

The linguistic landscape of business in an 'anglophone' francophonie: Grand-Case (Saint-Martin/French West Indies)

Summary

This contribution surveys the bottom-up signage of commercial businesses in Grand-Case, an emblematic village on the north-western coast of St. Martin, a small island of the Lesser Antilles archipelago in the Caribbean which is politically divided between a Dutch part (Sint Maarten) and a French part (Saint-Martin). English is the vernacular language of the island and the vehicular language in tourism, the mainstay of St. Martin's economy, while French is the (only) official language on the French side. After providing basic information on Saint-Martin's / St. Martin's history and its complex current sociolinguistic situation, the paper reports on the results of an empirical LL study carried out in early 2014, which suggest that English is definitely the preferred language for informative (denotative) communication on signs, while French can be found in informative as well as in symbolic (connotative or identitarian) uses. In the latter case, it tends to undergo commodification.

Keywords

Saint-Martin (French West Indies), French-English multilingualism, bottom-up commercial signage, language commodification

1 Introduction

The Caribbean can be claimed to be a region par excellence for the study of ethnic, cultural and linguistic encounters, both historically and synchronically. First, in a historical perspective, this region has been the plaything of colonial powers from the 16th century onwards, and European states like Spain, Britain, France, the Netherlands and others have left their linguistic marks in the form of their national languages, which even after processes of decolonization on many Caribbean territories remain dominant on most, if not all, of the islands, and also in the form of European-lexified Creoles as an outcome of a colonial plantation economy based on slaves of African origin and which are, after the early extinction of the pre-colonial population, now

considered in many places as the ‘autochthonous’ languages of the region. And second, in a more recent perspective, the Caribbean is an area where, due to increased mobility and various phenomena linked to globalization, North American, European and South American cultures meet and overlap. For practitioners of Francophone studies, the Caribbean is a particularly attractive and, at the same time, challenging area of research because of the on-going political and administrative presence of France, which, contrary to other former colonial powers, still possesses significant territories in that part of the world several thousands of kilometers away from the ‘mainland’ (Metropolitan France). These Overseas territories comprise several islands of the Lesser Antilles archipelago: on the one hand, the larger territories of Martinique and Guadeloupe (with some nearby islands) among the Windward Islands, and, on the other hand, the small territories of Saint-Barthélemy and Saint-Martin further north which form part of the Leeward Islands. Martinique and Guadeloupe have attracted the interest of linguists thanks to the presence and widespread use of the local Creole languages, and the sociolinguistic situation on these French outposts is well documented in the research literature (cf. Blackwood in this volume). The same holds for Saint-Barthélemy – better known to Anglophones as St. Bart(h)s – which, despite its tiny size (little more than 20 km²), boasts a surprising linguistic diversity, including a French-lexified Creole (cf. Maher 2013), which has puzzled sociolinguists and scholars of other disciplines interested in language issues. As for Saint-Martin, however, linguistic research has been limited, Martinez (1995) being the only dedicated monograph on the subject. This is all the more surprising since this French territory has a linguistic configuration, with English as the dominant language, that is unique in the Francophone world. The aim of the present contribution is not to fill this gap in research or to update the general picture drawn in Martinez (1995) (cf. also Barbier 2014a and 2014b). Instead, it focuses on one symptom of this complex linguistic configuration of Saint-Martin, namely the Linguistic Landscape (LL) created through commercial signage in the emblematic village of Grand-Case in the island’s north-west. The outline of this contribution is as follows: Ch. 2 gives a summary of the history and recent demographic and socio-economic development of the island in general and of the French part in particular. Ch. 3 contains an overview of the complex (socio-)linguistic situation found in today’s Saint-Martin as an outcome of the economic upheaval that this territory underwent during the last decades. Ch. 4 is dedicated to the LL case study carried out in Grand-Case; it describes the methodological approach and the working

hypothesis, presents the results in a quantitative manner and discusses them qualitatively. Ch. 5 draws some conclusions on whether, and to what degree, the working hypothesis could be confirmed by the data.

2. St. Martin: historical and socio-economic facts

St. Martin is one of the Leeward Islands (*îles sous-le-vent*) covering some 87 km² that is situated in the North-Eastern Lesser Antilles between the even smaller islands of Anguilla (a British overseas territory) and Saint-Barthélemy. Though rugged and mountainous, St. Martin is today very densely populated, with almost 900 inhabitants per km². It was discovered in 1493 by Christopher Columbus and integrated into the Spanish empire, but the Spaniards turned away from the ‘unproductive’ island in 1648. By that time, the Dutch had partially settled and fortified the south of the island in order to exploit the salt ponds, while French colonists had settled in the northern part (Barbier 2014b: 22). Therefore, in the same year of 1648, an agreement was reached according to which the island was divided into a (smaller) Dutch part in the South and a (larger) French part in the North, between which inhabitants and, later, goods could move freely and without physical or politico-administrative obstacles. This agreement of peaceful division and neighborhood between Dutch Sint Maarten und French Saint-Martin¹ was sealed in the Treaty of Concordia, which continues to be in force up to the present (Hillebrink 2013: 178s.). Salt, sugar cane, cotton and, to a lesser extent, tobacco came to be the economic pillars during most of the colonial period on both sides, during which colored workforce was brought to St. Martin mostly from neighboring Anguilla. Slavery was abolished in 1848 in Saint-Martin and in 1863 in Sint Maarten. The first half of the 20th century saw a severe decline of the traditional economy, salt production being the last activity to survive precariously. When in post-war France the Overseas territories were departmentalized, Saint-Martin (as well as nearby Saint-Barthélemy) became a municipality (*commune*) of the *département* of Guadeloupe, some 250 km away, «whereas Sint Maarten gained a large amount of autonomy as part of the Netherlands Antilles in 1951» (Hillebrink 2013: 180). When the political entity of the Dutch Antilles, comprising most prominently the so-called ‘ABC islands’ (Aruba, Bonaire,

¹ I follow the usage introduced by Hillebrink (2013: 177) to write ‘St. Martin’ when designating the entire island, ‘Sint Maarten’ when reference is made to the Dutch political territory, and ‘Saint-Martin’ when the French part of the island is meant.

Curaçao) in the southern Caribbean close to the Venezuelan coast, was dissolved in 2010, Sint Maarten became a separate autonomous country (*Land*) within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. French Saint-Martin also seceded from Guadeloupe when it was given the status of an Overseas Community (*Collectivité d'Outre-Mers*, abbreviated COM) in 2007 (Hillebrink 2013: 182ss.). This administrative construct was introduced through a change in the French constitution in 2003 in order to give a more adequate status and more decentralized decisional power to the former *Territoires d'Outre-Mer* and other Overseas territories which needed policies that would be better suited for local needs. In a referendum held in 2003 (cf. Figure 1) 76% of the voters voted in favor of this new status, a result which has to be linked to the radical socio-economic changes that Saint-Martin – and St. Martin as a whole – had undergone in recent decades.

North American presence on St. Martin grew after 1942, when the United States built a military air-base on the Dutch side which developed into nowadays' 'Princess Juliana' civil airport. From the mid-1950's, like on neighboring Saint-Barthélemy, rich Americans flocked in, buying land and building individual residential estates. Sint Maarten entrepreneurs, thanks to local autonomy and lesser political restrictions, and foreign investors joined the move in the 1960's, and an economic boom leading to mass tourism ensued. However, «[t]he economy of the Dutch side started to overheat in the 1980s» (Hillebrink 2013: 185), while the French side, first left behind and then aiming «to provide an attraction for over-stay tourists on the Dutch side, by developing complementary services» (*ibid.*), finally tried to catch up massively with Sint Maarten (Nicolas 2005: 167ss.). This was fostered by the 1986 *Loi Pons*, a French law that provided tax exemption for investments in the Overseas territories (Redon 2006: 248; Hillebrink 2013: 186) and triggered a building boom, esthetically more cautious but otherwise similar to that in Sint Maarten and with investors from Metropolitan France involved in many projects (Chardon 1995). This 'gold rush' period due to the *défis-calisation* not only left a visible impact on Saint-Martin's scenery in the form of semi-ruins of abandoned or unfinished real estate developments, but also heavily modified the community's – and the island's – socio-demographic structure (Dahan 2005; Jeffry 2010). The population of Saint-Martin more than tripled between 1980 and the turn of the century (Nicolas 2005: 168) to reach 35.594 inhabitants at present (2015).² Due to the demands in the con-

² Cf. <<http://www.insee.fr/fr/ppp/bases-de-donnees/recensement/populations-legales/pages2015/pdf/dep978.pdf>> [10/01/2016].



Figure 1. Sticker in Grand-Case reminiscent of the 2003 referendum in Saint-Martin

struction sector and tourist services, many migrants from other Caribbean territories came in (including, in particularly high numbers, people from the Dominican Republic and Haiti on Hispaniola), along with numerous Europeans mainly from Metropolitan France. However, since the motivation for many projects launched after the *défisicalisation* act were tax benefits more than long-term sustainability and since the demand for hotel accommodation was seemingly over-estimated, the boom in Saint-Martin quickly slowed down, and many facilities closed down after the destructions caused by 1995's hurricane Luis (Hillebrink 2013: 186), so that today there are some 1.000 hotel rooms available against 4.500 before 1995 (Gavach 2014). The tourist trade of both Saint-Martin and Sint Maarten further suffered from shrinking numbers of US-American visitors after 2001. Today, long-stay tourism is the exception rather than the rule on the island. Apart from short-stay visitors who include St. Martin in their individual 'island-hopping' itineraries, the major group of tourists is generated by the cruise-ship business on the Dutch side, which started in 1962 with the construction of the first cruise-ship pier (Hillebrink 2013: 185). Today, during the tourist season, several cruise ships anchor at Sint Maarten's capital Philipsburg every day and pour many thousands of day or short-stay visitors onto the island, many of which choose to visit also Saint-Martin either on organized bus tours or by rental car. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of these cruise-ship tourists, as well as the other smaller visitors' groups mentioned before, continue to come from the US and Canada (while tourist influx from Europe stagnates at a rather low level); equally unsurprisingly, then, although the Netherlands Antillean

guilder is the official currency in Sint Maarten and the euro is that of Saint-Martin (which, despite its status change and contrary to Saint-Barthélemy, decided to remain part of the European Union as an ‘outermost region’), the US-American dollar is the most commonly used currency on the entire island. The currency situation bears similarities to the language situation on Saint Martin, which will be presented in the following paragraph.

3 Languages on St. Martin: an overview

According to Barbier (2014a: 90), 126 nationalities are counted among Sint Maarten’s population and 108 in Saint-Martin, which leads to a complex multilingual setting on the island. In Sint Maarten, Dutch and English (the latter since 2010) are official, while in Saint-Martin, French is the only language with this status. Still, the most widespread and most commonly used language is English, which holds for the Dutch as well as for the French side, where the presence of English goes back to the massive arrival of Anglophone workforce from Anguilla in the 18th century and where English can be considered as the language of the ‘autochthonous’ Saint-Martinois. However, when speaking of English in St. Martin, a difference must be made between the vernacular and the vehicular (‘lingua franca’) use of the language (Barbier 2014a: 94): in writing and in formal speech, a diatopically unmarked ‘Standard’ English is used, while in semi-formal oral uses, e.g. with foreigners, a colloquial English with North American tinge prevails. In informal and in-group usage, and as their native language, the St. Martiners speak a type of Caribbean English, a term that embraces ‘restructured’ varieties of English the classification of which as creoles or as ‘dialects’ is subject to debate and controversy (Aceto 2006). If St. Martin’s Island English (Martinez 1994: 88, or ‘anglais des îles’ [Barbier 2014a: 91]) was to be classified as a creole, the question as to what degree the creolization took place on St. Martin or whether it has to be considered an ‘imported’ restructured variety remains uninvestigated. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the building boom and the expanding tourist industry attracted many people from other Caribbean islands. These migrants formed new communities on St. Martin where their native languages are conserved and practiced. In Saint-Martin, the construction sector offered employment to Haitians, who added the French-lexified Haitian Creole to the language panorama, while many Spanish-speaking Dominican women found work in tourist facilities. As for the official lan-

guage, standard French is used in writing and formal or semi-formal orality, while colloquial French with various (and generally slightly marked) accents is used in casual oral speech by the French-speaking population of European (or French Canadian) origin living on the island, and by the Saint-Martinois when expressing themselves in that tongue. French is the only medium of education in Saint-Martin's schools but seems to be rarely used by schoolchildren outside the classroom (Barbier 2013); the when and why of the use of French by the general 'native' population, and the distribution and functions of the many language varieties mentioned hitherto in oral interaction in Saint-Martin, remain to be investigated.³ In the present contribution, only written language as used in the linguistic landscape of a specific and emblematic area, the village of Grand-Case, will be taken into account.

4 A linguistic landscape study in Grand-Case

4.1 The area of study

The village of Grand-Case is located in the north-west of the island, some 5 km north of Saint-Martin's capital Marigot.⁴ It was originally a center of the salt production and is built on the spit of land that separates the sea and the salt pond into which the runway of the small French airport 'Grand-Case Espérance' has been built. Administratively, Grand-Case is a quarter (*fraction*) of the municipality of Saint-Martin.⁵ The village's buildings mainly line up on both sides of the island's circular main road which on the French side is numbered N7 and links Marigot, on the west coast, to Quartier d'Orléans (locally better known as 'French Quarter') on the east coast. In the 1980s, due to the dense road traffic and frequent congestions that are quite typical

³ During my stay, informants claimed that French is now heard more frequently in Saint-Martin than in previous times, due to a rise in permanent (only) French-speaking population after the *Loi Poms*. This, however, is but a subjective perception and obviously not representative. When asked about language use, my interlocutors on the island tended to have a rather general or vague conception that didn't go beyond the statement that French and English were spoken equally on the island.

⁴ In September 2017 – long after this paper had been written –, Irma, one of the strongest and most devastating Atlantic hurricanes, and follow-up storms affected St. Martin terribly, regrettably causing the death of 9 inhabitants and tremendous damage. It is to be feared that many elements of the urban landscape of Grand-Case shown and discussed here, do no longer exist in the way they were when my fieldwork took place.

⁵ Therefore, no details on the permanent population of Grand-Case are available in INSEE's municipal statistics.

for St. Martin, a deviation of road N7 was built on the southern fringe of the salt pond from a junction in the center of Grand-Case to Hope Estate, so that the former road, named Boulevard de Grand-Case within the village, is now a local-traffic-only street giving access to the busiest part of the settlement. Grand-Case is the major tourist attraction in Saint-Martin, on the one hand due to its long and unspoiled beach, and, on the other hand, because of the rather well-preserved ‹creole› appearance of its built-up areas. In tourist guidebooks, Grand-Case is sold as an ‹authentic› French-Caribbean village and as the ‹gastronomic capital of the Caribbean›, and it is most obviously in Grand-Case where ‹for tourists from the American continent, Saint-Martin offers an opportunity to visit a little part of France without having to cross the Atlantic› (Hillebrink 2013: 186). Small hotels, restaurants – including some traditional local food outlets known as ‹dolo› – and bars, shops and other facilities catering for tourists are found here in huge number along the Boulevard, although some buildings look derelict or abandoned. Along the recent deviation of road N7, close to the junction with the Boulevard, a secondary but less densely built commercial zone developed. In the remaining streets of the village (apart from the Route de l’Espérance leading to the airport terminal) little commercial activity is found.

4.2 Aim of the study and hypothesis

The general aim of the research from which the present study derives was to check if, to what extent and in which form the complex linguistic make-up of Saint-Martin, with French as the legally dominant language, English as the factually dominant language, Dutch as an official language of an adjacent territory and the various immigrants’ languages, is reflected in the LL of Grand-Case. To this end, a large array of ‹signs› – understood in a broad sense as artifacts displaying written language on different material supports – both of the ‹top-down› (official and/or institutional) and the ‹bottom-up› (non-official and/or private) type, and, at least occasionally, of the ‹transgressive› type (stickers, graffiti) have been documented photographically. The present contribution is, however, narrower in scope: only the commercial bottom-up signs which address potential customers and therefore qualify for the advertising type of signage in a broad sense are taken into account. In general, text on signs may either be intended (predominantly) to inform the addressee, thus drawing on the denotative semantic value of language, or be (predominantly) symbolic, i.e. as stimulus for emotions or acting as an identity marker, and is, then, related to connotative semantics. This holds also,

and even more obviously, for commercial language use in advertisements (Edelmann & Gorter 2010: 97), where languages and language varieties may undergo commodification «because they are seen to have value and add value to products and brands» (Kelly-Holmes 2010: 23; cf. also Cameron 2012). This process of commodification tends to create multilingual LL with or without multilingualism in the addresses' group:

Commercial multilingualism [...] can be driven by a reflection of and a desire to respond to «real» multilingualism in the society, particularly where the speakers of languages are seen to be economically attractive targets for advertising and marketing messages. Or, it may have very little to do with lived multilingualism in the particular sociolinguistic context of an advertisement, and indexes instead some symbolic associations. (Kelly-Holmes 2010: 23)

The key question of this research therefore was to study the informative and symbolic uses of French, as compared to English and, if available, to other languages, and the degree of commodification of these languages and, above all, of French in the LL of Grand-Case. The working hypothesis was the following: Given the linguistic preferences and habits of the autochthonous Saint-Martinois and the impact that Anglo-American tourism has on Grand-Case's businesses, it should be expected that English is used more extensively and informatively in Grand-Case's commercial bottom-up signage while French should be expected to be used in a more commodified manner. Deviations from this tendency should be limited to establishments which do not, or only to a lesser extent, cater for tourist customers.⁶ The empirical basis of the study was gathered during a stay in Grand-Case in March 2014, i.e. during the main tourist season and on several days in order to collect relevant data exhaustively. For this data collection, apart from the above-mentioned «traditional» photographic method (which proved ethically and practically unproblematic since Grand-Case business owners and shop-keepers are used to European-looking tourists strolling around and taking photos of almost everything), a technique of «recorded walk-alongs» was applied: The researcher took a discreetly placed recording device with him and monologically commented on any object in the LL that caught his attention or seemed relevant for the subsequent analysis of the photographs.

⁶ Since language use in advertisement in France is subject to strict legislation (cf. Staudinger, in this volume; Martin 2010), a related question was to check if this restrictive policy, calling for French-language versions or translations of any advertisement message that is displayed, is observed in the specific Overseas setting of Saint-Martin and, if so, in which way. No hypothesis for this question could be issued in advance.

This technique turned out to be very efficient, helpful and less cumbersome than written field-notes. The area that was surveyed in this way comprises the entire Boulevard de Grand-Case from the beginning of the continuously built-up area near the cemetery in the south up to the junction with Route de l'Espérance in the North and includes its dead-end continuation called Rue de la Petit(e) Plage. Additionally, the approx. first 300m of the N7 deviation towards Quartier d'Orléans near the junction with the Boulevard was surveyed due to the high number of business establishments on that section. The base unit of analysis in this study is the commercial establishment and the object of analysis the written language(s) displayed on fixed or movable support (the latter mostly in the form of presentation stands) and visible from the outside. In a more quantitatively oriented first step of the analysis, features of typographic prominence, i.e. scales of 'granularity' in the sense of Auer (2009), and factors of recurrence (number of different artifacts displaying a language) have not been taken into account. However, in a second, more qualitatively oriented step, such differences in visibility have been included in the analysis, and special caution has been applied in weighing the impact of the language(s) used on the establishments' name-boards. On the other hand, product names and brands, even if they were in a clearly recognizable language, have not been counted. With its both quantitative and qualitative scope and its focus on a synchronic 'snapshot' on written language in a delimited physical space, the present study follows the traditional approach to LL and corresponds to what Blommaert (2016) – albeit critically – calls a 'first wave' study in LL research.

4.3 Results and discussion

In the surveyed area, a total of 116 commercial establishments have been identified. All of them were set up in stable closed buildings, with two exceptions: the bars called 'lolos' are open shacks and the 'la crêpe en rose' pancake outlet was installed in a movable trailer. In some cases, e.g. at a water sports school and equipment rental business, there were closed offices or storage rooms but most commercial activity took place outside. All of these were counted in the survey. The 116 establishments, the distribution and location of which is shown in Figure 2, can be classified according to six business activity types: (1) gastronomy / catering (restaurants, snack bars, cocktail bars etc.); (2) accommodation (hotels, guest-houses, vacation residences); (3) shops selling (primarily) food products (groceries, bakeries; there are no large-surface supermarkets in Grand-Case); (4) shops selling

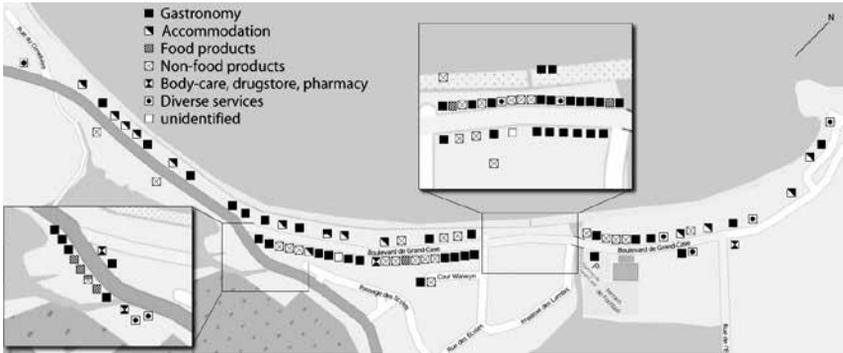


Figure 2. Classification of Grand-Case’s businesses into commercial activity types

non-food products of different kinds (clothing stores; souvenir, arts and crafts shops; jewelers shops etc.); (5) commercial establishment for health, body-care and beauty products and services (pharmacy, drugstore, hairdresser, barber etc.); (6) establishments for other services (medical treatments; real estate agencies; travel and excursion agency; sports; post office [this being a public service establishment in Grand-Case] etc.). Although several commercial establishments were closed at the time of the survey, only in two cases was it impossible to detect what kind of business activity had been carried out on the premises previously. Table 1 gives an overview of the distribution of business types; two establishment entered in two types, which are marked <+1> in the corresponding columns.

Gastronomy / catering	Accommodation	Food products	Non-food products	Health / body-care	diverse services	unidentified
52+1	13+1	6+1	28+1	4	9	2

Table 1. Classification of business types (N = 116)

Unsurprisingly, and in accordance with Grand-Case’s label as ‘gastronomic capital of the Caribbean’, restaurants and bars are the dominant type of business and are found in all parts of the survey area, with a particularly high concentration in the central section of Boulevard de Grand-Case. The second-most frequent type of business are non-food stores – many of them souvenir and gift shops, and clothing stores –, which concentrate in the same area and generally sell low- and mid-price products (contrary

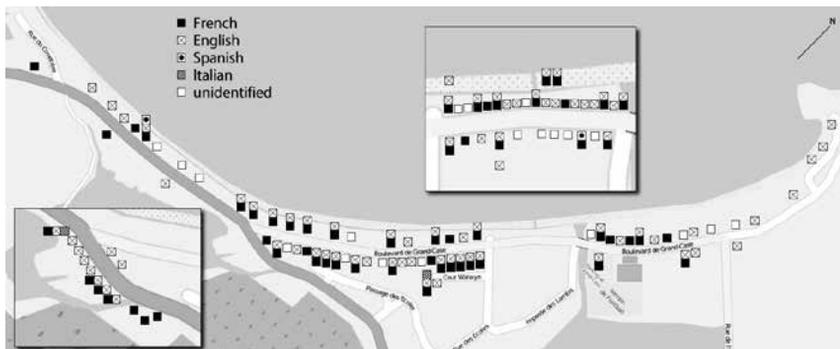


Figure 3. Languages used on signage of Grand-Case's businesses

to Philipsburg, the selling of luxury products is of very limited importance in Grand-Case and on the French side of St. Martin in general). Hotel and accommodation businesses are absent from the central-most area where the gastronomic ventures and non-food stores conglomerate. Figure 3 provides a general overview of the languages detected on the bottom-up signage of these 116 commercial establishments. For this overview representation, name-boards of shops and restaurants, even if they display (a) language(s) in a particularly ‹visible› manner, have only been counted if the language(s) appeared elsewhere on the business' signage (cf. below for a justification of this choice). Only four languages have been identified as being used in a systematic way: English, French, Italian, and Spanish, with English being displayed by 79 businesses and French at 58 locations; Italian and Spanish were used twice. Table 2 quantifies mono-, bi- and trilingual signage. ‹Bilingual› always means a combination of English and French, with the only exception of a cocktail-bar/discotheque that used French and Spanish; the few businesses displaying multilingual signage used Spanish (1, a vacation residence) and Italian (2 Italian restaurants) in addition to English and French.

monolingual English	monolingual French	bilingual	trilingual	unidentified
38	16	39	3	20

Table 2. Mono- vs. multilingual signage in general

What probably seems surprising, and thus deserves some explanation, is the high number of businesses with <unidentified> language use: these were, on the one hand, businesses which only had proper names and brand names displayed on its outside, and, on the other, some small-scale businesses which indeed only had their merchandise on display. This latter case might be due to the fact that the sellers rented their commercial space only on a short-term lease and didn’t bother – or were not allowed – to attach nameboards or fit inscriptions.

As can be deduced from Table 2, in general terms English is much more present than French, be it in bilingual or monolingual signage (38 items each). Table 3 lists mono- and French-English multilingual signage (including locations where a third language is displayed) as used in the 6 business types defined before.

	monolingual English	monolingual French	monolingual total	multilingual E+F
Gastronomy	13	1	14	31
Accommodation	3	1	4	5
Food products	4	0	4	2
Non-food products	12	7	19	3
Health / body-care	2	1	3	0
diverse services	4	6	9	0

Table 3. Mono- vs. multilingual signage according to business types

These data show that the use of English alongside with French (or vice versa) is the preferred option of the gastronomic branch in Grand-Case, while the accommodation branch shows no preference. The other business types prefer the use of one or the other language, with a clear tendency towards the privileged use of English except for what has been labeled <diverse services>. As a matter of fact – and this leads to more qualitative elements of the analysis –, at the medical services, the real estate agencies, the (only) travel/excursion agency, and the post office French was the only language immediately visible. Another group of businesses with a rather significant share of French-only signage was found among non-food shops. Upon closer scrutiny, these turn out to be souvenir and gift shops specializing in, or having in stock among other things, craft products of local origin or at least claiming to be hand-made artifacts of non-industrial origin. This is a remarkable sales strat-

egy, since there are no real traditional ‹local› St. Martin products that could be sold; at best, products with a certain ‹Caribbean› or ‹Creole› flavor could count as such. However, in many cases the only ‹local› attribute of these craft products is a Saint-Martin logo or script attached to merchandise such as shirts, sweaters or bags.⁷ By tagging products as ‹local› and ‹traditional› they are indexed as being authentic and of high quality (cf. Blackwood in this volume) and, therefore, deserve higher prices. It seems that, in the context of Grand-Case, and Saint-Martin in general, the use of French is seen as an efficient element in this authentication strategy, despite of French not being the ‹authentic› language of Saint-Martin in sociolinguistic terms. The same process of commodification is undergone by the French language in the gastronomic branch which, as said before, is extremely prominent in, and of high importance for, Grand-Case's commercial and linguistic landscape. French gastronomic practices and traditions hold a worldwide reputation, which in 2010 afforded them a place on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage,⁸ and the use of the French language in a gastronomic context is therefore considered as a label of quality and solid *savoir-faire*, which justifies adequate pricing, be it or not in an overall francophone setting.⁹ In Grand-Case, this general market value of French cooking can conveniently be added to, and thus amplified by, the ‹French touch› of the geographical place. This strategy is applied by many – generally rather high-priced – restaurants in the survey area, which, as shown in Figure 4a-d, not only carry French names but explicitly add ‹restaurant français› on their name-board.

However, this emblematic and highly symbolic language use on the name-boards does not necessarily imply that French is the preferred language elsewhere on the business' signage, since some (although few) of these gastronomic establishments use English only on other inscriptions, on menu boards and stands. It turns out that name-boards (of restaurants, but also of other businesses) may be misleading for the study of language prefer-

⁷ This becomes particularly obvious when, once a week, on the so-called ‹mardis de Grand-Case› (‹Grand-Case Tuesdays›) an evening open-air sale is held where, in addition to the local businesses, ambulant sellers expose their ‹traditional craft products› (‹produits artisanaux›) for sale on the Boulevard.

⁸ Cf. <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/RL/gastronomic-meal-of-the-french-00437>> [06.01.2016].

⁹ Cf. Ben-Rafael & Ben-Rafael (in this volume) and Pusch (2015) for examples in non-francophone locations.



Figure 4a-d. Name-boards of some 'French' restaurants in Grand-Case

ences and (effective) language use,¹⁰ and therefore establishments which only displayed French on their name-boards but not elsewhere were not counted as bilingual in the above-mentioned statistics. Under this condition, 17 gastronomic business ventures in the survey area qualified as displaying multilingual signage, for which the following tendency in the use of English and French could be detected: permanent signs and scripts, produced by professionals (advertising agencies, printers, sign-makers), are bilingual in most cases, whereas temporary signs and scripts are more often monolingual. This is particularly visible in the way that the restaurants and food-outlets communicate the meals they have on offer: while the externally fixed menu cards, which in the quality-prone 'French restaurants' of Grand-Case present an elaborate and carefully laid-out appearance, are generally homophonously multilingual (in the sense of Backhaus 2007: 90ss.), at least for the sections listing the dishes and beverages,¹¹ externally exposed blackboards and presentation stands detailing daily and lunch specials or promoted dishes and beverages (namely wines), and which are generally hand-written, are more often monolingual, with a slight preference for English (cf. Figure 5a-b). Table 4 lists selected examples of these divergent language uses for

¹⁰ Another, albeit less surprising point in case are the four 'Italian' restaurants, specializing in pizza, pasta and Mediterranean cuisine: two of them display the Italian language also elsewhere (and one, 'Agljo Olio', which is outside the central-most business area, uses Italian even systematically on its menu), while the two others restrict the use of Italian to the name-board and otherwise use French and English only.

¹¹ Some menu cards contain additional elements, such as references to regional or international gastronomic guidebooks or review portals (such as TripAdvisor), which then are predominantly in English only (cf. Figure xx), giving these menus a partly polyphonus character in Backhaus' (2007) terms. No systematicity could be detected as far as the (typo)graphic arrangement of the homophonous parts of the menu cards are concerned; some present the entries in subsequent lines, others use parallel columns, and French and English are placed in the most diverse manners on these layouts.



Figure 5a-b. Divergent language use on fixed and movable signage elements displayed by Grand-Case's restaurants

menu offers. Significantly, the «lolo» shacks, the most characteristic type of food outlet to be found in Grand-Case and which, in their overall signage, communicate almost exclusively in English, display monolingual menu cards or bilingual menu cards with part-writings (again in the sense of Backhaus 2007) and English as (typo)graphically first language (cf. Figure 6).

name-board	menu card	boards / presentation stand
Ocean 82	French, English	English
Il Nettuno	French, English	English
Bistrot Caraïbe	English, French	English
L'Auberge Gourmande	French, English	English, French
Calmos Café	English, French	French
Villa Royale Creole Restaurant	French, English	French

Table 4. Language use of selected Grand-Case restaurants on name-boards, permanent menu cards and temporary boards / presentation stands.¹²

¹² Order of languages reflects typographic / layout prominence given to French and English, respectively.



Figure 6. Predominantly English signage of ‘lolo’ food shacks in Grand-Case

For this language bias for temporary hand-written messages on menu boards and presentation stands three conjectural explanations may be given: first, the material limitations of these supports, which, due to their reduced surface associated with the rather coarse granularity of the scripts, do not physically allow creating parallel language versions; second, the authors of the scripts, i.e. the owners or managers of the gastronomic businesses, use, for these more spontaneous messages, the language they feel more comfortable in when communicating spontaneously; or, third, they take into account the (supposedly) dominant vernacular language among their targeted customers. Whether the language use on menu boards and stands is, in this sense, speaker-oriented or addressee-oriented, or both, obviously cannot be deduced from observing the signage alone, but would require additional interview data.¹³ A zone in the survey area which deserves a closer look is the above-men-

¹³ As can be inferred from what has been described hitherto, the Creole language(s) is (are) absent from the scene. The term ‘Creole’ was only found as a descriptive element on the name-boards of two restaurants and thus seems to be understood, on Saint-Martin, as a cultural attribute, on a par, if not synonymous, with ‘Caribbean’, but not as an ethno-linguistic term. This is in accordance with the fact that no autochthonous creolization took place in Saint-Martin and that (mainly Haitian) Creole has become part of the linguistic make-up of this part of the island through recent migration only.

tioned junction of Boulevard de Grand-Case with road N7 where the latter is deviated towards Hope Estate and Quartier d'Orléans. This junction section is characterized by permanent busy through traffic, and it is also the place where the numerous mini-buses serving the Marigot-Quartier d'Orléans line and which are mainly used by the local population but rarely by tourists, stop. The commercial establishments found in this area differ significantly from those found along the Boulevard in the central-most areas of the settlement: there are several gastronomic businesses of a more economic type, including snack bars, pizzerias and a shawarma restaurant. Moreover, and more importantly, it is in this area that the two local 'supermarkets' (actually grocery stores with an important array of non-food articles), one of which is run by Chinese owners, and the only bakery in the village are found, together with a barber's shop and a bank branch. Furthermore, a business building called 'Caribbean Queen' houses a pharmacy/drugstore and a medical center with offices of general practitioners and specialists. All these components identify this section as the area for the daily needs particularly – if not exclusively – of the local population.

English is the preferred language of the shops and gastronomic businesses in this area, and the only language displayed by several of them; this is the case, for instance, for the two 'supermarkets' (cf. Figure 7a-c). It seems appropriate to conclude that this preference for English reflects the fact that both the owners and the customers who are targeted at are autochthonous Saint-Martinois. However, as already pointed out above, the medical / health establishments, as well as the financial and real-estate businesses found in



Figure 7a-c. Signage in the 'autochthonous' shopping and service area of Grand-Case

this area, display predominantly or exclusively French signage. This could be due to the fact that these businesses do not only cater for local residents, but, contrary to the businesses in the central area, they do not address specifically an Anglo-American tourist clientele either. For the medical and financial service providers, it may well be that – not unlike the post office, which however is located in another part of the survey area – they aim at a more 'official' appearance, due to the essential type of services they provide, and therefore comply with the official language policy of Saint-Martin, which calls for the use of French and overrides, in these cases, the speaker- and addressee-oriented preference for the *de facto* vernacular language of the island.

5 Conclusions

The purpose of the present contribution was to verify if the complex (socio-) linguistic configuration of present-day Saint-Martin, as outlined in ch. 3, with English and French as competing vernacular and/or vehicular languages, a configuration which is an outcome of the peculiar history of St. Martin and of socio-economic changes that the island in general, and the French side in particular, has experienced in the past half century, as described in ch. 2, is reflected in the LL of the emblematic village of Grand-Case and, more precisely, in its 'bottom-up' commercial signage. The empirical results, described and discussed in par. 4.3, in part confirm the working hypothesis formulated in par. 4.2: English, as the dominant language among the local population and the mother tongue of the majority of autochthonous Saint-Martinois, but also of the most important share of the tourists paying a visit to St. Martin, clearly turns out to be the dominant language in the business LL of Grand-Case, too, namely with regard to informative / denotative language use. The status of French, the official language of Saint-Martin, is ambiguous and more difficult to pin down: on the 'bottom-up' signage at stake, it is also used informatively on many occasions, be it in part-writings or on homophonous signs alongside with English, and with the 'diverse services' branch among Grand-Case's business ventures, and the medical / health, financial and public services in particular, a segment of commercial activity could be identified that on its signs overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, communicates with its potential customers in French. On the other hand, in the gastronomic branch, which is of premier importance for Grand-Case's economy and tourist image, clear indications of commodification of French and a tendency towards predominantly symbolic / connotative use

of the language could be detected. The situation is still more blurred with regard to the accommodation and tourist-oriented non-food-selling businesses; particularly among the gift and clothing stores claiming to sell local arts and crafts products, French is used both as a medium of information, as a symbol for high-quality standards and authenticity, and as an identitarian expression, and these functions are intermingled in an intricate manner. The necessity of a French version of every written element (apart from names and brands) in commercial communication and advertising, which otherwise is a general requirement imposed by France's language policy and legal regulations, is complied with *cum grano salis* by Saint-Martin's business owners. The two other languages identified in the LL of business in Grand-Case, Italian and Spanish, are relegated to (almost) exclusively symbolic uses. As emphasized above, the present study is very limited in scope and addresses only one narrow domain of language use in Saint-Martin. Still, in doing so and despite its limitations, it can perhaps contribute to stir up the interest in Saint-Martin's linguistic landscape (in a broader sense) and stimulate further, and more comprehensive, (socio-)linguistic research on this remarkable and unique Caribbean island.

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