

MULTILINGUALISM IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF IBADAN, NIGERIA

Adeola Aminat BABAYODE-LAWAL

Simon Fraser University

Abstract

Linguistic landscape is concerned with the visual language use in the public space. Existing studies have mostly focused on semiotic analysis as well as the underlying motivations of power and solidarity communicated through signs with little attention paid to multilingualism on signs. This study was, therefore, designed to investigate how multilingualism is reflected in the linguistic landscape of Ibadan, Nigeria, in an attempt to show the number of languages found in the linguistic landscape used on the signs and their patterns with a view to enhancing the understanding of the spread and vitality of languages.

The study adopts Backhaus's (2007) sociolinguistic framework and Spolsky and Cooper's (1991) preference model for the analysis and description of data for this study. Data were gathered from forty signs selected in each of the seven (7) Ibadan communities: Challenge, Dugbe, Mokola, Iwo Road, Ring Road, Olodo and Sango comprising public road signs, advertising billboards, commercial shop signs and inscriptions on buildings using the purposive sampling technique. Ten (10) of each of the seven groups of signs were selected in the areas. The signs were photographed using a digital camera. There were 280 signs in all. The study combines qualitative and quantitative research methods and the data were content analysed. The statistical package utilised was stata 14.

Seven languages were identified in the linguistic landscape of Ibadan. Most of the signs (65.5%, 80%, 67.5%, 72.5%, 80% and 60%) were written in monolingual English in Iwo Road, Challenge, Dugbe, Mokola, Ring Road and Sango respectively, while the highest percentage of the signs (55%) was written in bilingual English/Yoruba in Olodo. Languages used on the signs perform informational and symbolic functions. The dominance of English, the visibility of French, Arabic and Nigerian Pidgin and the marginalisation of indigenous languages on the monophonic, homophonic, mixed part and polyphonic signs were explained in terms of the sign writer's skill condition, the presumed reader's condition and the symbolic value condition. There is the presence of English, Igbo, Hausa, French, Arabic, and Nigerian Pidgin and Yoruba. English, Arabic and Yoruba on the monophonic signs to show language dominance and distinctiveness. English, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa were used on the homophonic signs to suggest language hierarchy, multiculturalism and as a means of facilitating communicative efficiency. Arabic, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Pidgin and English were mostly used on the mixed part signs for economic motivations. Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Arabic and French were used on the polyphonic signs to express, multiculturalism, ethnolinguistic vitality as well as means of portraying the identity and solidarity of linguistic landscape actors. The pervasive use of English on signs was explained in terms of the social attractiveness and prestige attached to its use.

Multilingual language use in linguistic landscape of Ibadan is a result of the heterogeneous and cosmopolitan nature of the city. This reality brings into the limelight the reflection of linguistic hierarchies and language use patterns in the Nigerian urban linguistic landscape.

Keywords: Linguistic landscape, Multilingualism, Signs, Ibadan, Ethnolinguistic vitality

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