Asantes are Twi (a dialect of Akan) speakers. Akan is the most pervasive and popular language spoken in Ghana and *de facto* national language and functions as a lingua franca. According to Agyekum (2013), Akan refers to both the people and their language. It is a native language spoken by Akans (Ghana's largest ethnic group). Over 50 percent of Ghana's 30.8 million population can speak or understand the Akan language (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Akan is spoken natively by 47.5 percent of Ghana's population. According to the 2010 national population and housing census, 44 percent of non-Akans speak it as an extra language-first language, second language, or third language (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2019). Its dialects which are mutually intelligible, include; Asante, Akuapem, Fante, Akwamu, Akyem, Agona, Assin, Denkyira, Twifo, Wassa, Kwawu, and Bono. Out of these, the three major dialects which have received literacy status and are used in schools are Asante, Akuapem, and Fante. Akan is widely spoken in nine of the 16 administrative regions of Ghana; Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono, Bono East, Central, Western, Western North, Eastern, and Oti regions.

The rapid growth and commercialization of Kumasi have called for the influx of many commercial vehicles (with inscriptions) into the city. Therefore, the researchers have chosen Kumasi as the site for this study. Public transportation is primarily provided by transit buses in the metropolis, a mix of privately-owned minibuses known locally as *trotro*, taxicabs, and buses. *Trotros* are usually converted minibuses that run on established routes and provide a more comfortable ride. Tricycles popularly known as *Pragea* were also included. Two lorry terminals within the Kumasi enclave were used for the study. These include; Sofoline and Tafo lorry terminals.

DATA COLLECTION

The data collection took place between January 9 and February 16, 2022. The researchers travelled to the lorry parks on three different occasions to photograph the inscriptions. Permissions were sought from station managers and drivers, and subsequently, photos of vehicles with monolingual inscriptions in Akan were taken. In some instances, the researchers were only allowed to write the inscriptions without the pictures which we complied. Bilingual and trilingual inscriptions were not taken because they did not fit into the purpose of the study. Only commercial vehicles were used because that is where these inscriptions are common. To

avoid data duplication, only one of the same inscriptions captured in different research locations was used for the analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The vehicle inscriptions were coded, categorized, and analysed according to the various themes. The derived themes were categorized and presented in table 1.

Table 1

Themes in the vehicle signages

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Religious belief	22	19.2
Good morals/advice	20	17.5
Innuendos	19	16.7
Poverty	14	12.2
Love	11	9.7
Regret	19	16.7
Death	9	8.0
Total	114	100

From the table themes on religious beliefs constitutes 19.2 percent, advice 17.5 percent, innuendos 16.7 percent, poverty 12.2 percent, love 9.11 percent, regret 16.7 percent and death 8.0 percent.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the various themes presented in Table 1. The discussions are qualitatively done, as we wanted to have a better understanding of the phenomenon.

THEME OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Table 1 illustrates that 19.2 percent of the signage showed inscriptions on religious belief. The totality of the Akan is centered on their belief in the Supreme Being. God is not a stranger to them, and for that matter, there is virtually no atheist in the Akan traditional society. The concept of God has been with them since creation. Their knowledge of God is expressed in many ways, such as in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories, and religious ceremonies. All these are easy to remember and pass on to other generations (Gyekye, 1996). The adage, *Obi nkyere abɔfra Nyame*, which means, ‘no one shows God to the child,’ exhibits God’s existence. It means everybody knows God’s existence almost by instinct, and even the child knows him.

This belief is deeply rooted in the Akan people and translated into the public space through the texts on vehicle signages. Some vehicle inscriptions exhibit God’s supremacy, favour, and blessings, while others talk about prayers. *Nyame ne hene*, which means ‘God is king,’ is an inscription about God’s supremacy. The import of this writing is that God is the supreme judge

of the universe. Therefore, everything is under his control, and he is capable of doing anything. Nothing is impossible for him to do in heaven or under the sun. God can set the captive free and release those in the bondage of the devil.

An inscription exhibiting God's favour is *Awurade akae me*, which means 'God has remembered me.' The message embedded in this writing is that the person put his request before God, and God has answered him. When you get the favour of God, you can do exploits. You can do things that are humanly impossible because of the grace of God on you. Blessing is a supernatural aid or reward. The Akan people believe that when there is God's blessing on you, nothing becomes impossible for you to accomplish under the sun. So, in all their worship and activities, they seek blessings from the Supreme Being as he steers the affairs of mankind (see Figure 1). The inscriptions on blessings are found in these examples:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (a) <i>Nhyira nka boafɔɔ</i> | 'Blessed be the helper' |
| (b) <i>Hyira yɛn</i> | 'Bless us' |
| (c) <i>Hyɛberɛ sesafɔɔ</i> | 'Destiny changer' |
| (d) <i>Adom wɔ wiem</i> | 'There is grace in the sky' |
| (e) <i>Onyame nsa wom</i> | 'God has a hand in it' |

We also found out that other religions, especially Christianity, have influenced the Akan culture. Some of the signages depicted biblical texts. For example, *Nnyae mpaebɔ da*, which means, 'Never cease praying,' is a direct quote from the Holy Bible in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. Again, *Nyame nhyira*, 'God's blessing,' is another signage that emerged from Proverbs 10:22. This makes credence to the statement that culture is dynamic as it changes and embraces other cultures. Here, we see the native Akans have accepted Christianity and have become part of it. Finally, the use of language in this context portrays the owners as being religious (see Anderson, 2020; Akuamah, 2022).

Figure 1

shows the example of a signage depicting belief in God.



THEME OF GOOD MORALS/ADVICE

The Akans cherish good moral values and upright living (Gyekye, 1996). In our analysis of signages in the linguistic landscape, we found pieces of advice. The inscriptions on advice constitute 17.5 percent of the data found in the study. Advice is a part of our social life. It is normally given in all spheres of life for people to put up good behaviour, so that they will not be misfits but useful individuals in society. Among the Akans, when someone is going into marriage, governance, trade, or embarking on a journey, they receive advice from elders of society to do what is expected of them. The Akans cherish advice and expect those given such advice to pay heed to it. They often say *Yetu wo fo na woantie a wokɔ anteade*, which literally means, ‘When you are given advice and you do not pay heed to it, you go to prison.’ The use of this apothegm is that it can lead you into trouble or death when you refuse the elders’ advice. Some vehicle inscriptions offer wise counsel about good behavior, while others admonish people to eschew social vices. Some inscriptions bring to bear the benefits of living in harmony with our fellow humans and avoiding indulging in social vices, while other inscriptions admonish people to be honest, forgiving, and the need to be hardworking.

For instance, the signage, *Di nokore*, which means, ‘Be truthful,’ admonishes people to be truthful. The Akans believe that if one is truthful, he or she is just, conforms to rules, and is transparent in everything s/he does. That is why in Akan, the officiant in naming ceremonies calls the child’s name, dips his hand into the water, and puts three drops on the tongue (Amponsah, 1977). The same is done with alcohol. In each case accompanied by the words, “If it is water, say it is water and if it is alcohol say it is alcohol.” The child is being told to differentiate the two. Thus, the child is being introduced to the truth at that tender age. This is re-echoed in the public space by signages as well.

The Akans preach forgiveness to foster harmonious co-existence. *Fa bɔne kyɛ*, which means, ‘Forgive’ is an inscription that tells people not to harbor the evils they have against those who have wronged them. An Akan adage supports this, *Wode asem kyɛ a, na womfaa hwee nkyɛɛɛ* meaning, ‘If you forgive you have not given out anything’. This suggests that forgiveness is part of human existence and should not cause a thing. This signage is admonishing society not to harbor hatred.

Other signages in this category also advise people to put up good morals so that they can have better-fulfilled life in the society, as can be seen in these examples:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| (a) <i>Susu biribi</i> | ‘Plan something’ |
| (b) <i>Brɛ wo ho ase</i> | ‘Humble yourself’ |
| (c) <i>Gyae mansotwe</i> | ‘Stop litigation’ |
| (d) <i>Ma w’ani nna fam</i> | ‘Be vigilant’ |

Figure 1

A signage advising people to be vigilant



THEME OF INNUENDO

Agyekum (2010) posited that in invective, the speaker says something which is painful to the addressee and offends him/her. In the Akan settings, innuendo is a derogatory reference to a person or thing. It is a way of using indirect words or actions to talk about something you are not pleased/content with. Some people use this means to attack those they are against or those who are against them. The words and actions used for innuendos are not direct, so if you do not understand indirections, you will hardly comprehend the message the person is putting across. However, the one casting the innuendo and the referent could be aware because there is a proverb in Akan which says, “*Akotia biara nim ne wura*”, this is to say, ‘The referent of innuendo knows himself.’ Because of its indirect nature, when someone casts it on you, you cannot summon the person to the elders of the Akan society. People use many ways to cast innuendo; among them are through; songs, dances, speeches, and body movements. 16.7 percent of the inscriptions were found to be exhibiting innuendo (see Table 1).

Yene wo sere kwa, which literally means, ‘We laugh with you for no purpose,’ is an innuendo inscription. It means that people may pretend to love you, they may do everything with you, they may share in your joy or pain, but deep in their hearts, they may hate you. So, you should be careful with those who claim to love you.

Boniaye kae da bi. ‘an ungrateful person, remember a some day’, is another innuendo inscription. The message this inscription sends is that the writer helped someone in difficult times, but the latter never recognized the writer’s assistance when he got out of his adversities. So, the writer indirectly tells the person to appreciate the good things he did for him. The following examples show that there is friction language in innuendo.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) <i>Nsee me</i> | ‘Don’t destroy me’ |
| (b) <i>Hwe won ntoatoa!</i> | ‘Look at their whining!’ |
| (c) <i>Di wo fie asem</i> | ‘Mind your own business’ |
| (d) <i>Suro nea oben wo</i> | ‘Fear your closet’ |

Thus, when someone casts it on you, you can feel it, or it can have an emotional or psychological effect on you, as argued by Agyekum (2010). Innuendo can sometimes result in a grudge. Therefore, when you cast it on someone and he feels it to be painful, he can reply to you with a more hurtful statement or action. If this continues back and forth and gets heated, it can end in an argument. As such, the Akans say, *Baabi a abube ne atebɛ te no, ntɔkwa mpa ho da*, which literally means ‘Where a person who casts innuendo and another person who understands innuendo stay, there is always a fight.’ This negative effect of innuendo makes the Akans abhor it. The writers of these signages wrote them out of personal experiences resulting from pain.

Figure 3

Example of innuendo that instigates ungratefulness.



THEME OF POVERTY

The Akans view poverty as a bad and distasted enemy. A poor person is unable to live a normal life. He usually lives below standards because of the lack of purchasing power. It was found that 12.2 percent of the signages are related to poverty (see Table 1). *Ohia ye adammɔ*, meaning ‘poverty is madness,’ is the Akan saying about poverty. They believe that the poor, with all apologies, behave like mad people. Thus, the poor cannot cater for their needs, so they dress shabbily, eat anyhow, and sometimes poverty can cause one to behave abnormally in society.

Most of the signages on poverty found in the study depict the effects of poverty on humans. One example is *Ohia asoma wo*, meaning ‘poverty has sent you.’ Poverty usually brings hardship to people. Those who do not want to stay in the state of being poor make frantic efforts to remove the burden of poverty on them. In the course of doing this, they engage in all manner of labor for them to make ends meet. Works that they would not ordinarily do, you will see them engaging in to make gains to remove the burden of poverty on them.

Poverty is also viewed as something that can cause pain to humanity. This is depicted in the following examples that show poverty. It can equally affect one’s respect and association with others in society:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (a) <i>Ohia ye mmusuo</i> | ‘Poverty is a taboo’ |
| (b) <i>Ohia ma mete nkwaseasem</i> | ‘Poverty makes me hear non-sense’ |

(c) *Ohia nni yankoo*
(d) *Kom wo fie*

‘The poor has no friend’
‘There is hunger at home’

The examples can be inferred that a poor community is highly deprived and underdeveloped. This makes the people unable to do exploits to make their lots better. When you are poor, people treat you with disdain. Some people treat the poor like filthy rags. The poor are not respected. People hardly recognize and regard the poor’s contribution to society, making the poor unhappy. This makes poverty very detrimental in a person’s life, and that is why everybody tries to work hard to make money, to eliminate the shadow of poverty on his or her life.

Figure 4

Examples of signages depicting the effect of poverty.



THEME OF LOVE

It was illustrated that 9.7 percent of the signages showed love inscriptions (see Table 1). The Akan word for love is *ɔɔ* meaning ‘something deep’. The Akans cherish love, hence, they say *Yɛɔ yɛn ho a yɛnnye akynnnyeeɛ*, which literally means ‘when there is love, we do not argue among ourselves.’ They believe that making arguments over sensitive issues can break the wings of love. Thus, when there is confusion between people, love is the main tool for Akans to make peace.

For example, *Obi ɔɔ obi a, obi nte aseɛ*, meaning ‘if you love someone somebody may not understand it.’ We should bear in mind that nobody will love someone for a mere reason. Before people can stay together and do things in common, there should be a binding force between them. As such, if you do not know the background for their mutual co-existence, it might beat your mind. Love is a deep binding force that can put people together regardless of

their religion, tribe, or status in society. The following love inscriptions portray the good things about love.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (a) <i>Onuado na eyɛ</i> | ‘Brotherly love is good’ |
| (b) <i>Me dofo ayɛ me yie</i> | ‘My lover has done me well’ |
| (c) <i>Fa do nante</i> | ‘Walk with love’ |
| (d) <i>Do yɛ fɛ</i> | ‘Love is beautiful’ |

Figure 5

Examples of love inscription signages.



THEME OF REGRET

The saying, *Mehunuie a anka, nanso na aka akyi*, which means, ‘had I known is always at last’, is better placed in this context. Regret is to show dislike or aversion for something. It is to feel sorry about a thing that has or has not happened, after thinking; to wish that a thing had not happened, that something else had happened instead. It is an emotional pain on account of something done or experienced in the past, with a wish that it had been different. The study shows that 16.7 percent of the signages depicted regret. *Na mennim....*, which means, ‘I never knew...’, is a regret inscription (see Figure 6). This regret inscription shows that when you give your heart out to do something, and it fails you, you may later feel sorry for doing it. When you invest in a business and incur a loss, you can regret for doing that investment. In the same vein, when you enter into marriage or any other contractual engagement, and you get disappointed in the end, you may regret it. People may learn from their regrettable situations. This makes them acquire a lot of experiences to guide them on how they will carry themselves in their future endeavours. On the contrary, those who refuse to learn from their regrettable situations are normally condemned by people and regarded as not mature enough in life. The Akan apothegm, *Wode yɛ wo na anyɛ wo ya a, wɔnnyae wo fa yɛ*, which means ‘when you are cheated and you do not feel it, you are taken for a ride’ tells us to be smart in our dealings with others. Thus, when we deal with others and we get duped, we should learn from that situation and advise

ourselves. The following examples demonstrate that regret usually causes anguish to the person who has been duped or deceived, and he wishes the incident had not occurred.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| (a) <i>Onipa nni nkae</i> | ‘Man is ungrateful’ |
| (b) <i>Ɔkyena nso bio</i> | ‘Next time’ |
| (c) <i>Aka m’ani</i> | ‘It has entered my eye’ |

Figure 6

Example of regret signage.



THEME OF DEATH

Death is inevitable in the life of humans. Adherents of the Akan traditional religion believe that the ultimate end of man is death. They believe that after death, the soul survives. This explains the concept of life after death. This belief is expressed in the way the dead is disposed-off; the dead is given coins, sponges, cloth and other items. There is the belief that the soul of the dead will need them in its post-earth life, that is, the spirit world, *asamando*. This confirms their belief in ancestors who are believed to be living in the spirit world interceding on their behalf (Gyekye, 1997). Their wise saying *Owuo atwedee ɔbaako mforo*, means ‘the ladder of death is not climbed by one person’, indicates every human being is mortal, and for that matter, no one can escape death. We are susceptible to death by aging, sickness, injury, or wound. Death is seen as something painful and heart-breaking. This is so because it causes an eternal separation between the living and the dead. When there is death, the bereaved family is consoled by well-wishers and loved ones for the loss of their beloved. This is normally done to reduce the sorrow in their hearts. Inscriptions on death constitute 8 percent of the data found in the study, (see Table 1). *Agya pa da yie*, which means ‘good father rest well,’ is a vehicle inscription on death. The Akans believe in life after death. Thus, the living usually wishes the dead a peaceful stay in

his or her next world, presumably that if one lived a good life, he would have a peaceful stay in his next world and vice versa.

Death is also personified in some of the signages to reflect its effect on humanity. Death is seen as something that causes separation, pain, disappointment and destruction. These can be inferred from the vehicle inscriptions in the following examples:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| (a) <i>Owuo amma manka m'asem</i> | 'Death prevented me from telling my story' |
| (b) <i>Owuo de dom beko</i> | 'Death will take thousands away' |
| (c) <i>Owuo see fie</i> | 'Death destroys home' |

Figure 7

Example of death signage on a vehicle.



In the light of the above discussion, we argue that these themes were identified because of their visibility in the linguistic landscape. The Akan's high vitality in the linguistic landscape may be attributed to institutional support. Because it is taught as subject in the schools, people can read and write in it. Furthermore, some of the inscriptions were direct quotes from the Akan (Asante Twi) Bible. Thus, its visibility in the linguistic landscape can be attributed to its use in the religious domain. Demographically, the location for the study (Kumasi) is predominantly Akan community with an influx of immigrants' background because of its location and urbanization. Therefore, the inscriptions are written in Akan reflecting their belief system, their religious values, and how they express regret, love, etc. and all these mirror the cultural heritage of the people of Akan. Hence, it supports Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory assessment that high-vitality groups are most likely to maintain their distinctive cultural traits and language in the face of multilingualism (Giles et al, 1977; Yagmur, 2011). Therefore, the presence of the Akan language showcases its cultural values in the linguistic landscape. The status of Akan in Kumasi in the diglossic sense can be considered as being high because it is the language used by the King

in adjudication, interacting with diplomats, used in education (at lower primary and as a subject from upper primary upwards), and the most prominent language used in the electronic media in Ghana (Akuamah, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the linguistic landscape of Kumasi by exploring the various themes that dominate Akan monolingual signages and how they mirror the Akan culture. The proliferation of Akan signages on vehicles can be attributed to factors such as status, demography and institutional support. It is obvious that the motivating factor for the writers of vehicle inscriptions is to convey messages to the public. Thus, the linguistic landscape can play an informative function as postulated by Landry and Bourhis (1997). The dominant themes identified were religious belief, good morals/advice, innuendo, poverty, love, regret, and death. The study found that the inscriptions on religious belief were the most portrayed in the signages and the inscriptions on death were the least portrayed in the signages. We found out that these themes were borne out of their cultural values and beliefs as Akans, because they are the things the Akans see in their everyday lives that have been translated into the linguistic landscape. This study has implication for language maintenance in a multilingual society like Ghana. It is recommended that future studies adopt interviews to elicit the inspirations behind these signages since this study only relied on the themes reflected by the Akan culture.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicting interest.

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