

# From France to the States: Multilingualism in Protest Signs

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## Introduction

In 2016, following the deace of a Chinese merchant Zhang Chaolin in Aubervilliers (93 arrondissement) in Paris in France, the Chinese community launched the protest #securitepour tous requesting the presence of more police force in the area to enforce their security.

In 2021, after several hate crimes targeting Asians in the US, the Asian community initiated a mass protest #stopasianhate in America. These two movements are similar in that they both concerned the Asian community and are related to hate crimes.

Therefore, it would be interesting to compare the multilingual signs the protestors used in these two movements.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1 Previous work on multilingual protest signs

Numerous works have been done on multilingual protest signs from different perspectives. For example, Kasanga (2014) examined the multilingual discourse of protest in the "Arab Spring" revolution and found that signs are powerful tools for conveying cultural and political meaning. Rojo (2014), by looking at the signs used in Arab Spring/ Indignados/ Occupy movements in Cairo, Madrid, Athens, L.A., and Santiago de Chile, demonstrated the spatial dynamics of discourse in global protest movements. Shiri (2015) then investigated the languages of protest signs in public spaces in Tunisia during the presidential protest. Monje (2017) focused on multilingual "unfixed" signs (including texts on bodies, t-shirt, etc.) in Protest in Manila and concluded that such "unfixed" signs are indices of linguistic diversity and ethnolinguistic vitality. Al-Naimat (2019), from a semiotic point of view, analyzed the multilingualism in signs of protest in Jordanian Protest in 2018 with a focus on code choice.

### 1.2 Current Analysis Models for Code-switching in written texts

Markedness Model proposed by Myers-Scotton (1993) and Conversation Analysis Model (Auer, 2010; Wei, 2005).

However, Sebba (2013:99) reasoned that the first would only be suitable for "more conversation-like and interactive written genres", such as emails (Goldberg, 2009), while the second is more restricted to "more conversation-like interactive written data" and is not helpful for "non-interactive data".

### 1.3 Sebba's Analytical Model

- Sebba (2013: 106-109) proposed a multimodal analysis model for written code-switching, which includes the following components:

- Units of analysis
- Language-spatial relationships
- Language-content relationships
- Language mixing type
- 'Parallel' texts and 'Complementary' texts

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Corpus

- For #securitepour tous, most of the photos come from their official Facebook account of the protest. Some others were found online. (<https://www.facebook.com/SecuritepourT/>)
- For #stopasianhate, all photos were taken from a Chinese social media app named RED (a quasi-equivalent of Instagram in the Chinese version).

### 2.2 Analytical framework

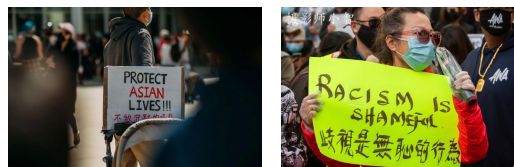
- Multimodal analysis model de Sebba

## 3. Results

### 3.1 #securitepour tous



### 3.2 #stopasianhate



When we compare the signs used in these two movements, we can see that, as in #securitepour tous, most of the signs in the movement of #stopasianhate are monolingual signs. But what is different from the signs used in the previous movement is that the monolingual signs in #stopasianhate are not exclusively in English, the official language of the country where the protests take place. We also see many monolingual signs written in Chinese. On the one hand, this might be due to the limited written repertoire of the sign-makers; on the other hand, #securitepour tous is more organized since the protestors have the t-shirt distributed ahead of the event, and the signs that they used seem to be uniform in size and material. Most signs used in #securitepour tous are pre-printed, while the signs used in #stopasianhate come in all formats. Therefore, there might be someone who controls the quality of the languages used in the protest signs in the first movement.

The difference in the signs used in these two movements reveals the different intended addressees. The #securitepour tous is more government and media-oriented, with pre-printed signs and uniform outfits. In contrast, the #stopasianhate might be more public-oriented, with signs in different styles, indicating that this is for everyone. This can be corroborated by the fact that the #securitepour tous intended to seek enhanced security by adding police force in 93 arrondissement in Paris. As a result of the movement, the police department wrote a public letter to the community.

## Conclusion

- In this article, by adopting the multimodal analytical model proposed by Sebba (2013), we compared some signs used in the movements of #securitepour tous and #stopasianhate, the first launched by the Chinese community in Paris following the assassin of Zhang Chaolin in Aubervilliers (in 93 arrondissement) in Paris and the second initiated by the Asian community in America following several hate crimes targeting Asians.
- As a result, we see that the two movements differ significantly in their organization and sign-making due to their difference in their intended addressees. By conducting a multimodal analysis, we demonstrate that nothing is randomly placed in protest signs. There is always some extra-linguistic information that the sign makers try to convey. At the same time, the signs can not only tell us about who the sign makers are but also who the addressees of the signs.

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