SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPES OF RELIGIOUS SIGNBOARDS IN AWKA METROPOLIS: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract
This study examines the Semiotic Landscapes (SL) of religious signboards in Awka metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. Through ethnographic observation and multimodal discourse analysis of signboards and public signage, the study analyses the symbols and other signs found on religious signboards in public spaces. In particular, the study seeks to identify the languages and meaning-making resources used in religious signboards and explore how they contribute to the semiotic landscapes of Awka metropolis. Furthermore, this study analyses the symbolisation of religious identity in Awka metropolis and its implications for the broader semiotic landscapes. Data for the study were collected through an ethnographic observation of religious signboards in Awka metropolis. Data on religious signboards were collected using a phone camera from the study sites. The data were analysed using a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis approach, focusing mainly on the different symbolic representations used in religious signboards. The study is theoretically framed around Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006, 2020) multimodality and Reh's (2004) typology of multilingual writing. The analysis revealed that a number of semiotic resources ranging from language, colours, images and other artefacts serve as meaning-making resources for distinguishing the semiotic landscapes and the various religious symbols used to signal religious identity. Findings from the study show that the semiotic landscape of Awka metropolis is complex and multi-layered. Furthermore, it is instructive to note that the multiplicity of languages in the study area and symbols used in the religious signboards in Awka metropolis contribute to a highly diverse semiotic landscape. In conclusion, this study shows that the religious signages in Awka metropolis play an essential role in the broader semiotic landscape of the city and that further research is needed to explore the implications of religious symbols for the semiotic landscape of Awka metropolis and Anambra State in general.

Keywords: Semiotic Landscapes (SL), religious signboards, advertisement, religious identity, multilingualism, multimodality, Awka metropolis, Nigeria

1. Introduction
In Nigeria, individual multilingualism in its oral uses has attracted considerable linguistic research attention; however, the written and visual uses have remained widely ignored, with limited studies looking at visual representation of these languages. This study examines the Semiotic Landscapes (SL) of religious signboards in Awka metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. Awka, the capital of Anambra State, is located in Southeastern Nigeria. In examining the SL of religious signages in Awka, as it is everywhere, signboards serve as advertising mechanisms that help to create awareness about the existence of these religious bodies and as well point to the direction of these religious centres. Language and visual communication, therefore, are essential in the representation of religious signages.

Fig. 1: Showing Map of Anambra (Awka)

Awka, like all other cities in Southeast Nigeria, predominantly practices Christianity (as a religion). There are also a few indigenous and non-indigenous citizens who are Muslims. Due in part to the number of Christians among the citizens, there are many churches with a few Islamic worship centres. There are also a limited number who are traditionalists. This contributes to the use of English, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa languages within the Awka metropolis, i.e. the University community, worship centres, marketplaces and the general community at large. Fig. 1 above presents a visual representation of Anambra State and its various cities, with Awka serving as its capital. As part of its SL, this study examines the Semiotic Landscapes of religious signboards in Awka metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria, through ethnographic observation and multimodal discourse analysis. It looks at how religious signboards and public signages contribute to the visibility of multilingual writing or otherwise in the study site.

2. Literature

The place of visual communication in a given society can only be understood in the context of the range of forms or modes of communication available in that society, and their uses and valuation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020:19). This visual communication in a society is what Kress and van Leeuwen (2020) refer to as 'Semiotic landscape'. In truth, the features of a landscape only make sense in the context of its environment and the history of its development. Within the semiotic landscape of Awka metropolis, Spatial mobility of religious objects, Linguistic visibility/visibility of multilingual writing and Languages/types of multilingual information constitute our focus as we examine semiotic landscapes of religious signboards in Awka metropolis. The focus here is to investigate how symbols and other signs on religious signboards serve as resources for meaning-making in public space.

2.1 Semiotic Landscape

Semiotic Landscape refers to "any (public) space with a visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning-making" (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010:2). SL is here understood as the visual, linguistic environment, including various semiotic resources, such as texts, symbols, logos and pictures/images used. SL combines three major areas of scholarly interests: language and visual discourse, spatial practices, and the changes brought about by global capitalism and ever-increasing mediatisation in order to examine how landscape generates meaning (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010).

Although a number of studies have been done on SL, in Nigeria, only very limited studies have focused on signage (Adetunji, 2013; and Inya, 2019); even though a number of studies have been considered from a multimodal perspective (Makinde, 2024; Omole, 2024; and Makinde, 2023), very limited studies

have combined multilingual writing from spatial mobility, as well as multimodal studies in the analysis of religious signages specifically in Anambra State. Without any iota of doubt, public signs are a particular type of semiotic signs because they point to something other than themselves. Some signs are placed directly on the company building/premises while some point the direction to the site of the business. As Backhaus (2007) notes, the make-up of a sign includes an index, icon and symbol; such signs can be categorised into two types: top-down or bottom-up signs (as shall be seen in this study). This view is in complementarity with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) compositional meaning as a mode to account for meaning-potentials that constitutes part of this study's analysis.

3. Methods
A qualitative research design is used in this study. Data for the study are collected through an ethnographic observation of religious signboards in Awka metropolis. A total of 40 religious signboards: Orthodox churches – 5, Pentecostal churches – 8; and those from new generation churches – 26 as well as Islamic ones consisting of 1 signboard are examined for this study. These religious signboards are collected from the study sites with the aid of a phone camera. The justification for the sample size stems from its being sizeable enough as it represents the capital city of Anambra State. As a capital city with a number of private and public establishments, the study site is large enough to justify its adoption for qualitative data collection and analysis of a study of this nature. The data collected for this study were analysed using a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis approach, focusing mainly on the different symbolic representations, languages and other semiotic artifacts used in religious signboards. As part of the data collection for this study, ethnographic observation constitutes part of the mode used to collect data for analysis. As regards the study's time frame, the data for the study is available all year round at the various locations where these religious centres are domiciled. However, the selected churches have their services on Sundays with other weekly activities during on weekdays while the Islamic centre meet on Fridays only for prayers and other religious activities.

4. Theoretical Basis for the Study
The study is theoretically framed around Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006, 2020) multimodality and Reh's (2004) typology of multilingual writing. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, 2020), in their discussion, see multimodality from the lenses of representation, interactive and compositional meanings.

The representational meaning is concerned with categorisation i.e. interactive and representative participants as well as vectoral relations involving narrative processes (enacting doing and happening) and conceptual processes. The interactive meaning is depicted via contact as in demanding and offering information, distance showing composition of the objects as close-up, immediate distance and longshot in its composition. Also, the spatial positioning of the objects is depicted via frontal angle, oblique angle and vertical angle. In contrast, the last aspect of the composition is depicted via colour as a mode in terms of mood, tone and saturation. Furthermore, Kress and van Leeuwen (2020) depict the compositional meaning via the information value of objects within visual through left and right, top and bottom and nucleus directions; it also includes framing, which consists of colours, forms, vector connector lines, and disconnect. The last part of the compositional meaning is salience, which depicts how the elements of an image or other visuals are made prominent via size, colour, etc. This is further elaborated in Fig. 2 below.

In addition, Reh's (2004) typology of multilingual writing, which is categorised into three parameters, is also used as a theoretical framework for the analysis of this study. The three parameters, as identified by Reh, are spatial mobility of the objects, visibility of multilingual writing, which could be visible or covert and the types of multilingual information that the object of investigation carries. Fig. 3 gives the visual representation of Reh's (2004) typology of multilingual writing, which shall be employed in the analysis of multilingual elements in this study. With these theoretical frameworks, we are able to account for the nature of multimodal perspectives employed in the representation of religious signboards as well as the multilingual writing patterns as semiotic landscapes in the analyses of the selected religious signboards in Awka.
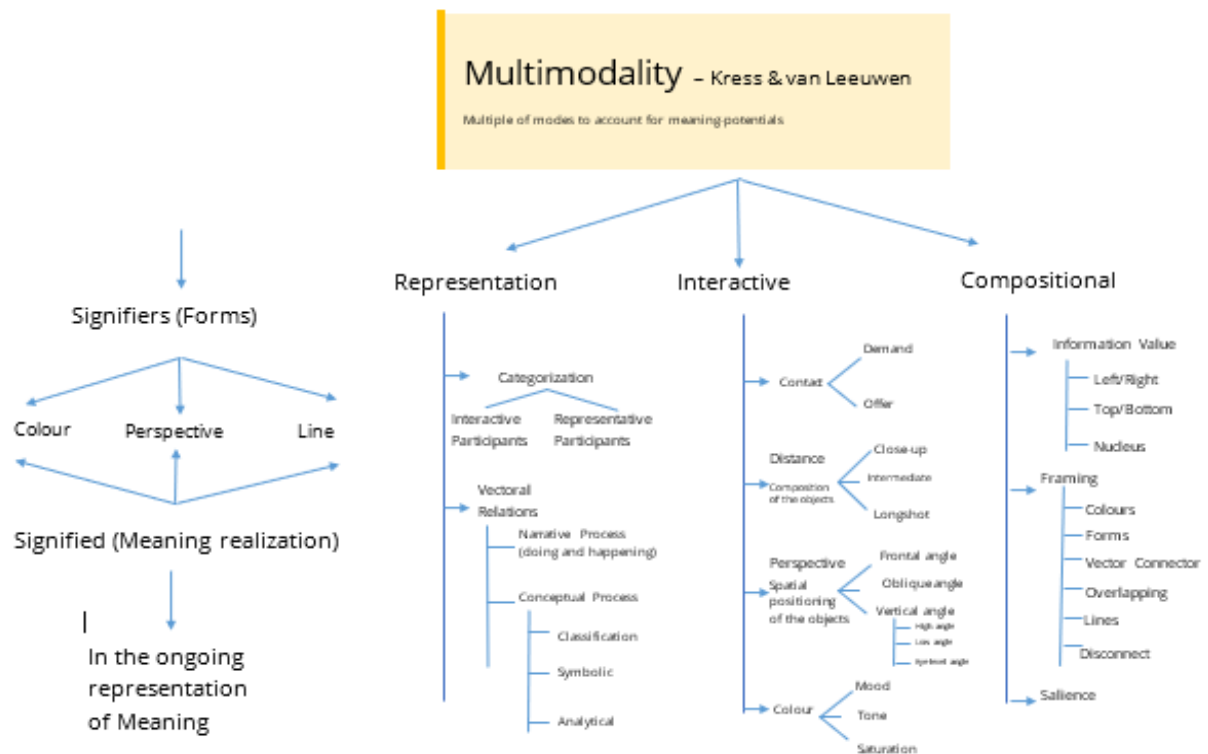
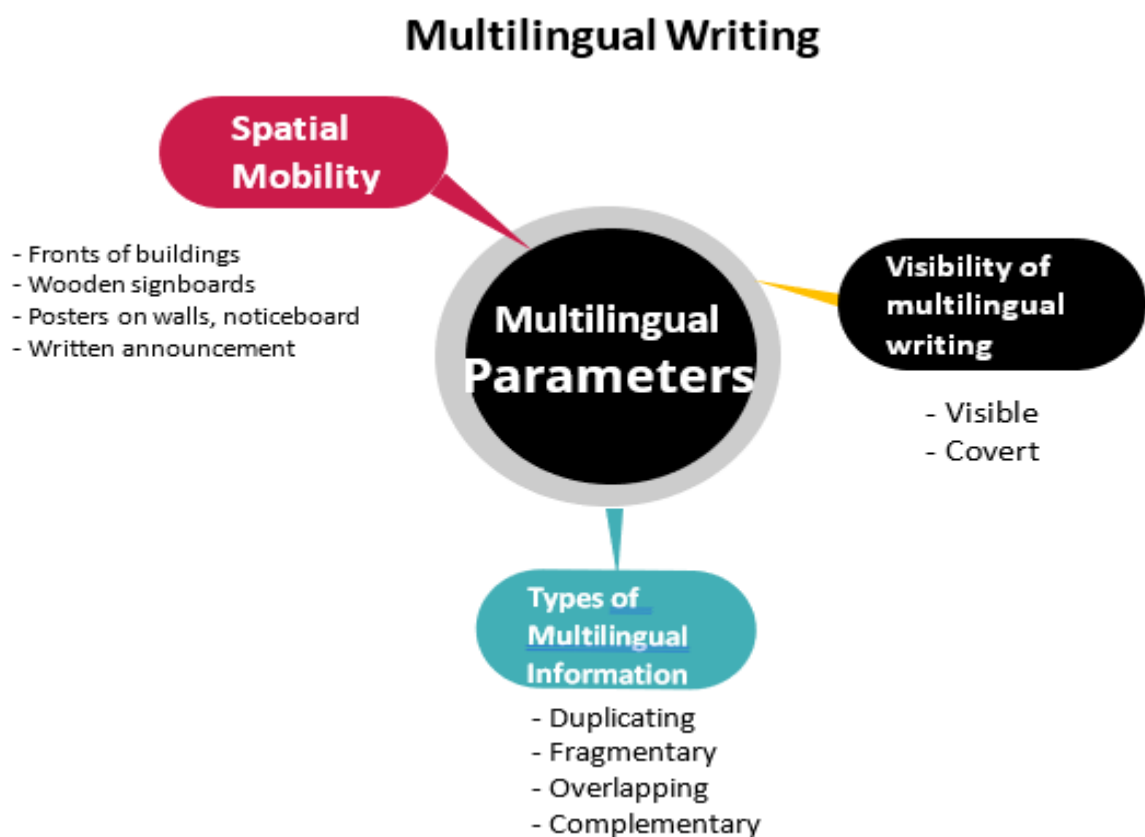Figure 2: On Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) Multimodality

Figure 3: On **Reh**'s multilingual writing - Adapted from Reh (2004)

5. Data Presentation and Discussion

Data on SL of religious signboards are thematically discussed from a multilingual and multimodal perspectives. How these resources are multimodally represented via such resources as information value, framing, silence, categorization as well as interactive aspects of these signboards are investigated. For the purpose of this study, we present and discuss tables and figures showing how the selected religious signboards are semiotically depicted in their various landscapes. Additionally, the selected frameworks on which this study is anchored enable discussion on multimodal and multilingual analysis on how texts and images depict religious ideologies.

Table 1: Showing Data on Orthodox

S/N	Category		Information Value	No of SL	Multilingualism		Semiotic Resources		
					MnL	B/MnL	Text (T)	Text/Logos (TL)	Text/Logos/Image (TLI)
1	Orthodox	Top-down	Top-Bottom	5	5	-	1	2	2
			Left-Right	-	-	-	-	-	-
2		Bottom-up	Top-Bottom	-	-	-	-	-	-
			Left-Right	-	-	-	-	-	-
			Total	**5**	**5**	**-**	**1**	**2**	

Table 1 above represents the tabular depiction of data collected from the Orthodox churches. The table presents 5 SL items of Christian signboards: 4 signboards and 1 programme banner. The table shows that all these (5) items are categorised under top-down in their information value. The multimodal element indicates the use of top-bottom information value with all the items rendered in monolingual (written in English). As per the semiotic resources employed in the representation of these Orthodox churches on billboards, the figure that follows presents the various affordances employed by these churches in their semiotic spaces. This enables the pictorial and visual representation of the billboards from Orthodox churches. In this way, we are able to present multimodal perspectives as resources for making meaning in the analysis of these religious signboards.
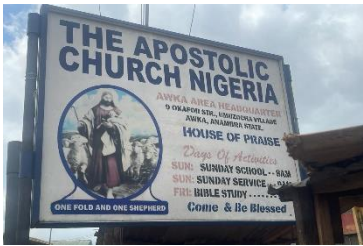
Fig. 4: Showing Billboard Representation of Orthodox Churches in Awka
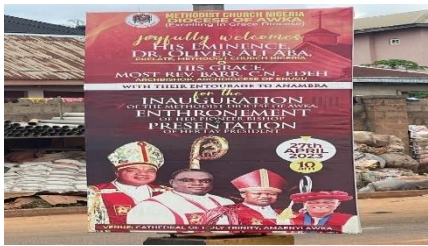

Pic 4.1.1

Pic 4.1.2

Pic 4.1.3

Pic 4.1.4

Pic 4.1.5

Fig. 4 above represents the billboards of Orthodox churches in Awka. These billboards are strategically positioned along the streets where the churches are located. They serve both as direction (indicating the

presence of these churches within the geographical location) and means of creating awareness about the existence of these churches for visitors and the general community. The first two billboards, pic 4.1.1 and pic 4.1.2, represent that of the Catholic Diocese of Awka and the Diocese of Awka Anglican Communion, respectively, with both located at Ifite, Awka. These billboards use texts and colours as semiotic resources. With their background colours, the two signboards are presented in top-down reading directions making the text visible via salience – capital letters and bold font sizes as they display their days of activities. Observation shows that these signboards are situated within the students' community. The third signboard represents that of The Apostolic Church of Nigeria. This signboard combines a more silent logo, font size, and colour to represent multiple modes. In a top-down and left-right reading directions, the signboard presents unique visual and textual elements combined for viewers' consumption. At the top is the church's name, which is made salient via bold font size and capital letters; below the church's name is the left-to-right reading composition of the church logo and texts offering more information about the church's address and days of activities. The church logo presents a unique representation of a shepherd and the sheep, depicting the church's belief in one-fold and one shepherd as boldly written below the logo. Here, Christ is presented as the Shepherd of the church, while the sheep represents the fold consisting of the members and leaders of the church.

The last two signboards, as in pic 4.1.4 and 4.1.5, present a colourful and modernised digital signboards with their multimodal affordances, which combine texts, images, church logos, colourful background and textual elements that signify the presence of these churches. These two signboards represent that of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, Awka Diocese. The first is that of the church signboard positioned along the street where the church is located. The second is a flex banner explicitly designed for a special programme – the inauguration of the Methodist Diocese of Awka as indicated on the flex. The flex banner is positioned at the centre of a busy road to create awareness about the programme of events for the inauguration. In their multimodal representation, the two signboards are presented in a top to down information value with such affordances as the church logo, texts detailing the churches' weekly activities and a number of images such as a human hand in pic 4.1.4 and the pictures of the Prelate, the Archbishop, the Pioneer Bishop and the Lay President from left to right in descending order as depicted in pic 4.1.5. In the last two pictures, language and visual discourse, spatial practices, and the changes brought about by global capitalism and ever-increasing mediatisation are depicted as affordances for visual representation. The colour saturation of the two pictures are well foregrounded to project the affordances employed by the designers of these signboards. Such backgrounded colour gives the visuals in these signboards prominence for viewers' consumption.

Table 2: Data on Pentecostal Churches

S/N	Category		Information Value	No of SL	Multilingualism		Semiotic Resources		
					MnL	B/MnL	Text (T)	Text/Logos (TL)	Text/Logos/Image (TLI)
1	Pentecostal	Top-down	Top-Bottom	8	8	-	1	7	-
			Left-Right	-	-	-			-
2		Bottom-up	Top-Bottom	-	-	-			-
			Left-Right	-	-	-			-
			Total	8	8	-	1	7	-

In Table 2, we have 8 SL items representing data from Pentecostal churches. All of these items are top-down in their multilingual representation. In addition, 1 of the items presented here uses text of big font size and an arrow pointing in the direction of the church. Also, 7 of the items incorporate texts, logos and other semiotic resources as visual elements. Like the previous data, all the items are rendered in English (monolingual), depicting the prominence of English as the language choice within the study site. The figure that follows depicts pictures of the various selected Pentecostal signboards presented for analysis.

Fig. 5: Showing Billboard Representation of Pentecostal Churches in Awka

Pic 5.1.1

Pic 5.1.2

Pic 5.1.3

Pic 5.1.4

Pic 5.1.5

Pic 5.1.6

Pic 5.1.7

Pic 5.1.8

In their uniqueness, the collage of signboards presented in Fig. 5 represents those of Pentecostal churches. These are signboards of The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Assemblies of God Church, The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, Deeper Life Campus Fellowship, Seventh-Day Adventist Church and Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. The billboards are strategically positioned along the streets within the locations of these churches. The signboards provide directions and indicate the presence of these churches in their various semiotic landscapes. These billboards use texts, church logos, and colours in their representation, except for that of Jehovah's Witnesses, which uses only texts with an arrow as a sign in place.

The first two pictures, pic 5.1.1 and pic 5.1.2, represent that of The Redeemed Christian Church of God for two different locations within Awka. Both signboards compositionally depicted top-to-bottom information values in their representation. At the top position is the church logo, with all its affordance of a dove at the centre of the logo and different layers of circles. Noticeable here is that the church name is also inscribed in circular form as part of the church logo. At the nucleus of the signboards is the church name and parish boldly written in capital letters for better visibility, thus making the signboards salient and prominent. The bottom of the signboard presents further information about the days of activities and the time for each activity day. Also noticeable is the use of the arrow at the lower part of the signboard. This signage directs the passers-by to the church venues, while the first signage directs the viewers to the right, the second points to the left side, thus constituting a sign in place for the viewers.

Pics 5.1.3 to 5.1.8 represent that of the Assemblies of God Church, The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, the Deeper Life Campus Fellowship, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. The signboards are presented in landscapes with affordances like the church logo and texts depicted in top-to-down information values. These signboards adopt simplified approaches in their designs as they depict church logos, names and locations of their churches in their representation.

This simplicity of design is associated with most Pentecostal churches. However, observations show some elements of modernisation in other aspects of the church representation, as many of these Pentecostal churches now adopt online media features in their representation. In all of these signboards, the churches concerned have used these signboards to create awareness about their presence and continuous existence at these locations. In this way, every worshipper is welcome to these churches.

Table 3: Data on New Generation Churches

S/N	Category		Information Value	No of SL	Multilingualism		Semiotic Resources		
					MnL	B/MnL	Text (T)	Text/Logos (TL)	Text/Logos/Image (TLI)
1	New Generation	Top-down	Top-Bottom	18	18	-	4	10	7
			Left-Right	7	7	-	-	-	6
2		Bottom-up	Top-Bottom	1	1	-	-	-	1
			Left-Right	-	-	-	-	-	-
			Total	**26**	**26**	**-**	**4**	**10**	**14**

In Table 3, 26 SL items of new-generation signboards are presented. 25 of these items are categorised under top-down reading directions. Compositionally, 18 items have top-bottom information values, while 7 items have left-right reading directions. Also, the table shows that 4 items use textual elements of different font sizes and colours. 10 of these items use text and logos, while 13 of the items incorporate multimodality in their representation. Out of the 26 items presented in Table 3, only one is bottom-up. All the items are monolingual and written in English. In the figures that follow, we present billboards representing New-Generation Churches in Awka.
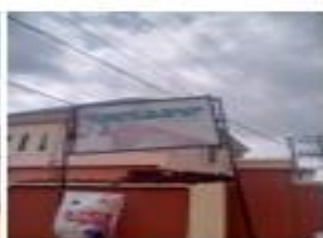

Fig. 6: Showing Billboard Representation of New Generation Churches in Awka

Pic 6.1.1 Pic 6.1.2 Pic 6.1.3 Pic 6.1.4

Pic 6.1.5 Pic 6.1.6 Pic 6.1.7

Pic 6.1.8 Pic 6.1.9 Pic 6.1.10

Pic 6.1.11   Pic 6.1.12   Pic 6.1.13   Pic 6.1.14

Pic 6.1.15   Pic 6.1.16   Pic 6.1.17   Pic 6.1.18

Pic 6.1.19   Pic 6.1.20   Pic 6.1.21   Pic 6.1.22

Pic 6.1.23   Pic 6.1.24   Pic 6.1.25   Pic 6.1.26

The above figure presents 26 signboards of the selected new-generation churches in Awka. This shows the dominant presence of these churches within Awka metropolis. All the data presented in Fig. 6 above adopt Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) view of multimodal representation. The use of these visuals helps create awareness about this category of churches and attracts more worshipers through the semiotic modes adopted in their representation. Regarding the spatial mobility of these signboards, pictures 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.1.3, 6.1.8, 6.1.10, 6.1.11 - 6.1.19, and pictures 6.1.21 - 6.1.26 are signboards strategically situated along the streets where these churches are located (Reh, 2004). Also, pictures 6.1.4, 6.1.5, 6.1.6, 6.1.7, 6.1.9 and 6.1.20 are flex banners, with some of them framed with wooden material and strategically positioned on walls, fences, and in front of the church buildings. Such models of framing are in line with Reh's (2004) spatial mobility of multilingual writing depicting the multilingual writing system and the semiotic landscapes of these religious billboards.

From multimodal perspectives, pictures 6.1.1 to 6.1.12 have representative participants, with most of these participants depicting pictures of the founders of these churches; except for pictures 6.1.5 to 6.1.7 which show visuals of the selected members as interactive participants. These visuals are depicted in vectorial relations and narrative processes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). From the compositional meaning, pictures 6.1.2, 6.1.5, 6.1.6, 6.1.7, 6.1.8 and 6.1.9 are presented in left to right information values. While pictures 6.1.2, 6.1.5, and 6.1.9 have image-text relationships with the images of the represented participants positioned on the left-hand side, the text is positioned on the right; pictures 6.1.6, 6.1.7, and 6.1.9 depict text-image relations with the text in these signboards placed on the left-hand side followed by the images of the interactive participants at the right of the frames. The rest of the pictures in Fig. 6 above are depicted in a top-bottom reading direction in their information values

with such affordances as framing showing such features as vector connector, lines and colour saturation as in pictures 6.1.6, 6.1.10, 6.1.12, 6.1.14 and 6.1.16 (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

As part of the semiotic landscapes, all the religious signboards presented above are made salient via bold and large font sizes that depict the names of these churches. The names of these churches are strategically positioned at the top sections of the billboards. At the same time, some are accompanied by the logos of the churches and made prominent for viewers' consumption. Some of the features used also include colours with artistic design of the texts carrying the names of the churches. Other features that contribute to the semiotic landscape of the signboards are pictures of the founders of these churches, addresses of the churches depicting their geosmeiotic (Scollon and Scollon, 2003) in their physical spaces as well as these churches' days of activities which offer further information on worship days and time. In the figure that follows, we present the signboard representing the Islamic religious, solely signboard depicting corpers fellowship within Awka landscape. From the fieldwork, observations show that although there are a few Islamic centres in Awka metropolis, these worship centres do not have signboards displaying their presence. The only one available is that showing the Muslim Corpers Association of Nigeria, as shown in Fig 7 below.

Fig. 7: Showing Muslim corpers association

Fig. 7 above represents the billboard depicting the Muslim Corpers Association of Nigeria (MCAN) in Awka South. As presented, the spatial mobility reveals the billboard design on a wooden signboard positioned in front of the building as it is made visible at the door's entrance to the Secretariat (Reh, 2004). The visibility of multilingual writing on this wooden signboard is covert, indicating monolingual information. The written information on the signboard is presented in capital letters with green colour, thus showing only one mode of representation. Thus, the multilingual writing of the selected Islamic signboard reflects its simplicity and the presence of this religious signage in Awka. This indicates that Islamic centres in Awka pay little or no attention to their semiotic landscape as signs in place in their visual representation.

6. Discussion of Findings and Conclusion
As Scollon and Scollon (2003) note, physical, material, and symbolic aspects of places are resources for producing meanings for the signs and practices found in them. Therefore, the strategic positioning of religious signboards, as presented in this study, in their semiotic landscapes contributes to the location of these adverts in the material world. As presented in the data above, the spatial mobility of the signboards shows that 33 are positioned along the roadside/junction while 7 are placed in front of buildings/walls. The data presented barely reveals multilingual writing in all the religious signboards represented. Instead, covert multilingual writing with all the appellations and other texts rendered in the English language is visible. The only visible elements of multilingualism are the addresses and names of the areas where these signboards are positioned.

Observation shows that while English and Igbo are the major languages spoken in Awka, a few Yoruba and Hausa languages are spoken in the metropolis, especially within the Federal University (Nnamdi Azikiwe University) and its environ. This factor contributes to the dominant use of English as the official language, with the Igbo language taking a secondary position in oral uses. Further observation also shows that language use at the various religious centres is classified into individual multilingualism in oral uses, which is common. Multilingual writing was widely ignored among individuals. Also, a limited number of bilingual texts are written in two languages with mixed codes for oral use among the users. The table below presents a cumulative representation of multilingual writing in the data collected for analysis.

Table 4: Showing a Cumulative Representation of Multilingual Writing Churches

S/N	Category		Information Value	No of SL	Multilingualism		Semiotic Resources		
					MnL	B/MnL	Text (T)	Text/Logos (TL)	Text/Logos/ Image (TLI)
1	Orthodox	Top-down	Top-Bottom	4	4	-	1	2	1
			Left-Right	-	-	-			-
2		Bottom-up	Top-Bottom	1	1	-			1
			Left-Right	-	-	-			-
3	Pentecostal	Top-down	Top-Bottom	8	8	-	1	7	-
			Left-Right	-	-	-			-
4		Bottom-up	Top-Bottom	-	-	-			-
			Left-Right	-	-	-			-
5	New Generation	Top-down	Top-Bottom	18	18	-	4	10	7
			Left-Right	7	7	-	-	-	6
6		Bottom-up	Top-Bottom	1	1	-	-	-	1
			Left-Right	-	-	-	-	-	-
			Total	**39**	**39**	**-**	**6**	**19**	**16**

By investigating 40 religious signboards in Awka metropolis, the study is set to determine the multilingual status of these signboards within their semiotic landscapes. Findings from the study show evidence in support of the use of the English language as the dominant language in the semiotic landscape of Awka metropolis. Unlike other signboards found within the metropolis, the results show a strong presence of the English language on religious signboards, with the local language (Igbo) serving the oral purpose at these worship centres. In this way, written languages are limited to the religious signboards, while the spoken language incorporates the use of multilingualism in some of these churches.

In the analysis, a number of semiotic resources ranging from languages, colours, images and other artefacts serve as meaning-making resources for distinguishing the semiotic landscapes and the various religious symbols used to signal religious identity. The study shows that the semiotic landscape of Awka metropolis is complex and multi-layered, with the use of covert multilingualism evident among the indigens and non-indigens who are residents of the study site. It is instructive to note that the multiplicity of languages in the study area and symbols used in the religious signboards in Awka metropolis contribute to a highly diverse semiotic landscape. Thus, the study reveals that the religious signages in Awka metropolis play an essential role in the broader semiotic landscape of the city and that further research is needed to explore the implications of religious symbols for the semiotic landscape of Awka metropolis and Anambra State in general.

The study suggests that multilingualism in religious gatherings, lecture halls (translanguaging), community gatherings, among others, should be encouraged to allow the use of multiple modes of communication in our society at large. In the face of the increase in technology and the world of AI, multimodal use in terms of language, visuals, and signs should be encouraged in our society for the

benefit of local, non-indigenous, and children within the community. This will pave the way for a dynamic community with a multilingual writing system.

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