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Multilingual contestations and the reproduction of English legitimacy in bottom-up linguistic landscape: an analysis of shop signs in Bulawayo

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic landscape refers to language visibility on public signs. This includes language on public buildings, street names and shop signs. The configuration of the linguistic landscape of an area is often shaped by extra-linguistic systems such as the history, politics, culture and the general ideological climate. This study analysed the bottom-up linguistic landscape of the city of Bulawayo to reveal how contestations on multilingualism and the city's identity are expressed, legitimised and challenged. Through a qualitative analysis of selected shop signs along Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Street in the CBD, the study sought to expose how the bottom-up constructed linguistic landscape aligns with or contests legitimate practices normalised by top-down discourses. The study deployed Bourdieu's concept of 'legitimate' language to understand these linguistic configurations. The study's findings reveal an English-saturated bottom-up linguistic landscape. Monolingual English signs dominate the linguistic landscape while Ndebele and Shona are used in hybrid practices, with Shona also dominating Ndebele. The subservience of Ndebele on the linguistic landscape contradicts the city's perceived Ndebele identity while the prominence of English on the linguistic landscape of Bulawayo reproduces the pervasive ideologies and practices that valorise it in all official domains as the legitimate language in Zimbabwe.

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Introduction

Throughout the world, most urban landscapes are language-saturated environments. The language that is inscribed on billboard advertisements, entertainment posters, shop signs, street names and public buildings forms part of an area's linguistic landscape (Hult, 2018; Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009; Moustauoi, 2019). The linguistic landscape is a relatively new concept that has begun to gain traction in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics (Gorter, 2006). It is attributed to the pioneering work of Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 23) who define the linguistic landscape as 'the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region'. The configuration of any linguistic landscape is neither random nor arbitrary but is often shaped by extra-linguistic systems to index the historical, sociopolitical, cultural and environmental milieu of an area (Adekunle, 2019; Gorter, 2013, 2018). These factors influence decisions about which languages are made prominent and which ones are backgrounded or invisibilised (Hult, 2018; Shohamy, 2006). Gorter (2018, p. 4) proffers a reconceptualisation of the linguistic landscape to include 'the motives, uses, ideologies, language varieties and contestations of multiple forms of 'languages' as they are displayed in public spaces'. This enables a discussion of linguistic landscapes as products of intersecting factors that influence the choice of language displayed on public signs. These factors often include language ideologies, language policies, and the general communicative needs of a community (Albury, 2021; Gorter, 2013; Moustauoi, 2019). According to Gorter (2006), public signs are categorised as top-down or bottom-up derived. This dichotomy distinguishes

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between 'official signs placed by the government or related institution and non-official signs put there by commercial enterprises or by private organisations or persons' (Gorter, 2006, p. 3). Regardless of their origin, forms of language representation on these signs create impressions about language hierarchisation and signposts the existence of multilingualism, or the extent of its acknowledgement (Hong, 2020), while also supplying important cues about power relations in society (Gorter, 2013; Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009).

In line with the foregoing, much linguistic landscape research has tended to focus on how public signs reproduce broader national and institutional language policies and ideologies (Ssentanda & Ncube, 2023). In particular, these studies have shown how language ideologies are expressed in top-down linguistic landscapes such as government buildings or street names (Akindele, 2011; Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Mubarak & Abdul Muthalib, 2021). The affordances of the internet have also resulted in increased interest in studying the linguistic landscape as constructed in virtual spaces, also termed the virtual linguistic landscape (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009). Among other things, this scholarship includes the analysis of the linguistic configurations of monologic top-down platforms such as government and institutional websites (Keles et al., 2020; Maseko & Siziba, 2023; Paramarta et al., 2022) as well as dialogic web platforms such as social media as virtual linguistic landscapes constructions (Hiippala et al., 2019; Lyons, 2017). However, there is still a lot that has to be understood about the bottom-up linguistic landscape both in its physical and virtual forms.

Contributing to this burgeoning literature, this paper analyses the bottom-up linguistic landscape of the city of Bulawayo to expose how contestations on multilingualism and the city's identity are expressed, legitimised and challenged. Through an analysis of selected shop signs along Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo (JMN) Street (formerly Main Street) in the city's Central Business District (CBD), the study expands our understanding of linguistic landscapes by uncovering how the privately constructed linguistic landscape in the form of shop signs aligns with, or contests legitimate practices normalised by top-down discourses. By focusing on small individually owned shops, we can access multiple forms of languages and language practices than when merely focusing on more visible standout buildings and street names (Dube, 2018; Ndlovu, 2020). Unlike previous studies, the present study is not interested in the onomastic aspects of the linguistic landscape. It considers other linguistic tokens that are visible on shop signs. Taking a cue from Ssentanda and Ncube (2023), we view these shop signs 'as prisms through which to make sense of more than the material posts but more importantly the embedded dynamics that underlie and shape language matters' (p. 61). This study also departs from the usual macro analysis by focusing on a single street in Bulawayo. By adopting a micro analysis of bottom-up shop signs, the study has the potential to reveal a more nuanced picture regarding contestations about multilingualism, identity and power, particularly how the dominance of English in the broader sociolinguistic context of Zimbabwe is reproduced in the bottom-up linguistic landscape of the city of Bulawayo.

Our analysis is located within the prism of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of legitimate language (Bourdieu, 1991). It unravels how the linguistic landscape construction in shop signs largely aligns with and reproduces ideologies that foreground English as the legitimate language, thus contradicting and subverting narratives of Bulawayo as a Ndebele-dominant city. While we accept the argument that Ndebele and indeed Ndebele-ness, are far from being monolithic constructs, but rather fluid and fuzzy identity concepts (Ncube & Siziba, 2017), we acknowledge the significance of the Ndebele language as being intertwined with the city's history and identity. The findings of the study show that shop signs tend to reproduce the dominance of English through monolingual and other hybrid linguistic practices incorporating Shona and Ndebele languages.

Research context

Bulawayo is Zimbabwe's second-largest city. It is historically associated with the Ndebele people and the Ndebele language, having served as the seat and capital of the last Ndebele monarch under the leadership of King Lobengula. It was originally known as Gibixhegu (Dube, 2018) and later renamed to 'Kwa Bulawayo' (the place of slaughter) following a bloody contest between forces backing Lobengula on one side and those loyal to his brother and heir apparent, Nkulumane, over who was to ascend the throne after the death of King Mzilikazi (Dube, 2018). The name Bulawayo was therefore born to symbolise this

struggle in which Lobengula prevailed to be inaugurated as Mzilikazi's successor. Lobengula's reign ended with his defeat by the Cecil John Rhodes-led British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1893 (Musemwa, 2008). His downfall signalled the collapse of any significant resistance to British imperialism and marked the entrenchment of colonial rule (Dube, 2018; Musemwa, 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). Because of this history, Bulawayo, which was conferred with city status in 1943 has become synonymous with the Ndebele people, culture and language (Dube, 2018; Ndlovu, 2020).

Apart from being one of the earliest colonial cities in Southern Africa, the history of Bulawayo as a major economic and industrial hub meant that it drew its labour force from across the region (Msindo, 2007). It is also the capital of the three Matabeleland provinces. Consequently, contemporary Bulawayo has evolved into a rich mosaic of different ethnic groups such as the Shona, Kalanga, Venda, Sotho and others. It is also home to immigrants and descendants of immigrants from neighbouring countries such as Zambia and Malawi, who settled for employment (Msindo, 2007). However, the post-2000 economic and political crisis bedeviling the country has precipitated a rapid de-industrialisation of the city, resulting in some industries and large corporations relocating to Harare to maintain viability, while others have simply exited the country. Against that backdrop, there has been a mushrooming of small individually owned shops in spaces left vacant by large corporates and departmental stores, significantly transforming the city's linguistic landscape, sometimes to the detriment of the once orderly and planned city development.

Despite the above dynamics, the Bulawayo City Council (BCC) has over the years strived to preserve the city's Ndebele identity and heritage (Ndlovu, 2020), sometimes to the extent of resisting directives from the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) controlled central government (Dube, 2018; Ndlovu, 2020). In spite of this history, and various attempts to reclaim the city's linguistic heritage, the preponderance of the English language as a relic of colonialism has continued to dominate the city's linguistic landscape, just as it dominates most facets of postcolonial Zimbabwean life as the main language of education, commerce, the media and judiciary services (Maseko, 2021).

Since the country attained independence in 1980, Bulawayo and the other Matabeleland provinces have remained symbols of resistance to the ZANU-PF-dominated post-colonial political and cultural landscape. This resistance was first epitomised by the Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo-led Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), initially allies with ZANU during the liberation struggle, and later sworn foes in the contest over political domination in independent Zimbabwe. Because of ZAPU's popularity in Bulawayo and Matabeleland provinces, it was perceived by those in ZANU as a 'Ndebele party,' while ZANU was considered a 'Shona party' (Sibanda, 2021). Consequently, ZANU's election triumph in 1980 was read by many as a victory by the Shona in ZANU over Ndebele politicians in ZAPU (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). This contestation was to turn bloody between 1983 and 1987 when Robert Mugabe, the then Prime Minister and leader of ZANU orchestrated a genocide against the Ndebele people. This operation is now commonly known as Gukurahundi—derived from a Shona term which denotes 'the rain that washes away the chaff before the summer rains' (Phimister, 2009, p. 471). It was executed by the North-Korean trained 5th Brigade unit of the national army, resulting in the killing, torturing, maiming and rape of over 20000 Ndebele-speaking citizens of Matabeleland and Midlands provinces (see, CCJPZ, 1997). Although the operation was executed under the guise of flushing out dissidents threatening to topple Mugabe and ZANU from power, Gukurahundi is now considered by many as being Mugabe's punishment of the Ndebele people for supporting Joshua Nkomo and ZAPU, thus scuppering his machinations to turn Zimbabwe into a one-party state (Alexander, 2021; Sibanda, 2021). Gukurahundi is thus viewed by many as an attempt to eliminate the Ndebele people and a form of 'ethnic cleansing' (Maseko & Nkomo, 2022; Ncube & Siziba, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Sibanda, 2021).

In contemporary Zimbabwe, the Gukurahundi grievance, coupled with the perceived systematic and structural marginalisation of Bulawayo and Matabeleland have been points of coalescence and mobilisation to galvanise the Ndebele people in open defiance of ZANU PF. This defiance is often punctuated by the perennial rejection of ZANU-PF candidates in successive general and presidential elections. There is also a growing secessionist sentiment and calls for the re-establishment of a separate Ndebele State by certain sections of Ndebele society (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). Bulawayo has thus been regarded as an opposition stronghold since 1980. It has provided a support base for various opposition formations such as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the MDC-Alliance and more recently, the Citizens' Coalition for

Change (CCC). As such, the ruling ZANU-PF party is always making manoeuvres to infiltrate the city to grow its very thin support base. Some of these moves include visible efforts to saturate the city's landscape with ZANU-PF's ideological symbols, for example by renaming Bulawayo streets around Shona and ZANU-PF-aligned political figures (Ndlovu, 2023). However, this too has been met with fierce resistance from Bulawayo residents, who have often registered their desire to have certain streets renamed after their own preferred ZAPU, and largely Ndebele heroes (Dube, 2018; Ndlovu, 2023). Such moves by the central government are suspiciously viewed as attempts to manipulate and rewrite a history that selectively celebrates Shona and ZANU-PF heroes and propagates a one-sided impression of history and the liberation struggle, feeding into what is characterised as patriotic history (see Ranger, 2004). The linguistic landscape of the city of Bulawayo has therefore become one of the many sites which exemplify city-state contestations.

Theoretical underpinning

In this study, we deploy Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'legitimate language' (Bourdieu, 1991) in the analysis of shop signs along a street in Bulawayo's CBD as bottom-up linguistic landscape construction. According to Bourdieu (1991), a legitimate language is that which gains prominence and normality because of its links to political and economic players within the state. This normality is often reproduced in official practices and national institutions which impose its recognition and reproduce its political domination (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 1996). Because the use of the legitimate language is bound to its perceived social, political and economic value, it reproduces systems of social difference by ranking and classifying those who use alternative languages or language varieties. The concept of a 'legitimate language' thus implies 'legitimate practices,' and the exclusion and marginalisation of those who lack competence in the legitimate language (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 1996). While this concept has been deployed to discuss top-down language ideologies and how they act on the linguistic landscape, it can also be appropriated to explain the attitudes and dispositions of bottom-up agency as read from the linguistic landscape configurations. We thus conceptualise shop signs as part of the bottom-up linguistic landscape since they are products of the individual language choices of shop owners, as contrasted with top-down signs which are often associated with a central authority, such as the government or municipality (Hult, 2018; Shohamy, 2006). Because it originates from individuals, bottom-up linguistic landscape can potentially reveal the complex relationships with official top-down signs. Akindele (2011) concurs that while top-down linguistic landscape items are those 'issued by national and public bureaucracies and include public sites, public announcements and street names' (p. 7) 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' (Akindele, 2011, p. 7).

Accordingly, our conception of shop signs as products of bottom-up agency in the linguistic landscape facilitates an understanding of the extent to which they reproduce or subvert 'legitimate practices' as well as the motivations behind these configurations. Towards this endeavour, we also extend on Spolsky's model of language policy which explains how language choices at micro and macro levels of society are related to language ideologies, practices and management (Spolsky, 2004, 2009). In this understanding, bottom-up linguistic landscape configuration is a product of shop owners' beliefs about language, which then act on their language choices and deliberate interventions to influence the linguistic landscape, especially in the absence of explicit language legislation that polices and regulates the generation of shop signs in Bulawayo. Building on Moustaoi (2019), we consider Individually constructed shop signs as part of an 'alternative space, which is visible, open and different from – although also shared with – the traditional space controlled by the state and official institutions' (Moustaoi, 2019, p. 85). Overall, this theoretical lens facilitates an understanding of how the bottom-up linguistic landscape either reproduces and validates or contests and dismantles established legitimate practices and normalities (Hult, 2018).

Literature review

Although the study of linguistic landscape is still in nascent stages, there is a growing corpus of literature in the European, American and Asian contexts (Albury, 2021; Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Hong, 2020).

Much of it focuses on the physical milieu although there is increasing interest to understand the linguistic landscape as constructed in the virtual world (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009). These studies suggest that the virtual linguistic landscape shares similar features with the physical (Keles et al., 2020; Maseko & Siziba, 2023). However, there remains a general lack of literature on linguistic landscapes within the African context (Ssentanda & Ncube, 2023). Available studies focus mostly on top-down linguistic landscape construction and the preponderance of ex-colonial languages on street and building names (Akindele, 2011; Jenjekwa, 2022). Germaine in most of these studies is the view of the linguistic landscape as a derivative of top-down ideologies operating through social, political and economic agency. They discuss how linguistic landscapes reveal the sociopolitical and economic capital of languages in a multilingual milieu. In particular, some studies show how the frequency and visibility of certain languages and the invisibilisation of others are vital signposts about the reproduction of *de jure* language policies or their contestations through *de facto* practices (Jenjekwa, 2022) as well as revealing general dispositions towards linguistic diversity and new linguistic practices (Akindele, 2011; Moustauoui, 2019). Yet other studies have examined the role of the linguistic landscape in ethnic space marking within diasporic contexts (Amos, 2021).

Focusing on the language representation on the linguistic landscape of the city of Gaborone in Botswana, Akindele (2011) suggests that increasing economic activity and demands of globalisation have led to the presence of English, Setswana and Chinese on the linguistic landscape. However, English signage largely dominates the other two languages. This is a reflection of the economic value and capital that English wields as a global language and also as the main language of commerce in Botswana. The presence of the Chinese language on the linguistic landscape of Gaborone attests to the influx of Chinese nationals and businesses into Botswana, while the invisibilisation of other African languages has a delegitimising effect on them. The ubiquity of English on shop signs in Kampala was also deemed to reflect enduring ideologies of English as a language of class, power, and a marker of the educated, despite the lack of proficiency in the language by the majority of Ugandan citizens (Ssentanda & Ncube, 2023). Shop owners therefore used English on their shop signs as a form of prestigious symbolic identity.

Language attitudes thus play a significant role in linguistic landscape construction in Africa. In a study of the linguistic landscape of the town of Masvingo in Zimbabwe, Jenjekwa (2022) established an overwhelming presence of English on streets, buildings and billboard signs. Akin to Akindele (2011) and, Ssentanda and Ncube (2023), Jenjekwa suggests that the construction of the linguistic landscape of Masvingo aligns with and validates colonially inherited ideologies of English as the legitimate language. The sporadic use of Shona, the dominant indigenous language spoken in Masvingo, contradicts the constitutional provisions that declared 16 officially recognised languages. The linguistic landscape of Masvingo thus fosters a *de facto* language policy which privileges the use of English more.

Although most studies have shown the dominance of English on the linguistic landscape, Moustauoui, (2019) found an increasing presence of local language varieties on the linguistic landscape of Morocco. For example, the study suggests that the prominence of Moroccan Arabic on the linguistic landscape of the city of Meknés is a result of the city's socio-economic transformation policies that have opened up new spaces of communication that accommodate new and hybrid linguistic practices (Moustauoui, 2019). This contrasts with most studies on the post-colonial African context which mainly lament the preponderance of ex-colonial languages in the top-down linguistic landscape (Akindele, 2011; Jenjekwa, 2022; Ssentanda & Ncube, 2023). For the present study, Moustauoui (2019) is important to shed light on how bottom-up signs can transform the linguistic landscape in ways that reveal emerging language ideologies held by private citizens. In our study, we also focus on shop signs as bottom-up linguistic landscape construction. With the current economic decline in Zimbabwe, 'entrepreneurship' has been the buzzword. This has seen an increase in small privately owned enterprises occupying spaces formerly occupied by large corporations.

In the context of Bulawayo, researchers have often taken an onomastic approach in the analysis of toponyms and oikonyms on the linguistic landscape to show how the top-down street and building naming practices reproduce the extant sociopolitical, historical, cultural, and hegemonic linguistic relations (Dube, 2018; Ndlovu, 2020, 2023). Ndlovu (2020) shows how the freezing of Zimbabwe's precolonial, colonial and post-colonial histories in some street and building names intersect with the country's linguistic and cultural heritage. They reflect the country's colonial ideologies of hegemony and

domination, while also feeding the post-colonial Pan-Africanism ideology. Relatedly, Ndlovu (2023) examines how the transformation of the urban linguistic landscape through the renaming of towns, suburbs and airports by the Zimbabwean government is linked to the ongoing discourses of decolonisation and Africanisation in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Both studies assume a rather simplistic view of the linguistic landscape as a contest between white and black heritage, symbolised by the move to replace colonial names with African ones. While also contributing to onomastics, Dube (2018) expands the understanding of the linguistic landscape of Bulawayo not only to reveal contestations between white and black heritage but also to show how it is a product of post-colonial struggles among blacks. For example, he demonstrates how street naming in Bulawayo is more than an act of heritage preservation but is linked to the post-independence linguistic and political contestations between the Shona and the Ndebele. The linguistic landscape is thus a contested space for establishing and asserting political and ethnic legitimacy. For example, the dominance of Shona on street names in Bulawayo CBD is a validation of the contribution made by Shona heroes in the liberation struggle, which resonates with Terence Ranger's views on patriotic history (Ranger, 2004).

The present study builds on these existing studies by focusing on bottom-up linguistic landscape construction in the form of selected shop signs along a street in Bulawayo CBD. By taking a micro approach to the analysis of shop signs, we seek to show how language ideologies of current shop occupants are reflected in new and hybrid linguistic practices on the linguistic landscape which validates, challenges and transforms established 'norms'.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach in the collection and analysis of data. Data consists of digital photographs of shop signs collected by the second author between the 4th of January and the 3rd of February 2024. The study focused on shops along JMN Street in Bulawayo CBD. The research site was demarcated from the intersection of JMN Street and 4th Avenue up to its intersection with 12th Avenue. This boundary marks part of the street with the highest concentration of shops. The second author used a digital camera to photograph shop signs that displayed interesting linguistic tokens. That this street was re-named after an icon of the liberation struggle and former vice president of Zimbabwe speaks volumes about its significance in Bulawayo. The location of Joshua Nkomo's statue as 'Father Zimbabwe' further animates this point. Although the street is home to various kinds of enterprises such as banks, a shopping mall, car dealerships, supermarkets and other parastatals such as the ZIMPOST and the National Social Security Authority (NSSA), our data was limited to small individually owned retail and service-oriented shops, often housed on partitioned buildings previously occupied by large corporates. Retail enterprises included shops which sell clothing, beauty products, stationery, electronics and hardware. Service-oriented shops included those offering typing, photocopying, printing and related tech services. The other category of shops was those selling various food items. Because of the concentration of such shops along this street, the number of visible linguistic tokens was expected to be high. Where a shop displayed more than one sign, we chose the one that stood out the most in terms of linguistic tokens. Taking a cue from Cenoz and Gorter (2006), we considered such signs to be representative of the enterprise regardless of the number of signs displayed. Based on our definition of the linguistic landscape, the study's data consists of those signs that were placed in locations easily visible to a passerby. By the end of the data collection period, a total of 46 photographs of shop signs had been collected. Following Backhaus' (2006) identification of the unit of analysis in linguistic landscape studies as 'any piece of text within a spatially definable frame [...] including anything from small handwritten stickers to huge commercial billboards' (Backhaus, 2006, p. 55), our data consists of signs that are of both permanent and temporary. Consistent with the character of qualitative research, this sample was deemed sufficient to satisfy the criteria of being information-rich in contrast to considerations of generalisability preferred by quantitative studies.

Data analysis was done following a thematic approach by both authors in dialogue. First, it involved categorising signs into monolingual or multilingual signs, noting how different linguistic varieties were represented. Iteratively, the analysis involved going back and forth between the data, the literature and the theoretical underpinnings to establish how these interacted with each other. In particular, the

conversation between these elements of the research sought to uncover how the configuration of the linguistic landscape on shop signs related to broader language ideologies circulating within the confines of Bulawayo and Zimbabwe generally. From this larger sample, we used selected shop signs to illustrate and explain how the bottom-up linguistic landscape communicated 'symbolic messages about the importance, power, significance, and relevance of certain languages or the irrelevance of others' (Akindele, 2011, p. 5).

Findings

Reproductions of English legitimacy in monolingual shop signs

The findings of this study reveal an English-saturated bottom-up linguistic landscape as constructed in shop signs along JMN Street in Bulawayo. The linguistic landscape is dominated by monolingual English signage, suggesting that it validates and adds to the legitimization of the English language. Linguistic tokens on signs which include promotional and advertising text visible from outside the shops show that, contrary to perceptions of Bulawayo being a Ndebele-dominated city (Dube, 2018; Ndlovu, 2020), the linguistic landscape does not align with this narrative. Although the prominence of English is challenged by hybrid practices involving Ndebele and Shona, such hybrid practices are restricted to a negligible number of shop signs. English was found in all categories of shops, while Ndebele and Shona were confined to specific categories. The ubiquity of English on shop signs thus sends important signals about the valuation of the language by shop owners. Figure 1 is an example of monolingual English shop signs.

The prominence of English in most shop signs reproduces dominant practices also associated with official domains such as education, the media and the judiciary in Zimbabwe. This practice aligns with the taken-for-granted notion that everyone can read and understand English. While English tends to dominate overall, some shop signs were found to be characterised by 'new' and hybrid language practices, where languages are either used in unconventional ways or mixed with other indigenous languages.

New and hybrid linguistic practices

Although English dominates in most shop signs, new and hybrid practices that cross language boundaries and norms (Gaibrois, 2018) are becoming visible. These hybrid practices are punctuated by language forms that are derived from heterogeneous sources and they subvert normative standards of language use (Gaibrois, 2018). In this study, these included the 'mixing' of formal and non-formal English on monolingual signs as well as the combining of English and indigenous languages on bilingual and multilingual shop signs, what Gaibrois (2018, p. 95) describes as 'doing a half-and-half'. The use of non-conventional forms of English spellings on some shop signs signals the presence of a younger generation of English users within shop ownership. Younger speakers are often associated with 'trendy' and non-conformist language practices. This could also be interpreted as one result of high levels of unemployment in the



Figure 1. Monolingual English shop signs.

city and Zimbabwe in general. Lack of formal employment opportunities compels school leavers to explore early entrepreneurship initiatives. The presence of such 'unconventional' forms of English therefore signposts this dynamic. Figure 2 is an example of non-conventional English spellings on shop signs as a form of new language practices:

In the above example, the word 'KWIK' on SHOP #37 sign is an unconventional form that approximates the word 'quick', while 'GRAPHIX' on SHOP 7 sign is an alternative spelling for the word 'graphics.' Similarly, the form 'Infinix' could be a version of the word 'infinite'. These are new practices which, while on one hand adding to the legitimation of English, challenge and subvert the formal aspects of the language. This informal language use indexes the presence of the younger generation particularly in the 'tech industry.' The economic downturn and high levels of unemployment have fostered the transformation of the urban linguistic landscape not only by increasing the visibility of the bottom-up linguistic landscape but also by introducing these new and hybrid language practices. Such hybrid practices, creativity and linguistic improvisation may result in the renegotiation of power relations since mixed language use can challenge hegemonic linguistic practices by producing new possibilities for speaking and communicating (Gaibrois, 2018). The new English practices shown in Figure 2 suggest not only the popularity of English as the main language of science and technology (Gorter, 2007) but also how the tech industry tends to be dominated by the younger digital natives. These non-conventional practices thus constitute sociolects, or occupation-specific language forms and practices (Gaibrois, 2018) which may only be understood by the creators and their ingroup, notwithstanding that the target market for the products and services being marketed is broader than the signs could appeal. This validates the argument that creators of shop signs are often influenced by the ideology of English as the legitimate language of business, regardless of whether or not their customers understand their meanings (Ssentanda & Ncube, 2023).

Hybrid practices involving the use of English and Ndebele were also visible, albeit on very few shop signs. However, these kinds of signs were of a temporary nature. They included price displays on backyard restaurant menus and small-scale butcheries in the CBD. Figure 3 shows hybrid language practices involving the English and Ndebele.

As shown in Figure 3, there is negligible use of Ndebele on the bottom-up linguistic landscape. In the first shop sign, the word 'EKASI' is a Ndebele slang term for 'township.' Its use within the CBD somehow challenges the so far dominant ideology that valorises and legitimate English in varying degrees. Ironically, however, the word is used alongside English, somehow undoing its intended function to challenge English legitimacy associated with the CBD. The word 'Ulusu' is a Ndebele term for 'tripe' which could have been used here to lure the 'low' class who are often associated with eating such kinds of dishes. The use of the Ndebele term could thus be considered complementary rather than legitimate and well-intended. The same can be said about the use of the word 'Ezangaphakathi' (barely legible on the third sign) on the menu price list. 'Ezangaphakathi' is a collective term for the usually cheap dishes comprising tripe and intestines, mixed and cooked together and served in local restaurants. The use of Ndebele can thus be viewed as complementary for purposes of clarity. Ndebele is not the preferred primary language on these shop signs.

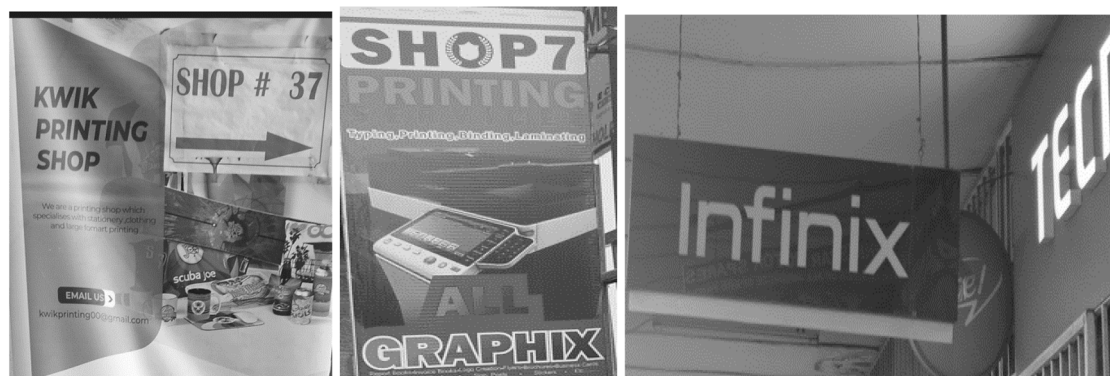


Figure 2. New English practices on shop signs.



Figure 3. English-Ndebele hybridising practices.



Figure 4. English-Shona hybridising practices.

Unlike English monolingual signs, the quality of the signs was also poor, to the extent of illegibility in some. Since the linguistic landscape is not randomly generated (Gorter, 2013), the quantitative and qualitative aspects of these signs generate important signals about the general dispositions and attitudes of the creators towards multilingualism as well as influence society's perceptions of the attendant power relations as embedded in linguistic configurations (Akindele, 2011; Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009). The temporality of hybrid signs involving the use of Ndebele could be read as a disposition towards the language. The use of Ndebele on poor-quality shop signs could also suggest that the signs were not created by speakers of the language. As Hong (2020) argues, 'Linguistic diversity in a neighbourhood's landscape does not only reflect the demographic composition of an area, but it also mirrors the social and economic standing of minority population groups' (Hong, 2020, p. 9). While there is a general perception that Ndebele is the most spoken language in Bulawayo, in terms of functional utility and status in the Zimbabwean linguistic ecology, the language is subordinate both to English and Shona. It is minoritised and marginalised in official high-status domains, while Shona, the politically and demographically superior indigenous language has tended to approximate a de facto status of being the symbol of Zimbabwean-ness (Ncube & Siziba, 2017; Ndhlovu, 2006).

Because of the above dynamic, some shop signs were found to use Shona. While there is increasing visibility of Shona on the bottom-up linguistic landscape, just like Ndebele, it is also through hybrid practices that also involve English. Figure 4 shows English-Shona hybrid practices on shop signs.

In comparison to the examples in Figure 3, Figure 4 reveals that the quality and quantity of English-Shona hybrid signs were much higher than those signs involving the use of Ndebele. On the first shop sign, the word 'NDORINDORI' is a popular slang term for any mobile phone that does not resemble the modern and trendy 'smartphone.' It serves almost as a derogatory reference for any cheap and unsophisticated mobile phone. Although the word has crystallized as part of Ndebele slang, its phonological structure resembles that of Shona. The alveolar trill [r] is not part of the Ndebele phonological inventory, but it is a very common sound in Shona. As such the word itself approximates the Shona language. On the second sign, 'SHIRI INOZO NGOFA' is another popular Shona expression now associated with football banter. It loosely translates to 'the bird will eventually die.' It predicts the 'inevitable' fall of a big football club. It is also a popular Shona youth lingo that explains how everything comes to an end, especially for

proud and insensitive people. On the third sign 'TSANO' is also a Shona word which denotes an in-law relationship, while the phrase 'Kwenga pano' on the last sign in Figure 4 is also a Shona-derived marketing expression which can be translated to 'transact using Kwenga here'. Kwenga is a portable mobile Point of Sale (PoS) machine that was introduced by Steward Bank to facilitate ease of transacting by the public in Zimbabwe.¹

While these are examples of Shona's influence in Bulawayo and, on the Ndebele language, the use of Shona on shop signs symbolises the imposition of Shona norms and popular culture forms on the linguistic landscape of Bulawayo. It also sends signals about the attitudes of shop owners towards these languages, thus supplying important cues about the linguistic background of the shop owners. The use of Shona in the linguistic landscape of Bulawayo has previously drawn scorn and condemnation from residents as an act of asserting Shona hegemony in a supposedly Ndebele-dominated ecology (Dube, 2018; Ndlovu, 2020, 2023). The quality and quantity of English-Shona hybrid signs serve to affirm and validate the supremacy of the two languages, further reinforcing the marginality of Ndebele as read from the relatively poor quality of shop signs that use Ndebele. This aligns with the argument that 'simultaneity and hybridity [...] can serve to equalise languages as a set of resources on an equal footing or to stratify them hierarchically' (Moustaoi, 2019, p. 88).

A few shops were found to use multilingual signs by mixing English, Ndebele and Shona as another form of hybrid practice. This involved translating terms across the three languages. Interestingly, these signs were mostly associated with shops providing health and get-rich-quick 'solutions.' These are the only signs where Ndebele and Shona were dominant, suggesting that the target market for such shops were Africans who are often associated with poverty and disease and are likely to believe in quick solutions to these problems. Figure 5 is an example of such signs.

While the above signs are characterised by substantial use of Shona and Ndebele, English also features substantially, probably as a strategy to appeal to those seeking solutions to 'elitist problems.' These include 'BUMS/HIPS & PENIS ENLARGEMENT, POLICE AND COURT CASES, EXAMS AND INTERVIEWS, and other health problems such as 'HERPS, B.P, TB ne (and) ASTHMA' as well as 'CANCER'. Another explanation for this could be the untranslatability of some of these specialised terms. English also stands out through capitalisation and boldening on the 'MUSIMBOTI AFRICAN MEDICINE' shop sign. This could also be influenced by the attitudes of the shop owners towards African languages. Being in the arena of 'science', these service providers could be capitulating to the compulsion to use English to project their practice as 'legitimate' science.

Discussion and conclusion

Findings of the study have shown that the bottom-up linguistic landscape of Bulawayo as constructed in shop signs reproduces English legitimacy in a variety of ways, contradicting narratives about the city

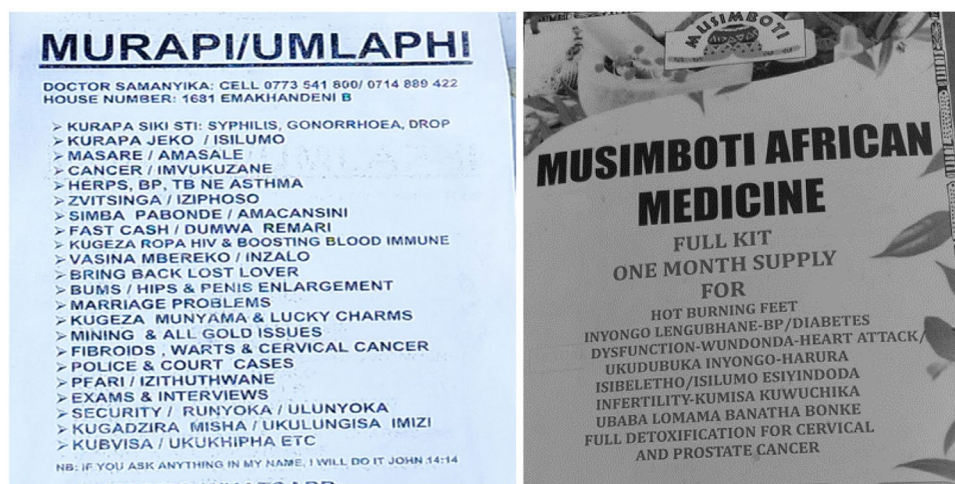


Figure 5. English-Ndebele-Shona hybrid practices.

being a Ndebele-dominant ecology. While the bottom-up linguistic landscape is often projected as capable of subverting and challenging dominant ideologies because of its origin from, and association with ordinary citizens and individuals (Hult, 2018), the study's findings suggest that shop signs along JMN Street in Bulawayo do not align with the city's perceived Ndebele-ness. Despite the various efforts by the BCC to reclaim the city's identity through initiatives such as the naming and renaming of streets and public buildings (Dube, 2018; Ndlovu, 2020), such efforts are not reciprocated by bottom-up agency. The preference for English-centered practices is validated by the quality and the quantity of English monolingual signs and the projection of English in hybrid practices. While English dominates both monolingual and hybrid signs, the few visible multilingual shop signs also reveal a hierarchical relationship between indigenous languages. Shona appears to be dominant as compared to Ndebele. This is also despite the perception of Bulawayo as a Ndebele-dominated city.

The findings of this study therefore resonate with the views expressed by previous scholars that linguistic landscapes are not randomly generated but reveal layers of the extant economic, political and social relations between speakers of the dominant and dominated languages (Hult, 2018; Shohamy, 2006). In the Zimbabwean linguistic ecology, the legitimacy of English infects all facets of life, particularly high-status domains such as education, the media, the judiciary services and legislature (Maseko, 2021). Ssentanda and Ncube (2023) also found out that the dominance of English on shop signs in Uganda was linked to the ideologies of English as the preferred language of business and globalisation. As a result, shop owners would feel compelled to use English on their shop signs to fulfil the function of legitimisation (Bourdieu, 1991). Within the context of Bulawayo, the increasing visibility of Shona on the linguistic landscape signals its hegemonic preponderance over other indigenous languages as the alternative to English, riding on the sociopolitical, economic and demographic superiority of its speakers in Zimbabwe generally (Ndlovu, 2020). This has also been the main finding in Akindele (2011), who suggests that the subservience of minority languages on the linguistic landscape reproduces the political and economic subservience of their speakers.

The multilingual contestations on the bottom-up linguistic landscape foreground the dominant Zimbabwean languages, inadvertently invisibilising several minority languages that are spoken in the Matabeleland provinces. One would expect to find these languages being represented in the linguistic landscape of the city of Bulawayo, given its position as the provincial capital. Overall, their invisibility perpetuates the ideology of Zimbabwe as a bimodal and bicultural State (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). Rather than contesting top-down practices and ideologies, the bottom-up linguistic landscape reproduces these dominant ideologies that precipitate the devaluation of indigenous languages. The call to reclaim the city's identity and heritage does not resonate with bottom-up agency, but rather, individuals whose shops occupy spaces previously occupied by large departmental stores partly perpetuate the legacy of colonialism by saturating their spaces with English. However, these findings contradict Moustauoui (2019) who found increasing visibility of local varieties of Moroccan Arabic on the linguistic landscape of the city of Mekn s, thus reproducing the city's socioeconomic transformation. These practices also fostered hybrid language practices by inscribing ideologies of transformation onto the linguistic landscape. Overall, this study confirms the notion that the linguistic landscape is not divorced from the ideological climate that influences specific regimes of language use (Hult, 2018; Moustauoui, 2019).

This study was limited to reading shop signs along a busy street in the CBD of Bulawayo as bottom-up linguistic landscape construction. As such, the findings of the study are not to be generalised to the entire CBD, and certainly not to the city of Bulawayo in general although they may reflect a general tendency. Future studies could therefore expand this scope to include perspectives of shop owners regarding the ideologies behind their shop signs. Other studies could also focus on other aspects such as identity contestations on the linguistic landscape. Within the context of Zimbabwe generally, there is a dearth of studies that examine how linguistic, political and social contestations are represented on the linguistic landscape. This is another potentially productive area of research on linguistic landscapes.

Note

1. <https://www.stewardbank.co.zw/steward-bank-launches-kwenga-a-portable-pos-machine-for-the-masses/>.

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