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Linguistic Landscape of Salon and Barbershop Signages in Nyamagana District: Revelations on Language Choice

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Abstract

This study investigated language choice as embodied on salon and barbershop signboards of the Nyamagana District, Mwanza – Tanzania, focusing on the prevailing language employed, the location of the signage, and gendered patterns of language use. Guided by the Language Choice Theory and adopting a qualitative approach, the study examined the linguistic landscape of these enterprises and customers' attitudes towards the adopted language. Data were collected through direct observation of signages and in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 informants: five salon owners, five barbershop owners, and ten clients (five from each setting). The findings show that signages are predominantly located at the front of shops and on adjacent walls and serve as visible linguistic zones of contact with potential clients. Kiswahili was the most widely used language in salons and barbershops, followed by English. However, this choice may unintentionally exclude customers who are not proficient in Kiswahili, potentially limiting customers' accessibility. These trends demonstrate how language use aligns with assumed gender tastes, social identity, and target market. The study concludes that while the current signage practices are designed to attract consumers, the exclusive reliance on a specific language, particularly English, in barbershops, is bound to restrict access by Kiswahili-dominant speakers. It recommends promoting bilingual signage and applying a national language policy for public signs to enhance inclusivity, ease communication, and ensure equal accessibility to services in gendered spaces.

Keywords

Linguistic landscape, salon, barbershop, signage, monolingual, code-mixing, code-switching, gender, language, Kiswahili and English

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1. Introduction

This article examines the linguistic landscape of salons and barbershops, focusing on the languages used in their signages. In multilingual countries, the choice of languages on public signage is critical. Often, signage fails to serve all audiences due to the prevalence of monolingual signs, leading to confusion or misinterpretation. This concern aligns with findings from [Benedicto and Tibategeza \(2021\)](#), [Alphonse and Lusekelo \(2018\)](#), and [Mdukula \(2017\)](#), who explored linguistic landscapes in Tanzania. However, choosing the appropriate language ensures clear communication for all. This article aims to identify the languages on salon and barbershop signage and assess customer perceptions of these choices in the Nyamagana District of Mwanza - Tanzania.

1.2 Background to the study

People come across different languages in their daily activities, especially in social settings. [Alotaibi and Alamri \(2022\)](#) note languages are present in large public commercial advertisements, shop sign language, and even salon and barber shop signage as well as road signs and institutional building names. Again, [Jaworski and Thurlow \(2010\)](#) present the linguistic landscape as the languages observed in specific public settings, sometimes called the semiotic landscape. Different scholars have tried to trace the term “linguistic landscape”. For instance, [Backhaus \(2005\)](#) notes that this concept is prevalent in Quebec and Belgium due to the rife language controversies (p. 104). Even more, [Landry and Bourhis \(1997, p. 24\)](#) explains that the strife developed between two factions over the language that was to dominate public written displays. This idea became especially pertinent after the violent quarrels between the French and Flemish-speaking people where it helped to resolve such disputes.

The approaches differ from one scholar to another about the definition of linguistic landscape. [Landry and Bourhis \(1997\)](#) have explained it as the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signage. Similarly, [Cenoz and Gorter \(2006\)](#) describe it as the presence of language constituents that can be physically seen in particular public areas, including inscriptions on billboards, road signs, place and street names, advertisement signboards as well as government building signage. One of the most widely quoted definitions was given by [Landry and Bourhis \(1997\)](#). They defined it as “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs and public signs on government buildings which together form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region or urban agglomeration” (p. 23). In broad terms, the linguistic landscape attempts to capture the tangible existence of languages within a specific geography and includes public facilities such as schools, universities, hospitals, hostels, and salons and barbershops. In this sense, choosing appropriate languages to adequate public facilities and services contributes significantly to creating a fitting linguistic landscape. On the contrary, the lack of proper language choice on signs may result in communicative barriers.

[De Bres \(2015\)](#) argues that language on signage typically serves purposes such as informing, advertising, directing, warning, regulating or announcing information to users or customers in public spaces. The choice of language reflects the prevalent languages in a city or region, highlighting which language(s) are locally relevant or emerging. [Alotaibi and Alamri \(2022\)](#) classify linguistic landscapes into two types: top-down and bottom-up landscapes. Top-down landscapes focus on language elements disseminated by the national government and public institutions, including signage in public spaces and official public announcements. In contrast, the bottom-up linguistic landscape comprises signs created by individuals such as shop owners and personal announcements ([Ben-Rafael et al., 2006](#)). Private organizations make bottom-up signs, whereas top-down signs are connected to governments or official institutions.

Language on signs usually serves to inform, advertise, direct, warn, regulate, or announce information to users or customers in public spaces, according to [De Bres \(2015\)](#), the language selection highlights which language or languages are emerging or relevant locally by reflecting the most common languages in a city or region. Language landscapes are divided into two categories by [Alotaibi and Alamri \(2022\)](#) top-down and bottom-up landscapes. The language used by the national government and public institutions, such as official public announcements and signage in public areas, is the main focus of top-down landscapes. In contrast, signs made by people, like store owners and private announcements, make up the bottom-up linguistic landscape ([Ben-Rafael et al., 2006](#)). Bottom-up signs are made by private organizations, whereas top-down signs are connected to governments or official institutions.

As Tanzania is well known for its diversity in languages with over 150 documented languages ([Muzale & Rugemalira, 2008](#)), Kiswahili serves as the national language and principal method of communication and English serves as the official language in many institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities. Indigenous languages are employed to carry out informal communication among speakers of specific indigenous dialects. Thus, in that sense, business

office signage needs to be bilingual or multilingual to provide messages easily to all target customers. Literature (Backhaus, 2005) confirms that social, political and economic discourse along with globalization, has facilitated the employment of monolingual, bilingual and multilingual advertising signage worldwide. Dominant languages are usually employed in both print and visual media outlets (Puntoni et al., 2009). Kasanga (2012) holds that languages on signs are indicators of locally significant languages or evidence of emerging languages of significance.

In a multilingual society, signs must be able to accommodate the language needs of the people. This concurs with De Bres (2015) in emphasizing the importance of language selection on signs, particularly for companies that wish to communicate information effectively to linguistically diverse populations. Clarity in language choice is necessary to ensure the message reaches the intended audience in time (Benedicto, 2022). Benedicto and Tibategeza (2021) indicate that the choice of languages in public spaces is essential in deciding the adequacy of the linguistic landscape. Additionally, they note that a failure to choose fitting languages for signs restricts information conveyed. The United Republic of Tanzania (1997) indicates that ethnic languages are crucial to maintain. However, there is minimal utilization of vernacular languages in public spaces where most of the communication occurs. The absence of explicit language policy and language regulation of signage aggravates the issue. Neither the Education and Training Policy of 1995, 2014 and 2014 (2023 edition) nor the Cultural Policy of 1997 states language choice for signage, leaving the owners to make choices on a basis that often results in exclusory use of language.

This observation agrees with Rosendal's (2010) observation that existing language policy decisions lean towards the use of non-African languages at the expense of developing African languages in a variety of contexts. The absence of language policies for signage thus lowers the status of African languages in various contexts. Choosing languages to employ in public spaces thus still remains an issue for multilingual countries like Tanzania. In view of the 156 languages which have served as means of communication in Tanzania (Muzale & Rugemalira 2008), this study focuses on the linguistic landscape of the signage employed by salons and barbershops. The lack of bilingual or multilingual signage in public spaces prevents customers belonging to various linguistic backgrounds from interpreting the information presented by the signage employed by salons and barbershops. Therefore, language unfamiliar customers have difficulties accessing salon and barbershop services. Foreigners also have the same difficulties when signboards are only monolingual. For instance, where only Kiswahili is used in disseminating information concerning salon and barbershop services, foreign consumers may find it challenging.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Alignment

2.1 An overview of the existing literature on linguistic landscape

Formal research on linguistic landscape begins with Landry and Bourhis (1997) who examined the language of Quebec in Canada. Since 2000s, the body of literature on this subject matter expanded in Europe, Asia and Africa. For instance, Calvera (2019) studied the linguistic landscape of the Valencian Community, comparing bilingual and multilingual signs in three areas: language contact, language dominance and the languages used by various institutions on public and private signs. Results indicate that the presence of Valencian in private and public institutions varies based on whether Spanish or Valencian predominated in a given area. The author concludes that linguistic policy is not evenly implemented (p. 19). Furthermore, using a photo-voice approach, Martinez (2014) evaluates the linguistic landscape of healthcare facilities along the U.S.-Mexico border. Results show significant differences in the presence of English and Spanish signage. The author notes that only 29 per cent of signposts convey messages in Spanish compared to 71 per cent in English (p. 20). Cenoz and Gorter (2015) study on multilingual schools in Basque indicates that linguistic landscaping resembles a web of significance, with languages used for varying purposes (p. 21). They found that the majority of signs were monolingual (82%), followed by bilingual (about 15%) and multilingual signs (3%) (p. 19). Linguistic landscape also spread to Asia. For example, in Japan, Wang (2015) researched on signs at Kyushu University's Ito campus. The results indicate that monolingual signs were more prevalent than bilingual or multilingual options, with monolingual signage at 52.3 per cent, bilingual at 46.1 per cent, and multilingual at 1.6 per cent. Wang concludes,

"The campus signs do not show as rich a construction of linguistic landscape as the urban area. Instead, the study reveals distinct features of campus signs, including a large presence of bilingual Japanese-English signage" (p. 137).

Al-Mousa's (2012) study of shop signage in Kuwait reveals a bilingual Arabic-English landscape that reflects the city's cultural diversity and openness to globalization. This bilingual approach is beneficial for accommodating both local and international shoppers, bridging language gaps in the commercial space. In Africa, Akindele's (2011) study of

Gaborone's linguistic landscape reveals a shift towards multilingual signage, yet English continues to dominate public spaces, sometimes at the expense of local languages like Setswana. This pattern, partly driven by globalization and economic factors, reflects the broader trend in Anglophone African countries where local languages are often marginalized. [Alphonse and Lusekelo \(2018\)](#) study urban linguistic landscaping in Tanzania, specifically focusing on billboards and shop signage across five regions, including Arusha, Iringa, Kagera, Manyara, and Mbeya. The results reveal that out of 60 bilingual billboards and shop signs in urban Tanzania, 61.11 per cent comprise English words, while 38.19 per cent constitute Kiswahili words (p. 23). This indicates that English holds a higher status than Kiswahili and other indigenous languages in urban signage.

The findings reveal that English is given higher status over Kiswahili on billboards and shop signs, with most signage featuring English font. This preference creates potential comprehension barriers for Tanzanian citizens, particularly those primarily speaking Kiswahili. [Mdukula's \(2017\)](#) study on linguistic landscaping at Muhimbili National Hospital reveals that dominant monolingual English signage creates significant communication barriers, limiting patients' and aides' access to crucial information. The study highlights the need for bilingual signage policies incorporating widely understood languages to improve communication. [Benedicto and Tibategeza \(2021\)](#) explore the linguistic landscape of regional hospitals in Tanzania, assessing whether selected languages on signage suit the needs of targeted populations. Results indicate using two languages, Kiswahili and English in hospital signage, with Kiswahili emerging as the dominant option. The finding suggests that linguistic landscapes within selected hospitals partially serve their intended audience, given that approximately 90 per cent of Tanzanians understand Kiswahili ([Petzell, 2012](#)). However, specific customers unable to comprehend Kiswahili remain excluded from information conveyed in hospital settings. In relation to the current study, the researcher observed two languages used in salon and barbershop signage, Kiswahili and English, with salon signage more frequently employing both languages while barbershop signage often exhibit monolingual representations dominated by English.

The aforementioned studies on linguistic landscapes have several important implications for the study of salon and barbershop signboards in Nyamagana:

1. Linguistic landscape reflects power, policy, and prestige

Studies by [Alphonse and Lusekelo \(2018\)](#), [Akindele \(2011\)](#), and [Calvera \(2019\)](#) suggest that language use in signage routinely reflects larger sociolinguistic hierarchies and policies. The dominance of English over Kiswahili in urban signage implies that English is associated with higher prestige, education, and globalization. Similarly, a study in Nyamagana shows a shift towards English, particularly in barbershops, with English being associated with being modern, elite, or stylish in these business areas, possibly to attract a certain clientele or mark status.

2. Uneven implementation of language policy

[Calvera \(2019\)](#) and [Mdukula \(2017\)](#) illustrate that official language policy does not necessarily translate into practice. In Nyamagana, both English and Kiswahili are official languages, but their usage is stratified by type of business (more bilingual signage in salons than barbershops), indicating either lack of policy enforcement or differing assumptions regarding the linguistic needs of their customers.

3. Exclusion risk due to monolingualism

[Mdukula's \(2017\)](#) and [Benedicto and Tibategeza's \(2021\)](#) studies point out that monolingual signage especially in English has the potential to marginalize vast segments of the population. Similarly, in Nyamagana, the use of mainly English signage in barbershops has the potential to marginalize Kiswahili speakers who are not proficient in English, thus creating accessibility issues and reduced inclusiveness in communication.

4. Variation in language use depending on the context

[Cenoz and Gorter \(2015\)](#) and [Wang \(2015\)](#) observe that language use in signs varies depending on context and use. Nyamagana salons post bilingual signs, but barbershops post more English-only signs, based on varying perceptions of their clientele, target market, or desired image. This accords with the premise that loquaciousness is purpose-driven and audience-dependent.

5. Signage as a symbol of globalization and commercial policy

[Al-Mousa \(2012\)](#) and [Akindele \(2011\)](#) show how bilingual or English-majority signs would reflect efforts at keeping up with global trends and attracting upwardly mobile or international customers. It is also evident in Nyamagana where English-majority signs in barbershops could be an assertive branding choice to appear modern or cosmopolitan.

6. Demand for comprehensive signage practices

The dominance of English in certain regions, noted in different research studies, necessitates more representative signage strategy. In Nyamagana, the potential benefit is the promotion of bilingual (Kiswahili-English) signage for the salons as well as barbershops to meet better understanding and to respect the language reality of the inhabitants, the majority of whom are easier to understand in Kiswahili.

Therefore, the findings of past linguistic landscape studies support the contention that the linguistic choices in monolingual and bilingual signage are determined by sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors. For salons and barbershops in Nyamagana, this study underscores the need for equitable, inclusive, and contextually appropriate signage that addresses both local and international language use. They also demand a critical analysis of how choices in public signage language result in either exclusion or inclusion of the public members.

2.2 Theoretical Congruence and Operationalization

The Theory of Language Choice in signage, originally developed by [Jackendoff \(1983\)](#) and later developed by [Spolsky and Cooper \(1991\)](#), is the theoretical foundation of this study. The theory draws on three mutually connected conditions informing language choice on public signs: (1) the skill condition of the sign-writer, (2) the symbolic worth condition, and (3) the assumed reader's condition. These conditions provide a clear platform for investigating language use within the linguistic landscape of Nyamagana salons and barbershops by linking motivations behind language choice to social and communicative purposes of signage.

1. Sign-Writer's Skill Condition

This condition states that signs are likely to be in languages that sign-writers can write. [Backhaus \(2007\)](#) accounts that language competence is a pragmatic problem: sign-makers would rather deal with languages that they know in order not to blunder grammatically and be understandable (p. 25). Applying the above criterion to this study, the researcher examined whether English or Kiswahili employed on salon and barbershop signs agrees with languages that are mainly competent with business owners or sign-makers in Nyamagana. For instance, English dominance on barbershop signboards could be either an indicator of the English language ability or reliance on standard templates that are regarded as trendy or professional, regardless of the actual local language literacy.

2. Symbolic Value Condition

The symbolic value condition addresses the identity or image that the sign-writer wishes to express. As [Backhaus \(2007\)](#) would have it, this involves writing in a language that reflects the writer's cultural identity, desired status, or social aspiration. In this study, this can explain why the majority of barbershop signs are English only: English tends to be considered a prestige, city-based, and modern language. By choosing English, the business owners may be positioning themselves with these symbolic values in hopes of appealing to upwardly mobile or youth clientele. Alternatively, use of Kiswahili or bilingual signage at salons may reflect a desire to be seen as open to being accessed, communal, or inviting. The research analyzed the symbolic meanings of language use determining whether the language employed on the signs conforms to specific social identifications or branding objectives. It also looked into the exclusionary consequences of such symbolic selection, for example, when vernacular languages are excluded in favour of English.

3. Presumed Reader's Condition

This is due to the communicative role of signs: that it is readable by its target population. [Gorter and Shohamy \(2009\)](#) point out that signs must be readable to the population it is intended to serve (p. 33), an argument held by [Mdukula \(2017\)](#), who argues that signage ought to be understandable in order to fulfill its informational and directing functions (p. 95). This requirement is central to the study's evaluation of language suitability in barbershop and salon signs. Operationally, the study analyzed whether the language(s) used on signs are synchronized with the local population's language capabilities. For instance, since Kiswahili is both spoken and written by over 90 per cent of Tanzanians ([Petzell, 2012](#)), English-only written signs have the potential to limit comprehension to a significant proportion of the population. Hence, the researcher found out to what extent the signage within the research area adheres to or ignores the linguistic reality of intended readers.

Previous studies on the linguistic landscapes of Tanzania such as ([Akindele, 2011](#); [Alphonse & Lusekelo, 2018](#); [Benedicto & Tibategeza, 2021](#); [Mdukula, 2017](#)) have concentrated principally on signage across greater urban

centers, hospitals, and commercial districts. However, salons and barbershops, which contribute importantly to social interaction and service provision, have hardly been addressed in sociolinguistic research. This lack of attention leaves a gap in understanding how everyday language use expresses social identity, accessibility, and communication requirements in localized, gendered service contexts. In multilingual societies like Tanzania, where English and Kiswahili coexist with many local languages, it has been found (Gorter, 2013; Gorter & Cenoz, 2015; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Lusekelo, 2019) that exclusive reliance on monolingual signs can create communication obstacles, especially in informal and semi-formal settings. At Nyamagana District, salons and barbershop signages are typically installed at points of entry, windows, and outside walls, acting as a first contact for potential customers. Observation shows that Kiswahili is the predominant language applied on signage, particularly for salons, while English dominates in barbershop signage in monolingual form. This gendered linguistic usage is predicated on assumed customer preference, as salons with female majorities have more bilingual signage (Kiswahili-English), whereas male-oriented barbershops settle for English alone. Such trends pose sharp questions of inclusivity and effectiveness of communication in such spaces. English language use in male spaces excludes customers who speak Kiswahili, whereas bilingual signage in salons reflects a higher level of commitment to inclusivity. This study therefore seeks to examine the language alternatives, visibility, and appropriateness of signages in salons and barbershops in Nyamagana, assessing how appropriate they are to the linguistic needs and expectations of their target market.

3. Research Methodology

Kombo and Tromp (2006, p. 75) emphasizes on the significance of carefully choosing the research location, as it can greatly impact of the information generated. The study was conducted in Tanzania, particularly in Mwanza region in Nyamagana district. Mwanza, particularly Nyamagana district, is dominated by native language speakers of Kisukuma (LOT, 2009). English and Kiswahili are the official languages of Tanzania (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014). The investigation focused on the choice of language on salon and barbershop signage in Nyamagana district.

Both salons and barbershops were involved in the study because the researcher aimed to conduct a study of the linguistic landscape in these establishments due to their similarities in provision of service. Since salons and barbershops use languages on their signage and are significant providers of beauty services, their choice of language on signage should linguistically correspond to the intended customers.

Additionally, most salons and barbershops are situated in urban areas inhabited by individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds, making public signage in these establishments particularly relevant. In that case, the researcher sought to gather insights from the respondents regarding their perceptions and feelings towards the languages utilized on signage in these settings. The researchers decided to select these establishments due to various reasons. They wanted to conduct an intensive study on linguistic landscape in both salons and barbershops, to the best of researchers' knowledge, there is lack of recent research done on these areas, again, these establishments are located in urban setting where people come from different linguistic background. Therefore, researchers wanted to prove whether the choice of languages on the signage in salons and barbershops suit the targeted people or otherwise.

Creswell (2012) defines sampling as the process of selecting units (e.g. people or organizations) from a population of interest to generalize results back to the population from which they were selected. Sampling should be based on the knowledge and suitability of respondents concerning the intended study. The study involved 20 respondents, namely five salon owners, five barbershop owners, five salon customers, and five barbershop customers. Both purposive and convenience techniques were employed since they are relevant to the study in order to get the intended respondents. Salon and barbershop owners were involved because they had diverse knowledge and experience on the salon and barbershop as they are directly involved on the choice of language used on the signage. The salon and barbershop customers were involved because these are targeted people for signage found in the salons and barbershop setting surroundings.

Data were collected through observations while taking photographs with a digital camera and a notebook. Additionally, interviews with salon and barbershop owners, as well as customers, were conducted to gather their perspectives on the linguistic landscape of salon and barbershop signage. Thematic and narrative analysis methods were then used to extract the desired information.

Creswell (2012) suggests that researchers must respect participants and the research settings they interact with to ensure productive study outcomes and prevent the invalidation of findings (p. 93). Leavy (2016) emphasizes the importance of ethical considerations in research by mentioning that they embody the ethics of honesty, integrity and

care (p. 39). To ensure the study's productivity, participant validation and comfort throughout the research process, the researcher considered the following ethical issues: Firstly, permission was sought from the relevant government authorities to conduct research on salons and barbershops and examine the linguistic landscape within those settings. This institutional approval ensured that the research complied with ethical guidelines and regulations. Also consent from the respondents to having their words transcribed and used in the study was obtained. Secondly, informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study. They were provided with comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits and their voluntary participation was explicitly requested. Thirdly, transparency and integrity were maintained throughout the research process, including data collection, analysis and reporting. The researcher committed to presenting findings that accurately reflected the perspectives of participants, steering clear of distortion or bias in their representation. Fourthly, academic integrity was observed, including avoidance of plagiarism and adherence to time management within the study. By upholding these ethical principles, the study aimed to achieve its goals with reliable and valid conclusions. Lastly, during data collection, the researcher prioritized maintaining human dignity, respect and unbiased voluntary interview participation. Each respondent was informed about the study's procedures to ensure they fully understood their participation requirements. By adhering to ethical principles, the researcher aimed to conduct a rigorous and ethically sound study that contributes valuable insights to the linguistic landscape studies concerning salon and barbershop signage.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Language Used on the Signage

In order to identify the languages used on the signage at the salons and barbershops, researchers were guided by various key issues in gathering the required information as presented and discussed below.

4.1.1 Types of Languages on the Signage

The study identified two types of languages (Kiswahili and English Monolinguals) on the salon and barbershop signage through observation. These linguistic signage posts are presented and discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

4.1.2 Kiswahili Monolingual Signage for Salon and Barbershop

The study reveals that there are Kiswahili monolingual signage posts in both salons and barbershops. The evidence of monolingual signage in Kiswahili is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Monolingual Signage in Kiswahili
Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 1 exemplifies Kiswahili monolingual signage posts on the salons and barbershops- *Tunasuka mitindo yote* (We style all kinds of hairstyles), *Tunanyoa nywele mitindo yote* (We cut all kinds of hairstyles), *Tunasuka, tunaosha na kuweka dawa* (We comb, wash, and apply treatment), *Tunanyoa nywele mitindo yote* (We cut all kinds of hairstyles).

Figure 1 demonstrates that both salons and barbershops use Kiswahili monolingual signage posts to inform customers about different services offered within the salons and barbershops. The use of monolingual signage in Kiswahili in salons is 71 per cent and in barbershops is 21 per cent. This indicates that Kiswahili language in salons is considered important in marketing salon and barbershop services to diverse customers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This concurs with [Kimanzi \(2024\)](#) who contends that Kiswahili is used in business marketing campaigns and it resonates more with local audiences. Advertisements, promotional materials, and customer service provided in Kiswahili can increase brand loyalty and market penetration. Moreover, [Habwe's \(2009\)](#) study on the role of Kiswahili in the integration of East Africa reveals that Kiswahili is the language which one uses at work. Since Kiswahili is an inclusive language used in the country in economic aspects, [Lembuka \(2024\)](#) adds that Kiswahili language is an inclusive communicative tool and remains to be the most common language spoken in East Africa and beyond and it continues to be one of the most widely used languages of the African family. Finally, [Mugaya \(2018\)](#) concludes that despite abundant multilingual societies in Africa, Kiswahili has been a widely spread language and used for intercultural communication.

4.1.3 English Monolingual Signage for Salon and Barbershop Names

Likewise, the English monolingual signage posts were observed in both salons and barbershops. These signage posts often convey essential information such as salon and barbershop names catering primarily to English-speaking customers as presented in Figure 2.

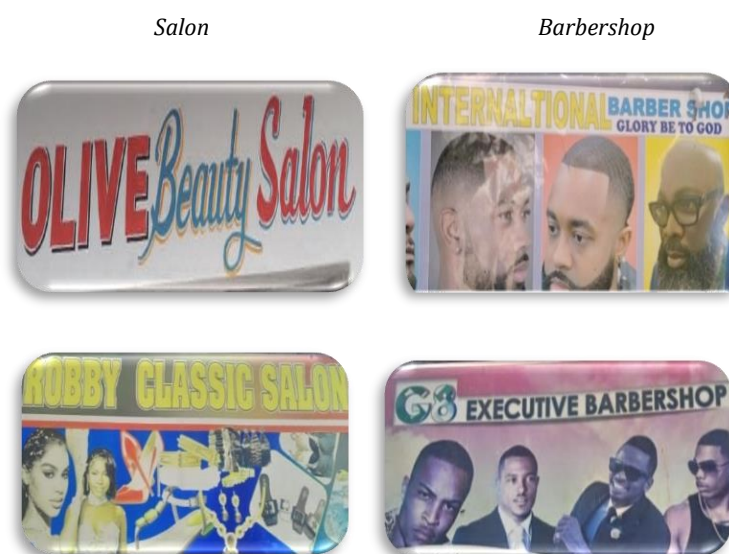


Figure 2: English Monolingual Signage for Salon and Barbershop Names

Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 2 presents English monolingual signage posts regarding salon and barbershop names. The researcher identified that both salons and barbershops use English monolingual signage for the identification of their office titles or names. This implies that the use of English monolingual signage position salons and barbershops to global, modern and international standards. This concurs with [Dimova \(2007\)](#), who asserts that one can expect to find English in the linguistic landscape of Veles because of its global role in business and economics, and indeed it is widely used there for international business communication and local advertising, business, and brand naming. Many businesses and products have spread globally, so that their names and slogans can be found in many countries both in their original forms and alongside translations. This is also supported by [Singay \(2024\)](#) who reveals that English is prevalent across all shop names, regardless of whether the shop signs are monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual. This suggests that English has become a dominant language in the linguistic landscape, transcending language

boundaries and influencing the naming conventions of businesses. [Martinaj \(2019\)](#) concludes that English as a foreign language influences the international buyer and seller relationships, establishes trust, signals commitment and respect for the customer, and has a major effect on the atmosphere that characterizes the relationship.

4.1.4 English Monolingual Signage for Salon and Barbershop Services

Through observation, English monolingual signage posts promoting beauty services were identified on salon and barbershops. Some English monolingual signage posts are presented in Figure 3.



Figure 3: English Monolingual Signage for Salon and Barbershop Services

Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 3 presents English monolingual signage posts. The researcher identified that both salons and barbershops use monolingual signage to announce to customers the various services that are available in the salons and barbershops. The use of English on salon and barbershop signage in Nyamagana serves as a strategic choice to attract English speaking customers. This suggests that English language on signage positions salons and barbershops as professional and high-end establishments. It conveys a sense of global service ideals and prestige, which appeals to English speaking customers especially foreigners seeking premium services. This coincides with [Martinaj \(2019\)](#) who shows that using English can make business communication easier. It alienates communication barrier between the owners and the non-Kiswahili speaking customers of salons and barbershops. [Lieber \(2024\)](#) adds that companies that communicate effectively in English can expand their reach, engage with international customers to market their products and services to a broader audience, ultimately driving growth and revenue. Since owners of salons and barbershops use the language that makes them succeed in communicating with the foreign customers who visit salons and barbershops, [Jones \(2005\)](#) holds that English language skills are connected to career success. However, this practice of using only English on signage posts limit accessibility for local customers who are more comfortable with Kiswahili, leading to a less inclusive environment. To avoid this, bilingual signage could be used to improve inclusivity, making these spaces more welcoming to diverse customers in Nyamagana district.

4.1.4 The Use of Two Languages on Salon and Barbershop Signage

By observation, the researcher found that some signage posts in both salons and barbershops were bilingual, consisting of English and Kiswahili. The bilingual signs included the names of the businesses as well as services provided.

4.2 Location of the Signage

Signage plays multiple important roles in marketing communication, including identification of businesses, way-finding ([Calori, 2007](#)), branding ([Bitner, 1992](#)), and advertising ([Taylor et al., 2005](#)). Through observation the

researcher discovered that most of the signage posts are located on the entrance doors, office front walls and billboards of the salons and barbershops

4.2.1 Signage on the Doors

Through careful observation, the study revealed that several signage posts are prominently displayed on the entrance doors of both salons and barbershops informing potential customers about the services offered and promotions available. Some signage posts are presented in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Signage Located on Doors

Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 4 on the left hand signage are Swahili words –*Tunasuka nywele, rasta, mitindo yote, pia tunapamba mahaarusi* (We style hair, dreadlocks, all kinds of hairstyles, and we also do bridal makeup). Figure 4 indicates signage posts located on the entrance doors of the salons and barbershops. The salon and barbershop owners revealed that signage posts on the entrance doors on salons and barbershops are mainly placed strategically to help customers easily see or identify the intended services. This indicates that salon and barbershop owners want their services to be more visible and welcoming to the customers. In support of this view, one salon and barbershop owner stated during an interview, “We place signage on the entrance door.....um....., because it is the first thing customers see. It clearly signals our services and creates an immediate connection....., making it easier for customers to recognize us due to our visibility...”. In support of the fact that signage posts are placed on the entrance doors for the purpose of making the salons and barbershops more visible to customers, another barbershop owner added: “.....Having a signage post on the entrance door ensures visibility of our businesses from the street. So..., It helps customers to quickly identify my barbershop basically.....”.

The other reported reason for placing signage on the doors is to make the salon and barbershop more observable and welcoming to customers as the other salon owner said, “aah.....By placing signage on the door, we ensure that both regular and new customers know exactly where we are, that is my idea....”. Also, one of the salon owners replied in an interview that visibility is the factor for salons and barbershop outdoor signage: “To me, signage on the entrance doors is our way of announcing our presence and services to passers-by”.

The data underscore the strategic importance of placing signage on salon and barbershop entrance doors. The door signage posts act as a vital first point of contact, clearly communicating services and attracting customers. This view is supported by Woolmer (2022) who reveals that having a great entrance signage that reflects your business is so important for giving your visitors the information they need. Entrance signage can also be a fantastic means for directing your visitors around your property and grounds. Furthermore, Woolmer adds that office signage on doors are very important for guiding customers and employees around the office. One example of the communicative role of signage, research has shown door signage (outdoor), on premise signs to be more persuasive as a source of new product or service information than messages conveyed by radio, internet and newspaper ads.

4.2.2 Signage on the Walls

The data revealed that some signage posts are strategically located on the walls at various places around salons and barbershops. Some signage posts are presented in Figure 5.

Salon

Barbershop

**Figure 5: Signage Located on the Walls***Source: Field data (2024)*

Figure 5 illustrates signage posts located on the walls of salons and barbershops. The signage posts are positioned on the front sides of these establishments. The salon and barbershop owners revealed that the placement of wall signage is intended to maximize visibility and ensure that customers easily access information about the services offered as one of the salon and barbershop owners stated in an interview:

Due to the nature of our business environment....., signage posts on the doors alone are insufficient to direct or inform customers about the services we offer. That is why we also display additional signage on the front walls of our offices....., ensuring that our target customers can easily see and read about our services. (Field data, 26th July 2024)

In support of the stated factor for wall signage on salon and barbershop, another salon owner commented:

"Well.....We write signage posts on the salon and barbershop front side walls because of the visibility which make us display, aah.....welcome, direct and inform the customers about the services we sell in our establishments for the purpose of letting our customers know the variety of services we offer". (Field data, 26th July 2024)

Another salon owner agreed that the signage posts on the wall are meant for increasing visibility as he said, "...We use wall signage because it is visible from a distance, uum...attracting attention even from across the street". Also, one of the barbershop owners said in support of the point that wall signage posts are strategically drafted for visibility, "Wall signage offers visibility for a larger canvas..., allowing us to showcase more information about services. It makes salon more appealing to customers' eyes.... So that is..."

The data indicates that signage posts on front walls enhance visibility and accessibility to service information. This fact aligns with the notion that office signage serves as a visual representation of a company's brand as it communicates key messages, values and culture to employees and customers. Moreover, [Linkedin \(2024\)](#) adds that strategically placed office signage enhances brand visibility and attracts attention. Wall signage posts always impact the business. Similarly, [Kellaris and Machleit \(2016\)](#) assert that wall signage as the oldest and most fundamental form of marketing communication positively affect marketing outcomes such as purchasing, visibility and other consumptive behaviours as well as the thoughts and feelings that precede and shape such behaviours.

4.2.3 Signage on the Billboards of Salons and Barbershops

Through observation, the study identified that some signage posts are prominently located on the billboards of salons and barbershops, specifically positioned on the roofs of both types of establishments. Some signage posts are presented in Figure 6.



Figure 6: Signage Located on the billboards on the establishments

Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 6 shows signage posts located on the billboards of salons and barbershops. The study revealed that the main aim of putting signage on top of the roofs is to help the customers see the intended services easily. This fact is supported by one of the salon and barbershop owners who commented through interview. "Um..., We design signage on the billboards and place them on top of our office so thatour services can be seen by our customers easily....." To evidence the fact that billboards are predestined for visibility, one of the salon owners added:

.....Actually, as a salon owner, I prefer writing the salon signage posts on the billboards to display the services offered in salonssince it assures more visibility and accessibility.um, Signage on billboards is more visible and last longer because of the durability of the billboard materials... (Field data, 26th July 2024)

Similarly, one barbershop owner supported the argument, "You know....., With billboard signage, aaah,...we target both local customers and passers-by, expanding our reach and visibility. Basically, It is an effective approach for showcasing special services of our barbershop's unique services...". Another barbershop owner supported the point that billboards signage enhance visibility to people driving or walking by. He argued that, it increases the exposure of the establishment andhelp the owners to stand out in a crowded market. Furthermore, in support of visibility as the reason for billboard signage, another salon owner responded, "Um..., we choose billboard signage because it amplifies our salon advertisement. It serves as a constant reminder of our salon customers, especially for those who travel the same routes daily. So, this visibility also helps to attract new customers....".

The data show that signage on billboards are mainly meant for getting attention from diverse customers passing nearby the salons and barbershops because of visibility. This fact is also backed up by [DL \(2022\)](#) who presents that Billboards offer unique opportunities for businesses to reach a large and diverse range of consumers. The results also correlate with a study by [Mdukula \(2017, p. 95\)](#) who contends that the public signage posts are meant to address the communicative function in the public space. This implies that a good choice of the location of a signage helps the targeted people get information found on the signage easily. Similarly, the study findings correspond with the second condition of language theory on the signage by [Spolsky and Cooper \(1991\)](#) of the presumed reader which stipulates that the signage is meant for communicative goals. [Elden \(2003\)](#) adds that the billboards primary objective is to gather and attract consumers' interest as well as their attention. So it is revealed that despite the various available

methods of advertisement, many marketers opt for billboards because of their unique power to attract customers towards products and services on the market (Jugenheimer, 2004).

4.2.4 The Most Frequent Signage

During observations, the data revealed that Kiswahili monolingual signage posts are the most commonly used type of signage in salons and English monolingual signage is the most commonly used in barbershops. A total of 97 out of 122 salon and barbershop signage posts collected are monolingual in which Kiswahili is more predominantly used compared to English language. Additionally, a total of 25 out of 122 signage posts collected are presented in a mixture of words from English and Kiswahili. Among the 97 monolingual signage posts, 52 signage posts are in Kiswahili and 45 are in English. This is evidenced as follows, Kiswahili monolingual signage posts in salons numbered 37, making up 71 per cent of the total salon signage collected. In barbershops, there were 25 Kiswahili monolingual signage posts, which accounted for 29 per cent of the total barbershop signage posts collected.

Additionally, in salons, there were 20 English monolingual signage posts, which make up 44 per cent of the total signage collected. In barbershops, English monolingual signage posts numbers 25, representing 56 per cent of the total signage collected. Altogether, there were 45 English monolingual signage posts in both salons and barbershops.

Signage posts, using both English and Kiswahili, appeared in 14 posts in salons, representing 60 per cent of Kiswahili and English signage posts collected, and in 10 posts in barbershops, accounting for 40 per cent of Kiswahili and English signage collected.

Furthermore, the study found that monolingual signage in Kiswahili is predominant by 43 per cent followed by English by 37 per cent and lastly the signage with a mixture of both Kiswahili and English posts by 20 per cent. The results show that the observed monolingual signage in Kiswahili and English are leading by 80 per cent at both salons and barbershops.

In that sense the researcher found that salons have many monolingual signage posts which are in Kiswahili compared to barbershops. This implies that Kiswahili is a dominant language in provision of salon service as one salon and barbershop owners stated in interview, "Kiswahili is mostly used in salon signage because it is the language of everyday communication used by local customers". Another salon owner in holding the argument that salon is used mostly in salon because it the language used in everyday communication commented that Kiswahili as the national language of Tanzania is the most effective language for communicating with many local customers who visit the salons. In favour of the argument, another salon owner supported the argument by arguing that they mostly use Kiswahili because it connects them with local customers, particularly female customers in their salons. Not only that but also, one of the barbershop owners sustained the fact that Kiswahili is the dominant language in salon as she elaborated, "Kiswahili is used in barbershops because it creates comfortable communicative environments for local customers to communicate easily with the salon/barbershop service providers"

This correlates with that of a study by Rosendal (2010) on linguistic markets in Rwanda, specifically on the language used in advertisements and signs. Rosendal noted, "Monolingual signs on both billboards and shop signs are most frequent" (p. 36). Similarly, Mdukula (2017, p. 102) argues that at Muhimbili hospital, about 70 per cent of the signs are monolingual.

Additionally, the results concur with that by Lusekelo (2019) who investigates on the language used on the billboards in Tanzania which shows that monolingual signage in Kiswahili are predominantly used in Northern Tanzania. The dominance of Kiswahili indicates that the choice of language on the signage suits the targeted people of that area because Kiswahili is the major language understood by majority of the Tanzanians. However, some foreigners who cannot understand Kiswahili find it difficult to understand information on the signage. This is in line with the findings in a study by Tibategeza (2010, p. 233) who notes that Kiswahili is the language which is spoken and understood by the majority in the whole country. Also, this declaration is supported by Laitin (1992) who says that, today in Tanzania, almost 90 per cent of the population speak Kiswahili. Hence, the use of Kiswahili on the signage is very crucial, though it is not encouraged to be used alone on the public space.

However, the predominance of Kiswahili signage may lead to the exclusion of some people who cannot understand this language. This idea is supported by Alphonce and Lusekelo (2018) who points out, "Since Kiswahili and English are the official languages of Tanzania, the choice and use of these two languages for the public domains is supposed to be even" (p. 9). Despite their recommendations, the monolingual signage in Kiswahili is predominant in the country.

The predominance of monolingual signage in the selected salons and barbershops sometimes is brought about by lack of language policy on the languages used on signage; hence, the salon and barbershop owners select any language according to their needs. This corresponds with Du Plessis (2012, p. 273) who in a discussion on the role of language policy in linguistic landscape changes in a rural area of the Free State Province of South Africa notes that the decrease in bilingual signage correlates with the relative increase in monolingual signage, obviously resulting in an overall increase in monolingual signage. Hence, the absence of a language policy on the languages displayed on signage may lead to the preference of a single language to many languages.

4.2.5 The Gendered Languages

Gendered language refers to using linguistic forms and expressions associated with and perceived as being specific to either men or women (Abdalgane, 2023). During observation, the researcher identified gendered languages on salon and barbershops appealing to men and women. For instance, the words 'beauty', *urembo* 'beauty' and *mama* 'mother' and 'woman' appeal to female gender. While the words 'father', 'daddy', and 'men' as observed on barbershop signage appeal to male gender. Some signage posts with gendered languages are presented in Figure.

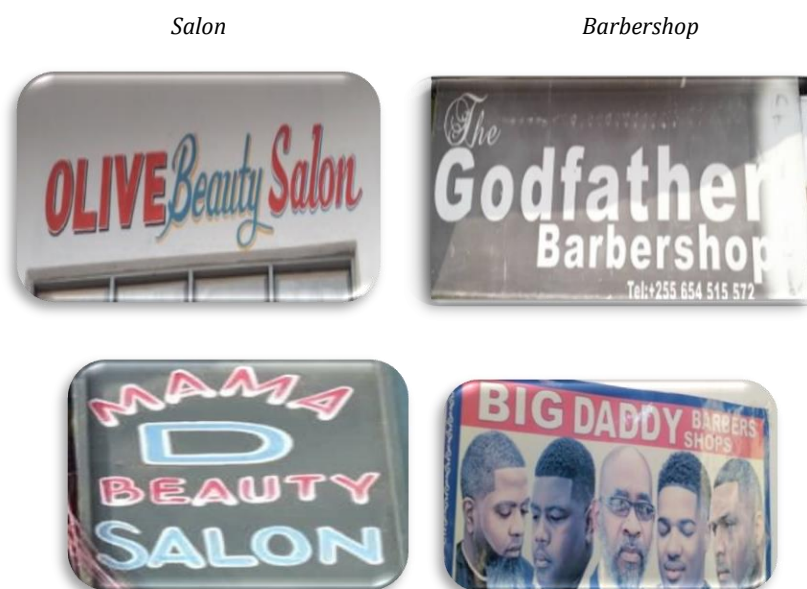


Figure 7: Signage posts with gendered languages

Source: Field data (2024)

Figure 7 shows signage posts with gendered words located on salons and barbershops. The study identified that salon and barbershop owners use gendered words in salon and barbershop signage posts communicate specific services to male and female customers, enhancing their recognition as one of the owners from the visited salons said during an interview, "We....we.. we use gendered languages on our signage to clearly communicate which services are tailored for men or women. Umm., It helps customers identify where they fit in, making it easier for them to choose services based on their specific needs". In support of the stated argument that gendered words are used to attract a specific and right customer, another salon owner added, "...Gendered language on our signage helps attract the right customer. By specifying services for men or women, we ensure that customers know what to expect, which reduces confusion....".

Another barbershop owner backing up the point commented that using gendered language allows them to market specific services, like haircuts or styling, to the correct customer. It also helps them to differentiate the services they offer for men and women, ensuring that they target the right customers. Similarly, the fact that gendered words are important on the signage was supported by one of the salon owners during interview:

We incorporate gendered language to clarify our services..... For example, aaah...men often want specific barbering services, while women may prefer different styling options. Clear, gendered signage makes it easier for customers to quickly understand what we provide for each group... (Field data, 28th July 2024).

Furthermore, one salon customer supported the argument as she replied, "I think, gendered languages on our signages.... allow us to be more direct with our marketing. 'So, It helps customers feel that the services are personalized for them". The finding exemplify that gendered languages are paramount in salon and barbershop signage posts since it helps businesses to clearly define their services, making it easier for customers to identify whether the salon or barbershop caters specifically to men or women. The argument corresponds with [Deng \(2024\)](#) who asserts that gendered language promotes diversity and helps brands target their right audience and create more meaningful customer connections. It also helps brand reach their targeted market and create positive messaging about gender roles and identities. Furthermore, gendered language acknowledges that different gender groups have different interests, needs and perspectives. However, gendered languages create a more inclusive and accepting environment for members of the community ([Atanga et al., 2013](#)).

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the choice of languages used on the signage at Salons and Barbershops. Therefore, the study concludes that monolingual signage in Kiswahili or English dominates, unlike bilingual signage at the selected salons and barbershops. In this case, the selected languages are only beneficial to those customers who are able to understand the two languages, and those who cannot are excluded. This is due to the lack of a specific policy on the language choice of the signage as well as the tendency of management teams to assume that all their clients can understand the languages used on the signage. This can be challenging for some customers because some feel shy to ask for assistance. The native languages such as Sukuma, Kerewe, Chaga and other languages are excluded on the salon and barbershop signage. This undermines home languages, which people are proud of in their societies. In order to select the suitable language on the signage in the salons and barbershops, the government should include guidelines on language policy specific to linguistic landscapes. Similarly, the salon and barbershop owners should initiate a language policy on the signage which will guide them in selecting the most suitable languages to promote, inform or invite their customers in their establishments.

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