

**Multilingual Landscapes: The Politics of Language and Self in a South African Township in Transformation.**

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## **Keywords**

Multilingualism

Politics of aspiration

Stylisation of self

Linguistic landscape

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Transgressive theories



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**Magister Artium**

## **Abstract**

Much language planning and policy in recent years in South Africa tends to overlook linguistic situations and practices, and focuses on notions of top-down language policy and implementation. This does not fit easily with the current multilingualism dynamics of late post-modern societies, which are increasingly characterized by a culture of consumerism and politics of aspiration. Taking its point of departure from a critical analysis of linguistic practices, in the form of visual literacies (billboards) in a township in South Africa, this thesis aims to draw forth alternative approaches that focus on the notion of sociolinguistic consumption, politics of aspiration and stylization of self, as a means of addressing the linguistic situation, and highlighting implications for language planning and multilingualism.

June 2009

## Declaration

I declare that *Multilingual landscapes: the politics of language and self in a South African township in transformation* is my own work, that has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other University, and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Sibonile Mpendukana June 2009      Signature.....



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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

South Africa embodies a multilingual context and boasts a language policy that seeks to promote multilingualism in society. The advance of South African democracy coincided with a period of transnational development when international organizations, such as UNESCO and the African Union (AU), came to play an important role in the production of discourses and legislations on multilingualism. International organizations are addressing language issues through legislation in ways that have come to impact on how nation states formulate or implement policies. Linguistic human rights discourses are predominant in these forums, and as Pujolar (2007: 77) remarks, ‘language is no longer a territorial issue, but a “civil rights” issue’.

In the South African context, the civil rights approach to language has been fuelled by the need for historical redress, in an attempt to correct an earlier history of linguistic discrimination. This has importantly involved official recognition of South African languages in the 1996 language policy, where 11 official languages are recognized at the national level, and provincial governments have formulated provincial language policies - choosing the widely spoken language(s) out of the 11 (National) official languages for a specific province as an official language(s); that is regional distribution of languages. In the South African constitution, Subsection 6 of Chapter one reads as follows (quoted in Ndebele, 2007: 72-73)

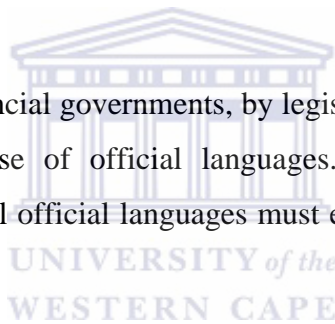
(1) The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, SeSotho, Setswana, siSwatiti, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.

(2) Recognizing the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the State must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.

(3) The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.

(b) Municipalities must take into account the language usage and the preference of their residents.

(4) The national and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must regulate and monitor their use of official languages. Without detracting from the provisions of subsection (2), all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.



(5) A Pan-South African Language Board established by the national legislation must

(a) promote and create conditions for the development and use of

(i) all official languages;

(ii) the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and

(iii) sign language; and

(b) promote and ensure respect for

(i) all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu; and

(ii) Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages used for religious purposes in South Africa.

Watchdog bodies, such as the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) have been formed in order to ensure that language rights are implemented across society. The central issue here, however, is that despite the constitutional recognition of multilingual reality, and government support for African languages, very little practical implications follow from this and the viability of different languages varies enormously in practice, which carries implications for their longer-term survival. Despite the growing public awareness of language rights and the significant representation of languages other than English on TV, radio (and to some extent the print media), there appears to be little interest among the general public to pursue their linguistic rights. There are estimates that as much as 88% of all language complaints are lodged by speakers of Afrikaans (who comprise only 8% of the population), and that as many as 12% of all language rights claims that are lodged have the potential to be ethnically divisive (Perry, 2004). Not surprisingly, perhaps, is that those speakers most active in lodging rights and safeguarding their language are speakers of Afrikaans – the historically most powerful group anyway.

This thesis recognizes therefore linguistic practice as an indispensable point of contestation precisely in a multilingual context like South Africa. The salient current issues, that is, the problems emanating from the disjuncture in implementation of language policies and everyday practice, need to receive more attention and become prominent points of contestation and constant review. Necessary attention and focus should then be given to these potential problems presented by the post-1994 South African context, and what their implications are for the future of multilingualism. As it is an important subject of engagement and evaluation of the society on current and emerging linguistic practices, gaining insight on the future and maintenance of multilingualism is a priority.

One factor that might be implicated in the decision whether or not to go for language rights is the identities and different social positions of actors in historical and contemporary structures of disempowerment. It appears today that new sociopolitical and

economic possibilities for mobility, development and transformation, such as the liberalization of the economy for the most underprivileged, is changing previously disempowered identities which in turn is bringing about a slow shift to English among African language speakers. One reason for this is the perception on behalf of their speakers of the lower status and usefulness of local African languages. However, at the same time, and in the interim, these perceptions are the outcome of a heightened awareness of language among speakers, something which is accompanied by the rise of new (transient) varieties, new registers and the general reorganization of multilingualism and what it means to be multilingual. The root of the problem is thus the fact that various other societal forces or structures counter-act or subvert government language policies, something that is termed ‘polycentricity’ (see Blommaert, 2004). This refers to a phenomenon where multiple centres, such as, commercial interests, NGO’s and Churches, may each determine a perspective on language norms or language use that sometimes may contradict or subvert each other. Linguistic polycentricity thus arises out of the processes that organize people, languages and representations in ways that lead to a redefinition of the role of the state and the national public sphere, and a resulting shift in the importance of public official linguistic markets.

In this thesis, I will explore a forceful factor in contemporary South Africa in the determination of language value – what we can call the economics of multilingualism – namely the way in which languages, and multilingualism specifically, are represented in commercial discourses, and in the linguistic landscape of commercial township space in particular. This question is framed against the background of the country’s emergence out of a historical system of apartheid that limited the aspirations and life chances of the sizeable ‘black’ community into a situation of increased socioeconomic and geographical mobility characterized by a ‘politics of aspiration’ and ‘an ideology of consumerism’ among its members (Mbembe, Dlamini & Khunou 2004, Nuttall 2004) with implications for the formation of new identities. As Androutsopoulos (2007), among others, notes, ‘current processes of sociocultural change create pivotal points for the public display of linguistic diversity’ (p. 208). As identities are constituted through linguistic practices (e.g.

Stroud & Wee 2007), it should not be surprising that new identities connected with new life-styles are impacting on perceptions of language; as attitudes towards a language determine its status and use, these developments will have consequences for the survival value of languages over generations. From language shift/maintenance research, we know that a significant contributing factor to whether languages are sustained over generations has to do with their fit with the social roles and identities of those who speak them (e.g. Gal, 1978; Kulick, 1992). The question of the 'economics' of language is dealt with in this thesis from an understanding of the importance of language in the construction of these new identities, specifically the role that *competing* languages and competing language norms play in the representations of 'self' in contexts of multilingualism and in relation to discourses of consumerism. It therefore makes sense to study the resources available for the creation of new aspired-to-identities, investigate what this might mean for the way languages are perceived and multilingualism organized, and situate a discussion of potential of language shift in this frame. In other words, shift/loss is really best seen against the backdrop of evolving and emerging varieties and values of ways of speaking and representing language.



Recent research has shown that identity is today more of a spatial category than ever before. On a related wing, and more appropriate and relevant to this thesis is that many of the spaces in contemporary South African townships are now more than ever before consumer oriented spaces, as they become a site for new media cultures and are aligned with the spread of popular culture. For instance, advertising billboards that aim to insert products like cell phones or awareness campaigns and clothes into the youth culture itself are examples of this. Effectively these products partially become the youth culture or at least part of it and in a way, they embody this culture. Furthermore and just as importantly is the way that different South African *languages* are used in the design of life-style products, and their contribution to the design of township space. In many cases, these life-style products are translocal, circulating on global markets of production and consumption. Androutsopoulos mentions that 'transnational flows of information provide linguistic and semiotic resources that are appropriated and recontextualized in local

practices of cultural *bricolage* (Androutsopoulos 2007: p. 208). It is these processes of bricolage and the link between language, product and space, how this is used in identity work, and the resulting value of languages in the economics of multilingualism that are the foci of this thesis.

There are three major theoretical assumptions and one methodological assumption that this work builds on that are important to explain at the outset. The first assumption is that in today's late-modern societies, *consumption* is a prime organizing parameter in the sociolinguistics of multilingualism – on a par with location/place (dialect) and class (sociolect). Just as local identities and social identities are performed and perceived through choice of linguistic variants, so do identities of consumption or aspiration for consumption determine linguistic value and choice.

The second theoretical assumption is that traditional notions of language as discrete and monomodal is being replaced by a deconstructed understanding of language as a transmodal – or at least multimodal - construction. As pointed out by Shohamy and Waksman (2009), because language(s) is embedded in a variety of semiotic devices that together contribute to perceptions of its value resources, a purely 'monomodal view of language distorts the understanding of language (2009: 318).

The third theoretical assumption is that explanations of linguistic phenomena must make appeals to a wider range of factors in the context of the situation, such as human agency, life-histories, biographies, mobilities, aspirations. Canagarajah has asked: How, then, do we practice a linguistics that treats human agency, contextuality, diversity, indeterminacy, and multimodality as the norm (Canagarajah, 2007: 98, quoted in Shohamy & Gorter, 2009: 320). This is one challenge that the present thesis hopes to respond to.

The methodological principle underlying the work in this thesis is that if identities and their linguistic representation are tied to commodities and products that are distributed in

space, then an approach that looks at the interaction between the production, distribution and circulation of commodities across populations, and the way the representation of commodity identities are structured in these chains should be in focus.

## **1.2. Research objectives**

The overarching objective of this work is to explore how multilingualism frames and is contextualized in representations of social identities in a transformative South African context, and how this may be of interest for language planners engaged in preserving South Africa's multilingual heritage. Its more precise focus is on how consumer discourses semiotically reconfigure township space as commercial space and how this semiotic figuration adopts, reworks and refashions identities of tradition and modernity, the local and the metropolitan/global/transnational. In other words, the focus is on how *spatial practices* (everyday practices that people perform in any given area), *representation of space* (how people make or create spaces) and *spaces of representation* (spaces that make and shape people) (Modan 2007) may contribute to the social construction of identities, social positioning and representation of the *self* in the public space (linguistic landscape). Ultimately, this thesis aims to contribute to an understanding of the semiotic performance of identity in late-modern contexts of consumption, particularly in the local performance of tradition and modernity, and to explore the implications for language and multilingualism.

## **1.3 Research questions**

An important semiotic linked to consumerism and consumerist identities is advertising. The main research question for the thesis is: how are salient social identities linguistically mediated in commercial signage, and what linguistic and social practices of tradition and modernity are employed in the mediation of a consumerist identity. This larger question breaks down into the following:

How are [new] social identities semiotically represented in consumer discourses?

What role do different languages play in these representations?

How are the indexical values of language constituted through multimodal representations of social identity?

In what ways might an analysis of linguistic landscape contribute to an understanding of the processes behind emerging new varieties?

#### **1.4. Structure of the thesis**

The structure of the thesis is as follows: in Chapter two I will provide a short account of post-1994 development in South Africa particularly focusing on how social transformation is impacting upon questions of language in a variety of ways. In particular I will touch on how new evolving political spaces, the expansion of commercial discourses and emerging new social hierarchies, new consumer based identities and power relations are mediated through patterns of multilingualism, including language choice. The focus here is on providing an overview of recent work detailing processes of globalization and the development of new economies. Chapter three will present the theoretical framework in more detail. Here, I will particularly focus on the notion of identity as multistructured (through media, spatiality, aspiration), and explore its relationship to contemporary research on linguistic landscape. Building on some critique of early research of this latter notion, as a point of departure, I introduce the notion of 'resemiotization' (Iedema, 2003) to capture how discourses travel across space and artefacts and are coded and encoded in different languages – a notion that links with that of intertextuality and recontextualization. Another important concept is that of 'enregisterment' (Agha, 2005), which allows an understanding of how semiotic forms come to be linked to particular social meanings through the social circulation of



messages, registers and languages across spaces and media, and the alignment of the social meanings carried in these messages with speakers, identities and personae. Core notions of the analysis are participation structures: frame, footing and alignment from the work of Ervin Goffman (1981) that I use to complement the analysis of enregisterment (cf. Agha, 2003). An important concept is that of genre/register; in particular how genres structure subjectivities (of consumption) in ways that carry transformation and continuity. Here, I also use concepts from visual semiotics (e.g. Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006) and geosemiotics (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) that are relevant to the multimodal make-up of genres of consumption. I discuss these core-concepts in relation to a discussion of the notion of linguistic landscape. In Chapter four I pull out the methodological implications of the theoretical framework, in particular the reconceptualization of linguistic landscape, and present in detail the procedures and assumptions behind the collection of signage studied here. In essence the data is primarily qualitative, and collected in order to show how particular discourse resemiotizations travel across different modalities and spaces, and how this is linked to different representations of consumption identities. I also here provide a sketch of the ethnography of the township of Khayelitsha. In focus here, is the development of a taxonomy of sites that is centred on Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of aesthetics and taste, where I distinguish sites of luxury, sites of necessity and a third site of 'implosion', where the prior distinction is fused or erased. Chapter five details an analysis of signage in sites of luxury, and the prime focus here of the analysis is on the resemiotization of commercial discourses across sites in Khayelitsha in different modalities. Chapter six focuses on sites of necessity, and in Chapter seven, sites of implosion are discussed in ways that show how design principles and genre structures from sites of luxury are amalgamated with design features of sites of necessity. Chapter eight provides an interpretation and discussion of the findings in relation to the notion of enregisterment, and a discussion of some implications for language planning. Furthermore, the approach used in this thesis is discussed in relation to a review of similar thinking in other, alternative, frameworks. The concluding Chapter nine rounds off the thesis with a summary of the main themes of the study.

## Chapter 2. Social transformation post 1994: Transnationalism and the politics of aspiration

### 2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the first theoretical assumption, namely that in today's late-modern societies, consumption is a prime organizing parameter in the sociolinguistics of multilingualism – similar to location/place (dialect) and class (sociolect). Mary Bucholtz in a recent text has sketched the development of sociolinguistic studies from those studies that were concerned with identities and demographics through *production*, to studies in today's late-modernity, where *consumption* has emerged as 'the primary site of identity formation within economic systems through the intensive marketing of life styles in niche markets' (Bucholtz, 2007: 371 ). South Africa is a good case of this, where since 1994, when the first democratic elections took place ushering in a transition to a post-apartheid government, it has experienced rapid and drastic transformation, especially socioeconomic and in terms of consumption. Fueling this transformation has been the opening up of South Africa's borders to an increasing incorporation in transnational processes, such as international legal frameworks, migration and increased visibility of linguistic minorities, and liberalization of the economy. This has brought with it a commodification of languages and identities, and new forms of media in a variety of languages. In this chapter, I will attempt to contextualize some important trends in South African language policy and the sociolinguistics of multilingualism against a brief account of some of the more salient of these national and transnational developments. I will also briefly comment on how this is linked to the use of language in identity work. I will suggest in this chapter that the very peculiar context of South Africa opens up a window on how one might want to pursue a holistic approach to the organization of multilingualism – an approach that I will call a *material ethnography*. This will set the scene for a more analytical account of some core concepts in Chapter three.

## **2.2. Globalization, language economics, new discourses of language and shift**

Much variation in the organization of multilingualism can be accounted for in terms of a *political economy of language*, where a variety of processes and trends associated with globalization are contributing to rapid shifts in the organization and meaning of multilingualism (Gal, 1978; Stroud, 2006). On the one hand, these processes are leading to the increasing visibility of multilingualism in public spaces (in media, language politics, education and the workplace). On the other hand, they are leading to language shift towards large metropolitan languages such as English. At the very least, the processes are reorganizing patterns of multilingualism. The particularities of how these global processes translate into local uses of multilingualism depends on the specific local structures of state, civil society and culture, the historical specifics of the local sociopolitical context, and the mode of their interaction with the global political and economic institutions (cf. Stroud, 2006). Some of the local dynamics of globalization that are important here in the South African context are, for example, the liberalization of the economy, the changing nature of space and community (migration and mobility), the role of the media and the general drift towards the commodification of language and identity. Each of these factors erodes ‘the ability of the nation-state to control public linguistic practices and control the reproduction of the national speech community’ (Pujolar, 2007: 81). Pujolar remarks on how

in the new economy, language and languages have become strategic economic assets in themselves, that is, they now feature at the centre of struggles over economic resources in a society and at a global scale. The main implication of this is that the private sector is developing into a counterpower of the state in the regulation of access to languages and in the management of linguistic resources in the public arena (2007: 81).

For example, *type* of media and *media genre* influence how (different) languages are used. Androutsopoulos (2007) distinguishes between public, commercial and non-profit media, each with a different perception of the audience they may be addressing; public media sees their audience as primarily citizens, whereas commercial media design their messages to be read by consumers in search of products, with non-profit media often straddling the two in the service of niche markets, special interest groups or ethnic groups. Clearly, addressing a message to a citizen requires a different use of language and bilingualism than selling a product. Thus, the media's use of language may reinforce government attempts to acknowledge a diversity of languages, and its role as a niche instrument may also contribute to linguistic diversity. On the other hand, as a medium and a platform of commercial interests and consumption, it highlights how government's ideal statements (language policies) and practice are not necessarily followed, or adhered to, in this potentially independent body. Media thus represents a complex situation – to some extent, it supports linguistic diversity, in other respects not. In the latter case, language norms are configured by other priorities for distinct commercial purposes. In other words, increasingly, questions of language management, such as what comprises appropriate speech styles, spellings and grammaticality, is out of the hands of the state and firmly entrenched in the private and commercial sector (Pujolar, 2007).

A core concept in understanding how transnational and local practices of consumption are linked to multilingualism is *identity*. A guiding theme of this thesis is that the linguistic value and the economics of language are linked to identity work that individuals (wish to) perform. Identity as a social category is multifaceted and comprises numerous dimensions, such as gendered identity, sexual identity, linguistic identity and traditional/modern ethnic identities etc. Identity, whether social or individual is not a fixed entity, but something that can be actively created, and hence actively transfigured (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004), influenced by context, history and social and cultural factors. It is evident from this perspective that identity formulation draws on different historically, socioculturally specific discourses – technologies of the Self (Foucault, 1988). In focus here is how these notions link with consumption ideologies, in terms of

what does consumerism do to, or for, identity construction. In today's world, identity is increasingly manifested through patterns of consumption, and different identities, based on characteristics such as ethnicity, age and gender, index different access to social goods within the social hierarchy (Rampton, 2006). Today, self-representations are also subject to global forces on global markets, and in the wake of postmodernity/late-modernity, new technologies have 'enabled the emergence of new or non-traditional linguistic and cultural sites for representing and doing identity' (Rampton 2006: 184). In post-modern contemporary society, people and goods travel extensively, and fragments and practices of products and processes are borrowed from different cultures and that becomes part of individual's identity. However, identity is also a *performance*. On gender identities, Johnson and Meinhof note that

The complex dynamics of self or individual identity is revealed when looking at how notions of, for example, *gender* are manipulated, transfigured, reinterpreted and displayed. Gender has to be constantly reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with cultural norms (themselves historically and socially constructed and consequently variable) which define 'masculinity and 'femininity' (Johnson & Meinhof, 1997:xx ).

Identities, then, be it gender, sexuality, race or ethnicity – are cultural-constituted entities that need to be reaffirmed by society, highlighting that an individual's identities and the definition of self, are fragments of diverse societal definitions of self. In what follows, I will look here at how identity is mediated through consumer discourses in different languages in different media, modalities and across contexts.

### **2.2.1. Liberalization of the economy**

South African democracy was finding its feet at a time when neoliberal economies were reaching their highpoint throughout the industrialized world and beyond. The *liberalization of local economies* was accompanied by the growth of neoliberal discourses more generally in public life. Contemporary developments in the new economy, such as privatization and growth of key industries of media, cultural production, tourism, and financial and banking services, are changing the functions and values accorded to language(s), as well as ushering in a completely new discourse around identity and linguistic authenticity. In the South African context, the politics of aspiration in the search for socioeconomic mobility is a driving factor in the formation of new identities of consumption.

Post-1994 in South Africa saw the implementation of the policies of Affirmative Action (AA), and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) as socio-economic redress strategies, which give preference in the job market to those previously disadvantaged in terms of gender and race. These developments emerging out of the socio-economic liberation impacted on the sociolinguistic dynamics through the changes they brought about in consumption patterns and the growth of a 'new kind' of black middle class, and the benefits this encompassed, such as the increased mobility (access to goods and travel previously denied through race), participation in the global village that guarantees access to the global market, and the de-racialization of schools and society in general. All this has meant a mingling and reconciliation between the diverse linguistic and ethnic groups who have benefited from this socioeconomic mobility, namely, middle-class blacks and whites. Significantly, Alexander (2006) also claims that racial identities are less significant today than they were in the previous apartheid era, and 'only become [a primary source of meaning] in specific circumstances' (Alexander, 2006: 45), and that the relevant identities are dynamic and related to the type of broader social transformations I have noted here. He goes on to say, quoting Hall (1991: 45-57) that 'new identities are created in the struggle against marginalisation'. However, these developments have at the same time expanded the gap between the mobile new classes of

beneficiaries and the large mass of the black and coloured population that remain outside the dynamic new economy. The historian and social critic Achille Mbembe (2008) has remarked, that despite the ‘multiple and systemic transitions’ (p. 5) in South Africa since 1994 where the ‘...daily horrors of segregation have declined dramatically’ ‘pervasive material inequality between whites and blacks co-exists with formal legal equality’ (p. 6). This dynamic also underscores that ‘not all new identities are driven by globalization and that even where they are, they are modified by local conditions’ (Alexander, 2006:59).

A linguistic market propelled by the economic value of a language, determined by its viability in local and global spheres and salience in the public sphere, impacts on basic principles of language use and linguistic prestige. In most contexts, languages are consumed based on their value, that is, the prospect of success they offer their speakers of material, cultural and symbolic capital (Stroud and Wee, 2007). Of particular interest here are schools, as the choice of schooling is heavily linked to language consumption and the politics of aspiration (Nuttall 2004), as schools are the prime structure in the dissemination of social, cultural and symbolic capital (Heller and Martin-Jones, 2001). For example, well-resourced schools are often English medium schools. Socio-economic rewards associated with English, as well as lack of materials, registers and trained teachers and language authorities more generally in African languages (de Klerk, 2000 ) adds weight to the increasing prominence of English as the sole language of economic affluence and up-ward mobility. These factors impact immensely on the development and sustainability of local languages. African indigenous languages have assumed less prestigious roles - being used mostly for traditions and for domestic purposes. In other words, the development of post- apartheid South Africa has brought about a sizeable portion of linguistic flux through socioeconomic and sociopolitical ideologies and perceptions, accompanied by the relevant factor of attitudes and a lack of trust towards indigenous languages as social capital especially among the Black educated elite (de Klerk 1996). In consequence, South Africa has seen an incipient language shift towards English (de Klerk, 1996; Dyers, 2008), especially among the black elite, which *may* be leading to the marginalization of African language speakers, politically and



socioeconomically due to more English prominence and use. This compromises the presence of language policies and language bodies like PANSALB in that these developments undermine the relevance and value of these languages, as the surge of problems pertaining to linguistic equality in everyday uses escalates. A real sense of the situation is a complete disregard for any other language except for English especially among those that have aspirations to climb the socio-economic ladder. Thus, a question for this thesis is how is aspiration and its realization in different social groups semiotically represented in consumer discourses and what role do different languages play in these representations?

### **2.2.2. Commodities and identities**

I noted in the previous section how in South Africa in particular, but in late modern societies more generally characterized by a culture of consumerism (Bauman, 1998; Baudrillard, 1988), material culture, its acquisition and appropriation, is an integral part of how social roles and identities in diverse walks of life are constructed and negotiated (Amin and Thrift, 2004; Giddens, 1991; Warde, 1994). For instance, Benwell & Stokoe (2006: 167) state that, 'consumption becomes a means of articulating a sense of identity and, perhaps even more crucially, distinction from others'. How an individual positions and defines the self is influenced by how the society defines the individual and *visa versa*. Elliot (1998) reinforces this notion by arguing that 'the development of individual's self-identity is inseparable from the parallel development of collective social identity...' therefore concluding that 'the self is embedded in social practices'. Current day social practices and perceptions are determined by consumerist discourses of the self that are market driven, where the market provides or depicts illusionary interpretations of the self that will in turn reshape and redefine perceptions of the individual about him/herself. Markus and Nurius (1986, cited in Elliot and Wattanasuwam 1998) note that:

An individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves derives from categories made salient by the



individual's particular socio cultural and historical context and from models, images and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences (p. 131).

Much of the models, symbols and images provided centre around commodities, and how these commodities are used to represent life-styles. One implication of this dynamics is the development of new (commodity-based) identities, especially among the youth in South African townships, where who you are is partly determined by how you dress, what cell phone you use, what car you drive, where you live, and what school you went/go to – all underscoring the role of access to goods, and to well resourced establishments, such as affluent residential areas, that are seeped in symbolic meaning. Elliott & Wattanasuwam (1998:131) argue that 'the consumer uses these symbolic meanings to construct, maintain and express each of her/his multiple identities'. In other words, popular music, fashion style and linguistic styles (varieties of speaking, specifically in township contexts), are all part of the expression of identity. Thus, consumerism influences how individuals define themselves (for example, in terms of what, how, where and when one wears certain things to reflect what about themselves), and that gets projected to how an individual perceives and defines the self in relation to the societal influences that manifest into one's identity. The social context, in conjunction with the type of interactions that one has in specific situations, effectively convenes to form perceptions about the self. It is important to note here, that youth identities in South Africa are increasingly 'personalized', with 'the Y [youth] generation, having more interest in consumerism than other aspects of culture' (Nkuna, 2006: 60). Consumer-based identities are paramount, as the dynamics we are witnessing in their evolution are creating particular identities of consumption.

The commodification of identities on new markets leads to a similar commodification of languages to the extent that linguistic resources are mobilized to manage a 'multiplicity of social identities' (Da Silva, *et al.* 2007:185). Increasingly, and due to processes in the new economy, with its emphasis on language and text as product, tourism, and other

forms of global activity (arts and crafts, global commercial markets), the links between language, identity and territory-body-personhood is reconfiguring language as a skill and, even more importantly, as a commodity (Da Silva *et al*, 2007: 184). Heller (2007) has noted how globalization has created a situation where mobility and migration is increasingly leading to the replacement of conventional identity politics associated with language by a position that sees language and culture as commodifiable resources. Thus, even though language has always been used to sell products, today it has become a product itself (Da Silva *et al* 2007: 187).<sup>1</sup>

Da Silva *et al* argue that the commodification of language creates the conditions for disentangling language from its traditional associations with social identities such as ethnicity, gender and the like, creating language as ‘something that is separate and external to their personhood’ (Da Silva *et al*, 2007: 185). What is also central here is the role of language in such figurations of identity on a symbolic market of identities in South African contexts. In fact, to a large extent whether such identities are perceived as legitimate and authentic by other actors depends on the success in how these consumer identities are mediated in new forms of language (and other semiotic expressions) (cf. above and reference to Nkuna, 2006). Thus, in more precise focus in this thesis is the performance of speakers’ late modern identities of consumption and politics of aspirations in the public space, and the implications this carries for language value. Thus, how are the indexical values of languages constituted through how identities are represented multimodally and through semiotic artefacts?

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<sup>1</sup> Although it needs to be noted that the commodifiable resource is the professional, well-structured image performed by a language professional, having a near perfect mastery of each individual standard language and not mixing them, that is, parallel monolingualisms (Heller, 1999).

### 2.2.3. Media

Consumerist discourses and the representation of identities in commodities, how the presentation of the self, the definition of the self and the re-definitions is provided for in relation to consumption and consumerist aspirations, are carried in the multilingual and multimodal construction of the media. It is a known fact that people see or identify with certain advertising texts, depending on what is advertised (Androutsopoulos 2007). Piller (2001) has also noted how definitions of self are embedded within a consumerist identity, that is aspiration to different symbolic values and meanings that can be derived from various advertised brands, in various languages (Piller, 2001). Carrigan (1997) elaborates this perspective by noting that, 'advertising is a crucial facilitator of consumption and relies heavily upon the social meanings that may be attached to products' (1997: 67). Elliott & Wattanasuwam (1998: 132) are critical of the influence that the media has in reshaping the individual's perception of the self when they state

the consumer exercises free will of [over] images of whom and what s/he wants to be although paradoxically, 'free will' is directed by values which are probably also a social product.

In many cases, in today's global world, choice of language and the way multilingual resources are deployed in the media can be understood as a direct reflection of how global identities are performed in their local contexts. The type and degree of language mixing in media may be determined by the relationship of the host community to 'other-language' societies (Androutsopoulos, 2007). This author also remarks on how 'media performers use language to stylize an array of identities that may be claimed for the performers themselves, projected to their audience or ascribed to social types in the bilingual community' (p. 215). This is the case for both conventional print media as well as for new electronic medias and modes of communication. The growing importance of media again needs to be seen in conjunction with the liberalization of the economy generally and the implications this carries for the wider availability of all forms of media,

the increase in the ethnic and linguistic diversity with the accompanying expansion of niche media for lifestyle and ethnic niche markets in transnational societies.

In general, Androutsopoulos (2007) claims that although mass media of all types is increasingly multilingual, this is especially the case for *life style magazines*, popular music and advertising. He notes how linguistic diversity is gaining an unprecedented visibility in the mediascapes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Research on media and multilingualism is a prime window on how multilingual resources are creatively managed in ‘the dense interpenetration of local performance with styles of speech that are reflexively designed, produced and disseminated through mass mediated institutional and/or electronic communication systems’ (Rampton, 1999: 423, quoted in Androutsopoulos (2007)) in ways that highlight how identities and indexicalities of language are publically constituted.

Androutsopoulos notes how ‘the symbolic values of discourses are determined by practices of multilingualism in the media’ (p. 226), although linguistic codes may be selected only for specific portions of a product – a choice made with respect to the aesthetic values this carries, and the projected effects on an audience etc. (p. 215).

Multilingual media may in some cases reflect the speech practices of the community (societal multilingualism), although this is often not the case, with media frequently employing practices found in *other* communities, what Bell (1999) calls *reference design*, that is, language use determined by an absent reference group, or as *language display*, the use of an out-group language to elicit associations to the group that speaks it.

The different media genres (comedy, movies, popular music, adverts) also exhibit different patterns of language alternation (with, for example, language alternation mainly taking place in the chorus of pop-music (Androutsopoulos, 2007), although how genres manifest multilingualism depends also on the specific sociolinguistic setting.

The concrete manifestation of language alternation ranges from an extensive expressive and stylistic use of code-switching to mere emblematic or token use of fragments. Here, only a few key phrases are used that are thought to be easily recognizable by a target audience assumed not to be proficient in the language – occurring as ‘framing devices in marginal spaces in a message’ (Androutsopoulos 2007: 214).

Furthermore, the design of media may entail the allocation of languages to particular *generic slots*. For example, emblems, that is, names, headers, section titles, jingles, station signs or website bars may use a language to carry specific aesthetic, symbolic or indexical functions – creating a ‘face’ – without necessarily then appearing in the ‘body’ of the text. Among multilingual media, advertisements have typically used language display as a way of attracting potential customers by exploiting the associations a language may have with particularly desirable or coveted traits. English, for example, is typically creatively deployed (as are other languages) in ‘non-English speaking adverts in slogans and headlines (often a preferred slot for language alternations), and is conventionally associated with a range of products and values. Cheshire and Moser (1994), cited in Androutsopoulos (2007), suggest that products that are linked to fashion and therefore particularly suitable for use in social identity statements, such as cigarettes, clothing, shoes, watches and alcohol, are often linked to English, although Bell (1992) denies that there is any such ‘categorical’ connection between language and products.

In other words, commercial media in the form of adverts is one type of discourse of globalization that is both constitutive and performative, and that may create new hierarchies in (postnational contexts) and differences between cosmopolitan identities and languages, on the one hand, and local identities and languages, on the other (e.g. Pujolar, 2007; Bauman, 1998). In fact, advertising can be seen to comprise one of the liminal spaces, noted by Pujolar (2007), where different understandings of multilingualism appear together in search of both authenticity (non-standard, hybrid and everyday forms) with appeal to a wider market through standardization (code-separation, brand-mixing).

In the South African context, Nuttal (2009) in a recent essay has noted how advertisements in the history of consumerism and the culture of the modern subject have moved from a history of denial of black Africans as consumers to a situation characterized by attempts to give content to a new modernist subjectivity through postmodern technologies within a project of desegregation. She notes how ‘commodity images and the market itself [has] come to produce some of the most powerful re-imaginings of race South Africa has known for some time’ (p. 109). One question for this thesis is thus, how are languages used in media representations of identity, and how do they contribute to constructions of commercial identity?

#### **2.2.4. Changing ethnoscapas: Mobility and the refiguration of apartheid space**

Identity is a spatial construct, because there is a link between place, space and identity construction. The link stems primarily from how individuals constitute the essence of their being individuals or ‘selves’ in public space, precisely the variety of behaviours and identities that are possible, used and assumed in certain places and not in other places. This point is further substantiated by Barnes (2000) arguing that, ‘*who* we are is inextricably linked to *where* we are, have been or are going’

On a related wing, and echoing the same line of argument, the place we find ourselves in says a lot about who we are at that particular time window. For instance looking at people queuing at a local supermarket could mean that they are shoppers while at the same time it means they are locals. This is what Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck (2004) call ‘indexicality’ as they argue that:

Indexicality forces us to look at social processes as culturalized, i.e. as turned into complexes of understandable (indexical) complexes of meaningful terms that offer semiotic potential to people (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck 2004:4).

Numerous potential identities can be assumed and derived looking at space and place (Johnstone, 2009 b). Recent research has explored the ways in which the ‘meaning of place/space is constructed in part through the social and interactional behaviours that can take place there, and, how in turn, the significance of space constrains or gives potential to particular interactions’ (Benwell & Stokoe 2006). Blommaert *et al* also note how relations of power and inequality that are linked to the scaled polycentricity and multifunctionality of place also determine local interactional regimes, sets of ‘behaviorial expectations regarding physical conduct, including language’ (2007: 212). In this sense, what an individual defines him/herself to be is indirectly and directly extracted from social activities.

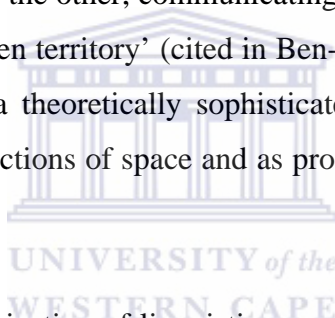
Importantly, for this study is the fact that much space is *semiotically* made into place – through the linguistic and literacy features of the landscape. In other words, not only is identity a spatial construction, but space is semiotically constituted. Identities may thus be semiotically layered into place, something that can be captured in the notion of *linguistic landscape*, classically defined by Landry and Bourhis as,

[t]he language of public road signs, advertising billboards, place names, street names, commercial shop signs and public signs on government buildings, of a given territory, region or urban agglomeration (Landry and Bourhis, 1997:25).

Gorter (2006:2) characterizes linguistic landscape studies as ‘the use of language in its written form in the public sphere’, and Ben-Rafael *et al* (2006:4) define it as ‘any sign or announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location’. Itagi and Singh (2002) approach linguistic landscapes in terms of language use in its written form (visible language) in the public sphere, although these authors also include other print media (newspaper, etc), as well as non-written language.



Much work sees signage in different languages as distinguishing several different indexical layers of place - as a space in which a specific linguistic population resides (as when a sign is composed in a local language), or as a pointer to the relations of power between local and non-local communities (as when a bilingual sign gives informational prominence to the message in one of a number of 'competing' languages). Reh (2004: 38) claims that the study of linguistic landscapes 'enables conclusions to be drawn regarding, among other factors, the social layering of the community, the relative status of the various societal segments and the dominant cultural ideals'. Spolsky and Cooper (1991) also refer to the visibility of multi-layering of co-existent language groups in linguistic landscapes when they note that signage functions as an 'informational marker on the one hand and a symbolic marker on the other, communicating the relative power and status of linguistic communities in a given territory' (cited in Ben-Rafael *et al* 2006: 8). And Ben-Rafael *et al* (2006) provides a theoretically sophisticated analysis of Israeli linguistic landscapes as symbolic constructions of space and as products of conflicting and shifting religious and identities.

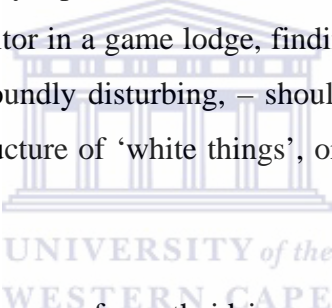


A formative factor in the organization of linguistic, specifically multilingual, landscapes is the rapid mushrooming of *ethnoscapes*, that is, new communities of migrants. The heightened visibility more generally of previously marginalized language communities within the nation-state are contributing to a greater awareness of linguistic diversity. As Pujolar mentions, the public space of urban centres 'has been turned into a constant re-enactment of a culturally diverse community' (2007: 78). In South Africa, the formation of new ethnoscapes is a result of an unprecedented mobility brought about in part by the freedom of movement that followed from the abolition of the pass laws and in part due to the liberalization of the economy, rising unemployment (in South Africa and the continent as a whole) and the search for jobs. Deumert and Mabandla (2006), for example, note how the linguistic composition of neighbourhoods in Cape Town has shifted quite radically since 1994.



Murray (2008) reports how the development of South African cities after the demise of apartheid and South Africa's integration into the global economy is increasingly dual, with 'urban glamour zones' (Sassen, 1998) hosting international businesses, finance houses and world-city infrastructure side-by-side with 'urban danger zones' the 'interstitial spaces of confinement with irreparable infrastructure, few social amenities, populated by the unemployed and dislocated migrants' (Murray, 2008). In other words, global developments are contributing 'new patterns of fragmentation, differentiation and separation along racial lines' (Murray, 2008: 145), further reinforcing previous structural inequalities formed around racial segregation.

Ndebele (2007) suggests that '...what is going on in the townships carries the defining characteristics of our new society' (p 104). He recounts an experience of ambiguity and discomfort of being a black visitor in a game lodge, finding the political sociology of the game lodge ontologically profoundly disturbing, – should he be seen as a black leisure colonialist caught up in the structure of 'white things', or a fully paying and respectable guest. He notes that



[a]s I write the landscape of apartheid is reproducing itself with a vengeance. Townships are bursting with informal settlements, reinforcing old dichotomies in the landscape. The psychology of apartheid, the culture of the game lodge, would teach us to regard informal settlements as a potential threat to our civilization, menacing the Europe in our midst.

And he goes on to say that defending the European residue may 'prevent the emergence of the recognition that what is going on in the townships carries the defining characteristics of our new society' (p. 104). In other words, space, its ownership and the way it is occupied is a profound semiotic for the politics of postapartheid South Africa.

This *mobile* and *dual* nature of space in South Africa is visible in the multilingual landscape of South African urban spaces, where the multilingual composition of a sign can be read off in terms of what it means and symbolizes to and about the community, as well as what it reflects about identity, specifically the reflection of the ‘self’. Urban visual forms, such as billboards, represent specific notions of modernity, the construction of the urban and race, and of culture and tell us a lot about a given territory as it participates in global cultures of circulation (Nuttall, 2004), highlighting the importance of urban visual forms, in this case billboards in reflecting, interpreting and portraying socio-cultural practices, and circulating this cultural phenomena in a given territory. One question for this thesis is therefore, in what ways might an analysis of linguistic landscape contribute to an understanding of the processes behind emerging new identities and varieties of language?

### **2.3 Towards an integrated epistemology**

South Africa is experiencing a period of social transformation post-apartheid, which, in all its complexity is giving a specific profile to the way in which the practice and perception of its diverse languages is organized. The study of how languages link to and manifest identity in multilingual contexts is fundamental in assessing the motives behind how people or individuals perceive language, and make choices in what language to speak, as there is a range of language dynamics that surface in language choice. Foremost among these is the fact that languages with perceived economic value, that is, languages that are associated with social and economic mobility (such as English in South Africa) are languages of choice – guardians will choose this language to socialize and educate their children, partners might choose their prospective spouses on the basis of what linguistic capital they possess etc (e.g. de Klerk, 1997, 2000; Dyers, 2008; Fishman, 1991). The shift into emphasizing language as a commodity contributes to this.

The value that people accord to different choices is also determined by its use in public domains and prestigious contexts such as in parliament and in media and advertising (as a

marketing tool), which also contributes to its economic value. Long-term and frequent preference for a particular language - giving it prominence - in most cases also results in language shift in many contemporary societies, as the choice in itself of a language adds to the status and economic value of this language. In other words language choice is determined by perceived value associated with a particular language, and certain languages are seen to offer more economic value than others. These linguistic dynamics are mediated by people's attitudes towards their languages in multilingual contexts (cf. de Klerk 1996).

The linguistic choices that an individual makes also highlight how individuals perceive themselves within the economics of language. For example what languages an individual speaks effectively determines their status socially, in the sense that the prestige, or the lack of it, that the language offers opens or constrains an individual's upward and socioeconomic mobility, specifically in multilingual contexts. Fundamental to understanding, therefore, the role of the economics of language in language shift is a clear conception of the role that language plays in *identity* constructions.

By way of interim conclusion, the hypothesis here is that the *semiotic packaging of life-style products are an important factor in the mediation of linguistically constructed identities* that ultimately underlie the emergence of different patterns of multilingualism, and perhaps resulting language shift. This semiotic packaging is itself subject to a range of material determinants. What can be deduced from this situation is a need for an appropriate and viable means to describe, capture and to engage with the current post 1994 situation. Ndebele claims that knowledge in today's South Africa must be integrative and interdisciplinary. He says,

...our society has moved away from parallel development towards horizontal relationships; from the security and certitudes of isolation towards the creative risks of interaction; from repression towards expression; from secrecy towards revelation and exposure; from

analytical towards integrative modes of thinking. All this suggests a major shift from an analytical towards an integrative epistemology that gropes towards relational coherence (2007: 71).

Such an epistemology, Ndebele claims, would allow the removal of ‘barriers between knowledge disciplines and obstacles to the full development of intellectual activity’ (Ndebele 2007: 71). This resonates well with the fact that the tensions between practice and policy - new emerging hybrid trends in linguistic practices, with complex implication for indigenous languages, are the combined outcome of the semiotics of linguistic landscapes, the representation of language and identities in media genres, the place of languages and identities on material and symbolic markets of aspiration and mobility, and the increasing commodification of languages and identities. These dimensions all need to be in place to understand how language uses and roles are constituted, specifically with respect to the role played by practices and representations of *multilingualism* in this highly transformative context. By way of conclusion it’s important to look at how languages are pragmatically used; the nature of multilingualism as a resource; and the idea of community in relation to polycentricity.

Thus, what is the relationship between perceived language status, identity work and the way in which language is visually contextualized in forms of media that travel across space that is, the information structuring and salience of language in visual compositions. In the next chapter, I will attempt to operationalize these questions in a theoretical framework.

## Chapter 3. Towards a material ethnography of multilingualism

### 3.1. Introduction

How languages are organized and distributed across modalities, artefacts, and spaces illustrates how they are used and thought about as resources for stylization of identities and the representation of voice on important markets of social and symbolic capital (Piller, 2003; Coupland, 2001). The fact is that language use is linked with other social levels of meaning making, which are not language *per se*, such as spatial and visual semiotics, the circulation of commercial artefacts, which when taken together, allow us to focus on a deeper level of language use, practice, and the deployment of semiotic means – sociocultural artefacts – while at the same time, we get insight into the micro processes of production connected with sociocultural, sociopolitical, socioeconomic and historical space. In other words the motives behind the processes of production, composition and patterns of language use in commercial discourses – (consumer oriented discourses in public space) – are subject to many social processes of meaning making.

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the two remaining theoretical assumptions I introduced in Chapter 1, the view of language as a transmodal construction, and the idea that linguistic phenomena needs to take into account a wider range of factors in the context of the situation, such as human agency, life-histories, biographies, mobilities, and aspirations. In section 3.3, I pull together some theoretical concepts that will serve this study. I elaborate on some of the technical tools that will allow an exploration of the link between identity and multilingualism, and that will help reveal how subjectivities represented in different languages and circulated across media, modalities and spaces in

semiotically meaningful ways provide resources for identity work in consumer discourses.

### **3.2. Notion of language**

Makoni and Pennycook (2007: 27) argue that ‘the concept of language, and indeed the “metadiscursive regimes” used to describe languages are firmly located in Western linguistic and cultural suppositions’. They are to be seen as ‘part of a process of epistemic violence – languages were posited as separate entities at a particular moment in European philosophical and political thought’ (p. 21). The authors argue for a complete rethinking of language in order to abandon construing it as a natural ‘object’ and to recognize the multiple historical and current political contingencies that lie behind its genesis. They argue for a disinventing the notion of language, but at the time for its reinvention in alternative discourses. Bauman and Briggs (2003: 7) have also explored the processes behind the modernist project of ‘creating language as a separate domain’ and the ‘process involved in creating language and rendering it a powerful means of creating social inequality’ (2003: 7). Muhlhausler (2000) and Toolan (2003) (cited in Makoni and Pennycook, 2007: 19) argue that ‘language is integrated with its environment, and that languages cannot be viewed as discrete items’, thus rejecting as a ‘powerful and misleading myth, any assumption that a language is essentially an autonomous system which humans can harness to meet their communicational needs’ (Toolan, 2003: 123 cited in Makoni and Pennycook, 2007: 19). Harris (1990: 45) has earlier queried whether ‘the concept of a language, as defined by orthodox modern linguistics, corresponds to any determinate or determinable object of analysis at all, whether social or individual, whether institutional or psychological’. Pennycook, in recent work (2007:49) remarks that

the separation of language from the complexity of signs with which its use is associated has limited our understanding of a broader semiotics. Segregationalist linguistics has constructed language as a

separate entity. However, not only is language integrated with its environment, but rather that languages themselves cannot be viewed as autonomous systems outside the other meaning-making practices of the bodies of texts, contexts, and histories in which they are embedded.

Recent notions of immersion and immersion systems (Gibson, 2007), where sound, architecture or other structures immerse, absorb and meld the body with the world, producing a sense of alteration and ‘sensory purchase’ on the world also impact on discourse. People become an integral part of the text and an inherent part of meaning construction, the visual semiotics and space, that is, context.

### **3.3. Trends in sociolinguistic explanation**

Penelope Eckert (LSA, plenary, 2008) sketches the development of sociolinguistic studies of linguistic variation through three stages, what she calls, the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> wave respectively. The 1<sup>st</sup> wave comprises the Labovian approach with its quantitative correlations of discrete and variable linguistic features to demographic variables such as social class and gender, where the data was primarily collected through formal elicitation means and narrative. The 2<sup>nd</sup> wave employs more ethnographically inspired methods to explore the relationship between variation and social meaning of such variation for local, participants’ understanding of, or construction of, their immediate social realities. Eckert and Rickford’s (2001) classical study of Jocks and Burn-outs come to mind here, where features of language related to demographic variables such as social class, age or gender are given specific meanings in the local adolescent context of identity work. Both 1<sup>st</sup> wave and 2<sup>nd</sup> wave studies relate the meanings of variants as identity markers directly to the groups, according to Eckert, whereas 3<sup>rd</sup> wave studies shifts attention from discrete linguistic variables to *styles*, or structured constellations of (semiotic) resources, exploring how linguistic forms contribute to the stylization of identities. The emphasis in

3<sup>rd</sup> wave studies has thus shifted from an emphasis on speaker categories to the construction of *personae* or *subjectivities*. Importantly, the semiotic resources for stylization of identities are no longer confined to linguistic variables, but also include multimodal forms.

Bucholtz (2009) also concurs that '[t]he sociolinguistic study of identity has increasingly become the study of style'. In the Labovian paradigm, style was treated as a continuum of forms ranging from vernacular and less monitored and informal speech to more formal, monitored speech that more closely approximates the standard. In contemporary sociolinguistics, style is increasingly seen as the multimodal and multidimensional performance of many different semiotic practices (Buckholtz, 2009; Coupland, 2008). Buckholtz also points out that in the realization or performance of style or stylization, the social meaning of linguistic forms is generated, not from correlations with social/demographic categories, but through indexicality where speakers 'take stances, create alignments and construct personas' (through interactional practices and *ideological representations*). She points out that 'as sociolinguistics increasingly shifts towards an indexical view of linguistic variation, the notion of stance becomes a critical mediating concept between linguistic forms and larger social structures' (2009: 165).

Bucholtz (2009) refers to the importance of Bourdieu's notion of 'taste' or discernment, claiming that 'discernment is pivotal in linguistic research on consumption as seen in the connoisseurship among yuppie wine aficionados' (Silverstein, 2003) and coffee-drinkers (Gaudio, 2002), fashion knowledge as a marker of cosmopolitan modernity and even the symbolic trappings of social difference in the New York city store (p. 378). She goes on to say that 'discernment is a thoroughly social and cultural phenomenon, produced through the accumulated effects of interactions in which taste is socialized and shaped' (p. 378).

Barbara Johnstone (2006) emphasizes the important role of speakers' social and geographical mobility for processes of enregisterment, that is, the emergence and



crystallization of (a cluster of) linguistic resources as a ‘recognizable’ variety. She points out that the life experiences and histories of speakers’ encounters with different ways of speaking, and not only the circulation of varieties in the media, contribute to the metapragmatic and metadiscursive processes that single out and mark particular ways of speaking as carrying out particular types of social meaning. She notes how,

growing up at different times; in the context of different circulating public representations of speech, class and place; and with different ways of experiencing local language in daily life, each of these people hears, feels and talks about local speech in a different set of ways (2006: 78).

She also points to the importance of *intertextuality* in the emergence of registers, genres and varieties and their associated indexical meanings. Referring to an example of how the American dialect Pittsburghese is becoming standardized, she notes how t-shirts carrying typically Pittsburghese words and phrasings circulate across different markets, are sold in different venues and enter into intertextual chains with other examples of Pittsburghese in the media, such as on-line lists and folk dictionaries. Intertextuality thus has equivalent outcomes to speaker mobility in that linguistic forms appear in different contexts and media that all contribute to speakers’ experience of the social meanings associated with a form.

### **3.4. Core theoretical notions**

Each of the following notions: Genre/register, indexicality/enregisterment, resemiotization, space and place is pivotal to the analysis in chapters 5, 6, and 7 as this study is concerned with sociolinguistics of multilingualism, social transformation and material ethnography, where necessary I will give a brief presentation of how each of the core concepts relate to core notions in sociolinguistics.

### 3.4.1. Genre/register

Blommaert (2005; 2008) has noted how identities are in fact ‘particular forms of semiotic potential organized into repertoires’, and the notion of *genre* is one way of capturing how (re)organizations of forms of semiotic potential provide for new positions of subjectivity and ways of talking about and managing social transformation. Genres organize multilingual resources into complexes of communicative-formal features that make a particular communicative event recognizable as an instance of a type (Blommaert, 2008; Bauman and Briggs, 1999), by community members as conventional performances of subjectivities and activities. Blommaert (citing Fabian among others) points out how textual practices, repertoires, registers, that is, genres, are important arenas where new social processes and cultural innovations are formed, offering new epistemological or cultural forms for the formation and expression of particular types of identity (Blommaert, 2008: 47). They are therefore ideal for looking at how identities change, and with this, how linguistic and multimodal resources are redistributed and realigned, with changing social circumstances.

Bucholtz (2009: 158) remarks on the importance of studying the circulation of ideologies about language through the means of metapragmatic representation. In late-modern contexts, commercial discourses in the form of adverts provide important metapragmatic representations of language by comprising particular genres for the organization of repertoires of subjectivity, and offering mediated narratives of self, consistency, and authenticity. This is what I am concerned with here, as well as the resources for alignment/perspectives on alignment footing etc that representations offer – in other words, interacting with material representations in particular spaces, offer up variable resources for ‘reading’ and for identity work. To the extent that media provides models and symbolic meanings used in identity constructions, we can ask how these constructs of identity are juxtaposed and transformed by the media, and what sociolinguistic strategies are used as marketing devices? As all semiotic practices are ‘situated in polycentric and

stratified systems of value' (Bucholtz 2009), I thus explore this issue in terms of how genres - as repertoires of identity - (Blommaert, 2008) are constructed differently in different spaces. Effectively and concretely, how are these notions linguistically assembled in public space?

The expression of identity involves accessing registers and repertoires of affective and epistemic orientation, as well as interpersonal stance that together realize a particular *voice*, that is, the entextualized figures of personhood, linked through the metalinguistic processes I will discuss below to features of language, (Agha, 2007: 45). In the particular genres of subjectivity in focus here, the resources deployed for encoding epistemic, affective and interpersonal stance are multimodal and multilingual. The multimodality and multilingualism of these stances warrants a substantial conceptual frame of analysis to delve into socioculturally diverse communicative activities (*linguistic practices*) to understand contemporary linguistic and social dynamics (see Collins and Slembrouck 2005, Rampton 2006).

I have therefore chosen to build my analysis on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model for the multimodal analysis of visual compositions that allows insights into how genres found in signage organize language and multimodal resources along a variety of contextual dimensions. I thus approach commercial signage from the point of view of how it refers to peoples, places, activities and things (the *ideational metafunction*); the way in which the composition engages with the viewer/reader, and how the authenticity or credibility of the signage is perceived (that is, the *interactional or interpersonal metafunction*, including the *modality* of the message); the information value, salience and framing of the message (its *text design*); and the linguistic and typographical features of the sign (that is, its *verbal characteristics*) (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Therefore the notions put forward by Kress and Van Leeuwen are relevant to the notion of genre and expression of subjectivity as a means to read into how public space messages are played out- the role of genres of subjectivity in identity formulations and how in turn subjectivity is expressed.

### 3.5. Indexicality/enregisterment

Through what metalinguistic processes, then, are genres or registers of subjectivity constructed? What are the dynamics behind their emergence? How are the linguistic and multimodal resources crafted into symbolic materials for the performance of subjectivities? The notions of *enregisterment* and *indexicality* are important here.

An *index* is a linguistic form that evokes and/or constructs (presupposes and/or entails) social meaning, that is, situational appropriateness, stance (certainty/authority) and social identity (class, ethnicity, interactional role), locality, etc (Johnstone, *et al*, 2006: 81). These relationships between linguistic forms and social meaning occur at different *orders of indexicality*, a notion that allows us ‘to relate the microsocial to the macro-social frames of analysis any sociolinguistic phenomenon’ (Silverstein, 2003: 93). Silverstein identifies *first*, *second* and *third-order* indexicals, which can be compared to William Labov’s *indicators*, *markers* and *stereotypes* respectively (Silverstein, 2003; Johnstone, 2009 a). As Johnstone remarks, 1<sup>st</sup> order indexicality (indicators) is only *potential* indexicality because speakers have not yet associated social meaning to a variable or variant, or become aware of its potential to be associated with a meaning – it is merely a variable or variant used by a particular demographic or social group, and carries no explicit or definable stylistic value. However, a particular variable or variant may become a 2<sup>nd</sup> order indexical (Silverstein) or marker (Labov) when speakers have begun to use different variants in different contexts indicating the emergence of stylistic meaning associated with the variant. So, if a speaker has begun to interpret or associate a particular variable with a particular social class or a particular locality, s/he may either choose to exaggerate the use of this variable to signal regional or class-based loyalty, or avoid using the variable to present a self that is non-local or class-based. These forms are thus employed as markers. In Silverstein’s words, 2<sup>nd</sup> order indexicality is ‘1<sup>st</sup>-order indexical variation that has been swept up into ideologically-driven metapragmatics’ (2003: 219). A 3<sup>rd</sup> order indexical or stereotype, finally, comes about when the second-order indexical becomes increasingly linked to, and interpreted as, evidence of social identities. Adapting

a tabular representation of these relationships constructed in Johnstone *et al* (2006), this looks like the following:



Table 1

Types of Indexical Meaning, according to Labov (1972b, 178-80) and Silverstein (2003)

| Labov   | Silverstein   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>“indicator”</b>: A variable feature that shows no pattern of stylistic variation in users’ speech, affecting all items in the relevant word classes. Speakers are not aware of the variable. The variable is “defined as a function of group membership,” of, as its use spreads in subsequent generations, group membership and age.</p>   | <p><b>“<math>n</math>-th-order indexical”</b>: A feature whose use can be correlated with a sociodemographic identity (e.g., region or class) or a semantic function (e.g., number-marking). <math>N</math>-th-order accounts are “scientific” (p. 205), that is, could be generated by a cultural outsider such as a linguist. The feature’s indexicality is “presupposing”: occurrence of the feature can only be interpreted with reference to a preexisting partition of social or semantic space.</p>  |
| <p><b>“marker”</b>: A variable feature that shows stylistic variation, that is, speakers use different variants in different contexts, because the use of one variant or another is socially meaningful. Markers are “norms which define the speech community,” to which members of the community react in “a uniform manner,” although without necessarily being aware of the variable or their social meanings.</p> | <p><b>“<math>n+1</math>-th-order indexical”</b>: An <math>n</math>-th order indexical feature that has been assigned “an ethno-metapragmatically driven native interpretation” (p.212), that is, a meaning in terms of one or more native ideologies (the idea that certain people speak more correctly than others, for example, or that some people are due greater respect than others). The feature has been “enregistered,” that is, it has become associated with a style of speech and can be used to create a context for that style. Its indexicality is thus “entailing” or “creative.”</p> |
| <p><b>“stereotype”</b>: A variable feature that is the overt topic of social comment; may become increasingly divorced from forms that are actually used the form may eventually disappear.</p>   | <p>“For any indexical phenomenon at order <math>n</math>, an indexical phenomenon at order <math>n+1</math> is always immanent, lurking in the potential of an ethno-metapragmatically driven native interpretation of the <math>n</math>-th-order paradigmatic contextual variation that it creates or constitutes as a</p>  |

register phenomenon” (p. 212). In the case of Labovian “stereotypes,” “ $n+1$ st order indexicality has become presupposing... replacing an older  $n$ -th order indexical presupposition” (p.220)

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Thus, while performing language use across a wide spectrum of purposes and motives, [speakers] display orientations towards orders of *indexicality* – systematically reproduced stratified meaning often called norms or ‘rules’ of language, for example, standard versus non-standard forms (Blommaert, 2005: 73). And identity is central to orders of indexicality, as orders of indexicality allow claims to, and performances of, identity (cf. Blommaert, 2005), and importantly, representations through linguistic mediations of those identities in the public space.

*Enregisterment* refers to the ‘processes whereby forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of users’ (Agha, 2005). In the theory of context, identity and style in relation to language practices proposed by Asif Agha, register competence is disseminated across social populations by institutionalized practices of speech typification, where ‘images of social personhood [are] linked to speech through the circulation of discursive artefacts’ such as narratives, printed cartoons, newspapers, magazines, novels etc. The reflexive work of identity and subjectivity is mediated by, and impacts on, particular language forms and linguistic values to the extent to which ‘distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users’ (Agha 2005), a process that can be captured in terms of notions such as voice, footing, and alignment. These notions allow us to chart the reception, perception and consumption of discourses; *footing* refers to ‘how interactants simultaneously are positioned and do positioning work’ (Collins and Slembrouck, 2007: 6), while *alignment* refers to how speakers perceive themselves within specific identities as they resist, reject and align themselves with particular identities (cf. Slembrouck, 2007). Register revalorization

occurs principally through the mechanism of individuals establishing forms of footing and alignment with voices indexed by speech. (Agha, 2003: 38). *Footing* and *alignment* can be applied to any sign mediated interaction, involving distant participants as well as co-present interlocutors, and written as well as spoken utterances (Agha, 2005). They are particularly interesting for this study in that they allow capture of reader roles or the role of the reader-sender in messages. As will become apparent, employing these notions in the analysis of signage allows us to distinguish many different roles that readers may take towards a piece of signage. The diversity of reader roles can be likened to the diversity of interactant or participant roles that speakers participate in when engaged in oral communication. This means that we can use participant frameworks (footings and alignments) as a proxy for different types of social network and for geographical and social mobility, thus building on Johnstone *et al* (2006) findings of the importance of these parameters for processes of enregisterment (over and above participation frameworks, role alignments also mediate interpersonal stances, attitudes, forms of irony, respect and formality).

Most work on enregisterment has looked at how delocalized varieties or registers emerge – such as Agha’s seminal work on the emergence of Received Pronunciation from South Eastern (British) Englishes (Agha, 2003), has studied how speakers localize language practices in order to sound vernacular or working class (Johnstone, *et al*, 2006). In both these cases, the focus of research is clearly on *linguistic* forms. I am here looking at how speakers draw on particular clusters of *multilingual* and *multimodal resources* to signal mobile, transnational and socially transforming (local) subjectivities. In this sense, my study attempts to work on enregisterment.

### **3.6. Resemiotization**

A central aspect of enregisterment is the circulation of variants across modalities, materials and spaces, as ‘registers are not static facts about language but reflexive models of language use that are disseminated along identifiable trajectories in social space



through communicative processes (Agha, 2003). Agha underscores how ‘enregisterment is best studied by analyzing large scale semiotic events and the modes of their interconnectivity’ (Agha 2005), in particular, the large scale circulatory processes through which individuals are socialized to models of register usage, and Agha (2005) argues for study of ‘semiosis across encounters’, and for moving beyond the isolable moments and concrete swaths of time or ‘bounded episodes of social history’ encapsulated in notions such as ‘speech event’ or ‘interaction order’ in order to capture the ‘lived moments that lie beyond them’ (2003:1). Following Agha’s injunction, orders of indexicality and enregisterment in this thesis are applied to the circulation of meanings in and across modalities, materials, and space, I use the notion of *resemiotization* (Iedema, 2003) to chart and capture messages in movement as they traverse spaces. *Resemiotization* attends to the ‘inevitably transformative dynamics of socially situated meaning-making processes’ (2003: p. 30), addressing how textual meaning is shifted and reordered (Silverstein and Urban, 1998) as messages travel in multimodal entextualizations across contexts and practices. Investigating how messages are resemiotized involves tracing how discourses are temporally encoded across semiotic artefacts (such as books, visuals, buildings, and signage), technologies (visual/written/electronic and various forms of spoken media) and spaces.

Iedema also underscores the importance of ‘the social dynamics that shape our meanings as they emerge’ (p. 40), and notes how resemiotized messages in the process of their production are subject to gradual and increased (social) investment (such as when an architect’s plans result in a building), becoming increasingly resistant to change and more durable, and thus also increasingly the object of social consensus. The relevance of the concept of resemiotization, therefore, is on the *mobility* of linguistic forms, on how messages get circulated assuming different forms, and the *intertextuality* of forms in different media that give rise to consensus on social meanings. In essence, resemiotization produces effects similar to those of intertextuality in that messages are circulated across a variety of media, a process that reinforces particular orders of indexicality, and that mimics the social and geographical mobility of linguistic forms, as

speakers are exposed to different realizations of a form in different contexts of use (cf. Johnstone, forthcoming).

### **3.7. Space and place**

Texts are always keyed to contexts and practices of their production, construction, uptake and reuse (Blommaert, 2008: 12), with Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) noting that ‘what matters is the site as much as the kind of surface on which the text is received’ (2006: 220). One of the most important factors in this regard is *place*, and the types of message resemiotizations that are available across what semiotic artefacts (for example, email, internet and sms, billboards) and the economic, infrastructural and technological framing conditions for different forms of message circulation. *Place* is important for how signs are interpreted, with the field of geosemiotics (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) attending to the study of how the geographical placement of signage contributes to its meaning making. Landry and Bourhis (1997) have looked at the concepts of ‘placeness’ in the notion of linguistic landscape and how this is figured through ‘indexical meaning’ (the derivable meaning(s) of the sign on and about the community space at which the sign is found), and ‘symbolic meaning’ (the symbolic meaning of the sign on and about the community).

#### **3.7.1. Scale**

An important aspect of place/space is *scale*, a space ‘where diverse economic, political, social and cultural relations and processes are articulated together as ‘some kind of structured coherence’ (Fairclough, 2006: 65). Spaces are semiotically rich, containing different codes, representations, customs and practices that can be ordered in hierarchies of value in relation to which linguistic items, products and representations are produced and positioned. For example, the Englishes spoken in center, up-scaled, economies constitute prestigious symbolic capital, as opposed to the local Englishes of peripheral

economies. The processes whereby persons, goods, cultural artefacts, imaginations and languages are circulated and transported between locales and sites of different dignity in known as *rescaling*. One form of rescaling common to late modern societies occurs together with the circulation of (transnational) forms of language through electronic media and advertising. Jaquemet (2005) speaks of how globalization has brought about a change in the communicative environment which is no longer predominantly face-to-face, focused and monolingual, but increasingly characterized by the *transidiomatic practices of deterritorialized* speakers linked, in the work of producing ‘recombitant identities, through local and electronic media’ (p. xx). In media production, the sampling and recontextualization of existing texts in new rap compositions, and processes typical of late-modernity, such as ‘conversationalization’ (Fairclough, 1995), where features of everyday conversational language (including code-switching) are incorporated into public language, may comprise a rescaling of language forms. However, although texts may travel across the semiotic economies of centre and periphery, ‘the system of use, value and function in which they were produced usually does not travel with them’ (Blommaert 2008: 6). Collins and Slembrouck (2004: 15) note how

All reading [of multilingual signage] is a contextualized interpretative practice that may draw on frames of interpretation that are organized inter alia in terms of assumptions about geographic scale....

That is, according to different *orders of indexicality* (Silverstein, 2003) or *orders of discourse* (Chouliarki and Fairclough, 1999). The notion of *frame* is a powerful concept for connecting ‘spaces existing prior to any activity and as a trigger of activities’ (op cit: 6). Substantially Collins and Slembrouck (2009: 5) alludes to how that this concept (enables us) to link spatial partitioned units (buildings)... and individual participants in the social organisation of activities, in other words, the mechanisms that constitute how social meanings in language use correlate with space. This argument is expressed with a claim that, space is inhabited and reconfigured by occupants during social activity

(Collins and Slembrouck, 2007: 5). These concepts permit for a deeper understanding of multilingual flows of consumer-oriented discourses in the public space.

### **3.7.2. Economics of space**

Another important dimension of place/space related to scale – although not identical to it – and that impacts upon its semiotics is *economics*. The economics of place is reflected in the way in which commercial linguistic landscapes are organized. Thus to the extent that the economics of a place determines the capacity of different stakeholders/authors to ‘buy or rent legitimate spaces of inscription’ (Cronin 2006:4) it exerts an influence on what type of signage is located where, as well as the content displayed and the language used. Jufferman (ms) in an unpublished study on grassroots signage in Gambia of how local emplacement is enacting global identities through Blommaert’s notion of ‘grassroots literacy’ shows how the material constraints on grassroots literacies, allow only handcrafted and manually written signage, often with information left out due to lack of space. This signage therefore requires a particular type of reading strategy.

Differences in the economic and material organization of place also provide for different types of interactional orders, sets of ‘behaviorial expectations regarding physical conduct, including language’ (Blommaert et al 2005: 212; Goffman, 1974, 1981) as well as types of and patterns of mobility and technologies of transport, predisposing towards the engagement of different sensory modalities, and privileging distinct culturally determined aesthetics (Cronin, 2005: 15)) for how space and its material contents are read.

Applying Bourdieu’s distinction about taste to notions of space provides us with a tool to think about how the multilingual and multimodal representations that constitute spaces of consumption link market economic discourses with individual sensibilities and social change. In his writing on the arcades of Paris, Benjamin (1999) noted the relationship between space, aesthetics and consumption. Spaces of consumption are ‘material

assemblages constituted by material artifacts, signs and symbols' compr[ising] a way of seeing, a way of perceiving the world' (Styhre and Engberg 2003:121).

### **3.8. An integrative approach: material ethnography**

Da Silva (2007) has noted how the tension between the construction and competition of different identities can be researched through viewing language as a social practice embedded in processes of social structuration. Identities are linguistically mediated and tied to multimodal representations that are in themselves embedded in material determinants/constraints (such as economy and space). Identities are linked to multimodal/multilingual representations through indexicality. This is because the ways in which languages become (re)contextualized in different genres and multimodal economies may carry different implications for their indexical value due to the central role played by *context* in the construal of language.

Identities are here thus the embodiment of polycentric norms manifested in the enactment of different genres of materially determined multimodal repertoires and practices of representation. This is the fundamental idea of a material ethnography of multilingualism that allows us to approach Ndebele's idea of an integrative epistemology for post-apartheid South Africa.

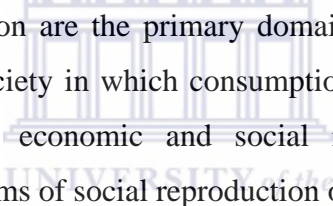
The questions to be dealt with below then are how is language in general, and multilingualism specifically, (re)configured in different types of commercial signage: to what extent are (representations) of linguistically mediated late-modern identities of consumption reorganizing popular multilingual repertoires and ushering in and promoting new practices and perceptions of language? These questions imply looking at how readers/producers are economically, socially and phenomenologically positioned in relation to productions of signage – a material ethnography of multilingualism.

The notion of *enregisterment* is central here, as it connects linguistic forms to particular *indexical meanings*, the social meanings that forms of language come to signal and stand for. Processes such as *footing* and *alignment* where language users identify with particular forms or variants of language in circulation comprise the motor for the attribution of indexical values to language forms. The result is a formation/sedimentation of a *register* or *genre*, a complex of linguistic resources associated with a particular place, style or, as in the cases studied here, identities/subjectivities. As we shall see, an important issue here is that the contexts, media, modalities and spaces through and across which variants circulate contribute to, or determine, the indexical *value* or meaning of particular language items, something that is captured in the notions of *scale* and *resemiotization*. This shows that the semiotic structuring of identities is framed in a material economics of variants.



## Chapter 4. The site and methodology

The focus of this study then is on the production/construction of multilingual/multimodal semiotic resources underlying emergent genres of commercial subjectivity. More specifically, the study explores how 3<sup>rd</sup>-order indexical meanings of particular linguistic variants is keyed from how they are used in multimodal/multilingual commercial representations and the mode of circulation of linguistic variants across media and modalities in different spaces and places. Because of the importance and visibility of place in South Africa for the process of social transformation, and because place is where a number of material semiotics come together in ways that allow a transmodal (movement, gaze, perspective, etc) approach to language, the notion of *linguistic landscape* is thus a core feature of this study. Styhre and Engberg point out,



spaces of consumption are the primary domains for the society of the spectacle, the society in which consumption plays an important role in veiling the economic and social inequalities and the underlying mechanisms of social reproduction of power (2003: 122).

In order to approach these questions from the point of view of a material ethnography, it is necessary to choose a site where there is semiotic evidence of on-going social transformation, and to construct a methodology appropriate to the assumptions underlying the theoretical framework.

The township of Khayelitsha is just such a site. Khayelitsha is located 28 kilometers from the Cape Town Central Business District, bounded on the north by the N2 highway, on the south by the Atlantic Ocean, by Mitchell's plain on the west and Kuilsriver to the east. It is home to more than one million people, the vast majority of whom are blue-collar workers, but with a small minority of professionals also residing there. Linguistically and demographically, Khayelitsha is typical of many African townships in the Western Cape; isiXhosa is the most widely spoken language, but there are also

significant numbers of speakers of Afrikaans and English, with other African languages increasingly present through migration from other parts of (South) Africa.

Khayelitsha's origins can be found in the height of apartheid oppression. The distant location of the township from the city center, with a lack of public transport impeding mobility, and a city plan organized to constrain freedom of movement and thought, was designed to instill an embodied sense of racial inferiority among its inhabitants. Even today, Khayelitsha comprises a peripheral space of social closure and exclusion typical of 'advanced marginality' (Waquant, 2001), a notion that refers to an order of society resulting from the 'unstable and heterogeneous structure of wage-labor' (Wanquant 2001: 124), the concentration of the unemployed and dispossessed to bounded and increasingly isolated territories, and a felt dissolution of place, accompanied by decomposition of class and de-proletarianization. Data from 2004 on key indicators of poverty and deprivation in Khayelitsha show that 63% of households have an expenditure of below R 500 per month; that 94% of households spend more than 40% of their income on food; and that 20-30% of households 'often' go without sufficient food, fuel and shelter (adapted from du Toit, 2005). According to Du Toit (2005:17), the impoverishment of Cape Town's townships 'is directly related to the dynamics of 150 or more years of forcible *incorporation* into the South African economy and racialised capitalism', today augmented by 'the racial and spatial geo-politics of the postindustrial metropolitan labour market' (Du Toit 2005: 11).

Nevertheless, despite the many remaining legacies of apartheid, such as the inefficient transport system or the paucity of quality educational infrastructures, the streets and stores, municipal squares and school-yards of Khayelitsha are slowly transforming into sites for the performance and refashioning of late-modern African selves (Nuttall, 2004). Informal shack settlements are being replaced by municipal housing programs, and bodily stylizations (hairdos and clothing styles, such as *ipantsula*, *umrapper*, *ipsidaans* and *amarafulla*) and varieties of speaking, such as *iscamto/tsotsitaal* are evidence that 'new cultures of commodification, are emerging [which] underlie new aesthetic forms, of



which cell phones, cars and various registers of fashion are but one example', (Mbembe *et al* 2004). Accessories such as cell phones carry great symbolic and aesthetic value, as do products aspired to such as BMWs and VW Golfs. Township mileus host new forms and sites of erotic performance and dress, and nurture the growth of new registers of black beauty and fashion (Mbembe *et al* 2004: 505).

Translocal developments such as these can be read-off from the Khayelitsha skyline, which is increasingly dominated by billboards of global products at the same time as local wares, products and services are semiotically packaged as potentially global life-style products. The question for the methodology of the thesis is what to sample among this signage, and according to what principles.

Methodological issues have been in focus in linguistic landscape studies since its inception. Despite the many exciting and innovative studies in the field (e.g. Backhaus, 2007; Bagna & Barni, 2006; Ben-Rafael *et al* 2004, 2006; Calvet, 1994; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Huebner, 2006; Itagi & Singh, 2002; Jufferman *et al*; Reh, 2004; Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Spolsky & Cooper, 1991), there is a sense in which the notion of linguistic landscape is still looking to establish a theory and methodology of language in space. Much literature has treated linguistic landscapes as spatially bounded clusters of text, which has informed the type of questions studies have asked of methodology. Issues of what may be taken to comprise a sign – the unit of analysis – (whether to define it physically in terms of extension/cohesion or semantically, in terms of information units or discourses (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, and whether newspapers, posters, books etc should be included), how to sample and define survey areas and determine their representativity, and what sampling procedures to use; how to encode the characteristics of signs, and how to classify them (e.g. a common distinction employed in many studies between official/non-official or top-down/bottom-up signage obscures the fluid interactions between these categories) – all operate with a localized notion of space and an associated 'social topology of structure' (Urry 2000). The tendency to view linguistic landscapes in terms of 'space of places' (Castells, 2000) occupied, fully or partially by

language(s), has meant that encounters between languages/speakers are treated as boundary crossing and transport, while the co-presence of multiple languages in one place are seen in terms of spatially located categories of ‘community’, neighborhoods, ethnic groups etc. These studies see linguistic landscapes as being comprised of ‘language that is visible in *a specified area*’ (my italics) or as the ‘sociosymbolic construction of *public space*’, or language within ‘*a given geographical area*’ (Ben-Rafael, *et al*, 2006) with a sign defined as ‘a text with a *spatially definable frame*’ (my italics).

However, the sociolinguistic dynamics of contact in late-modern multilingual societies is a sociolinguistics of linguistic mobility, and crossings, constrained by hierarchies of economics and differential power relations. This suggests that studies of linguistic landscape need to attend to (trans)local economies of message production and consumption, and the way that languages flow within and across (translocal) space, the material constraints on different message modalities, as well as the formative participant structure - social activities, interactions and acts of communicative consensus/conflicts - that contribute to the way a message unfolds over time and across space.

An important issue in landscape studies is what to take as comprising an instance of a sign. The unit of analysis for this study is thus a (loosely defined) Foucauldian notion of ‘discourse’, ‘socially constructed knowledge of (some aspect) of reality...developed in specific social contexts and in ways that are appropriate to the interests of social actors in these contexts’ (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2002:4). In most cases here, discourse will be identifiable as about consumption, and aspiration, and how sought after subjectivities are layered into the consumption of products. Discourses serve to both transform and legitimate social practices. In the particular cases under consideration here, the discourse is one of life style and consumption, specifically, relationships and their productivity through the intimate giving of gifts and the psychology of smartness. I see genres as multimodal, culturally specific, realizations of these higher order social discourses. Such a focus on tracing the passage and transport of discourses as the unit of analysis across

sites and artefacts suggests that no any one particular site should be sampled *per se*, but that focus should be on the way in which different sites impact on and determines the resemiotizations in the flow of messages across media and artefacts.

With respect to how to *encode* or describe a piece of signage, in this context, I have chosen to focus on its linguistic and visual composition, the readership roles or participant structures (footing and alignment) it assumes, and its placement or geosemiotic parameters. This is in order to explore its characteristics in terms of register or genres of subjectivity – the focus of this study.

Another question is, how to sample it and in what numbers?.Barni and Bagna (2009) detail a procedure for covering a geographical area in terms of multilingual organization of signage, and discuss principles for allocating each text to a georeference and to a particular genre, domain, and context, and describe how the emplacement of signage in different languages also determines the meaning of the language. They point out how ‘a number of factors intermingle in a complex way in the structuring of linguistic urban landscapes’ (Barni and Bagna, 2009: 129). An important dimension in how signage is distributed in Khayelitsha, especially with respect to the translocal or local origin and circulation of signage, is the local *economics* of place. Khayelitsha comprises different ‘sections’ or ‘sites’ with the status of a neighbourhood depending on the type and the size of housing in that particular section (e.g. Litha Park, Khanya Park and Phakamisa, all of which are considered up-market). The section of interest for this paper is Site B that was established in the early eighties out of the Site C informal settlement, KTC (Nyanga) and Cross Roads. Site B is a mixture of informal settlements (shacks) and proper brick or concrete housing, where the mixed nature of the area with respect to socioeconomic status is reflected in different practices and discourses of consumption. Drawing on Bourdieu (1984: 23), and what he called the ‘taste of necessity’ (the popular aesthetic of ‘the subordination of form to the function’) and ‘taste of luxury’ (which focuses on ‘the mode of representation, the style). An aesthetics that differs in the distance of their users to economic necessity and practical urgency’), I differentiate here between township *sites*

of necessity and sites of *luxury*. This tactic allows the linkage of spaces of consumption with the idea of discernment – the socialized process of taste that contribute to the symbolic trappings of social difference, and one of the processes that feeds into indexicality.

My procedure here was thus to systematically collect and photographically document the bulk of all commercial signage along two streets, one around the taxi-rank and station linking Khayelitha to metropolitan Cape Town, and the other, a local residential and commercial area along Lansdowne Rd – a major thoroughfare that besides (indirectly) linking the township to Cape Town serves predominantly as a trunk road with tributaries of access to different areas of the township itself. I chose these particular streets because of their ‘emic’ significance for the local neighbourhood residents in terms of how they perceived the streets as predominantly providing access to local neighbourhood sites or to more urban and up-market commercial areas – a correlate of the *economics* of space. In Khayelitsha, economically advantaged spaces, sites of luxury, attract predominantly commercially oriented signage around products and services at the higher-end scale, while spaces lower in the economic hierarchy, sites of necessity, are more predisposed to linguistically peddling products of everyday necessity. Signage in sites of necessity is built around available technologies and materials found in the township and constrained by the local political, economy; whereas signage in sites of luxury employ high-tech modes of production, often also involving chains of representations across different types of media.

From the sample of signage collected in this study (in total 36 in number), a number of instances of commercial signs were selected that were representative of the types of signage found in these two Khayelitha sites as a whole, with respect to the material used in the signage, the nature of the networks of production and consumption in which they are embedded, the products advertised, and use of language (monolingual (English/isiXhosa), bilingual or hybrid. What primarily differentiates signage in the two sites of necessity and luxury) are the semiotic implications of the representations being

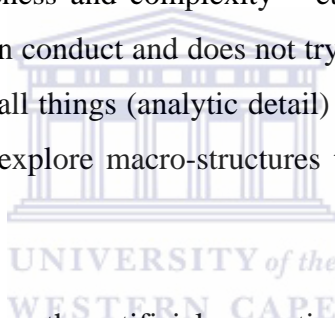
tied to different resources and modes of production that reflect the hierarchical nature of the sites in which they are produced and displayed. In Khayelitsha, there are differences in the linguistic and metalinguistic processes that find expression in different strategic choices for creativity, variable language choice as well as conventions for use of orthography, grammar and code-mixing. In other words, the different economics of place can be read off from the participant structures and from the semiotics of the signage, and the way this organizes practices and perceptions of multilingualism.

Data for this study thus comprises signage of different genres sampled from sites chosen on the basis of theoretical principles. The data has been subjected to analyses of the multiple forms of signification (linguistic and visual and spatial) that make up the sign. As my purpose was to mainly explore how the semiotic resources were produced that could become the stuff of identity reworking, and thus of re-indexicalization of languages, the data does not include interviews or other forms of direct human interaction with the artefacts of the linguistic landscape *per se*, that is, there is no data here on the authorial intention behind a signage and/or the readers' interpretation of it. Malinowski (2009) has noted how 'the complexities of the authorial intention amidst multiple and simultaneous processes of signification remain necessarily unexplored' (p. 111), pointing out how the 'importance of any individual's [authorial], (my addition) intent in the face of the larger social forces [of convention]' is not easy to determine.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, when interrogating the readings of the sign, Malinowski found that 'the emergence of unexpected meanings ....suggest that signs in the linguistic landscape...might mean more, or mean differently, than the individuals recognized as authors could have intended' (p. 118). The author makes reference to Butler's idea of performativity and excitability of speech in this context, suggesting that processes of *embodied signification* (in this case carried in the *materiality* of the *signage*, rather than the materiality of the embodied act of speaking and in the complex interaction of multiple communicative modes present in the linguistic landscape (p. 120) 'generates meaning beyond control'.

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<sup>2</sup> Johnstone makes a similar point in her study of the monothongization of Pittsburgh /aw/.

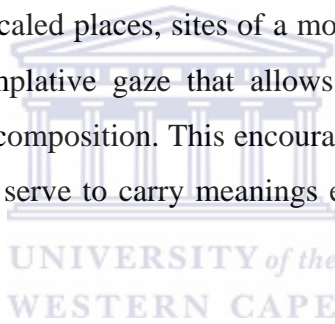
Some readers might find it problematic to label this study ‘ethnographic’. They might argue that if there are no human actors figuring in the analysis, then looking at instances of signage is not ‘doing’ ethnography in the sense in which it is popularly thought of. Blommaert (2008) has argued strongly that working on core data that is comprised of texts (or artefacts) only can, in his opinion, be understood as ethnographic, even though it does not involve fieldwork in the traditional sense, or - we might add – interactions with human agents. He warns against equating ethnography with a particular methodology and technique, noting how this distorts or obscures what is truly of value in the ethnographic approach, namely that it is a theoretical perspective on human behaviour, characterized by (i) an assumption about the situated (contextualized) nature of human actions; (ii) an interpretative stance and a reflexive awareness of ‘bias’ in all stages of research; (iii) a commitment to comprehensiveness and complexity – ethnography does not attempt to reduce the complexity of human conduct and does not try to reduce it to ‘core’ features – and (iv) an assumption that small things (analytic detail) can shed light on bigger things, or, in another jargon, we can explore macro-structures through micro, (Deumert 2008: 13)



He also critiques what he sees as the artificial separation between *practice* and *product* (p. 13), claiming that ‘practice always yield products, that such ‘products’ ‘therefore contain traces of practices and can disclose the nature of such practices’ (p. 14). This insight is captured in the notion of *sedimentation* which refers to the traces in texts and images of its production, intention and intended audiences (Pahl, 2008; Roswell, 2008). I therefore refer to the approach used in this thesis as a material ethnography in that it views relationships of production and circulation as sedimented in signage. It is ethnographic because not only do ‘things’ take on a life of their own and populate spaces, but people live and get identity through things and spaces (cf, the idea of immersion system, and how gaze and consumption may be determined by material designs of spaces etc)and how these are represented.

## Chapter 5. Sites of luxury

Sites of luxury host billboards in what Scollon and Scollon (2003) refer to as *authorized spaces*, which, in Khayelitsha, comprise areas enclosed in barbed-wire, such as schools and hospital grounds, as well as main squares and busy shopping centers.<sup>3</sup> Here, the products and services on offer, such as health and education, are only available through professional service-providers, and in contradistinction to other types of signage, these billboards carry a considerable material and economic investment in the form of long production chains involving various stakeholders and large-scale, industrial production techniques. Their production and placement are closely monitored with respect to content and design by local government authorities. The location of these billboards in ‘up-market’ and economically up-scaled places, sites of a mobility (e.g. taxi-stands and main squares), encourages a contemplative gaze that allows the eye to dwell – almost in aesthetic appreciation - on the composition. This encourages a complexity of design with multiple layers of context that serve to carry meanings encoded in the use of color and spatial positioning.



### 5.1. Genres of subjectivity

The bulk of the particular commercial signage in sites of luxury presents with a discourse geared to the production of (aspirational) identities. In general, the genre characteristics of this type of signage revolves around projecting an image of an identity/subjectivity configured around late-modern patterns and products of consumption, specifically an identity comprising a juxtaposition of elements of modernity and tradition, and of the local and the global. The identities associated with consumption are ascribed to particular hybrid role-figures and manifest as a *personification*. The reader/viewer is invited to identify and align with the personification of consumption as it is embodied in the

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<sup>3</sup> One of the billboards is placed between a shopping center and the train station, suggestively marking the boundary between household chores, work and home, and suggesting a point of transition between the space/time of leisure and that of work/domestic labor.



product in how the interpersonal dimension is designed in terms that invite and engage with the reader/viewer. Reader identities are discursively and multimodally constituted (providing the ‘appropriate’ semiotic resources for subjective positioning) in relation to the product advertised.

Much of this up-market commercial signage juxtaposes depictions of people and products in terms of the local and global, in ways suggestive of the increasing tendency towards discourses of personification/individualization noted by Chouliaraki and Fairclough, (1999) as typical for late-modernity. A more detailed look at the Castle beer advert (fig. 1) and the King Korn brew billboard (fig. 2) shows this at work.

Figure 1





Figure 2



In both billboards, the characters are represented as a comfortable syncretism of traditional and modern identities. The Castle beer advert (fig.1) anchors the *modern* in the *traditional* and the *global* in the *local* by borrowing fragments of tradition from the Zulu culture and juxtaposing these with indexicalities of the modern such as Western clothing and the nature of the product advertised. In the Castle Milk Stout advertisement, we find the activity of drinking beer presented both as a specifically male-gendered pastime, but also as an activity that bridges the young and the old and the traditional and the modern. The man on the left, for example, is dressed in modern clothes but his right wrist sports a goat-skin which is associated with a cleansing ritual among the Zulu's. The man on the right is wearing a leopard skin, and a traditional necklace, holding his glass with his left hand and revealing a traditional bracelet on his left arm. From the way in which this figure is dressed, one can conclude that he is meant to represent a King.

The King Korn brew advert (fig. 2) was found next to the Castle beer advert in Site B, Sanlam Centre. In contradistinction to the previous billboard, this signage represents a *traditional* product and custom in *modern* terms, and reconstructs the *local* in terms of points of reference to the *global*. As with the Castle advert, this billboard juxtaposes

images of the modern with the traditional, partly in how it depicts the woman as half modern, half traditional (thereby symbolizing contemporary city life) and partly through the representation of the advertised product, King Korn beer, which is a modern way of brewing African traditional beer. Here, we observe a figure of a woman with so-called relaxed hair and contemporary clothing, wearing make-up and lipstick, all features of modern contemporary fashion conscious women, and suggestive of a young woman typical of late-modern service economy. However, in addition, her face has white dots made with ochre that symbolizes a traditional African/Xhosa woman and this also identifies her as a woman who customarily brews local beer in the local township bars, the 'sheebens'. This signage is characterized by suggestion, innuendo and the ambiguity of the traditional and modern in how femaleness is depicted, and clearly encodes a shift in the perception or ascription of femininity from the traditional older woman beer-brewster to a younger and more late-modern service provider. The advertisement also contains an image of a traditional clay pot filled with traditional African beer and alongside it is an image of a packet of King Korn Mtombo-Mmela home brew. The clay pot plays up and repeats the theme of tradition depicted in the female figure in a directional reading from left to right, whereas the packet is clearly an item to be found on a modern super-market shelf. This way of representing the product thus also serves to lift it out of the traditional sheeben and into modern circuits of consumption.

*Personalization* – the ascription or construction of identities of late-modern consumption around commercial products - is repeated and reinforced by the interpersonal and information structuring dimensions of the billboards. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of this type of signage is in how the different languages are embedded in structures high on interpersonal involvement and structured according to conventional hierarchies of information prominence that all support the build up of a genre of new identity. For example, both the Castle and King Korn advertisements *invite* the reader to engage with the content of the composition, a function that is carried in this signage through features such as the size of the characters depicted in the representations, the perspective and angle from which the reader is positioned to view the composition, and

the engaging nature of the gaze of the actors depicted. In the Castle advertisement, the size of the two main protagonists suggests a physical distance between the reader and the participants typical of a shared, intimate, drinking communion in a bar. In addition, the younger figure is portrayed with direct eye contact with the viewer as if to invite interaction. In this composition, we also find an interesting use of vectors; the figures of the two men are positioned in relation to each other in such a way that the viewer is invited into the inter-generational and male communion formed around the apex of the triangle comprising the juxtaposition of the two figures, and the angle of the bottle. Particularly, the way each man holds the beer glass in the right and left hand respectively is a central design feature of this apex, and it is notable that it is the two traditionally adorned arms that hold the glass of beer.

In the King Korn beer advertisement, the size of the woman's face suggests close and intimate proximity, and this together with the slight tilt of her head and the hint of a seductive labial pout, suggest her imminent availability to serve. The angle from which the reader views both, the King Korn and Castle advertisement signals viewer involvement rather than detachment.

Information structure and language distribution in the representations also contribute to how the genre of personalization is constituted. Information structuring refers to how the message is multimodally organized along three basic dimensions, namely *information value*, which depends on how elements in a composition are positioned *vis a vis* each other, that is layout of information and reading paths (*given-new*; *ideal-real*); *saliency*, which has to do with foregrounding and back-grounding of information or elements in the visual composition (often by means of relative size); and *framing*, that is, how the message is embedded or contextualized.

The structuring of information along the vertical axis of a composition, what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) refer to as the parameter of *Ideal* and *Real*, structures sociosemiotic meaning along dimensions of hypothetical, abstract, future or goal oriented (*Ideal*) versus

factual, concrete, concurrent and present (*Real*). In visual semiotics, the *Ideal* is associated with the 'top' and the *Real* with the 'bottom' in spatial composition. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) note that for something to be *Ideal* means: 'that it is presented as the idealized or generalized essence of the information, hence also as its ostensibly, most salient part, while, the *Real* is then opposed to this in that it presents more specific details (e.g. details), more 'down to earth' information (e.g. photographs)...' (2006:187).

The Castle advertisement is made up of layers of *Given* and *New* where an image of the two smiling male figures, holding glasses of Castle milk stout, comprise, the *Given* and *Ideal*, and with a bottle of Castle milk stout that overlaps to position *Real-New*. The other layer of *Given*, embedded in the first, is the leftmost figure in Western dress as opposed to the rightmost figure in traditional clothing. It is suggestive that the left most figure in position *Given* is the younger man. From a sociosemiotic perspective, information that is presented as *Given* may be that taken to be uncontested and unmarked – the point of departure for the message and something already known to the viewer, whereas information in position *New*, on the other hand, may be socially transformative or marked, as something which is not yet known, or perhaps not yet agreed upon by the viewer, hence as something [to sic] which the viewer must pay special attention' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006:181). In the Castle Beer advert, we read the message as referring to the fact that younger people can generally be expected to drink beer, whereas the position of the older man in position *Real-New* could be taken as a reflection of the cultural/traditional propensity for older men *not* to drink commercial beers, thus comprising a *novelty*. Placing information at position *New* also brands this information as potentially socially contested material.

At position *Real*, we find the phrase 'true greatness comes from within' framed by a warning: 'Not for sale to persons under 18'<sup>4</sup>. The first phrase is the pay-off line of the

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<sup>4</sup> Although it is not immediately apparent here, the phrase 'true greatness comes from within' (which is conventionally associated with the product in most contexts) is accomplishing subtle identity work in this advert. In order to grasp this, the reader must be familiar with a televised series from which the characters and 'the plot' of the advert are taken, namely a young Zulu warrior's many attempts to win the hand of the King/s daughter (both figures depicted in the advert). In the televised session, the story tells of a young

advertisement, and the second line repositions or contextualizes the local, intimate, cozy and private nature of this act of drinking metalinguistically (and metavisually) as an act subject to official sanction and regulation on a public arena. In addition, the two phrases are divided by a defining frame of black and white; the pay-off line is on the black frame, inscribed with highly salient earthy colored beige while, the warning is inscribed in the white frame with black letters. Here, the colouring serves to hold the message together and express coherence – whereas the pay-off line is clearly within the message frame, the warning is not, signaling its nature as a metalinguistic, commentary. The sharp division between *Ideal* and *Real* is bridged by the Castle bottle which reaches across and thereby conjoins the two parts of the composition.

Even in the King Korn beer advertisement, there are layers of *Given* and *New* in that the rightmost cluster of objects juxtapose a ‘more *Given*’ and traditional way of brewing beer with the more *New* packet of King Korn meal. Likewise, there is a suggestive *Ideal-Real* structure in the relative positioning and perspective between the bowl of beer and the packet. The salience of the modern packet is also reflected in its *size* relative to the pot of beer, clearly underscoring how the traditional is incorporated into the modern.

In other words, what we observe here in both adverts is a message of syncretism of the old and the new and the local and the global; social change and modernization of traditional characters and products subtly expressed in the movement across the *Given* and the *New* and the *Ideal* and the *Real*. The high involvement of the reader brought about by the design of the interpersonal dimension of the adverts facilitates an alignment on behalf of the reader/viewer with the syncretic identity representations.

Turning to the linguistic practices, English is typically constituted in this signage through the fact of its location in prominent positions of high information value and salience, occupying the *Ideal*, or top, position in a composition, while isiXhosa is more frequently

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warrior who lacks financial and material resources with which to pay a dowry for the King’s daughter; all he is able to offer his prospective father-in-law is his good heart and honest intentions – therefore the link to the phrase ‘true greatness comes from within’.

found in the *Real* position. English is also found more often in position *Given*, or leftmost, thereby contributing to its construal as a linguistic point of common departure, the unmarked case, while isiXhosa in position *New*, constructs it as socially contested – or at the very least, carrying novelty. Furthermore, English is also found in functions expressing authority, respect and formality – recall how English provides a formal and authoritative metaframing for informal activities such as drinking in the Castle advertisement. IsiXhosa, on the other hand, is clearly used in the construction of local figures/voices – voices that may thus be interpreted through the dominant and more audible voice of English as a matrix language in linguistically juxtaposed signage (cf. fig. 3).

In these representations, both English and isiXhosa occur in contexts of high involvement and modality, suggesting that both languages are comfortably niched at the intimate scale of the community. For English, this signifies a significant migration of the language into domains of the everyday and informal. It is suggestive that each language is monolingually associated with different genders, and there are other examples in the larger sample where English appears. For example, the KFC advert in chapter 7 below, where the use of isiXhosa is highly suggestive of a female subjectivity distributed across masculinity and isiXhosa across femininity. Both languages are therefore high on involvement and interactivity and ‘reader identification’ – but of different types (which associates each language with specific modern/traditional roles). English and isiXhosa are represented here as distinct and separate languages and figure in distinct spaces. English occurs in a wide range of functions in a standard variety, for example, in the Castle advertisement, two English phrases are used with a fully representational meanings and in grammatically standard forms: ‘true greatness comes from within’ and a warning message ‘not for sale to persons under 18’ (a hortatory, metalinguistic framing, of the activity of drinking).

An important part of this multimodal genre is colour, that is used primarily to encode the information structure, and the predominant factor in the choice of colour is the product

advertised and its associated activities. The colour forms a tapestry or frame which serves to hold the different parts of the message together into a cohesive whole. The Castle advertisement thus employs a variety of colors, black, beige and white, where black and beige are both used for the product because they are the colours of the beer. The King Korn advertisement employs pastel colors, with brown as the dominant color for the background and white for its letters. The colour of the beer contributes to the framing, local contextualization and coherence of the message for the Castle advert, as does the background in the Kong Korn advert which depicts a reed mat.

### **5.1.1. Summary**

The genre of subjectivity here, then, presents with an up-scaling of traditional identities onto translocal arenas – a delocalization process. Resources or spaces for reader footing/alignment are structured through the interpersonal parameter (stance/appreciation). We find code separation and a hierarchical construction of English (manifest in masculinity, frequently slotted into positioned *Ideal* and *Given*, its use as an authoritative metalanguage and the wide range of functions it expresses). In other words, we have a particular genre of subjectivity – a delocalized although traditional Self that is carried through a particular combination and use of language and other multimodal characteristics such as colour.

## **5.2. Enregisterment**

In order to explore some of the possible processes of enregistering these multilingual and multimodal resources in sites of luxury, we can look at adverts for Cadbury's chocolate. The first such billboard is an early instance of this advertising campaign (fig. 3). The high cost behind the industrial production of this billboard involving many hours of manpower input from different stakeholders also finds semiotic reflex in two types of linguistic *rescaling*; on the one hand, the English language text is highly edited so as to conform to



standard centre norms of English, and, on the other hand, the billboard contains pan-African varieties of language – expressions that are common to many different African languages (although sometimes with slightly diverging meanings). The billboard is a fairly conventional PRIMEDIA<sup>5</sup> advert, and is designed to be ‘read’ diagonally from top left to bottom right.

Figure 3



There is a clear link between the product, a ‘sweet’ and the phrase ‘*sweet-talk waya waya*’ written in clear bold-text in the same sized fonts as the introductory P.S. The phrase itself is suggestively ambiguous in that it can be read as making reference to ‘sweet-talk’, that is, using words of love or fondness to woo the lover, or as referring to a metalinguistic act of actually talking about the sweet itself as an object of contemplation. The wording is a hybrid construction that uses a pan-African/ urban/ contemporary language form, *waya-waya*, with the meaning ‘to go on and on’ and an English

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<sup>5</sup> PRIMEDIA is a media corporation with a number of subsidiaries and is a large producer of billboards in South Africa.

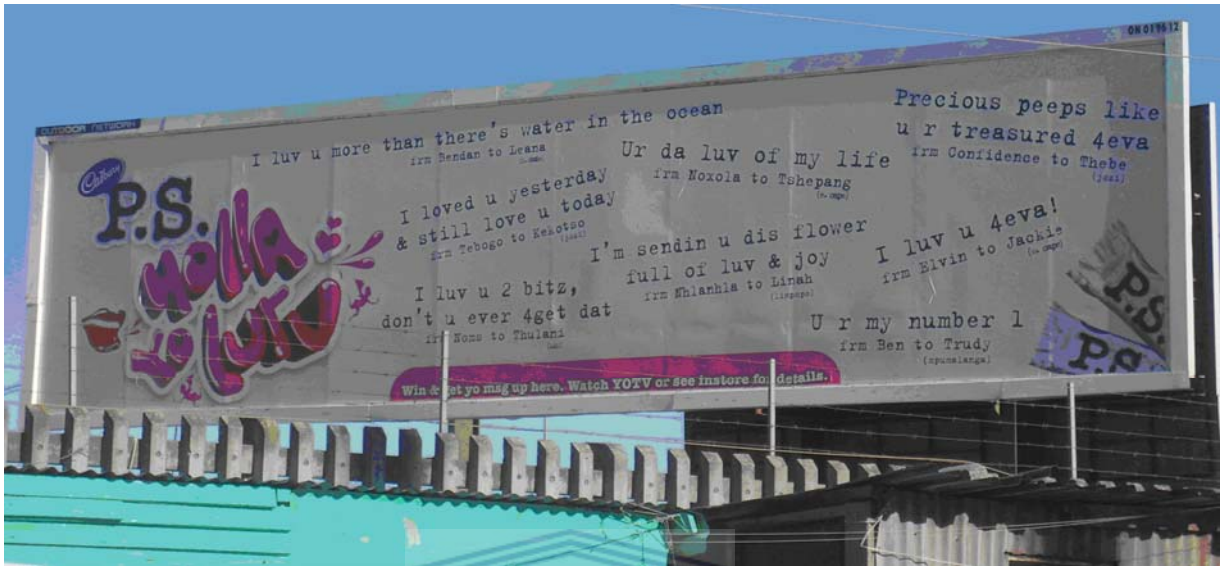


compound noun which together roughly translates as 'sweet-talk non-stop'/'non-stop sweet talk'. In fact the phrase *waya-waya* is popularly predominantly associated with nice times, which drives home the message put across by the advertising company of languishing pleasurable moments. The small font-sized phrases of intimacy that provides the background to the composition, such as *unwrapping you...*, *uncovering you...* and *exquisite sweetness*, suggest that the sweet is put on top of a love letter, and the background of the signage thus reinforces the sensual message that the ad is attempting to link to the product. This is further substantiated by the word *personal* written on the top-right corner of the sweet itself and the phrase *P.S. I love you xxxx*.

The semiotics of this billboard creates powerful scale effects, as much in this signage generates associations to distance and even *erasure* (Irvine and Gal, 2000) of the local. For example, the phrase '*PS, I love you*' is indicative of a message from afar through its associations with a written register (letter, sms, or email) which positions the reader as a 'non-proximal' interactant/recipient of distant others with whom there is some indication of an intimate relationship. However, there is also the possibility of reading this billboard from the role perspective of a by-stander/overhearer (ratified or not), or of an audience to a podium event, creating shifts in footing and alignment with the message. Likewise, the pan-African phrase *waya-waya* suggests non-localness and distance/extension, covering as it does many different language groups and spaces, as well as directly referring to languid, drawn out, iterative and pleasurable times. In fact, taken together, the interactive regimes, the production of registers appropriate to non-presence and the linguistic pointer to distance and extension (*waya-waya*) iconically signal longing, aspiration and anticipation, and carry multiple references to distance and scale. It also generates multiple reader stances.

The following billboard *P.S. Holla Yo Lurv* is a sequel to *P.S. I love you*, and extends the discourse schemata into new contexts. It is part of a larger chain of meaning construction (also incorporating the first billboard) that reaches across a range of media.

Figure 4



This billboard is an example of the aggregate ‘inter-semiotic, interdiscursive dialogicality’ of signage referred to by Scollon and Scollon (2003: 23) in that it speaks directly with the billboard in the previous example. In fact, viewing the billboard from the perspective of a network of multimodal and multilingual (re)contextualizations, throws up four ways in which the resemiotizations with associated reframings produce shifts in footings and alignments that generate different reading positions. Firstly, there is the recontextualization of the same product, just noted, across different representations with an expansion/elaboration/itemization of the noun phrase ‘sweet talk’; while the original billboard suggested what might be meant by ‘sweet-talk waya waya’, this signage goes a step further by actually displaying multiple examples of such talk. The second instantiation is a recontextualization of the message in the format of a televised competition on *Yo TV*, which aimed to promote the product on kiddies’ television by getting contestants to come up with winning examples of ‘sweet talk’. Thirdly, all the examples of ‘sweet talk’ displayed on the billboard are authentically composed by young people who are ‘sweet-talking waya waya’ through the medium of SMS language. In other words, the product message is recontextualized in a specific register typical of youth and new technology, namely the register of short messaging, with its numerous

orthographic abbreviations and truncated grammar, a choice of register that is clearly target-market related and oriented towards youth. The fourth resemiotization implies a remodulation or reframing of the animator/principal in terms of a (transnational) black persona through the orthographic rendering of *Holla Yo Lurv*. This represents an additional up-scaling of the message mediated through the Black American pronunciation that simultaneously serves to produce distance/space.

In other words, this billboard comprises one moment in chains and clusters of resemiotized discourses across time/space in earlier signage and outwards to another engaging medium, *Yo TV* through a new technological register of SMS communication, and a reframing in Black American Vernacular. As with the previous example, the reader is subjectively positioned in relation to the product through a variety of *participation structures*, depending on whether the billboard is read as a podium or stage event, or as a demand or offering. Readers are frequently positioned as non-present/non-proximal - engaging with distant others - as opposed to deictically anchored first and second person typical of local signage in sites of necessity (cf. below, chapter 6). These participation structures reinforce the construction or image presented of a non-localized (timeless) space, technologically linked through a chain of recontextualized and transmodalized meanings. Agha (2005) has remarked on how the social relevance of inter-event semiosis is its capacity to formulate and maintain social formations. In this context, we note how the discourse schemata of aspiration, involved participants and target group, identities and emotions are built across many varied scales, involving different languages, different registers and variable media in the production of the Cadbury's representation. This signage also exemplifies how spaces may be semiotically imagined that are not co-existent with place of consumption (cf. Pennycook, 2009). This category of signs are examples of Benjamin's (1917) notion of *inscription* - 'a dehistorical use of space, one that discounts context and tradition within a given site' (Wong and Bishop, 2006), and which 'presumes the space as capable of conversion into a tabula rasa, which can be inscribed and erased at will' (Wong and Bishop 2006).

### 5.2.1. Summary

What, then, is the significance of these multiple resemiotizations across scales? And how do the many different reading positions, or participation structures, contribute to the semiotics of this signage? More specifically, in what way can these processes be seen as informing the construction of orders of indexicality and processes of enregisterment? As I noted in Chapter 2, in principle, the effect of chains of resemiotizations is equivalent to the ‘geographical mobility’ of variants, where speakers encounter the linguistic form across many different contexts that each informs its value and meaning. Just as the reading of a news item in RP on BBC serves to metapragmatically (although not necessarily *metadiscursively*) posit the high social status of RP elements purely through dint of its figuring on national radio, so does the contexts in which particular encodings of a discourse message occur speak to its ‘value’. The use of English here is repetitively and performatively enacting distance, aspiration and scale. In other words, resemiotization contributes to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> order indexicalities associated with a particular pattern of language use – a particular practice of multimodal multilingualism characterized by code separation and standard forms with the social meaning of delocalized traditionality. The different participation structures generated by how the reader is positioned through devices of footing and alignment with the composition can be seen as equivalent to, or proxy for, social mobility, that is, readers encounter these higher order indexicalities from the vantage points of very different subject positions and reading roles – something that is suggestive of Milroy and Milroy’s loose knit social networks, (cf below).

## Chapter 6. Sites of necessity

The site in which the billboards are found is located along a tributary road where a number of other services are also located, and are designed to attract the gaze and attention of passers-by who are in search of precisely the services offered and who know that they can be found in the sites in question. The signage is geared to products and services such as local food-stuffs, firewood and gasoline, street car wash and repair services, hairdressing salons and mobile phone repairs, and these signs serve therefore primarily to inform the reader of the exact nature of the services or goods on offer. In sites of necessity the form of signage is constrained by the material and spatial possibilities of resource-scarce networks of production and consumption. The signage is manually produced on a unique basis with a relatively modest economic investment, and fashioned out of materials that do not weather well. Typically, the shop-owner or service provider will consult on the design of the signage with a painter (often a young student known for his artistic abilities). Reading paths are multiple, that is, it is possible to read a sign from diverse starting points and different trajectories.

### 6.1. Genre of personalized transaction

This signage is sharply oriented towards initiating and structuring focused interactions around the delivery of a particular service (for immediate consumption) – an encounter of the task-oriented kind (Goffman, 1981). It serves as a pre-sequence to a business transaction by presenting the name of the shop/product, the specific indication of the services or products on offer, and a relevant deictic anchoring in the form of contact numbers and names of service providers. The information is displayed in the form of ideal and real structure. Rather than comprising the ascribed (Pavelenko and Blackledge, 2004) identity typical of the top-down genre of *personification*, we find here the *adopted* (Pavelenko and Blackledge, 2004) identity of, what we can call, *personalization*, whereby transactional signage in sites of necessity, organizes verbal and visual practices

into a repertoire/register expressing individual, personalized and idiosyncratic voice. This is underscored in much of the multimodal composition, such as the aesthetics in the embellished calligraphy, the idiosyncratic and creative deployment of limited resources and access to these resources (through enlisting the help of others), the individual hybridity and mix of verbal and visual practices, and the ludic nature of the signage. The signage is clearly a product of an inspired *bricolage* by individuals using the local and global semiotic options available to them and tailoring it to local economic contexts.

Figure 5





Figure 6



In Siya's Fruit and Veg, we note the use of English in the shop name (horizontally and vertically depicted) as well as in the employment of the Coca-Cola logo – a transidiomatic (Jaquemet, 2005) icon - which frame and physically envelops the pictorial images of fruit, vegetables and ice-cream. The semiotizations in both Siya's and the Herbal Chemist use multiple codes, isiXhosa and English, as well as graphic representation in cleverly hybrid constructions. For example, the name of the spaza, Siya's spaza has an English possessive inflection on an isiXhosa name, which is also carried through a change in colouring from blue to pink. Likewise, the '&' symbol is in mixed colouring. Furthermore, the visuals and the verbals can be read as part of the same utterance, a multimodal code-switch; for example, in Siya's the phrase *ezibandayo zikhona* (cold things sold here) is a truly multimodal structure with the listed array of figured images of ice-cream cones, lollies etc,' serving as an attribute/modifier to the IsiXhosa noun phrase, 'cold things'. This construction highlights the intimate interaction between the verbal and the visual in this type of signage. Interestingly, English is not fully integrated into the semiotic of the local signage; the only hybrid structure in which

English occurs is in colouring, but not with isiXhosa and not with visuals (as isiXhosa does).

The Herbal Chemists, in a way similar to Siya's, exhibits a close relationship between the isiXhosa text and visual imagery, the theme of medicine, as attribute, is taken up in the vertical juxtaposition of the traditional clay pot, and the 'we' is repeated in the shield, spear and club – a conventional symbol of traditional medical practitioners.

The presence of the coca-cola logo, a symbol of popular (and global) culture, is what Scollon and Scollon (2003) refer to as *decontextualized semiotics*, that is, signs, pictures and texts that appear in multiple contexts but always in the same form, although recontextualized or reframed for specific occasions of use. Likewise, in the Tears of Joy Herbal Chemists, the name of the shop in English against a blue frame encompasses the pictorial depiction of the Zulu shield and the medical pot, as well as the list of services offered in Xhosa against a yellow background.

Colour, particularly colour saturation plays an important part in transactional signage. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) distinguish between two types of saturation with different meanings; highly saturated colors that give salience to parameters of 'positivity', 'exuberance' and 'vulgarity' and low saturation that highlights subtle and more tender meanings (but also 'coldness'.) (2006: 233). Siya's spaza uses bright but soft colours; light blue, a colour of low saturation, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), is a dominant color in the composition, with some red, black and blue making up the letters in the billboard. The local chemists uses a range of colours; blue, red, yellow, black, white and green, although a highly saturated yellow is dominant. The mix of verbal (English) and specific visuals frame the product and services offered as belonging to a particular African *place*, and as addressing a particular (local) target market. The choice of colour is linked to the particular product on offer, for example, blue is typically found on stores that sell groceries and fruits and vegetables; whereas yellow is typically



associated with medical products. We thus find English (in restricted functions, cf. below) contextualized in a traditional and local tapestry of colour and form.

I have already noted how the *Real* in bottom-up signage is often expressed through a listing of services and products, as well deictic references to the service provider. This information structuring dimension is also realized in other semiotic choices, such as choice of language, typography and use of colour framing. For example, the spaza's name, Siya's fruit, veg, is found at the top in colorful bold letters in English, that is at the *Ideal* position and the concrete information of what is on offer, in the form of signs or images, is found at the bottom at *margin Real* and gives an expansion of services offered in the spaza. In the *Real* position, the images emphasize what the name is about by providing portraits of the array of products and services on offer inside the outlet, such as fruits, vegetables, sugar, coca-cola, ice cream and fish. English is the only language to occur in position *Ideal*, and then only in the form of labeling noun phrases and the limited use of rubrics. Color contrasts are used in a text-structuring way to off-set the title from the text, and the font size of the position *Real* is noticeably smaller than the font used at position *Ideal* – expressing salience of the *Ideal*. We also find a particular calligraphy in positions *Ideal* as opposed to *Real*. English here, then, is configured through a top/*Ideal* positioning associated with aspiration, and manifested in a particular font size and colour dimension.

With respect to the *Given-New* distinction, the leftmost position on the building front, the English wording *Fruit & Veg* serves to off-set or frame the pictorial image of fruit and vegetables, the products on sale. At the same time as these phrases contribute to salience and framing, they also form a *Given-New* structure with *Fruit & Veg* making up the leftmost position and the coca cola signage positioned rightmost. There is a similar bracketing or framing structure in the isiXhosa wording *ezibandayo zikhona* which translates as 'cold things available' and that brackets off the image of the ice creams in a centre –margin or triptych construction with the pictures providing the centre and the

isiXhosa wording making up the margins. The wording comprises a *Given-New* structure, as well as an *Ideal – Real* embedded construction, manifest in the slanting position of the words in the phrase. There is, then, a multifunctionality and ambiguity in the means used for information structuring because of the way the text is slanted. However, there is yet another level of embedding in this frontage made up of a centre line with a surrounding text running through the whole signage and carried in the visual images of fruits and ice creams. We also find here an intriguing multi-embeddedness, which is because of the 3-dimensional nature of the material. There is a segment of the shop-front, comprising the left most English language framing, Fruit & Veg and the pictorial representation of vegetables and fruits that open up as a shop front doorway and that can be read independently from the leftmost side as a Given-New/Equative structure. In other words, Siya's spaza is semiotized as a hierarchy of parentheticalness around a centre axis.

The Herbal Chemists exhibits a similar configuration of linguistic information along the parameters of *Given-New*, *Ideal-Real*, *Saliency and Framing*. The name of the chemist is placed at the top, that is, at position *Ideal*, with big font size and bold letters –another expression of personalization. Again, additional fragments of information are found just below the name of the chemist along with the name of the doctor practicing there at position *Real*. Once again, as with the Spaza, the isiXhosa phrases are found at position *New*, and there is again a listing of products and services on offer – as with Siya's. In the Chemists, the order of content in this position differs from the one found at Siya's. For one it contains some isiXhosa phrases but in a list form rather than images. However, it also uses images in the form of a figure of a traditional clay pot with a spear, bones and (*itshoba*) 'a cow's tail' and a figure of a shield, spear and a club in position *New*. The mid-line is also important here – as it was in Siya's - although this one follows a vertical pattern parallel to the list of doctors with contact numbers in the far left. Interestingly, right at the bottom, at position *Real*, there is an explicit mention of what is sold in isiXhosa, similar to what we find in Siya's, namely, *sithengisa amayeza* meaning 'we sell medicine'.

### 6.1.1. Summary

In summary, in sites of necessity, we find an intimate mix of print and visuals, a hybridity and mixing in language (which is also repeated in other modalities), and the production of multiple reading paths that generate representations of a networked message. These features are conventional, and typical of a web site rather than a linear left-right local signage. The texts are able to reach out and address a variety of audiences through the multilingual and multimodal depictions of services and products for sale, and does so through forms of language similar to social graffiti, although also employing traditional visuals (Zulu shield for pharmacy) as well as by the use of *transidiomatic* language.

*Personalization* is arguably the organizing principle behind the deictic references to place, and product, and its local anchorage, and in how semiotic functions are encoded across verbal and visual means of expression, as well as the complex and networked character of the information structuring. These genre features are particularly clear in the Siya's Fruit and Veg. and The Herbal Chemists.

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### 6.2. Processes of enregisterment

Again, we can ask what types of processes of enregisterment of we find associated with these spaces and signage types. We can look more closely at some examples in this respect. The first example is from an upholsterer's shop.

Figure 7



One of the most striking linguistic characteristics is the way in which the ‘author’ of this signage takes over and adjusts English to isiXhosa, particularly in the words, ‘khava’ meaning ‘cover’ and ‘isofa’ meaning ‘sofa’ in a clause where isiXhosa is the matrix language. Linguistic hybridity is also exploited in the presence of the English word *plastic* in an adopted or adjusted Xhosa sentence. This signage follows a conventional text structure, or genre, for signs in these types of networks, with the name of the referent and service offered uppermost, followed by a clarification of the more exact nature of the services, and ending up with the contact details. Of interest is how the use of color, in this case, the mix of red and blue, has a text structuring function in off-setting the title from the text. Signage of this type also contains ‘ludic spaces’, where originality, creativity, and playfulness are displayed. Often these spaces are located in the margins or peripheries of the signage. In the present illustration, the ludic space is on each side of the composition and manifested as drawings of two chairs.

A second instance of signage found in sites of necessity is again designed in a conventional format characterized by much deictic anchoring to the immediate context (in the form of service providers' names, (as well as naming conventions for the businesses themselves), the working hours, working days and contact numbers of the provider), an exhaustive list of services as well as price-levels thought to be suitably affordable for the context. The signage must be read in conjunction with an array of supporting artefacts in its immediate surround, such as the fire-extinguisher placed within easy reach (in the right top-side of the picture), the gas-tube for welding next to the make-shift ramp for immediate, off-the-cuff exhaust repairs, and the graveled piece of earth that demarcates the workshop proper. It is also significant that the signage is located at a junction where vehicles need to stop before proceeding onto a main road, thereby capitalizing on the stationary gaze.

Figure 8



This signage is written in unmonitored and unedited English, visible in lack of consistent use of orthographic principles, and a non-standard spelling of short vowels, (e.g. *fittment*



for *fitment*, *bugglary* instead of *burglary*, *motor* instead of *motto* and *nagociable* for *negotiable*), as well as some grammatically non-standard phrases (e.g. *we specialized on:-contractor of all*). Although the bulk of this composition is in English, the name of the shop, *Yebo Fittment Centre*, is a hybrid construction where *Yebo* is a Zulu word (meaning ‘yes’) that was popularized in a Vodacom advertisement (*Yebo Gogo*, which means ‘yes grandmother’). There is a clear sense here in which the writer is attempting to call up a positive face with the use of *Yebo*, and aiming for an ‘up-scaling’ of the activity by choosing to call it ‘centre’. The use of billboard space is unevenly distributed between the different contents of the message, with the name of the shop and the services provided taking up most space, and with space for afterthought and contact details bottom-most. Important information structuring devices are the use of colour and font size in off-setting and highlighting the essential nature of the services on offer. The lateral and bottom margins of the billboard are spaces for creativity, and improvisation, here in the form of a MOTOR (MOTTO) – ‘The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want’) which concludes the signage. Handwriting is stylized.<sup>6</sup>

The relatively low level of material and economic investment in these two billboards is apparent in the short production chain, the relatively few recontextualizations/resemiotizations that the message goes through from single authorship to production of the message, and the peripheral normativity<sup>7</sup> (Blommaert et al) of both isiXhosa and English (indicative of less ‘movement’ across scales, or

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<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that Khayelitsha is a predominantly isiXhosa speaking township, the sign is written completely in English. One plausible reason for this is that the owner is a Nigerian national and does not speak the local language. However, it is not unusual to find ‘sangomas’ (traditional healers) working solely in English, especially those that are foreign nationals from all over Africa, and who might not master isiXhosa. However, the use of English is quite likely also symbolically associated with a level of scale in the provision of the service that is designed to appeal to prospective customers.

<sup>7</sup> These readings illustrate the ‘close interplay between judging utterances in terms of available structural grammars and the indexically organized social-geographic differentiation of speakers’ (Slembrouck et al 2007).

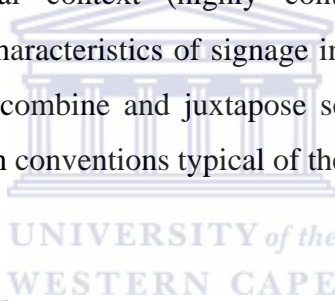
rescaling). Together with the circumscribed task-based interactional routines, and the multiple deictic anchoring to the immediate context (and choice of language), these features ‘index’ a local place that is cohesive and co-extensive with local geographical space.

### **6.2.1. Summary**

The genre we find here then is one of performance of localized subjectivities, and the forms of language that are associated with this localization or personalization of selfhood are hybrid and mixed, and highly multimodal in construction, where at least for Xhosa, verbals and visuals combine to make up ‘modally-mixed utterances’. Each billboard serves as a pre-sequence to a prototypical participant structure around clearly defined roles of animator/author/principal (provider) and recipient (by-stander) client. The fact that these signs/discourses do not ‘travel’, are circulated in short or dense chains of resemiotizations, and display, what we can call, uniplex and dense participant structures, where circulation of linguistic and multimodal features take place in tight social networks, suggests that this form of multilingual and multimodal organization is not an ideal candidate for enregisterment on a larger scale, but possible conducive to the establishment and reinforcement of local norms.

## Chapter 7. Sites of implosion

Sites of implosion are an interesting blend between sites of luxury, on the one hand, and sites of necessity, on the other. They are typically authorized spaces, in the sense of Scollon and Scollon (2003), and are also sites of mobility and movement. Every one of the billboards in this chapter is located in favourable economic sites, is industrially produced, and involves considerable investment of time and money. Furthermore, the construction of the signage shows typical features of long chains of resemiotization, of close monitoring and of being crafted from expensive, up-market materials by professionals. On the other hand, the way in which the signage is composed linguistically and the geosemiotics, of the signage that is, the way in which the signage is inserted into, and interacts with, the local context (highly contextualized in the immediate environment), exhibits many characteristics of signage in sites of necessity. In fact, it is the case that these billboards combine and juxtapose semiotic conventions of signage typical of sites of necessity with conventions typical of the construction of sites of luxury.



### 7.1. Genres of subjectivity

All of the three billboards in sites of implosion advertise the same product, KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken). The subjectivities associated with signage in sites of implosion are themselves hybrid – on the one hand, the construction through the product of ‘hoodedness’ and street-wiseness, at the same time as the target consumer, the reader role is somewhat ambiguously portrayed as as a caring parent, or an aspiring kid. I call this representation of a *personal* voice – the reader/viewer is invited to identify with an interesting syncretism of local identities and values (the ‘kasi’) with a picture of modern parental care and responsibility for the self obtainable through commercially designed and packaged nourishment.



Figure 9



This second example (fig. 10) also capitalizes on the notion of smartness through the hybrid linguistic construction ‘Cinga smart Yitya smart’ ‘cinga’ - isiXhosa for ‘think’ and ‘yitya’ - isiXhosa for ‘eat’, thereby anchoring the message in local context. Being smart within the township/urban space/ culture is a form of social status, whether in clothing style or means of transport, and this billboard capitalizes on this, just as it also refers to streetwiseness and school children - firmly fixing the message in the present interactional context of reading the sign (school billboards) as well as in the aspirational future of a distant and less linguistically constrained space signified in the message product.

Figure 10



The final example here (fig. 11) deviates slightly from its previous counterparts by formulating the main message completely in Xhosa. The phrase; '*Faka imali yakho kulonto uyitshoyo*' translates as 'put your money to what you say' (or, more idiomatically in English, 'where your mouth is'), that is, 'commit' or 'make the choice', 'take the dive'

Figure 11



I will not here go into too much detail of the analysis of the transmodal nature of this signage. It is very similar in design principles to the signage in sites of luxury discussed in chapter 5, with respect to the how information is structured along the parameters of *Given* and *New* and *Ideal* and *Real*. In each case, the leftmost position in the billboard is occupied by a visual display of the chicken nuggets, with an embedded *New* in the form of either a tub of mashed potato (fig. 9), fries (fig. 10) or bread (fig. 11). In all three compositions, the rightmost *New* informs us that the product is the 'number one meal'; to 'think smart and eat smart'; and to 'put your money where your mouth is'. The product names, 'streetwise one', 'streetwise two' and 'streetwise tiger' are in two instances in position *Ideal* in relation to the text (figs. 10 and 11), whereas this ordering is reversed in the case of figure 9. It is tempting to speculate that, after having established through the composition in figure 9 that the product 'streetwise (one)' is 'Kasi's number one meal', the following sequence of adverts are more focused on giving *Real* grounds for the *Ideal* injunctions to 'think smart, eat smart' and 'put your money where your mouth is' by noting this can be accomplished through 'Streetwise'. (There is, of course, the linguistic

difference here between whether the message is predominantly in English or isiXhosa, and it could be of interest to explore any possible implications for multimodal designs of this parameter in future work).

In all three billboards, the global product around which the consumer may display their (caring) streetwiseness is in a series of linked product types, and there is a chronological ordering between the products represented.

### **7.1.1. Summary**

In this signage, the global product is inserted into a local context, bringing with it a shift in the meaning associated with ‘smartness’ and streetwiseness, away from conventional ‘Kasi’ postures and subjectivities of smartness and into one that can be realized through the consumption of a global food product. This type of signage resembles what Benjamin (1917) calls *marks* (as opposed to an *inscription* or *sign*) that emerge from a context and reveal ‘a complexity of embedded local knowledge interacting with global modernity and commenting upon it in ways not grasped by an outsider’ (Wong and Bishop, 2006).

## **7.2. Enregisterment**

*Kasi* in ‘Kasi’s number one meal’ is nicely ambiguous in that it is an orthographic rendering of a local isiXhosa phonological reading of KFC, at the same time as it also refers to ‘street’ – the word *Kasi* was originally an Afrikaans word (‘Lokasie’) meaning township. Its current orthographic rendering resonates with a contemporary urban readership because of its close ties with *tsotsitaal* or *isicamto* an urban mode of communication that mixes and adopts different linguistic items from a variety of languages, so-called ‘street talk’ (cf. Machin & van Leeuwen, 2003). Reference to ‘number one’ carries the idea that KFC provide a premium meal, at the same time as it refers idiomatically to ‘smartness’/streetwiseness among those who eat chicken nuggets.

Other ways in which local space is ‘deictically’ figured in this representation is in the name of the school that appears in the top left-hand corner of the frame of the advertisement.

The second example (fig. 10) of this particular discourse of consumption is also firmly situated in the local context through literally being set into a wooden frame bearing the name of the local school. The advert is an example of what Kress and Van Leuven (2004) call a ‘demand’ (Kress and van Leuven, 2002), and the interactional regime is similar to that found in local billboards with participation frameworks and production formats typical of task-oriented encounters.

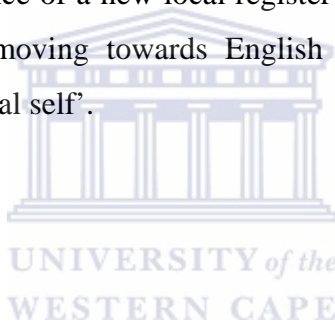
The Xhosa translation in figure 11 is a non-idiomatic and direct translation from the English, and indicative, in a sense, of the blended nature of the billboard semiotic. The billboard also makes ‘rescaled’ reference to a message in a non-local context by reference to the phrase including, ‘streetwise *tiger*’, where the word ‘tiger’ is a pan-African slang-word with the meaning ‘ten Rands’, further developed in the price tag R9.90 – which in turn illustrates the *local* convention of price-giving familiar from signage found in sites of necessity. The product name ‘streetwise one’ (and ‘streetwise two’) again embodies the typical product characteristics (one chicken breast or two), at the same time as the wording doubles up as a marker of the chronological ordering of the advertisements in township space, displaying the interdialogicality of signage typical of commercial signage, in the sites of luxury.

### **7.2.1. Summary**

There are then, multiple ways in which these compositions embed products in the local, isiXhosa speaking township context, while at the same time, eliciting associations to a transnational product emanating from a higher scale. The local is semiotically constructed by the way in which translocal products/distant spaces or aspirations are ‘descaled’ through either the use of isiXhosa, by reference to the convention of giving a price tag for

a service or product, (thereby imitating the pre-sequencing features of local signage), through multiple (linguistic) references to local features of township life and sites (e.g. the local school) or by way of reference to ‘streetwiseness’. On the other hand, the reader needs to bring other scales to bear in the reading of the signage, when, for example, reference is made to higher order spatial scales emblematically signaled in the KFC logo and the US English phrase ‘It’s finger lickin’ good’, as well as the use of pan-Africanisms and ‘blended’ isiXhosa.

This is a potentially sociolinguistic semiotic, in that it displays the particular structure and resemiotization typical of sites of luxury with the local features of place found in sites necessity. This suggests there are strong conditions (social networks, mobility and intertextuality) for the emergence of a new local register of isiXhosa that retains relative ‘monocodal’ integrity while moving towards English and co-alescing around social meaning of ‘hybrid modern-local self’.



## Chapter 8. Discussion and interpretation

### 8.1 Introduction

What, then, can this particular perspective on space/place and the distributions of multilingualism tell about language in social transformation? How do languages accrue indexical value? What forms of language are gaining prominence through social circulation? More precisely, can this type of data give us insights into processes of potential enregisterment, that is the ‘process through which a linguistic register becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms’ (Agha 2003:231).

Stroud and Wee (2007) remark (with the example of Singapore) on how late-modern identities construed in terms of consumption are radically altering the sociolinguistic options available to highly mobile speakers (cf. also Heller, 2007). The starting point for this thesis was that the material and economic shifts in South African society were reconfiguring identities and giving rise to different (multimodal) registers and ultimately to variable and various forms of multilingualism and multilingual organization. I have noted in this study here how these options are mediated through the different ways in which identities are represented in different genres, repertoires and languages that are *materially* indexicalized. In this final chapter, I will briefly summarize the findings with respect to each of the research questions introduced in Chapter 1. I will then briefly present some alternative attempts at accounting for the material and economic basis of language variation, and compare them with the current approach – a material ethnography. I will conclude with some thoughts on the possible implications of this study for language policy and planning.



## 8.2. Multilingualism multimodality and commodity identity in socially transforming South Africa

### 8.2.1. How are [new] social identities semiotically represented in consumer discourses?

In the preceding, I have tried to show how a competing visual semiotics of the Khayelitsha commercial linguistic landscape contributes to different representations and distribution of languages in public space in accordance with the different genre requirements of the signage found in sites of luxury, necessity and implosion respectively. I have identified three pervasive modes of organizing multilingual and multimodal resources into genres of subjectivity (a *personalized* voice (sites of necessity), a genre of *personification* (sites of luxury genres) and a *personal* voice (the hybrid mix of mainstream consumption subjectivities with local flair) that mediate more traditional and late-modern local subjectivities respectively. Each configures a particular set of relations between English and isiXhosa and other semiotic resources. Each of these genres expresses a particular scale-semiotics; *personification* in sites of luxury appear to *delocalize* or to up-scale traditional identities to more global contexts; *personalization* in sites of necessity, on the other hand, functions to reinforce or further *localize* existing local identities and networks; and, finally, *personal* genres in sites of implosion *relocalize* a modern-traditional identity in local spaces and idioms.

Furthermore, we can note how ‘similar structures can have very different functions’ depending on the particular ‘cultural reality’ (Blommaert, 2008), that is, patterns of speech, repertoires and ways of organizing them, linguistic hierarchies and ideologies, which illustrates Kress’ notion of ‘transduction’, where ‘that which is conceived and figured in one mode is reconfigured and reshaped according to the affordances of a different mode’, in this case, different types of production network specific to the different types of signage and sites. One feature that illustrates how the repertoire of semiotic resources deployed differs in type and significance across the different



commercial genres is colour. Many functions (such as text structuring (*ideal-real*) that are expressed verbally through language are also encoded in visuals, specifically colour (cf. Kress 2003). In signage of necessity, colour is used predominantly to encode ideational and interpersonal functions, while in luxury signage; it is used for textual functions primarily. Furthermore, when colour is used specifically to signal coherence/intertextuality (the textual metafunction) rather than the interpersonal or ideational metafunction, both isiXhosa and English are represented as more prototypically 'language' and English is used in a wide range of functions.

### ***8.2.2. What role do different languages play in these representations?***

In signage in sites of necessity, English has primarily 'headline' (poetic functions) and information functions, and retains its integrity in the bulk of the signage, with clauses that are either independent of the pictorial content, or serve as a commentary on that content. IsiXhosa is contextually embedded, occurring as lists and inserted into hybrid, multilingual and multi-coded (such as graphic) representational systems, especially. Sometimes, the isiXhosa employed takes the form of local non-standardized varieties (township slang, even though this is very minimal). Furthermore, the isiXhosa verbal material is integrated into the reading of the visual materials. In signage of this type, languages are construed as permeable and intimately multimodally integrated practices, a mix of local language and *transidiomatic* forms, (Jaquemet, 2005) or decontextualized semiotics (Scollon and Scollon, 2003), (e.g. Coca Cola emblem) that is, forms of language that travel globally. Signs are mainly handwritten (and/or appear in an elaborate aesthetic, and personalized calligraphy), in idiosyncratic orthography and grammar. English serves a range of aesthetic and 'play' functions (aside from or instead of representational/denotative) functions.

In signage from sites of luxury, English is used in a comparatively wider set of functions (representational as well as metalinguistic), and clauses may carry multiple meanings only interdiscursively readable. English is the matrix language in mixed (codeswitched or

loanworded e.g fig. 7 ) constructions, where isiXhosa figures as fragments, translations, or clarifications. There is a clear tendency towards *monolingualism* in both English and isiXhosa and *monocodism* as either verbals or visuals in contradistinction to the mix of languages and visuals/verbals in signage from sites of necessity. Languages are represented monolingually and as ‘pure’ languages, and English is presented as a linguistic system which is less permeable, offers more linguistic integrity, and spans many more sentence types and functions, than is the case with isiXhosa.

Finally, in sites of implosion, English and isiXhosa in general co-exist in individual loans (‘kasi’), phrasal code-switching and whole sentences/discourses. There is no ‘hybridity’ or code-*mixing* of the complex (and multimodal) type found in bottom-up adverts, although some cross-linguistic transfer is apparent in isiXhosa from idiomatic English turns of phrase. This type of ‘hybridity’ differs from that found in bottom-up texts in that the use of dual codes respects word boundaries (free morpheme constraints, etc).



### ***8.2.3. How are the indexical values of language constituted through multimodal representations of social identity?***

The extent to which speakers construct alignments and footings in relation to the particular voices we have identified here, in what ways this is manifest, and how the may be explored is a matter for further empirical investigation. Nevertheless, the multimodal organization of multilingual practices and repertoires of English and isiXhosa do differ significantly across the voices we have investigated here. Languages are thus recontextualized (Silverstein and Urban, 1996) as they move across different semiotic spaces, and ultimately come to carry different indexical values.

First of all, the variable ways in which different languages are commercially used and publically and spatially contextualized contribute to the dynamics that give them value and meaning. English, for example, appears in a wide range of sites and a wide range of varieties, and is clearly being fashioned as a ‘robust resource’ that lends itself to bending

and tweaking according to local normative principles to suit a newly mobile and aspiring population.

Secondly, the way languages are differentially represented and performed in different sites impact upon perceived language values. Scollon and Scollon (2003), for example, by way of reference to a notion of 'preferred code' note that

In most cases studied so far the preferred code is located above the secondary or peripheral codes if they are aligned vertically.....a third possibility....the peripheral code is placed around the periphery. (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 120).

The different genres of consumer identity figure variably across different *media* (with personification finding outlets in varied technologies, such as sms language, tv adverts etc, personalization limited to local products and media, and the personal exhibiting a mix of both); *spaces* and through different *organizations* of multilingualism.

Thirdly, the participant structures in relation to each of the genres allow different 'reader roles' on languages. In sites of luxury, these compositions often take the form of 'staged' or 'podium' events (Goffman, 1981), engaging the reader in participation structures and production formats different to those of generic conversation or the more ritualized transactional encounters found in sites of necessity below. In fact, these compositions allow 'a rich array of structurally differentiated possibilities' (Goffman, 1981) with respect to interactional regimes, where different subject or reading positions are constructed out of shifting participant structures, such as, in Goffman's terms, audience, by-stander or ratified participant. Much of this signage is actually part of chains of resemiotized signage of an intertextual/transmodal/interdiscursive nature, where, in order to fully comprehend or interpret the message, it is necessary for the reader to be familiar with other occurrences of the advert in other modalities.

In sites of necessity, on the other hand, the economics of the context of the signage means that the majority of signs here exhibit forms of meaning resemiotization and interactional regimes typical of a circumscribed, task-oriented (production) network of necessity, with short chains of resemiotization, and by being highly contextualized in the immediacy of task-interaction. In contradistinction to the billboards in sites of luxury, this signage has deictic anchors to local context.

#### ***8.2.4. In what ways might an analysis of linguistic landscape contribute to an understanding of the processes behind emerging new varieties?***

I have tried to document as carefully as I can the interconnectivity of signage in accordance with Agha's recommendation. The analyses of how discourses and languages travel across semiotic artefacts and spaces, and how representations link across contexts, do allow us to conjecture that the forms of language that may in the near future gain currency and popularity are most likely those found in signage situated in the heterogeneous and mobile sites in which there is a physical circulation and movement of many people. Shohamy and Gorter (2009: 319) have also suggested that it is especially in changing public spaces with flows, blurring, human interactions that we may expect to find that new linguistic forms are created and displayed (Shohamy and Gorter, 2009: 319) – new words, new constructions, messages, codes and icons. The authors note how 'in these spaces there are often no fixed linguistic boundaries but rather a variety of crossings of the traditional homogenous linguistic borders.

We could in fact hypothesize that the characteristics of mobility and flux characterizing public spaces will increasingly become projected onto forms of language found in these sites through processes such as *fractal recursivity* (Irvine and Gal, 2000), where the public nature of place is reflected in perceptions of language variants. One reason for this is that public spaces host signage that generates multiple footings, alignments and reading positions among readers, a participation structure that can be linked to the social networks of multiple and weakly linked social roles that have been found to be behind

linguistic change generally (cf. Milroy and Milroy 1992). This is the case for both sites of necessity and sites of implosion. Of interest here, is the two different natures of the code that is emerging, in the one case a ‘pan- African multilingual’ (luxury) and in the other case, a local ‘shifting’ variety of isiXhosa.

Given this, signage found in sites of necessity is unlikely to contribute to emerging varieties as the ‘proxy aspects’ of mobility and general uptake, intertextuality and resemiotization, does not have the spread or type of organization of materials necessary for a generalized and cohesive uptake.

### **8.2.5. Summary**

This analysis has provided a metapragmatic representation of resources available for exploitation by speakers. Future work would need to explore how these variants are taken up or circulated among speakers in their speech practices.

As noted earlier, most studies of enregisterment have looked at the emergence of standard norms, and in some cases, the development of non-standard registers. This study has focused on shifting relationships between language forms (multilingualism) and multimodally constituted registers – the enregisterment of multilingual and multimodal semiotic resources. As such this approach comprises a novel use of the notion of enregisterment. This is motivated by the view that languages are not closed, finite and homogenous, but fluid, dynamic and open (Shohamy and Waksman, 2009), in need of deconstruction (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007) and of transmodal reconstruction (Pennycook, 2008). That is, the insight that language practises and values are determined by its performance/manifestation/existence in a range of modalities and material contexts (commodities, products) and distributed in space (movement, gaze) motivate this approach taken here.

### 8.3. Material ethnography

This thesis has worked with a conception of material ethnography as a resource for the study of social circulations of meaning in society. Material ethnography is here taken to refer to the ways in which relationships of semiotic production, circulation and consumption are layered into material artefacts (such as signage) as forms of sedimentation that allow the recovery or forensic analysis of semiotic *processes* from semiotic *products*. This has informed the analysis of signage - linguistic landscapes - as one form of linguistic re-contextualisation in a chain or network of resemiotizations across (economically differentiated) technologies, artefacts and spaces.

This approach bears many similarities to more recent approaches to language and its construction in space, place and materiality. For example, Pennycook has emphasized the need to study signs or semiotic 'marks' in context. Furthermore, rather than speak about languages, which directs attention towards conventional representations and suggests that meanings are inherent in the written word alone, without attention, Pennycook suggests it is more appropriate to talk of how different semiotic resources are used in terms of the total ecology, namely in terms of their pretextual, intertextual, subtextual, posttextual and contextual meanings. However, in order to know what a sign means, we need to know more about how, why and with what intentions (beliefs or ideologies) a sign came into being, and how they are made etc.

The approach also bears some similarities to a recent model proposed by Huebner (2009). This author has proposed an integrated framework based in an ethnography of language framework (Hymes), taking the notion of *genre* as fundamental. Genres, 'a class of communicative events identified by both its traditionally recognized form and its common functions' (Hymes, 1972: 65), are often recognized and labelled by the community itself, and therefore provide a potentially real and grounded taxonomy of signage types. Using Hymes' SPEAKING mnemonic (Setting/Scene, Participant, Event, Act, Key, Instrumentality, Norm, Genre), Huebner, points out that the temporal and

spatial setting/scene of the sign (its immediate context) with its concomitant orientation to the 'reader' is an important and little studied variable in linguistic landscapes research, with implications for the amount of text, type of image and language choice. Furthermore, he suggests that more attention should be paid to a more delicate analysis of the **participants** in the signage, such as who the sign is designed for and by whom in order to capture *agency*. Likewise, attention to the **End/Means** of the billboard (expressive, regulatory, informative or multiple combinations of these functions) carry important distinctions for the design of billboards. The **Act** sequence, i.e. commonality of form with a genre of signage with respect to spatial organization of elements, that is, the visual semiotics (cf. Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006) also provides important information. **Key** refers to the tone, modality and manner of the message or act performance. **Instrumentality** refers to the choice of code or register (the linguistic repertoires associated with particular social practices and the people associated with this), including code switching. And finally, the **norms** and regulations, that is, multidimensional norms of interpretation and interaction need to be part of any model.

An important aspect of this study has been the insistence on studying the *circulation* of semiotic materials. Approaching linguistic landscapes in terms of linguistic mobility resonates well with new understandings of community and space in contemporary urban (social) geography. Appadurai (2000) has noted how 'it has become something of a truism that we are functioning in a world fundamentally characterized by objects in motion. This is a world of flows'. Today's communities comprise distanced, post-social, heterogeneous networks of human and material actors characterized by flow and mobility of people, information, languages and objects, 'where circulation, hybridity and multiplicity are key urban moments, and fixed boundaries are temporary allegiances and alignments,' (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 77), far from the territorial stereotypes and traditional notions of community based on face-to-face interaction. Although the scope of the analysis bears similarities to mine, the main difference is the inclusion of agents.



Other authors, such as Hult (2009), however, points to the possibility for a more dynamic take on linguistic landscapes by marrying Scollon and Scollon's nexus analysis to landscape studies. Whereas linguistic landscape studies serve as 'a tool for investigating certain niches of specific languages in the linguistic ecosystem', nexus analysis, which studies how discourses operate across time and space focus on 'relationships between languages and social actions of those who inhabit ecosystems'.

#### **8.4 Language policy in postnational, new economies**

On the basis of the findings in this paper, it is clear that language planning needs to proceed from an analysis of how people on the ground use their linguistic resources in a variety of everyday contexts when creating and performing subjectivities and identities (cf. Hornberger 2007 on bottom-up language planning). These are perspectives that many researchers have already indicated as important ways forward. The original contribution of this study, however, can be traced to a number of points. First of all, the notion of polycentricity has raised many issues in this paper. The commercial signage in sites of luxury and necessity that I have studied shows that the principles for organizing languages are very different from the official policies of government and municipalities. The question is: to what extent are existing formulations and implementations of policy and legislation able to accommodate the types of dynamics found here? This is part of a more general problem, namely how do government agencies fare in neoliberal economies generally?

A second issue is the way that language is perceived in policy and planning discourses and in the multiple commercial spaces that I have investigated here. Whereas government policy documents invariably treat language in a technological discourse as an object that can be identified unambiguously and that is subject to technical intervention, the contexts in which language appears here are transmodal and various. We have seen how the notion of isiXhosa and English varies from media to media and across modalities and contexts.



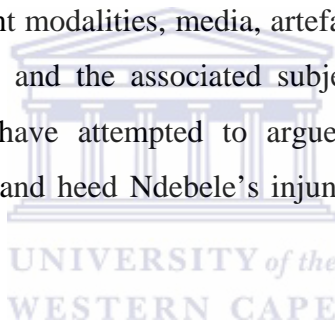
This makes language far from the uniform entity assumed in much language planning discourse. In principle, how can one plan something that is changing form as we speak?

This raises another issue, namely whether the contexts, modalities and situations where different languages are used are so various and so different in terms of the priorities and organizing principles of language that any one approach or ideology with respect to the use of language would be destined to fail. Whereas government institutions see language as a resource for democracy and citizenship, equity and empowerment, commercial interests view language as a commercial product linked to performances of life-styles and identities. These two very distinct domains organized in distinct ways would seem to require very different types of intervention. If our intention is to promote multilingualism and assist in the maintaining of languages, how can this underlying aim be reconciled with the very different principles of language production and design?

Finally, and again following from the last point, given that institutions such as education or civic organizations, many times express the desire to attempt to build on the multilingual resources that pupils or citizens bring to their offices, how does one incorporate into these institutional activities the ways of using multiple languages found in the commercial media or other spaces in the environment?

## Chapter 9. Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to sketch the way towards developing a material ethnography of multilingualism, using the South African context as its primary source of data. I have suggested that the South African context allows special insight into some of core problems of multilingualism in that the context of transformation that South Africa is presently experiencing is revealing of many of the underlying and often hidden dynamics that determine the organization of multilingualism in other, less transparent, situations. Of particular importance has been the recognition of the transmodal/multimodal constitution of language, specifically how *what language* is dictated by how it appears in different spaces, across different modalities, media, artefacts, and how it is manifested in conjunction with commodities and the associated subjectivities and aspirations of its speakers. In other words, I have attempted to argue that we need to go beyond landscapes, beyond media etc and heed Ndebele's injunction to consider an integrative epistemology (of language).



The findings do point to how English and isiXhosa may be practiced – and performatively constructed – in different ways, and how this is integrally linked to the genres of subjectivity – traditional and emerging – in which they are found as the resources for repertoires. I have attempted to discuss and interpret the findings against a contemporary theory of register development, and I have in the process compared some different approaches to the sociolinguistics of language shift and change that also employ material and spatial analytical insights. Finally, I have also noted how a material ethnography raises some issues for further debate with respect to language planning and policy.

There is much that could have been done differently in this study. Perhaps the most important lesson learnt is that future work on signage from the perspective of a material ethnography of multilingualism would benefit from exploring in detail how people take

up, use, manage and discard, interact with and through, re-contextualized media as they as speakers insert signs and artefacts into practices and ideologies of language construction in their everyday interaction.



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