Linguistic Landscape in Kunuz Nubian Tourist Villages: Language Policy and Commodification of Minority Languages in Egypt

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Abstract

This study investigates the visibility of Mattokki, a Nubian ethnolinguistic minority, compared to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) displayed on private and public place signage as symbols of the construction of linguistic landscape (LL) in two Kunuz Nubian tourist villages: Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island. Following the conceptual framework of Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), the *bottom-up* and *top-down* LL signs are explored from political and socioeconomic perspectives. Drawing on Cenoz and Gorter's taxonomy of the *non-market values* of linguistic diversity in the LL (2009), the researcher identifies the types of values attached to the non-official and official place signs in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island. A qualitative-descriptive analysis is conducted to interpret the degree of visibility of Mattokki and MSA on place signs in the LL of private and public localities to account for language policies and benefit considerations standing behind the high or low visibility of Mattokki and MSA in the data. The findings have shown that Mattokki is highly visible in the LL of tourist localities in both villages for commercial-benefit considerations and symbolic functions related to preserving Nubians' ethnocultural identity. The study has also revealed that commodification of Mattokki in the LL of non-official localities indirectly contributes to its revitalization and reduces the potential of ranking this language as an endangered variety. Whereas Mattokki is entirely absent in the LL of official localities in both villages due to the priority, legality, officiality, and dominant status of MSA explicitly declared by the Egyptian language policy (LP) and manifested by linguistic practices. Besides, the results give grounds for the presence of English on the bottom-up LL signs by referring to the salience of English as a linguistic aspect of globalization and a referential means of communicating information.

Keywords: Nubia, linguistic landscape, ethnolinguistic minorities, language policy, identity, language commodification

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Introduction

The construction of dams along the river Nile in Aswan (Aswan Reservoir and the High Dam) drastically affected the lives of Nubians and their cultural and historical heritage. The vast Lake Nasser submerged around 500 km of Nubians' homelands and caused the forced displacement of thousands of Nubians from their homelands to new settings known as New Nubia in Kom Ombo Plateau. Being dispersed from their original lands and resettled far from the river Nile, Nubians lost much of their material and intangible cultural heritage. Dispersion in different areas along the Egyptian and Sudanese lands seeking for job opportunities has hindered younger generations from acquiring their indigenous languages in stable speech communities. Thus, the forced displacement is considered the main reason having severely contributed to increasing the potential of ranking Nubian varieties as endangered languages.

According to the UNESCO document prepared by Ad Hoc Expert Group on language vitality and endangerment in 2003, language vitality in speech communities is assessed by nine factors that generally measure the extent to which a language, governed by language policies and ideologies, is used in all domains and by all ages. Directly related to this study is the first factor known as *Intergenerational Language Transmission* which evaluates the impacts of the forced displacement of Nubians upon transmitting their ancestral languages from one generation to the next. Based on the UNESCO document (2003), Egyptian Nubian varieties are ranked as unsafe since they are neither used by some children in all domains nor by all children in limited domains (p. 8). At the same time, they are definitely, severely, or critically endangered because they are spoken respectively by parental, grandparental, or great-grandparental generations (p.8).

Researchers in the field of LL emphasize that the linguistic composition of public spaces, shaped by specific political and socioeconomic factors, is a direct reflection of the relative status of various ethnolinguistic varieties in communities (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Shohamy, 2006; Marten et al., 2012; Shohamy & Mahajneh, 2012). Leeman and Modan (2010) argue when an ethnic language (mostly unsafe) acts as a visual index of ethnicity in public spaces, it contributes to the commodification of ethnic culture which in turn helps revitalize this language. Because the current study is concerned with the presence of Mattokki as an element of the LL of tourist localities in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island, the researcher presupposes that the visibility of Mattokki may relatively promote the revitalization of Nubian minority varieties.

Research Objectives

This study aims at investigating the visibility of Mattokki compared to MSA on public and commercial signs in the LL of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island to account for the Egyptian LP that governs the presence or absence of Mattokki in public space with regard to the impacts of various political and socioeconomic factors that are highly influential in shaping the linguistic composition of this particular area of Nubia. It also explores how the symbolic economy contributes to the commodification of

Mattokki as an ethnic product in non-official localities to achieve commercial and cultural benefits. Manipulating the LL of ethnolinguistic communities to revitalize endangered languages is a main area of investigation in this study.

Research Questions

The present study attempts to provide answers for the following questions:

1. What does the growing visibility of Mattokki in the LL of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island reflect in terms of language vitality?

2. How could the commodification of Mattokki on tourist place signs in the LL of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island contribute to its revitalization?

3. To what extent does the linguistic composition of the public space in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island reveal the Egyptian LP towards majority and minority varieties?

4. How does the increased presence of Mattokki in the LL of the two villages help preserve Nubians' ethnic identity?

5. What functions does the presence of Mattokki on tourist place signs in the LL of the two villages serve?

6. Does the LL of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island express the relative power and status of the members inhabiting these speech communities?

Research Setting

Limitations of the Setting

Nubia is a narrow strip stretching from the first cataract, the south of Aswan, to the fifth cataract, the north of Sudan. Egyptian Nubia in particular extends from the first cataract to the second cataract in Wadi Halfa, a city located in the far north of Sudan near the Egyptian borders (Abdel Meguid, 2008). People living in this narrow strip of the Nile valley are called Nubians. Ethnographically, they are divided into three main tribes: Kunuz (occupying the northern part of the strip), Fadijja or Faddicca (occupying the southern part of the strip), and the Arab Al-Olayqat (living in the middle part of the strip and they speak Arabic). Linguistically, there are two Nubian languages in southern Egypt: Mattokki spoken by Kunuz around Aswan and Kom Ombo and Fadijja or *Nobiin*[1] spoken by Fadijja tribes in the far south of Aswan up to Sudan. The term 'Fadijja' refers to the ethnic group and the variety used by Fadijja communities as well (Taha, 2019, p.115). It is worth noting that Mattokki and Fadijja "are not mutually intelligible" to each ethnic group (Taha, 2019, p.114).

The setting of this study is confined to two Kunuzi villages: Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island. Gharb Suhail is located on the western bank of the Nile around 15 kilometers to the south of Aswan city. Gharb Suhail is particularly chosen because it was not affected by the construction of the High Dam in the 1960s as it is located on the north of it. Therefore, Nubians of Gharb Suhail did not suffer from displacement forced upon other Nubians living in the villages south to the High Dam and Aswan Reservoir. Elcheikh (2018) asserts that indigenous people of Gharb Suhail could considerably preserve much of Nubia's intangible cultural heritage shown in their distinctive traditions, values, practices, ceremonies, rituals, and above all their language (Mattokki). In addition, Gharb Suhail is a remarkable tourist attraction where "ethnic tourism has been increasingly developed as a particular trend of cultural tourism" (Elcheikh, 2018, p.243). Aswan Island, also known as Elephantine Island is located on the western side of the Nile just north of the first cataract. It contains remains of ancient temples and Aswan Museum. Inhabitants there are Kunuzi

groups mainly working in tourism and handicrafts.

The setting for this study is limited to Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island where the linguistic manifestations of Mattokki used for promoting ethnic tourism are evident in the LL. Accordingly, the practices of the Egyptian LP and the economic considerations of public and private forces could be observed and unveiled. Other Nubian villages (Kunuz or Fadijja) are not valid locations for this study since their ethnic varieties are not visible in LL due to the fact that the common occupations there are mostly farming and fishing.

Scope of Linguistic Landscape Research

LL research is a branch of study first emerged in the field of language planning, a sub-discipline of sociolinguistics. It explores the material manifestations of languages in public spaces as being symbolic indicators of various issues in speech communities such as language policies, linguistic diversity and language conflicts, identity, and commodification of minority varieties. Linguistic items displayed in public spaces are not arbitrarily exhibited. Rather, they are intentionally employed by authoritative entities for specific purposes. LL studies investigate the presence or absence of languages in public sphere to evaluate the vitality or sickness of languages in the built environment. Besides, LL research measures the degree of language visibility in public spaces to detect the language policies standing behind the relative power and status of certain varieties.

Review of Literature

Landry and Bourhis (1997) were the first to provide a comprehensible definition of LL which is mostly acknowledged by all researchers in this domain. They define the notion of LL as:

> The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. The linguistic landscape of a territory can serve two basic functions: an informational function and a symbolic function. (p.25).

The presence of a specific language on public signs can serve an informational function indicating that this language "can be used to communicate and obtain services within public and private establishments located in the pertinent territory" (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). The symbolic function of LL is highly evident in ethnolinguistic communities where it serves as a salient indicator of the value and status of in-group varieties and contributes "most directly to the positive social identity of ethnolinguistic groups" (p.27). Correspondingly, Cenoz and Gorter (2006) emphasize the bidirectional relationship between LL and the sociolinguistic context. On the one hand, the LL reflects the relative power and status of different languages in a specific sociolinguistic context. On the other hand, LL contributes to the construction of the sociolinguistic context since the visual linguistic items on place signage affect how people perceive the value and status of different languages and, as a result, their linguistic behavior is changed (pp. 67-68).

Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) propose a taxonomy, widely adopted by many researchers in later studies, to compare the degree of visibility of languages displayed on public and private LL signs in multilingual communities. They categorize LL signs in a given region into: (1) *The top-down forces* which include the LL official signs issued by governmental institutions and (2) *The*

bottom-up forces which include the LL non-official signs issued by private business actors and commercial investors (p.14). They develop a coding system of multiple parameters to examine the distribution of the top-down and bottom-up LL objects in different localities and domains of activity. They argue that the presence or absence of a particular variety on the top-down or bottom-up forces is governed by the impacts of three factors: rational or benefit considerations, presentation of self, and power relations (p.7).

Shohamy's pivotal study on language policies (LPs) (2006) underline the necessity of interpreting LPs in a given territory in a broader way than what is officially declared by the authoritative institutions. She argues that LPs should be explored through a variety of devices or mechanisms that are covertly deployed by the authoritative entities and in-group members "to impose, perpetuate and create language policies, far beyond those that are declared in official policies" (p. xvi). Shohamy states that it is through the observation of the effects of these mechanisms, the actual or 'de facto' LPs could be interpreted (p. xvi). A controversial issue investigated in Shohamy's study (2006) is the influential role of LPs in nation-state communities where multilingual immigrants, indigenous ethnic groups, and diverse cultural patterns are identified. In such heterogeneous communities, powerful LPs, known as *hidden agendas*, are manipulated to perpetuate "collective identities, homogenous and hegemonic ideologies, unified standards and categories of inclusion and exclusion" (p. xvii).

Backhaus (2009) compares the influence of language policies on the visibility of two minorities on place signs in two cities that are geographically, politically, and linguistically recognized as strongly different. The first city is Quebec where Francophone is a minority dominated by

English. The second city is Tokyo where English is a minority dominated by Japanese. Backhaus (2009) finds out that language regulations in Quebec and Tokyo are strikingly dissimilar due to the different political ideologies in both cities (p.170). While language laws in Quebec overtly promote the status and visibility of French and restrict the presence of other languages in the LL, Japanese language policies explicitly encourage the representation of English on commercial signs in the LL since the status and vitality of Japanese is uncontestably secure (p.170).

In a pioneering study, Leeman and Modan (2010) investigate the role of ethnic varieties in commercializing urban spaces and commodifying ethnic cultures in contemporary times. Their study demonstrates how the material manifestations of Chinese minorities in Washington DC's Chinatown are deployed as 'strategic tools' to reconstruct the LL of the built environment and commodify it as a high-profit product (p.183). Besides, their study explains how the American entrepreneurs in the 1980s and 1990s smartly invest the concept of *symbolic economy* by manipulating Chinese minorities in Washington DC's Chinatown to attract consumers and market products and services labelled as 'themed' and 'authentic' (p.185).

In a comparative quantitative study, Barni and Bagna (2010) argue that the relationship between LL and language visibility and vitality of immigrant languages in the Italian multilingual community is not a direct causal one (p.16). They claim that the higher visibility of immigrant varieties does not guarantee a greater potential for vitality and maintenance in sociolinguistic context. According to Barni and Bagna (2010), there are other conditions which determine the relationship between the visibility of minorities in Italian public spaces and their potential vitality. These conditions include

linguistic, extra-linguistic, and other contextual factors related to the language policies adopted in Italy (p.15).

Abundance of research in the field of LL explores the relationship between language policies and the de facto language practices manifested in public spaces of different urban cities worldwide. A considerable number of these studies interpret the influence of LPs on the visibility and vitality of minority languages in metropolitan cities and decide whether these LPs are explicit concerning the promotion of linguistic diversity in public spaces or not (Dunlevy, 2012; Janssens, 2012; Karam et al., 2018). Others investigate how ideology, power, and economic considerations in multilingual societies contribute to maintaining or threatening the identity of the members of ethnic groups inhabiting these societies. (Abdul Manan et al., 2015; Benu et al., 2023). Many studies focus on the growing dominance of English, representing the cultural and economic concepts of globalization, over indigenous or official varieties in mono-/multilingual communities where the domains of digital media, commerce, and urban planning are booming (Tang, 2020; Sarhan, 2023; Fawzy, 2023; Garg, 2024).

To the extent of the researcher's knowledge, this study significantly contributes to the LL research in Egypt as it is one of the preliminary studies investigating how the LL in Kunuz Nubian villages could reveal the hidden Egyptian LPs towards ethnolinguistic varieties and how it is deployed to promote ethnic tourism. Besides, the study, unprecedentedly, is oriented to explore the relationship between the visibility of Mattokki in Kunuz tourist localities and maintaining Nubians' ethnic identity. Thus, the study could expand the LL literature in Egypt by addressing new areas of research.

Methodology

Data Collection

The data collected for this study is a sample of 143 photographs (uploaded on Google drive, Appendix 1) taken from the streets of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island. A collection of 100 digital high-quality pictures of official and non-official place signs are taken in four shooting trips by two professional Aswani photographers. The remaining 43 pictures are uploaded by the researcher from Facebook. The initial corpus was higher than 165 pictures, but it was reduced into 143 after excluding the likely-repeated ones to develop a precise *sign coding scheme* (discussed in the following part). The language displayed on non-official place signs is Mattokki mono-transliterated into Arabic/English or bi-transliterated into Arabic-English orthography. These visible texts represent commercial signs and advertising placards of guest houses, hotels, restaurants, cafés, and Nile boats. Bazaars are numerous in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island, but, unexpectedly, they are placed without any signs. On the other hand, the language appears on official signs is MSA. These signs are placed on governmental institutions like schools, youth activity centers, community development organizations, and local health units. It is noteworthy that the sample collected is not as sizable as those gathered in previous studies on the LL due to the geographical extent of the area which is spatially limited.

Representativity is a significant point of consideration when determining on the sample of analysis (Backhaus, 2006; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Huebner, 2006). For this study, it has been essential to select localities that represent Nubians' ethnolinguistic variety as being an aspect of their cultural distinctiveness. The corpus is a faithful representation of the linguistic composition of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island.

Moreover, it indexes the growing presence of Mattokki as a minority variety that imprints itself clearly on the LL of the research setting.

Theoretical Framework

Top-down and Bottom-up Taxonomy

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytic approach based on the model proposed by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006). This model categorizes LL place signs into 'top-down' forces and 'bottom-up' forces. Top-down items refer to official signs issued by governmental public institutions. Bottom-up items refer to non-official signs placed in the LL by private companies, commercial actors, or shop owners (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006, p. 14). This categorization is followed by a *sign coding scheme* which subdivides 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' signs according to relative variables like the domain of activity, location of the sign, the number of languages on the sign, the order of languages on the sign, and the size of the font used (p.15).

The corpus of the study is treated, according to Ben-Rafael et al. (2006, p.7), as *"symbolic construction of the public space"* that is explained by context-dependent impacts of three different factors : *rational considerations* that are concerned with how individuals estimate the attractiveness of signs based on the value and popularity of varieties appearing on them; *presentation of self* which reflects indigenous people's aspiration to express their identity by imprinting it strongly on the public space ; and *power relations* that govern the choice of particular linguistic varieties to be visible on place signs (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006, p.7).

Non-Market Values of Linguistic Diversity in the LL

The study draws on Cenoz and Gorter's taxonomy of economic valuation of linguistic diversity in the LL (2009). They develop a model of assigning an economic value to linguistic diversity in the LL that goes in parallel with the method of economic valuation of biodiversity in environmental economics proposed by Nunes and De Blaeij (2005). Cenoz and Gorter (2009) contend that linguistic diversity in the LL can have non-market values just the same as goods and services that cannot be sold or bought directly in the market (p.60). In other words, items of linguistic diversity in the LL are non-market goods and services which produce intangible benefits to individuals although they don't have a direct value. Non-market values of linguistic diversity are classified into: use values and non-use values.

Use Values. They are the values attached to the active use of language signs by individuals in a given area. They fall into two sub-categories:

Direct Use Values. LL signs have direct use values when they are exclusively used to convey information. For instance, when signs are used by citizens to know the names of streets or stores and to understand destinations or traffic regulations, they fulfill the communicative function of language as long as citizens are able to understand the languages displayed on them. These languages may be dominant or minority varieties, but they are learned and used by citizens as indigenous languages in their society (Cenoz and Gorter, 2009, p.66).

Indirect Use Values. They have multiple functions. They are beneficial for tourists; they can solve communication problems; they can contribute to the sustainability of the languages used in a specific area; they can integrate different groups of speakers; they help build an image of being in a modern, sophisticated, and multicultural city; and they could avoid some costs of marketing for tourism in an area (p. 66).

Non-Use Values. Cenoz and Gorter (2009) explain that non-use values are

attached to the fact that citizens may not actually use the languages displayed on signs at the informative level, but they enjoy seeing them exist in the LL for affective and symbolic reasons deeply related to identity and authenticity (p.66). They are sub-categorized into:

Bequests Values. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2009), bequest values "refer to the benefits from ensuring that the languages in the LL will be preserved for future generations" (p.66). Therefore, speakers of ethnolinguistic minorities are positive that their languages will not be easily lost if they are constantly visible on signs in the LL.

Existence Values. Cenoz and Gorter (2009) maintain that existential values are related to the benefits which citizens attain from knowing that their languages do exist in the LL. Thus, speakers of minorities appreciate these values higher than other speakers of dominant languages because the former benefit from seeing their languages exist on signs in the LL even if they are not used in communication (p.66). The inclusion of a specific language on signs in the LL is a statement of its existence.

Language Policy and Language Planning in Egypt

Arabic and Ethnic Varieties in Egypt

The terms *language planning and language policy* are often used interchangeably as synonyms, but *language policy* refers more often to the goals of language planning (Cooper, 1989, p. 29). From a political perspective, Shohamy (2006) considers LP as the primary mechanism through which "decisions are made with regard to the preferred languages that should be legitimized, used, learned, and taught in terms of where, when and in which contexts" (p.45). From a sociolinguistic perspective, Holmes (2013) explains that LP refers to the political decisions taken by the concerned authorities and socially prestigious groups to select, regulate, and legislate the use and teaching of a language in society for the purpose of assigning status to this language and securing its acceptance by people as an official language (p.107). Holmes's (2013) explanation complies with what are called by Cooper (1989) as *Status Planning* and *Acquisition planning*. On the other side, what Cooper (1989) identifies as *language planning* or *corpus planning* is mainly concerned with codifying and standardizing the linguistic features of a variety.

The monolingual policy of Egypt is declared explicitly in many versions of the Egyptian Constitution (1971, 1980, 2012, 2014, 2019). Since adopting the 1971 Constitution, known as The Permanent Egyptian Constitution, Article (2) stipulates that Arabic is the official language of Egypt. Neither do the above-mentioned versions of the Egyptian Constitution overtly state any articles discussing the status and attitudes towards any ethnic varieties, e.g. Nubian, Siwi, Bedouin, nor provide domains in which such varieties should be used. Although Article (2) endorses Arabic as the official language that gains high status and supremacy and represents national identity and common history, the Egyptian Constitution does not explicitly prohibit the use of other varieties in non-official domains. Egyptian LP concerning minority and ethnic varieties is not publicized through declared policy statements. Rather, it is often imposed and perpetuated in covert and implicit ways. However, these ways could be observed through language practices that take place in the real ecology of minority varieties. It is only through the observation of these linguistic practices that 'hidden' language policy could be detected (Shohamy, 2006, p.46).

Political and social authorities in Egypt do not acknowledge the use of Nubian as an indigenous language in official domains, yet they implicitly approve using it in non-official domains at specific levels for restricted purposes. This hidden policy could be exposed when observing the linguistic practices in Nubian landscape. The visibility of Mattokki in the LL of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island is exclusive on place signs of non-governmental domains such as tourism, hospitality, and commerce for economic and cultural purposes. This may disclose 'the hidden agenda', according to Shohamy's view (2006), of the more politically and socially dominant Egyptian entities.

Status of Nubian Language in Egypt

Hudson and McConvell (1984), Schmidt (1990), and Tsunoda (2005) classify the status of languages according to the degree of their endangerment or viability into four criteria: (a) number of speakers, (b) age of speakers, (c) transmission to children, and (d) functions of the language. Egyptian Nubian varieties are classified as *sick* languages because "they will pass away soon if they do not receive treatment" (Hudson and McConvell, 1984, p.29). Young people may understand a sick language, but they may be able to say only few words. Alongside, Nubian languages are *weakening* varieties because "they are usually spoken by older people, but not fully transmitted to the younger generation" (Schmidt, 1990, p.54).

According to the above classification and the LP of Egypt previously discussed, it most likely appears that Nubians are recognized as indigenous people in Egypt. However, their ethnolinguistic variety is not acknowledged as an official language. It has gained the status of 'endangered' language since it is not fully transmitted to younger generations. This may be explained by several reasons: (1) the absence of a codified writing system for Nubian, (2) no language laws or regulations are stated to protect it, (3) it is not taught in schools as a local/vernacular language, and (4) it is not practiced by younger generations in various domains, particularly public domains. Beriar and Rababah (2016), Osman and Abuoaf (2022), and Wafa (2024) contend that the absence of a standardized writing system for Nubian at present will eventually lead to the disappearance of the distinct Nubian intangible cultural heritage such as stories, songs, poetry, proverbs, jokes, folklore, and all forms of oral traditions.

Minority Languages and Commodification

Language Commodification is a term used in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology to describe "a shift from understanding language as being primarily a marker of ethnonational identity, to understanding language as being a marketable commodity on its own, distinct from identity" (Heller, 2003, p. 474). The globalized new economy has transformed language and promoted it as a *commodity* with a market value (in the local and global market). Therefore, it could be invested and consumed as an economic resource to achieve a variety of profits at economic, political, social, and cultural levels (Heller, 2010). When minority languages are invested in promoting ethnic tourism, they could be "commodified to lend authenticity and value to material objects and products" (Karam et al., 2018, p.197). Cenoz and Gorter (2006) argue that a strong language policy has an effect to protect and promote the visibility of a minority language in the LL on commercial signage (p.78). This safeguarding effect is described by Mensel et al. (2017) as 'trickle-down' since it guarantees the visibility of a minority language in the LL (p.436). However, Mensel et al. (2017) attribute the increased presence of a minority language in the LL "to be more a question of economic

factors than a reflection of actual language behavior or language vitality" (p. 436). This explanation corresponds to the views of Heller (2003, 2010) and Cenoz and Gorter (2006) that an active language policy could revitalize a threatened ethnolinguistic minority and transform it into an authentic valued commodity mainly served to attract tourists and achieve commercial profits.

Leeman and Modan (2010) point out that in the late 20th and early 21st centuries there has been a trend toward commodifying culture and commercializing public space along the world. This trend, accordingly, has a direct impact on the language used to display the cultural aspects in environment. Tangible manifestations of language, e.g. store signs, are invested or *commodified* to promote cultural symbols, products and services (p.185). Leeman and Modan (2010) emphasize that urban areas in the mid-20th century and beyond have undergone a shift into 'symbolic economy' in which "entrepreneurs invest in projects that rely on cultural symbols to attract consumers.

Further, culture, products and services are bundled together and marketed as 'experiences' (p.185). The same economic concept is invested in less urbanized regions like Nubia. In Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island, business actors commodify ethnic language and cultural symbols to brand traditional products and services as a commercial bundle known as 'authentic' or 'exotic' experiences that are highly popular and widely demanded by tourists from all over the world.

Discussion and Findings

The study explores the degree of visibility of transliterated Mattokki and MSA displayed on private and public place signs as symbols of the construction of linguistic scenery in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island. Following the conceptual framework of Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), an analysis is given to compare the presence of Mattokki and MSA on bottom-up and top-down sings in the two villages to expose the language policies and socioeconomic forces that exist behind the construction of LL in these Nubian localities.

Table 1: LL Signs in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island

Category	Sub-Category		Number	Languages
	Domain	**Examples**		
Bottom-up signs **(Non-official** **signs)**	Tourism	Hotels & Guest houses	76	1. Transliterated Mattokki 2. Transliterated Mattokki + English 3. Transliterated Mattokki + Arabic
		Hotel boats	6	
	Commerce & Advertising	Restaurants & Cafes	20	
Top-down signs **(Official signs)**	Information & Directions	Building names	14	1. MSA 2. MSA + English
		Billboards	7	
		Informative notes	12	
		Graffiti	8	
Total			**143**	

Table (1) is a comprehensive mirror of the non-official and official place signs in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island. The photographic record quantified in Table (1) shows that the bottom-up signs are predominant in localities related to the domains of tourism and commerce where Mattokki is highly visible. Considerable number of the bottom-up signs are displayed in Mattokki along with English or Arabic or both. As shown in Table (1), the top-down signs are widely present in governmental localities where MSA is exclusively dominant to provide information and directions. Some official signs are bilingual providing the same information in MSA and English.

Bottom-up Private Signs

Table 2: Languages Displayed on Bottom-up Signs in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island

Languages	Type of Sign	Size of the Font Used	Order of Languages	Number
Mattokki	Mono-transliterated	easily noticed	---	20
	Bi-transliterated	both writing systems have mostly equal size of fonts	prominence of both orthographies is mutual	26
Mattokki - English Mattokki – Arabic	Bilingual	shop names in Mattokki are bigger	Mattokki is more prominent	56
Total				**102**

Collage A: Mono-transliterated Mattokki in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island

Collage B (Pics. 1-10): Bi-transliterated Mattokki in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island

In this section, the researcher will have a closer look at the linguistic composition of 'bottom-up' private signs set on the fronts of guest houses, hotel boats, and restaurants in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island to examine the presence of Mattokki, identify the orthography into which it is written, and recognize any other languages appear on the signs. Collages A & B provide the names of tourist and commercial places in Mattokki transliterated into Arabic or English or both orthographies. The corpus has clearly shown that signs of mono-transliterated Mattokki has the minimal presence (collage A). On the contrary, signs of bi-transliterated Mattokki have obviously stronger presence in the setting of research (collage B). The number of bi-transliterated signs is much higher than the modest number of mono-transliterated signs. Concerning the size of fonts used to write bi-transliterated signs, it has been observed that there is no consistent pattern for either transliteration. The sample has revealed that in most signs both spelling systems are nearly the same size. In few cases, Arabic orthography takes the more prominent place in terms of size (collage B, pics. 2, 5, 7, & 8). On many establishments where there is more than one text on the same sign, Arabic and English orthographies exchange the prominent/modest places equally (see Appendix A).

Turning to estimating the economic value of mono-/bi-transliterated Mattokki on the bottom-up LL signs (Collages A & B), the researcher concludes that these signs have *Non-use bequest values* since speakers of Mattokki feel that their ancestral language "may survive and be used by future generations" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2009, p. 65). Although these signs are not good for tourists at the informative level because they are not accompanied with translation for the transliterated Mattokki words, they fulfill a substantial aim for citizens whose indigenous language is Mattokki. Maintaining the visibility of Mattokki in the LL promotes its revitalization and moves it a step away from being an endangered language. Besides, the youth will know that their ethnolinguistic variety is less likely to be lost and could be sustained as an intangible heritage resource. According to the *presentation-of-self* factor proposed by Ben Rafael et al. (2006), transliterated Mattokki is intentionally used as an identity marker based on the *cultural-benefit considerations* on the side of Nubians. Egyptian governmental authorities do not discourage the use of minority languages in the bottom-up LL to help ethnic groups honor and preserve their identity. To assert their distinctive identity, Nubians are willing to adapt with the concerned sociopolitical forces and manipulate the non-official domain of tourism to represent their identity to the public.

Despite the unintelligibility of mono-/bi-transliterated signs (Collages A & B) to tourists, they have clear economic value in tourism. It could be claimed that not many tourists understand mono-/bi-transliterated Mattokki signs, yet their visibility "give an authentic and perhaps exotic flavor to the tourist location" (Salo, 2012, p. 253). Deploying Mattokki as a symbol of ethnicity and cultural diversity is a common strategy used by Egyptian private institutions and business agents to promote ethnic tourism. Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island have become a renowned destination for national and international tourism and Mattokki has turned into a brand purposely appears on commercial signage to attract tourists who are looking for authentic experiences. It has gained a new kind of values in 'marketing authenticity' (Salo, 2012, p.244).

Mattokki on storefront signs are bundled with tourist services, traditional handicraft products, and other cultural symbols to market the neighborhood as a tourist destination (Leeman & Modan, 2010, p.189). In terms of symbolic economy,

Mattokki is reduced to a visible commodity invested to create a 'themed environment' in Kunuz villages. It serves as "a vehicle both for the spatialization of culture and the commodification of space" (Leeman & Modan, 2010, p.196). Mattokki helps *spatialize* the tangible cultural elements in a definite space which is unique and exotic for visitors. For tourists, seeing an ethnic language on shop-names even in their own orthography and being able to recognize that it is different from their own language in phonological features and semantic meanings will give them the sense of having visited an authentic place. The absence of translation from mono-/bi-transliterated Mattokki signs in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island is deliberate on the side of both local residents and business agents to provoke leisure visitors' curiosity to ask about the denotations of these ethnic words. Eventually, such linguistic practices contribute to the revitalization of Mattokki as an endangered language.

Collage C: Transliterated Mattokki + Arabic in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island

Bilingual Mattokki-Arabic place signs (Collage C) have the least presence in the data collected. Although Arabic is the official and majority language that is spoken at all ages in Nubian villages, it does not have a predominant visibility on place signage in the bottom-up LL in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island. As shown in Collage C, Arabic is displayed to indicate the type of place (pics.1 & 2), while it takes a modest place to provide translation for Mattokki words in small font in picture 3. An interpretation for the relatively weak presence of Arabic on bilingual signs is related to *rational considerations* which focus on "the attractiveness of signs to the public and clients" (Ben Rafael et al., 2006, p.7). In tourist destination localities, *economic-benefit considerations* exceed the interest of showing markers of the official language to foreign visitors (Ben Rafael et al., 2006). These considerations have clearly been validated in the corpus recording the minimal visibility of Arabic on the bottom-up LL signs being a less attractive and not so much popular variety for foreign visitors. Another

reason is attributed to the invasion of cultural values of globalization to small villages like Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island resulting in threatening the status of Arabic, excluding it from signage of private localities, and replacing it with English as a sign of modernity and exoticism.

Collage D: Transliterated Mattokki + English in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island

Bilingual Mattokki-English signs (Collage D) have the most dominant presence in the corpus. Despite the fact that English is neither the official nor the majority language in Egypt, it is strongly and excessively visible as a global lingua franca on place signs in the bottom-up LL of tourist localities, particularly in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island. It is always seen on prominent positions to specify which type of place the sign presents. Bilingual Mattokki-English signs have rated the highest frequency in the corpus. They have *Indirect use values* since they do not have an explicit market value, but they are good for tourists who will be able to know the kind of place shown on the sign (Cenoz & Gorter, 2009). Besides, leisure visitors will feel comfortable when seeing their own language or a lingua franca exhibited in the surrounding environment. The indirect value of the visibility of English on the signs of tourist localities can also solve communication problems and decrease the costs of tourist guidance in such places.

For private business agents, the visibility of English on storefronts, next to or below transliterated Mattokki is required to achieve several aims related to the

commodification of ethnic culture in Nubia and the transmission of sociocultural aspects of globalization into small towns like Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island. Inspired by the concepts of modernity and sophistication, private entrepreneurs attempt to build an image of metropolitan or multicultural city in these small villages. This would likely to have another indirect impact on the integration of different groups of speakers who are visiting the place. Ben Rafael et al. (2006) maintain that the inclusion of a specific language in the linguistic composition of a given space is designated by the rational perspective and benefit considerations of the LL actors. For private business agents in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island, it is economically beneficial to keep English visible in the bottom-up LL to facilitate promoting and marketing of ethnic tourism. On the other hand, the good-reasons perspective interprets the constancy of English on the bottom-up LL forces as having a worldwide prestige which definitely make

it a 'natural' ingredient necessary for cultural transformation in a given society (Ben Rafael et al., 2006, p.24). Thus, both the economic and cultural aspects of globalization are imbued together to commodify and brand Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island.

Bilingual Mattokki-English signs also index *Non-use existence values* for both Nubians and foreign visitors. For Nubians, they highly appreciate seeing their indigenous variety transliterated in bigger font and occupying a prominent place prior to English. It is an indication of their ethnic identity or "a political stand in showing that these endangered languages spoken by a few tens or hundreds do exist" (Salo, 2012. p.253). For foreign visitors and Egyptian speakers of Arabic, it is important to acknowledge that linguistic diversity *exists* even if they do not understand these minority varieties. (Cenoz & Gorter, 2009).

Top-down Public Signs

Table 3: Languages Displayed on Top-down Signs in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island

Languages	Type of Sign	Location	Number
• MSA • MSA + English	• Building names • Billboards • Informative notes • Graffiti	Gharb Suhail	28
		Aswan Island	13
Total			41

Collage E: Top-down LL Place Signs in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island

The photographic record of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island has shown that the top-down LL signs appear on public buildings of official institutions. Signs are usually monolingual exhibited in MST, and they are sometimes bilingual when they are accompanied with English translation. All the top-down place signs exist in places other than tourist localities. They mainly fulfill the referential function of language as they are used to convey information, give instructions or warnings, and provide spatial guidelines. The political-benefit considerations of governmental authorities are behind the presence of the top-down sings in public locations (Ben Rafael et al., 2006). The visibility of MSA, opposed to the absence of Mattokki, on the top-down LL items expresses the dominant status of MSA that is explicitly decreed by political forces and codified by language planners as the official language in Egypt. Shohamy (2006, p.110) argues that the public space is a relevant arena that serves as a mechanism for reflecting "de facto language policy" in a given territory. The visibility of MSA as an exclusive language in the LL of official domains is perceived by Egyptian citizens as a 'symbolic message' of the supremacy and legitimacy of MSA (Shohamy, 2006). Thus, what is displayed on the LL signs, taking locations of signs into consideration, intentionally affects the individuals' perception of the LP dominating a particular country.

Political forces in a country legislate language laws which guarantee the visibility of a specific language in public spaces and restrict the visibility of others. Besides,

officiality of languages is decreed to grant perpetuation and to impose specific language behaviors in all domains of public sphere (Shohamy, 2006). As a result, the top-down LL entities are considered tangible manifestations of how language policies are embodied into actual language practices. In the case of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island, the manifestation of the officiality of MSA is strong in the LL of governmental institutions and other places that provide basic services to the Egyptian citizens.

On the other hand, while other languages are not declared as official in Egypt, this "does not imply that they will not be used in public spaces" (Shohamy, 2006, p.62). As it is exposed in collage E, some signs are bilingual presented in MSA and English. Whereas English is not an official language in Egypt, it is visible on the top-down LL signs for informative purposes because it retains the comprehensibility of signs for those whose native language is not Arabic. The researcher gives another rationale for the presence of English on the top-down LL signs to the fact that the status of Arabic is relatively secure. Therefore, the authoritative forces allow the visibility of English as it does not cause a direct threat to Arabic.

According to Cenoz and Gorter (2009), the top-down signs in the LL have *direct use values* to communicate objective information of a referential kind. Citizens understand top-down sings because they are written in the official language they have learned and can practice. Cenoz and Gorter (2009) state that direct use values "have an exchange value that could be reflected in the market even though the estimation of this value may be difficult" (p.66). As long as the meanings of signs are intelligible to the citizens of a specific community, the signs effectively achieve an implicit non-market exchange value that is hardly noticed in terms of commercial benefits, yet its impact could be measured by the amount of information exchanged and transmitted to citizens.

Conclusion

The present study has yielded significant findings which fully answer the previously-raised questions. They are summarized as follows:

- According to the UNESCO document (2003) on language vitality and endangerment, the increased presence of Mattokki in the LL of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island does not reflect real language vitality because it is not used by all ages in all domains in the setting of the study. Mattokki is only visible on private place signs for commercial purposes responding to the tourist market forces that are mainly concerned with economic-benefit considerations.

- The commodification of Mattokki on tourist place signage indirectly contributes to the revitalization and recategorization of this ethnolinguistic minority and reduces the potential of ranking it as an endangered language. Mattokki is presented as a commodity in the LL of tourist localities not only for promoting authentic products and exotic experiences, but also for helping Nubians feel that their indigenous language may survive and be transmitted to future generations (Non-use bequest values).

- The linguistic composition of public space in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island obviously reveals the Egyptian LP towards MSA and ethnolinguistic minorities. The corpus has shown that Mattokki is solely prominent in the LL of private and non-official places while it is completely absent in official localities. Restricting the visibility of Mattokki to a specific domain (tourism) and certain places discloses the hidden LP and mechanisms manipulated by the Egyptian

authoritative forces to impose and transform this policy into actual linguistic practices. On the other hand, the absence of Mattokki in the LL of official domains is an uncontested manifestation of the Egyptian LP towards maintaining the status and dominance of MSA.

- The visibility of Mattokki on the bottom-up LL signs in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island helps display Nubians' ethnic identity. According to the factors of *presentation-of-self* and *cultural-benefit considerations* proposed by Ben Rafael et al. (2006), the visibility of minority languages on the LL items serves as identity markers and containers for protecting intangible ethnocultural heritage.

- The linguistic manifestations of Mattokki on tourist place signs in Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island do not serve an informative function since no Arabic or English translation is offered to provide the semantic meanings of these Mattokki words. Rather, they mainly serve symbolic functions as they index ethnicity, authenticity, and linguistic diversity in a speech community governed by another majority/official language (Non-use existence value).

- The LL of Gharb Suhail and Aswan Island does not express noticeable power and status of the members of these linguistic communities. Mattokki is a spoken variety proved to be visible exclusively in Arabic or English orthography on commercial signs in non-official localities mainly for economic purposes. Otherwise, members of these speech communities would have been able to strongly impose and perpetuate their ancestral language in all domains of communication.

Notes

[1] The term 'Nobiin' only refers to the linguistic variety used by Fadijja tribes, while the term 'Nubian' is used to refer to the people of Nubia as an ethnic group and to their ancestral language as well.

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Appendix (A)

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1t2pZ7nr7q7MCKPUFJzqSkPEzjQic9anT?usp=sharing

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