Communication Cues, Identities and Errors of English in the Bottom-up Linguistic Landscape in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

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Abstract

Communication identity in linguistic landscape is a means in which sign producers express their linguistic or cultural background in their signage. This also influences the sign consumers to form their understanding of signage emplaced. However, linguistic landscape (LL) makeup is often shaped by extra-linguistic factors such as, the background, culture and environment. As a result of dichotomy in the language use in the society, most bottom up signage are characterised by the use of the English language and do not showcase the local identity. The study examined how sign producers reflect their identity focusing on the language errors and reproduction on the selected bottom-up signage. It also explored whether these signs communicate effectively to sign-viewers/consumers. The study adopted descriptive qualitative approach using geosemiotics theory to analyse how language elements in public discourse convey meaning beyond their literal interpretation. Signage around Ado-Ekiti metropolis were used for the study. Relevant articles, journals and archives were sourced to gather information for the study. The findings of the study showed that most signage reflect errors like grammatical errors, substitution, sound deletion, substitution and reproduction of English in their use of the English language. The choice of language used on these signage is informed largely by attitudes towards the use of the English language being a Lingua Franca and assumed that it is widely used in their environment. The study concluded that most of the bottom-up signage reproduced the ideologies of the top-down signage hence, the local language is not found on the signage.

Keywords: Bottom-up, Communication identity, Linguistic landscape, sign-viewers/consumers, signage, top-down

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Introduction

Communication identity in the linguistic landscape refers to the attitude of both sign producers and sign consumers that contribute to the production and consumption of signage. This influences how they create, perceive, understand and interpret meaning in their environment. Linguistic landscape cannot be mentioned without referring to the language of a particular society. This is because it is an essential factor that distinguishes man from animal. However, the desire for communication was the main cause for language making. Language is deeply rooted in a society and a society without a language would be impossible. Members living in a society need language to coexist and relate with one another. This relationship is what makes scholars investigate and examine the communication contact and how members of society use different means to communicate. This means that a language is what members of a society speak, how the use of language vary in the society and how the society in turn influence the use of language. This is what sociolinguists set to find out. Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to society and aims to determine how social institution affects language and how the varied uses of language affect social groups.

Linguistic landscape according to Gorter & Cenoz (2017) is a subfield of sociolinguistics that studies the relationship between language and society. It focuses specifically on the visual display of language in public spaces, bill boards, advertisements and other visual displays. The road signs are examined in relation to the language choice amidst other things like the script and topography, size and prominence, iconography, layout and organisation, code-switching and so on. The study of linguistic landscape also helps to determine the language policy of a particular society as it embraces the language choice used in public spaces, (Cenoz & Gorter, 2009). In addition, linguistic landscape carries symbolic meaning and reflects the cultural values of the society.

According to Gu, (2024:1) "access to languages is a human right". This is what makes linguistic landscape important in any given society. This means that everybody must have access to language(s) spoken in their given society and this is also present in the linguistic landscape. This helps in the meaning-making that helps foster communication. Thus, besides words, people can communicate with others through signs, and these signs are what form the basis of linguistic landscape. In other words, it is the visibility and awareness of language used as signs in a particular area. However, linguistic landscape of a particular community or society cannot be better understood without interacting or penetrating the language of the society.

Backhaus (2007) as quoted in Denil, et al. (2024:50) explains that "the signs in public reflect the use of language in a region. Because of that, signs in public spaces can also be referred to as linguistic landscapes". As a result, the language used or spoken in a particular region will be reflected in the linguistic landscape of that region. This was further buttressed by Mahmud (2004, 2013) as quoted in Jolayemi and Olayemi (2017:1), who state that "road signs which constitute a major part of linguistic landscape is a form that is marked by an intention to communicate something meaningful". This means that these signs are deliberately

emplaced to inform, warn, describe, educate and direct the signs- consumers. They also posited that "if language is a means of communication, then, signs as various forms of symbolic language are indeed communicative features which constitute the extra linguistic elements of communication". In addition, non-verbal features of language process form part of what the receiver uses to interpret the message of the sender.

According to Gorter and Cenoz (2017:1), "linguistic landscape focuses on any display of visible written language, but not exclusively, also multimodal, semiotic, other visual, and even oral elements can be included. Linguistic landscape in Ado-Ekiti has not been thoroughly researched. Considering existing literature, the studies carried out in Nigeria focused on meaning making in Nigerian linguistic landscape in Ibadan, (Adetunji, 2013) and the linguistic landscape of religious signboards in Ado-Ekiti (Inya, 2019). Most signage in Ado-Ekiti reflects the use of the English language, thereby leading to error or reproduction.

Language error is the ineffective way of using language especially the target language (second language). It is a systematic deviation from the rules which indicates incomplete learning or mastering of the language. The process of identifying the frequency, kind, causes, and effects of poor language use is known as error analysis (Phuong, 2022). This is as a result of a learner not internalising the rules of the second language very well or an interference from the knowledge of the first language against the learning of the second language. This interference could occur at different domains of language study such as phonology, morphology, syntax, discourse and semantics.

This study however aims to examine the communication identity and language errors present in some selected bottom-up linguistic landscape in Ado-Ekiti exploring how the English language is wrongly used or reproduced in some selected bottom-up signage. It also investigates why the local identity (indigenous language) is not highlighted in the linguistic landscape. In spite of how the local identity is challenged and not expressed through these signage, the production of these signage does not imply literacy or proficiency in the English language, but rather forms a sense of standard-symbolic identity.

Literature Review

Linguistic landscape (LL) is a sociolinguistic concept that shows the relationship between sign-producers and sign-consumers. Sociolinguistics explains the connection and relationship between language and society, language and its users as reflected in such major domains as language planning and policy, language choice, language maintenance and shift, and language variation (from the ends of both uses and users). It also presents meaning as co-constructed and contextual; a context that determines how meaning is made (intended and interpreted). However, research in linguistic landscape is concerned with factors such as setting, purpose, users and language dynamics that play through signage. It also reflects the linguistic or cultural background of those involved. There have been many researches done on the concept and many researchers have given their own definitions.

Linguistic landscape was first used by Landry and Bourhis (1997) and they define it as: "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration." Itagi and Singh (2002:10) consider it as "language use in its written form (visible language) in the public sphere" while Gorter (2006:2) explains it in a more literal meaning "of the piece or expanse of scenery that can be seen at one time from one place, and a picture representing such a view of natural inland scenery". He further analyses that in the studies of the linguistic landscape, both meanings were employed, explaining that linguistic landscape is, "the literal study of the language as the representation of the languages, which was of particular importance because it relates to identity and cultural globalisation, to the growing presence of English and revitalisation of minority languages". Ben-Rafael (2009) in his own words referred to it as "linguistic objects that mark the public space". They concluded that linguistic landscape is any sign or announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location. In their perspective, the definition of linguistic landscape seems to be broader, which means that they do not only focus on signs inside a public institution or a private business, but also signs outside these places or buildings. However, public space in urban commercial areas contains many different types of signs which include street names, shops signs, outdoor advertisements, graphics, digital prints, promotional material, specialty displays among others. Most of the signs also contain some text and images and at the same time, some may be monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual.

Hu, (2022:2) opines that "linguistic landscape exists as a unique mark in various public places, which aims to describe the difference between the local language group and other languages". He maintains that linguistic landscape is prominent in urban cities especially where many languages are used for communication and of course language conflict may occur. He further explains that it can be seen from different perspectives among which sociology is one of them and this helps in language policy and planning. In his study, Lefebvre (1991) as quoted in Aiestaran et al. (2010:1) observes that there may be disparity in the linguistic landscape. He explains that "an average passer-by may not notice the presence of the language used on fire alarm signs or rubbish containers, even if the signs on these and other common objects are plentiful while billboards and store fronts with advertisements for products may attract some attention as they try to persuade customers to buy the products". Also, "tourists may be expected to pay more attention to signs, such as street names or direction signs, which provide them with relevant information to where they are going especially if they are navigating for the first time".

Consequently, Landry & Bourhis, (1997:25) reiterate the fact that the public space will be experienced differently by different groups and individuals whose history or social positions differ. That is, people will view the linguistic landscape differently depending on their "knowledge of languages and attitudes toward different languages" present in the locality or community.

According to Gorter, (2006), public signs are categorised as top-down or bottom-up. This distinction distinguishes between "official signs emplaced by the government or related institution to sign consumers and non-official signs put there by commercial enterprises or by private organisations or persons." This explains the disparity between the choices of the language used on the two types of signage and the impression this has on the sign consumers. He further explained that top-down signs are characterised by language hierarchy and power which may not be present in bottom-up signs. Relatedly, Akindele (2011:7) agrees that top-down linguistic landscape items are those "issued by national and public organisations which include public sites, public announcements and street names while bottom-up items are those issued by individual social actors such as shop owners and companies, including names of shops, business signs and personal announcements". Similarly, Jenjekwa (2022:1) in his studies establishes the overwhelming dominance of English both in the cityscape and landscape. He posits that indigenous languages always appear in a few instances in the form of proper names. Therefore, most local languages are not part of the visible signs on roads, billboards and buildings. In his own opinion, the silencing of indigenous languages has serious implications for equity in language use. Gorter and Cenoz (2017:1) submit that "it is hard to find a pure monolingual linguistic landscape because of the spread of international brand names or slogans and the spread of English." This is evident even in non-English speaking communities.

A study by Sharafutdinov (2018) affirms that one of the ways to study the growing prominence of English in non-English speaking communities is to examine their linguistic landscapes especially where English contends with local languages.

According to Chima-Omeike & Taiwo (2015:1), "indigenous language has a great impact in aiding understanding, transmitting the accurate meaning." This explains that language of the immediate environment is crucial in determining the linguistic landscape of such environment. However, the saliency of languages in public spaces is evidence that linguistic landscape cannot exist without referring to the language of the environment. Most of these sign producers reproduce the English language hence, language error is unavoidable.

Error analysis is a deviation that results due to lack of adequate knowledge of the rules of the targeted language. This is mostly seen when a second language must be learnt. In his study, Parameswari, (2024: 131), states that "the foundation behind error analysis is that bilingual students' systematic mistakes may reveal information about their interlanguage". This is so because there is a wide variation between the linguistic system of the first and second language. However, some may have already internalised the rules of the first language thereby resulting into error.

Pawlak (2014) as quoted in Nenotek, et.al (2024:274) concludes that "the most popular way to assess language error is by comparing learner's utterances with those produced by native speakers". It may imply that a language error deviates from the rules of the standard language. This error results from the speaker or writer's inability to understand the language's pattern and produce it correctly. He states further that language error is also known as

performance errors. Performance involves the actual production and the use of the language in real context. Competence represents the internal knowledge of the language while performance reflects its external use or output.

A study by Moiden and Liaw, (2021) affirms that these errors are caused by violations of grammatical formulas, that is, structural differences of the first language (L1) with the second language (L2). Some are also influenced by the speakers' or writers' physical factors such as fatigue, drowsiness, forgetfulness, emotional stress and hastening to complete a task. Similarly, Touchie (1986) as quoted in Nenotek, et.al (2024:274) affirms that these errors are made due to the native language's influence which can occur because of the interference of the mother tongue, violation of grammatical rules, and inter-lingual and developmental factors and so on. Language error in linguistic landscape can be seen as language error used or seen in public places. These errors can be traced to lack of English knowledge possessed by the translators or sign producers.

McDowell, L. (2020:462) identified four principle error types: omission, addition, selection and ordering. In his explanation, the omission error is to omit the necessary use of words while the addition error is to add words that are not necessary in a text. The selection error is to substitute a correct word for a wrong one while the ordering error is to arrange words in a text wrongly.

However, error analysis approach identified the two main causes of error:

> the interlingual error which is an error made by the learner's linguistic background and native language interference, and the intralingual error which is the error committed by the learners when they misinterpret some target language rules, so the error cause lies within and between the target language itself and the learners wrong use of certain target language rules. Maruti (2023:5)

This explains that learners might not interpret some of the rules of the target language correctly because there would be differences in the first language and the target language in terms of grammar, vocabulary, phonetics and phonology.

Studies (Ariani & Artawa, 2021, Moiden&Liaw, 2021, Bruyèl-Olmedo& Juan-Garau, 2010) have paid attention to language errors in public spaces with limited attention to communication cues on these signage. Against this background, this paper examines the communication identity present despite the language errors visible on them. It also explores the inconspicuous state of the indigenous languages used in public spaces and the inherent challenge this will pose for language planning.

Functions in Linguistic landscape
Landry and Bourhis (1997) identified two major functions of sociolinguistic landscape signs and they are: informative and symbolic functions. The informative function also known as the indexical function of sociolinguistic landscape provides information about the linguistic situation

of the society, that is, language characteristics and language boundaries of a given language community. The symbolic function on the other hand helps to reveal the status or salience of languages (in relation to one another) within a given language community. It helps to determine power relation between languages.

According to Putra, Novela, & Busri (2024:164), there are three classifications of signs: (i). based on their use and function (warning signs, advertising signs, road signs, informative signs, object labels, and graffiti), (ii) based on materials used (wood, metal, tiles, posters, and plastic), (iii). based on the language used in the sign (multilingual, bilingual, and monolingual). This classification makes the researchers analyse the linguistic landscape more easily because they can focus on what is learnt from the sign itself.

However, Ayyub & Rohmah (2024:3) in their own words identified different functions performed by linguistic landscape. They agreed that LL may serve as a "directional guide for road users, indicating the designated crossing points on roads or streets".

Directional guide for road users

The next function is advertisement. Another function identified is providing information. This informs sign consumers and provides them any information they need to know.

Another function identified is warning/prohibition as seen in figure 3 below. This sign serves as a precautionary warning to signs consumers

Theoretical framework

The study adopts geosemiotics theory created by Scollon and Scollon (2003) to examine public discourse. This explains that meaning of public texts like road signs, notices, and brand logos can only be achieved through physical and social contextualization. This explains how language elements connect to social context and convey meaning beyond their literal interpretation.

According to Scollon and Scollon (2003:63), "Geosemiotics is the study of signs in place as indices of discourses constituting the web of pathways through the material environment". It is used to understand meaning-making in the physical world as it is primarily concerned with ways these discourses, or signs, are indexed in the world. They further explain that signs may take the form of an icon (a sign resembling the object it represents), an index (a sign pointing to or referencing an object), or symbol (a sign arbitrarily representing an object). Their concept of semiotic landscapes investigates how the placement and context of signs influence their interpretation and how environmental factors contribute to meaning making in these signs.

Collins and Slembrouck, (2007) in their own opinion corroborated this that sign categories are not mutually exclusive but can work together to represent meaning. This means that all signs have indexicality in that the meaning they embodied is influenced by this place at this time in this space. Therefore, sign placement in the real world is in propinquity with other objects in the real world

Methodology

This study adopts qualitative approach in the collection and analysis of data using geosemiotics theory. This is suitable for our analysis because the study is an ethnographic study which

explores by describing, analysing and interpreting how language is used in forming the linguistic landscape and how communication is established in a particular community. Data consist of photographs of signage such as notice boards, information boards, direction signs, commercial board signs as well as business signs which include advertisement taken within the Ado-Ekiti metropolis.

The signage include both permanent and temporary signage and which are individually owned by retail and service shops. The retail businesses included shops which sell slides, clothing, different products, and stationery while the service shops included those offering typing, photocopying, printing, cutting of hair and fashion designing. The collection of these signage cuts across different places in Ado-Ekiti. Also, the signage revolves different areas such as business, advertisement, road map, and information among others. They were of written and pictorial media, that is, they consist of words that show the description, direction, or information of product of places.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the English language is prominent in most of the bottom up signage in the Ado-Ekiti metropolis. In essence, the linguistic landscape is dominated by English signage. This suggests that it considers and renders the English language important as seen in plate 1 below. It contains no indigenous language. It is an example of a monolingual English signage and this implies that the sign producer aims at targeting the elite in the society.

Plate 1: Signage of a private primary school
Source: Author compilation

However, some of these signage reproduces the language thereby making it a hybrid of the English language and the indigenous languages as seen in plate 2 below.

Plate 2:   **Plate 3:**
Source: Author Compilation   **Source:** Author Compilation

Also, some of these signs do not conform to the correctness and legitimacy of the English language. The salience of English on these signage can be traced to the fact that the English language has been seen by the sign producers as the language of business thus sends a crucial signal about the status of the language by business owners. The sign producers of the above signage hybridise and reproduce the English language.

Errors of English in bottom up signage
The projection of English in most signage reproduces dominant practices also associated with official domains mostly seen in top down signage. Akindele, (2011:5) corroborates this in his findings. He claims that "some of the causes of the spread of English are colonialism and globalisation", which tends to sustain businesses and aims at increasing their sales. This is due to the fact that it is believed that everyone can read and understand English and while it probably dominates if used alongside other languages, some of the sign producers chose to use the hybrid or nativised language practices, where languages are either used illicitly or mixed with other indigenous languages.

The data used showcase the English language error in terms of sound replacement and substitution, grammatical error, letter deletion and so on.

Linguistic landscape: Error of sound deletion and substitution

Plate 4: Signage of a bookshop
Source: Author Compilation

Plate 5: Signage of a cordwainer
Source: Author Compilation

Plates 4 and 5 show the language error with letters substitution and spelling error. This is a way of replacing a sound or letter with others. The sign producer in figure 1 replaces the letter 'e' with 'a' in the word stationery. Generally, most people refer to 'stationery' (writing materials, envelopes and office materials) as 'stationary' (not moving). Similarly, in plate 2, the sign producer replaces 'stationery' with stationaries and deleted the letter 'p' in the word 'slippers', thus writing it as 'slipers'. These errors are said to be overgeneralisation of how the English language is perceived, pronounced and spelt.

Plate 6: Signage of a barbershop
Source: Author Compilation

Plate 6 exhibits letter deletion and word substitution. The sign producer substituted the word 'saloon' for 'salon'. However, the two words have different meanings.

Linguistic landscape: Signage on grammatical error

 Plate 7: Signage on a beauty shop
Source: Author Compilation

 Plate 8: Signage of a beverage depot
Source: Author Compilation

Plate 7 above reveals grammatical error which the sign producer might not be aware of. The addition of the letter 's' to the word 'include' is not grammatically correct since the services rendered by the sign producer is more than one. Plate 8 in the same manner is another example of grammatical error which displays the omission of apostrophe in the word God. An apostrophe ought to be used to show possession, measurement, or source in addition to the -'s ending to be grammatically correct.

Plate 9: Signage of a seamstress
Source: Author Compilation

Plate 9 above shows the letters deletion in the word 'design' and resulting in a spelling/grammatical error.

Plate 10: Signage of a unisex boutique
Source: Author Compilation

The above signage contains a grammatical/spelling error where the owner substitute "female" with "femail".

However, the sources of these errors are mother tongue induced, thus can be traced to the effect and interference of the knowledge of mother tongue against the learning of the second language. Some of these sign-producers manifest these errors in their production of their signage when translating from their mother tongue to the second language. Also, some of them are not exposed to the language and are not properly informed about the structures of the second language while some of them are not familiar with the English words.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The linguistic landscape in Ado-Ekiti reflects the prominent use of English language. This implies that the bottom-up sign producers show preference for the language as a movement towards globalisation and standard-symbolic identity. Even though, the English language dominates in most signage, few of them were found to be the encoded in the English monolingual language hence they are either reproduced or written in error. This accounts for mixing the standard with non-standard and indicate that the English language is prevalent in the commercial linguistic landscape of Ado-Ekiti. Sign producers prefer to use language that is effective and in ample review of the public/viewers. Considering these factors, the commercial linguistic landscape reveals the communication identity of an environment.

It showed that linguistic landscape does not reflect the identity of the people and the environment. Also, these signage do not reflect the local identity of their producers and this poses a challenge for the indigenous language. As seen in the linguistic landscape of the Ado-Ekiti community which ought to reflect the indigenous languages and identity does not thereby being a threat to cultural knowledge, practices and histories.

It is therefore recommended that necessary and deliberate effort should be put in place to ensure that the local identity be promoted via the linguistic landscape of the environment. Sign producers should produce signage in their indigenous languages, subsequent research should examine ways to enhance and promote cultural legacy in linguistic landscape.

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