

**SIGNAGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: A LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE STUDY OF
LETHBRIDGE**

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ABSTRACT

The study examines how multilingual signage and product displays in immigrant-owned and mainstream grocery stores in Lethbridge, Alberta, reflect cultural identity and acculturation. Using linguistic landscape analysis, the study compares six stores: Real Canadian Superstore, Save On Foods, Asian Supermarket, Umami Shop, Genesis Exotic Market, and Vestelyn Varieties. Data were collected through photographs, field notes, and a Ghanaian menu-based shopping exercise designed to test the availability and presentation of culturally specific ingredients across the stores. The analysis shows that the stores differ significantly in how they represent immigrant foods and audiences. Mainstream supermarkets offer only partial support for Ghanaian cooking, while immigrant-owned stores, especially Vestelyn Varieties, provide stronger access to authentic ingredients and culturally familiar retail environments. Asian Supermarket occupies a high position next to Vestelyn as compared to Genesis, which is the intermediate, while Umami Shop presents global foods through a curated, cosmopolitan frame. The study argues that linguistic landscapes in retail spaces do more than display language; rather, they index belonging, cultural maintenance, and different forms of acculturation in a mid-sized Canadian city.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the University of Lethbridge. The data used in this research were collected from publicly accessible commercial spaces, and no private or sensitive personal information was gathered. Where necessary, consent was obtained from the store owners before photographs were taken, and care was taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals and businesses involved in the study. This study was approved by the University of Lethbridge Research Ethics Board Committee (REB1), study ID Pro00163027.

USE OF GENERATIVE AI

AI was not used by the student in the research, editing, and writing of this thesis, except to the degree it was unavoidable as part of consumer-focused applications and software (like Grammarly and AI searches in Google etc.).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As diversity in Canada has risen, a variety of linguistic practices have emerged in urban and semi-urban areas. The language of a group of individuals defines who they are. Language can be said to be an essential cultural medium that captures the subtleties and values that are specific to a certain civilization. A crucial factor influencing international marketing is having a thorough appreciation of the host nation's culture (Torkestani et al., 2025). Therefore, finding market niches in the global market that are culturally recognizable and comparable to the culture of the place of an immigrant's origin is vital. Nonetheless, the incorporation of foreign terms into a language frequently leads to discussions on the possible dilution or alteration of cultural identity (Evans, 2025; Zenner, Rosseel, & Calude, 2019). With its emphasis on language phenomena and signals shown in public settings, the linguistic landscape is a significant field of research within sociolinguistics (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Hu, 2021). Central to this field is the idea that public space itself is saturated with written and visual language, extending far beyond conventional printed texts.

While we tend to think of books and other types of authored documents as “written texts,” names of streets and buildings, signboards, traffic signs, and other types of displayed writing must also be considered. This distinction between *authored writing* (such as books, newspapers, and official documents) and *environmental writing* (including street signs, shop names, and public displays) appears frequently in linguistic landscape research, with many studies employing this analytical framework (Shohamy and Gorter, 2008). This study intends to find out if the linguistic landscape of Lethbridge shops reflects the cultural identity of the targeted audience. It also aims to explore how shop owners in Lethbridge use the linguistic landscape to portray acculturation into mainstream Canadian society.

The phrase “linguistic landscape,” according to Landry and Bourhis (1997), typically refers to all readable characteristics that are apparent to individuals in each location. It is worth

noting that the linguistic landscape extends beyond traditional road signs, billboards, and street names, among others, as the concept may encompass other forms of mobile signage (Hong, 2020), such as branded vehicles. The language manifestations of immigrant groups are becoming more noticeable in public settings, particularly in marketplaces, as they relocate into relatively smaller areas like Lethbridge, Alberta. (Bonifacio & Drolet, 2016; Lok & Zhuang, 2025). These statements are frequently made visible through signage, which serves both sociocultural and communication purposes. There are numerous individuals from several different nations who call Canada their home.

The World Migration Report 2018 states that Canada had the seventh-highest percentage of foreign-born citizens in 2015, with 22% of its population being immigrants (Morozovskaia, 2021). These immigrants contribute significantly to Canada's economy in terms of providing a labor market, increasing public finance, and yielding economic growth. That is, immigrants are found to take up low- and high-income jobs, fulfil their tax obligations, patronize transportation, purchase and/or rent accommodations, purchase goods and services, and, most importantly, related to this study, establish businesses in Canada (OECD, 2018). Relevant to this study is the establishment of immigrant-owned markets or shopping centers in Lethbridge, Alberta. Specifically, markets owned by immigrants from Asia, Ghana, and Nigeria. It is enlightening to know that Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC, 2017) revealed that immigrants are more likely than Canadians to be entrepreneurs, which has steadily been increasing Canada's trade relations with immigrants' home countries.

Linguistic expression and cultural identity maintenance are crucial in multicultural communities such as Canada. Additionally, multiculturalism can help the native populace have more favorable views of newcomers (Ward & Masgoret, 2006). In contexts where minority or local languages are dominant, the growing use of borrowed English words in marketplaces and on public signage can contribute to the marginalization of local languages

and, by extension, shifts in cultural identity (Evans, 2025). At the same time, migration itself may reshape individuals' identities, worldviews, and self-perceptions as they adapt to new linguistic and cultural environments (Schwartz et al., 2006). Thus, people's cultural identities may shift when they attempt to blend in with a new setting and culture. Yet, being conscious of a person's identity and how it has changed may facilitate a more seamless transition into a new society and foster a closer bond with it.

1.1 Problem Statement

The promotion of immigrant languages and the official Languages of Canada continue to clash, regardless of the country's formal bilingualism and tolerance for diversity. Ibodullayeva (2024) has argued that in non-English-speaking contexts, the introduction of English borrowings into local languages may contribute to cultural and linguistic change, including a weakening of linguistic identity. However, other studies have also posited that some cultures show unusual adaptation and resilience to linguistic changes; the impact is less than anticipated (Qani, 2025). Gaining knowledge of how language and culture interact can help one grasp the wider social effects of linguistic intervention, eventually demonstrating the resilience of cultural identities. Moreover, there is limited study on smaller metropolitan areas (Gorter & Cenoz, 2020), such as Lethbridge, as studies conducted to date have mostly concentrated on large cities or in other provinces and/or countries: for instance, Cormier (2019) studied the trans-language and linguistic landscapes of Manitoban schools, while Song (2024) researched the linguistic landscapes of Chinatowns situated in Canada and the United States. Also in Montreal, Leimgruber and Fernandez-Mallat (2021) assessed the language attitudes and identity building in the city's linguistic landscape. Hatoss (2022) carried out a study in Ottawa regarding linguistic landscapes as a practice and pedagogy. Bouchard (2024) explored language ideologies and the use of French in an English-dominant setting. There are just a few studies that have included participants from more than one city or province, such

as the study by Morozovskaia (2021), which considered seven provinces in Canada. Considering studies carried out outside of Canada, Hong (2020) assessed the linguistic landscapes of a Chinese community in Seoul, a city in South Korea; similarly, Anderson et al. (2020) examined the linguistic landscape of Accra, the capital of Ghana. Gyasi et al. (2023) also conducted a study in Cape Coast, a city in Ghana, to discover the various linguistic landscapes. Other cities in several other countries have been studied concerning the linguistic landscapes they bear (Xie, 2020; Owusu-Afriyie, 2020; Gu, 2024; Rungswang, 2023; Tian & Tian, 2023; Vitasari & Agustinus, 2022; Kim et al., 2025).

Linguistic landscape research has increasingly turned its attention to commercial spaces, where signage does not merely convey practical information but also indexes the identities, languages, and cultural affiliations of those who inhabit and use that space. Immigrant-owned markets in Canada provide distinctive environments in which signage contributes to how social integration and cultural identity are visually constructed.

Yet there is relatively little research on how such visual indicators function in smaller Canadian cities, where they may serve as important resources for negotiating and expressing cultural identity. Haugen et al. (2024) note that Canadian research on immigrant settlement tends to focus on large urban centers, a pattern that would include the underrepresentation of smaller centers such as Lethbridge. This study addresses that gap by examining the linguistic landscapes of selected immigrant-owned businesses in Lethbridge and analyzing how their signage portrays cultural identity and social integration within Canadian society.

1.2 Research Objectives

The research objective of this thesis is to understand the interaction of language use as an index of acculturation and differences in the immigrant shopkeeper community of Lethbridge, Alberta.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do Lethbridge shopkeepers use the linguistic landscape of their stores to indicate their target audience?
2. What does the linguistic landscape of immigrant-owned shops say about their owners' acculturation in Lethbridge?

1.4 Significance of the Study

To better understand the sociolinguistic makeup of a region, it is useful to identify the kind of linguistic landscape present in the area. An outcome of this study is a reference for identifying problems with the policy of language, position, role, and public opinion. It furthers the knowledge of how linguistic landscapes serve as political and cultural texts within migrant societies. The findings provide meaningful and useful awareness for other stakeholders, including but not limited to government policymakers, educational institutions, and sociolinguists, who are interested in improving the policies of urban language, visibility in culture, diversity, and inclusion. Additionally, the discoveries of this study encourage comprehensive urban planning and enhance immigrant support services.

This thesis proceeds in two parts. The first part offers a linguistic-landscape reading of how the six stores represent themselves through signage, product grouping, and branding. The second part tests that self-representation empirically, using a West African recipe as a research instrument to ask how far each stores presentation matches its actual utility for a diaspora shopper. Both parts are read against Berry (1997) and Silverstein (2003). Berry is used to supply a spectrum of acculturation while Silverstein supplies the mechanism by which a store comes to occupy a position on it. On this account signage and stock are both acts of indexing: they presuppose a particular community of shoppers and thereby entail a claim about the store's relation to heritage and host culture.

The two parts of the thesis correspond to two levels of that indexing. What a storefront claim about its audience is one order of index; what its shelves presuppose about what (and who) will cook from them is another. The recipe test is the instrument that separates the two, and where they diverge — as they do most sharply at Umami Shop and at Asian Supermarket — the divergence is itself the finding.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The fundamental framework for this research is the concept of the linguistic landscape. The term “linguistic landscape” describes all the readable features that people in a certain place can observe (Landry & Bourhis 1997). Landry and Bourhis further suggest that the linguistic landscape might have significant symbolic and informative purposes as a gauge of the relative strength and standing of the local linguistic societies. Some studies have focused on the social and political spectrum of visible language in public settings (Holmes & Wilson 2022; Gorter 2006). As Kallen (2023) argues, the temporally and geographically vibrant combination of materials, scripts, and discourse that contribute to a linguistic landscape has made it a prominent area of sociolinguistic study. Linguistic landscape researchers are curious about how signage informs readers about the cultural perception of each language and the function or functions it fulfills in society (Dressler, 2015). This current study, therefore, mirrors prior studies by linguistic landscape researchers (Acar, 2024; Gorter, 2013; and Malinowski et al., 2021) by establishing the relationship between linguistic landscape and cultural identity.

Although the world is becoming increasingly multifaceted due to migration, many immigrants experience a loss of cultural heritage, particularly in terms of language, as migration and integration into host societies often contribute to language shift and attrition (Nesteruk, 2010; Place & Hoff, 2023). However, immigrants have several difficulties as they attempt to adjust to a nation with distinct linguistic, cultural, and geographic traits after leaving their native countries (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). According to Poyrazli and Lopez’s (2007) study which examined the perceived discrimination and homesickness of international students, it was identified that these immigrants face challenges such as continuously vacillating between preserving one’s own cultural identity and embracing new cultural ideals as well as substituting a new culture or setting where one is viewed as an outsider for a support

system of families, allies, and neighbors (Poyrazli and Lopez 2007). Thus, immigrants are often left with the option to either assimilate, coexist, or resist the culture of their new home.

Several studies have examined linguistic landscapes and their relation to cultural identity, integration, and immigrant resistance in host countries. Anderson et al. (2020), in their study of the linguistic landscape of the central business district of Accra, Ghana, found that the very busy linguistic landscape of the city was made up of signboards, billboards, taglines, and signposts, and these were predominantly scripted in English. Similarly, Hong (2020) studied the linguistic landscapes in street-level images of South Korea. Even though the study found most of the city's linguistic landscape to be in Korean, he found it interesting that the number of signs with Chinese scripts had increased from a mean of 4.6% in 2008 to 11.4% in 2018. Rungswang (2023) carried out a study in Thailand on the linguistic landscape, its forms, and functions on the road. It was evident from the findings that Thai-only signs were nonexistent on the roads, whereas English Thai signs (bilingual signs) were found to be the majority, and next to them in hierarchy were English-only signs.

Xie (2022) analyzed the competition between Romanized scripts in public space, considering the linguistic landscape of the shop signs in Zhanjiang, China. The findings of the study revealed that since English is linked to internationalization and superior quality, local store owners chose it for their signs over the Hanyu pinyin language. Thus, the linguistic landscape analyzed did not represent the local linguistic heritage (cultural identity) of the city. Morozovskaia (2021) found, from the study of the linguistic journey of Russian-speaking immigrants in Canada, that the surveyed participants equally promoted or supported both the Canadian and Russian language and culture. Moreover, the study found that even though learning English or French was vital, learning French or English became less important than preserving Russian. These findings suggest that participants successfully integrated into

Canadian society while maintaining their Russian cultural identity by prioritizing their native language over the dominant languages (English and French). Although multi-lingualism plays a less central role in the stores analyzed in this thesis than in much Linguistic Landscape literature, the approach is still relevant to this project because it shows how linguistic landscapes can index identity and social belonging, especially in multilingual and immigrant settings.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Linguistic Landscape Theory

The linguistic landscape theory, developed by Landry and Bourhis (1997), argued that, in multilingual environments, the linguistic landscape must be considered as a significant sociolinguistic element influencing the survival of rival ethnolinguistic groups. They defined the linguistic landscape in two forms. Firstly, it is the “visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region”. Secondly, as shop signs, billboards, road signs, street names, names of places, signs on government buildings of a given territory or region” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, 25). According to the authors, the linguistic landscape of a territory can serve two basic functions: an informational function and a symbolic function. Serving as a unique indicator of the geographic area occupied by a particular language group is the linguistic landscape’s most fundamental informative function (Bourhis, 1992). As a result, the linguistic landscape informs in-group as well as out-group affiliates on the linguistic traits, borders, and geographical bounds of the area they have entered.

In other words, the variety of languages found on signs tells us about the sociolinguistic makeup of a region, as well as the relative status and authority of a certain group. The symbolic function, on the other hand, refers to the inclusion of the in-group language on public signs that is affectively charged and that complements the informational function of the linguistic landscape (Quebec, 1996). According to this function, one’s own

language group's power, worth, prestige, or vitality within sociolinguistic contexts can be enhanced by the appearance of its language on both private and public signs. These include but are not limited to advertising billboards, shop signs, names on governmental buildings, and public road signs, among others. Language has become the most significant aspect of ethnic identification in contexts where the symbolic function of the linguistic landscape is highly prominent (Sachdev, Bourhis & D'Eye, 1990). The in-group language's ability to positively impact ethnolinguistic groups' cultural identities may be most clearly attributed to these kinds of environments. The theory appropriately sets out a guide for this study as it gives a clear and concise definition of what can be considered a linguistic landscape, as well as providing a basis for the conceptual framework, where the study assumes that the linguistic choices by immigrant business owners may portray their cultural identity. However, cultural identity for immigrant population is rarely static; rather, it is continuously negotiated as individuals balance their heritage culture with the norms and expectations of their host society. This process of negotiation is the central concern of acculturation studies, which offers a framework for understanding how immigrants' visible linguistic choices may reflect broader strategies of cultural adaptation and identity maintenance.

2.1.2 Berry's Bidimensional Model of Acculturation

The first and most important study on acculturation is Berry's definition of cultural adaptation (1997). This paradigm evaluates inclinations to both the host culture and the native culture of an individual. With this method, people might report different degrees of acceptance and adherence to both their home and host cultures. According to Berry (1997), four different forms of acculturation result from varying degrees of involvement with the two extremes of cultural orientations: separation, marginalization, assimilation, and integration. Separation happens when people discard the new culture while clinging to their old one. Giving up one's native cultural identity and fully assimilating into a new one is known as assimilation. When

people continue to have healthy relationships with both their new and their old cultures, integration takes place. Being marginalized entails not adhering to any culture, which is neither the individual's host culture nor their home culture. According to Kuo, it is believed that the four acculturation techniques that a particular group uses represent the coping mechanisms they use to control their interactions with the host or dominant cultural group (Kuo, 2014).

Acculturation is further divided by the theory into "group-level" and "individual-level" effects (Berry, 1997). According to the concept, some individual and group-level elements that arise before and during acculturation might influence the course and results of migrants' adaptation. When groups undergo cultural change, they typically begin by identifying the specific pressures they face in the new environment; an example is language barriers, unfamiliar social norms, workplace expectations, or experiences of exclusion. Based on how they interpret these stressors, they adopt coping strategies such as learning the dominant language, seeking support from co-ethnic networks, maintaining key heritage practices, or selectively adopting elements of the host culture. These strategies in turn shape outcomes such as levels of psychological stress, feelings of belonging, and the extent to which original cultural identities are maintained, modified, or blended with new identities. The group will then experience long-term results from this, expectedly in the form of a successful adaptation. The theory suggests some moderating factors for an individual before acculturation at the individual level. These include demographics (such as gender, status, age, level of education, etc.), migration intent, personality traits, and cultural distance (such as language, religion, etc.). During the acculturation process, factors that can moderate it include support from society, the length of the acculturation process, techniques and resources for coping, among others.

The theory was chosen for this study because it has a strong conceptual and empirical appeal in sociological and psychological research. Moreover, the theory is suited for this study due to its links to a variety of psychosocial issues among migrants. Berry's model of acculturation serves as a fundamental basis for identifying whether participants are integrating, assimilating, separating, or marginalizing in the Canadian context.

2.1.3 Silverstein's theory of indexicality

Silverstein's (2003) theory of indexicality explains how linguistic landscape signs generate meanings beyond their literal content. It is particularly useful for linguistic landscape research. Silverstein distinguishes between indexical presupposition, where a sign reflects a preexisting social reality, and indexical entailment, where a sign actively constructs a new social meaning through its use. This distinction is useful for linguistic landscape research because it allows signs to be read as active sites of meaning making rather than functioning as neutral texts. Signs may index broader social identities and relationships through language choice, script, layout, and visual design. In multilingual environments, these features can signal ethnicity, class position, consumer orientation, and transnational affiliation. This same logic extends beyond language itself: the presence of specific heritage ingredients can likewise function indexically, presupposing an existing community of consumers while entailing claims about a business's cultural identity and level of acculturation—a connection this study develops further below.

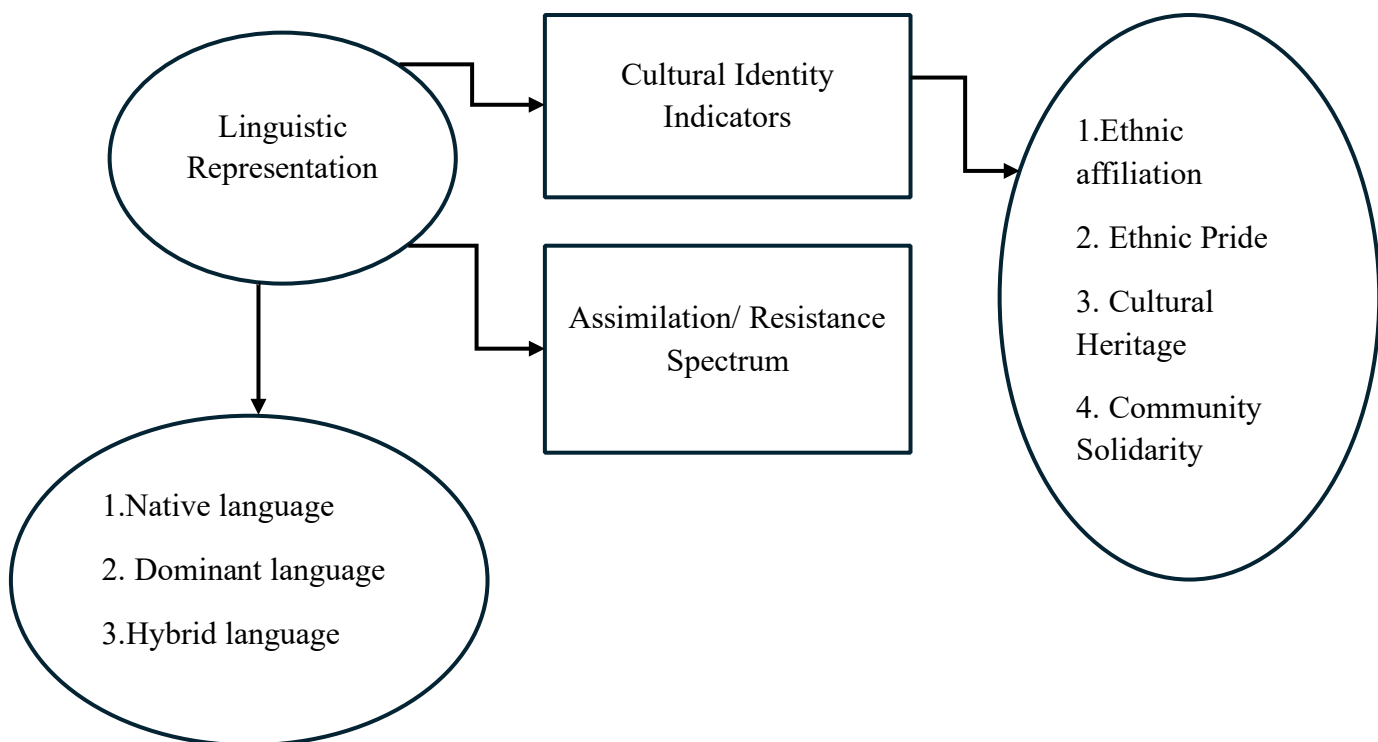
2.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is portrayed in Figure 2. 1. The rationale is that the choice of linguistic landscapes used in the various immigrant-owned markets serves as a facilitating artifact between cultural identity and integration into a society. Hence, the focus of this study is the linguistic landscapes of shops in Lethbridge. This will involve identifying how shop owners or managers use the linguistic landscape of their stores to express and attract

a target audience. The other part of the study focuses on societal integration. The conceptual framework assumes that the linguistic landscape choices may either reflect the cultural identity of the targeted audience or otherwise depict the absence of one. Thus, the framework assumes the various linguistic landscapes used in these shops can reveal if shop owners are assimilating into the Canadian culture, otherwise resisting or coexisting with the Canadian culture. Berry's model and Silverstein's theory of indexicality do different but complementary work in this framework. Berry supplies the spectrum itself; the range of positions, from separation through integration to assimilation, along which a store's practices can be located. Silverstein supplies the mechanism by which a store comes to occupy a position on that spectrum: the act of indexing, through language, script, layout, and product choice, of a particular relationship to heritage and host culture. Berry names the destinations; Silverstein explains how signage gets you there.

The three major elements of the conceptual framework (linguistic representation, cultural identity, and integration/resistance spectrum) are defined as follows. Figure 2.1.

Conceptual Framework of the Study



1. Linguistic representation

Refers to the kind of scripts or languages used in the signs of the selected immigrant markets. These languages could be the dominant language of the city (that is, English); the other official language (that is, French); the native language (such as the Akan Ghanaian language, Chinese, and Nigerian Yoruba, etc.); and other local languages (such as the Canadian Indigenous languages, Japanese, Polish, etc.). This considers the way a given community's social stance is reflected in the choice of language, grading, and prominence of languages. The visual dominance of languages and the frequency of monolingual vs multilingual signage are examples of this.

2. Cultural identity

Involves how signs used in the selected immigrant markets convey elements of ethnic pride, cultural history, and collective identification. Thus, these signs used could be connected to the cultural background of the owners or patrons. These scripts or signs can be made up of native icons, wise sayings, names, or cultural themes. In open spaces, these elements support the heritage of culture and a feeling of communal cohesion.

3. The integration or resistance spectrum

Examines whether signs used in the selected markets in Lethbridge reflect inclinations for conflict, cohabitation, or cultural alignment. The use of linguistic landscapes that combine multiple languages (dominant and native languages) and the use of translations may communicate cultural integration; whereas the predominant use of native languages against the dominant language may reflect cultural resistance.

This study is built on the connection established between these three elements of the conceptual framework, and it will guide the study's data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach and Design

This study adopts a multimodal ethnographic design that combines linguistic landscape analysis, commercial space ethnography, and visual documentation to examine multilingualism as an index of acculturation among immigrant shopkeepers in Lethbridge, Alberta. The central objective is to understand how multilingual practices in commercial spaces interact with differences within the immigrant shopkeeper community, focusing on how language choices, product curation, and spatial organization materialize acculturation processes in everyday retail environments. Multilingualism is conceptualized as a set of visible and spatialized practices that both reflect and shape shopkeepers' positions along Berry's two acculturation dimensions: heritage cultural maintenance and engagement with the host society. Following Silverstein's notion of indexicality, linguistic forms on signage and packaging are treated not only as referential but as social indexes that point to identities, target publics, and imagined communities.

This study's design is descriptive, with the use of pictures, using a qualitative research approach. The design for this study is based on the linguistic landscape theory and utilizes visual content analysis of signage mounted or used in Lethbridge markets owned by immigrants and those that are not. This method made it possible to understand language use in physical environments in a rich way, reflecting and negotiating cultural identity and integration. The selected area of study was Lethbridge, Alberta. Lethbridge has come to be known as one of the fastest-growing economic cities in southern Canada due to the number of immigrants in the city (Toneguzzi, 2019).

3.2 Data Collection

The study used primary data gathered by the researcher through photographs of labels, posters, directional signs, banners, and advertisements displayed in publicly accessible spaces of the

selected shops in Lethbridge. It employed a purposive sampling technique to select markets, which are ethno-cultural commercial shops, predominantly patronized by immigrants from Ghana, Nigeria, and Asia (China, India, and the Philippines), and the general-market stores. Considering the number of shops targeted at these immigrant groups in Lethbridge, the study includes at least one shop from each group, as well as an equal number of Canadian shops. A list of shops included: two explicitly African-community-focused shops: Vestelyn Varieties and Genesis Exotic Market; two “Asian” shops (although, as we shall see, these stores have a broader focus than this name implies) that are owned by the same family but have very different market positions: Asian Supermarket and Umami; and two general-market shops: Real Canadian Superstore and Save-On-Foods. The inclusion criteria for the linguistic landscape of the shops were that signs had to be publicly visible; contain textual elements, even when combined with pictures, symbols, or colors; and relate to the cultural/ethnic group, whether by name, script, language, imagery, or ownership. Further, to assess how effectively the stores supported immigrant food practices, a standardized shopping list was developed from a West African recipe and used as a basis for comparison across the selected stores.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data gathered will be analyzed qualitatively, where the various signs will be coded thematically to categorize them into the kind of language/script used, whether it is multilingual or monolingual, translated, whether it possesses any visual hierarchy of the sign, and whether cultural or ethnic symbols appear through colors, images, or other design features. The study will also use semiotic analysis to identify meanings beyond language, including spatial arrangement, imagery, and color, as well as the symbolic positioning of signs in relation to identity, inclusion, exclusion, or resistance. On this basis, the signs will be classified along an integration continuum that includes exclusive ethnic signs, which use heritage-language or culturally specific branding with a strong ethnic identity signal;

integrated bilingual signs, in which ethnic and English elements are intentionally designed together; and add-on bilingual signs, in which English or French is added mainly for regulatory or communicative purposes without replacing the original ethnic branding; and mainstream English-only signs, which use English alone and do not include explicit ethnic branding. The analysis will show how linguistic language design and sign placement communicate inclusion, exclusion, division, or cultural pride.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

The methodology is grounded in three interrelated theoretical strands as discussed in the previous chapter. First, linguistic landscape (Landry and Bourhis 1997) research emphasizes the visibility and hierarchy of languages in public and commercial signage as indicators of which languages and communities are locally salient. Second, Berry's (1997) bidimensional model of acculturation provides a framework for interpreting linguistic and spatial patterns in terms of integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization strategies. Third, Silverstein's (2003) theory of indexicality informs the treatment of multilingual signs as layered indexes of ethnicity, class, consumer identities, and transnational orientations, rather than as neutral information displays.

Within this framework, multilingual signs and product arrangements are analyzed as semiotic resources through which shopkeepers negotiate economic survival, cultural continuity, and inclusion in Canadian society. The interpretive focus is on how language combinations, scripts, and visual hierarchies signal different imagined customer bases, degrees of openness to wider publics, and intra-community distinctions among immigrant groups.

3.5 Research Context and Site Selection

Lethbridge, Alberta, is a medium-sized Canadian city with an increasingly diverse population (Statistics Canada, 2021), including significant Filipino, Chinese, South Asian, and Africanorigin

communities. Its commercial landscape is characterized by both large mainstream grocery chains that have added international sections and smaller immigrant-owned specialty stores operating as ethnic and multicultural hubs. This dual structure makes the city an appropriate context for examining how ownership, scale, and corporate policy shape multilingual practices and acculturation trajectories.

A purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2015) was used to select sites representing contrasting retail typologies:

1. Two large mainstream grocery retailers (Real Canadian Superstore and Save-On-Foods)
2. Two small immigrant-owned specialty stores (Vestelyn Varieties International Foods and Genesis Exotic Market).
3. Two Asian stores (Umami Shop, a curated ‘world food’ retailer, and Asian Supermarket, a long-established immigrant grocery)

Mainstream chains were selected to access corporate strategies toward multicultural consumer markets, while the immigrant-owned stores were chosen as a case of entrepreneurial acculturation where the owner has high discretion over language and products.

3.6 Data Sources and Corpus

The primary data set consists of 44 photographs collected across the six site types, supplemented by contemporaneous field notes on spatial organization, customer traffic, and interactional language use. These pictures are stored in a Zenodo repository to ensure longterm preservation and citable access for other researchers (Tabiri 2026). The pictures document exterior facades, internal layout, section signage, and specific product displays, with particular attention to multilingual packaging, international aisles, and non-food cultural products such as hair extensions, textiles, and decorative items. The corpus is structured into three broad categories to facilitate comparative analysis:

1. Images of mainstream stores (Superstore, Save-On-Foods),
2. Images of immigrant-owned stores (Vestelyn Varieties, Genesis),
3. Images of immigrant integrated stores (Asian supermarket and Umami shop), and
4. Images of cross-cutting product categories (staple foods, prepared foods, condiments, beverages, personal care items, and cultural/decorative products). This structuring supports systematic comparison across ownership types, ethnic sections, and product categories, directly aligning with the study's objective of relating multilingualism to acculturation and intra-community differences.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

Fieldwork was conducted over five days (26-30 November 2025) during regular business hours to capture stores under typical conditions and pre-holiday product displays. Mainstream supermarkets were treated as public commercial spaces where photography of shelves and signage is generally permitted, while entry into the immigrant-owned store followed a customer-first approach, with verbal permission requested before focused photographic documentation. Photographs were taken using smartphone cameras (iPhone 16 Plus and iPhone 16 Pro Max) to minimize intrusiveness and to reflect typical customer perspectives in the stores. A systematic protocol guided documentation of

1. Exterior signage and surrounding streetscape,
2. Overall store layout and placement of international or ethnic sections, and
3. Detailed close-ups of product categories across food, personal care, and cultural items, with explicit attention to visible languages, scripts, and spatial hierarchies. The final selection of six stores emerged from methodological refinement. An initial comparison between mainstream stores (Real Canadian Superstore, Save-On-Foods) and immigrant-owned stores (Genesis Exotic Market, Vestelyn Varieties) risked creating a false binary, in which stores within each category appeared similar while differences across categories

remained unexamined. The addition of two intermediate stores, Umami Shop and Asian Supermarket, provided crucial comparative leverage and allowed for a more nuanced analysis. Notably, these two stores are owned by the same Vietnamese Canadian family, presenting often identical merchandise in strikingly different market presentations, enabling analysis of how the same objects index different acculturation strategies and consumer communities.

3.8 Ethical Considerations and Positionality

Ethical considerations centered on minimizing disruption, protecting privacy, and ensuring responsible representation of immigrant businesses and communities. Photographs were composed to avoid capturing identifiable customers or staff whenever possible; images with recognizable individuals were either not taken or excluded from the analytic corpus, and the immigrant-owned store's participation was based on verbal consent and a clear explanation of the research purpose. Data were stored in access-controlled cloud storage. Reporting was limited to information already publicly visible in the retail environment and avoided commercially sensitive disclosures. The researcher's positionality as an observer situated within Canadian society but not a member of all focal communities' shapes what is considered salient; reflexive notes taken during and after fieldwork attend to this partial perspective, especially in the interpretation of heritage languages and the meaning of products or brands.

3.9 Data Management and Organization

Handwritten field notes were typed within 24 hours, tagged by store and section, and crossreferenced with image IDs to enable triangulation between visual evidence, spatial observations, and interactional notes. A master spreadsheet was created to serve as a coding and analysis matrix, with each row representing a photographed display or sign and columns recording the store type, product category, languages present, script, language hierarchy, communicative function, spatial location within the store, and analytic comments. This

database provides the quantitative and qualitative backbone for the subsequent phases of analysis outlined below.

3.10 Analytical Framework and Procedures

The analysis proceeds through four interconnected phases, each addressing specific dimensions of the research objective while building toward an integrated interpretation of multilingualism as an index of acculturation and community difference.

Phase 1: Linguistic Landscape Analysis

The first analytic phase consists of a visual survey of the photographic corpus to identify the languages and textual elements present in each image. The analysis then considers how languages and text functions contribute to patterns of representation and transnational linkage.

Phase 2: Spatial and Organizational Analysis

The second phase analyses how multilingual products are spatially organized within and across stores, treating layout as a semiotic resource that indexes cultural boundaries and degrees of integration. Aisle maps and wide-angle photographs are used to reconstruct the placement of international or ethnic sections relative to mainstream categories, noting whether products are fully integrated, partially segregated, or spatially isolated. For each product type (e.g., rice, sauces, personal care), shelf placement (eye-level vs. lower shelves), length of shelf space allocated, and promotional emphasis (endcaps, sale signs) are recorded, enabling comparison of the prominence of different cultural products and communities. This spatial coding is applied separately to mainstream supermarkets and the immigrant-owned store, highlighting differences in how corporate retailers and immigrant entrepreneurs categorize and display cultural goods.

Phase 3: Acculturation Indexicality Analysis

The third phase draws explicitly on Berry's (1997) acculturation model to interpret linguistic and spatial patterns as indexes of acculturation strategies. Berry's model posits four

acculturation strategies based on two dimensions 1. Maintaining one's heritage culture and identity

2. Seeking relationships with the larger society.

In the limited cases where multilingual displays appear, they suggest attempts to balance cultural specificity with broader customer outreach. In some ethnic sections, predominantly English-only packaging and signage may indicate efforts to make ethnic goods legible to mainstream consumers. Conversely, displays where heritage language dominates, and English is minimal or absent, particularly in the immigrant-owned store, are treated as indexing separation strategies focused on serving first-generation or intra-community clientele.

Marginalization is examined through cases where neither heritage languages nor English are strongly foregrounded—for example, aestheticized scripts that are not legible to local communities or generic global branding that erases specific cultural references—though such cases are expected to be rarer in the corpus. Silverstein's concept of layered indexicality is used to attend to how the same multilingual sign can simultaneously index ethnicity, cosmopolitanism, and market segmentation depending on its language mix and visual design.

Phase 4: Comparative Pattern Analysis

The final analytic phase conducts systematic comparisons across store types, product categories, and ethnic sections using Vestelyn Varieties serving as a locally grounded index store against which other Lethbridge retail spaces are read. The comparison proceeds along two dimensions:

1. How English and heritage languages are distributed between store-level signage and product packaging.
2. The degree to which cultural goods are integrated into the overall store layouts. Together, these comparisons reveal how retail spaces index the visibility and cultural positioning of immigrant communities in Lethbridge.

Phase 5: Description of the Recipe

Finally, this thesis used a standardized recipe test to evaluate how each store's selfpresentation translated into practical support for Ghanaian cooking. Using a typical Ghanaian beans stew recipe (Chefabby, 2024), I converted the ingredient list into a shopping checklist and visited each of the six stores with it. For every ingredient, I documented availability (alignment with West African diaspora expectations), presentation strategy (labeling, packaging, spatial organization), price range, and photographic evidence. This fifth phase of data collection links the visual and historical analysis of the stores to an embodied, recipebased assessment of how immigrant culinary practices are materially supported or constrained within Lethbridge's retail environment.

3.11 Inferring Community Indexing and Commercial Integration

Across all phases, the analysis treats linguistic choices as clues to the imagined customer base and the shopkeeper's own acculturation trajectory. For example, multilingual packaging combining heritage languages, English, and sometimes French in mainstream stores is interpreted as targeting multicultural shoppers and second-generation consumers who navigate both heritage and Canadian linguistic repertoires.

In the immigrant-owned stores, heritage-language-dominant labeling, dense displays of community-specific products, and the presence of community notices or informal gathering spaces are examined as indices of cultural maintenance and intra-community solidarity. At the same time, the inclusion of Canadian mainstream brands and English signage in this store is treated as evidence of economic integration and outreach beyond a single ethnic group, positioning the store as a bridge between heritage cultures and broader Canadian society.

3.12 Rigor and Acknowledging Limitations

3.12.1 Limitations

Considering the type of data used for the study (photographs), the findings will be susceptible to presenting what is only observed or seen by the researcher and might not elicit what the community or shop owners perceive to be the intended meaning behind the signs. To enhance rigor, the analysis relies on triangulation among visual data, field notes, and spatial observations, systematically applies coding categories across the corpus, and actively seeks negative cases that challenge emerging interpretations. Informal conversations with staff, where ethically possible, serve as member-checking opportunities (sharing with participants information given initially to confirm accuracy) to test whether researchers' readings of linguistic and spatial choices align with shopkeepers' own accounts, while recognizing that full interview data are beyond the scope of this study. Several important limitations constrain the methodology. First, the study includes only six retail sites, limiting the generalizability of findings to broader patterns of immigrant retail practices in Lethbridge or other Canadian contexts.

Secondly, data collection occurred during a single five-day period in late November 2025, capturing a pre-holiday snapshot that may not represent seasonal variations in product offerings or linguistic displays throughout the year. Thirdly, the absence of systematic interview data means that interpretations of shopkeepers' intentions and customers' experiences remain inferential, derived from visible signs and spatial arrangements rather than direct accounts.

Also, in a limited number of cases, language identification relied on visual cues and was therefore treated with caution where uncertainty remained. The study focuses exclusively on visual and spatial data, excluding the auditory dimensions of multilingualism, such as

instore announcements, staff-customer interactions, and background music that might provide additional layers of acculturation indexing.

These limitations are addressed by framing the study as an in-depth, exploratory case analysis rather than a representative survey, by cautiously interpreting linguistic landscapes as indicative rather than definitive evidence of acculturation strategies, and by acknowledging that the findings represent visible dimensions of multilingualism that may not capture the full complexity of shopkeepers' and customers' lived experiences. Future research could address these constraints through longitudinal observation, systematic interviews with shopkeepers and customers, and expansion to additional retail sites and immigrant communities in Lethbridge and comparable Canadian cities.

CHAPTER 4: LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES AND SELF-REPRESENTATION OF THE STORES

This chapter examines how six grocery stores in Lethbridge present themselves through their linguistic landscapes: signage, product displays, store layout, and branding. The analysis focuses on how these visual and material elements represent immigrant food, cultural identity, and social integration within a small Canadian city. The chapter moves from description to comparison, beginning with individual store profiles and concluding with a discussion of broader patterns across the six stores.

The stores in this study fall into three broad categories: mainstream Canadian supermarkets, immigrant-oriented international grocery stores, and West African grocery stores, as was previously discussed. The first group includes Real Canadian Superstore and Save-On-Foods, which present immigrant foods as one section within a broader corporate retail environment. The second group includes Asian Supermarket and Umami Shop, which also foreground international foods more explicitly, but differ in branding and target audience.

The third group includes Genesis and Vestelyn Varieties, which are more directly oriented toward African, especially West African, foodways and community needs.

The data for this chapter were collected through photographs of storefronts and interior spaces, inventories of product offerings (with special attention to African and West African items), background research on the history and ownership of each store, and, where relevant, brief conversations with staff or owners. These methods are described in detail in Chapter 3.

4.1 Real Canadian Superstore

4.1.1 Background and ownership

Real Canadian Superstore is a national Loblaw-owned supermarket chain that originated in Western Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the first location opened in March 1979 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, initially under the name SuperValu (Loblaw Companies Limited 2026). In Lethbridge, the current store at 3515 Mayor Magrath Drive South is in a large retail complex that has been altered over time, including the closure of one entrance. Its identity is shaped by corporate standardization, English-language dominance, and a broad appeal to general Canadian consumers. At the same time, it includes an international foods section, labeled in part as ‘Asian,’ where immigrant foods are positioned within a general grocery environment rather than as the store's central identity.

4.1.2 Location and exterior presentation

The exterior of Real Canadian Superstore is large, highly visible, and strongly branded. The signage emphasizes the chain's corporate identity, and the overall appearance is consistent with that of a big-box supermarket. The store does not visually mark itself as an immigrant or ethnic food destination. Instead, it presents itself as a general-purpose Canadian grocery store.

Figure 4.1. Exterior of Real Canadian Superstore, Lethbridge



4.1.3 Interior layout and product signage

Inside the store, the layout is standardized and organized according to familiar supermarket categories. Product signage is overwhelmingly in English, with a clean, standardized layout—consistent fonts, uniform branding, and minimal decorative elements—that resembles the visual conventions of large commercial retail chains rather than independently run ethnic markets. Foods associated with immigrant or international cuisines are typically grouped into designated sections, which makes them accessible but also sets them apart from mainstream products. This arrangement suggests that such foods are available, but not central to the store’s identity. Inside Superstore, the aisles follow a standardized supermarket layout organized into clear categories such as produce, dairy, frozen foods, bakery, meat, and household goods, with an “Asian” aisle dedicated to immigrant products which does not mean literally ‘Asian’ but ingredients that are not considered part of unmarked Canadian or North American cuisine. Immigrant foods are not distributed across the store but are concentrated in this designated

section, which makes them accessible but also marks them as separate from mainstream inventory. Signage throughout the store is overwhelmingly in English, with multilingual information appearing only on product packaging rather than on shelf signs or store labels.

Figure 4. 2. Interior aisle showing international section of the immigrant foods



Figure 4.3. Signage for international products



4.1.4 Representation of immigrant foods

Real Canadian Superstore represents immigrant foods as supplementary rather than foundational. The presence of international products suggests an awareness of cultural diversity among consumers, but the store still frames these foods within a dominant Canadian retail environment. In this way, the store's linguistic landscape reflects inclusion without cultural specialization. The key observation made was that immigrant foods are present but marginalized to a single section, which is mainly Asian dominated.

4.2 Save-On-Foods

4.2.1 Background and ownership

Save-On-Foods is another major Western Canadian supermarket chain owned by the Pattison Food Group and, like Real Canadian Superstore, operates in Lethbridge as a mainstream grocery store aimed at a wide customer base rather than a particular immigrant community.

Save-On-Foods was established as a corporate brand in 1982 in British Columbia by

Overwaitea Foods, a company with historical roots dating to 1915 (Save-On-Foods 2024; Blue Book Services 2023). The company rebranded and gradually converted Overwaitea stores to the Save-On-Foods banner beginning in the 1980s; the final two Overwaitea locations were converted in 2018, bringing the older brand to an end. Save-On-Foods arrived in Alberta in 1990, in a standalone location on the west side of Centre Village Mall's property. In 2016, the chain relocated into Centre Village Mall itself as part of a larger redevelopment, where it became an anchor tenant in a \$26-million redesign managed by Anthem Properties. This shift from standalone retail to mall-integrated retail reflected broader changes in shopping patterns and retail strategy in Western Canada. Like Real Canadian Superstore, Save on Foods represents mainstream, corporate grocery retail. As part of the Jim Pattison Group's diversified holdings, it is oriented toward broad mainstream consumers rather than explicit immigrant market segmentation. Its integration into Centre Village Mall also shaped how it is positioned within Lethbridge's retail landscape. The store's presentation reflects convenience, familiarity, and standardized retail organization. It has locations at 401 Highlands Blvd W and 1112 2nd Avenue A North.

4.2.2 Location and exterior presentation

The exterior of Save-On-Foods is polished, with branding that clearly identifies it as a corporate supermarket. Its signage is simple and consistent with the chain's larger identity.

The store does not visually signal any immigrant community or cultural specialization.

Instead, it presents itself as a conventional Canadian grocery space.

Figure 4.4. Exterior of Save-On-Foods, Lethbridge



The storefront has a large green and white ‘Save on Foods’ sign, the company logo clearly visible from the road. The building sits in a commercial area with standard retail parking and lighting. Signage is in English only, and the design emphasizes corporate identity rather than any cultural or ethnic specialization.

4.2.3 Interior layout and product signage

The interior is organized clearly and efficiently, with products arranged according to standard grocery categories. English dominates the signage, and any multilingual or culturally specific products are generally confined to designated sections. This creates a clear distinction between mainstream groceries and specialized immigrant foods. The store’s layout is mainstream retail logic rather than a culturally specific one. The placement of food in categorized aisles makes the products visible and accessible but also distinguishes them from

the store's mainstream inventory. Store signage is predominantly in English, while multilingual information is generally limited to packaged imported goods.

Figure 4.5. The interior of Save on Foods



4.2.4 Representation of immigrant foods

Immigrant foods at Save-On-Foods are available, but they appear as secondary items within a larger Canadian supermarket framework. Their placement in the European aisle suggests recognition of multicultural demand, but not a deep orientation toward immigrant food practices. The store's linguistic landscape therefore presents diversity as part of a broad consumer market rather than as a defining feature. However, the aisle for international foods is mainly European.

4.3 Asian Supermarket

4.3.1 Background and ownership

Asian Supermarket occupies a more specialized position in Lethbridge than the mainstream Canadian chains. It should be understood within the broader history of Asian food businesses

in Lethbridge, including the former Chinatown area and earlier stores that served immigrant communities. This historical background matters because it shows that the store is part of a longer trajectory of Asian and immigrant commercial life in the city. It is not simply a standalone business, but part of a wider urban and cultural history. The Asian Supermarket, located on 13th Street North in Lethbridge, has served the city and much of southern Alberta for over 25 years and is operated as a family-owned business (Tourism Lethbridge 2025). Its history should also be read in relation to the longer development of Lethbridge Chinatown, which dates to the 1880s and was an important center of Chinese-owned business in the early twentieth century (Alberta Heritage Resources Foundation 2014). Rather than being the only source of non-European foods in the city, the Asian Supermarket is better understood as part of a longer local history of immigrant food retail. It carries extensive inventory traversing diverse Asian cuisines (Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Thai, among others), increasingly serving the city's diversifying immigrant communities. Product categories include raw ingredients like cassava root, fresh produce, packaged goods, and prepared foods created on-site.

4.3.2 Location and exterior presentation

The storefront marks the business as culturally specific through its visible signage and retail presence. Even if the exterior is modest, it signals to customers that this is a place for “Asian” food, but also those from many other immigrant communities: Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Thai, Filipino, Mexican, East Indian, European, African, and Middle Eastern groceries and related products. The name itself, along with any multilingual signage or culturally recognizable imagery, helps define the store's identity. This makes the business legible as an immigrant-oriented grocery space.

Figure 4.6. Exterior of Asian Supermarket, Lethbridge



4.3.3 Interior layout and product signage

Inside, the store is organized around imported and specialty food items, with aisles structured by product type and in some cases, by cuisine or regional use. Unlike the mainstream supermarkets, immigrant foods are not limited to a small, designated section but make up the central stock of the store. The store signage is primarily in English, though multilingual packaging and product labels contribute to a more visibly transnational retail environment. The layout suggests a customer who is already familiar with these foods or who is seeking specific ingredients for home cooking. Unlike the mainstream supermarkets, the store does not present immigrant food as a side category; it is central to the store's entire structure.

Figure 4.7. Interior aisle with Asian products

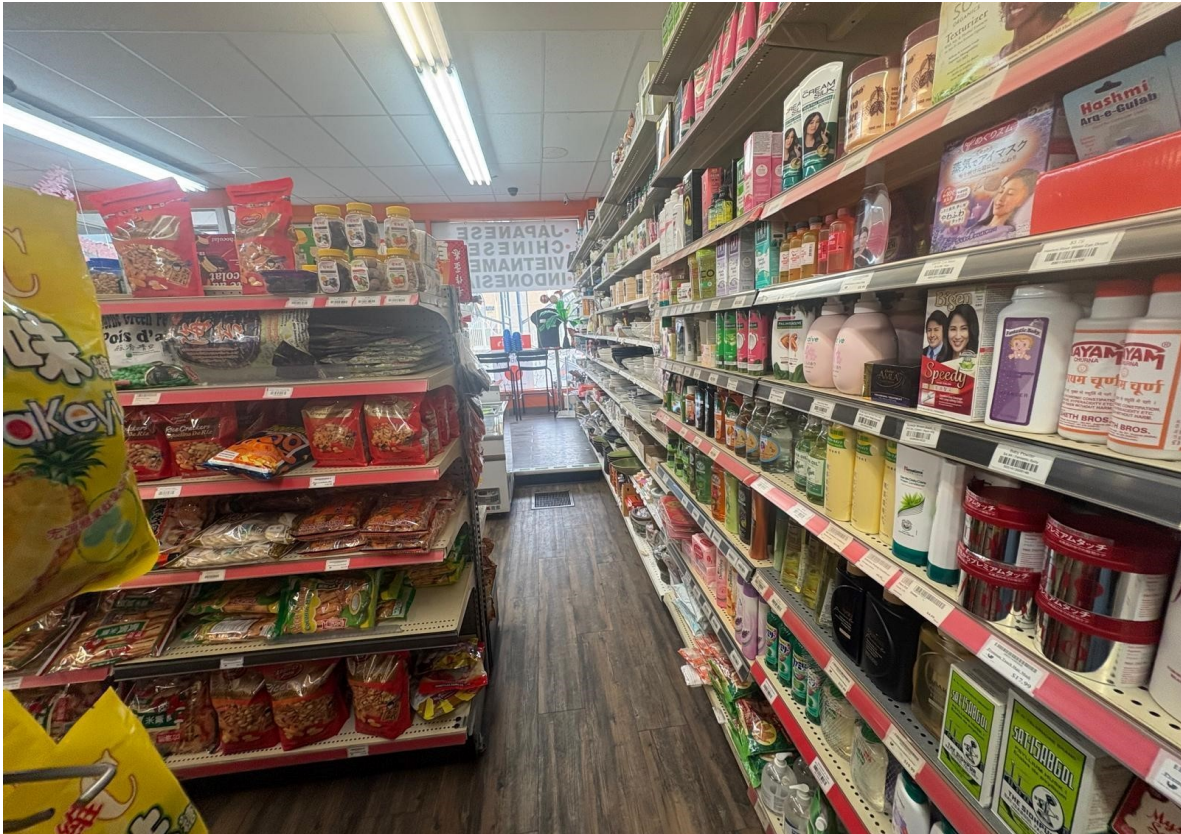
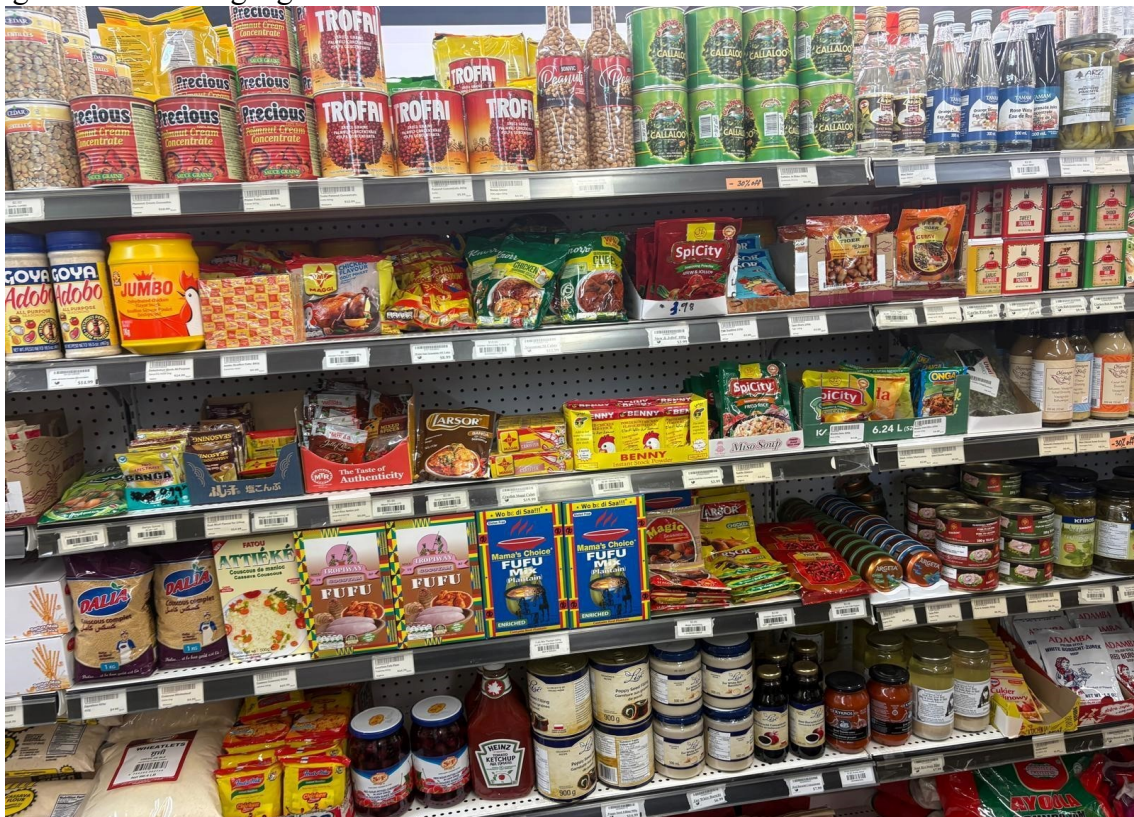


Figure 4.8. Shelf signage



4.3.4 Representation of immigrant foods

Asian Supermarket presents immigrant foods as its core function. The store's linguistic landscape supports a culinary and cultural identity rooted in Asian food practices. At the same time, it may also appeal to customers outside the immigrant community who are looking for international ingredients. This gives the store a dual identity: both community-based and broadly multicultural.

4.4 Umami Shop

4.4.1 Background and ownership

Umami Shop is a curated and branded international grocery space. Compared with Asian Supermarket, it appears to place greater emphasis on presentation, styling, and a broader food experience. Its identity is shaped not only by what it sells, but by how it frames those products for customers. The store, therefore, occupies a position between immigrant food access and commercial lifestyle branding. Umami Shop, opened in 2016, represents a second-generation immigrant retail venture created by Patricia Luu and her husband, Sven Roeder (Fritz 2022).

The founding narrative reflects Patricia's parents' experiences. Louis and Thao arrived in Lethbridge in 1980 as Vietnamese boat refugees, subsequently building their lives and establishing the Asian Supermarket. Patricia and Sven, as second-generation merchants, had previously pioneered a dynamic world grocer concept in Europe, with a flagship store operating in Chalon-sur-Saône, France, which successfully served diverse and established immigrant communities.

Recognizing that Southern Alberta had experienced significant international immigration and ethnic diversification, Patricia and Sven identified an opportunity to establish their European retail model in their hometown. Umami Shop underwent a comprehensive 6,000-square-foot renovation completed in 2016, designed in modern European minimalist

style with collaboration from Portuguese architect Ana Guerreiro. The store functions as a comprehensive culinary destination combining world grocery retail, coffee shop, on-site cooking classes, and seasonal cooking shows broadcast via social media, reaching over 2,000 viewers during pandemic-era livestreams.

Umami's market positioning deliberately highlights education and curation. Products are marketed as interesting and exotic, with intentional explanations and contextual framing provided to consumers. The store targets cosmopolitan educated consumers seeking global culinary experiences. Products receive a curated presentation, distinctly different from bulk merchandising approaches. Reflecting family commitment to local sourcing, Umami offers meal kits featuring Alberta beef, local farm produce, and wine pairings, positioning itself as a bridge between global cuisine and local Alberta food systems.

In sum, Umami Shop and Asian Supermarket are owned by the same family and frequently present identical merchandise. Yet their presentation strategies, market positioning, and consumer assumptions differ fundamentally. This parallel ownership structure enables analysis of how identical products index different acculturation strategies and consumer communities—the Asian Supermarket selling to consumers seeking “home,” Umami selling “exotic” discovery to culinary explorers.

This double use of ‘exotic’ is itself an instance of indexical dialectic: the same word carries opposite meanings depending on who is doing the reading. At Genesis and Vestelyn, ‘exotic’ is addressed past the mainstream browser to the diaspora shopper it serves; functionally, it means ‘like you; we carry your things because we understand what ‘exotic’ has been made to mean for people like you.’ In the mainstream and cosmopolitan framing at Umami, by contrast, ‘exotic’ means strange, not you, it addresses a consumer positioned outside then culture being marketed. The comparison is not unlike a travel agency called Exotic Travel: the name does not mean West African travel for West Africans; it means trips

to Bangkok for people who are not from Bangkok. Because indexicality is dialectic; a sign meaning depends on the hearer sharing the frame that makes it meaningful, the same word on a storefront can carry contradictory indexical values for different audiences without contradiction. A Ghanaian shopper reads Vestelyn's 'exotic' correctly not because of the word itself, but because of everything else about the store that supplies the frame in which 'exotic' means 'for you.' This is precisely what the recipe-tracing experiment in Chapter 5 is designed to test: whether a store's declared 'exotic' framing is backed by the material infrastructure that would let a diaspora shopper read it as home.

4.4.2 Location and exterior presentation

The exterior of Umami Shop presents a modern and carefully designed image. The store name itself is memorable and cosmopolitan, suggesting a sophisticated relationship to food culture. Rather than emphasizing a single ethnic or immigrant identity, the branding creates a more abstract sense of culinary worldliness. This allows the store to appeal to both immigrant and non-immigrant consumers.

Figure 4. 9. Exterior of Umami Shop, Lethbridge



4.4.3 Interior layout and product signage

Inside, products are arranged in a way that foregrounds visual appeal and curated selection. Signage may help customers understand what items are for, especially if they are less familiar with the cuisines represented. This type of presentation makes immigrant food accessible to a wide audience, but it can also frame those foods as exotic or premium. The store's linguistic landscape, therefore, combines functionality with lifestyle marketing.

Figure 4.10. Interior display of Umami Shop, Lethbridge



4.4.4 Representation of immigrant foods

Umami Shop represents immigrant food as something that can be both practical and stylish. It offers ingredients for culturally specific cooking, but it does so in a way that may appeal to customers looking for a more upscale or adventurous shopping experience. This differs from a community grocery store, where the priority is access and familiarity. In Umami, immigrant foods are both commercial products and markers of culinary sophistication. Umami shop does not treat immigrant food as a marginal specialty section; instead, it frames it as part of a broader ‘world cuisine’ experience that is meant to be both accessible and appealing to a wide range of shoppers.

4.5 Genesis

4.5.1 Background and ownership

Genesis Exotic Market (GEM) is a grocery store that appears to be strongly oriented toward African, especially West African, food products and customers. Its identity is closely tied to immigrant food practices and to the needs of a specific community. Unlike the mainstream chains, Genesis is organized around cultural continuity and everyday immigrant use. It therefore offers an important example of a store whose self-representation is directly connected to community belonging. Located at 225 Stafford Drive South, it was established in 2017 as a family-owned business by Toyin Oyebola, who is from Osun State in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, serving as a multiethnic retail destination for African diaspora communities across Lethbridge and southern Alberta, but mainly targeting Nigerian immigrants, she mentioned in an interview. The store's self-description emphasizes its comprehensive product range as "a one-stop shop for everything exotic. From groceries to clothing and jewelry, as well as the finest skin & hair products"—a phrase that positions its goods as distinctive or non-mainstream without specifying whether that description reflects its intended immigrant clientele or a broader consumer audience. Inventory includes African groceries, clothing, wigs, human hair extensions, ethnic cosmetics for both men and women, footwear, accessories, and jewelry. Genesis implements extensive brand imprinting on merchandise, visibly marking goods with the store's own branding and identity.

Beyond retail merchandise, Genesis provides worldwide shipping services and participates actively in Lethbridge community events through outdoor carnival booths, signaling a commitment to community integration and visibility. Their operating hours (Monday–Saturday, 11 AM–6 PM, closed Sundays) reflect scheduling practices common among immigrant-owned specialty retailers.

Genesis has received public recognition as a Black-owned business representing innovation and community service. In a 2021 Global News feature, the store was highlighted for offering items “one can’t find anywhere else in Lethbridge,” spotlighting its role as a cultural retail anchor. The store specifically positions itself as serving “the ethnic communities of Lethbridge,” demonstrating intentional market orientation toward diaspora consumers seeking culturally specific products at affordable prices.

4.5.2 Location and exterior presentation

The store’s exterior should be read as part of its cultural message. Its use of the word ‘exotic,’ along with its signage and storefront presentation, suggests that the business is positioning itself around difference and novelty rather than explicitly identifying itself as an African food store. Even if the storefront is small or modest, it still communicates a broad sense of cultural distinctiveness that may attract customers seeking unfamiliar or mainstream foods and ingredients from home.

Figure 4. 11. Exterior of Genesis, Lethbridge



4.5.3 Interior layout and product signage

Inside, the store emphasizes African staples through product grouping, shelf arrangement, and practical signage. The visual environment may be less polished than a corporate supermarket, but it is highly functional and culturally legible. Products associated with West African cooking are not marginal; they are central to the store's identity.

While the exterior branding (Genesis Exotic Market and the language of exotic) only indirectly hints at African products and may rely on word of mouth or community familiarity to communicate its specificity, the interior of the store clearly foregrounds African staples through product grouping, shelf arrangement, and practical signage. In the interior space, products associated with West African culinary practices are not marginal; they are central to

the store's identity and are immediately legible to customers who recognize these ingredients. The linguistic landscape, therefore, reflects a store designed for immigrant everyday life rather than broad commercial appeal. The style of the store is simple, and the functional display foregrounds everyday cooking needs rather than decorative merchandising. Store-level signage is minimal and largely handwritten or absent, so product packaging itself—brand names, logos, and multilingual labels—does much of the communicative work in guiding shoppers toward the items they recognize.

Figure 4.12. Interior aisle with African staples



Figure 4.13. Shelf signage



4.5.4 Representation of immigrant foods

Genesis presents immigrant food as normal, central, and culturally meaningful. The store's layout and product selection show that it exists to support African cooking practices in Lethbridge. In this sense, it is more than a grocery store: it is also a site of cultural maintenance and adaptation. Its self-representation places it near the strongly community-oriented end of the spectrum.

4.6 Vestelyn Varieties

4.6.1 Background and ownership

Vestelyn Varieties is similarly important as a store strongly connected to African and especially West African foodways. Its identity is shaped by the needs of immigrant consumers looking for culturally specific ingredients and familiar products. Like Genesis, it should be understood as part of a community-oriented retail environment rather than a general

supermarket model. This makes it a key site for examining how immigrant food is represented in a smaller Canadian city.

Vestelyn Varieties operates as a specialized ethnic and cultural retail store serving African diaspora communities in Lethbridge. It is located at 323 13th Street North, and the store is situated within an emerging cultural retail corridor. The store's product portfolio foregrounds goods from the African and Western diasporas, including African clothing, accessories, and hair care products tailored to the preferences and needs of African immigrant and diaspora communities. It represents immigrant entrepreneurship and cultural retail specialization. The store functions as both an economic enterprise and a cultural institution, providing access to familiar products and cultural goods otherwise unavailable in mainstream retail environments like the Canadian-owned shops. However, publicly available historical documentation regarding the store's founding date, ownership structure, and detailed business history remains limited. The store owner is Stella Baah, popularly known to her customers as "Aunty Stella." She explained that the business began as a home-based operation in 1999, then expanded as her clientele grew; she moved into the shop where she now sells in 2011. She is originally from Abgozume in the Ewe area of Ghana. This history helps explain the store's role as a locally rooted business that developed gradually through community demand and personal networks. The shop operates from Monday to Saturday from 9 am to 6 pm and on Sundays from 12 pm to 5 pm.

4.6.2 Location and exterior presentation

The storefront does not explicitly present itself as an African grocery; instead, it uses broad terms like "ethnic foods" and references like "African Style Lace," alongside advertisements for hair extensions and beauty products. These cues may be immediately legible to community members familiar with African salons and shops, but to a passerby they signal difference in a general way rather than a clearly stated African food identity. Even when the exterior is

understated, it may still convey a sense of belonging and specificity. The store's outward appearance, therefore, plays an important role in its self-presentation.

Figure 4.14. Exterior of Vestelyn Varieties, Lethbridge



4.6.3 Interior layout and product signage

The interior is organized around core African and West African staples, with shelves devoted to items like beans, yam, flour, dried spices, and packaged snacks. The shelves are arranged to support practical shopping. Signage is simple: handwritten price tags and practical, but it contributes to a clear cultural atmosphere. The store's organization helps customers navigate ingredients that are meaningful to their culinary routines. In this way, the linguistic landscape supports both access and cultural continuity.

Figure 4.15. Interior with African staples



Figure 4.16. Shelf signage



4.6.4 Representation of immigrant foods

Vestelyn Varieties treats immigrant food as central to its business. The store is not merely responsive to diversity; it is built around it. Its self-representation therefore differs from the mainstream stores and even from the more curated international stores, because it is grounded in a specific community's everyday needs. This places it near the most specialized end of the spectrum.

4.7 Comparative analysis

Taken together, the six stores reveal a spectrum of self-representation. Real Canadian Superstore and Save-On-Foods present immigrant foods as secondary sections within a mainstream Canadian retail environment. Asian Supermarket and Umami Shop place immigrant food more centrally, though in different ways: one through community-oriented import retail and the other through a more curated, lifestyle-based presentation. By contrast, Genesis and

Vestelyn are more strongly community-centered inside than outside. Their interiors clearly foreground African and West African food practices, but their exteriors rely more on indirect cues, familiarity, and word of mouth than on explicit labeling as immigrant food stores. This suggests not a weaker cultural identity, but a different mode of recognition, one that depends more on insider knowledge than on storefront self-description.

One interesting aspect of the the difference in presentation involves the use of the words “exotic” and “ethnic.” As noted above, access to “exotic” and “ethnic” foods is an important part of the cosmopolitan self-representation of the Umami shop: it is a store that presents itself as a place where curious *outsiders* can discover more about other cuisines and ingredients. But Vestelyn Varieties and Genesis Exotic Market also describe their products as “exotic,” or “ethnic,” even though many of their core customers experience these goods as ordinary, “down home” food and style. This tension suggests that the language of exoticism may reflect broader retail and branding conventions more than immigrant customers' selfunderstanding and raises further questions about how “home” foods are publicly framed in small immigrant businesses.

This double use of these words is itself an instance of indexical dialectic: the same word carries opposite meanings depending on who is doing the reading. At Genesis and Vestelyn, they address themselves past the mainstream browser to the diaspora shopper they serve; functionally, they mean “we carry things you will understand because we understand what ‘exotic’ has been made to mean for people like you.” In the mainstream and cosmopolitan framing at Umami, by contrast, “exotic” means strange, i.e. “not-you.”

It addresses a consumer positioned outside the culture being marketed. The comparison is not unlike a travel agency called Exotic Travel: the name does not mean West African travel for West Africans; it means trips to Bangkok for people who are not from Bangkok. Because indexicality

is dialectic, a sign's meaning depends on the hearer sharing the frame that makes it meaningful. The same word on a storefront can carry contradictory indexical values for different audiences without contradiction. A Ghanaian shopper reads Vestelyn's "exotic" correctly not because of the word itself, but because of everything else about the store that supplies the frame in which "exotic" means "for you." This is precisely what the recipe-tracing experiment in Chapter 5 is designed to test: whether a store's declared "exotic" framing is backed by the material infrastructure that would let a diaspora shopper read it as home.

This comparison shows that the linguistic landscape is not only about language on signs, but also about how stores position themselves culturally and commercially. Some stores speak primarily to a broad Canadian consumer base, while others address immigrant communities more directly. The differences in storefronts, product placement, and signage reveal different assumptions about who the customer is and what kinds of food knowledge the store expects.

The next two chapters will test these self-representations by examining how well each store supports the practical task of cooking a West African meal. The comparison between linguistic landscape and cooking outcomes will reveal where self-representation aligns with, or diverges from, actual support for immigrant food practices.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 The Ghanaian Menu as Research Instrument

Chapter 4 established how each store represents itself: which customers it appears to address, and what that self-representation implies about its position on Berry's acculturation spectrum. This chapter turns from representation to practice, asking how far that self-representation holds up when tested against the concrete task of sourcing ingredients for a West African Ghanaian meal. Building on the linguistic landscape framework outlined in Chapter 2, this chapter uses the Ghanaian menu as a research instrument to examine how different stores support the preparation of Ghanaian beans stew, and how storefront presentation relates to practical access to ingredients. This chapter introduces a product-based comparative methodology designed to test retail spaces through the concrete exercise of sourcing ingredients for a traditional Ghanaian menu across six Lethbridge grocery stores.

This approach transforms abstract questions about multilingualism and immigrant acculturation into empirically testable propositions. Following Silverstein (2003), heritage ingredients and signage can presuppose an existing community of heritage-culture consumers, while their prominence or absence entails claims about that business's positioning along Berry's (1997) acculturation continuum: markets favoring heritage ingredients may index separation, while English dominant, standardized signage may index assimilation. The guiding hypothesis is that the linguistic landscape of immigrant-owned markets indexes the level and direction of acculturation of the community. This chapter's central question is to what degree each store's linguistic self-representation matches its actual utility as a grocery store for a West African consumer. This is testable empirically by asking: Where can a West African immigrant obtain familiar ingredients? Which stores assume customer fluency with African cuisine, and which position African products as exotic discoveries? How do presentation strategies including labeling, packaging, spatial organization, and merchandising

materially index acculturation orientations? It was hypothesized that each store's practical utility for Ghanaian cooking would match its linguistic self-representation: mainstream stores would underperform, diaspora-anchored stores would overperform, and intermediate stores would fall in between. The data only partly confirm this. Real Canadian Superstore, Save-On Foods, and Vestelyn Varieties land exactly where their self-representation predicts. Asian Supermarket scores markedly higher than its intermediate self-presentation would suggest, while Umami Shop scores markedly lower despite its curated 'world food' branding—meaning self-presentation alone is not a reliable predictor of practical support as Asian and Genesis do not perform according to storefront analysis. The menu-based methodology emerged from iterative pilot observation and reflexive design revision that identified a critical limitation in the initial four-store comparison. Comparing only mainstream corporate stores (Real Canadian Superstore, Save-On-Foods) with immigrant-owned specialty stores (Genesis Exotic Market, Vestelyn Varieties) risked collapsing meaningful differences within each group, treating all corporate stores as interchangeable and all immigrant-owned markets as interchangeable. In practice, however, each of the six stores examined in this study reflects distinct linguistic and semiotic choices in its signage and product presentation. The addition of two intermediate stores—Umami Shop and Asian Supermarket, both owned by the same Vietnamese Canadian family yet presenting largely identical merchandise in fundamentally different ways—creates the comparative leverage necessary for nuanced analysis. They occupy the intermediate position between the mainstream corporate stores and the African-focused specialty markets, a finding that further complicates any binary corporate/immigrant-owned distinction. Testing whether a Ghanaian meal can be prepared entirely within each store, and documenting how each store presents the necessary ingredients, reveals a spectrum of acculturation assumptions and consumer positioning strategies that a simple spatial analysis would miss.

The menu functions as a deliberate methodological probe, selected to represent traditional Ghanaian cooking that would be familiar to West African diaspora communities while simultaneously requiring ingredients not universally available in mainstream Canadian retail environments. The menu comprises multiple components across different ingredient categories, enabling systematic comparison of product availability, brand authenticity, and presentation strategies. It centers on a primary dish characteristic of Ghanaian home cooking: beans stew, traditionally made with black-eyed peas, fish as the protein source, along with tomatoes, onions, peppers, palm oil, and various seasonings (fresh tomatoes, onions, bay leaf, rosemary, ginger, and garlic are excluded from the scoring throughout this study, since nothing about the Ghanaian version of these six ingredients is distinctive from what is generally available). Importantly, the dish's Ghanaian identity relies on the inclusion of momoni, a strong fermented fish that serves as a signature flavoring and distinguishes it from typical beans stews found in mainstream Canadian stores. This protein-based stew is typically served with fried or boiled plantain or plain rice.

Vegetable components include fresh tomatoes, red and yellow onions, and hot peppers (preferably Scotch bonnets), which provide aromatic and flavoring elements. Essential condiments and seasonings include Maggi seasoning cubes which is not a Ghanaian brand but the formulation of it changes from market to market and that is to say the one present in the Ghanaian market is different from the one present in a Venezuelan market (with particular attention to generic Canadian substitutes like Knorr which is not an alternative in Ghana), palm oil, fresh ginger, and hot pepper in various forms.

This menu was selected for several strategic reasons. First, it represents everyday Ghanaian home cooking rather than specialized ceremonial dishes, testing whether routine diaspora food practices can be sustained within Lethbridge's retail infrastructure. Second, the menu deliberately spans multiple ingredient categories (proteins, vegetables, condiments) to

enable a comprehensive assessment of each store's inventory breadth. Third, certain ingredients, particularly West African-branded Maggi cubes, Ghanaian fish powder, and momoni, function as diagnostic markers that differentiate stores serving diaspora communities from those serving mainstream or cosmopolitan consumers. Because several ingredients exist in both authentic and substitute forms (for example, West African Maggi versus generic seasoning), the menu enables analysis of not merely availability but also authenticity and quality.

5.2 The Recipe

5.2.1 Ingredients

- 2 cups black-eyed beans
- ½ teaspoon of saltpeter
- ½ bottle of palm oil
- 1 large red onion, chopped
- 3 large fresh tomatoes, chopped
- 3-4 red scotch bonnet peppers (depending on how spicy you want it), blended
- 3 tablespoons ginger (blended with pepper)
- 3 cloves garlic (blended with pepper)
- 3 leaves of bay leaf (blended with pepper)
- 2 tablespoons of rosemary (blended with pepper)
- salt, to taste

- 1 Smoked mackerel
- 1 cube of Maggi seasoning
- 1 momoni

5.2.2 Method

- Sort, wash, and soak the beans, then cook with lots of water until soft. Chop a ⅓ of the onion into the water to help cook beans faster and add ½ teaspoon of saltpeter)
- In a separate pot, heat the palm oil and fry the chopped onion
- Add the momoni
- Add the blended mix (garlic, pepper, ginger, bay leaf, rosemary, onion), then cook the mixture down until it thickens and the raw smell disappears
- Add the chopped fresh tomatoes; let it simmer for about 4 mins
- Add salt, Maggi seasoning, smoked mackerel, then simmer briefly
- Add the cooked beans to the stew and stir well
- Let the stew simmer gently until the flavors combine, then serve hot with fried plantain or cooked white rice

Note: add beans in a way it's not more than your stew base. This recipe is used as the benchmark for comparing how well each store's supports the preparation of Ghanaian beans stew.

5.3 Shopping for beans stew in Ghana

In a Ghanaian context, sourcing ingredients for beans stew typically involves visiting an openair market rather than a single all-purpose supermarket. A home cook might purchase blackeyed beans and grains from one trader, fresh tomatoes, onions, and peppers from another, and smoked mackerel, stinking fish (momoni), and other preserved fish from a dedicated fishmonger. Core items such as palm oil and West African–branded Maggi cubes are widely available, though often in informal or bulk packaging rather than standardized supermarket formats. Larger Ghanaian supermarkets and hypermarkets—large-format store’s combining groceries with general merchandise—may stock all components of the stew under one roof, but market-sourced ingredients are generally perceived as fresher or more authentic.

This Ghanaian shopping experience provides one useful baseline against which the Lethbridge stores are evaluated: the closer a store comes to enabling this kind of complete and recognizably Ghanaian stew, the more fully it supports diaspora food practices. This is not to suggest that a substituted ingredient fails to support diaspora communities, indeed, ingredient substitution and adaptation are themselves common and legitimate diaspora food. Instead, this baseline is used here because it offers a concrete, comparable metric for assessing ingredient availability and completeness across the six markets, while later sections consider how hybridity and substitution also factor into how Ghanaian immigrants navigate food access in Lethbridge.

5.4 Preparing the Recipe (Beans Stew)

5.4.1 Real Canadian Superstore

At Real Canadian Superstore, I was able to assemble the basic components of a beans stew, but only through a series of layered substitutions that collectively distanced the dish from its Ghanaian benchmark. Black-eyed beans, fresh tomatoes, red onions, rosemary, and bay leaves

(these four ingredients are not scored in the analysis as mentioned earlier) were readily available in the mainstream dry goods and produce aisles, indicating that the core categories of pulses, aromatics, and herbs required for the recipe are fully integrated into Canadian grocery repertoires. The judgment that these ingredients are ‘authentic’ and therefore that their availability signals integration into Canadian grocery repertoires is itself shaped by lived experience within Ghanaian culinary culture, rather than a neutral assessment. Availability is an empirical fact; its significance as a marker of acculturation depends on its interpretive judgment of authenticity. Following Silverstein (2003), availability functions indexically only in relation to a particular interpretive frame—here, a culturally situated understanding of what counted as a ‘correct’ version of an ingredient itself. It is a relational judgment that links ingredient access to broader processes of acculturation.

However, every Ghana-specific ingredient required compromise. Palm oil, which provides a distinctive color, aroma, and mouthfeel in Ghanaian beans stew, was absent and was replaced with canola oil, resulting in a noticeably lighter stew with a flatter flavor profile. Red Scotch bonnet peppers, central to the dish’s heat and aroma, were likewise unavailable; I substituted generic red chilies, which provided spiciness but not the characteristic fruity aroma. Instead of West African Maggi seasoning cubes, I used Knorr stock cubes from the mainstream soup section which is not an alternative known to Ghanaian cuisine, and I substituted fresh mackerel for the smoked mackerel listed in the recipe, since no smoked fish or fish powder was available. Finally, the absence of saltpeter (culinary potash), which I approximated with baking soda, further illustrates how the chemical and textural dimensions of Ghanaian recipes are not anticipated within this retail environment. The resulting stew was edible and familiar to me as a Ghanaian bean-based dish. Still, this pattern indexed a retail infrastructure that supports Ghanaian cooking only through an integrationist strategy of piecing together ingredients across multiple, disconnected retail spaces, rather than through a

single store fully equipped to support the practice. Unlike separation where heritage ingredients might be fully available through dedicated specialty markets or assimilation where heritage cooking would be largely unsupported altogether, this fragmented availability reflects a form of integration that places the burden of cultural food maintenance on the individual consumer's resourcefulness than on the retail infrastructure itself.

Table 5.1. Ingredients Availability in Real Canadian Superstore

Ingredient	Status at Superstore	Type
Black-eyed beans	Available	Authentic match
Palm oil	Not Available	Substituted with Canola oil
Saltpeter	Not Available	Substituted with baking soda
Fish Powder	Not Available	No substitute
Scotch Bonnet pepper	Not Available	Substituted with red chilies
Maggi cube	Not Available	Substituted with Knorr cubes
Smoked mackerel	Not Available	Substituted with fresh mackerel
Momoni	Not Available	No substitute

Fresh Tomatoes (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Red onions (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Bay leaf (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Rosemary (not key)	Available	Not Scored

5.4.2 Save-On-Foods

At Save-On-Foods, I was again able to assemble the basic components of a bean stew, but only through a sequence of substitutions that displaced the dish from its Ghanaian benchmark. Black-eyed beans, fresh tomatoes, red onions, rosemary, and bay leaves were all available in the dry-goods and produce aisles, suggesting that the core ingredients of the recipe are widely incorporated into mainstream Canadian grocery repertoires. However, the ingredients that mark the dish as specifically Ghanaian were either absent or required compromise. Palm oil was not stocked and had to be replaced with canola oil, which lightened the color of the stew and muted the layered flavor and aroma associated with Ghanaian palm-oil cooking. Red Scotch bonnet peppers were also unavailable; I substituted habanero peppers, which approximated the heat level but did not reproduce the same fruity aroma profile. Branded Maggi seasoning cubes were missing and were replaced with Knorr cubes, and smoked mackerel was substituted with fresh mackerel, with no fish powder available at all. Saltpeter was likewise unavailable and was approximated with baking powder from the baking aisle. The resulting stew was edible and recognizable as bean stew, but, as at Real Canadian Superstore, the cumulative substitutions indexed a retail environment in which Ghanaian cooking practices are only partially supported

and must be continually adjusted to fit Canadian product availability rather than being directly accommodated.

Table 5.2. Ingredients Availability in Save on Foods

Ingredient	Status at Save on Foods	Type
Black-eyed beans	Available	Authentic match
Palm oil	Not Available	Substituted with Canola oil
Saltpeter	Not Available	Substituted with baking soda
Ingredient	Status at Save on Foods	Type
Fish powder	Not Available	No substitute
Scotch Bonnet pepper	Not Available	Substituted with habanero peppers
Maggi cube	Not Available	Substituted with Knorr cubes
Smoked mackerel	Not Available	Substituted with fresh mackerel
Momoni	Not Available	No substitute
Fresh tomatoes (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Red Onions (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Bay leaf (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Rosemary (not key)	Available	Not Scored

5.4.3 Vestelyn Varieties

At Vestelyn Varieties, the ingredient list for beans stew could be assembled in full without any substitutions, marking this store as the only retail space in which the Ghanaian recipe could be realized as in fully authentic form (except for fresh tomatoes and red onions, because these can be sourced from Canadian supermarkets). Black-eyed beans, palm oil, red scotch bonnet peppers, rosemary, and bay leaves were all available, with palm oil and scotch bonnet peppers providing the color, heat, and layered aroma that anchor the stew as distinctively Ghanaian. Branded Maggi seasoning cubes were stocked alongside other West African products, and both smoked mackerel and fish powder were available, allowing me to reproduce the characteristic smoky, fish-forward flavor that was impossible to achieve at the mainstream Canadian supermarkets. Even saltpeter could be sourced here, rather than approximated with baking agents from the baking aisle. In contrast to Real Canadian Superstore and

Save-On-Foods, where Ghanaian beans stew emerged only through a series of compromises, Vestelyn Varieties provided a complete infrastructure for cooking the dish without alteration, supporting not just a generic “beans stew” but a specifically Ghanaian culinary practice.

Table 5.3. Ingredients Availability in Save on Foods

Ingredient	Status at Vestelyn Varieties	Type
Black-eyed beans	Available	Authentic match
Palm oil	Available	Authentic match
Fish powder	Available	Authentic match
Saltpeter	Available	Authentic match
Scotch bonnet pepper	Available	Authentic match
Maggi seasoning cube	Available	Authentic match
Smoked mackerel	Available	Authentic match
Momoni	Available	Authentic match
Fresh Tomatoes (not key)	Not Available	Not Scored
Red Onions (not key)	Not Available	Not Scored
Bay leaf (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Rosemary (not key)	Available	Not Scored

5.4.4 Genesis Exotic Market

At Genesis Exotic Market, the sourcing experience closely approximated that of Vestelyn Varieties, with a notably inclusive inventory of West African ingredients. Black-eyed beans,

rosemary, bay leaves, palm oil, red scotch bonnet peppers, Maggi seasoning cubes, and dried spices were all readily available, indicating that Genesis anticipates and accommodates Ghanaian cooking practices as a deliberate consumer category. The shop’s stocking of branded West African products, including palm oil and Maggi cubes specifically formulated for African markets, signals an understanding of diaspora culinary authenticity. However, four key absences constrained full ingredient sourcing: smoked mackerel, fish powder and momoni, requiring substitution with fresh mackerel or complete omission. Saltpeter was likewise absent, with no available substitute. Despite these targeted gaps, the resulting stew would closely approximate Ghanaian preparation, as the core flavor profile—anchored by palm oil, scotch bonnet peppers, and Maggi seasoning—could be fully realized. Genesis Exotic Market thus occupies a liminal position between Vestelyn Varieties (which supplies complete authenticity) and the mainstream retailers: it provides sufficient infrastructure to support recognizably Ghanaian cooking practices, yet the absence of specific seafood ingredients and saltpeter suggests these items fall outside its operational definition of West African cuisine, or that sourcing them presents supply chain challenges distinct from the more readily available plant-based and flavoring components.

Table 5.4. Ingredient availability at Genesis

Ingredient	Status at Genesis	Type
Black-eyed beans	Available	Authentic match
Palm oil	Available	Authentic match
Saltpeter	Not Available	No substitute
Fish powder	Not available	No substitute
Red scotch bonnet	Available	Authentic match

Maggi	Available	Authentic match
Smoked fish	Not Available	Substituted with fresh mackerel
Momoni	Not available	No substitute
Ingredient	Status at Genesis	Type
Fresh tomatoes (not key)	Not available	Not Scored
Red onions (not key)	Not available	Not Scored
Bay leaf (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Rosemary (not key)	Available	Not Scored

5.4.5 Umami Shop

At Umami Shop, the sourcing experience exhibited a notably different constraint profile than that of the other retail spaces examined. While fresh tomatoes, red onions, rosemary, and bay leaves were available, the absence of black-eyed beans immediately distinguished this store from even the mainstream retailers, forcing a complete substitution with an alternative pulse. More significantly, Umami Shop did not maintain a consistent supply of core aromatics, necessitating strategic compromises. The shop offered dried chilies as a substitute for red scotch bonnet peppers, which approximated heat but lacked the fruity aroma profile essential to Ghanaian beans stew. Maggi seasoning sauce, rather than the seasoning cubes available elsewhere, presented a different form of flavor delivery, altering both texture and dissolution in the stew. Most critically, Umami Shop replaced smoked mackerel with fresh salmon—a

fish which is not entirely outside the West African flavor tradition. Saltpeter and fish powder were both absent, with no available substitutes. The resulting dish, if prepared from Umami Shop ingredients alone, would occupy an ambiguous position: it would be recognizable as ‘Beans stew’ but substantially de-anchored from its Ghanaian culinary origins. Unlike Vestelyn Varieties, which supported full authenticity, or Superstore and Save-On, which required multiple compromises within a coherent framework, the Umami Shop presented ingredient absences that suggested this store does not anticipate Ghanaian cooking practices as a consumer category. This suggests that immigrant-owned or specialty status does not automatically extend to Ghanaian consumers specifically; a store’s support for a given diaspora group depends on whether that group is anticipated as part of its consumer base at all. For Ghanaian shoppers, Umami shop functions much like a mainstream store but without even the partial workarounds Superstore and Save-On offer, placing it paradoxically further from supporting Ghanaian food practices than either the corporate or the fully heritagematched specialty stores.

Table 5.5. Ingredients Availability in Umami Shop

Ingredient	Status at Umami Shop	Type
Black-eyed beans	Not available	No substitute
Palm Oil	Not available	No substitute
Saltpeter	Not available	Baking soda
Fish powder	Not available	No substitute
Red scotch bonnet	Not available	Substituted with dried chili

Maggi seasoning cube	Not available	Substituted with Maggi seasoning sauce
Smoked mackerel	Not available	Substituted with fresh salmon
Momoni	Not available	No substitute
Fresh tomatoes (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Red Onions (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Bay leaf (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Ingredient	Status at Umami Shop	Type
Rosemary (not key)	Available	Not Scored

5.4.6 Asian Supermarket

At Asian Supermarket, the sourcing experience most closely aligned with those of Vestelyn Varieties and Genesis Exotic Market, demonstrating the highest level of ingredient availability and West African product integration among all six stores examined. Black-eyed beans, fresh tomatoes, red onions, rosemary, bay leaves, palm oil, red Scotch bonnet peppers, Maggi seasoning cubes, and fish powder were all readily available, indicating comprehensive anticipation of Ghanaian culinary requirements. The shop's consistent stocking of West African product lines, including authentic palm oil, Maggi cubes, and specialty seafood ingredients, signals deliberate commercial positioning toward diaspora consumers. However, a critical absence emerged: saltpeter was unavailable and replaced with baking soda. Despite this targeted gap, the availability of fish powder distinguishes Asian Supermarket from Genesis, enabling the preparation of more nuanced seafood-forward flavors than Genesis

alone permits. The resulting beans stew would closely approximate authentic Ghanaian preparation, with only minor compromises in smoking and chemical texture adjustment. Asian Supermarket thus represents near-complete infrastructure for Ghanaian culinary authenticity, standing alongside Vestelyn Varieties as a space that treats West African cooking not as an exotic or supplementary category but as an anticipated and fully integrated consumer practice, and takes its place as the first ever immigrant international supermarket in Lethbridge. Vestelyn Varieties own labeling of its goods as ‘exotic’ illustrates Silverstein’s (2003) orders of indexicality: at the level of branding, ‘exotic’ functions as a second-order index, marketing the store to a broader consumer base. At the level of actual stocking, however, its completeness indexes a first-order relationship in which West African cooking is fully anticipated and supported—meaning the store can market itself as ‘exotic’ while still functioning as fully integrated infrastructure for Ghanaian foodways.

Table 5.6. Ingredients Availability in Asian

Ingredient	Status at Asian	Type
Black-eyed beans	Available	Authentic match
Palm oil	Available	Authentic match
Saltpeter	Not available	Substituted Baking soda
Fish Powder	Available	Authentic match
Red scotch bonnet	Available	Authentic match
Maggi seasoning cube	Available	Authentic match
Smoked Mackerel	Available	Authentic match

Momoni	Available	Authentic match
Fresh tomatoes (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Red Onions (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Bay leaf (not key)	Available	Not Scored
Rosemary (not key)	Available	Not Scored

5.5 Overall Comparison Across the Six Stores

Across the surveyed retail sites, Vestelyn Varieties offers the most complete set of Ghana-specific ingredients for beans stew, including smoked mackerel, momoni, fish powder, palm oil, Maggi cubes, and Scotch bonnet peppers. Only generic items such as fresh tomatoes and onions are obtained from mainstream Canadian supermarkets, so very few substitutions are required, and overall adequacy is very high. Genesis Exotic Market provides nearly all key Ghanaian components, with strong overlap in palm oil, fish powder, momoni, smoked mackerel, and seasonings. However, some gaps in specific fish, momoni, or saltpeter mean that occasional substitutions or omissions are needed; Genesis is moderate, while the Asian supermarket is high.

Umami Shop carries a limited subset of Ghana-relevant items within a broader “world food” assortment, so many components rely on generic Canadian or non-West African alternatives, and adequacy for beans stew is low. Real Canadian Superstore and Save-On Foods stock only generic versions of relevant ingredients (like vegetable oil, generic chilies, and standard stock cubes) and no clearly Ghana-specific brands, which means extensive substitutions are required for almost every Ghana-specific item, and the Ghanaian flavor profile can only be approximated, with low adequacy overall.

Taken together, these results show a clear hierarchy in how Lethbridge retail spaces support Ghanaian home cooking. Vestelyn Varieties most closely approximates a Ghanaian market, offering nearly all the core ingredients in Ghana-specific forms, while Genesis and the Asian Supermarket also enable a recognizably Ghanaian beans stew, albeit with some substitutions and gaps. By contrast, Umami Shop performs worse than its curated, “world food” presentation might suggest, providing only partial coverage of the menu and requiring frequent reliance on generic or non-West-African substitutes, making it low.

Table 5.7. Overall Comparison Across the Six Stores

Store	Presentation Type	Recipe Support
Vestelyn Varieties	Diaspora-anchored	Strong
Store	Presentation Type	Recipe Support
Asian Supermarket	Immigrant integration	Strong
Genesis Exotic Market	Strongly African-coded	Moderate
Umami Shop	Exotic/ curated	Weak
Real Canadian Superstore	Mainstream	Weak
Save On Foods	Mainstream	Weak

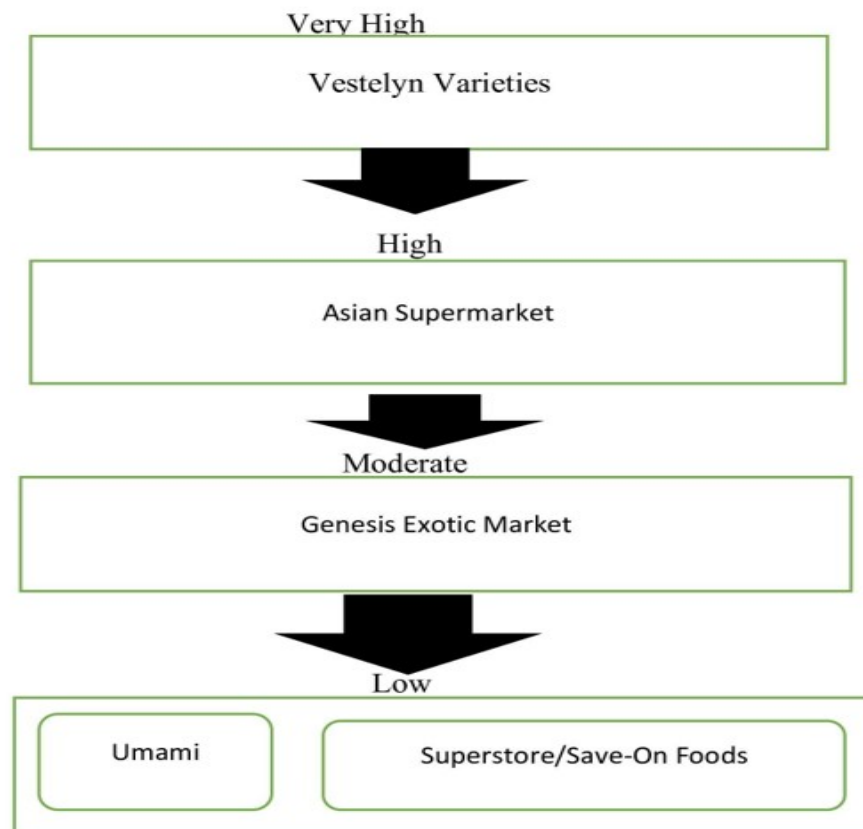
The two mainstream supermarkets, Real Canadian Superstore and Save-On-Foods, sit at the bottom of the hierarchy: they supply basic components like beans, generic oils, and onions, but lack the Ghana-specific items—for example, West African Maggi cubes, Scotch bonnet peppers, and palm oil—that define the stew’s diasporic identity. This ordering becomes crucial in the discussion chapter, where it is compared to how each store’s linguistic landscape positions its imagined customers.

5.6 Acculturation Spectrum of Retail Spaces

5.6.1 Acculturation spectrum of retail spaces

The Ghanaian menu findings allow the six stores to be positioned along a spectrum from diaspora-anchored retail environments to mainstream Canadian supermarkets that treat Ghanaian cooking as marginal or impossible. Rather than a binary opposition between “ethnic” and “mainstream” shops, the data suggest a continuum of acculturation orientations, which can be represented schematically as follows:

Figure 5.1. Acculturation spectrum of retail spaces



From the above table, Asian Supermarket outperformed Genesis Exotic Market in supporting the preparation of Ghanaian beans stew, despite Genesis presenting itself far more overtly as an African-focused store. This suggests that storefront identity does not translate directly into culinary support: a broadly multi-ethnic store with deep, consistent stock can outperform a more narrowly African-coded store with a few key gaps. Vestelyn Varieties remains the only store offering complete support, while Umami Shop’s curated “world food” branding produces the weakest result of any store in the study, mainstream or specialty despite far more polished self-presentation than either mainstream chain.

(Text variant of the illustration of the acculturation spectrum above)

At the diaspora-anchored end, Vestelyn Varieties and Asian Supermarket most closely approximate Ghanaian markets, enabling full or near-full preparation of beans stew with Ghana-specific ingredients and presupposing insider culinary knowledge. Genesis Exotic Market occupies an intermediate position: it supports multiple immigrant communities and allows Ghanaian cooking through a mixture of authentic and substitute ingredients. Umami Shop, despite its “world food” branding, indexes cosmopolitan Canadian consumers who experiment with global cuisines; its limited support for Ghana-specific ingredients places it in the mainstream. Real Canadian Superstore and Save-On-Foods occupy the mainstream end of the spectrum: they supply only generic ingredients, so Ghanaian meals can only be approximated through substitutions, pushing recipes toward assimilated Canadian versions. The recipe findings complicate the storefront analysis. Some store’s present themselves as more culturally specific than their practical usefulness for Ghanaian cooking, while others appear more generic but support the recipe more effectively. This suggests that visual self representation and culinary accessibility are related but not identical dimensions of retail space.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Discussion

6.1.1 Analytical Framework

6.1.1.1 Acculturation and Indexicality

Read together, the two parts of this thesis test each other. Chapter 4 showed what each store's linguistic landscape claims about its audience; chapter 5 tested whether that claim holds up in practice. The discussion below considers where those two levels align, and where they diverge. The menu-tracing methodology generates data interpretable through Berry's acculturation model and Silverstein's indexicality theory. Berry's framework distinguishes four acculturation strategies based on two intersecting questions: whether immigrants maintain their heritage cultural identity, and whether they engage with the broader host society. Integration denotes simultaneous maintenance of heritage and engagement with the host society; assimilation denotes adoption of the host culture at the expense of heritage practices; separation maintains heritage culture while avoiding engagement with the host society; marginalization engages with neither the host culture nor heritage practices.

Retail spaces shape what is possible for diaspora shoppers, but they do not dictate behavior. Customers exercise agency. Consider a store stocking both West African ingredients and mainstream Canadian products. This enables integration—shoppers can cook Ghanaian meals while also participating in broader Canadian consumer culture. Yet shoppers decide *how* to use such stores. Miller's (1998) ethnography shows that shopping involves care, creativity, and selectivity, not passive consumption. A Ghanaian customer might visit Genesis weekly for specific spices but purchase staples at Save-On-Foods or use ethnic stores only for special occasions.

Conversely, stores that primarily offer mainstream products do not automatically compel assimilation. Ghanaian shoppers adapt by shopping across multiple stores, substituting

ingredients, or modifying recipes. These practices' express identity negotiation, not retail submission (Warde, 1997).

My analysis treats retail infrastructure as creating conditions of possibility rather than deterministic outcomes. I examined what stores offer, but also foregrounded how diaspora households actively interpret, resist, and combine those offerings. Stores stocking exclusively ethnic products facilitate separation by enabling heritage maintenance without integration. For example, if Genesis or Vestelyn offered only West African goods, with no mainstream Canadian products, shoppers would need to visit multiple stores to meet basic needs—thereby maintaining ethnic identity while remaining separated from mainstream consumer practices. Marginalization—the absence of support from both heritage and host cultures—would manifest if a store offered neither authentic ethnic products nor accessible mainstream alternatives. However, this scenario is unlikely in Lethbridge; even mainstream stores like Real Canadian Superstore stock some international foods, and ethnic stores typically carry basic Canadian staples alongside specialty items.

The six-store comparison enabled this analysis. These retail environments reflected assimilationist pressures on Ghanaian cooking practices, as heritage ingredients are largely absent and substitution is required. Genesis and Vestelyn's position toward separation or integration depended on whether they also stock mainstream Canadian products. The Asian Supermarket and Umami offered a particularly revealing comparison: owned by the same family, presenting similar merchandise, yet positioned differently. Asian Supermarket supports heritage maintenance for diverse immigrant communities (integration or separation depending on customer use), Umami facilitating cosmopolitan Canadian engagement with exotic global cuisines (a form of host-society cultural diversification rather than immigrant acculturation per se).

Silverstein's (2003) indexicality theory provides the semiotic apparatus for analyzing how material presentation creates these positionings. Indexical signs point to social meanings beyond their referential content. A bag of cassava root does not merely refer to a botanical object; it indexes membership in communities for whom cassava is a dietary staple, signaling "this store knows who you are." The absence of cassava similarly indexes exclusion or assimilation pressure.

More specifically, Silverstein distinguishes presupposing indexicality (signs that assume pre-existing social identities) from creative indexicality (signs that construct or reshape identities). Unlabeled cassava in a diaspora store presupposes customer identity; "you already know this is cassava and what to do with it." Curated cassava with recipe cards at Umami creates identity; you are someone adventurous enough to try exotic ingredients. The French stickers on African imports index Canadian legal requirements but also presuppose immigrant customer identity (these products were not originally packaged for Canada; they were imported for you). Factory bilingual packaging suggests integration into the Canadian mainstream market.

The menu-tracing methodology thus reveals not merely ingredient availability but the semiotic landscape through which retail spaces position consumers within acculturation processes. The data generated enabled the analysis of whether Lethbridge's retail infrastructure supported integration (providing resources for both heritage maintenance and host society participation), pressures assimilation (requiring abandonment of specific culinary practices), or enabled separation (maintaining heritage practices with minimal mainstream engagement).

6.2 Conclusion

6.2.1 Methodological Implications

The product-based comparative methodology addresses a fundamental limitation in linguistic landscape research, the risk of remaining descriptive rather than analytical. By using a concrete Ghanaian menu as a research probe, this methodology transforms retail spaces from passive objects of documentation into active sites of empirical testing. The question shifts from “What signage exists?” to “Can I sustain my heritage cooking practices here?” This reorientation centers diaspora experience and transforms abstract theoretical concepts, acculturation, indexicality, and linguistic landscape into materially grounded empirical questions.

The six-store comparison provides the basic methodological architecture for my analysis, but it cannot bear the weight of claiming to represent Canadian immigrant retail environments more broadly. This study necessarily captures a localized and partial configuration of grocery retail rather than a national pattern. The initial four-store design risked reproducing a simple binary between “mainstream” and “ethnic” grocery spaces—mapping too neatly onto assimilation versus separation—rather than interrogating how such categories are constructed in practice. The addition of Asian Supermarket and Umami, particularly their shared family ownership, combined with the divergent presentation of largely overlapping merchandise, enables me to focus on how display strategies, branding, and menu design, rather than mere product availability, construct different acculturation positionings. This small-N design reflects a core principle of comparative methodology—that cases must be similar enough to sustain comparison yet different enough to reveal meaningful variation—but I treat the resulting patterns as exploratory insights into one city’s West African and immigrant retail ecology, rather than as a transferable general theory of Canadian multiculturalism.

The methodology also exemplifies the epistemological contributions of diaspora researchers. My position as a Ghanaian immigrant researcher is not offered here as a general epistemic advantage; insider knowledge is not always superior to outsider observation, and a substantial body of scholarship argues the reverse (see Naples 1996 on the insider/outsider debate in ethnographic research). Because the object of analysis is immigrant indexicality as presented by immigrant-owned stores to an implied immigrant reader, this positionality matters specifically because recognizing that indexicality requires sharing the interpretive frame it depends on. The embodied knowledge of what ‘African chicken’ should taste like, or which Maggi formulation is authentic, is not incidental detail; it is the condition under which Vestelyn’s ‘exotic’ can be read as ‘for you’ rather than “strange.” An outsider researcher could document the same signage but could not necessarily distinguish a store’s declared selfpresentation from its actual, practically legible, meaning to the community it addresses; which is exactly the gap the recipe-tracing methodology in Chapter 5 was designed to close. The previous chapters presented findings from the implementation of the methodology across all six stores. Analysis examined ingredient availability patterns, brand authenticity distributions, presentation strategy variations, and their implications for understanding how Lethbridge’s retail infrastructure positions immigrant consumers within acculturation processes. The methodology transformed retail spaces from neutral commercial environments into sites where acculturation negotiations materially unfold, where the possibility or impossibility of maintaining heritage practices became empirically demonstrable, and where linguistic landscapes revealed themselves as infrastructures of belonging and exclusion.

6.2.2 Answer to Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: How do Lethbridge shopkeepers use the linguistic landscape of their stores to express their target audience? The combined analysis of store histories, interior presentation, and the beans stew menu-tracing experiment show that each store mobilizes its

linguistic landscape—signage, product grouping, packaging languages, and in-store displays—to hail a different imagined customer. Although from the outside both stores bill themselves as “exotic,” on the inside, Vestelyn Varieties and Genesis Exotic Market presuppose a West African diaspora clientele: unlabeled bulk products, Ghana- and Nigeriaspecific items (such as mortar and pestle known in the Ghanaian language; Twi as ‘waduro ne woma’ shown in the figure below, particular breads, flours, and fish), and imported brands with minimal explanation all index an expectation that customers already possess the culinary knowledge needed to recognize and use these goods. In these spaces, Ghanaian and Nigerian shoppers are positioned as insiders for whom the store is “home.”

Figure 6.1. An Image of a Mortar and Pestle



The Asian Supermarket constructs a broader immigrant-oriented landscape outside and in mixed Asian, African, and Caribbean products, extensive use of non-English scripts, and dense aisles of bulk goods presuppose familiarity with a range of non-European cuisines, but not necessarily with Ghana specifically. By contrast, Umami Shop’s minimalist design, curated shelves, explanatory labels, and cooking-school infrastructure address cosmopolitan Canadian consumers seeking “world” or “exotic” food experiences, not primarily first-generation immigrants. Mainstream chains such as Real Canadian Superstore and Save-

OnFoods, with clearly bounded “international” aisles and English-dominant labeling, position ethnic foods as marked, peripheral categories within an otherwise Canadian grocery environment. In short, the linguistic landscapes of these six stores differentiate between diaspora insiders, general immigrant communities, adventurous non-immigrant foodies, and mainstream shoppers, and the menu-tracing results confirm that these semiotic positionings align with how far each store supports Ghanaian cooking. Specifically, Vestelyn Varieties and Genesis, positioned toward diaspora insiders, offered the strongest and most moderate recipe support respectively; Asian Supermarket, addressing a broader immigrant community, still matched or exceeded Genesis, showing that broad immigrant framing can serve a specific diaspora as well as targeted branding. Umami, addressing adventurous non-immigrant food explorers, offered comparatively weak support: curation for exploration does not guarantee stock depth for heritage cooking. Superstore and Save-On, positioning ethnic foods as peripheral for mainstream shoppers, required the most substitutions. The Asian Supermarket/Genesis discrepancy shows this alignment is strong but not perfect.

6.2.3 Answer to Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked: What does the linguistic landscape of immigrant-owned shops say about their owners’ acculturation in Lethbridge? Interpreted through Berry’s model, the six-store comparison suggests a spectrum of acculturation strategies that is materially realized in signage, product range, and menu support. Vestelyn Varieties and Genesis maintain strong heritage orientations through their inventories and in-store semiotics, but they also stock Canadian staples and operate within wider local retail circuits, enabling customers to integrate—maintaining Ghanaian and Nigerian foodways while engaging with the Canadian host society. The Asian Supermarket, originally founded to serve immigrant communities across multiple regions, similarly supports integration: its broad multilingual offerings allow diverse diasporas to sustain heritage practices while shopping alongside other groups.

Umami and the mainstream chains embody different acculturation logics. Umami's linguistic landscape indexes a cosmopolitan, host-society orientation: it integrates "global" cuisines into an upscale Canadian food culture, but offers limited support for specifically West African cooking, effectively assimilating African ingredients into a generalized "exotic" repertoire. Real Canadian Superstore and Save-On-Foods display assimilationist tendencies at the level of culinary practice: Ghanaian shoppers can only approximate beans stew by using generic oils, stock cubes, and chilies, which pressures heritage recipes toward Canadianized versions. None of the stores fully instantiate separation or marginalization in Berry's sense—ethnic shops sell Canadian staples and mainstream shops carry at least some international foods—but the pattern of menu adequacy shows that some linguistic landscapes more robustly support integration (Vestelyn, Genesis, Asian Supermarket), while others primarily facilitate host-society diversification rather than immigrant acculturation (Umami, mainstream chains). The Ghanaian menu thus makes visible how acculturation orientations are built into retail infrastructures: into what can be cooked, with what substitutions, and at what cost to diasporic culinary identity.

As summarized in the spectrum diagram in Chapter 4, these stores occupy distinct positions along a continuum from diaspora-anchored environments (Vestelyn, Genesis), through multiethnic immigrant integration (Asian Supermarket), to cosmopolitan "exotic" curation (Umami) and mainstream Canadian supermarkets (Real Canadian Superstore, Save-OnFoods), operationalizing Berry's abstract categories in the material organization of retail space. Concretely, Vestelyn and Genesis operationalize separation-leaning strategies through complete or near complete heritage ingredient stock combined with minimal accommodation for non-diaspora shoppers; unlabeled bulk goods and handwritten signage presuppose insider knowledge as to explaining it. Asian Supermarket operationalizes integration through its dual capacity to support heritage cooking across multiple immigrant communities while remaining

legible to a broad consumer base, evidenced by both its high recipe adequacy and its accessible, English-language signage. Umami is a host-society-oriented form of engagement rather than immigrant acculturation: with its curated labeling and explanatory framing, it addresses Canadian consumers exploring unfamiliar cuisines, while its weak recipe support shows this framing is not built around sustaining diaspora practice. Likewise Save-On and Superstore also operates on an assimilation pressure through the near total absence of Ghanaspecific stock, forcing Ghanaian shoppers to substitute host-culture products for the heritage ones to approximate the dish at all. In this way, Berry's categories are not simply applied as external labels but are read directly off material features—stock completeness, signage accessibility and substitution burden—that differentiate one store's retail infrastructure from another's.

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APPENDIX 1

Pictorial Representations of the Six Stores

1. Vestelyn Varieties



2. Genesis Exotic Market



3. Save-On-Foods

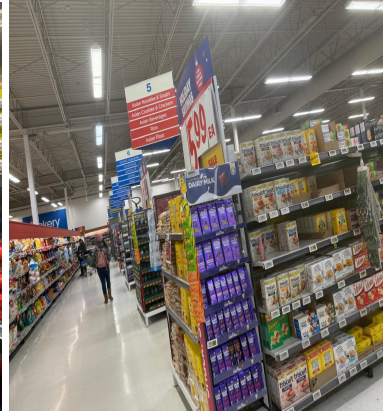
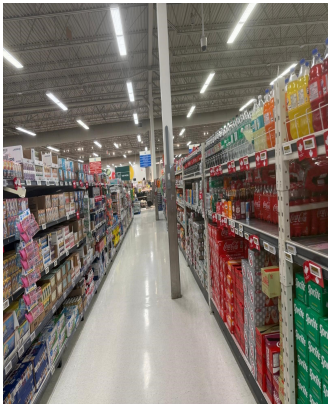


4. Umami Shop



5. Real Canadian Superstore





6. Asian Supermarket

