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Shifting agency in shaping linguistic landscape:
Evidence from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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Abstract

YANG, Chul-Joon. 2014. Shifting Agency in Shaping Linguistic Landscape: Evidence from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. *The Sociolinguistic Journal of Korea 22(2)*, 45-64. This paper addresses the question of agency in shaping linguistic landscape and its manifold social and political implications in changing language ideology, attitudes and situations in post-Ujamaa Tanzania. Based on empirical data collected in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, this paper attempts to explain shifting agency in shaping linguistic landscape in the context of globalization as well as the spread of English in Tanzania.

Agency in shaping linguistic landscape is inseparably interconnected with various social actors'motivations and reflects social changes at large. The domain of human agency behind linguistic landscape (public uses of written language) can be characterized as an epiphenomenon which involves a historical dimension and perspective.

The study of linguistic landscape with special reference to agency offers a useful tool for examining various social actors who vie for public space. Agency in linguistic landscape needs to be seen in the wider context of social processes and existing power structures. (150)

Keywords: agency, linguistic landscape, multilingualism, language policy, polycentricity, Swahili, Tanzania

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I. Introduction

Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25) define that "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape[1] of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration."Linguistic landscape (hereafter referred to as "LL") is indicative of sociolinguistic situations in a given society that include common patterns of language use, language policy, multilingualism, language vitality, prevalent language attitudes, socio-pragmatic functions and language ideology among others. LL, though an ephemeral and transient graphic externalization of what is intended as public signage, commercial advertisements and so on, offers clues in understanding relationships among languages, social contexts for languages, power dynamics of languages and socially circulated perceptions on and attitudes towards languages in a given society. Furthermore, a study of LL gives us an insight into the semiotic representations and processes, indexical values and other relevant features.

This study explores the question of agency in shaping LLand its overall implication in the light of social changes in the making. Tanzania has been often cited as a typical example of endoglossic language policy by which an indigenous language, Swahili, has been vigorously promoted. The so-called Swahilization has fundamentally transformed Tanzania into a country distinctively characterized by its successful language planning that has spanned over 50 years.

As Bwenge summarizes:

> In this regard, *Tanzania offers an exceptionally clear case of a postcolonial African nation that, at least up to the late 1980s, had aggressively promoted an indigenous African language, Swahili, as the medium of all modern official communication such as administration and education,* while reserving the language of the former colonial

1) Awkwardly but attractively labeled "linguistic landscape" (Spolsky 2009: 25), LL is also termed "graphic environment" (Calvet 1994).

> power, English, for highly specific domains such as secondary and tertiary education as well as international relations and interactions (my emphasis 2009: 152).

Tanzania has, however, gone through rapid change in the post-Ujamaa era and this change has brought about an emerging set of guiding principles and practices for language ideological questions that range from the medium of instruction in the education system to the role languages are expected to play in society at large.

Being a visual representation of social changes dotted with semiotic and emblematic values, LL provides us with an unusual opportunity to look at society as it is. An investigation into LL in Tanzania will enable us to understand the way Tanzanian society has gradually evolvedfrom centralized Ujamaa socialism to decentralized capitalist system.

In what follows, we give a brief description of the question of agency in LL, language policies in Kenya and Tanzania, top-down and bottom-up signs, the choice of language and other related matters.

II. The question of agency in shaping linguistic landscape

Agency in the study of linguistic landscape is a fundamental factor (Spolsky 2009: 30), but we note the paucity of research about how agency is treated in the study of LL. Bearing in mind that public space is a site of agency and power and that LL is a contestation of public space, this study is basically deals with how various social actors occupy their domain.

Defined as “the human capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001: 7), agency is inseparably intertwined with the way society is organized and run. It is for this reason that agency could be used as a significant conceptual tool, with which many aspects of society come to the fore.

Shaping LL may be an individual action, but individuals are inclined to shape LL in a mutually constitutive manner with society in general. Therefore, “the personal” cannot be personal on its own, but social as well as political in

the strict sense of the word. In other words, agency is socially and historically conditioned and constrained to the extent that it is not solely an individual domain. As pointed out by Malinowski (2009: 116), LL authorship is mutually constituted by individual intention and social convention.

Malinowki lucidly points out:

> Taken together, these perspectives on speech acts allow us to posit tentatively a notion of linguistic landscape authorship that is mutually constituted by individual intention and social convention (Malinowki 2009: 116).

III. Endoglossic and exoglossic language policies as manifested in linguistic landscape: Tanzania versus Kenya

Language policy pursued and implemented by each individual country in the form of regulation and legislation affects the shaping of LL in one way or another. In this respect, LL can be said to be at the other end of language policy.

Language policy in Kenya presents a visible contrast to that in Tanzania. Since decolonization, Kenya and Tanzania have taken a rather different path with respect to the national language issue.

While Tanzania, for the new nation-building, embarked on an endoglossic language policy with a zealous nationalism, Kenya, though not explicitly expressed, pursued a *de facto* exoglossic one. Unlike its neighboring Tanzania, Kenya was not resolute for the adoption of Swahili as its official language. English remained the language of daily government activity, the medium of instruction and the language of private business (Fasold 1984: 276).

Concerning the distinction between endoglossic and exoglossic language policies, Wolff gave a categorical definition:

> Choosing an African language as official language is referred to as an *endoglossic* language policy, opting for a foreign language is referred to as *exoglossic* language

policy (emphasis in the original 2000: 342).

A casual glance at LL both in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi reveals this difference of language policy reflected in LL. The following are the same commercial advertisements in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi respectively. They have the same message with the same graphic design, but in different languages, namely Swahili and English.[2)]

Figure 1.1 (JUL/2008)

Figure 1.2 (JUL/2008)

Figure 1.3 (JAN/2010)

Figure 1.4 (JAN/2010)

2) Photographs in this paper were taken by the author during the author's fieldworks conducted in July 2008 and January 2010 respectively. Figure 1.2, which shows a Coca Cola advertisement in the heart of Nairobi, reads "Enjoy to the last drop."

Most multinational corporations based both in Kenya and Tanzania such as Coca Cola, Airtel, Vodacom and other companies advertise their products in English and Swahili respectively. This urban cityscape is responsive to and resonant with the language policies of these two East African countries.

Cross-border towns between Kenya and Tanzania such as Isebania, Sirari, Namanga, Horohoro and Lunga-Lunga are also exemplary places for sensing the distinction between endoglossic and exoglossic language policies. Public signs are written mainly in English on the Kenyan side, whereas on the other side of the border they are rendered bilingually in English and Swahili.

IV. A brief historiography of language policy in Tanzania

Swahili in Tanzania is considered as one of the most successful instances of national language institution in the world (Fasold 1984: 266). Despite the fact that Tanzania is a linguistically diverse nation with more than 126 ethnic languages, over 90 percent of Tanzanians speak Bantu languages which are very similar to Swahili in terms of their structure and vocabulary (Mbaabu 1996: 179). Therefore people find it far more easier to learn Swahili. Furthermore, Swahili was not the predominant language of the largest ethnic group. Swahili has been vehemently promoted as a language of wider communication in every walk of society.

Historically speaking, the wide spread of Swahili in Tanzania was largely trigged by trading activities. By the mid-nineteenth century, Swahili has become the dominant trade language along the trade routes from the coast to the interior (Fasold 1984: 267).

Even before independence the Germans and the British used Swahili for colonial administration because Swahili had already established itself as the dominant trade language over a wide area. Although British colonialism at the end of the First World War altered the status of English as a language of government and higher education (Fasold 1984: 268), Swahili as a language of national communication was irreversible.

Tanzania has a triglossic situation (Abdulaziz-Mkilifi 1972) in which Swahili, English and ethnic languages interact with varying degrees of prestige and roles. English is considered to be a high variety (H) as the language ofhigher education and international business. Ethnic languages are, on the contrary, low varieties (L) for intra-ethnic and informal communication. However, this multilingualism has produced ambivalent attitudes.

1. Post-colonial and Ujamaa period

Swahili, which was undisputedly effective and potent in mobilizing Tanzanians in the struggle for independence, played a crucial role in establishing a national identity for political and cultural reasons (Whiteley 1969: 115).

Soon after independence Tanzania designated an indigenous language, Swahili, as its national language in 1962. In addition to being declared the national language, Swahili became the official language alongside the former colonial language English. It is here worth mentioning that each language was assigned compartmentalized, if not dueling, functions and domains (Whiteley 1969: 114). Ardent nationalist inclinations that swept across the country furthered the cause of Swahili. Blommart notes:

> The real boost for Swahili came when the state embarked on a massive campaign of nation building in the mid-1960s. The nation building campaign was an attempt towards establishing socialist hegemony, and Swahili was given a crucial role in this. The language was defined as the language of African-socialist (Ujamaa) ideas, and the generalized spread of Swahili would be a measurable index of the spread of socialism across the population (2010: 183).

Ujamaa socialism as state ideology and language went in tandem in Tanzania (Blommaert 1999). Swahili was an essential and cohesive tool for bolstering Ujamaa ideology, which was linguistically represented in Swahili. It was essentially a period marked for characteristic nationalist zeal.[3)]

3) For Swahilization in Tanzania see Yang (2009: 8-10).

Mazrui and Shariff note:

> If in capitalist Kenya the Swahili were denied an ethnicity by the extinction of the very notion of "Swahili identity," the socialist policies of Tanzania resulted in the opposite tendency, the tendency to generalize Swahili identity beyond the frontiers of Swahili ethnicity. At least in what is sometimes called Tanganyika (mainland Tanzania), therefore, the term Swahili has often come to refer to virtually any person of African origin in that general region. We have been told that it became a matter of policy in Tanzania to discourage any writings that claim an independent Swahili ethnicity distinct from other ethnicitieswithin the country. *Swahili was thus arbitrarily expanded in the quest for a wider national identity* (emphasis mine 1994: 44-45).

Monoglot ideology was prevailing at the height of Ujamaa. Swahili was equated with nationalism and Ujamaa. In other words, Swahili was an effective tool for cementing national cohesion and solidifying the hegemonic monopoly of Ujamaa socialism all over the country.

2. Post-Ujamaa period

Ujamaa was gradually at the ebb in the mid-1980s largely by internal problems coupled with external factors. When President Ali Hassan Mwinyi succeeded Julius Kambarage Nyerere in 1985 Tanzania started incorporating into the capitalist world system. This incorporation into the capitalist world system meant the loosening of the state's hold on a wide range of matters. In the political arena, a multi-party system was introduced in 1992, ending decades-long one-party system.

The post-1990 world order, i.e. the era of contemporary globalization and capitalist hegemony (Blommaert 2010: 86) has seen the transformation into a market economy in which foreign investment and private sector development have been actively encouraged on the economic scene.

A number of politico-economic and socio-cultural transformations have ensued as a consequence of structural adjustment programs (SAPs). Social structures constrained by the actions of individual or non-institutional agents have started

emerging as powerful forces. This signals that non-institutional social actors have begun to come into prominence in language-related matters too.

Swahili, which was relegated to the status of second-class language in the British colonial era and enjoyed a prestigious status at the heyday of Ujamaa, has devalued again in the labor market. English has made a robust comeback with new opportunities and possibilities.

V. Top-down versus bottom-up signs

One approach to agency in public signage is the "top-down, bottom-up" sign distinction (Spolsky 2009: 30-31), but it needs to be mentioned here that this distinction is not always clear-cut and classificatory. Spolsky draws our attention:

> There is an equally fundamental factor often ignored in our studies, which attempt to define the meaning of signs without recognizing the process by which a sign is produced. One approach is the "top-down, bottom-up" sign distinction, but this is simply a *post-hoc* guess (2009: 30-31).

Put it another way, this sort of binary categorization is not applicable to all the signs. Although this binary dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up signs is the blurring of lines, it is mainly for the sake of classificatory convenience. Alongside with "top-down"/"bottom-up" distinction, other terms such as "public and private," "official and non-official," "commercial and non-commercial" and so on are also used.

Top-down signs tend to involve institutional agency that manifests itself in the form of specific language policy, while bottom-up signs are largely motivated by economic or commercial value. This distinction implies the contestation of public space and shows asymmetrical strengths of languages.

However, this distinction between top-down and bottom-up continues to be diluted because institutional agency is mixed up with individual or collective

agency and this confluence makes it difficult to distinguish them.

1. Top-down signs

The implied "top" in the "top-down" model is usually a language management authority which sets a specific policy on language choice (Spolsky 2009: 31). Thus the language chosen for top-down signs is often the one stipulated by law and, for this reason, is more easily predictable in terms of language choice.

Institutional agency usually predetermines top-down signs which are written and regulated by authorities. Thus top-down signs include those made by national and public institutions.

Top-down signs tend to fulfill informational and statutory functions which are publicly oriented. Although the state as one scale-level in a stratified polycentric system (Blommaert 2010: 184) played a predominant role in shaping top-down signs such as government signs, street names, public announcements (*matangazo*), warnings (*maonyo*) and notices (*ilani*) various social actors have differential agency available to them. In this sense, the state is not the sole actor in shaping and regulating top-down signs.

When it comes to language choice, what is characteristic of top-down signs is that the principles of bilingualism are, in relative terms, predictably observable.

Figure 2.1 (JAN/2011)

Figure 2.2 (JUL/2008)

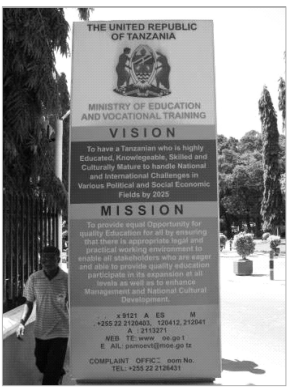

Figure 2.3 (JAN 2010)

Figure 2.4 (JAN 2010)

2. Bottom-up signs

Bottom-up signs include those made by individual social actors. Bottom-up signs include both fixed and mobile advertising billboards, signboards, bags, posters, wrappers, commercial shop signs and other materials. Since bottom-up signs are generally intended to attract the general public, they are of an elaborate character and economic value.

Big commercial billboards are manufactured and managed by specialized advertising companies such as A1 Outdoor, Tan Advert, Clear Channel and Alliance Media (Bwenge 2009: 160).

Non-state actors, be they multinational corporations and transnationally organized groups, have a great deal of authorship behind the making of bottom-up signs and are increasingly influential especially in this age of globalization and transnationalization characterized by the heightened interconnectivity between people and the loosening of national boundaries.

Contrary to rigidity, uniformity and norm-abiding character commonly observable in top-down signs, bottom-up signs are characterized by their innovative creativity since they call for interactivity and performativity. Playful uses of language are not only confined to language itself, but also to other

semiotic means of publicizing what is intended.

For instance, di-/multi-graphic societies have more varied and diversified ways of communicating effectively by virtue of what each grapheme has.

Bottom-up signs are densely populated along the main arteries of Dar es Salaam, namely Ali Hassan Mwinyi Road and Morogoro Road and central business district (Bwenge 2009: 159).

The ways in which these actors achieve agency have something to do with what has been taking place in Tanzanian society and can be explained in that context. Attention-drawing bottom-up signs are typically commodified instances of language use. We need to point out that access to agency in shaping LL has been made more flexible.

3. Language choice in top-down and bottom-up signs

The fact that Tanzania is a linguistically diverse country has no relevance to written languages in public space. When it comes to language choice in LL, languages chosen for shaping LL are exclusively in English and Swahili. Other ethnic languages are not represented at all. Even in ethnically homogeneous rural communities, ethnic languages are seldom, if ever, used in shaping LL. This is largely attributable to Tanzania's linguistic culture and language policy.

In order to analyze language distribution in signs, photographstaken mainly in Central Business District, Ali Hassan Mwinyi Road and Morogoro Road are classified and examined for languages displayed. As can be seen below, there is a stark contrast between top-down and bottom-up signs in terms of languages choice. Swahili or Swahili alongside with its co-official language English are predominant in top-down signs, whereas more than half of bottom-up signs are in English.

Top-down signs are made by governmental institutions, be they central or municipal, and tend to display official bilingualism. Top-down signs are by and large classified into two main categories. Public road signs, public campaigns and public signs on government buildings constitute the first category which strictly adheres toofficial bilingualism. On the contrary, public announcements,

warnings and noticesappear to be niched in a small corner of public space and are prepared almost exclusively in Swahili. I would call it collective grassroots agency in consideration of who assumes a prime authorship for these signs.

Table 1. Language distribution in top-down signs N: 72

Languages	Number	Percentage
Swahili only	32	44.44
English only	1	1.38
Swahili and English	39	54.16

Another salient point is the absence of bilingual advertisement (Bwenge 2009: 153) which is not a rarity in other parts of the world. For instance a meager 4.62 percent bottom-up signs are bilingual. This absence of bilingual advertisement presents a striking contrast to the way advertisements take place in Kenya where bilingual advertisements have been in vogue in recent years.

Table 2. Language distribution in bottom-up signs N: 238

Languages	Number	Percentage
Swahili only	104	43.69
English only	123	51.68
Swahili and English	11	4.62

As shown above English constitutes the highest number in bottom-up signs, followed by Swahili signs. This attests to the fact that English is becoming a preferred medium through which advertising takes places and that English is increasingly taking a hegemonic position.

VI. Globalization and the spread of English in Tanzania

The effect of globalization on language, specifically English, is omnipresent in today's Tanzania. English is increasingly associated with positive values such as upward social mobility, international orientation, sophistication, higher education, modernity, globalization and accessibility into a wider world.

People at the upper, if not top, echelon of society, tend to consider English as the language of higher education and socio-economic advancement. Those who are competent in English have a better career prospect than those who are not, and exercise a great deal of influence in all spheres of life. In this sense language has become a powerful means of the reproduction of social class and status in society.

This collective enthusiastic zest for English has led to the establishment of a lot of English-medium primary schools mainly in urban areas. English is equated with quality education and this equation has created a social quest for opportunity perception. This example shows language ideology and how people themselves evaluate languages in a multilingual social context. LL is by itself an excellent window through which one can see this changing language dynamics and how languages are evaluated in economic and utilitarian terms.

VII. From languages to linguistic and semiotic resources

In an era increasingly marked by intensified globalization process (Blommaert 2010), a creative and innovative use of language in communication activities including commercial advertisements is of vital importance in maximizing its effect. This calls our attention to the very essence of Blommartian sociolinguistics underlining the fact that concrete linguistic resources have priority over languages as an abstract system. Blommaert is emphatic in his assertion that:

Sociolinguistics is the study of language as a complex of resources, of their value,

distribution, rights of ownership and effects. It is not the study of an abstract language, but *the study of concrete resources in which people make different investments and to which they attribute different values and degrees of usefulness* (my emphasis 2010: 28).

A rather creative and innovative deviation from linguistic normativity, which is becoming a common phenomenal occurrence in public space, purports to be a playful use of language. The size, order, stylized letters, transliterated letters, visual framing, colorand other features contribute to invoking semiotic, emblematic and other desired values to the potential reader.

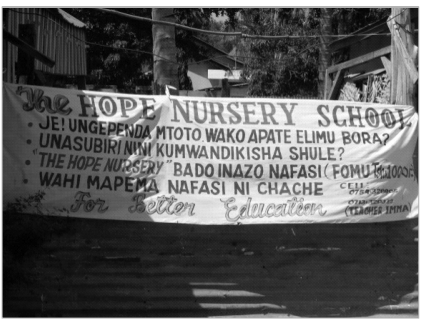

Figure 3.1 (JUL/2008)

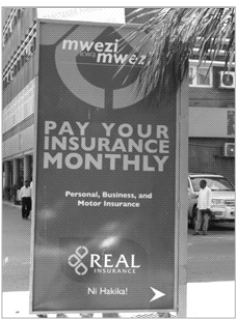

Figure 3.2 (JAN/2010)

It is in this vein that instances of code-mixing and other playful language uses become much more frequent especially in bottom-up signs.[4)]

1) Cheka Time (JAN 2010/Vodacom).
'Smile time.'

2) Feelanga free (April 2011/Nairobi/Airtel).
Feel-habitual marker-FV
'Just feel free.'

4) Sheng words are very frequently used in commercial advertisements in Kenya.

3) Tutakusort (July 2013/Nairobi/Co-op Bank).
SM-Fut-OM-sort out
'We will sort you out.'

4) Tujuane Tariff. Ongea bila Wass (July 2013/Nairobi/Orange).
SM-know-Recip-sub FV. Say-FV without worry
'Let's know tariff each other. Say without worry.'

5) Sisi tunabelieve na Postbank (JAN 2010/Nairobi/Postbank).
We SM-Pres-believe in (with) Postbank.
'We believe in Postbank.'

6) Now you too can sambaza (JAN2010/Nairobi/Safaricom).
'Now you too can distribute.'

7) Beba Laptop with the Wezesha Initiative (JAN2010/Nairobi/Safaricom).
'Carry a Laptop with the Empowerment Initiative.'

The above-enumerated examples demonstrate various ways of maximizing advertising effects by being dependent on locally available linguistic resources. These need to be seen in the local exchange of meaning.

VIII. Concluding remarks

The issues surrounding agency in shaping LL provide us with a plentiful source of information on how the center of gravity shifts with the times and LL could posit itself as an indexical token of social mutation over time and space.

To sum up, several significant points can be made in relation to the main idea of this paper. Firstly, although the state as a crucial actor in matters pertaining to language continues to be somewhat influential, it is no longer a sole actor in regulating language planning activities that include LL. The directive principles of state policy at the time of Ujamaa socialism are bygone and not applicable to language-related issues in post-Ujamaa Tanzania.

Secondly, shifting agency in shaping LL in Dar es Salaam could be interpreted to be a visual indication that society is on the verge of gradual shift from centralized monocentricity to decentralized polycentricity. This is tantamount to saying that power and authority exercised in language-related matters increasingly emanate from the multiple centers that have different layers of influence.

Thirdly, those who concretely participate in the shaping of LL as agentive actors may vary from one society to another. And the question of agency in the shaping of LL is both a synchronic and diachronic issue that has something to do with being and becoming in a retrogressive way. In this regard, when one takes into account the actions of agentive individuals, it is imperative to investigate into a synchronic snapshot from a diachronic perspective that encompasses historical context and social history. Put it another way, LL needs to be examined with the aim and end of explaining the history of becoming for it inevitably contains a specific chronotopocity that does not cease to change.

Fourthly, agency is not a static entity, but an organic being that continually oscillates with changing environments and circumstances. Individuals'agency may be constrained or dictated by social structure which influences or limits the choices and opportunities available to them. Agency in language, specifically shaping LL, is not an exception.

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