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Linguistic Landscape of Hawassa City: Language Use in Shop Signs in FocusYekatit Hailu Mekonnen¹ and Mengistu Dinato Diden^{2*}

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Abstract

This study mainly aimed at describing the various types of language uses in the linguistic landscape of the study areas focusing on shop signs and taking different socio-linguistic perspectives. The study was conducted on shop signs of five selected areas of the city. Data for the study were collected using photography and in-depth interview. The results revealed that Amharic and English are the dominant languages that appear on monolingual (Amharic only or English only) and bilingual (Amharic and English) shop signs. Amharic was found out to be the most dominant language in the shop signs of the city, followed by English. Language choice was found out to be dominantly customer oriented. Amharic is chosen mostly because it is the language of wider communication in Ethiopia, whereas English, an international language, is chosen mainly targeting foreigners and for the purpose of attracting business. The pattern of using languages on the bilingual shop signs, including the font size differences, indicated that showing the power difference between the two languages was not the intention of shop owners; rather it was a haphazard choice. The Amharic at the top and English at the bottom pattern in the bilingual signs seemed to have been copied from the public signs on government buildings. As Sidama people holds the highest population size in the city, it would be fair to include Sidaamu Afoo in the city's shop signs.

Keywords: / Bilingual signs/ Hawassa city/ Linguistic landscape/ Monolingual sign/ Shop signs/

¹See the detail at the back

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1. Introduction

The study of linguistic landscape (LL, here after) is a relatively new sub-discipline in applied linguistics which usually focuses on written language in public space. Linguistic landscape, according to the most quoted definition of Landry and Bourhis (1997), is the combination of “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings in a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration” (p.23). Spolsky and Cooper (1991), on their part, listed signs they believed to make up the LL of a given area. These include street signs, advertising signs, warning notices, prohibitions, building names, informative signs (such as directions and hours of opening), commemorative plaques, objects (such as post box, fire extinguisher), and graffiti. Furthermore, Shohamy (2015) gave a more elaborated view on the composition of LL by considering elements far beyond written texts. According to Shohamy, LL includes visuals, sounds, movements, gestures, history, politics, location, people, and bodies which make it multidisciplinary that enjoys approaches and methods from different fields such as sociolinguistics, sociology, social psychology, geography, and media studies. Although all elements of the definitions given above are present in the current research setting, the study limited its focus to language use practices of shop signs, and the factors that shape the use and choice of languages for shop signs. Shop sign was selected because in Hawassa City shop signs are more prevalent than the other elements of LL. Shop signs are mainly used to indicate the presence of some kind of business as well as to advertise and attract potential customers to their products or services.

Regarding the function of LL, Landry and Bourhis (1997) states two basic functions: the informative and the symbolic functions. According to them, "the informative function of the LL indicates the borders of the territory inhabited by a linguistic group and also the availability of a specific language to communicate in that territory. The symbolic function, on the other hand, refers to the perception that members of a language group have about the value and status of their languages as compared to other language" (p.27). Hence, LL researchers focus on either or both functions of the LL. When they attempt to describe and identify systematic patterns of the presence and absence of languages in public spaces, they focus on the informative function of LL. On the other hand, when LL researchers try to understand the motives, pressures, ideologies, reactions and decision making of people regarding the creation of LL in its varied forms, they focus on the symbolic function. In this regard, our study tried to understand both functions of LL. When we tried to understand languages that are used on the shop signs, we focused on the informative function. Whereas when we tried to investigate the arrangement of languages on bilingual signs (one language written at the top and the other at the bottom of a sign), or the difference in the font size of the languages on a sign, and the shop owners' choice of language for their shop signs, we focused on the symbolic function.

Linguistic landscape makes people notice the sociolinguistic context as they process the visual information that comes to their mind, and the language in which signs are written can certainly affect the way the people perceive and rank different languages. It could even influence language use among people (Nofal & Mansour, 2014). Languages visible in public signs indicate what languages are locally relevant, or give evidence of what languages are becoming locally relevant (Shohamy, Ben-Rafael & Barni, 2010; Kasanga, 2012). What is more, the visibility of language in public spaces could be affected by legal decision. A country, state, province, city or any administrative region in a given country may set its own language policy for regulating the use of language in LL of its respective territory. A typical example of such a case is the Charter of the French Language of 1977, also known as 'Bill 101' in Québec (Bourhis & Landry, 2002). Of the requirements of the bill, making advertisement in French alone and using French for all commercial signs are included. In connection with this, the study attempted to assess if the language use and choice is influenced by the language policy of the country.

In the study of LL, the understanding of signs is very crucial. A sign is “any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame” (Backhaus, 2006, p.55). The components of sign, in this sense, range from hand written stickers to huge commercial billboards. Linguistic landscape researchers basically categorize signs into two. Although the categories are given different names by different authors, the concept of the classification is similar. The “top-down and bottom-up signs” are among the common names given to the two basic categories of signs (Bernard, 2009, p.28; Ben-Rafael, 2009, p.49). The top-down signs are ‘government’ signs or official signs which reflect a specific language policy like road signs, building names, and street names. The bottom-up signs, on the other hand, are private signs such as the signs of shops, advertisements, and private offices which may be influenced by language policy. They mainly reflect individual preferences. As the focus of this study was shop signs, the focus was, by and large, on the bottom-up signs.

Lots of scholars including Nofal and Mansour (2014) suggested that the study of LL is more interesting in bilingual or multilingual contexts. This is one of the major reasons the multilingual and multicultural City of Hawassa was chosen for the study. Hawassa City is a capital of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) by the time this research was conducted i.e. 2017. However, in the following year, 2018, structural reform took place in the country and the city became the capital of the newly formed regional state called Sidama National Regional State. The city is located 273kms South of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, in the Great Rift-Valley lying between 7°5' latitude North and 38°29' longitude east. It is one of the largest cities in the country with a population size of 343,175, according to the 2007 population census (the latest available). The City administration lies on an area of 157.2sq. kms and is divided into eight sub-cities and thirty-two kebeles (Hawassa City Administration Socio-Economic Profile (here after HCA-SEP), 2015). Heterogeneity in composition is the remarkable feature of the people of Hawassa. Diverse population that includes major ethnic and linguistic groups in the country lives in the city. This is the reason for having a nickname “the City of Diversity”. Of these multiple ethnic groups living in the city, the following are the major ones in terms of size according to the 2007 population census: Sidama (158,646), Amhara (52,104), Wolayta (49,218), Oromo (17,6100), and Gurage (14,658).

As a result, it is common to hear diverse languages in Hawassa although most of these languages are rarely available in the LL of the city according to our preliminary observation. Such a situation is in agreement with Ben-Rafael *et al.* (2006) and Ben Rafael's (2009) statement. It reads: “the assumption that the language forms displayed in local public spaces do not always reflect the actual spoken uses of languages by the local people”. On the other hand, a language which is represented and exhibited in the public space indicates that it is being spoken to a varied degree (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

The study mainly explored what the language use in the LL of the sample sites generally looked like and what shapes the language choice and use of the signs that construct the LL. It particularly focused on shop signs in selected areas of the city namely, Menaheria, Arab-sefer, Piassa, Atote, and Zero-amest where major business activities are held and large numbers of shops are available. Menahria is one of the main business areas with various types of businesses mainly small and medium. It is also a street close to the bus station where large number of people from inside and outside of the city comes into contact. Arab-sefer is the oldest commercial center of the city and close to the city's biggest open market where major business interactions are held by people mainly from the city and neighboring towns. It is also a place where Arab origin people who engaged in different businesses are found in large number. That is the reason why the street was given the name Arab-sefer (the village of the Arabs). Piazza is the center of the city and also a commercial center containing entertainment and other businesses. Zero-amest is located close to the major tourist sites such as Fikir Hike (Lake of Love (Lake Hawassa)), Amora-gedel (cliff of crows), Gudumale (the Center of Chambalala, Sidama People's New Year), Lewi Resort, etc. There is high concentration of businesses such as hotels, cafes, Spa, and bars. Atote is a relatively younger business area in terms of establishment. It was selected to see the relative language use tendency compared to the older areas of the city. The selected streets are relatively longer ones in the city and they cover five sub-cities out of the eight and nine kebeles out of the 32.

As it has been discussed above, the study of LL provides diverse and valuable information about the LL of the area ranging from language vitality, attitude towards languages, language power, and language conflicts to representations. “It also contributes to the knowledge about language in different ways. For example, they can give us insights on the development of multilingualism, the spread of English, the effect of linguistic policy or language awareness in school children” (Gorter, D., & Cenoz, J. 2007).

In Ethiopia, however, the study of LL is in its infantile stage. According to Alemayehu and Takele (2016), the case of LL study in our country has not been given much consideration, and if not improved, it may result in loss of some languages. In favor of their caution, their LL study revealed that although Afan Oromo is a working language of the study areas, it has the least ethnolinguistic vitality compared to Amharic (the strongest) and English. Their conclusion puts “Afan Oromo [is] at risk”. Furthermore, their conclusion calls for more LL study to see if such a problem exists elsewhere and for appropriate measures that need to be taken early. However, only limited number of LL studies have been conducted in some towns and cities in Ethiopia like Addis Ababa, Adama, Jimma, and Mekele.

Although Hawassa city has suitable context for LL study due to its multicultural and multiethnic composition, no study has been conducted so far. In addition to the absence of LL study on the city, the preliminary shop signs observation in the city indicated that, next to Amharic, English language seemed more visible and that clicked a question in the minds of the researchers. These two points were the major reasons which inspired the interest of the researchers to conduct this study. The study also tried to find out whether the language use in the LL of the sample areas (1) follows certain patterns or represents a particular identity, (2) shows power contestation between languages, etc. Furthermore, the study tried to find out the reason why English language is more abundant than the local language so as to understand factors that shape the language use in shop signs of the city. Hence, it was believed that the findings of the study would serve as a reference for further studies, and may fill the gap in the literature.

The following are the major research questions the study tried to answer: What does the LL of the sample sites of Hawassa City look like? What shapes the language choice and language use of shop signs in Hawassa City? What do the different features of language use on bilingual shop signs imply?

2. Methods

Studies of LL are traditionally quantitative oriented in which all of the signs in a particular demarcated area are documented by photographs (Lanza & Hirut, 2014, p.497). More recent approaches to the study of LL, on the other hand, tend to be informed more by ethnographic tools and use critical examples that illustrate theoretical issues (Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009). Barni and Bagna (2015) also noted the need of employing different methodologies based on research objectives. The current study adopted the latter approach as it lends itself well to the purpose. To serve the same purpose, intensive observations were made and different pictures of shops signs were taken. To identify the proportion of the signs which were collected based on the categories set in each theme i.e., monolingual and bilingual, the study employed quantitative method. The number of signs collected may appear small but are enough to represent the sampled sites. The data were also analyzed qualitatively from different perspectives such as intention behind using local or foreign language, implications of language patterns on bilingual signs, opinions of owners and customers on the language choice and language use on shop signs.

Main business streets of the five areas in the city namely, Menaheria, Areb-sefer, Piazza, Zero-amest, and Atote were selected as sample areas for data collection. The selection of the areas was mainly based on the framework proposed by Gorter and Cenoz (2008, p.343), i.e.: to select city areas or streets that share the same

characteristics. Business centeredness, location of the businesses, and time of establishment of the business centers were used as criteria to select the sites since we know them as residents of the city. That means the sampling of the streets was purposive. Because the whole length of the streets selected covers a large area, only the busiest and the main shopping parts of the streets were used for data collection. It was done so with the belief that diversity in the shop signs will be reflected more where the density of shop signs is high. The unit of analysis in this study was a sign (shop sign). Based on the analysis, the signs were categorized into major and sub themes in each site separately first and for all the sampled streets later. Major themes included language of shop signs, position and font size of languages on bilingual signs, and the use of translation and transliteration in the bilingual signs. Position and font size of language on bilingual signs was addressed in the analysis because they signal possible ideologies and contestations between languages.

Regarding the tools for collecting data, digital camera was used. The collection of data was conducted by carefully photographing all signs in the main shopping areas of each street where large number of shops are found. From the pictures collected (a total of 160), 100 pictures of shop signs, the texts of which are clearly seen, were selected for the final analysis. That is, 20 shop signs from each sample site were selected. The remaining 60, the texts of which had been washed away and which didn't have the required information, were excluded. The types of business in the sample area included mobile phone shops, construction materials shops, minimarkets, boutiques (shoe shops, clothes shops), liquor stores, restaurants, cafes, hotels, photo shops, electronics shops, and textile and tailor shop, and so on.

Concerning interview data, a semi-structured interview guide was prepared and interviews were carried out with sample shop owners, customers, and officials who were in charge of authorizing business license after pictures had been collected. The shop owners for interview were selected based on the language(s) they used for their shop sign and the pattern they employed: Amharic only, or English only, or Amharic and English. For instance, out of the five shop owners who used Amharic only shop sign, two were selected for interview. This procedure was followed because the types of signs selected for the analysis were the basis for the selection of interviewees.

Interview was made with eight shop owners who were chosen using stratified random sampling based on the type, the number, and the patterning and font sizes of languages they used on their shop signs. It included participants from all sampled streets (from Piazza, Zero-amestm, Arab-sefer (two from each), and from Menaheria and Atote (one from each)). The interview mainly focused on the owners' reasons behind their language choice and pattern of use for their shop signs.

The second group of participants was that of customers. The purpose was mainly to find out their perception and opinions on language use of shop signs since they are the main target shop owners take into account when the shop signs are designed. Stratified random sampling was employed here too to choose the participants. Five customers, all local, were randomly selected based on their estimated age. Unfortunately, no foreign customers were encountered during the data collection. Three of them were in their early twenties and the rest two were above forty.

Experts who were in charge of authorizing business licenses were also interviewed from Trade and Industry Departments of two sub-cities namely, Bahil-Adarash³ and Hailk Dar. They were mainly asked if they had specific criteria regarding language choice and/or language use in the shop signs when business licenses were issued to shop owners. This was to discover if there is a regional regulation/directive/guidelines set for language choice and use on private shop signs.

This study used only private commercial shop signs for the investigation. The reason is, unlike the government signs which exhibit similar top-down feature as we had seen during the preliminary observation, private commercial signs are diverse and distinct which are worthy of study. For the consumption of this

³ This sub-city was named after Sidama Culture Hall that is found in this sub-city. Bahil-Adarash means Culture Hall. It is the first modern hall in the city located in Piazza. It is like any hall meant for meetings of large number of people.

specific study, the word 'shop' refers to any profit based fixed private commercial institution. And the phrase 'shop sign' refers to a sign which is hanged on the front side, or gate of a fixed shop to make the shop identifiable by customers and give information about the shop. It usually contains specific name of the shop and type of business which is written in one or more scripts. Signs inside shops, on moving objects, notice boards, roundabouts and other similar places were not included.

The unit of analysis was each sign of shops. This model was adopted from Griffin (2001) and Spolsky and Cooper (1991) who analyzed data of their study on Global English infiltration in Bulgaria and the LL of Jerusalem, respectively. Therefore, each shop sign was coded. The major variables were (a) monolingual signs (only Amharic or only English signs) or bilingual signs (Amharic and English signs), in terms of the number of languages, (b) Amharic top, English bottom or vice versa, in terms of place of the languages on bilingual signs, and (c) Amharic in larger font size than English and vice versa, in terms of power contestation in bilingual signs, and (d) translated or transliterated bilingual signs, in terms of the way the two languages are visible on the signs.

3. Results

The study mainly examined the language type, number, and use including reasons for the language choice and use as it appeared on the shop signs. The study also tried to describe the LL in terms of various sociolinguistic aspects including representation and power contestation. Hawassa City is known for a wide range of linguistic composition although its LL doesn't reveal this. The LL of the city is dominated by Amharic, the official working language of the federal government of Ethiopia (Art. 5/2 of the 1995 Constitution of Ethiopia) and the SNNPRS, followed by English which is mainly observed where foreigners are assumed to be possible customers. Only one shop sign that was written in Sidaamu Afoo⁴ was identified in Arab-sefer. The picture was not selected for analysis because it was faded and the letters were not visible enough. Thus, one could say that language choice for shop signs in the City is limited to Amharic and English.

3.1 The Use of Language in Shop Signs

Based on the use of language, the shop signs in Hawassa City could generally be classified into monolingual and bilingual. Monolingual shop sign refers to a shop sign with one language (Amharic only, or English only), whereas bilingual shop sign refers to a sign with two languages (Amharic and English). In the face of the existing language policy of Ethiopia (FDRE Constitution, 1995, Art. 5 (1)) that marked the shift from monolingual policy to multilingual one, the dominance of Amharic and English only in the LL of the city could be taken as the result of the long decades' language use practice in which the two languages remained dominant in the public and private signs.

Monolingual shop signs. The number of monolingual shop signs (Amharic only or English only) is less compared to the bilingual shop signs. It constitutes only 38% of the total sample shop signs collected.

⁴ Because the color of the sign was faded, it was not possible to take a picture that is visible enough to include in the used in this paper. .



Fig 1A: Amharic only shop sign



Fig 1B: English only shop sign

Table 1: Monolingual shop signs distribution across the sampled streets (areas)

Sample streets (areas)	Number of monolingual shop signs		
	Amharic Only	English Only	Total
Menaheria	6	-	6
Areb-sefer	8	1	9
Atote	6	1	7
Piazza	1	3	4
Zero-amest	6 (4 of them are on temporarily built shops) ⁵	6	12
Total	27	11	38

As we can see from Table 1, over 2/3 (71.1%) of the monolingual signs were in Amharic language, whereas nearly 1/3 (28.9%) was in English. Menaheria, Areb-Sefer, and Atote are the sites dominated by signs written in Amharic. The study of Alemayehu and Takele (2016) conducted on the LL of selected Oromia towns and the study of Wolff.*et.al.* (2013) on the LL of Adama also confirmed the high visibility of Amharic in public space. Among the reasons shop owners gave for using Amharic only signs are the fact that their customers are local people and that Amharic is the language of wider communication in Ethiopia. This implies that customers are the major factors shaping the language choice of shop owners.

Piazza and Zero-amest, on the other hand, exhibited more English only shop signs than the other streets. Most of the businesses in these streets present products and services that are relatively expensive. The two sites are also known for being visited by relatively large number of foreigners. Piazza, as the center of the City (downtown), contains more shops, accommodations, supermarkets, hotels, and the like that are mostly needed by foreigners. Zero-amest exhibits even more English only shop signs compared to Piazza mainly because it is the street very close to major tourist attractions such as Lake Hawassa and Amora-gedel and big hotels like Lewi Resort. Interview data also showed that shop owners use English only signs for their shops because it is an international language that the majority of foreigners understand. Ethiopians with at least secondary education can also read English and understand the messages of shop signs, although they may not use it for day-to-day communication with compatriots. In relation to this one shop owner said, “እንደኔ እምነት አብዛኞቹ የሀገር ውስጥ ደንበኞች እንግሊዘኛን ያነባሉ። ስለዚህ ቋንቋውን በሱቁ ላይ መጠቀሙ ለአካባቢውም ሆነ ለውጭ ደንበኞች ችግር የለውም።” (In my belief most of my local customers read English. Hence, using the language (English) on my shop sign makes no problem to local and foreign customers). This implies that shop owners of the study area mainly emphasize the informative function of shop signs, i.e., indicating the presence of a business.

There were also respondents who use English to convey a message, “my shop is of international standard”. There are also customers who believe that shop signs which use English language in any way indicate having quality and modern products or services. This is a typical example about the use of English

⁵ These shops were temporarily built by Hawassa City government and delivered to unemployed youth groups

signs for its symbolic function i.e., connecting English with internationality, modernity, and quality beyond its informative function. Lanza and Woldemariam (2014) found out similar result in their study in the LL of Addis Ababa. They stated, “Shop owners employ English and international brand names in order to index higher order scales, which they associate with development and hence modernity and the prestige that carries in the local context” (p.503). Moreover, hotels which claim to be international dominantly used English only on their signs.

Bilingual shop signs. Bilingual shop signs are exhibited in large number compared to the monolingual ones in general.

Table 2: Bilingual shop signs distribution across the sampled streets (areas)

Sample areas	Number of signs	Percentage
Menahria	14	22.6%
Areb-Sefer	11	17.7%
Atote	13	21%
Piazza	16	25.8%
Zero-amest	8	12.9%
Total	62	100%

Out of the total of 100 signs (both bilingual and monolingual) in all streets, while the bilingual signs accounted for 62% (62 in number also), the monolingual signs accounted for 38% (27 Amharic only and 11 English only). As we could see from Tables 1 and 2 above, except Menaheria Street which did not have English only monolingual sign, all streets had both bilingual and monolingual (Amharic only and English only) shop signs. As to bilingual signs, while Piazza had the highest number of bilingual signs (25.8%), Zero-amest had the lowest (12.9%). Zero-amest street largely exhibited monolingual English only signs because it is located on the way to major tourist sites in Hawassa. The interview data indicated that the choice and use of language for shop signs is mostly determined by the owners of the shops and there is no government interference at all at that time. The owners of shops with bilingual shop signs claimed that they used both languages on the same sign considering local and foreign customers. In this regard, experts from Trade and Industry Departments indicated that there was no guideline regarding the use of language on shop signs. They felt that the city is getting international posture and attracting large number of foreigners. Customers’ opinion on language of shop sign also indicated that they prefer bilingual signs (with Amharic and English) for the city.

Position and font size of languages on bilingual shop signs. Bilingual signs that are positioned (patterned) vertically (one language above the other or the vice versa) appeared in large number. There are also horizontally placed bilingual signs (one language to the right or left of the other) although they are few in number. Font size differences between languages of bilingual signs were also examined.

Out of the 62 bilingual signs from all sample sites, a large proportion of them, 77.4%, used Amharic at the top and English at the bottom pattern (see Fig 2A) and only 12.9 % of them used English at the top and Amharic at the bottom pattern (see Fig 2B). On the other hand, out of the 37 (59.7%) of the bilingual signs that exhibited visible font size difference, a significant portion of them, 32 (86.5%) were with Amharic in bigger fonts than English (see Fig 3B) and the remaining five (13.5%) with English in bigger fonts than Amharic (see Fig 3A). Zero-amest and Piazza are also areas where English only monolingual signs dominated. The dominance of English at the top and Amharic at the bottom signs, and English fonts bigger than that of Amharic signs in these areas clearly reveal the important place English has in the areas although owners claimed that such use of languages was not with the intention of showing language power contestation. In this regard, the order and font size difference of languages on signs are not haphazard. Alemayehu and Takele (2016) argue that the position and font size of multilingual signs have implied meanings. They stated that Afan Oromo was

placed on the top of Amharic and English to show its legitimate priority as a working language in the area and occasional font size difference, Amharic larger fonts than Afan Oromo signals the opposition of language policy and politics which is operating in Ethiopia. It seems that the Amharic at the top of English bilingual sign pattern is a trend copied from government office signs which use Amharic at the top of English uniformly on their signs. It seems they (shop owners) simply imitated the pattern but they do not have any idea about the meaning behind the use of that pattern. That may be the reason why the shop owners claim that such patterns are haphazard.



Fig 2A: Amharic top, English bottom



Fig 2B: English top, Amharic bottom



Fig 3A: English font size larger than Amharic



Fig 3B: Amharic font size larger than English

Translated and transliterated bilingual shop signs. Bilingual signs put the two languages either translating one language to the other or simply transliterating (writing words or letters of one language only in a different alphabet or language). Likewise, the bilingual signs collected from sample areas are also written by either of these two ways. The use of translated and transliterated shop signs may shed some light on the knowledge level of the owners about the languages being used as it is, in most cases, the owners themselves who choose the language and write the text.



Fig 4A: Transliterated sign



Fig 4B: Translated sign

The numbers of translated and transliterated bilingual signs are almost proportional. In terms of business, hotels, bars, restaurants, computer centers, and mobile maintenance shops mostly used transliterated bilingual signs. However, most of the transliterated and translated bilingual signs look carelessly written, and one can find a lot of errors particularly, orthographic ones in the English version of the texts.



Fig 5A: Transliterated sign with a missing letter in English version

Like the transliterated ones, translated bilingual signs (see Fig 4B) are also available in significant number. In terms of businesses, shop signs of building materials, textile and garments mostly used translation. Regarding errors, bilingual translated signs exhibited more errors or mistakes compared to the transliterated ones. The errors included (1) minor orthographic errors more of which are similar to those which were seen in the transliterated signs, i.e., using a word or an expression which is not equivalent to its corresponding word or expression in the other language, and (2) leaving a word or an expression untranslated or unrepresented in either of the two languages.



Fig 5B: A wrongly translated sign

The sign in Fig 5B contains inappropriate translation about ceramic products. That is ' the Amharic version 'የባሾ ቤት እቃዎች' 'የ/የባሾ/ is an adjective marker and the two words, a compound word 'ባሾ ቤት' /bæno bet/ which literally means /bathroom/ and 'እቃዎች' /ikawotf/ which means 'materials' is wrongly translated as 'ceramic products' which is unequal expression or translation. These kinds of errors are exhibited in significant number in the translated bilingual signs.

Some of the owners who were interviewed said that they were responsible for what was written on their signs. This is because they themselves give everything to be written on their signs to the printers or painters. In addition to lack of focus or carelessness, the number of errors exhibited on the signs mostly reveals the gap in the owners' proficiency of English language.

Although this study mainly aims to show the various language uses on the shop signs, the researchers are concerned about the number of errors shown and would like to flash the issue for further study.

4. Conclusions

The current study attempted to describe the LL of Hawassa City, the capital of the regional state with the highest number of linguistic diversity in Ethiopia. Despite this diversity, the data indicated the dominance of two languages in the private shop signs, Amharic and English. The language choice and use in the shop signs need to be given attention by institutions in charge of deciding on language matters. This is important because it helps to ensure that the shop signs serve their function - indicating the presence of a business, advertising the business, and attracting potential customers - effectively. The language choice and language use that were practiced in the city were found partly not in accord with the existing linguistic and sociolinguistic factors on the ground. While most of the residents are speakers of Sidama language, the shop signs did not reflect that. The long decades' dominance Amharic and English had in shop signs and other features of LL in Ethiopia seems to be operating despite the language policy change of the 1995 which changed language use practices in institutional settings like schools, courts, etc. Although the number of foreigners who reside in the city is very small, English language which is mainly meant for foreign customers seems to be dominant in the shop signs of the city because of the status it has in Ethiopia and in the world. Except Amharic, other local languages that have relatively large number of speakers in the city (e.g., Wolayta (49,218), Oromo (17, 6100), and Gurage (14,658)) were not visible in the shop signs, let alone those with lesser number of speakers. Attracting customers who come from different linguistic backgrounds seems to be the underlying motive of all shop owners. The existence of shop signs of different pattern in terms of appearance, the number of languages on a single sign, and the arrangement of the languages on one shop sign implies absence of a guideline to govern language use on shop signs.

Translated and transliterated bilingual signs exhibit various errors, particularly English version, as seen in Figs 5A and 5B above. Whether the shop signs are drafted and designed by owners or those who are engaged in the business of designing signs, the errors in the shop signs imply the low level of knowledge and skill and/or low sensitivity to the quality of language they use. The language choice of shop owners is largely customer oriented. Amharic is chosen mostly since it is the language of wider communication and a working language of the SNNP region. Symbolic implications such as showing respect and pride for the local language was also raised as a reason for using Amharic in addition to its informative function. On the other hand, English is chosen mostly owing to the positive symbolic value people associate with it, and to attract foreign customers. It also appeared that the use of English is associated with quality, standard, and modernity. The fact that the majority of languages in the region are rarely represented in the LL of the city reaffirms the theoretical framework language forms displayed in local public spaces do not always reflect the actual spoken uses of languages by local people.

5. Recommendations

Although the current study covered limited LL items and selected areas in the city, the researchers believe that the findings would serve as important input for the concerned bodies to focus on the issue, conduct further studies, and make required decisions on language use and language choice in signs. Hawassa city, which is nicknamed as the "City of Diversity" does not reflect LL features that commensurate the linguistic diversity it hosts. It would be fair if languages with large number of speakers in the city are visible in the LL of the city. Accordingly, one would naturally expect to see Sidaamu Afoo (the language of Sidama) in the LL of the city, for which shop sign is just one means. The errors that are observed in the shop signs are many and varied. This may damage the image of LL of the city. The concerned government bodies need to develop guidelines to manage language use in public signs to which shop signs are part, and to work towards raising the awareness of the shop owners and those who design shop signs as to the role of language use and language choice in signs. It would also be important if further study is conducted on the city's LL covering larger areas and including more genres like street signs, billboards, local newspapers, building signs, radio and TV programs.

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1. Yekatit Hailu Mekonnen: Developed the proposal, collected data, transcribed the interview data, translated the data into English, analysed and interpreted the data and wrote the manuscript.
2. Mengistu Dinato Diden: Reviewed and enriched the proposal, reviewed the transcript and the translated data, analysed the data and revised the manuscript.

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Competing of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Consent for publication

We have agreed - to - submit to the Journal of Social Sciences and Language Studies and approved the manuscript for submission.



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