

## *English as a Global Language in the Linguistic Landscape of Rome's Papal Basilicas*

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### **Keywords**

English, Italian, alignments, language combinations, global and local

### **Abstract**

The linguistic landscapes of places of worship have not been the focus of extensive research when compared to street signage. This paper examines, both qualitatively and quantitatively, 323 stationary signs photographed inside and within the confines of Rome's four major basilicas. The scope of this investigation is specifically to explore the latent message that the choice of language, and the different positions in the design of the signs, relay. The linguistic analysis reveals how the use of English is adopted by the sign writers to reflect the universality of the Catholic Church in the basilicas, despite the fact that they are all located in Rome, the capital of Italy. In parallel to this, the use of Italian is extensive, a need arising from the fact that most patrons are Italian. A plethora of other languages ranging from Chinese to other minor languages, reflects the fact that Catholicism is dispersed all over the globe. In all this, the practicality of using English so widely, clearly points to this language's function as a global language in the contemporary world, here instrumentally used to ensure that the message reaches the audiences whose languages do not appear on the signs.

### **Introduction**

There is a growing interest in the linguistic landscapes of places of worship, conducted in countries such as, the Philippines (Esteron, 2021), Nigeria (Inya, 2019), Malaysia (Coluzzi & Kitade, 2015), Indonesia (Wafa &

Wijayanti, 2015) and Saudi Arabia (Alsaif & Starks, 2015). Surprisingly so, there are hardly any studies (Sciriha, 2021) on the religious places of worship in Rome, a city dotted with famous churches, though Rome's street and shop signage has been the object of detailed studies by Griffin (2004), Bagna & Barni (2005), Gorter (2007), Barni & Bagna (2010), Barni & Vedovelli (2012), among others. This paper seeks to fill this gap in linguistic landscape research. Since this study is limited to the four papal basilicas, narrow comparisons with broader linguistic studies covering non-religious settings are therefore not apposite, because the validity element for direct comparison is missing.

In this study, the signs collected in these four basilicas were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The analysis compares the linguistic landscapes of these basilicas and specifically 'all visual forms of language present' (Lou, 2016, p. 2) in a 'given territory' (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). It employs quantitative methodology by giving the frequency, the range of languages and the order of preference in the signage. Also considered is whether the signs are used to provide information, directions or warnings (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003; Cook, 2022). Furthermore, a qualitative interpretation on bilingual and multilingual signs in both horizontal and vertical alignments is given. Also discussed is whether the material used for these signs purposely gives more stature and prestige to some languages.

Using elements present in the signage of the four papal basilicas, i.e. which languages are used and their relative positions, this paper seeks to explore the latent messages that are being relayed to visitors. Thus, the specific research questions are:

- (a) What is the latent message underlying the signage used in the four papal basilicas?
- (b) How is this message grounded in the fact that the basilicas, although belonging to a universal church, are all located in Italy?
- (c) How does the latent message reflect the universality of the Catholic Church?

## The Papal Basilicas

Visitors to Rome recognise St Peter's Basilica, 'the headquarters for Catholicism' (O'Neill, 2018, p. 55). It is the only one of the four major papal basilicas situated inside Vatican City, the smallest state in the world. The other three – St John Lateran, St Mary Major and St Paul Outside the Walls – are located on Italian territory. Besides being places of worship for Roman Catholics, the four basilicas are important repositories of paintings, sculptures and architectural masterpieces. All are visited by millions of tourists. Although

St Peter's, built on the tomb of the first pope, is the foremost basilica, these four basilicas are grouped together because they are the only ones that include both a papal altar that can only be used for eucharistic and liturgical functions by the Pope or his delegate, and a Holy Door which is opened only during Jubilee years.

### *Uniqueness of the Papal Basilicas*

*St Peter's*, the largest basilica in the world was built on the first church (348 AD), then commissioned by Constantine, the first Christian emperor. The first stone of the *new* basilica was laid in 1506. St Peter's floor plan is like the other three papal basilicas, in the form of a cross, having a central and side naves, a transept and an apse (Figure 1).

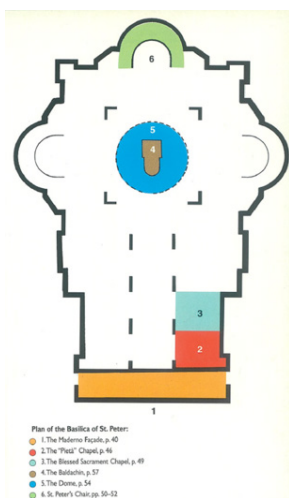


Figure 1: **Plan of St Peter's** (Braghin, 1998, p. 35)

Inside the portico are five doors leading to the interior of the basilica, of which the Holy Door, is open only in Jubilee years. The focal point of the basilica is the papal altar with Bernini's ornate bronze canopy. Rising high above it, Michelangelo's majestic cupola, the highest in the world, dominates the basilica and the city's skyline. The *Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament* is on the right aisle, while on the right transept of the basilica is a large *Penitential area* with wooden confessionals. Only St Peter's includes this specially designated *Penitential area*. In the other three papal basilicas wooden confessionals are spread in different locations.

*St John Lateran*, first built in 314 AD and dedicated to Our Saviour and to St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, was erected as a votive offering by Emperor Constantine. As this was the first Christian church to be

built, it is considered the mother of all churches. It is the seat of the Pope as Bishop of Rome (Korn, 2000; Lewis, 2015). St John's has five entrances, one of which is the Holy door, leading to a central nave with two naves on each of its sides (Figure 2)

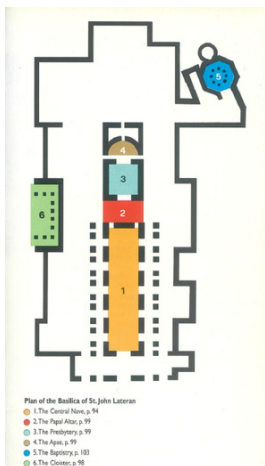


Figure 2: **Plan of St John's** (Braghin, 1998, p. 61)

The focal point of the basilica is the papal altar which is covered by a magnificent gothic canopy. Beneath this altar, in the area known as the *confessio*, there are the remains of Pope Martin V (1417 -1431) and there is also a statue of St John the Baptist.

*St Mary Major*, the largest Marian shrine in Rome, was built in the early fourth century and later embellished by Pope Sixtus III. It has five doors, one of which is the Holy door, two side naves, a transept and an apse (Figure 3).

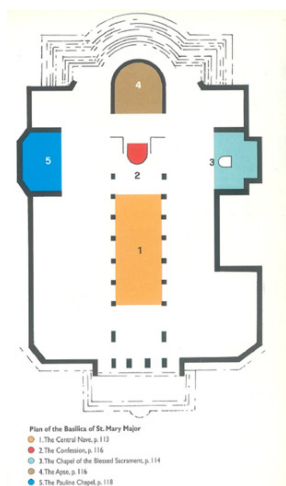


Figure 3: **Plan of St Mary Major** (Braghin, 1998, p. 109)

On entering, one is immediately struck by the magnificence of the ceiling ‘decorated with the first sheets of gold that reached Spain from America’ (Bovini, 1996, p. 7). At the far end of the central nave is the papal altar. Underneath this altar is the *confessio* which houses a silver reliquary containing alleged fragments of the manger of Jesus Christ by Giuseppe Valadier (Casali, 2016). Of particular religious and artistic importance are its two chapels: *the Pauline Chapel* on the left side houses the much-venerated painting by the Roman people, the *Salus Populi Romani*; on the right transept is the *Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament*.

*St Paul Outside the Walls*, the second largest basilica in Rome is situated two kilometres away from the Aurelian walls on Via Ostiense. The basilica is characterised by its large rectangular portico; entrance is through one of its three doors with the Holy Door on the right side of the portico. The basilica has five naves, a transept and an apse. The majestic central nave has a colonnade of Corinthian columns, and a gilded coffered ceiling. A series of papal portraits that are found above the naves and the transept. St Paul was martyred here in AD 67 and his remains are found underneath the basilica’s papal altar. Figure 4 presents the floor plan.

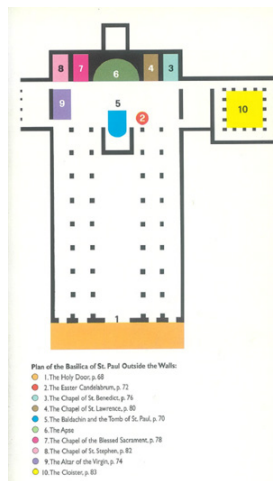


Figure 4: **Plan of St Paul Outside the Walls** (Braghin, 1998, p. 87)

At the end of the central nave lies the papal altar and rising above it is Arnolfo di Cambio’s Gothic red porphyry columned canopy (Vicchi, 1999). On opposite sides of the transept are two altars both made of lapis lazuli: the right is dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, the other commemorates the Conversion of St Paul’s.

## Methodology

To answer the three research questions listed above, data was gathered both inside and within the confines of the four basilicas. Most of the photos were taken inside the basilicas, but signs outside the basilicas were also included in the corpus. Only photos of recently placed signs which serve as directions, warnings, requests or give information to those visiting the basilicas were taken. No photos of words in the basilicas' friezes, tribunes, transepts, or the inscriptions on monuments and sarcophagi are included.

St Peter's is the most guarded with several Vatican employees posted in most of its areas. This fact was methodologically challenging: visitors are only allowed to photograph the many artefacts in designated areas. Two locations are well protected: (i) the *Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament* and (ii) the *Penitential area*. Although access to these two areas was gained, no photos inside the *Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament* could be taken. However, a photo of a multilingual sign outside the main door of this chapel is included in the corpus.

The layout of the *Penitential Area* in St Peter's is unique. Whereas in the other three basilicas wooden confessionals are found in different places and photos can be taken anywhere without having to go to confession, in St Peter's this is restricted. In all four basilicas the confessionals carry a framed notice attached to one of their sides showing the priest's name and his availability to hear confessions in an array of languages. Also, all basilicas have pews for pilgrims to sit or kneel on in prayer. In some pews, inserted in a groove on the flat surface where one rests one's arms as one kneels, there are prayers in different languages. Though allowed, it was technically quite difficult to photograph those long pews with the prayers in different languages. Photo 1 is an example from St Paul's. It reproduces a panoramic photo with nine languages taken from the pew in the *confessio*, in front of St Paul's tomb. A clear photo of each language in this pew was only possible when a photo of the same prayer in each language was taken.

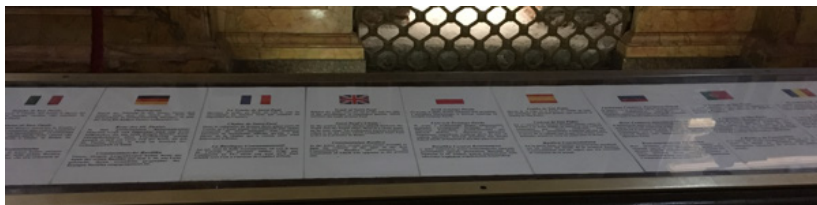


Photo 1: Prayers in the pew in St Paul's with Italian in 1<sup>st</sup> and Romanian in 9<sup>th</sup> position

## Selection and codification of signs

This study uses Gorter's 'unit of analysis' (Gorter, 2006, p. 3). Thus 'any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame' was included (Backhaus, 2007, p. 66). Each photo was given a unique identifier. Six factors were used to codify the corpus: *by basilica* (St Peter's, St Mary's, St John's, St Paul's), *by language* (Italian, English, French etc.), *by linguistic category* (monolingual, bilingual and multilingual), *by location* (confessionals, altars, parvis etc.), *by type of sign* (warning, direction, information etc.) and *by the material used in the sign* (poster, digital screen etc.). A coding frame was created to show 'the visual hierarchies of languages' (Backhaus 2007, p. 103) and the positions of the languages as they appear on each sign (Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2003).

The classification of how multilingual signs, which included both vertical and horizontal alignments (Photo 2), were to be ranked for this study is based on a decision taken by a specific focus group organised for this purpose. This focus group was guided by research on the 'eye-tracker technique' (Cook, 2022, p. 63), in the way signs are read. The ranking used follows a left to right direction and a horizontal reading was preferred to a vertical one. Thus, in the case of Photo 2, the resultant ranking is as follows: first line ranking is Italian followed by French (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> positions); the second line German followed by Spanish (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>) and the third line English followed by Portuguese (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>).



Photo 2: Multilingual sign – St John's

## Findings

### (a) Corpus Profile and Preferred Languages

The corpus profile by basilica (Table 1) totals 323 signs. St Paul's (N=100; 31%) has the highest number of signs, though one would have expected the highest number to be in St Peter's (N=85; 26.3%). Seventy-six signs (23.5%) were captured in St John's and 62 (19.2%) in St Mary's. The highest percentages of signs are bilingual (N=134; 41.5%), and the lowest multilingual (N=69; 21.4%). One hundred and twenty signs (37.2%) are monolingual. Though bilingual signs are present in all four basilicas, the highest number is in

St Paul's (N=57: 17.6%), the least in St John's (N=17: 5.3%). Contrastingly, the highest number of monolingual signs is in St John's (N=37: 11.5%), followed by St Paul's (N=31: 9.6%), St Peter's (N=27: 8.4%) and St Mary's (N=25: 7.7%).

Interesting is the presence of multilingual signs with 'duplicating multilingual writing' (Reh, 2004, p. 8) in all four basilicas. St Paul's registers the lowest number of multilingual signs (N=12: 12%). Higher numbers are registered in St John's (N=22: 28.9%), St Peter's (N=18: 21.2%) and St Mary's (N=17: 27.4%).

**Table 1: Corpus Profile by Linguistic Category and by Basilica**

		Monolingual	Bilingual	Multilingual	Total
St Peter's	N=	27	40	18	85
	%	31.8	47.1	21.2	100.0
St John's	N=	37	17	22	76
	%	48.7	22.4	28.9	100.0
St Mary's	N=	25	20	17	62
	%	40.3	32.3	27.4	100.0
St Paul's	N=	31	57	12	100
	%	31.0	57.0	12.0	100.0
Total	N=	120	134	69	323
	%	37.2	41.5	21.4	100.0

Note: The base for each row percentage is the total; all percentages have been rounded

A comparative analysis of the number of languages (Table 2) shows that multilingual signs with a minimum of three languages are least frequent in St Paul's (N=3), when compared to St John's, St Mary's and St Peter's (9, 6 and 5 signs respectively). The placement of 5 languages in 1 sign occurs in all basilicas, but are fewer in St Peter's and St John's (each with 4 signs), while St Mary's and St Paul's each have 5 signs. The inclusion of 6 or more languages in signs is rarer. St Peter's alone has 1 sign with 7 languages, while St Mary's and St Paul's each include eight languages in 3 signs and 1 sign respectively. Interestingly, St Paul's includes nine languages in two of its multilingual signs (see Photo 1).

**Table 2: Number of Languages in the signs by Basilica**

	St Peter's	St John's	St Mary's	St Paul's
Number of Languages	N=	N=	N=	N=
One	27	37	24	31
Two	40	17	20	57



Three	5	9	6	3
Four	4	6	3	1
Five	4	4	5	5
Six	4	3	1	0
Seven	1	0	0	0
Eight	0	0	3	1
Nine	0	0	0	2
Total	85	76	62	100

Base=All

This study also examines the preferred language, in line with Scollon & Wong Scollon (2003), for whom ‘the preferred code is located above the secondary or peripheral codes if they are aligned vertically. If they are aligned horizontally, the preferred code is located in the left position and the peripheral code is located in the right position. A third possibility is that the preferred code is in the centre and the peripheral code is placed around the periphery’ (p. 120). Photo 3 (St John’s) shows a horizontally aligned sign with 6 languages. Latin is the first language, followed by Italian, English, French, German and Spanish in second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth positions respectively. But this sign is quite an exception as, in reality, Italian is the preferred language in most of the signs in all three categories: it features in 80 out of 120 monolingual signs. Not included in Table 3 are another 8 languages which, though appearing in first position, are only present in either two signs (Portuguese) or in just one sign each – Latin, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Romanian, Slovakian, Croatian, Russian and Maltese.

Italian is accorded first position (Table 3) in many signs (N=249; 77%). Its dominance in the basilicas’ linguistic landscape is to be expected, not only because Vatican Council II enforced the use of vernacular languages for church services, but official state regulations now in place regard the mandatory use of Italian in street signage (Barni & Vedovelli, 2012). In fact, Italian is seldom in second position (N=24) and rarely in third position (only 2 signs). The basilicas’ sign-writers respect the status of Italian as Italy’s official language. Conversely, Latin is not given the preferred position in St Peter’s despite it being the Church’s official language, and one finds only 5 signs in the other three basilicas. On the other hand, the preferred position of Polish (N=9), mostly in St Peter’s (N=5), is noteworthy.

The prestige of English as a global language towers over all the other non-Italian languages and occupies first position in 24 signs, second position in 150 signs and third in just 15 signs. Only Italian commands comparative visibility. French, the erstwhile international language, occupies all three po-

sitions in some signs, but the numbers are low: it ranks in first, second and third position in 10, 13 and 11 signs respectively. Spanish (N=12) and German (N=5) also appear in first position.

Italian in second position in either bilingual or multilingual signs is infrequent (N=24), unlike English which is present in a total of 150 signs. This differs extensively in respect of the other main European languages: French (N=13), German (N=7) and Spanish (N=6). Other languages, not listed in Table 3 (Hungarian, Romanian, Czech and Hindi), appear in this position only once. Thirteen languages are present in third position: only 2 signs are in Italian, in St Peter's and St John's. English is in third position in only 15 signs. German and Spanish each occupy third position in 15 signs, while French is present in 11 signs.

**Table 3: Main Languages in First, Second and Third Positions by Basilica**

		St Peter	St John	St Mary	St Paul	Total
		N=	N=	N=	N=	
First Position	Italian	61	54	44	90	249
	English	3	6	6	9	24
	French	6	3	1	0	10
	Spanish	3	3	6	0	12
	Polish	5	2	2	0	9
	Latin	0	3	1	1	5
	German	3	1	1	0	5
Second Position	English	47	25	17	61	150
	Italian	4	6	12	2	24
	French	2	6	3	2	13
	German	1	1	1	4	7
	Spanish	2	0	4	0	6
Third Position	English	3	4	4	4	15
	French	2	2	3	4	11
	German	8	2	5	0	15
	Spanish	1	10	1	3	15
	Portuguese	1	0	1	1	3
	Italian	1	1	0	0	2

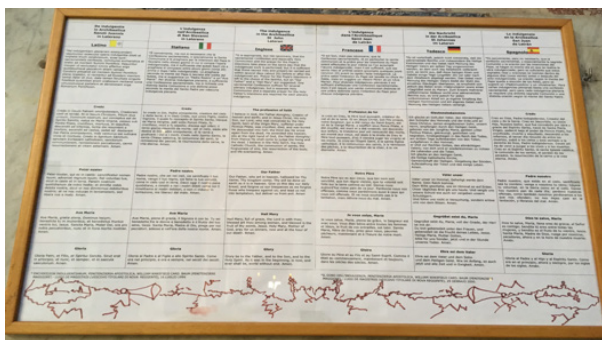


Photo 3: Sign in 6 languages – St John's

***(b) Language alignments and combinations in bilingual and multilingual signs***

Horizontal and vertical language alignments of bilingual and multilingual signs have also been analysed. Table 4 summarises these alignments in the signs of the four basilicas. For this reason, monolingual signs have been excluded from this analysis (N/A=120).

Vertical alignments (N=129) are more common than horizontal (N=22) ones. A sizable number of signs (N=52) includes both vertical and horizontal alignments. These combined alignments are found in all four basilicas, possibly to save space and to make the sign smaller. Both St Peter's (N=26) and more so St John's (N=56), employ both kinds of alignments in their signs, unlike St Paul's (N=3) and St Mary's (N=2). Photo 2 (St John's) exemplifies a sign with both horizontal and vertical alignments in 6 languages.

Table 4: Language alignments in bilingual and multilingual signs

	St Peter's	St John's	St Mary's	St Paul's	Total
	N=	N=	N=	N=	N=
N/A (monolingual)	27	37	25	31	120
Vertical (top to bottom)	26	17	30	56	129
Horizontal left to right	6	30	5	10	22
Both horizontal (Left to Right and vertical (Top to Bottom)	26	56	2	3	52
Total	85	76	62	100	323

Following Gorter (2007), the language combinations of bilingual and multilingual signs are also considered. There are 57 and 40 bilingual signs in St Paul's and St Peter's respectively, with the majority being vertically aligned (Table 5).

Multilingual signs have different combinations, with the most popular having Italian as the preferred language, immediately followed by English and other European languages (I+E+ European: N=51). This combination is mostly found in St John's (N=18) and St Mary's (N=15).

Other combinations include Italian and English, followed by European languages and also non-European languages (I+E+European+non-European). The only 3 signs captured with this combination are in St Peter's. These include Italian, English and non-European languages (I+E+non-European: N=4). Another combination is Italian together with European languages (I+ European: N=9). Most of the signs in this latter combination are found in St Peter's (N=5). Photo 4 exemplifies a sign with Italian, English, European and non-European language combination in St Peter's.

**Table 5: Language Combinations in Bilingual and Multilingual signs by basilica**

	St Peter's N=	St John's N=	St Mary's N=	St Paul's N=	Total N=
Monolingual	27	38	23	32	120
BL (Bilingual): I+E	36	12	11	54	113
BL: E+I	0	1	4	2	7
Other Bilingual	4	4	7	1	16
ML(Multilingual): I+E+European languages	9	18	15	9	51
ML:I+E+European+Non- European languages	3	0	0	0	3
ML:I+E+Non-European languages	1	2	1	0	4
ML: I+ European languages	5	1	1	2	9
Total	85	76	62	100	323



Photo 4: Multilingual – St Peter's

### (c) Type of Signs

When analysed by type, 11 types of signs were discovered. Different types of signs provide *information* (N=135) on some historical or artistic aspect and are posted in various locations (Table 6). These are mostly found in St

Paul's (N=49) and St Peter's (41). *Notices* are another type of sign used in these basilicas (N=35).

Table 6: Types of Signs by Basilica

	St Peter's	St John's	St Mary's	St Paul's	Total
	N=	N=	N=	N=	N=
Prayers	8	6	11	1	26
Advertisement	3	1	2	9	15
Information	41	21	24	49	135
Warnings	7	8	3	10	28
Directions	6	5	6	14	31
Appeal	1	0	0	0	1
Notices	7	14	6	8	35
Mass Intention	0	0	4	1	5
Donation/Request	3	10	3	6	22
Name	7	3	0	0	10
Mass Opening Hours	2	8	3	2	15
Total	85	76	62	100	323

Signs requesting *donations* are not common in St Peter's and St Mary's (each N=3), when compared to those at St John's and St Paul's (N=10 and N=6 respectively). There are some types of signs which are not present in all basilicas: *Mass intentions* are only present in St Mary's and St Paul's. On the other hand, all four basilicas include signs with *prayers*. All the basilicas post signs giving the *opening times* of the church and the times of eucharistic celebrations. As regards *directional* signs, St Paul's has the highest number (N=14); St John's has the lowest (N=5). Photos 5 and 6 show two types of signs, namely prayer and donation requests.



Photo 5: Prayer – St John's Photo 6: Donation request – St Peter's

#### (d) Locations of signs

Table 7 groups the location of the signs under 10 headings: the most popular location is the *main entrance*. St John's registers the highest number (N=42); the lowest number is in St Peter's (N=12). Though St Mary's is the

smallest of the four basilicas, it has 26 such signs. The *confessionals* carry signs bearing the name of the priest confessor and his linguistic repertoire: St Mary's (N=25) and St Peter's (N=20).

St Peter's has the largest number of signs (N=26) next to the side altars, followed by St Paul's (N=14).

The parvis and piazza of St Peter's and the outdoor area of St Paul's are full of signs. Other locations where signs are found within the confines of the basilicas include bookshop/*souvenir outlets*, the *post office*, *inside the church* and the *exit*. Photo 7 is an example of a vertically aligned warning sign in Italian, English and French which is found before entering the *Pauline Chapel* in St Mary's.

Table 7: Locations of signs in the four basilicas

	St Peter's	St. John's	St Mary's	St Paul's	Total
	N=	N=	N=	N=	N=
Confessional	20	14	25	9	68
Side Altars	26	3	6	14	49
Main Entrance	12	42	26	19	99
Piazza / Parvis / Portico	21	9	2	34	66
Sacristy	2	1	1	5	9
Bookshop / Souvenir Outlets	2	2	0	7	11
Post Office	2	0	0	2	4
Inside Church	0	3	0	4	7
Exit	0	2	0	0	2
<i>Confessio</i>	0	1	2	5	8
Total	85	76	62	100	323



Photo 7: Outside Pauline Chapel – St Mary's

### (e) Materials used in the signs

In their study on Jerusalem, Spolsky and Cooper (1991) discuss the materials used in the signs of their corpus. Scollon and Wong Scollon (2003, p. 129) note that the material used for signage is an important consideration since it shows 'permanence or durability, temporality or newness, quality and whether there are add-ons or extensions.' Table 8 shows that most signs are

printed inside frames (N=141). St Peter's (N=49) has the highest number of these laminated poster signs (N=73) are the second most popular and are mostly found in St Paul's (N= 47).

Digital screens, serving as noticeboards in several languages, are more common in St Peter's (N=12). Their presence shows 'permanence or durability' (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003, p. 129).

There are also signs which are covered or protected by *perspex* or glass. Photos 8 and 9 exemplify some of these signs in St Peter's and St Paul's.

**Table 8: Material used**

	St Peter's N=	St. John's N=	St Mary's N=	St Paul's N=	Total N=
Printed inside Frame	49	28	34	30	141
Typed on Laminated Paper	0	14	0	6	20
Handwritten	1	0	0	0	1
Inscribed in Stone	1	0	0	0	1
Metal	6	6	3	4	19
Digital Screen	12	5	5	1	23
Laminated Poster	8	10	8	47	73
Typed Poster	0	7	0	0	7
Protected by Perspex/Glass	8	1	2	1	12
Typed on Paper	0	5	10	10	25
Envelope	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>323</b>

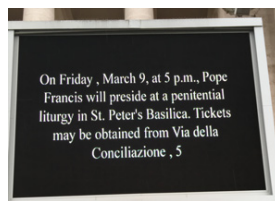


Photo 8: Digital screen –St Peter's Photo 9: Laminated poster – St Paul's

The position of Latin, the Church's official language, is incongruous in the signage analysed. It is not present in any sign in St Peter's and, as already pointed out above, it is only present in 5 signs (3 in St John's and 1 each in St Paul's and in St Mary's) of the corpus. Latin is no longer spoken, and it is restricted to formal inscriptions, which were methodologically excluded in the present corpus. The pastoral reach of the church is reflected in the use

of other languages, particularly French, German and Spanish, as well other non-European languages, only present in St Peter's. Photo 10, a multilingual sign in four languages, is a clear example of this pastoral outreach. Each language includes the country's flag, the font sizes are identical, and the translation is faithful to Italian, the relay language. Of the four basilicas, St Peter's attracts the most linguistically diverse visitors, and this is reflected in the different combination of languages used. St Paul's has 3 signs in 9 languages which are all European. In contrast, St Peter's has signs in Chinese and other Asian languages.



Photo 10: Multilingual vertical sign – St Paul's

Signs in at least 7 languages, and at times even 8 and 9 languages serve not only as an affective aspect but reflect the Church's universal appeal and presence in different cultures.

The corpus revealed one interesting incidence that does not follow the norm: in 1 sign in St Peter's, a handwritten piece of paper, stuck with adhesive tape onto one of the framed signs on a confessional (Photo 11), informs the public that no confessions in Portuguese will be held because the priest involved would be attending a course. The simplicity of this sign which Scollon & Wong Scollon (2003) call 'add-ons or extensions' (p. 129), is shown by the fact that it is handwritten in capital letters and by the material used: a piece of paper which will be removed once the priest returns.



Photo 11: Temporary notice added on a frame in penitential area: St Peter's



## Discussion

This comparative study of the linguistic landscapes of the papal basilicas reveals both similarities and differences. One needs to address the fact that even though they are grouped together, signs do not have the same appeal. In fact, the massive number of visitors in St Peter's automatically creates a security concern. Numerical data on visitors to each basilica are unfortunately not available. As such, a precise correlation analysis between the number of visitors and the number of signs is not possible. Of the four basilicas, St Peter's is well-guarded by a good number of employees placed in key areas. Despite this, some areas in this site are cordoned off and photography is not possible. Less rigid security measures are taken in respect of the other three basilicas.

The foregoing presentation of the data reveals the latent agenda of the signage. Although the numbers and arrays are indicative, a quantitative analysis needs to be supported by a qualitative appraisal. During informal interviews with officials working in the four basilicas, it became clear that the corpus of 323 signs reflects not only the varying statuses of the languages used, but also the choice of communication channels between a particular basilica and its patrons. The position of Italian as the first and the foremost language in Italy has the same function that Indonesian has in the signage of the places of worship in Surabaya (Wafa & Wijayanti, 2018). The use of Italian results from the fact that the four basilicas are located in Italy, and they uniquely contribute to its national identity. Italy and Catholicism are fused in popular Italian culture.

The massive presence of English in the four basilicas is in line with its function as a means for communication in a globalised world and confirms the dominance of English in Nigeria's linguistic landscape as documented by Inya (2019). This is because the basilicas serve an international audience, and the fact that there are millions of learners of English worldwide (Beare, 2019). In consequence, other languages like French, German and Spanish, have relatively low visibility.

The presence of European and non-European languages reflects an important affective element because of the relationships that the basilicas have with far away communities, which add colour to the universality of the Catholic Church. According to Reh (2004), the fact that the texts are duplicated in many languages 'serves identity purposes and signals the equality of all the linguistic and cultural communities' (p. 9). Even so, these languages have mostly been relegated to the less preferred positions, except for Polish which features as a first language in 5 signs in St Peter's, clearly a heritage of the massive imprint of John Paul II's pontificate.

## Conclusion

The foregoing discussion clearly shows that the choice of language in the signage used in the papal basilicas is not purely instrumental to assist patrons, believers and unbelievers alike, find their way while visiting. Language use, position and materials have a wider significance that addresses the multifarious functions of the papal basilicas in the world.

The extensive use of Italian manifestly shows the importance of locality; the use of other languages is a clear pointer to outreach. In particular, the extensive use of English confirms that the basilicas' sign writers are acutely aware of this language as the vehicle for international communication. Its wide dissemination makes it the contemporary world's *lingua franca*. Its use does not identify a speaker with any particular country because English now belongs to everyone. This is not true only of the Roman basilicas: Barni & Vedovelli (2012) note this fact when writing about signage in Rome.

Nevertheless, the signs in the various languages and in different formats and material used in the papal basilicas belie a deeper understanding of the 'clients' who benefit from them. The papal basilicas are concomitantly places of worship, tourist locations of international appeal and repositories of two millennia of history, culture and artefacts. The linguistic landscape reflects all three of these functions, addressed in parallel to different segments of its clientele: (i) to the worshippers they provide instructions and prayers to be said in different areas of the basilicas; (ii) to the tourists, they provide guidelines, protocols and at times even warnings as to what is acceptable and what is not inside these temples of worship; and (iii) to the cultural aficionados they provide information on the artefacts housed in these basilicas.

These three very distinct functions are symbiotically united in the varied instruments used. In view of the basilicas' iconic significance, the medium could not be monolingual. The signs are rooted in Italy, the geographical setting, through the massive use of Italian where the basilicas stand. However, the use of a wide portfolio of languages clearly aims to incorporate as many other cultures as possible. In no uncertain terms, the professed catholicity of the Church is thus clearly symbolised in the pervasive use of non-Italian elements.

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