



## ЯЗЫКИ. КУЛЬТУРЫ. ИДЕОЛОГИИ LANGUAGES. CULTURES. IDEOLOGIES

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### Linguistic landscape study of commercial intra-city vehicle inscriptions in an African city

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**Abstract.** Universally, an understanding of the Linguistic Landscape (LL) of a group of people is crucial to understanding their language behavioural traits. The study was purposed on exploring the LL of commercial intra-city vehicles in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis of Ghana. This single case study with embedded units utilised the multi-stage sampling technique, and the sources of data were: 1) responses from in-depth interviews from some of the commercial intra-city vehicle drivers and 2) the respective inscriptions. An interview guide and an iPhone 12 mobile phone (for pictures) were used to elicit the data. The in-depth interview data were analysed using Creswell and Poth's (2018) Analysis Spiral Plan, whereas the signages were analysed using content analysis. The findings projected a situation where no attention was paid to the indigenous Ahanta language but rather major preference given to the Mfantse and the English languages. Easy readability and comprehension of the messages were cited by the commercial intra-city vehicle drivers as their reasons for preferring the English language. The implication of the study is that the Ahanta language, the indigenous language in Sekondi-Takoradi is endangered. Resultantly, the authorities of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly should work closely with the Ministry of Local Government to heighten individuals' use of the Ahanta language to save it from death. Also, this calls into sharp attention the need for stakeholders in other jurisdictions to work to improve the use of endangered languages to protect them from extinction.

**Keywords:** ahanta, commercial vehicle, Sekondi-Takoradi, metropolis

**Conflict of interest.** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Языковой ландшафт африканского города: надписи на коммерческом внутригородском транспорте

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**Аннотация.** Как правило, изучение языкового ландшафта (ЯЛ), окружающего группы людей, имеет решающее значение для понимания особенностей их языкового поведения. Целью исследования — выявление особенностей ЯЛ коммерческого внутригородского транспорта в метрополии Секонди-Такоради в Гане. Методологический аппарат данного пилотного исследования включал метод многоступенчатой выборки. Источниками данных послужили: 1) ответы, полученные в ходе проведения подробных интервью с водителями коммерческого внутригородского транспорта; 2) надписи на транспортных средствах водителей. Для сбора данных использовались руководство по проведению интервью и мобильный телефон iPhone 12 (для создания исследовательской картотеки). Данные глубинных интервью были проанализированы по модели спирального анализа (по Creswell and Poth 2018), а надписи — по методике контент-анализа. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что коренной язык аанта не использовался в надписях. Основное предпочтение отдавалось языкам фанти и английскому. Одна из причин предпочтения этих языков, согласно ответам водителей, легкость чтения и понимания сообщений. Исследование позволяет сделать вывод о том, что язык аанта, коренной язык в Секонди-Такоради, относится к категории угрожаемых языков. Таким образом, городские власти Секонди-Такоради должны сотрудничать с Министерством местного самоуправления, чтобы расширить использование языка аанта и сократить его шансы на исчезновение.

**Ключевые слова:** аанта, коммерческое транспортное средство, надписи, Секонди-Такоради, метрополия

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## Introduction

Linguistic landscape (LL) encompasses the various advertisements, signages and notifications that populate public spaces within towns and cities (Santiso, 2023). It includes the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs and public signs on governmental buildings (Landry, Bourhis, 1997). Santiso posits that the examination of LL becomes especially fascinating in regions characterised by multilingualism, as signages serve as visual representations of the interplay and relative significance of all languages present. In some countries, language policies exist to regulate the standing of each language within the LL; nevertheless, these rules might be undermined by the populace in order to reflect the linguistic dynamics of the given region (Hult, 2018).

Globally, the literature is awash with studies on LL (Alomoush, 2018; Loth, 2016; Lusekelo, Alphonse, 2018; Lee, 2019). Nuria Yáñez-Bouza (Yáñez-Bouza, 2015) examined LL on public signs, advertisements and other visible linguistic features in townships at Galicia and found that the design and typography of LL could influence the legibility and attractiveness of public signs and messages. In addition, Marta Rodriguez-Garcia (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2017) investigated LL's role of typography for the expression of linguistic diversity in bilingual signs in Madrid and discovered that the choice of typeface conveys a particular cultural or historical identity. Furthermore, Santiso (Santiso, 2023) examined LL of signs in the main shopping street of Ondarroa (both top-down and bottom-up signs) and found that contrary to the situation of Basque in urban areas, Basque is the language with the largest presence in the LL of the streets in Ondarroa.

In Ghana, there are studies that have concentrated on the LL of street names, hotel names, inscriptions on vehicles and on canoes (Agbaglo, Afful, 2023; Anane, 2019; Nyame, Tomekyin, 2018; Owusu-Afriyie, 2020), but there is limited research on LL in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. Agbaglo and Afful (Agbaglo, Afful, 2023), for instance, investigated names of hotels in Accra — the capital city of Ghana, with considerable financial, cultural and industrial significance. Agbaglo and Afful found that most of the hotels employed English monolingual names, with a few using bilingual names. On their part, Nyame and Tomekyin (Nyame, Tomekyin, 2018) studied the LL of taxis in Ajumako and Winneba and found that the English language and the Mfantse language dominated in both communities. Even though Sekondi-Takoradi is Ghana's third most populous cosmopolitan city and a commercial, cultural and industrial hub of Ghana's Western Region, there is virtually no study on the LL of commercial intra-city vehicles in the metropolis. Not having any empirical study on the LL of commercial intra-city vehicles in the metropolis could hide critical information from, especially, language policy makers. The study was, therefore, purposed on exploring the LL of commercial intra-city vehicles in the Sekondi-Takoradi

Metropolis. The following research questions guided the study: 1) What is the dominant language on the inscriptions on the commercial intra-city vehicles in Sekondi-Takoradi? 2) Which factors influenced the choice(s) of language(s) for the inscriptions? 3) Which meanings do the drivers/vehicle owners ascribe to the inscriptions used?

Three reasons underpin the conduct of this study. First, this study makes a vital contribution by revealing the LL of commercial intra-city vehicle inscriptions in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis. Despite the existence of studies on LL in Ghana, there is a notable absence of recorded empirical research that specifically addresses commercial intra-city vehicles' LL in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. This study, therefore, contributes significantly to the extant literature by uncovering the LL of commercial intra-city vehicles in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. Second, this study is intended to serve as a foundation for further studies to be conducted into other apposite areas such as the nexus between LL and vehicle typography and the LL of canoe typography in Sekondi-Takoradi. Third, a comprehension of the LL of intra-city commercial vehicles in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis will position stakeholders such as linguists, historians, anthropologists, cultural heritage experts and successive governments to develop and institute strategies to strengthen language use in Ghana.

## Literature Review

**LL Studies.** Studies on LL around the globe are not in their infancy (Agbaglo, Afful, 2023; Legère, 2022; Lusekelo, Alphonse, 2018; Santiso, 2023), as different aspects of LL have been studied by scholars. Lusekelo and Alphonse (2018) advance that LL serves as an avenue for examining issues of multilingualism. Lusekelo and Alphonse indicate that monolingual and multilingual signages have different discourse purposes and values. Multilingual signages give various degrees of inclusivity, while monolingual signages restrict readership to only one language. Similarly, Karsten Legère (Legère, 2022) posits that LL provides the backdrop to our everyday lives and serves as a treasured language learning resource because signages are everywhere and open for every individual to see freely and that signages also shape how people interact in society. Han and Hu (Han, Hu, 2020) studied language policy, linguistic landscape and residents' perceptions of language use in Guangzhou, China, and found that there were incessant conflicts and dissents in the city space of Guangzhou, especially in relation to the use of English, Cantonese and traditional Chinese characters. In another study, Momoko Nakamura (Nakamura 2021) examined linguistic landscape of vehicles in Japanese streets, and found that about a half of the scripts on the right side of vehicles are written in the non-normative direction, from right to left. In a related study, Akoli *et al.* (Akoli, 2022) investigated the glocalisation phenomena of English language expressions found on minivans

as a means of public transport in Kupang city of Indonesia. Akoli *et al.* found that English language use on public minivans is predominantly characterised by language errors and variations.

As regards studies on LL in Ghana, Agbaglo and Afful (Agbaglo, Afful, 2023), Nyame and Tomekyin (Nyame, Tomekyin, 2018), Landry and Bouris's (Landry, Bouris's, 1997) and Anane (Anane, 2019) are among the scholars who have conducted investigations. For instance, Nyame and Tomekyin (2018) studied the LL of Ajumako (an indigenous Mfantse-speaking community) and Winneba (a cosmopolitan area with Effutu or Awutu being the home language) to find out whether the languages found in each actually reflect the languages spoken by each community, and to discover which language was most dominant based on their ethnic makeup. Nyame and Tomekyin found that the English language and Mfantse language were very dominant in both communities, and few others appeared infrequently. The expected result, Mfantse language being more frequent in Ajumako and at least a marginal appearance of Effutu in Winneba, was not supported by the findings: the ethnic makeup of Ajumako and Winneba does not seem to be related to the visual language encountered in the linguistic landscape. In another study, Job Anane (Anane, 2019) examined the language used on canoes in Winneba, a Cosmopolitan town in the Central Region of Ghana, and found that Mfantse was the dominant language used, even though Winneba is Effutu-speaking. The reasons found were that people can express and share their experiences through the use of Mfantse language better. Furthermore, Akoto and Afful (Akoto, Afful, 2021) examined church names (ecclesionyms) which constitute part of the religioonomastic landscape of Ghana to discover the various languages embedded in them and found that churches in Ghana generally adopt three global languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin), a glocal language (English) and three local languages (Akan, Ewe and Ga). In a related study, Agbaglo and Afful (Agbaglo, Afful, 2023), investigated names of hotels in Accra — the capital city of Ghana, with considerable financial, cultural and industrial significance. Agbaglo and Afful found that most of the hotels employed English monolingual names, with a few using bilingual names. From the foregoing review, it is evident that language boundaries extend beyond traditional borders and that people make language choices mainly based on ease and the ability of the language to reach the target audience for the right impact. This situation is applicable both in Ghana and outside Ghana.

**Overview of the General Linguistic Landscape in Ghana.** Ghana is characterised by its linguistic diversity, with an estimated 80 indigenous languages documented and visually represented on a linguistic map (Eberhard *et al.*, 2019). The linguistic diversity in Ghana enables a clear differentiation between the geographical distribution of languages classified as "OF" and "IN". The linguistic map of Ghana exhibits a wider scope and greater comprehensiveness

compared to the map depicting the languages spoken within the country. The linguistic map of Ghana displays the native languages, which have been categorised as dominant and minority languages by Elvis Yevudey and Edzordzi Agbozo (Yevudey, Agbozo, 2019). It is important to acknowledge that this classification is not static, as the status of a language can readily shift, allowing a minority language to acquire a "dominant" position. Once again, the concepts of dominance and minority can be quantified to varying degrees. The Akan language, once recognised as the primary language in southern Ghana, is currently acknowledged as a regional lingua franca (Yankson, 2018). The current linguistic contact situation in Ghana is not accurately reflected by the OF map. During the colonial and postcolonial periods, Ghana experienced a significant increase in the presence of foreign languages. Several typologies have been proposed subsequently to elucidate the language landscape in Ghana (Akoto, Afful, 2022).

According to Ellis and Ure (Ellis, Ure, 1982), a language model was proposed that categorised languages into high, middle and low levels. In this model, the high level corresponds to English only, the middle level represents a mixture of English and Ghanaian languages and the low level signifies the use of Ghanaian languages exclusively (Owusu-Ansah, 1997). According to Akoto's (Akoto, 2018) classification, languages in Ghana can be categorised as global, glocal or local based on their level of association with the sociocultural and linguistic setting of Ghana. In contrast to the rather static nature of the IN Ghana map, the OF Ghana map exhibits a continuous expansion due to the forces of globalisation. This phenomenon is characterised by the growing internationalisation of some languages, like Chinese and Spanish, among other factors. In contemporary times, it has been increasingly prevalent to encounter the presence of the Chinese language inside the linguistic milieu of Ghana, encompassing both official and non-official written communications. In essence, the LL of Ghana is complex because of globalisation which has engendered language contact — a phenomenon which allow for a wide range of languages to be used within a particular geographical context — a situation that the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis may not be exempt from.

***Theoretical Underpinnings — Linguistics Landscape Model.*** This study was underpinned by Elana Shohamy's (Shohamy, 2006) Linguistic Landscape model, which focuses on examining written language such as signs, advertisements and inscriptions on buildings in public spaces. Several scholars have employed the Shohamy's (Shohamy, 2006) Linguistic Landscape Model to examine LL, which has demonstrated its efficacy in facilitating a comprehensive comprehension of this phenomenon (Gorter et al., 2008; Gorter, Cenoz, 2014). The model comprises three main components, each providing a framework for analysing and understanding the presence of written language in public spaces. First, visibility in the LL Model refers to how languages are visually present in a given public space. It involves analysing the written texts, signs and symbols displayed



in an environment. Researchers using the LL Model assess the quantity and prominence of different languages in a specific urban or public setting. They examine the visibility of linguistic elements, such as street signs, advertisements, public notices and other written messages to understand the linguistic diversity and prominence within a particular space. The second component of the model is interpretability, which refers to how easily individuals can comprehend the written language in a public space. It involves analysing factors such as language proficiency, linguistic diversity, and the clarity of the messages conveyed. Researchers explore how the linguistic landscape impacts people's ability to interpret information in a given context. This includes assessing the readability and language proficiency of the population and the potential challenges or ease with which individuals can understand and interact with the written language present in the public space. The third component is ideology, which relates to the socio-political meanings attached to the languages and scripts present in public spaces. It explores the power dynamics and symbolic meanings associated with the linguistic choices made by different communities. Researchers using the LL Model investigate the ideological aspects of the linguistic landscape, aiming to uncover the social and political implications of language use. This includes analysing language choices in terms of dominance, resistance or affiliation, and understanding how these choices reflect the cultural, political or identity-related ideologies of the communities inhabiting or using the public space.

The overarching rationale for the adoption of this Model is that this study encapsulated the three dimension components — visibility, interpretability and ideology. Visibility applies to this study because the dominant language on the inscriptions on the commercial intra-city vehicles in Sekondi-Takoradi was sought. The interpretability aspect of the LL Model was applicable to this study because the meanings the drivers/vehicle owners ascribe to the inscriptions used was sought. As regards ideology, the factors that influence the choice(s) of language(s) for the inscriptions were investigated.

## Research Methodology

**Study area.** According to Ernest Biney and Ebenezer Boakye (Biney, Boakye, 2021), Sekondi-Takoradi (approximately 218 kilometers west of, the capital city of Ghana, Accra) is a port city located in the Western Region of Ghana, on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa. The city was formed in 1946 when the two separate coastal towns of Sekondi and Takoradi were merged. Samuel Danso and Isaak Addo (Addo, Danso, 2017) indicate that Sekondi-Takoradi is an important commercial centre in Ghana, with a thriving fishing industry and a major seaport. The port is the main gateway for imports and exports to and from the Western Region and neighboring countries such as Liberia, Burkina Faso and Mali. The city has many manufacturing companies and is also home to a number of multinational companies, including Tullow Oil, Kosmos Energy

and Ghana Rubber Estates Limited, which have contributed to the economic growth of the city (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021; GhanaWeb, 2023). As of the 2021 Population and Housing Census, the population of Sekondi-Takoradi was estimated to be around 445, 205, making it the third-largest metropolitan area in Ghana. The majority of the population is made up of ethnic groups such as the Ahanta, the Nzema, the Mfantse and the Ewe. The people of Sekondi-Takoradi are primarily Christians, but there are also significant populations of Muslims and traditionalists (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021; GhanaWeb, 2023). The official language of Ghana is the English language, and it is used for official business and education. However, the people of Sekondi-Takoradi speak a variety of local languages, including Ahanta, Mfantse, Nzema and Ewe. Sekondi-Takoradi is indigenously Ahanta (Addo, Danso, 2017), and the Ahantas have their own language known as Ahanta. The Ahantas are known for their fishing and trading activities. They are known for their rich culture and traditions, which include music, dance, festivals and storytelling. The city has a tropical climate, with an average temperature of around 28 °C. The wet season runs from April to October, with heavy rainfall and high humidity, while the dry season runs from November to March (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021; GhanaWeb, 2021). Fig. 1 below depicts the map of Sekondi-Takoradi, the study area.

**Research design.** The simple case study design with embedded units (Gustafsson, 2017; Yin, 2003) was utilised for this enquiry. Case study research deals with the researcher selecting a phenomenon and selecting the site/context within which to study that particular phenomenon so that the phenomenon will be very well understood. John Creswell (Creswell, 2007: 73) espouses that case study, "involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i. e. a setting, a context)." Specifically, the simple case study, which involves the investigator selecting a single case to investigate deeply, depending on the investigator's focus on the case was appropriate for this enquiry. This is because the aim of the study was to explore the LL of commercial intra-city vehicles in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis of Ghana. This study took place within a single context (Sekondi-Takoradi commercial intra city vehicle stations) and at three different sites (Sekondi Taxi Station, Kwasimintsim Taxi Station and Sekondi Trotro Station), using the under listed research questions:

- (1) What is the dominant language on the inscriptions on the commercial intra-city vehicles in Sekondi-Takoradi?
- (2) Which factors influence the choice(s) of language(s) for the inscriptions?
- (3) Which meanings do the drivers/vehicle owners ascribe to the inscriptions used?

The pragmatics paradigm shaped the study (Sarantakos, 2012), aiding the researchers to get a collective insight into the LL of commercial intra-city vehicles in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis of Ghana.





Figure 1. The STMA showing the study area  
Source: (Addo, Danso, 2017).

**Participants and sampling.** The population was all commercial intra-city vehicles in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis. The target population comprised all commercial intra-city vehicles with inscriptions and the drivers/owners of the commercial intra-city vehicles with inscriptions. The commercial intra-city vehicles with typography were targeted because they contained the data for the researchers to conduct further enquiries to answer this enquiry's research questions. In addition, the drivers/owners of the commercial intra-city vehicles with inscriptions were targeted because they were in the position to provide enough usable responses to answer this enquiry's research questions. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used to elicit data for this enquiry. The first stage involved the purposive selection of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis commercial intra-city vehicle parks. For the second stage, all commercial intra-city vehicles with inscriptions were purposively selected. For the last stage of the process, the drivers/owners of the commercial intra-city vehicles with typography were conveniently selected. The convenient selection was employed because not all the drivers/owners of the commercial intra-city vehicles with typography were present at the time of the collection of the data, so the researchers had to rely conveniently on those who were available.

**Procedure and data collection.** The researchers meticulously followed apropos ethical procedures to obtain clearance and approval for this enquiry. The lead researcher sought permission from the Station Masters of all the three vehicle parks and assured the participants that the study posed no risk to them. The lead researcher informed the participants about the nature of the enquiry and permitted them to opt to be part of the study voluntarily. They were assured of their confidentiality and the willpower to bow out anytime they felt like opting out. In order to ensure the participants' rights to anonymity, pseudonyms were used to refer to them throughout the study. In order to increase the data, the researchers visited each of the sites on two different occasions.

The researchers used personal observations, photography and in-depth interviews to elicit the data. The personal observations and photography were applied on the inscriptions on the vehicles. For the photographs, an iPhone 12 was used; the iPhone 12 was used because of its relatively advanced picture quality. The in-depth interview was employed because of its popularity and effectiveness in the collection of qualitative data (Vanderstoep, Johnston, 2009); an interview guide was fittingly applied on the drivers of the commercial intra-city vehicles with inscriptions (Creswell, 2007). An interview guide was used because, according to Creswell, it allows the researcher to follow pre-set questions but not all the prearranged probes, transitions and follow-ups are used. This situation, therefore, gave the interviewers the freewill to deviate as and when necessary to explore serendipitous findings. The interview guide had two sections. Section A covered the factors that influence the choice(s) of language(s) for the inscriptions. Section B contained questions on the meanings the drivers/vehicle owners ascribe to the inscriptions used. The

interview guide was, followingly, an appropriate data collection tool for an enquiry such as this one. As backup, in order not to lose valuable data, field notes (Vanderstoep, Johnston, 2009) and audio recordings (*Author*) were taken. In all, 125 photographs were taken, and 20 in-depth interviews were conducted from 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2023 to 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2023. Averagely, each interview lasted thirty minutes.

**Data analysis techniques.** Olive M. Mugenda and Abel G. Mugenda (Mugenda, Mugenda, 1999) advance that raw data from the field is difficult to interpret, demanding data management. Data management deals with exploring what has been gathered in a survey or experiment and creating assumptions and extrapolations (Creswell, 2007). Pertaining to the analysis of the observation and photography data (research question 1 = What is the dominant language on the inscriptions on the commercial intra-city vehicles in Sekondi-Takoradi), document analysis (Rapley, 2007; Corbin, Strauss, 2008; Bowen, 2009), which is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, was used to analyse the data. Following the three steps advanced by Bowen, the photographs were firstly skimmed (superficial examination) by the researchers. After that, the photographs were properly read (thorough examination) and, lastly, the photographs were interpreted. Simple frequencies (mode) were used to analyse the data in respect of research question 1.

As regards research question 2 (which factors influence the choice(s) of language(s) for the inscriptions?) and research question 3 (which meanings do the drivers/vehicle owners ascribe to the inscriptions used?) thematic analysis (TA), a method used for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data (Creswell, 2013), was used to handle the data obtained from the in-depth interviews. In specificity, Creswell and Poth's (2018) Analysis Spiral Plan was used to analyse the data. As illustrated in Fig. 2, the spiral loop 'A' involves organising the data. In 'A', the elicited data will be compiled and disintegrated into smaller units. Loop 'B', which is the perusal stage, will enable the researchers to glean meaningful concepts and ideas from the data and additionally make preliminary interpretations of the data. For Loop "C", which is the classification stage, the data will be further grouped into categories, themes and sub-themes, all of which will be based on interpretations derived from the codes. For the synthesis stage (Loop 'D'), the data will be integrated and summarised and will be synthesised with existing empirical literature at the discussion stage of this study.

## Results

This section contains the results of the study. The result is divided into three themes: the dominant languages of the inscriptions, the factors that influenced the choice(s) of language(s) for the inscriptions and the meanings ascribed to the inscriptions.

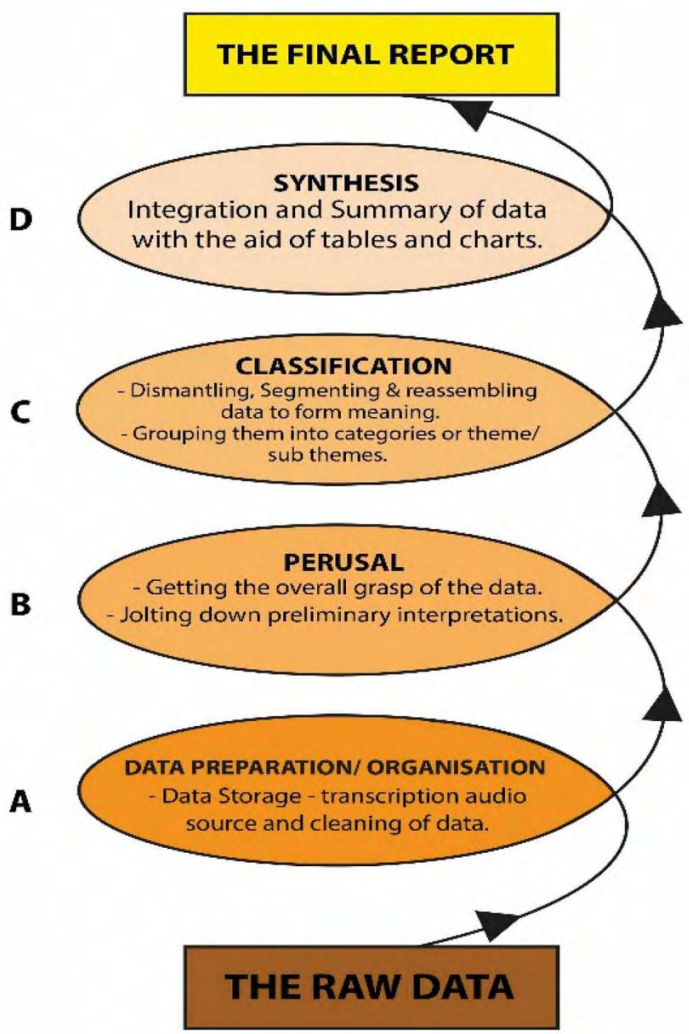


Figure 2. Analysis spiral plan  
Source: (Creswell, Poth, 2018)

Results

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**Dominant language used on the commercial vehicles.** Inscriptions on vehicles constitutes a crucial aspect of LL studies John Nyame and Cecilia Tomekyin (Nyame, Tomekyin, 2018). This domain was, therefore, explored to identify the dominant language used on the intra-city commercial vehicles in Sekondi-Takoradi (Table 1).

Table 1

Language Distribution of the Inscription on Vehicles			
Language	Frequency F	Percent	Rank
English	53	42	1
Twi	37	30	2
Mfantse	29	23	3
English and Mfantse	3	2	4
English And Twi	2	2	5
Spanish	1	1	6
Total	125	100	

The results show that three different languages and two manifestations of code switching (English and Mfantse languages and English and Twi languages) were employed on the vehicles. Regarding the ranking, the English language ranked (F = 53; 42%) as the most dominant language used on the commercial intra-city vehicles in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. This was followed by Twi (F = 37; 30%), Mfantse (F = 29; 23%) and Spanish (F = 1; 1%). Three of the inscriptions were code-mixed (English language and Mfantse), and two of the inscriptions were code-mixed (English and Twi) representing 2% and 2% respectively, further consolidation the overall dominance of the English language within the studied LL. These findings support the claim that the English language dominates in territories where the English language is the official language. The respondents’ preference for the English language is line with those in Accra and Cape Coast (Agbaglo, Afful, 2023) who found the English language as the dominant language. Some images of some of the inscriptions in various languages are presented forthwith (Fig. 3).

**Factors that influence the choice(s) of language(s) for the inscriptions.** The selection of languages for inscriptions is a multifaceted process shaped by a variety of influential factors (Han, Hu, 2020). These choices are not arbitrary but are often driven by historical, cultural, political and practical considerations. Examining the factors that influence the choice of language(s) for inscriptions provides valuable insights into the dynamics of communication, identity and power within a given context. In this exploration, the researchers, therefore, explored this domain to unravel the key determinants that contribute to the selection of languages for the inscriptions.





**Figure 3.** Images of inscriptions in different languages placed on the car windows  
Source: Personal collection of R. Asafo-Adjei, F. Bukari, E. Klu.

The respondents revealed a variety of factors that informed their choices of language. One dominant factor identified was easy readability or mileage for their inscriptions. That is, many of the respondents chose the English language because of the belief that a lot more people could read and understand the English language. When asked for the reason behind his choice of the English language, D79 indicated that he chose to inscribe 'AM SORRY' (Fig. 4) on his vehicle in English language because

*...most people in Takoradi can read and understand the English language. If I write it in Mfante, people will not be able to read.*  
(D79, 2023)

By choosing the English language, the D79 aimed to ensure that his message was comprehensible to a broad populace. This decision is strategic, considering the linguistic diversity that may exist within the city (Alomoush, 2018). The practicality of using a language familiar to the majority enhances the likelihood that the intended message will reach and resonate with a larger number of people (Sjöblom, 2013).





**Figure 4.** Inscription in English on the rear window of the car  
Source: Personal collection of R. Asafo-Adjei, F. Bukari, E. Klu.

Another participant, D102, 2023, explained that he inscribed “WHO KNOWS HIS FUTURE” (Fig. 5) at the back of his vehicle because:  
*“... In this country, English is what everyone speaks. If you write something in English, it also easy to read.” (D102, 2023).*

By acknowledging English as the official language of Ghana, D102 aligns the inscription with the linguistic norms established by the country’s governance and administration. This reflects a sense of conformity to official standards, ensuring that the message adheres to the language recognised and endorsed by government institutions (Yevudey, Agbozo, 2019). Consequently, the choice of English can be seen as a form of linguistic compliance and a demonstration of civic responsibility.



**Figure 5.** Inscription in English on the rear window of the car  
Source: Personal collection of R. Asafo-Adjei, F. Bukari, E. Klu.

In addition, *D 44, 2023* gave similar respondents when asked why they preferred to use the English language in their inscriptions ("I am that I am", and "Fear not, Allah is with you"):

*English language is easy to read so people can easily understand. (D77, 2023)*

*I chose English language because most people will be able to read and understand. (D79,2023)*

It is evident that the lingua franca status of the English language informed the choice of the language by most of the respondents. That the English language largely guaranteed that the inscriptions would be read by most of the people in society was enough basis for the respondents' to use the English language, reinforcing the power of the English language as a world language (Akoto, Afful, 2022).

**Meanings drivers/vehicle owners ascribe to their inscriptions.** The messages emblazoned on vehicles often serve as public statements, reflecting the individual's values, beliefs or even a sense of humour (Nyame, Tomekyin, 2018). The researchers, followingly, explored this domain to ascertain the situation, as pertains in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. The ranking of the themes under which the inscription fell were presented, after which a detailed presentation and exemplification of each theme followed. The results of the thematic analysis on the ranking are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Meanings of Commercial Vehicle Inscriptions			
Theme	Inscriptions of Theme		Rank
	Number f	Percentage	
Religion	75	60	1
Life experience/advice	38	30	2
Prestige	12	10	3
Total	125	100	

From Table 2, it is evident that religious (f = 75) connotations ranked first as the meaning that the respondents associated with the inscriptions they put on their vehicles, suggesting that they value religion greatly. Life experience/ advice (f = 38) and Prestige (f = 12) followed in that order. The implication is that the respondents did not make the inscriptions or not reason. They had targeted messages for society, and these messages inspired them to make such inscriptions on their commercial vehicles.

*Religion.* The majority of the respondents used religious inscriptions to show their belief in God, Allah, and gods. Specifically, they used the inscriptions

exhibit their appreciation to God, their belief in God, salvation and perseverance. Some of the religious inscriptions and their related ascribed meanings are fond in Table 3.

Table 3

Inscriptions and ascribed meanings	
Inscription	Ascribed Meaning
Religion	
Bisa Awurade (Ask God.)	"I believe that whenever you are faced with trouble, and you pray to God, everything will be ok." (D 18, 2023)
I am that I am.	"Without God (Jesus) there is nothing again." (D 23, 2023)
Megyefo te ase (My redeemer lives)	"In 2021, at the Court Junction, I had serious accident, if was not for the intervention of God, I would have died." (D34, 2023)
Fear not, Allah is with you.	"I had three motor accidents but by the grace of Allah I survive, and I am talking to you today". (D 44, 2023)
Life experience/advice	
Wo ye wo ho se adofo (you act like you have love).	"I had quarrel with my neighbour, and anytime he sees me, he talks bad about me, so when I bought this vehicle, I chose this inscription". (D 12, 2023)
Who knows his future	I think every human being should humble, you can die anytime. (D 19, 2023)
Life is not a race.	This is my advice to the youth, we are in hurry to much. (D55, 2023)
Nhyira nka boafu (blesseth be the helper).	"I was struggling to get my own taxi, and someone good helped me with some money. I added some money to buy this taxi. That is the reason why I chose this inscription to thank him." (D15, 2023)
Dwen addwen pa ma wonua (have good thoughts for your neighbour).	"The hate is too much in the society, and I want people to learn and be each other's keeper." (D14, 2023)

From the Table 3, *D 18, 2023* wrote the inscription because he believed there is nothing God cannot do. That is, the omnipotence of God is highlighted in this response. Also, *D23, 2023*, explained that he took this statement from the Bible because he believes in the Bible, and believes that God is mighty and powerful.

On the part of *D34, 2023*, he had a serious accident which could have resulted to his death; that informs his reason for writing that on his vehicle because God saved him, implying in his strong belief in the saving abilities of God. More so, *D15, 2023* explained that he went through a lot of challenges in life, and those informed his choice for a religious message. The religious meanings embedded in the inscriptions on vehicles offer a unique perspective into the spiritual inclinations, beliefs and expressions of drivers or vehicle owners (Anane, 2019). From biblical verses to sacred symbols, these vehicular messages serve as public declarations of faith, conveying a connection to religious values and guiding principles.



**Figure 6.** Inscription in English on the rear window of a non-commercial vehicle

Source: Personal collection of R. Asafo-Adjei, F. Bukari, E. Klu.

*Life Experience/advice* encompasses the lessons learned from navigating the complexities of life, relationships, work and various situations (Nyame, Tomekyin, 2018). The participants employed message on this theme because of their lived experiences. For *D12, 2023*, that he had a bad relationship with his neighbour caused him to inscribe that message on his vehicle to indirectly tell the neighbor that his deeds, which are not of love, are known to the respondent. *D11, 2023*, explained that his neighbour used to insult him that he could never get married, but through perseverance and hard work, he was able to marry and has three children with his wife. On the part of *D55, 2023*, he wrote "Life is not a race" (Fig. 6) to advice everybody, especially the youth, that they should not be too quick to acquire wealth because that may land them in trouble; a lot

people encountered problems because they wanted to copy others and that did not end them well. D15, 2023 explained his choice of the inscription because someone helped him to buy the vehicle. Therefore, he chose that inscription to thank the person who helped him. So, whereas others had inscriptions based on negative life experiences, the reverse was the case for others, reflecting the uncertainties of life. Regarding D14, 2023, his message was an attempt to help purge negativity in society by advising people to eschew hatred and embrace love and positivity.

The inscriptions adorning vehicles serve as poignant reflections of the life experiences, wisdom and advice that drivers or vehicle owners wish to share with the world (Han, Hu, 2020). Whether through inspirational quotes, personal mottos or words of guidance, these vehicular messages become conduits for the accumulation of life's lessons. This exploration delves into the diverse ways in which individuals encapsulate their experiences and render advice through mobile expressions. As we navigate the highways of these personal narratives, we uncover the rich tapestry of meanings that drivers ascribe to their chosen inscriptions, offering glimpses into the unique journey each vehicle represents.

*Prestige.* This sub-section delves into the world of prestige-laden inscriptions, unravelling the layers of social identity, economic standing and personal pride that individuals embed into their vehicles.

*Top of Form.* Some of the vehicle drivers and owners wrote nicknames on their vehicles. These nicknames include local and foreign names: *FREQUENCY*, *PRESIDENT 1*, *BORGA UNO*, *BINGO*, *KMB*, *BOBBY*, *RASPO*, *PANYA*, *ABUSUA* etc. these respondents revealed that those names were written on their vehicles for easy identification purposes. Some explained that due to the uniqueness of their vehicles because of the names inscribed on them, whenever their vehicles were far, people still recognised them. For instance, the driver with the inscription *BORGA UNO*, explained that he was in Spain and when he came back to Ghana, everybody was calling him "Borga One", so he changed "One" to "UNO" which is Spanish. He said "in this station everyone knows me because of my name". Some of the participants further explained that even though each vehicle had a unique number plate, they are easily identified by the nicknames. Again, some of the drivers were of the view that they inscribed these names on their vehicles because they cherished such names. The one with inscription "PANYA" explains that he cherishes the name, hence his reason for inscribing it on his vehicle. He said, "*I like the name PANYA that is why I wrote it on my car*".

Each nickname serves as a way of expressing individuality in a visually distinctive manner. Again, the use of nickname such as "ABUSUA" reflects a strong connection to family and heritage. The driver may want to emphasise the importance of familial ties, possibly contributing to a sense of community and shared values. Generally, the choice of nicknames can reflect cultural influences, personal experiences and aspirations, contributing to the prestige and uniqueness of each vehicle on the road.



## Discussion

*Jeffrey Kallen et al.* (Kallen, 2020) note that the defining feature of terrestrial LL are framed in terms of publicly recognisable and recognised written texts. The study indicates that the English language dominates both monolingual and bilingual inscriptions of the commercial intra-city vehicles analysed. It is obvious that the English language has a strong presence in the LL of Sekondi-Takoradi. The LL found in the current study is different from Job Anane's (Anane, 2019) findings. Anane found Mfantse domination among canoe inscriptions in Winneba. However, the findings confirm the posits of Ebenezer Agbaglo and Joseph Afful (Agbaglo, Afful, 2023) and Gordon Adika (Adika, 2012) who argue that the use English language in Ghana is appreciating in multilingual environments. Given that English is the official language of Ghana, this finding is not surprising. It is simply a reflection of the language policy of the country. Also, the dominance of the English language in the names analysed can be perceived as a reflection of the relative power and status of the English language, as compared to other languages in Ghana (Owusu-Afriyie, 2020; Akoto, 2018). This can be seen negatively as the major language causing the death of minor languages, making English the killer language (Akoto, 2018; Yankson, 2018). Santiso (2023) observes that the dominance of the English language in the public space is part of the large scale globalisation of the English language, where the English language has become widespread, with functions ranging from widespread global politics to the intricacies of peoples' lives.

Another reason for the dominance of the English language may be that the population considers it as a language of neutrality (Agbaglo, Afful, 2023). Due to the discovery of oil in the Western Region of Ghana, the capital city has attracted people from diverse linguistic and culture backgrounds. Therefore, it makes sense when commercial intra-city vehicles owners and drivers inscribed their vehicles in the English language to avoid being linguistically biased towards specific ethnic groups. This has negative effects on the other major languages spoken (Addo, Danso, 2017). It can result to the death of minor languages spoken in Sekondi-Takoradi.

From the assertion of Paula Sjöblom (Sjöblom, 2013), one can argue that, naturally, the dominance of Twi in commercial intra-city vehicles inscriptions is a result of language prestige. Obeng argues that Twi is the most prestigious of all the Akan languages (Mfantse, Wassa, Nzema, Bono, Sefwi etc). It should be noted that the native language of the Sekondi-Takoradi is the Ahanta language (Biney, Boakye, 2021). It was surprising that the Ahanta language was missing in the inscriptions of the commercial intra-city vehicles. This has serious implications for the Ahanta language. Perhaps, the people do not attach any prestige to its usage — a situation that could culminate in endangering the language.

The supremacy of English in this current study, shows the language ideology in Sekondi-Takoradi. Inhabitants in Sekondi-Takoradi appear to have positive



attitude towards the English language, as compared with other languages spoken in the metropolis. While local languages like Fanti may be widely spoken, English, as the official language and commonly used for writing, often takes precedence for inscriptions (Akoto, 2018). This preference stems from the desire to ensure readability for a broader audience. Unlike English language, most Ghanaian languages have complex scripts or characters that may be unfamiliar to certain audiences, making them harder to read (Biney, Boakye, 2021). Economic and cultural factors also influence the choice of language for inscriptions on the intra-city commercial vehicles. For example, English signage is commonly used in Sekondi-Takoradi due to its status as a global lingua franca and its widespread usage in international business and tourism (Alomoush, 2018). A similar observation was made by Agbaglo and Afful (2023) in their study on the sociolinguistics of names of Hotels in Accra. Agbaglo and Afful indicated that the English language is used as names of the majority of hotels and catch phrases because English is a global lingua franca and its widespread usage in international business and tourism.

Relatedly, to evoke their religious beliefs and prestige and to indicate their life experiences. Drivers and vehicle owners express their religious beliefs through inscriptions on their vehicles. These inscriptions were quotes from scriptures, or prayers. For individuals who hold strong religious convictions, these inscriptions serve as a form of outward expression of their faith and a source of spiritual guidance and protection (Anane, 2019). Examples of religious inscriptions may include phrases like: *FEAR NOT ALLAH IS WITH YOU, I AM THAT I AM*. Some vehicle owners use inscriptions as a means to convey messages of advice or inspiration to themselves or others on the road. These inscriptions often include motivational quotes, words of wisdom, or reminders about safety and responsible driving (Akoto, Afful, 2022). Messages like *PATIENCE; LONG LIFE* fall into this category. They aim to promote positive behaviour in the society. Finally, vehicle inscriptions serve a prestige-related function (Cenoz, Gorter, 2017). Owners adorn their vehicles with inscriptions that convey status, wealth, or affiliation with exclusive groups or organizations (Legère, 2022). Overall, vehicle inscriptions serve as a form of self-expression and communication for owners, reflecting their beliefs, values, and aspirations while also influencing perceptions of others on the road.

## Conclusions

The study was purposed on exploring the LL of commercial intra-city vehicles in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis of Ghana. An interview guide and an iPhone 12 mobile phone (for pictures) were used to elicit the data. Six major conclusions were drawn based on the findings. Firstly, the English language was the most preferred language used on the commercial intra-city vehicles in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. This was evidenced in the fact that it ranked first. Secondly, four languages (English, Mfantse, Twi, Spanish) were found as the

languages of the inscriptions on the commercial intra-city vehicles. Thirdly, the language choices were not only monolingual; there were code-mixes (English and Twi) found on some of the vehicles studied — a situation that emphasises the multilingual nature of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. More so, easy readability and comprehension of the messages were found to inform the use of the English language over the other languages. In addition, the native Ahanta language was overlooked, signalling that the language is potentially endangered. Furthermore, religion, life experiences/advice and prestige were found to dominate the messages that were inscribed on the commercial intra-city vehicles studied.

### Limitations of the study

This investigation has been conducted from a single perspective — the inscriptions and what the owners/drivers think of them. This skews the investigation, and does not make it all-encompassing. Future studies could investigate the phenomenon from the perspectives of passengers or the public to know whether they can read and which languages they feel more comfortable with. The domain of the meanings that the public associate with the messages of the inscriptions could also be explored.

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