



RESEARCH

Clarkston Linguistic Affections and Cosmopolitan Orientations: A Study of Migrant Language Attachments in a Densely Multilingual Ecology

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Clarkston, Georgia, is frequently described as one of the most linguistically diverse square miles in the United States. This article analyzes interview data from thirty-six refugee and migrant residents to examine how they speak about the languages they “love the most.” These interviews form part of a larger sociolinguistic survey of the Clarkston area, in which the research team encountered 663 people (Lukkarila 2025). Drawing on recent scholarship on cosmopolitanism, diasporic literacy, and religious multilingualism, the analysis groups the loved-language responses into three orientations, reports descriptive counts alongside respondents’ education, religious affiliation, and length of residence in the United States, and integrates qualitative excerpts that display how language affection participates in affective cosmopolitanism, diasporic literacy and access, and intergenerational language imaginaries within Clarkston’s densely multilingual ecology.

Introduction

The small Atlanta-area city of Clarkston has become emblematic of contemporary refugee resettlement in the United States. Its prominence rests less on the scale of its arrivals than on the conditions that produced them: federal placement patterns have shifted steadily away from traditional immigrant gateways toward smaller, less costly metropolitan areas, where even modest numbers of arrivals can reshape a community’s linguistic composition (Singer and Wilson 2006; Bose 2021). Clarkston represents an intensified instance of that broader pattern rather than a departure from it, and that concentration is precisely what makes it a productive site for examining how multilingual repertoires form and how residents describe them. Refugees resettled in Georgia since fiscal year 2012 have come from sixty-eight countries,¹ though arrivals have been heavily concentrated, with only a handful of those countries accounting for more than a thousand people each: Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bhutan, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The sociolinguistic survey on which this article

¹ Data available from the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, annual “Refugee Arrivals by State and Nationality” reports since FY2012, <https://www.rpc.state.gov/archives/> (accessed October 1, 2026).

draws encountered Clarkston-area residents from roughly forty countries who reported ninety-six confirmed mother tongues, with a further forty-nine languages named as second languages or possible mother tongues (Lukkarila 2025). This concentration of linguistic and cultural diversity renders Clarkston a densely multilingual ecology in which everyday interactions carry the traces of global conflict, humanitarian regimes, and religious transnationalism.

Within such ecologies, multilingual practices are not only instrumental. They are also affective, ethical, and imaginative. Individuals cultivate attachments to particular languages that display kinship, region, religion, aspiration, or safety. Recent work in cosmopolitanism has stressed that global belonging should not be conceptualized solely as an abstract moral stance but also as an embodied and situated practice shaped by migration histories, power relations, and competing imaginaries of the “world” (Banerjee et al. 2025; Delanty 2018; Ritter 2025; van Hoof 2009; Weltman 2024). Studies of diasporic and digital cosmopolitanism likewise underscore how dispersed communities develop new forms of identification and connectivity through media, literacy, and language choice (Minchilli 2024).

Building on this framework, this research asks: (RQ1) How do Clarkston residents describe and evaluate the languages they love, and (RQ2) how can their descriptions inform modern cosmopolitanism studies? It examines how refugees and migrants in Clarkston approach the languages they “love the most,” rather than treating language as a neutral medium. The analysis takes language affection as an entry point into cosmopolitanism, power, and belonging. The focus is on three patterned orientations that emerge from the data: mother tongue love, cosmopolitan adaptation, and interwoven acclimatization.² Together, these orientations illuminate how residents of a materially constrained but linguistically rich community assemble repertoires that are partly chosen and partly imposed, and that mediate identity, mobility, and dignity alike. The findings display how refugees and migrants negotiate linguistic capital, language use in prayer and worship, and intergenerational language imaginaries in the United States resettlement context.

Conceptual Framework: Varieties of Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is explored in philosophy, political theory, and sociology to describe both ethical obligations toward all people and real-world patterns of global interaction. In practice, the term is sometimes misconstrued as a single normative ideal anchored in abstract world citizenship, but this is not the case. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes its plurality, situatedness,

² Following the coding scheme detailed in the appendix, *mother tongue love* denotes affection for a heritage language grounded in family, origin, and belonging; *cosmopolitan adaptation* denotes affection for a language of wider reach, valued for mobility, prestige, or expressive range; and *interwoven acclimatization* denotes a layered attachment spanning more than one language, in which heritage and reach are held together rather than traded against each other.

and contested histories. For example, van Hooft (2009) conceptualized cosmopolitanism as a moral stance grounded in equal concern for all persons, while also recognizing the need to locate that ethical commitment in concrete practices and institutions. Delanty (2018) further argued that cosmopolitanism is best understood as a series of historical and social projects rather than a finished state, highlighting the productive tensions between local attachments and global orientations. In this vein, scholars note diverse traditions of cosmopolitanism—religious, postcolonial, and non-Western—that challenge any single Western perspective (Banerjee et al. 2025; Flanagan 2025). More recently, Ritter (2025) proposed a morphological approach that analyzes cosmopolitanism as a cluster of concepts and practices that can combine in different ways in different places. A prime example of this is offered by Minchilli (2024), who examines diasporic cosmopolitanism and digital media, showing how dispersed communities cultivate cross-border attachments and practices without abandoning local commitments, a pattern observed during research in Clarkston in November 2025. From a religious standpoint, Filomeno (2024) studies Christian cosmopolitanism directly. He convened deliberative dialogues on immigration among more than a hundred Christians across fourteen Baltimore congregations of differing demographic makeup, asking whether such conversations could bridge divisions of nationality, race, and culture. He concludes that they can, and he closes with practical tools for church leaders who want to use dialogue to work against segregation.

This broader view provides several resources for interpreting the phenomenon in Clarkston, Georgia. First, it invites attention to overlapping and sometimes competing cosmopolitan projects. Residents may enact several of what Flanagan (2025) identifies as varieties of cosmopolitanism. Flanagan distinguishes identity, aesthetic, pluralistic, moral, political, and prudential cosmopolitanisms. The last of these holds that attending to others' flourishing is in one's own interest, given shared conditions of peace and safety, and Flanagan observes that in an interconnected world prudential and moral reasons converge. The Clarkston material sits mainly in Flanagan's aesthetic and prudential registers, but it presses against his taxonomy in two respects. Respondents orient toward African and Asian networks rather than Euro-Atlantic centers, so that the wider world they reach toward is a translocal South rather than the West; and their openness is often sustained through shared worship and sacred languages. Both patterns are collective rather than individual. Where Flanagan's varieties describe positions a person may hold, these are formed within communities and passed on through them, which suggests that in a resettlement context cosmopolitan orientation is as much a property of groups as of persons. Second, it foregrounds the ethical and political stakes of cosmopolitan practices. Loving English, Swahili, French, or Arabic is not neutral; it is bound up with global hierarchies of value and access. Respondents who named English as the language they love most tended to explain that choice in terms of access, schooling, and

opportunity rather than identification with Anglophone culture. These accounts do not settle whether such attachment reflects the workings of linguistic hierarchy, since frameworks of linguistic imperialism anticipate precisely this kind of reasoning (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). What the survey does suggest is narrower: within this sample, love for English was articulated as a claim on the future, and respondents rarely framed it as displacing affection for the mother tongue.

In Clarkston, these conceptual cosmopolitan threads converge around language. The data document what can be described as cosmopolitan adaptation: an orientation in which individuals develop affection for power languages that enable movement through state agencies, humanitarian bureaucracies, workplaces, and transnational faith networks. At the same time, mother tongue love persists as an affective anchor, and interwoven acclimatization captures those cases in which residents hold together mother tongues, regional lingua francas, and global or sacred languages as part of a single, interdependent repertoire. Cosmopolitan themes anchor these findings conceptually to promote understanding of the complexity at hand.

Methodology

This article analyzes a subset of a larger sociolinguistic survey of Clarkston and the surrounding Atlanta area, conducted by Pioneer Bible Translators in partnership with SIL International and Dallas International University between August and November 2025 (Lukkarila 2025). The present analysis was carried out by Kendra Duran of Dallas International University and Miranda Kuykendall of International Literacy and Development (ILAD). The parent study was a language and literacy needs assessment. Its stated goals were to determine which minority languages and ethnolinguistic identities are present in the area and to assess the need for literacy development, including gaps in access to Scripture. Over the course of the survey, the research team encountered 663 people. Of these, thirty-six agreed to a full interview, and this article analyzes those thirty-six records. The remaining participants were recorded in survey journals, which captured mother tongues, second languages, and countries of origin, along with observations and conversational details. Interviewees gave documented informed consent before any personal information was requested. No one under eighteen was interviewed. Where this article draws on conversational material recorded in the survey journals rather than on interview responses, it is noted.

Recruitment proceeded by self-selection rather than by approach. Because of the political climate during the fieldwork period, the team judged that approaching residents directly risked causing fear and set up tables at most survey sites so that people could come to them instead. The interview instrument was designed to capture both structural and affective dimensions of multilingualism. It recorded mother tongues, other spoken languages, literacy practices, migration pathways, and religious participation, alongside

open-ended questions on language attitudes. A central item asked, “Which language do you love the most?” This was an open-ended question rather than a fixed-choice item; respondents named a single language in most cases, though two volunteered a pair, and one answered in terms of mother tongue rather than naming a specific language. Interviewers frequently recorded a brief rationale alongside the response. The item was followed by prompts about religious practice, languages used in worship and prayer, and intergenerational language use. Twenty-nine of the thirty-six interviewees answered the loved-language item, and the orientation analysis below rests on those twenty-nine responses.

Participants learned of the survey through local networks, including community spaces, faith communities, and refugee-serving organizations. Although the sample is not statistically representative, it reflects Clarkston’s core geographies of origin, including Burma/Myanmar, Nepal, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Poland. Respondents reported a wide range of lengths of residence in the United States, from recent arrivals who had been in the country for only two weeks to individuals who had lived in the country for more than two decades. Educational backgrounds ranged from no formal schooling to postgraduate degrees. Religious affiliations included various Christian traditions and Islam, with a smaller number of respondents preferring not to disclose their faith. Respondent characteristics are summarized in the appendix (Table 1. Respondent Characteristics).

The survey was administered in person by trained researchers. When necessary, interpreters assisted in the elicitation process to ensure comprehension and to allow respondents to answer in their preferred language. Responses were recorded on a standardized form and entered into a digital dataset.

A note on terminology is needed before the variables are described. The survey instrument used the phrase mother tongue, though the term is neither self-evident nor neutral. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) points out that a mother tongue can be defined by at least four competing criteria: origin, identification, competence, and function. These criteria often point to different languages for the same speaker. The Clarkston responses bear this out. Several respondents named more than one mother tongue. Two reported that they never had the chance to learn to read or write in the language they named. One distinguished the name of his language from the name of his town. Rampton (1990) argued for replacing the figure of the native speaker with the finer categories of expertise, affiliation, and inheritance, and those categories fit these respondents better than any single label. Where this article uses mother tongue, it follows what respondents said about themselves rather than applying a test of competence, and it treats the resulting ambiguity

as evidence rather than as noise. Laitinen (2017) works through the same definitional problem at greater length and is a useful entry point for readers who want the fuller debate.

A second note concerns the language written here as Burmese. Respondents and their interpreters used Burmese throughout, and most named the country Burma rather than Myanmar, so this article follows their usage. Readers should know that the government of Myanmar designates the language Myanmar, and that Burmese carries the name of the country's majority ethnic group, an association that speakers of minority languages from the same country may experience as a reminder of what was left behind.

Several variables were central to the analysis. First, the loved language response was coded into three orientations: (1) mother tongue love, (2) cosmopolitan adaptation, and (3) interwoven acclimatization (Figure 1. Thematic Coding of Language Affection Responses). Mother tongue love refers to cases where respondents name their mother tongue or a closely affiliated heritage language without reference to global reach or institutional functions. Cosmopolitan adaptation refers to cases where respondents explicitly justify their affection for a language in terms of its reach, mobility, prestige, or expressive affordances, particularly when these languages are widely recognized power languages such as English, Swahili, French, or Arabic. Interwoven acclimatization refers to cases where respondents love a combination of languages or narrate their language affection as a layered response to religious, regional, or institutional contexts, for example, naming a church language that is not their mother tongue or combining a heritage language with English.

Second, basic demographic and life-course variables were retained, including the highest level of education, self-reported length of residence in the United States, and normalized religious affiliation. Third, the country-of-origin field was used to locate respondents within broad regions and to interpret how regional linguistic ecologies might shape language orientations.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. Quantitatively, descriptive counts and cross-tabulations were generated to explore associations between orientations, education, years in the United States, and religious affiliation. These relationships are not presented as causal effects but as indicative patterns that inform interpretation. Qualitatively, open-ended responses were analyzed through iterative coding. Visually, four figures were developed to depict the thematic coding of orientations, the trajectories of interwoven acclimatization, language repertoire size by orientation, and a formal conceptual model.

Findings

The findings are organized around three orientations that recur in the Clarkston data: mother tongue love, cosmopolitan adaptation, and interwoven acclimatization. These categories are interpretive, but they grow directly out of how respondents describe their affection for particular languages and the reasons they offer.

Mother Tongue Love

Nearly every respondent expressed deep admiration for their mother tongue. We group these responses under the heading mother tongue love, which is our analytic term rather than one respondents themselves used. They name languages such as Zo, Karen, Zomi, Pashto, Nouba, Fulani, Tamil, Tennessean, and Burmese as the languages they love most. The sentiment emphasized familiarity and affect rather than reach, status, or institutional function.

Discussion around mother tongue love is grounded in memory, family, and origin and is associated with childhood, kinship, local communities, and, in some cases, village life. Mother tongues are the languages in which participants first learned to speak and often the languages they associate with relatives who may or may not have migrated. In the context of a densely multilingual ecology like Clarkston, naming a mother tongue as the most loved language is an act of continuity. It signals that, despite multiple relocations and new linguistic demands, attachment to the mother tongue persists, sustained through continued contact with other speakers both locally and at a distance.

This orientation does not map neatly onto any simple social gradient. Respondents who express mother tongue love include individuals with middle school education and those with university degrees, as well as people who have lived in the United States for only a few years and those who have done so for more than a decade. The data suggest that mother tongue love persists even when the language has limited “market value” in the United States. It operates as a form of affective resistance to purely instrumental logics and as a key component of intergenerational language imaginaries. Respondents often express the view, elsewhere in the survey, that children should learn their parents’ language first, then acquire English or other languages later. These views situate language transmission as a moral and cultural responsibility rather than a pragmatic choice.

Cosmopolitan Adaptation

A second orientation centers on cosmopolitan adaptation. Here respondents express love for languages that enable them to participate in wider publics and to navigate institutions. These languages are loved not only because they

are present in daily life, but because they are perceived as power languages that open doors, allow movement, and confer recognition. They are steps in achieving dreams, desires, and goals.

English is the clearest example. One respondent explains that he loves English as an “international language” and that he is “done with second languages of Myanmar.” The language affection is explicitly justified in terms of scale. English allows the speaker to move beyond the politically fraught languages of his homeland. It becomes a mobility tool for accessing jobs, paperwork, and higher education. It also functions as a cosmopolitan shield, enabling circulation in spaces where ethnic labels from Myanmar matter less. In this sense, loving English exemplifies what Bourdieu (1991) calls linguistic capital, the competence that yields a profit of distinction because the linguistic market has been unified and access to legitimate competence is unequally distributed. Bourdieu presses a harder question as well. He argues that symbolic domination works through a complicity that is neither passive submission to force nor free assent to a norm, but a set of dispositions laid down slowly by the sanctions of the market itself, and he notes that speakers who lack the legitimate competence are effectively shut out of the settings where it is required. Affection for a power language may therefore be at once a real attachment and an effect of the hierarchy it is used to navigate. Holding both readings together seems truer to the Clarkston accounts than choosing between them, and the affection also resonates with van Hooft’s (2009) insistence that cosmopolitanism is rooted in the capacity to relate ethically and communicatively to distant others.

This respondent, a Rohingya speaker who named English as the language he loves most, repays closer attention, because his case complicates any reading of cosmopolitan adaptation as simple preference. He was the only Rohingya speaker in the sample, and his was the only mother tongue that any respondent reported as having no written form; of the twenty-nine who answered that item, the other twenty-eight described their mother tongues as written. That report reflects perception rather than fact. Rohingya has three writing systems: Hanifi, the Latin-based Rohingyalish, and Arabic Fonna, but because it has not been taught as a school subject in Myanmar or in the camps in Bangladesh, most Rohingya do not regard it as a written language (Kuykendall 2025, 10–13). His own responses carry that tension: he reported his mother tongue as unwritten while also noting that he can read and write a little Rohingya and that his children cannot. The Rohingya Language Preservation Project (2022), a Rohingya-led research team based in Cox’s Bazar, documents how suppression in Myanmar and displacement into Bangladesh have together accelerated the loss of Rohingya language and cultural practice toward cultural genocide. In light of that history, being done with the second languages of Myanmar reads as more than an embrace of English as opportunity; it also carries a distancing from the languages of a state that targeted his community. That distancing is an orientation rather

than a break, since Burmese remains among his best-spoken languages and is used by children in his household. Even so, he continues to pray in Rohingya, and Rohingya remains one of the languages he uses at his place of worship alongside English and Hindi.³ Affection for a power language and devotional use of a mother tongue he regards as unwritten are held together in one person, and neither displaces the other.

The report also makes his answer about writing intelligible rather than anomalous. Rohingya culture rested for generations on oral transmission rather than a formal written script, and although two scripts are currently in use—Hanifi Rohingya, built from Arabic letters in the 1980s, and the Latin-based Rohingyalish, devised in 1999—written Rohingya remains recent and unevenly established. The same report traces a deliberate state campaign against the language: its removal from national radio broadcasting in 1964, the 1982 citizenship law that struck the Rohingya from the roster of recognized ethnic groups, and the renaming of Rohingya villages and landmarks with Burmese ones at the end of the 1980s. Bourdieu (1991) describes this process in another setting, where the formation of a state produces a unified linguistic market in which other languages and dialects are devalued by being measured against a single legitimate variety. The terminology is itself part of the mechanism: classifying a minority language as a dialect has long been one way of denying it standing, in Myanmar as elsewhere. What the Clarkston interview adds is the long tail of such policy, carried in one man's account of which languages he is finished with. The languages of wider communication in this case were the instruments of a hierarchy imposed from above, and the respondent's stance toward them registered that. But wider communication does not always arrive by imposition, and the next example shows a case of that kind of language being embraced rather than refused. Swahili represents a distinct form of cosmopolitan adaptation, regional rather than global.

A Bembe speaker from the Democratic Republic of the Congo names Swahili as the language he loves most, describing it as a language of “worldwide communication.” Swahili is not his mother tongue; he acquired it, and he places it alongside English and Bembe as one of his three strongest languages. His phrasing is worth noting. The reach he ascribes to Swahili is not that of a global lingua franca but of a regional one, and calling it worldwide reflects the world his own movement has described. Here “worldwide” is best interpreted as East and Central African cosmopolitanism rather than Euro-Atlantic horizons. Swahili crosses national borders across the Great Lakes and East Africa, bridges multiple ethnic groups, and is used in markets, transport, churches, and refugee camps. Loving Swahili means loving the capacity to

³ Rohingya speakers commonly draw on Urdu for religious material, and Hindi and Urdu are closely related; the interview did not distinguish between them, and the response is reported here as recorded.

speak across communities and to participate in a regional public sphere larger than any single nation-state. One respondent said, in a conversation recorded in the survey journals rather than in the interview schedule, that they would not have reached Clarkston without Swahili (Lukkarila 2025). This pattern corresponds to scholarship on Southern and regional cosmopolitanisms, which emphasize non-Western networks of trade, mobility, and cultural production (Banerjee et al. 2025; Delanty 2018; Minchilli 2024).

Beyond these cases, and more broadly, French appears in the data as a language associated with prestige, schooling, and NGO or state interfaces. Respondents with Central African backgrounds often list French alongside multiple African languages. French indexes formal education, literacy, and bureaucratic competence. Loving French is less about affective inheritance from France and more about admiring the doors it opens. It is the language in which respondents can interact with officials, doctors, school administrators, and aid workers. It allows them to present themselves as competent and serious in “high” institutional spaces. This pattern fits with the idea of diasporic literacy and access: refugees cultivate certain literacies, including in colonial or global lingua francas, because those literacies enable institutional recognition and resource acquisition.

The data also reveal that Arabic most often functions as a language of religious literacy, authority, and cross-border reach. Respondents describe Arabic as “beautiful to hear and speak, especially in poetry and song” and associate it with scripture, prayer, and teaching. In at least one narrative, Arabic becomes the language through which past stigmatization is reworked. A respondent notes that he was mocked for his Dinka, but he has now become an expert in Arabic. Religious study provides a pathway from shame to mastery, and Arabic becomes a vehicle for status and respect. This fits with Filomeno’s (2024) observations about Christian cosmopolitanism, where religious discourses and practices shape how communities imagine and enact global responsibility. In Clarkston, Arabic anchors a form of religious multilingualism in which sacred languages mediate authority, learning, and transnational belonging. Among Muslim respondents in Clarkston, two Pashto speakers from Afghanistan and a Fulani speaker from the Gambia all reported praying in Arabic while continuing to use their mother tongues at home, so that Arabic works less as a replacement for the heritage language than as a shared register of belonging reaching across the widest geographic distances in the sample. The pattern is not uniform, however. A Swahili speaker from the Democratic Republic of the Congo prays in Swahili, and the Rohingya respondent prays in Rohingya, which suggests that the devotional reach of Arabic varies even within a single faith community.

Cosmopolitan adaptation therefore differs from mother tongue love in both rationale and affective trajectory. While mother tongue love is anchored in memory and inheritance, cosmopolitan adaptation is grounded in what

the language can do in the world. Respondents explicitly reference “international” and “worldwide” communication, the ability to “express self better,” or the aspiration to speak “with an American accent.” They sometimes position these beloved power languages in tension with the smaller languages of their origin, as in the decision to be “done with second languages of Myanmar.” Yet the relationship is not purely oppositional. Respondents who show cosmopolitan adaptation rarely abandon their mother tongues. The two are distributed across domains rather than ranked against each other. In accounts of daily use, English is associated with workplaces, shops, and encounters with strangers, while mother tongues hold in the home, among relatives, and in congregational life. Several respondents drew the division explicitly, naming one language for parents and grandparents and another for coworkers and children. What this suggests is not a hierarchy of attachment but a division of labor in something close to Fishman’s (1972) sense of domain: languages are held at once and deployed according to setting and interlocutor. Institutional encounters, with employers, schools, clinics, and resettlement agencies, plainly bear on which languages are acquired, though our items asked about interlocutors rather than institutions, and we report only what respondents named.

Interwoven Acclimatization

A third group of responses illustrates what can be called interwoven acclimatization. In these cases, language affection is not concentrated in a single tongue. Rather, respondents narrate layered attachments that bring together mother tongues, regional lingua francas, institutional languages, and sacred languages. Four cases of interwoven acclimatization emerge as distinct linguistic trajectories, each illustrating a different pathway to layered language affection (Figure 2. Interwoven Acclimatization: Linguistic Trajectories and Layered Affection).

Case A exemplifies *congregational mediation*. The respondent’s mother tongue is Mru, a minority language from Myanmar, but he names Burmese as the language he loves most because “all my church people speak Burmese.” Here, congregational belonging in the United States is anchored in a language that is not the heritage tongue, and church community mediates language affection.

This arrangement is not peculiar to one family or one congregation. Churches serving communities from Myanmar commonly adopt Burmese as a shared language of worship and Scripture, and many East African congregations use Swahili in the same way, so that the language uniting a church is often a regional lingua franca rather than any one group’s heritage tongue. The Clarkston data show the pattern clearly. The respondent who named Burmese as the language he loves most, the Mru speaker who explained that his church community all speak Burmese, was interviewed at a Burmese-language Baptist congregation, and he reported worshipping in

Burmese while praying in both Mru and Burmese. Venue and finding are not independent here, and we flag the overlap rather than read his account as evidence of a wider pattern. A Bembe speaker from the Democratic Republic of the Congo worships in English and Swahili, prays in Swahili, and named Swahili as the language he loves most. Zomi-speaking respondents, by contrast, described congregations that worship in Zomi rather than in Burmese, sustaining the heritage language in precisely the domain where other communities have given it up. Congregational language choice therefore functions as a form of language planning that faith communities carry out for themselves, and it shapes which languages residents come to love. Eleven of the twenty-one Christian respondents worship in a language that includes their mother tongue, and seventeen pray in one that does (Table 2. Languages of Worship and Prayer, by Religious Affiliation).

Case B illustrates a *stigma-to-mastery trajectory*. The respondent, from South Sudan, describes being “picked on for his Dinka” in childhood but later becoming “an expert in Arabic” through religious and academic study. His affection is layered: Dinka carries both pain and identity, while Arabic mastery represents reclaimed dignity. After twenty-six years in the United States and graduate education, he worships in both Arabic and English. His trajectory links ethnic stigma, religious learning, and eventual recognition across different language regimes.

Case C represents *heritage-access duality*. The respondent simply names “Nepali and English” as the languages she loves most, dual affection explicitly stated, with neither displacing the other. She worships in English, suggesting religious life conducted in the mobility language while heritage affection persists.

Case D presents *learned-language affection*. The respondent, who holds a PhD and has lived in the United States for twenty-six years, names “Italian and Malayalam,” neither of which is a mother tongue (Trinidadian English Creole and English) nor an obvious power language. With the most extensive repertoire in the sample (more than ten languages mentioned), her affection is grounded in intellectual and aesthetic choice rather than heritage or access alone.

Together, these four cases reveal that interwoven acclimatization is not a single phenomenon but a family of trajectories united by layered affection, extended residence, and substantial multilingual resources. Interwoven acclimatization is particularly visible among respondents who have lived in the United States for longer periods and have higher levels of formal education. Additionally, it seems more likely among those who speak four or more languages (Figure 3. Language Repertoire Size by Orientation Type). This suggests that, over time, people living in a densely multilingual ecology develop complex repertoires in which no single language can stand in for their identity or aspirations. Instead, they weave together mother tongue love

and cosmopolitan adaptation. Interwoven acclimatization thus names the process by which multiple varieties of cosmopolitanism become integrated into everyday life, including the regional and religious forms proposed here as extensions of Flanagan's (2025) taxonomy (cf. Delanty 2018). It also mirrors Ritter's (2025) morphological understanding of cosmopolitanism as a cluster of elements that can be configured differently in different settings.

Discussion

The Clarkston data complicate simple narratives about assimilation, loss, or world citizenship. They show how residents of a densely multilingual ecology negotiate the tension between mother tongue love and cosmopolitan adaptation, and how interwoven acclimatization emerges as a pragmatic and affective response to life in migration corridors.

From a human rights and migration perspective, these orientations are not merely cultural curiosities. They reflect practical negotiations of institutional access and diasporic literacy. English, Swahili, French, and Arabic function as power languages. Residents love them in part because they facilitate access to work, health care, schooling, and legal status. Cosmopolitan adaptation, therefore, encapsulates what might be called a migration-pragmatic orientation, in which language choice and affection are deeply tied to survival, recognition, and the capacity to claim rights.

Written status and practical access are not the same thing. Nearly every respondent who answered reported that their mother tongue exists in written form, twenty-eight of twenty-nine. Yet only fifteen of the twenty-five who addressed the follow-up said they could obtain materials in that language in Clarkston. That item did not distinguish physical from digital access, and the open responses suggest respondents largely heard it as a question about materials at hand: four who answered no went on to describe online sources, including a Bible app, songs and poetry on video platforms, and one respondent who said printed materials were unavailable but that most things could be found online in his language. The figure is best read as an indicator of local print availability rather than of access overall. Their accounts of what is available are specific and uneven. One respondent from the Central African Republic explained that Sango materials cannot be bought locally and that new arrivals carry in hymnbooks and Bibles from home. Another had assembled a personal library and lost it in a move from Tennessee. A Zomi speaker observed that government documents are issued in Burmese and Karen but not in Zomi. Diasporic literacy in these accounts depends less on whether a language has a script than on whether anyone is supplying materials, and the shortfall falls hardest on speakers of the smallest languages (Table 3. Mother Tongue Written Status and Access to Materials, by Length of Residence in the United States).

At the same time, mother tongue love remains a crucial bulwark against erasure. It sustains intergenerational language imaginaries in which parents hope that children will inherit not only a religion or a national identity, but a language and the bodies of knowledge it carries: oral tradition, song and poetic genres, kinship terminology, and forms of practical and moral instruction that have no ready equivalent in English (Lewis and Simons 2016). Much of that inheritance comes from contexts that may be difficult or dangerous to revisit. This attachment resonates with critiques of cosmopolitanism that warn against its capacity to flatten difference or reproduce colonial erasures where local languages and histories are not taken seriously, a worry that Weltman (2024) canvasses before arguing against it. Several conversations recorded in the survey journals, rather than in the structured interviews, describe a related dynamic (Lukkarila 2025). Where parents spoke their mother tongue without learning English, the work of interpretation fell to their children, and that arrangement proved unstable in two directions. Some children were described as turning the dependence to their own advantage, misreporting what was said when problems arose at school. Others were relied upon in domains where their own command of the heritage language was incomplete, since children raised in resettlement commonly hold the household register while lacking the technical, numerical, and institutional vocabulary that such encounters demand. Both patterns appear in earlier fieldwork among refugee families in Dallas–Fort Worth, where service providers described children interpreting for their parents as insufficient for the communication schools require, and where parents reported feeling they knew only one half of their bicultural children (Kuykendall and Johnson 2019, 24, 45). Mothers in these conversations voiced concern about familial fragmentation, in which mother tongue love was pursued in isolation, and recommended to newcomers what we have called interwoven acclimatization with the help of fellow migrants as a way to strengthen the family, especially the mother’s voice. Because this material comes from unstructured conversation rather than from the interview schedule, it is offered as context rather than as a finding, and no count is implied; it does, however, identify a need for further research.

Interwoven acclimatization brings these tensions into a single repertoire. It aligns with Minchilli’s (2024) description of diasporic cosmopolitanism, where migrants maintain ties to multiple places and publics simultaneously, often mediated by digital and transnational media. In Clarkston, residents move between mother tongues, regional lingua francas, global languages, and sacred languages in ways that produce what might be called religious multilingualism. Faith communities become key sites where cosmopolitanism is debated, experienced, and enacted (Filomeno 2024). Congregations mediate not only theological commitments but also everyday language practices, from the choice of sermon languages to the languages used in prayer, song, and fellowship.

The three orientations can be positioned along two dimensions: identity anchoring and mobility function (Figure 4. Conceptual Model: Language Orientations by Identity Anchoring and Mobility Function). Identity anchoring reflects the degree to which language affection is grounded in kinship, community, and shared cultural and moral values, held in memory of an origin, but also enacted in worship, song, and daily relation. Mobility function reflects the degree to which affection is tied to institutional access, transnational reach, and recognition. Mother tongue love occupies the upper-left quadrant, characterized by high identity anchoring and relatively low mobility function. Cosmopolitan adaptation occupies the lower-right quadrant, where affection is oriented toward power languages that enable movement through institutions and wider publics. Interwoven acclimatization occupies the upper-right quadrant, combining high identity anchoring with high mobility function through layered linguistic repertoires. This position captures the distinctive quality of interwoven acclimatization: rather than trading heritage for access, individuals in this orientation hold both together, often mediated by religious community, extended residence, or accumulated multilingual resources.

The findings also speak to debates about varieties of cosmopolitanism. The affection for Swahili as a language of “worldwide communication” reflects a regional cosmopolitanism rooted in African networks rather than in North American or European imaginaries (Delanty 2018). Affection for French and Arabic indexes colonial histories and global hierarchies, but it also reveals how refugees appropriate these languages for their own purposes, transforming them into tools of religious authority or institutional navigation. This underscores Ritter’s (2025) point that cosmopolitanism is morphologically variable. The same language can encode different cosmopolitan projects depending on who uses it and to what ends.

Finally, the Clarkston material highlights affective cosmopolitanism. Residents do not only use power languages instrumentally. They love them. They admire the freedom, respect, and intelligibility these languages provide. For some, mastery of a power language is a way to reclaim dignity in the face of stigma, as in the shift from mocked Dinka to expert Arabic. For others, loving English is a way of aligning themselves with imagined futures of education and mobility. This affective dimension matters. It suggests that cosmopolitanism is not only a moral or political stance, but also a felt experience of connection, possibility, and social imaginary.

Limitations

As is common in migration research, the analytic sample is small. Twenty-nine respondents answered the loved-language item, and the smallest orientation contains four people. No inferential test is reported and none would be meaningful at these cell sizes. Where this article notes patterns by education, length of residence, or repertoire size, these describe the present

sample and are not offered as estimates of any wider population. Beyond this, item-level missingness is substantial and was handled by listwise deletion. Seven respondents did not answer the loved-language item, nine did not report a religious affiliation, six did not report length of residence, six did not report education, seven did not report whether their mother tongue is written, and eleven did not report whether materials are available locally. Finally, the orientation coding was developed by the authors and applied to open-ended responses that are often very brief. Several responses could reasonably be placed in more than one category, particularly where a respondent names a regional lingua franca that is not a mother tongue. Readers should treat the boundary between mother tongue love and cosmopolitan adaptation as interpretive rather than fixed. Rather than report an agreement statistic, we publish the coding rules and every coded response in full (Table 4. Orientation Coding Sheet), with the six borderline cases marked, so that readers can audit each decision.

Conclusion

Residents of Clarkston reveal a complex interplay of mother tongue love, cosmopolitan adaptation, and interwoven acclimatization. They hold tightly to mother tongues that anchor identity and memory. At the same time, they develop deep affection for power languages that enable them to navigate institutions and wider publics and to maintain familial bonds and unity. When these attachments combine, they produce interwoven acclimatization, a layered orientation that embodies multiple varieties of cosmopolitanism, including regional and religious forms that complicate global North frameworks.

By attending to how people talk about the languages they love, this article contributes to ongoing debates on cosmopolitanism, migration, and language in human rights contexts. It suggests that cosmopolitanism in places like Clarkston is not an elite ideology but an everyday practice that emerges at the intersection of displacement, institutional encounters, and multilingual repertoires. It also underscores that any adequate account of cosmopolitanism must grapple with the enduring power of mother tongues and the affective stakes of linguistic adaptation.

Future research could deepen this analysis by extending the dataset, incorporating longitudinal interviews, or conducting ethnographic fieldwork in specific congregations and community organizations. It could also explore how children and youth in Clarkston negotiate intergenerational language imaginaries and how digital media reshape diasporic literacy and access. For now, the Clarkston survey offers a snapshot of how refugees and migrants in one small U.S. city make sense of their linguistic worlds and, in the process, articulate their own varieties of cosmopolitanism.

Data come from the Clarkston Global Diaspora Survey, jointly funded by Dallas International University, SIL Global, and Pioneer Bible Translators. Analysis used Python (pandas, NumPy, SciPy, Matplotlib). Claude Opus (Anthropic) was used, under the authors' direction, to write and execute the Python code for data cleaning, coding, and statistical analysis, and to generate the tables in Appendix 1. The authors reviewed all output and take full responsibility for it.



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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Appendix: Tables and Figures

Download: <https://jlc.diu.edu/article/172051-clarkston-linguistic-affections-and-cosmopolitan-orientations-a-study-of-migrant-language-attachments-in-a-densely-multilingual-ecology/attachment/369571.pdf>
