Translation of Shop Signboards: A Hermeneutic Perspective

PRIYADA SHRIDHAR PADHYE

Abstract

The pragmatic dimension in Translation Studies broadened the area of study to include "Schildertexte" (Stolze, 1994) which were also called performative texts (Snell-Hornby, 1984) as an important text type. Though shop signboards as a text type were not explicitly mentioned, one could safely consider such texts under the rubric "Schildertexte". In Sherry Simon's 2019 book "Translation Sites. A Field Guide" names of hotels, bridges, markets, etc. became an area of study in translation. These are sites where translation pervades the ordinary and mundane and becomes sites of memory, migration, and translation. This article focuses on shop signboards as an area of translation study from the hermeneutic perspective. Shop signboards are usually viewed as just deictic gestures, the translation of which can be done, thanks to the realisation of Warren Weaver's dream of FAHQT by apps like WayGo, Naver Papago Translate, and Microsoft Translator amongst many others. The minute signboards are viewed not only as deictic gestures but as hermeneutic texts, they become contested sites, sites that subvert and comply with hegemonic language policies, sites of creativity that reflect history and human migration, sites that reveal and conceal identity, in short, sites where translation is at play. This article looks at shop signboards caught in the middle of language wars, human migration, and memory from a translation perspective.

Keywords: Specialised Translation, Linguistic Landscapes, Text-types, Hermeneutics.

The field of specialised communication has been continuously growing with more and more special purpose texts being added to the existing repertoire. Ranging from highly standardized texts like

patents, user manuals, contracts, medical leaflets, and supply and delivery conditions to less standardized texts like tourist texts, advertisements, and information leaflets. It is an ever-growing list. That shop signboards too can be added to this existing list should not come as a surprise. Though shop signboards in particular have received less attention in the academic discourse, signboards in general i.e. "Schildertexte" also known as "performative texts" have already been discussed in the field of Translation Studies (Stolze, 1994/2018).

Shop signboards and their translation have recently caught the imagination of translation research. Sherry Simon's 2019 book "*Translation Sites. A Field Guide*" investigates names of not only shop signboards but also signboards of hotels, bridges, markets, etc. as sites where translation pervades the ordinary and mundane and becomes sites of memory, migration, and translation. Signboards are hermeneutic texts for Sherry Simon. Research in machine translation from the mid-twentieth century aiming to make machine translation useful in day-to-day life (Weaver, 1955) has fructified specifically in the form of apps like WayGo, Naver Papago Translate, and Microsoft Translator amongst others, for translating signboards. Smartphone-based applications (Khan, Kaushal, Agarwal, Kumar, 2020) have also been researched for the same purpose. Developments in machine translation treat shop signboards as informative texts, texts fulfilling a deictic function. When the same shop signboards reflect language policy (cf. Sunwani, 2005)[1], they can be studied as expressive texts in the context of translation sociology. Some scholars have researched shop signboards within the theoretical framework of linguistic landscape studies (LL), a field of research in socio-linguistics (cf. Al-Athwary, 2022). This is a relatively young discipline which defines LL as:

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[1] This article investigates the three language signboards in the capital city of Bhubaneswar which were a result of the 2003 Central government directive making it mandatory for all government offices to display the signboards in three languages: Hindi, Oriya and English. The directive makes it compulsory that the size of the letters for all languages should be the same, thus creating grounds for equality between the three languages.

"The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration" (Landry and Bourhis, 1997: 25).

Shop signboards are divided into two types: Bottom-up signboards, which are non-official or private, and top-down signboards which are official or public (Rafael, 2009), a terminology that has been used in this article as well. If one takes into consideration the large number of newspaper articles on shop signboards across the world[2], one will have to admit that shop signboards have become a hotly debated topic even in the media. There are increasingly more and more reports on signage rules and rows, mistranslations on the signboards, making shop signboards, sites of confrontation, compliance, human identity, and migration.

This article first attempts to situate shop signboards in the academic discipline of specialised translation and then explore the various text types (Katharina Reiss, 1976/1983) under which texts on shop signboards can be studied.

Shop Signboards as Special Purpose Texts -Theoretical Perspectives

The field of language for special purposes is divided, to put it simplistically, in two ways: One is vertically according to the degree of technicality of the specialized discourse in the special purpose text, and two horizontally, according to the domain specificity. One is aware of the various models of vertical and horizontal

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[2] Click on the following links to read more about newspaper articles published on the issue**: "**Kannada signboards lost in translation". In: https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/kannada-signboards-lost-in-translation/article67832454.ece 30/3/2024

"Explained: Why shop signboards in Mumbai will now compulsorily be in Marathi". In: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/mumbai-shops-marathi-signboards-7857719/ 30/3/2024

"Misuse of Arabic language on signboards sparks new row". In: https://www.khaleejtimes.com/article/misuse-of-arabic-language-on-signboards-sparks-new-row30/3/2024

classification of special purpose languages in academic discourse. Roelcke's model of 2010, to cite an example, takes a nuanced look at the discipline and divides the specialized discourse texts horizontally into two main categories: One is the "Theoriesprache" (theoretical language)* and the other is the "Praxissprache" (language discourse in a practical setting)*. The former is further divided into "Wissenschaftssprache" (language of Science)* and "Techniksprache" (technical language)*. The category "language discourse in a practical setting" is further divided into "Institu tionensprache" (institutional language)*, "Wirtschaftssprache" (language of commerce), and "Konsumtionssprache" (language of consumption)*. Kalverkämper concretises the term "Wirtschaftssprache" and calls it "Sprache und Kommunikation in den ökonomischen Tätig keitsfeldern des Handels und Verkehrs" (language and communication in the economic field of trade, commerce and transport)*. He elaborates "Konsumtionssprache" as "Sprache und Kommunikation zwischen Anbietern und den Verbrauchern eines Produkts sowie unter den Verbrauchern selbst" (language and communication between suppliers of products and their consumers as well as between consumers)* (Kraft/Roelcke, 2019: pp 4-9). It is this particular category in Roelcke's table, further elaborated by Kalverkämper, that allows this article to investigate shop signboards on the interface of specialised translation and hermeneutic discourse, where on the one hand, these texts have a specific purpose and follow a particular format, but on the other hand, reveal the human agency involved in standardising, subverting, concealing, revealing, complying, resisting and most often navigating and negotiating linguistic policies, foreign cultures and linguistic identities while doing business.

Hausmann's classification of specialized discourse (1985) also proves to be useful in this context because he too brings in the human aspect to this categorization by adding in his model a column for "Kommunikationsträger" (communication partners)*, which is crucial for the deliberations in this article. Hoffmann's model too corroborates the above by classifying specialized discourse in five

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* Author's translation

stages from A to E, in which under "A" comes the most abstract specialized discourse, the kind that only takes place between experts, and "E", refers to communication which has the lowest level of abstraction, the kind that takes place between representatives of material production or representatives of commerce and consumers as well as between consumers (Kraft/ Roelcke, 2019:8). The communication between manufacturers of commerce or material production and consumers legitimizes the investigation of shop signboards as specialized texts, because it is a communication between the owner of the shop who is offering a product or service and the consumers who buy the product or avail of the service.

Having firmly placed shop signboards within the existing theoretical models for Language for Special Purposes (LSP) I will proceed to draw on another theory that also underpins this paper's investigation. That is M.A. K. Halliday's register theory of the 1960s. According to the register theory, LSP texts follow a certain set of norms for language concerning terminology and syntactic structure which are determined by the extra-linguistic context. The function of a register according to Halliday is, "to uncover the general principles which govern this variation so that we can begin to understand which situational factors determine what linguistic features" (1978: 145).

The extra-linguistic context which is responsible for the standardization of a certain kind of text, is also the one responsible for bringing about the variation in the text, because every text however standardised it may be, is situated in a particular geo-political and social context. This context is to be understood as a semiotic structure that comprises, according to Halliday, three variables: discourse field, discourse mode, and discourse tenor. "Discourse field" is the subject of the communication, which in the case of shop signboards is the offer of a product or a service to customers. In the case of shop signboards the "discourse field" is the only factor that remains constant. The variables "discourse tenor" and "discourse mode" are the dynamic variables playing a decisive role in the form of expression that the shop signboards adopt.

The variable "discourse mode" plays a crucial role in deciding "what" the shop owners want to disclose about the product on the

signboard, "how" they wish to do it" and "how much" of information they put out, consciously or subconsciously. The decision to opt for a specific "discourse mode" makes the text on the signboard either an informative text, an expressive one, an audio-medial one, since one has digital signboards too (Reiss, 1983: 20) or a hermeneutic text. The category of hermeneutic texts does not exist in Reiss' text typology. It is added here as an additional category for the investigation of creative shop signboards, because certain shop signboards invite, what Schleiermacher calls "Nachkonstruieren der gegebenen Rede" (cf. Cercel, 2012: 155), which could be translated as re-construction of the message[*]. In the case of such signboards, understanding the shop signboard is not just a passive reception of the message but rather an active investigation of the text message. It is "actio und passio zugleich" (Cercel, 2012: 158), which means, the act of decoding the message is both an active as well as a passive act. Such shop signboards stand out, grab one's attention, and make one think. They seem to contain a coded message, which needs to be decoded first to reconstruct the message. Such signboards could reveal the history of a town, reflect its syncretic culture, narrate to the discerning eye the existing situation, in which the people residing in the town find themselves and even allow a shop owner to express his/her innermost feelings.

Investigating the variable "discourse tenor" tells us about how the communication is being conducted between the communication partners (which can be more than two, namely; the shop owner, who puts up the signboard, consumers who read it, and the agencies which have the authority to regulate such signboards). It reveals to us whether the social setting of the shop signboard is hierarchical or egalitarian in nature (Halliday, 1978: 145). If a hierarchy exists, then the signboard can become a contentious site, a site where power is at play, a site where social ramifications of government policies, linguistic exclusion, and individual expression, as well as aspiration, find a translation. If not, then it is a simple informative text.

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[*] Author's translation

The shop signboards impacted by the variables "discourse mode" and "discourse tenor", place the present investigation within the framework of translation sociology and translation hermeneutics.

This study is perched on the interface of specialised translation, hermeneutics, and the field of Linguistic Landscape studies. In this article, I first deal with shop signboards which are more than mere informative texts. In such types of texts the field and tenor are constant, or let me call them neutral, but the mode is dynamic. Later I deal with those shop signboards where the tenor, in other words, the communication partners play a decisive role in how the message on the signboard is displayed and received. This variable almost always also impacts the mode, thus making shop signboards amongst many other things, sites of conflict and compliance. Finally, I deal with creative signboards which in my opinion are hermeneutic texts.

Bottom-up Shop Signboards

As already explained, these shop signboards are a result of the personal choice of the shop owner. The owner decides how the signboard will look and what needs to be displayed on it. As a result, the texts on the signboards may become expressive texts that do not limit themselves to informing the customer about the product and service on offer or may simply remain an informative text.

Monolingual Informative Signboards

Those shop signboards that merely inform us about the product they are selling can be termed informative signboards. An example of such signboards are signboards of the famous chain of shops for electronic goods called "Saturn"

(https://in.images.search.yahoo.com/search/images;_ylt=Awr1TVU7 61ZmI84TpSi9HAx.;_ylu=c2VjA3NlYXJjaARzbGsDYnV0dG9u;_ ylc=X1MDMjExNDcyMzAwNQRfcgMyBGZyA21jYWFlZQRmcj IDcDpzLHY6aSxtOnNiLXRvcARncHJpZAN6enkzcXNFMVIuMl R3NHhaelE4VGlBBBG5fcnNsdAMwBG5fc3VnZwMxMARvcmlna W4DaW4uaW1hZ2VzLnNlYXJjaC55YWhvby5jb20EcG9zAzAEc HFzdHIDBHBxc3RybAMwBHFzdHJsAzYxBHF1ZXJ5A2NyZWF

0aXZlJTIwУ29tbW9ucyUyMGltYWdlcyUyMG9uJTIwU2F0dXJuJTIwZWxlY3Ryb25pYyUyMHN0b3JlJTIwaW4lMjBHZXJtYW55BHRfc3RtcAMxNzE2OTcyNDU5?p=creative+commons+images+on+Saturn+electronic+store+in+Germany&fr=mcafee&fr2=p%3As%2Cv%3Ai%2Cm%3Asb-top&ei=UTF-8&x=wrt&type=E210IN1494G0#id=12&iurl=https%3A%2F%2Fthumbs.dreamstime.com%2Fb%2Fberlin-saturn-electro-shop-germany-august-people-visit-consumer-electronics-store-atalexanderplatz-brand-has-stores-243456500.jpg&action=click accessed on 29/5/2024)

The name "Saturn" is simply a brand name for electronic items, a typical example of a globalized economy with no room for localization and, hence no scope for cultural interference or transference. One can't read anything in such signboards other than the fact that it sells electronic items.

On the other hand, stand-alone shops, or less globalized businesses, shop signboards of eateries for example, which are supposed to reflect the kind of cuisine which is being offered in the eatery, fulfil more than just the informative function.

There is a chain of an Indian restaurant in Europe called "Maharaja" which offers Indian cuisine. The signboard I am referring to is the one located, according to their website in Blutenburgstrasse, 79 in Munich, Germany

(https://in.images.search.yahoo.com/search/images?p=creative+commons+images+%2B+maharaja+restaurant+munich+germany&fr=mcafee&type=E210IN1494G0&imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Flookaside.fbsbx.com%2Flookaside%2Fcrawler%2Fmedia%2F%3Fmedia_id%3D100046412294282#id=10&iurl=https%3A%2F%2Flookaside.fbsbx.com%2Flookaside%2Fcrawler%2Fmedia%2F%3Fmedia_id%3D100046412294282&action=click accessed on 29/5/2024)

If one follows the above link to see the signboard, one realises that it does not even have a tag-line specifying that the product is "Indisches Essen" (Indian cuisine), rather simply has the exotic name (for the German setting) "Maharaja". We know that it means "Emperor" in most Indian languages. The exoticity of the signboard ends with the Indian name. If the name was written in the Indian

script, Devanagari, it would be ("महाराजा"). This would be alienating for the average customer in Germany and would only hamper the communicative purpose and the informative function of the signboard which is to attract guests. If the potential guests in Germany do not understand the signboard there will be no business to do. Hence this signboard reveals how commerce navigates linguistic and cultural landscapes to do business. To express it in translation parlance, the signboard exoticizes without foreignizing or alienating. Most importantly the signboard puts on record the openness of the German government's policy for signboards (the only restriction imposed by the German regulators in recent times is the one about the digital signs which have to be switched off from 10.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. to save energy[3]) which desists from making signboards adhere to the German transliteration. In this case, for example, there is no compulsion that the signboard should spell the name as "Maharadcha", thereby allowing the foreign entrepreneur the freedom to display his/her signboard as he/she deems fit. In this example, we see that the owner of the eatery has opted for a third language, English, as a middle ground between the two poles of domestication "Maharadcha" and foreignization "महाराजा".

Eateries reveal not only cultural negotiation at play but also inform the potential clients about the exclusivity of their products by making an informed choice of what gets displayed on their signboards and how. Take the example of another eatery in Munich by the name of "Bollywood Indisches Restaurant" which means "Bollywood Indian Restaurant

(https://in.images.search.yahoo.com/search/images;_ylt=Awr1SUM S7VZmLg4UMSG9HAx.;_ylu=c2VjA3NlYXJjaARzbGsDYnV0dG 9u;_ylc=X1MDMjExNDcyMzAwNQRfcgMyBGZyA21jYWZlZQR mcjIDcDpzLHY6aSxtOnNiLXRvcARncHJpZANwREFkSHZCRF

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Bollywood stands for the mainstream Indian movie industry. This brand of movies is known for its light, non-serious, mass-appeal films. These are formula movies that are made fast and are meant to provide light entertainment. The name "Bollywood Indisches Restaurant" gives the eatery its Indian identity and informs the potential clients that the cuisine on offer is "fast food".

The signboards of "Maharaja" and "Bollywood Indisches Restaurant" tell us a lot more than simply what they are offering. While "Maharaja" as the name suggests is regal, exclusive, and what can be called "Fine Dine" with the possibility of booking a table, "Bollywood Indisches Restaurant" suggests that it offers non-exclusive, run-of-the-mill kind of "Fast Food".

What else do these signboards in Germany or similar such signboards in other European cities tell us? If we put the text on the signboard, its geographical location, the immigration policy of Germany, the make-up of the Indian community that is running the restaurant, etc. together, one gets caught up in deliberating on the message on the signboard. Such deliberations tell us that there is a substantial number of Indians in Germany and that Indian cuisine has arrived along with them. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, the status for the year 2022 is that approximately 13 million Indian nationals work abroad, of which more than 35 lacs in the UAE, more than 22 lacs in Saudi Arabia, more than 8 lacs in Kuwait and Qatar and more than 5 in Oman

(https://www.mea.gov.in/loksabha.htm?dtl/36994/QUESTION+NO3
776+INDIAN+CITIZENS+IN+VARIOUS+COUNTRIES5/7/2024).
In short, reading such shop signboards sets in motion a chain of
thoughts revolving around the human aspects of societies, peoples'
aspirations, government policies etc. making an informative
signboard into a hermeneutic text.

Today the "Indian food" has become a brand behind which other
Asian identities are concealed. This comes to light when a chat with
the owner of an eatery of an Indian restaurant reveals his Pakistani
identity, a taste of the *sambhar* by a south Indian connoisseur,
reveals its Sri Lankan roots and the lingo of the serving personnel
addressing the male and female Indian guests as *Dada* (Brother) and
Didi (Sister) respectively in Milan's "Ristorante Bombay" reveal the
Bangladeshi identity of a restaurant owner. In short, the more one
engages with the extra-linguistic context of signboards the more we
unearth and excavate a world of knowledge.

One of the most visible facts that increasingly finds expression in
shop signboards is the phenomenon of human migration.

Top-down Shop Signboards – Peace and tranquillity?

Shop signboards that display the names in two or more languages
have a very different story to tell from the monolingual ones. They
are proof of top-bottom processes where more than one language has
been made mandatory through appropriate governmental regulation.
Below are a few examples of bilingual top-down shop signboards.

Bilingual Shop signboards in Dubai

Dubai is one of the seven important cities of the United Arab
Emirates (UAE). A large number of Indians work there. The shop
signboards here (ref. pictures 1 and 2) display the names in two
languages, viz: Arabic and English. The scripts on the signboards are
Roman and Arabic but the product is an Indian product "Hyderabadi
Cuisine" and "Lassi". So English again seems to be the neutral,
navigating medium between the message on the Indian product and
the Arabic script.
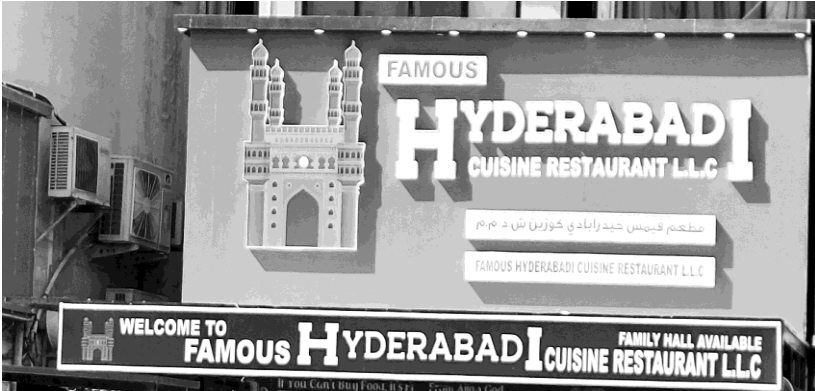
Picture. 1 Photo taken on a personal trip to Dubai

Picture 2. Photo taken on a personal trip to Dubai

These bilingual signboards are a product of the regulation in Dubai according to the website of a business solution provider called "Beyond Limits" which states that "Arabic language must comprise at least half of the written content, and be positioned on the right

side of the board"[4]. My research on signage-specific guidelines that are available online on the official websites of the United Arab Emirates specify the size and location of signboards amongst other factors in great detail, but not that the signs should be in both languages. The above pictures, various published journal articles, and the presence of two languages, one Arabic as the official language and the other English as the "Verkehressprache" (commercial language)[*] are visible signs of such a regulation. Let us look at the signboards closely.

"Hyderabadi cuisine" is cuisine from Hyderabad. Hyderabad was the seat of the *Nizam*. Because Hyderabad was the royal capital, it was known for excellence in its products: be it the Hyderabadi pearls, architecture, gastronomy, etc. "Hyderabadi Biryani" is one such famous representative of the Hyderabadi gastronomy. For an Indian to see this signboard in a city like Dubai makes one wonder whether one has travelled out of India at all, especially given the fact that one is surrounded by Indians, especially from Kerala, speaking Hindi or English. Arabic, except for its presence on the signages, is conspicuous by its absence. That one hardly sees the local populace moving around in public spaces also robs Dubai of its foreignness. The very first impression of foreignness in a strange place is the linguistic landscape of a city and the sweet challenge of linguistic navigation it poses to foreign tourists. As an Indian one misses that in Dubai because of the omnipresence of Indian food displayed on the signboards, Indian people, Indian language, etc. The same is the case with the signage shown in picture 5 above. It displays the word "Lassi" prominently and another product "Red Berry Juice Preparing". The grammatical error notwithstanding, it becomes clear that the main product is "Lassi" which has become quite common and easily available in most parts of the world.

Apart from the signage policy in the United Arab Emirates, what else do such signboards reveal? They announce the palpable presence of Indians, as one of the largest groups of immigrants to

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[4] https://www.beyondlimits.ae/blog/advertising-in-the-uae-commercial-signboards/30/3/2024

[*] Author's translation

Dubai[5]. On the official website of the UAE though, the Indians are referred to as "non-Emirati", hence rendering them invisible, one among the many groups of immigrants to Dubai[6].

It is interesting to note that the signboards that announce the presence of the Indian diaspora in the UAE remain invisible behind the rubric of "Non-Emirati" on the official website of the UAE. It is a fact that the UAE, unlike other migrant-friendly countries like Canada, does not offer citizenship to immigrants, irrespective of how long they live, or how much they contribute to the economy of the UAE. Are the Dubai shop signboards subverting the official invisibility of the Indian diaspora? Are these signboards the expression of their insistence on inclusion?

A study of the Linguistic Landscape of the city of Najran in Saudi Arabia concludes that multilingual signboards with Indian languages Bengali, Hindi, and Malayalam are also to be found especially in areas that are dominated by Indian immigrants in modest quarters of the city (Al-Athwary, 2022: 2064).

Apart from a few newspaper articles and journal publications discussing the mistakes in the Arabic language on signboards, these regulations appear to have been implemented peacefully, which is more than one can say about the regulation of bilingual shop signboards implemented in the two Indian states, Maharashtra and Karnataka. These shop signboards have become a contentious site, a site resulting in violence and conflict as will be shown in the following section.

Bilingual Shop Signboards – Sites of Conflict and Violence?

Maharashtra and Karnataka are two states with a large cosmopolitan population. The non-locals work in all professions and

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[5] "There are more than 200 nationalities living and working in the UAE. The expatriate community outnumbers the population of UAE nationals. Indians form the largest foreign community in the UAE followed by Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, other Asians Europeans and Africans". (https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/fact-sheet 8/4/2024).

[6] https://www.dsc.gov.ae/Report/DSC_SYB_2022_01_03.pdf 8/4/2024)

often, like in other states too, English becomes the language of communication. Shop signboards too are found in the English language. As a result, the linguistic landscape is dominated by the English language. Governments and local municipalities in these two states have come out with directives on the use of local languages on shop signboards. This has unleashed a language war which has spilled onto the shop signboards. The shop signboards have become contested sites. The following section deals with the shop signboards in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Bilingual Shop signboards in Maharashtra and Kannada

In an article titled *"When Betty Turns 'Beti' & Jimmy Choo Has 'Badi Ooh'"* which appeared in the "The Times of India" by Jaysanghani Pinto (https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/impact-of-marathi-signboard-drive/articleshow/105576957.cms8/4/2024), names of international brands like "Blue Dart" and "DHL", as well as an Indian garments' brand "Go Colors" appear written side by side in English as well as in Marathi (the official language of the state of Maharashtra in India). The state of Maharashtra, an industrialised state of India has had a long history of migration from other Indian states. Though migration is an old phenomenon, it did not spill onto the shop signboards till recently. The Indian Express published on April 6 a press release by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), that all shop signboards in Mumbai, will have to display the names of the shops prominently in Marathi in the *Devanagari* script (https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/mumbai-shops-marathi-signboards-7857719/ 20/4/2024). Another article by the same newspaper reports that the Chief Minister of the state of Maharashtra mandated that all shops and establishments having less than ten workers must display the name in Marathi and the font of the Marathi *Devanagari* script cannot be smaller than that of the other script. This was done by amending the Maharashtra Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act of 2017 (https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/all-shops-establishments-in-maharashtra-asked-to-display-signboards-in-marathi-7720118/ 18/4/2024).

This top-down regulation is in itself not problematic. It becomes problematic when non-compliance with such regulations attracts legal action which leads to conflicts, rows, and vandalising. An article in "The Hindu" highlights how the BMC came down heavily on those shop owners who did not comply and tried to resist this regulation. The civic officers of the BMC inspected 3,575 shops and found signboards of 161 shops and establishments violating the apex court directive. On the first day of the drive, the teams had inspected 3,269 shops and establishments, and taken action against 176 of them. The same article reports that there were also instances of blackening the signboards of shops that did not display their names in Marathi (https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/marathi-signboards-bmc-takes-legal-action-against-161-shops-in-crackdown/article67589576.ece 10/4/2024).

The signboards in Marathi are not simply informative texts. They are expressions of the individual positions of the shop owners. Those who do not comply with the regulation are trying to express their dissent and those who do, elect to bow down to the regulation to be able to do business in peace. The decision of the government to mandate the use of a particular language is the result of an attempt to stop languages disappearing from our public life whereas the decision not to comply with it is an act of resistance. Hence such signboards become contested sites of conflict and compliance.

The other Indian state which is also grappling with a similar crisis is Karnataka. While the Maharashtra government mandated that the size of the *Devanagari* script on the signboard be larger than the other script, Karnataka government mandated that 60% space on signboards must be taken by Kannada language, the official language of the state of Karnataka and the remaining 40% by any other language including English. This was brought about by amending the Kannada Language Comprehensive Development Act, of 2022. The municipal corporation of Bengaluru, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) issued the mandatory 60% space on signboard directive around Christmas of 2023 and a Kannada outfit called *Karnataka Rakshana Vedike (KRV)* which can be translated as Karnataka Protection Platform tried to enforce the rule on the 27th December itself leading to protests and vandalism

across the city. This led to the intervention of the High Court directing the government not to take any 'precipitative action' like shutting down businesses and shops over failure to implement the 60% Kannada sign rule (https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/what-is-the-60-kannada-signage-rule-here-s-all-to-know-about-the-law-124032100291_1.html 20/3/2024).

Not only have signboards become a site of war and violence but also a site of translation-related discussions. The newspaper "The Hindu" carried an article titled "Kannada signboards lost in translation". The reporter interviewed *Kannadigas* (people of Karnataka) and each had stories of grammatical errors, spelling errors and even words not existing in the Kannada language to tell. The reason for such errors was supposed to be the fact that many shop owners themselves or even the board makers did not know the language according to the report. The activists who spearheaded the campaign suggest that the government set up an online platform, where such names can be checked. The article also mentions that some of the interviewees suggested that awareness of the inaccuracy of translation websites should be created through the media (https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/kannada-signboards-lost-in-translation/article67832454.ece 10/2/2024). So much for the success of artificial intelligence (read Machine Translation) in the field of translation.

One should not forget that the fight for linguistic supremacy in Maharashtra and Karnataka to the point of bracketing out linguistic plurality is also a fight for linguistic survival, especially in the face of disappearing languages. Similar developments are seen in other Indian states like Punjab, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu too. Perhaps the signboards of Bilimora which I will now discuss can show the way to solve such issues.

Bottom-up signboards in Bilimora: Visible Scripts, Hidden Language, and Hidden (hi)stories

Bottom-up signboards have been discussed above as private, unofficial signboards. I discuss now two signboards of tea shops in the town of Bilimora as bottom-up signboards, not only because they are private signboards, but because they have, in my opinion,

emerged organically from the culture of the town in which one finds them. They are a product of a peaceful and gradual process of acculturation and assimilation between people of varied communities, who also are immigrants, and who together have forged a syncretic culture and identity. Hence the bottom-up label for these signboards should be understood in a broader sense. Such signboards are the most interesting of all the above-discussed examples. They are highly creative. Their creativity can only be appreciated by those who are aware of the political and commercial history of this town and have a thorough understanding of the aspirations of the people who live here. Such signboards invite the reader to have a hermeneutic understanding of the text. If the reader wishes to appreciate their creativity, s/he will have to be a "knower" of this place and will have to decode the message and reconstruct it successfully.

Bilimora is an erstwhile port town that has seen bustling industrial activity in the past. Today it has become a medical hub with clinics, hospitals, and pharmacies in every nook and corner, but no industry to speak of, forcing the inhabitants to move out of town as well as country, in search of jobs.

Located in the southern part of the state of Gujarat, bordering the neighbouring state of Maharashtra, it has a very diverse population with Gujaratis, Maharashtrians, and Sikhs (who came as refugees and were repatriated after the partition of India and Pakistan), all living in relative peace. Though there are immigrants from the south and the north of India today, the particular bond with Maharashtra and its people is visible in the shop signboards of Bilimora.

The Maharashtrian connection of Bilimora goes back to the 18th century when Bilimora was a part of the Kingdom of the royal family of the Gaekwads. The Gaekwads, a Hindu Maratha dynasty of the former Maratha Confederacy, hail from the neighbouring state of Maharashtra (https://historyofvadodara.in/gaekwads/#:~:text='Matre'%20was%20originally%20believed%20as,of%20more%20than%20one%20village 27/05/2024). Probably that is the reason for the presence of a large number of Maharashtrians in Baroda and neighbouring towns like Bilimora. The Gaekwads were patrons of education, art, and architecture. They set up schools, colleges and

universities. Generations of Maharashtrians who speak Marathi with a Gujarati accent still live and work in Bilimora.

An in-depth study titled "International out-migration from Gujarat, India: the magnitude, process and consequences" published in 2017 puts the emigration rate for Gujaratis via formal channels (through agents) and informal channels (relatives, family, kin, friends, religious groups) at 8 per 1000 people which is an increase from 3 per 1000 in 2007-2008 (Bhagat et. al, 2017).

Knowledge of these two facts: the close historical bond with Maharashtra and Maharashtrians and the aspiration of the Bilimorians to go abroad, find reflection in the following two signboards.

These shop signboards defy categorisation. They are monolingual but conceal bilingualism, they are informative, expressive as well as hermeneutic texts, all rolled into one. The frames on these signboards evoke scenes (Fillmore, 1977: 63) that are far removed from their immediate location. I discuss them in detail below

Boston Tea Party-Bottom-up monolingual signboard

Picture. 3 Photo clicked by the author of this article who lives in Bilimora

Picture 6 is a signboard of a tea shop. This particular signboard is written in the Gujarati script. The first line is બોસ્ટન ટી પાર્ટી which means "Boston Tea Party". It reminds the reader of the historical incident in Boston in America where all the tea was thrown into the sea as a mark of protest against the British. One wonders what this

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reference is doing in a small Gujarati town. Is it supposed to evoke the scene of the migrating Gujarati with one foot abroad and another in Gujarat? One can only guess. The second line too is in Gujarati script અમૃતતુલ્ય which, transliterated into English, reads as "Amrutatulya". This word is a composite noun formed of "Amrut" which means "elixir of eternal life" and "tulya" meaning comparable to. Hence "Amrutatulya" raises the status of tea, making it comparable to the elixir of life. This is a Marathi word written in the Gujarati script. In the Marathi language, it would look like this अमृततुल्य. Tea shops in many Maharashtrian towns are called अमृततुल्य. The word "અમૃતતુલ્ય" is a calque which makes this signboard neither monolingual nor bilingual. It occupies a middle, mediating space. The fact that the Marathi word typically for tea shops is written in the Gujarati script tells us that the word has been accepted, as it is, in the Gujarati language. The local and the non-local languages are on par. The words "Boston Tea Party" bring to mind the historical incident and the word "Amrutatulya" evokes the scene of a tea shop in Pune. Only when all these factors are put together do we understand this signboard, which is a classic example of the "whole being more than the sum of its parts" (Vannerem/Snell-Hornby, 1986). The text on the signboard is hence a hermeneutic text which as Rainer Kohlmayer puts it, is only the tip of the iceberg. There is a whole world of information concealed behind this text, waiting to be decoded and re-constructed.

To finish the discussion on this signboard let me share the translation of the tagline. It says એક બાર પિયો તો ફરી આવશો which transliterated in the roman script is *"Ek vaar piyo to fari avasho"*. This is the only line that is written in the Gujarati language as well as the Gujarati script. It means "If you drink it once, you will come again".

Tea with Love- Bottom-up Bilingual signboard

Picture 7 below is another tea shop signboard in Bilimora which appears to pay homage to the Gujarati-Marathi syncretic culture. It is bilingual and expresses the love between the two communities.

Picture 4 Photo clicked by the author of this article who lives in Bilimora

Right in the middle of the signboard are written in Marathi script and Marathi language the words प्रेमाचा चहा which means "Tea with love" in the way one writes on presents "With love". So it means that the owner is serving tea with love. Above it to the left is written in Gujarati script and language in green colour મહારાષ્ટ્ર ની નં. ૧ ચાય which means "The number one tea of Maharashtra". The text proudly refers to its origin being in the state of Maharashtra and at the same time puts its loyalty to the Gujarati people on display by using the Gujarati script. The tagline which is also in the Gujarati script and language says આપણા પણ નો સ્વાદ which translates as "The taste of belonging", but if one decides to use a rhetorical device of alliteration, it would sound better if it was translated as "Taste of togetherness" again referring to the Gujarati-Marathi connection and relation. The tagline says it all, it encompasses history, geography, society as well as good business sense by addressing both Maharashtrian as well as Gujarati customers.

Conclusion:

If one has to understand why the top-bottom shop signboards in Dubai, Maharashtra, and Karnataka are the way they are, one would have to look beyond what is written on the shop signboard and engage with other related topics such as overseas migration, language policy, and politics. Hence translation of such signboards in another target language would be a linguistic exercise fulfilling only a deictic function because it would not do justice to the

bilingual nature of this text type. If the bottom-up signboards of Bilimora are to be understood one would have to engage with the history, geography, and multilingual nature of the town and its people. it would be impossible to translate the sense of belonging expressed in the प्रेमाचा चहा signboard or convey the multiple layers of cultural nuances revealed by the બોસ્ટન ટી પાર્ટી shop signboard. Such texts subtly nudge a narrative of cohabitation amongst the populace.

Not always do cultures meet and blend as harmoniously as in the signboards of Germany and Bilimora. Often the migration of human beings, which leads to syncretic practices and traditions, leads to confrontation, rows, and clashes. Given the humongous potential of signboards communication, it would be a shame to reduce their translation to a linguistic nature, the kind that a smartphone app may be able to carry out. Machine translations and app translations of the signboards will be a lifeless reflection and shadow of the original but not an enriching echo. If the "*Sinnpotentialititäten*"[7] of the original has to be unleashed and the fourth step in the hermeneutic motion, the one of reciprocity, has to be fulfilled, so that we don't leave behind a lifeless original, then the translation will have to find its "eingeatmete Stimme", in other words, breathe life into the original (Steiner 1975, 296-414). A balance between translation pragmatism and translation responsibility will have to be struck.

When a language disappears it also takes along with itself a world of knowledge because languages have human histories, human endeavours, and human solutions trapped in them. Hermeneutic translation alone, which requires human intelligence, can unlock this potential of languages and not machine translation which can make do with artificial intelligence. I see the translation of shop signboards as a balancing act between the cognitive intelligence of a machine and the emotional intelligence of wo(man).

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[7] "Sinn" means and "Potentialiät" means potential. The word means the potential to communicate meaning.

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About the Author

Priyada Shridhar Padhye
Priyada Shridhar Padhye is Assistant Professor at the Centre of German Studies,Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her areas of interest are translation theory and specialised translation. She publishes academic papers and chapters in books on translation, edits translated books, conducts workshops and delivers lectures on the subject.

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