Linguistic Landscape of Tanzanian Public Universities: Is Kiswahili Still Dominant in Public Communication?

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic landscape of Tanzanian public universities, focusing on Kiswahili's dominance in public communication. While language use in urban Tanzania has been widely researched, the higher education sector, especially campus signage, remains underexplored. To address this gap, this paper discusses how Kiswahili continues to dominate signage in university public spaces and its role in promoting accessibility and inclusivity. Data were collected through photographic documentation of institutional and commercial signs at the University of Dar es Salaam and the University of Dodoma. Using qualitative content and thematic analysis based on the Linguistic Landscape approach and Bilingualism Theory, the findings reveal that Kiswahili only and Kiswahili and English bilingual signs prevail on campuses, accentuating Kiswahili's role in facilitating communication among diverse groups. English only signs appear mainly in formal academic contexts. Emerging multilingual signs, including Chinese, reflect global influences, while signs with personal names highlight identity and belonging. The study emphasizes Kiswahili's unifying role and calls for inclusive language policies that accommodate linguistic diversity and ensure equitable access to information. Future research could explore how campus communities engage with multilingual signage to deepen

understanding of language, identity, and globalization in education.

Keywords: bilingualism, language policy, signposts, Tanzanian universities

Introduction

Linguistic landscape (LL) research in Tanzania has increasingly focused on major urban centres such as Dar es Salaam, Arusha, and Dodoma, where scholars have examined complex patterns of language use in public spaces (Bwenge, 2009 & 2012; Chul-Joon, 2014; Peterson, 2014 & 2015; Lusekelo & Mdukula, 2021). Despite this growing body of work, the higher education sector remains significantly underexplored. Universities play a crucial role in shaping language ideologies and communication norms, yet few studies have systematically analysed linguistic practices in these academic settings. This gap limits the understanding of how Kiswahili, English, and other languages are used and represented in public signage and institutional communication on campuses. Addressing this gap is essential for developing language policies that reflect the lived linguistic realities of university communities and promote inclusive multilingual environments. This study investigates the linguistic landscape of selected Tanzanian public universities, focusing on the presence and functions of Kiswahili and English in public signage, alongside other languages. It seeks to answer the central question: How are Kiswahili, English, and other languages used and represented in university public signage? The findings aim to inform language policy development, foster multilingualism, and improve communication strategies on campuses. By analysing signage and language-use patterns, this paper aligns institutional policies with the evolving

linguistic realities of university communities. A comparative approach may reveal effective strategies for promoting multilingual inclusion and enhancing language accessibility. More broadly, this study contributes to national discussions on linguistic equity and inclusion by recognising the linguistic diversity within academic environments, supporting the creation of more inclusive learning spaces and responsive language planning across Tanzania's public institutions.

Lusekelo & Mdukula (2021) challenged the traditional top-down/bottom-up dichotomy in their study of signage in Dodoma City by introducing a third category, "middle-type" signage. Their findings reveal that both Kiswahili and English are highly visible in public signage, though their frequency, symbolic value, and social prestige vary. While English may appear statistically dominant, this dominance is not absolute. Many English acronyms conform to Kiswahili grammatical structures, highlighting Kiswahili's structural influence on public language practices.

Lusekelo & Buberwa (2021) observed the persistent presence of personal and place names tied to ethnic identities on privately owned signage, despite official discouragement of ethnic language use. These naming practices, rooted in shared cultural and regional affiliations, foster familiarity and trust and reflect social identity theory principles. While such practices promote cultural belonging, Kiswahili and English remain the dominant languages on public signage, underlining their symbolic prestige and institutional authority.

Mdukula (2022) examined language use on labels of pre-packaged food and beverage products, finding English to dominate despite Kiswahili's official status as the national language and the regional lingua franca. This English

preference raises concerns about linguistic accessibility and equity, as it risks excluding consumers with limited English proficiency, thereby affecting consumer rights and informed choice.

In university contexts, previous research indicates distinct but significant roles for Kiswahili and English. English dominates formal academic domains such as instruction, administration, and assessment (Abdul-Aziz, 1972; Puja, 2003), while Kiswahili is more prevalent in informal interactions between students and staff, and among peers. However, these studies tend to overlook the formal use of Kiswahili within Kiswahili departments, the Institute of Kiswahili Studies, as well as in specialized Kiswahili classroom instruction and formal administrative meetings conducted in Kiswahili. Additionally, there are notable instances of code-switching during lectures, where lecturers teaching in English often shift to Kiswahili for clarification, emphasis, or to facilitate student comprehension, particularly when explaining complex or culturally grounded concepts. This practice reflects Tanzania's broader multilingual sociolinguistic environment. Recent studies also highlight the presence of Ethnic Community Languages (ECLs) in university social spaces and peer conversations (Mohr & Ochieng', 2017; Lema, 2021), indicating a more complex and layered linguistic ecology than previously recognized.

Additional studies emphasise the complexity of university linguistic landscapes. For instance, Zhan's (2023) study at the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China (UNNC), found bilingual Chinese-English signage common in residential areas, whereas English predominated in academic zones, reflecting institutional priorities and differing communicative functions. Research at Muhimbili University of Health and

Allied Sciences (Mdukula, 2017) and more recent work by Lusekelo, Alphonce & Nyinondi (2021) documented increased use of Kiswahili in health-related signage during the COVID-19 pandemic. Phrases such as *tafadhali nawa mikono* "please wash hands" and *tujilinde* "let us protect ourselves" were widely displayed, while English appeared mainly on manufacturer labels. The use of visual symbols further enhanced clarity and accessibility. These shifts illustrate Kiswahili's expanding public communicative role, even in domains traditionally dominated by English. Generally, existing studies highlight the dominance of Kiswahili and English in Tanzania's public linguistic landscapes, with limited presence of ethnic community languages. University contexts reveal complex multilingual practices, but remain underexplored. This paper addresses this gap by examining language use on public university campuses to inform inclusive language policies.

Theoretical Framework

This study primarily draws on the Linguistic Landscape Approach to examine language use in Tanzanian public universities. This approach directly aligns with the study's core objective of analysing the visibility, distribution, and symbolic presence of Kiswahili, English, and other languages in public university spaces. Pioneered by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) and developed by Shohamy & Gorter (2009), the Linguistic Landscape Approach focuses on how languages are visually represented in signs, notices, and advertisements. It emphasizes that language visibility reflects underlying power relations, institutional preferences, and language ideologies. In Tanzanian universities, the prominence of Kiswahili in signage and informal communication highlights its cultural importance and role in social identity, while English's prevalence in formal academic

spaces signals its institutional authority. However, while this approach effectively captures symbolic representation, it does not fully account for the functional and pragmatic dimensions of language use in everyday interaction. Specifically, it lacks explanation of how and why speakers choose certain languages across different social and communicative contexts within the university setting. To address this limitation, the study incorporates Bilingualism Theory, pioneered by Fishman (1967) and developed by Grosjean (2010) and Cummins (2000), as a complementary framework. Bilingualism Theory explains how two or more languages operate within a community with often distinct roles. In the Tanzanian university context, English dominates formal academic discourse and instruction, while Kiswahili is widely used in informal conversations among students and staff. This functional division clarifies why particular languages dominate specific domains and how social roles influence language choice. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of language use in Tanzanian public universities by capturing both the symbolic visibility of languages in public spaces and their practical, domain-specific functions. This dual perspective is essential for addressing the study's key question: Is Kiswahili still dominant in public communication within Tanzanian universities? This study highlights the sociocultural patterns of language use in Tanzanian universities, emphasizing the complementary roles of Kiswahili, English, and other languages. Its insights can assist language planners and educators in developing inclusive, culturally responsive strategies that promote effective communication in multilingual settings.

Methodology

This study was conducted at two public universities in Tanzania: The University of Dodoma and the University of Dar es Salaam. We selected these two universities as they are the most prominent public universities in Tanzania, each exemplifying a distinct historical and regional context. As public institutions, they are closely tied to government policies and national priorities, making their signage a likely medium for expressing official ideologies. The University of Dar es Salaam, the oldest in the country, represents a long-standing academic tradition and national intellectual heritage. In contrast, the University of Dodoma, a newer institution located in the current capital, reflects ongoing efforts to expand and decentralize higher education. Both universities serve large, diverse student populations, and enjoy significant social visibility. Their differing trajectories and institutional roles make them particularly well suited for examining how Tanzanian universities construct and convey identity through signage. Our data collection, conducted between late 2019 and early 2020, was deliberately timed to capture developments in the linguistic landscape following the earlier images collected by Legère & Rosendal (2018).

Data were collected through photographic documentation of signposts displayed in academic buildings, along campus streets, and within premises offering various services such as food and hairdressing. A purposive sampling technique was employed, guided by predefined criteria including visibility, location, intended audience, and functional relevance. This approach ensured the selection of signposts representing both top-down signage, typically associated with academic units, and bottom-up signage found in commercial service areas. A total of 110 signposts were documented, with 45 from the University of Dodoma and 65 from the

University of Dar es Salaam. The analysis draws on the combined dataset without engaging in direct comparisons between the two universities. Data analysis employed both content and thematic approaches. Content analysis focused on classifying linguistic and symbolic features, including language choice, use of symbols, and visual elements such as colour and layout. Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns in language representation and symbolic communication. Findings are presented through descriptive summaries and thematic categorisation to highlight how linguistic and visual choices shape the communicative landscape within the university environment.

Research Findings

This section presents the findings based on the linguistic landscape data collected from selected Tanzanian universities. The analysis is organized into two categories: top-down signposts, which refer to official signage produced by institutional authorities, and bottom-up signposts, created by individuals or non-institutional actors. This distinction highlights how language choices reflect institutional language policies, everyday communication practices, and the continued dominance of Kiswahili in public communication within university settings.

Language usage on the top-down signposts

Signposts for academic and administrative units reveal four strands. Firstly, some departments use English exclusively, as shown in Plates 1 to 3, while Kiswahili features in the university emblem in Plate 1. Although Kiswahili's presence in the emblem is primarily symbolic, reflecting national identity and cultural pride, English predominates in functional signage, aligning with academic practices shaped by institutional policies

and global expectations. This choice reflects the broader educational policy of the country, where English serves as the main medium of communication in higher education (Puja, 2003). Signposts are written solely in English to ensure adherence to these norms and to support wider educational objectives, such as maintaining consistency with national language policies and promoting inclusivity within the academic environment.
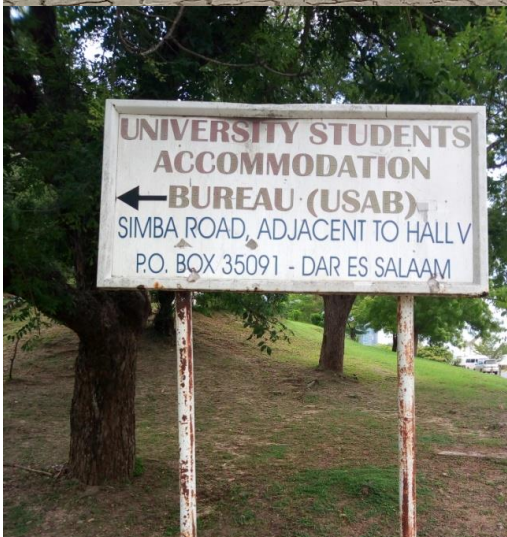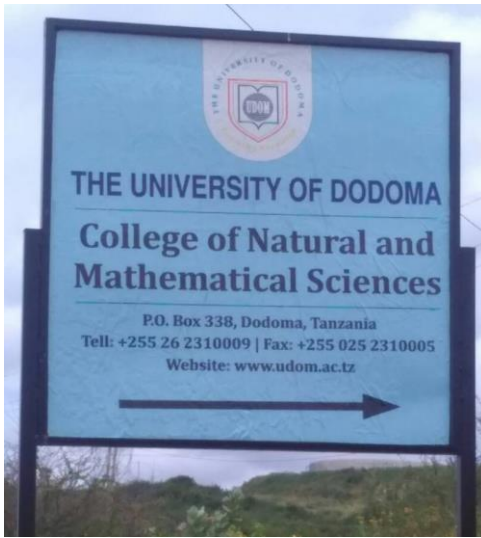
Plate 1: English-only signposts for academic units in Tanzanian universities

Secondly, Tanzanian universities also feature signposts exclusively displaying department names in Kiswahili. Illustrated by Plate 2, these signposts solely utilize Kiswahili for departmental titles, for instance, IDARA YA ELIMU – MIMEA "Botany Department". The selection of Kiswahili-only signposts in Tanzanian universities reflects endeavours to prioritize the national language, promote cultural identity, and facilitate public communication. This approach resonates with the Bilingual Theory, aiming to nurture inclusivity and linguistic diversity within educational environments.

Plate 2: Kiswahili-only signposts for academic units in Tanzanian universities

Thirdly, the utilization of bilingual signposts within Tanzanian institutions, as evidenced by Plate 3, reflects foundational aspects of Bilingual Theory. These signposts feature Kiswahili followed by English translations, thereby acknowledging the significance of both languages. Kiswahili, as the national language, widely comprehended by Tanzanians, ensures accessibility for the local populace, while English, recognized as an international language prevalent in academic and professional spheres, caters to global audiences. This dual-language strategy, congruent with the theoretical underpinnings of bilingualism, underlines the importance of recognizing and empowering diverse linguistic expressions within educational environments. Such an approach fosters inclusivity and facilitates effective communication across varied language backgrounds, a notion substantiated by scholarly works such as those of Peterson (2015) and Mdukula (2017) which highlight similar practices in Tanzanian institutions and supermarkets in Dar es Salaam, respectively.

Plate 3: Kiswahili-and-English signposts for academic units in Tanzanian universities

The incorporation of Chinese characters into the linguistic landscape of urban Tanzania, as observed in Plate 4, presents an intriguing intersection with principles of Bilingual Theory. While Kiswahili and English have traditionally dominated signage in Tanzanian urban areas, the emergence of Chinese characters signifies a shift towards multilingualism. This reflects the core tenets of Bilingual Theory which advocate for the recognition and empowerment of multiple languages within diverse contexts. In this case,

the addition of Chinese characters accommodates the linguistic needs of a growing Chinese-speaking community in Tanzania while also acknowledging the importance of Kiswahili and English as established languages of communication. Moreover, the provision of translations in Kiswahili, English, or both languages alongside Chinese characters exemplifies efforts to ensure inclusivity and effective communication across linguistic backgrounds, aligning with the principles of bilingual education and linguistic equity.

Plate 4: Chinese characters in the signposts for academic units in Tanzanian universities

The English-only signposts for parking lots at the University of Dar es Salaam, depicted in Plate 5, accentuate the institution's reliance on English as the primary language of communication. This choice may stem from various factors, including historical language policies. Furthermore, the use of English in visual cues, such as the capital letter "P" for parking, further reinforces the dominance of the language in everyday interactions within the university environment.

Plate 5: Signposts written in English-only with visual communication aid in Tanzanian universities

In signpost design for utilitarian purposes, visual images are often employed to effectively convey the intended message, reflecting a conventional semiotic approach (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2011). Moreover, it is noteworthy that messages on such signposts may be presented in Kiswahili, as observed in Plate 6. This bilingual approach caters to the linguistic preferences and needs of the local population, ensuring clear communication and accessibility. By integrating visual symbols and Kiswahili text, these signposts exemplify efforts to enhance functionality and inclusivity in communication within the designated spaces.

Plate 6: Kiswahili-only signpost for utilitarian purposes in Tanzanian universities

This observation does not preclude the existence of bilingual signposts that may be overloaded with instructions. In such cases, the Kiswahili text typically targets the university public, which predominantly communicates in Kiswahili, especially in informal settings (Puja, 2003). This linguistic choice aligns with the linguistic preferences and everyday language use of the local population. Conversely, the inclusion of English text on these signposts serves to cater to other members of the university community, potentially including foreigners or individuals who primarily communicate in English. This bilingual approach ensures that signposts effectively communicate instructions to all members of the university community, regardless of their linguistic background. It also reflects efforts to promote inclusivity and accessibility within the university environment by accommodating diverse language needs of all individuals, in line with the principles of Bilingual Theory.

Plate 7: Bilingual Kiswahili-and-English signpost for utilitarian purposes in Tanzanian universities

Other public facilities, like latrines, display bilingual texts, as seen in Plate 8. This bilingual presentation ensures clear communication for all users. The Kiswahili text caters to the local population, while English serves other community members, promoting inclusivity and accessibility within public spaces.

Plate 8: Bilingual Kiswahili-and-English signpost for utilitarian purposes in Tanzanian universities

The semiotics of signage within university campuses frequently incorporates individuated signs, exemplified in parking slots (Plate 9). Comprising numbers or letters, these signs convey precise meanings within parking regulations. Individuated signs operate as signifiers, conveying meaning through learned associations and social conventions. They constitute components of a broader sign system within the university environment, serving to enhance communication and organizational efficiency. These signs, as visual or textual elements, play a pivotal role in

conveying specific information or instructions to users, thereby facilitating orientation and communication within the university setting.

Plate 9: Individuated signposts in parking lots in Tanzanian universities

The commercial centres within university campuses significantly influence signage practices. Multinational corporations such as WESTERN UNION and EMS WORLDWIDE COURIER, alongside national entities like TANZANIA POSTS CORPORATION, typically favour English-only signposts (Plate 10). This choice reflects adherence to global business standards, aiming to accommodate international clientele and maintain brand consistency. Given English's status as a lingua franca, its use facilitates communication with diverse stakeholders. Consequently, English signage aligns with pragmatic business strategies and cultural considerations, highlighting the importance of practicality and global standards in signage practices. This preference indicates the elaborate interplay between pragmatic features, global business norms, and cultural influences in shaping signage within university environments.
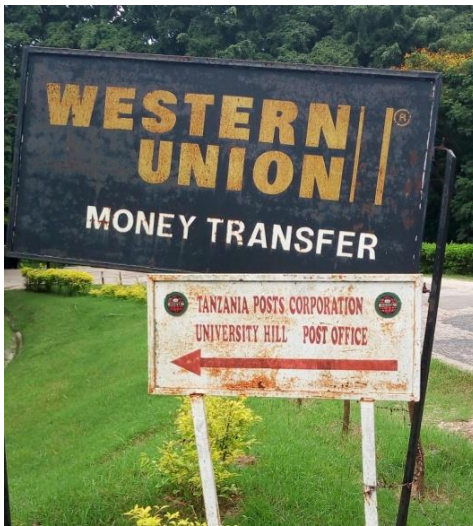
Plate 10: English-only signposts for multinational and national companies in Tanzanian universities

Local institutions often adopt a bilingual approach, incorporating both Kiswahili and English in their signage. For example, UDOM SACCOS LTD features the Kiswahili word SIMU, meaning "phone", alongside its English counterpart, thereby making the signpost bilingual in language content (Plate 11). This bilingual signage reflects the linguistic diversity and

cultural context of Tanzania, where Kiswahili serves as the national language and English holds significant importance as an international language of communication. By incorporating both languages, institutions like UDOM SACCOS LTD cater to a broader audience, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for speakers of both Kiswahili and English. Moreover, bilingual signage promotes linguistic harmony and cultural appreciation within the local community, fostering a sense of belonging and understanding among diverse language groups. Thus, the adoption of bilingual signage by local institutions represents a pragmatic approach that acknowledges and celebrates Tanzania's linguistic and cultural richness.

Plate 11: Bilingual English-and-Kiswahili signposts for local companies in Tanzanian universities

The absence of ethnic community languages in Tanzanian university's top-down signposts reflects a strict adherence to the utilization of Kiswahili and English, as emphasized by Mdukula (2017). While ethnic community languages may be present in Tanzania, their prevalence is primarily

observed in signposts found in rural areas, as noted by Lusekelo & Alphonce (2018) and Lusekelo (2019). In contrast, neighbouring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda, as documented by Rosendal (2010), incorporate formal languages like French, English, and Nyarwanda in their top-down signposts. This discrepancy suggests a deliberate prioritization of Kiswahili and English within Tanzanian universities, restricting the use of ethnic languages across all formal domains, including educational institutions.

Language usages on the bottom-up signposts

Bottom-up signage in Tanzania is prevalent, as highlighted by Peterson (2014) and Lusekelo & Alphonce (2018). These signposts commonly feature both Kiswahili and English, reflecting Tanzania's linguistic diversity and the importance of accommodating multiple language speakers. Interestingly, there are regional variations in language preference observed in bottom-up signage. In tourism regions, English, the international lingua franca, tends to be favoured to cater to international visitors who frequently visit these areas for tourism, business, or cultural activities (Lusekelo & Alphonce, 2018). Conversely, in urban centres like Dar es Salaam, Kiswahili emerges as the preferred language among the majority of locals (Peterson, 2014). This linguistic variation in bottom-up signage reflects the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and regional identity within Tanzania. It shows the importance of contextual considerations in language choice, highlighting the need for signage to be inclusive and accessible to diverse linguistic communities across different regions of the country.

In Tanzanian universities, bottom-up signage predominantly consists of English-only content, as depicted in Plate 12. These signposts adhere to the

national language policy, which stipulates English as the dominant language in higher education institutions across the country. However, there are instances where Kiswahili is incorporated into the signage, albeit selectively. For example, in Plate 13, place names such as CAFÉ, CATERING, FIRE, STAFF CANTEEN, and BUSINESS COLLEGE appear in English, reflecting their status as proper nouns or specific locations. This bilingual approach caters to the linguistic diversity within the university environment, ensuring that both English and Kiswahili speakers can navigate and understand the signage effectively. It also highlights the pragmatic considerations involved in signage design, where language choice may vary depending on the context of the sign.

Plate 12: English only bottom-up signage in Tanzanian universities

Plate 13: Kiswahili with less English for locations and proper names

Bilingual bottom-up signposts are a common sight not only in Tanzanian universities but also in various locations throughout the country as documented by several studies (Bwenge, 2009; Peterson, 2014; Lusekelo & Alphonce, 2018; Lusekelo, 2019). In Plate 14, the inclusion of Kiswahili phrases like *Tunasuka Mitindo Yote* "We plait all styles" and KARIBUNI "Welcome" serves more than just a functional purpose. Beyond conveying information, these Kiswahili expressions carry cultural significance and national identity, reflecting the broader role of Kiswahili as Tanzania's national language. This deliberate incorporation of Kiswahili into signage highlights a dual objective: effective communication with Kiswahili-speaking individuals and the celebration and promotion of Tanzanian culture and linguistic heritage. Thus, bottom-up signposts serve as tangible

expressions of linguistic and cultural diversity, enriching the communicative landscape of Tanzanian institutions and communities.

Discussion of the Findings

This study offers a comprehensive examination of the linguistic landscape in Tanzanian universities, focusing on the use of Kiswahili and English in public signage. The findings emphasize the continued dominance of Kiswahili in public communication, despite the increasing prominence of English in academic and formal contexts. This reflects broader sociolinguistic trends in Tanzania, where Kiswahili functions as the national language, while English maintains its role in higher education. These patterns can be interpreted through Bilingualism Theory, which explains how languages often coexist with distinct functional roles within bilingual communities (Fishman, 1967; Grosjean, 2010). In this case, Kiswahili remains the language of social interaction and identity in public signage, while English serves the formal and academic functions.

The use of Kiswahili and English in university signage highlights their complementary functions. Previous studies (Bwege, 2009; Peterson, 2014; Mdukula, 2017; Lusekelo & Alphonce, 2018) have documented the coexistence of top-down and bottom-up signage in Tanzania, often combining Kiswahili, English, or both, particularly in urban areas. This study builds on those findings by focusing specifically on universities. According to the data, bilingual Kiswahili-English signposts make up 37 percent of the total, followed by English-only at 33 percent. This bilingualism reflects Bilingualism Theory, with Kiswahili fulfilling the role of everyday communication and English maintaining its prestige in academic contexts.

Kiswahili is frequently used for practical communication. For instance, the sign MARUFUKU KUEGESHA GARI/PIKIPIKI ENEO HILI: AMRI "It is strictly prohibited to park a car or motorcycle in this area: Order" exemplifies its accessibility. As Puja (2003) observed, Kiswahili is widely understood and ensures message effectiveness, as using English alone in such contexts could limit communication. Utilitarian signposts often include visual images alongside text, following a semiotic approach (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2011). Plate 5, for example, uses the English word "IN" and a vehicle image to indicate parking. Similarly, Plate 6's UDSM CAR PARK NO. 6: SWIMMING POOL is supported by a parking symbol. Bilingual signs enhance clarity for both local and international users. Plates 7 and 8 illustrate bilingual signage that caters to diverse audiences such as restroom signs and messages prohibiting vehicle entry on sports grounds.

In contrast, rural markets where Kiswahili dominates may not require bilingual signage. Plates 2 and 3 show this contrast: Plate 2 features Kiswahili-only signage, while Plate 3 combines both languages to emphasize clarity over attention-grabbing. This reflects the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Framework, which emphasizes the visibility and social significance of a language as a marker of its vitality (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977; Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Kiswahili's prominence in public signage, even in urban and academic spaces, reinforces its vitality in Tanzania, especially in contexts where functional communication is prioritized.

The study also shows that bottom-up signage in universities is predominantly in English. For example, Plate 12 presents English-only signs for public awareness messages, contrasting with earlier findings (Peterson, 2014; Lusekelo & Alphonce, 2018) that reported mixed language

use in urban signage. Examples of English-only signage in university settings include SPREAD KNOWLEDGE NOT THE VIRUS – DODOMA VOLUNTEER NETWORK and UNISEX SALOON at The University of Dodoma. This shift towards English in informal, bottom-up signage, is in line with the broader influence of English as a global language and its institutional dominance, as predicted by Bilingualism Theory.

Additionally, individualized parking spaces are often marked with English, as seen in Plates 9 and 10, which feature signage for Prof. NGWARE and Prof. D.J. MKUDE in parking areas. Commercial signage in universities also favours English, including signs for multinational companies like WESTERN UNION and EMS, and national companies like TANZANIA POSTS CORPORATION. This trend highlights the continued role of English in institutional and global spheres, as well as its association with higher social status and prestige, consistent with the findings of Ethnolinguistic Vitality (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977; Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

Table 1: Distribution of Languages in Signposts in Tanzanian Universities

Language	Frequency	Percent
Kiswahili-only	12	11
English-only	36	33
English-only with visual images	8	7
Bilingual Kiswahili-English	41	37
Chinese-Kiswahili-English	4	4
Chinese- English	4	4
Individuated signposts with proper names	4	4
Total	**110**	**100**

The distribution of languages in university signage reflects the multilingual nature of Tanzanian universities. According to Table 1, bilingual Kiswahili-

English signposts make up 37 percent of the total, while English-only signs represent 33 percent. Kiswahili-only signs account for 11 percent, and signs with visual cues make up 7 percent. This distribution demonstrates the complementary roles of Kiswahili and English, with the 37 percent of bilingual signs improving accessibility, while the 33 percent of English-only signs highlight the continued institutional and global importance of English. The Linguistic Landscape Approach (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006) allows us to see how these language distributions represent the power dynamics at play in public space. Kiswahili's visibility in signage represents its cultural and local significance, while English's continued prominence highlights its institutional power and global reach.

The appearance of Chinese-Kiswahili-English and Chinese-English signage, though limited (4 percent each), reflects the growing linguistic influence of China in Tanzania. This aligns with global trends in other regions, as noted by Banda & Jimaima (2015) in rural Zambia and Peterson (2014) in Dar es Salaam. This finding also contributes to ongoing discussions on bilingualism in academic contexts. Legère (2022) has highlighted Kiswahili's cultural significance and English's institutional dominance, and the findings of this study support these arguments. Therefore, the linguistic landscape in Tanzanian universities reveals a complex interplay of historical, institutional, and global influences. The findings highlight the need for inclusive and flexible language policies that support effective communication across diverse linguistic communities in academic settings. This interplay, understood through the lenses of Bilingualism Theory and the Linguistic Landscape Approach, provides a comprehensive view of how language functions in Tanzanian universities, balancing local, national, and global considerations.

Conclusion

This study has explored the linguistic landscape of Tanzanian universities, an area previously receiving limited attention from linguists, revealing important insights into the prominence of Kiswahili, English, and other languages within these institutions. The findings emphasise Kiswahili's functional role in communication with the general public, its use in Kiswahili courses, and within Kiswahili departments or institutes, whereas English continues to dominate other academic and formal contexts. Kiswahili-only signage comprises a substantial portion of university signage, attesting to its prominent visibility and significance.

While English remains dominant in formal academic settings, Kiswahili plays a crucial role in ensuring accessibility and inclusivity throughout university environments. Bilingual Kiswahili-English signage is prevalent across campuses, reflecting Tanzania's bilingual sociolinguistic context. Although Kiswahili-only signage accounts for just 11% of the total, its presence reaffirms the language's enduring significance in everyday communication. These signs, often paired with visual images, are vital for reaching a diverse university community, including non-native speakers. The minor presence of Chinese language elements on select signposts highlights the growing global influence of China within Tanzania's linguistic landscape. This research contributes to the expanding field of linguistic landscape studies, particularly within African academic contexts where research remains limited. It confirms that Kiswahili's dominance is both a cultural legacy and a practical necessity for effective communication.

The study calls on universities to prioritise Kiswahili in their communication strategies to foster inclusivity and ensure accessibility for

all stakeholders. The findings also have important implications for language policy in Tanzanian universities, advocating for inclusive bilingual communication strategies with Kiswahili at the forefront. Additionally, the study emphasises the role of visual elements in signage to improve accessibility for all members of the university community. As Tanzania engages with an increasingly globalised world, promoting and sustaining the use of Kiswahili in academic and public communication remains vital to ensuring equitable access for all members of the university community.

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