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SOMALI REFUGEES AND THEIR URBAN AND NON-URBAN LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES

Abstract:
This study examines the linguistic landscapes found in two related spaces—one urban and one non-urban. Both are sites of Somali refugee settlement in the Upper Midwest of the United States. The analysis draws on Scollon and Scollon's (2003) theory of geosemiotics in understanding how signs index meaning and are contextualized in public spaces. The analysis additionally relies not only on the linguistic landscape as it appears at a single moment, but how it has changed over time. Through an analysis of the linguistic landscapes, Somali identities and networks are shown to be maintained in similar ways in various refugee communities, though the resulting scope and emplacement differ. Importantly, this study incorporates a discussion of a non-urban linguistic landscape that became multilingual with the arrival of refugees.

Keywords: non-urban ◆ urban ◆ linguistic landscape ◆ refugees ◆ geosemiotics

Although a monolingual bias in linguistic research has given way to increased interest in experimental research on language contact phenomena (e.g., Benmamoun, Montrul & Polinsky 2013, Montrul 2008, and Polinsky 2018), there are still unexplored areas in multilingualism. Of particular note are the new multilingual contexts that result specifically in refuge situations, i.e., multilingual situations that bring together speakers of differing languages because of (forced) displacement. Refuge situations contain a variety of social and cultural realities: 1) those brought

with the refugees, 2) those encountered in the place of refuge, and 3) those formed as a result of their new contexts. When refuge spaces are multilingual, complex sociolinguistic dynamics emerge. Especially for those forced to leave their homeland, perhaps due to social or political unrest or natural disaster, negotiating the new multilingual environment is also affected by significant (socio)psychological stress. Similarly, temporary asylum in refugee camps and the prospect of displacement from their home with no discernable end contribute greatly to the complex sociolinguistics of a community—the transience or permanence of the refugee in the new environment has a strong impact on how refugees will navigate their new multilingual realities (Brown 2018).

An important heuristic for understanding such complex multilingual spaces is the linguistic landscape (LL) of the refuge site. As physical signs and other semiotic devices emerge to index the population, relationships between the refugees and majority culture and the majority language become public. This study examines the LLs found in two related spaces—one urban and one non-urban—for Somali refugees in the Upper Midwest of the United States. The article begins with an overview of the LL as a heuristic for understanding the social and cultural aspects of multilingual spaces. Following that section is a sociohistorical description of the "mother," i.e., original, community in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and "daughter," i.e., offshoot community in Barron, Wisconsin. The bulk of the article is a description of the LLs in both locations with the goal of understanding signs as indexing meaning in the space and community and as dialogically interacting with the space (Scollon & Scollon 2003). The article concludes with a discussion of the issues raised and suggestions for further study.

Linguistic Landscapes

The study of the connection between public writing and space has a long tradition outside of linguistics (Pavlenko & Mullen 2015). It did not fully come to the awareness of linguists until Landry and Bourhis (1997) and the conceptualization of Linguistic Landscape Studies (LLS) as a method for understanding the nature of sociolinguistic situations as revealed in public signage. LL is defined here as the "symbolic construction of the public space" (Ben-Rafael 2008: 41). Its symbolic nature means that public space is not random, but intentional, and therefore indicative of the linguistic realities within that space. Signage and other semiotic devices regulate the public space and very overtly show how language and culture are socially negotiated (Stroud & Jegels 2014, Stroud & Mpendukana 2009, Ben-Rafael, Shohamy & Barni 2010). These aspects are especially poignant in multilingual spaces where multiple languages are available for the negotiation of the public space. As the social and cultural make-up of the space changes over time, and as relationships between the speakers of minority and majority languages change, the space is continually negotiated. Residents, consumers, tourists, and others, who move about the space,

process the visual information available publicly and, as a result, linguists can understand a great deal about the relationships between speakers and spaces and about how, especially in multilingual situations, power and legitimacy of one language and its speakers over another are manifested visually—and in which contexts. In such situations, the LL can link to ideologies about language and provide insight into the sociolinguistics of the community (Cenoz & Gorter 2006, Woldemariam & Lanza 2014, Aronin & Ó Laoire 2012).

LLS diverges from traditional lines of inquiry in sociolinguistics, in that they force sociolinguists to move the focus from speakers to spaces and from orality to literacy (Blommaert 2013). Since signs organize the social dynamic of a space, they are significantly powerful. Signs can be constructed from government or majority culture institutions (top-down) or from minority language speakers (bottom-up). The resulting contested space shows the coincidence of language ideologies at play in multilingual contexts. The power negotiated in multilingual spaces means that signs are not only useful to inform sociolinguists about the demography, society, and culture, but also about the historical and political aspects of a space (Pavlenko & Mullen 2015). The turn to investigate visual power in the LL diverges from earlier LLS which sought to count fixed multilingual signs and quantitatively show the prevalence of one language over another. The early distributional models were useful as a sociolinguistic diagnostic, informing about the languages that were visible in a certain space. These models were unable, however, to show the relationships among the languages, communities, and spaces and the dynamics of those relationships over time. More recent work in LLS not only incorporates relationships of power and changes over time in a multilingual space, but expands the study of fixed signs to include mobile signs and images that are monolingual, e.g., Aronin and Ó Laoire (2012). Banda and Jimaima (2015) have even expanded LLS to include the semiotic landscape, incorporating multimodal resources, such as walking narratives and artifacts, e.g., architecture. LLS is an ever-changing field, which puts the visual display of language and speakers at the center of its inquiry.

Although LLS shows potential for understanding the sociolinguistics of multilingual spaces, there are areas that require further study. In one of the first edited volumes on LLS, Coulmas (2008: 14) suggests that the field is rather narrow in scope, stating that "the linguistic landscape is really linguistic cityscape, especially in multilingual settings." Seven years later, Banda and Jimaima (2015: 644) noted the continued urban bias in LLS. Seeking to remedy this bias, Jenks (2018) provided an insightful study on nationalism and the rhetoric surrounding it on billboards in the rural United States. In so doing, he showed how rural signs contribute to larger political ideologies and effectively showed how ideologies manifested through rural LLs can have far-reaching impacts.

Although refugees and immigrants are typically associated with urban areas of settlement, rural areas can also be multilingual. Only a handful of studies have appeared on non-urban multilingual

LLs. Salo's (2012) work on the historically multilingual North Calotte region of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia looked at endangered indigenous languages and how they are used in the rural LL. She found that the indigenous Sámi language was used for cultural institutions, tourism, and festivals—showing that the language has become part of the area's "globalized multilingual economy." Du Plessis' (2012) research on rural areas of the Free State Province of South Africa showed how local identities affect the LL in rural areas, noting the erasure of Afrikaans and the construction of bilingual Bantu signs. This, he asserts, is due to the lack of language visibility regulations in rural areas. Both studies highlighted the role of rural identities in interactions with multilingualism dictated by majority society. Both, however, are situated around the identities and language practices of minority-language speakers in their homelands. Lacking is an examination of the LL, in a non-urban area, of a migration context, i.e., a recent refugee group to a non-urban area. This study explores this by showing how the LL in a non-metropolitan Wisconsin town compares to that of a metropolitan area nearby.

Sociohistorical Context: Minneapolis and Barron

The Somali Civil War has been a devastating conflict, impacting both Somalis and the rest of the world. In 1991, approximately two million Somalis refuged to neighboring African nations as a result of the war. It is estimated that perhaps 500,000 Somalis have died as a result of the war, including those who have died due to starvation caused by militia blockades of refugee camps (White 2012). In 1992, 37,000 soldiers from twenty-four nations—including the United States—entered the conflict to provide increased security and food supplies (Yusuf 2012). A year later during the Battle of Mogadishu, hundreds of Somalis and eighteen Americans were killed, causing the American withdrawal from the conflict. Since then, the United States has provided asylum for Somali refugees. Between 2001 and 2005, Somalis made up 25% of the entire refugee population admitted to the United States, up from 5.5% in the previous two decades (Wisconsin Advisory Committee 2012). In 2014, Somalia was in fourth position behind Iraq, Burma, and Bhutan for number of refugees admitted at 7,608 people (Department of State 2014). Refugees from this East African nation state came en masse to the Upper Midwest, especially Minnesota, because of better economic prospects and a lower cost of living (Yusuf 2012). Approximately 36,000 Somali refugees live in Minnesota with the largest percentage residing in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood in downtown Minneapolis; local members of the community, however, estimate the number of refugees to be closer to 70,000 (Yusuf 2012: 63). The Cedar-Riverside neighborhood is a historically diverse space and has been home to various immigrant groups since the late nineteenth century (Brown in preparation). Today, remnants of its Scandinavian and Asian immigrant cultures still persist below the towering apartment structures on Somali Street, now called "Little Mogadishu" locally, just yards away from Minneapolis' oldest mosque.

Increasing urban stressors, such as crime and overcrowding, have drawn groups of Somalis away from Minneapolis to a small town in northwestern Wisconsin since the 1990s. Barron, Wisconsin, the county seat of Barron County, has a population of just over 3,000 people. It is largely white, of European descent, and Christian), so the arrival of approximately 400 Somalis, who are racially, culturally, linguistically, and religiously very different from Barron's preexisting residents, has created a visible impact on the local space. Because of its increase in Somali residents between 1990 and the first decades of the twenty-first century, the local community has instituted several programs that promote "cultural understanding" and English as a Second Language training (Brown 2018). The largest draw to Barron continues to be better job prospects, at a Jennie-O® poultry processing facility where a large percentage of the Somali refugees are employed.

Linguistic Landscapes of Urban and Rural Spaces

This study examines the LL through an ethnographic approach, i.e., a description of the social and symbolic practices and resources of a particular group of people (Duranti 1997); as such it attempts to be holistic in not only looking at visual signage, but other semiotic devices and historical analysis. The historical analysis derives in large part from participant-observation and interviews conducted as part of a large-scale, longitudinal community ethnography project that has been on-going since 2014 (see Brown 2018 for a detailed treatment). The project continues to uncover the complexities of refugee communities in the Upper Midwest. As a result, the analysis in this paper is a "snap-shot" in time of the LL in both communities, while also relying on the historical aspects of the communities up to that point. It is imperative, though, that the changing nature of both communities not be ignored, even if incorporating photographs may reinforce presumptions about the static nature of the communities.

In understanding the LL in these spaces of refuge, the *theory of geosemiotics* (Scollon & Scollon 2003) is used, i.e., "the study of social meaning of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world" (2003: 211). In this theoretical framework, signs constitute a bundle of semiotic systems, e.g., visual, spatial, habitual, etc. Understanding the relationship between signs, the space, and the community requires engaging with *indexicality* and *dialogicality*. Signs index meaning through their emplacement—the spatial and temporal aspects of their existence. Moreover, meaning is conveyed through the permanence / transience, placement of language visually, and the material or quality of the signs. However, a sign does not exist in a vacuum, so understanding the signs in the same environment is necessary, i.e., how the signs in a particular space dialogically interact and, in turn, how that interaction relates to discourses within the community. Importantly, Pavlenko and Mullen (2015) add to geosemiotics the idea of *diachronicity*; the consideration of signs over time in a longitudinal context are necessary for understanding the immediate semiotics of the space.

Linguistic Landscape in Cedar-Riverside (Minneapolis)

Walking along the streets of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, one is immediately struck by the prevalence of halal markets, international money wiring offices, communication companies, and clothing stores specializing in various multicultural forms of observant Muslim dress for women and men. (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Cedar Avenue, Minneapolis.

Signs on the vast majority of these businesses are not bilingual in Somali and English, nor Arabic and English. They index the community through their imagery and business names. Many of the participants in the ethnographic interviews clarified that maintaining communication with family in refugee camps in Somalia or neighboring African nations is a major priority and occupies a large amount of their time. Additionally, sending money to those family members so that they too can apply for admittance and travel to the United States weighs heavily on the refugees in Minneapolis. The presence of several of these businesses indexes the needs of the community in maintaining the close familial bonds with kin who are still in Africa. Although the mall sign "Al Karama" in Figure 1 is Arabic for 'dignity' and the Somali Dahabshiil 'golden' or 'gold smelter' on the sign next to it are indicative of the community's multilingualism, the signs' contribution to the visual storefront is more important. The fact that Al Karama sells exotic clothing, that Dahabshiil is a money wiring service to East Africa, and that Lycamobile is an international phone company highlights the needs of the Somali community and how Somalis shape the landscape through the inclusion of local clothing stores with Arabic names and Somali national money wiring agencies. The existence of spaces with money wiring and international calling services indicates the ties that they continue to have to their homeland. The image in Figure 1, although containing only one word from Arabic in Latin letters and a company name in Somali, still shows the

importance of connecting with East Africa. Necessities such as food and clothing also figure prominently in the neighborhood (Figure 2). Providing halal ("religiously permissible") food options and clothing that is religiously sanctioned supports the maintenance of their Somali identities within a Minneapolis that is mostly white (64%) and Christian (70%) (US Census Bureau 2010, Pew Research Center 2019). Imagery that indexes the community shows not only the demographic make-up of the space, but also, in the case of businesses, the economic viability of locales that cater to the refugee population. Selling religiously sanctioned and traditional clothing for Somali women highlights its importance to some individuals in their new context. Figure 2 shows the inventory of a local clothing store with examples of the colorful dirac dress, worn for special occasions, and various styles of hijab (veil) and shash (headscarves). The imagery, more so than the linguistically mediated information, informs the observer how the expression of Somali and Muslim identities exist in the refugee environment.

Figure 2. Cedar Avenue, Minneapolis.

There are a few bilingual signs in the neighborhood in English and Somali. They are all related to Somali businesses and the signs are not produced "top-down", i.e., from a governmental institution (Figure 3 below). The nature of these signs, as originating from the businesses themselves, is indicative of the power that Somali and English hold within the community. Bilingual signs are used only for regulations (parking, in most instances), while advertising is done nearly always in English. In addition to Somali and Muslim symbols on the businesses, one is also struck by the number of temporary protest signage posted on streetlights and other structural elements of the landscape (Figure 4 below). All of the protest signage indexes opposition to anti-Muslim ideologies. Business signage and visual imagery promote Somali identities in the new refuge

Figure 3. Cedar Avenue, Minneapolis

Figure 4. Riverside Avenue, Minneapolis.

environment. Moreover, the inclusion of English in these signs is indicative of their new environment.

Since the majority of Somalis are Muslim, these signs may exist in Cedar-Riverside, because of the substantial Muslim concentration there. Overt protests of anti-Muslim ideologies as well as community-relations building programs led by the Confederation of Somali Community housed in the neighborhood's Brian Coyle Community Center are hallmarks of the neighborhood's efforts to increase cultural understanding between the minority and majority cultures. Observation as part of the long-term ethnography in the neighborhood and boundary areas with other neighborhoods indicates that these signs are not found to the same degree in neighboring areas as within Cedar-Riverside. The geosemiotics of Cedar-Riverside indexes maintenance of Somali identities through dress, food, language, and networks reaching to East Africa. Additionally, protest and educational programs on signs aimed at working against cultural misunderstanding and combatting racism show the interactions between the Somali community and the majority Upper Midwestern society. Historically, Cedar-Riverside has been a site of continuing waves of immigration to Minneapolis. Eastern Europeans, Scandinavians, and Asians have lived here throughout its history. This historical fact has now become part of a tourism campaign there (Figure 5 below), as a way to combat xenophobia and to legitimize the diversity of the space. In highlighting the neighborhood's immigrant past and connecting it with its diverse present, the Somali presence is contextualized as one more chapter in the long history of Cedar-Riverside's multilingual and multiethnic space.[1]

[1] See Brown (in preparation) for a complete analysis of the layered LL of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood.

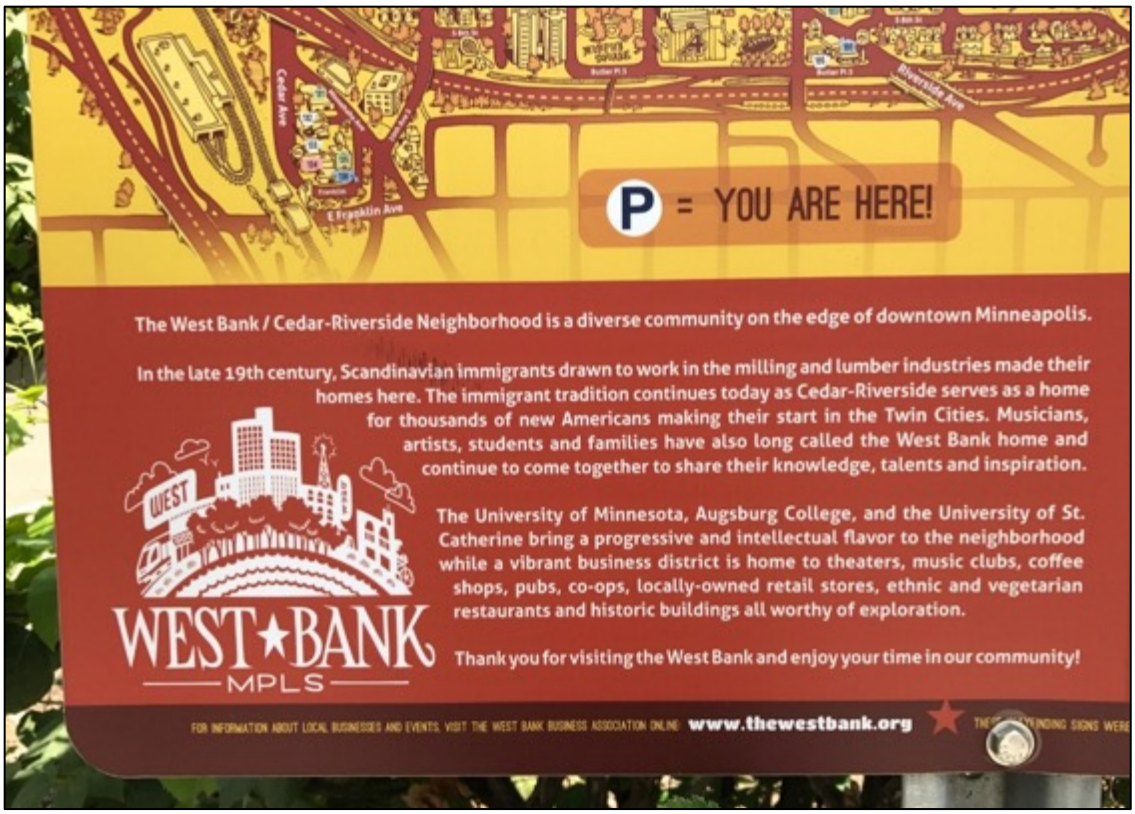

Figure 5. West Bank / Cedar-Riverside promotional tourism sign.

Linguistic Landscape in Barron

The mother settlement of Somali refugees in Cedar-Riverside has a LL that both linguistically and symbolically indexes the community. Similar semiotic indexes are found in Minneapolis's daughter settlement in Barron, Wisconsin. Ninety miles from the traffic-laden urban environment of Cedar Avenue in South Minneapolis, Somali businesses are found along East La Salle Avenue in Barron's somewhat sleepy downtown (Figure 6, next page).

Figure 6. East La Salle Avenue, Barron.

The multi-business shown in Figure 6 above is a halal grocery store, restaurant, and convenience market. Just as in Minneapolis, this business sells phone cards and SIM cards. As it is located in a non-urban area, which cannot necessarily support separate restaurants, grocery stores, and markets, this one-stop-shop fulfills a number of needs for Somali refugees. Maintaining contact with family in East Africa and maintaining Somali identities by way of access to halal food are prominent features of this single Barron business, as they were for the many businesses lining Minneapolis's Cedar-Riverside streets. However, the storefronts in Minneapolis do not list all of the Somali goods. Here is a main difference in the communities' signage. Cedar-Riverside has a dense concentration of Somalis within a single neighborhood; neighborhood businesses can afford to cater to Somali patrons. In Barron, Somalis are a minority population of the community that could potentially be consumers at a business. As a result, the Somali business in Barron seeks outsider interest and thus lists a number of Somali food items: *anjera* (a sour pancake-like staple of Somali cuisine) and *qahwa* (spiced coffee often served with dates or halwa). Cultural terms like *halal* 'permissible' and *zabiah* 'slaughtered' are untranslated adjectives to the goat meat that they sell. Patrons, both Somalis and non-Somalis, see the list of food items with cultural terms in Arabic and Somali and realize that this is a Somali grocery and restaurant. Catering to outsider palates, the restaurant highlights fusion cuisine: Somali steak sandwiches are listed alongside Philly sandwiches and gyros.

Historically, Barron had a Somali restaurant in that same building—the name is faded on the storefront awning—that was started in 2007, after a large influx of refugees to the town. The restaurant eventually ceased operation and its owners became intermediaries for the local Somali population and external resources, e.g., finding jobs and assisting in filling out governmental forms. The community there still yearned for a connection to its Somali heritage, and a small coffee cart with limited Somali foods operated and delivered to homes and businesses. The current permanence of a Somali enterprise on Barron's main street, complete with restaurant and other resources, indicates the increasing permanence of the Barron Somali population.

Fewer in number to Minneapolis are Somali businesses in Barron, but they still dot the landscape. Figure 7 shows a Somali-run fashion shop next to the town's mosque.

Figure 7. South Third Street, Barron.

Bushra, an Arabic female name, shows the connection to religiously permissible fashion that Somalis may rarely encounter in area malls and stores—similar to the shops in Cedar-Riverside. Religious identity is indexed linguistically at the mosque next door. Unlike Minneapolis's Dar Al-Hijrah Mosque (aptly "home of migration") which is only marked with a simple sign using Latin lettering, the Barron mosque Al-Taqwa 'piety' has its name translated into Arabic below the Latin lettering. Just as in Cedar-Riverside, Barron's signage shows both Arabic and Somali cultural items that index maintenance of Somali identity within a majority culture and the connection to East Africa. The enduring connection with the mother settlement in Minneapolis is indicated by

the area code of the first telephone number on the mosque sign alongside another telephone number with a Northern Wisconsin area code.

Missing from Barron are the regulation signs in Somali and English created by Somali businesses. The bilingual signage in Barron that does exist, however, is in some respects more visible than in Cedar-Riverside, because it is unexpected given the overwhelmingly monolingual English landscape of the town. The bilingual signs in Cedar-Riverside were placed by businesses and indicated regulations. Regulatory bilingual signs can be viewed throughout Barron's linguistic landscape. The major difference is that unlike the bottom-up signage in Cedar-Riverside, the signs in Barron are top-down and manufactured by an administrative institution. For example, all of the public schools in Barron have signage on their doors in English, Somali, and Spanish (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Barron High School entrance.

It is important to note the historical connotations that are indexed with the schools' multilingual signage. Current signs point historically to the large population of Latinx immigrants, who worked at the poultry processing plant before the arrival of Somali refugees. The signs were previously (within the 2016–17 school year) standardized for the district and replace previous signs that were computer-printed and only in Somali. The movement to more permanent-looking and professionally-designed signage is a change in the nature of Somali signage. Bilingual signs also exist at the local clinic on the outside (Figure 9 below). Although printed on paper and not necessarily permanent, they are visible at the door to alert for possible infectious diseases.

Conclusion

Figure 9. Clinic in Barron.

In comparing the urban and rural landscapes, differences and similarities emerge in the sibling Somali refugee communities. In Minneapolis, the geosemiotics rely on imagery and symbolic linguistic identifiers to index the community. Businesses aimed at maintaining the historical connection to their homeland—through international calling plans and international money transfer services—show that although the Somali refugees are physically located far from the Horn of Africa in the Upper Midwest of the United States, they are still intimately connected to their historical homeland. In Barron, the LL is more multilingual in nature. Although culturally-specific terms, like food items, are found on the only Somali-owned grocery store in the town, the other bilingual signs are found on non-Somali institutions. This "top-down" relationship in using Somali on signage shows the different relationship that local institutions have with regard to the local community. As part of my long-term ethnographic work in both areas, the community in Barron seeks out culturally intentional programs and efforts to incorporate the Somali community and undo cultural misunderstandings. School-based efforts on Somali integration, like a larger ESL program and a soccer team, provided a foundation for cooperative efforts between the long-time Barron residents and the newly-arrived Somali refugees. This is not to say that the community in Minneapolis lacks community outreach programs. The outreach programs there are typically based within the refugee community and done on a much larger scale through the local community center. In some ways, the Somali presence in Cedar-Riverside, although still contested, as shown in xenophobic attacks on the community over the years, is more "invisible" than religiously, racially, and linguistically very different individuals in small-town Barron, Wisconsin.

This study has shown that two similar populations—in this case of urban and non-urban Somali refugees—are indexed within their communities in the Upper Midwest in a variety of linguistic and symbolic ways depending on the social, cultural, and historical contexts of their spaces. In other studies on non-urban LLs, visual semiotics are often not foregrounded in the landscape as much as other semiotic resources like architecture or geographical and natural landmarks, e.g.,

trees, posts (Banda & Jimaima 2015). However, this study has shown that in non-urban communities, for a group that is not indexed historically within the space under analysis, visual semiotics do play a strong role. The LL for refugees, who have in a sense created a multilingual space within a non-urban area, is markedly different in the two locales, sociolinguistically speaking.

Further work on "invisible" or closed public spaces within visible public spaces will be able to show how sociolinguistic identities are negotiated in spaces occupied by the community. Community centers, which are prominent in both Cedar-Riverside and Barron, although not readily visible to the passer-by, still contribute to the LL for members of the community who make use of the services within the walls of those venues. Additionally, governmental offices, social service offices, and medical clinics would be important for this analysis as well. Including walking narratives to the ethnographic work in both Barron and Cedar-Riverside may also reveal differences between the related communities which may contribute to our understanding of the role of the sociolinguistic context of the multilingual community. The temporary nature of signs versus their permanence may indicate narratives of permanence and citizenship that are negotiated among the refugees and between the refugees and majority society. Those issues are important for understanding refugee identities and how those identities manifest in multilingual contexts. Likewise, the changing nature of the sociopolitical relationship within Somalia and between Somalia and the United States will have an impact on how these refugee spaces are visibly constructed in years to come.

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