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The Language of the Public Spaces in Tanzanian Universities during the COVID-19 Pandemic



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ABSTRACT

The language of public space in Tanzania is increasingly reported to be dominated by English in the bottom-up signage for maintaining the higher status quo. At the same time, the utility of Kiswahili predominates for the top-down signposts that aim to pass information to the public quickly. While the literature shows the utility of Kiswahili is skewed towards the communication intended message, the COVID-19 situation expanded this utility in the public universities in the country. The expression of statements that select Kiswahili words is primarily associated with a warning (e.g., *tafadhari nawa mikono* 'please wash hands') and safety (*Tujilinde* 'Let us protect ourselves'). Therefore, English words are not featured in the signposts, except for the statement produced by manufacturers of the handwashing

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machines. Apart from texts, visual pictures are provided in the COVID-19 signposts to reinforce the text message.

KEY WORDS: choice of words, COVID-19, English, Kiswahili, linguistic landscape, Tanzanian universities

Introduction

The state of bilingualism in the education system in Tanzania is reported to involve the utility of Kiswahili even in environments in which English is expected (Puja 2003; Lema 2021). The presence of English is narrowed down to involve formal settings, mainly classroom teaching (Lema 2021). But even during classroom teaching, code-switching is the norm of the day (Shartiely 2016). To understand the way information is communicated to the public by the universities' administrations, we investigate the language used in the signposts and notice boards placed for public consumption during the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country.

The linguistic landscape of the education institutions in Tanzania represents a bilingual situation. The primary usage of Kiswahili in regular conversations outnumbers the use of English, even though English is the medium of instruction (Legère, Rosendal 2019; Lusekelo, Mdukula 2021; Mdukula 2018). This is a common phenomenon reported in the studies of linguistic landscape in urban centres in the country (Lusekelo, Alphonce 2018; Peterson 2014). However, the prevalence of COVID-19 altered the socialisation in universities worldwide, and consequently, the communication structure changed (Basch et al. 2021; Mohlman, Basch 2021; Uwiyezimana 2021). Therefore, the current investigation assumes that the language of public space in universities in Tanzania, which was reported in Mdukula (2018) and Legère, Rosendal (2019), has changed due to COVID-19 protocols. This article makes a representation of the linguistic landscape in universities during the COVID-19 crisis in the country.

This investigation focused on four public universities located in three places in the country, namely, the University of Dar es Salaam and the Muhimbili University of

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Health and Allied Sciences in the ancient commercial city of the country¹, the University of Dodoma in the centre of the country, and the Sokoine University of Agriculture in Morogoro region. Images about COVID-19, which are shared by the university authorities with the public, had been photographed by the authors. Based on the analytical procedures in linguistic landscape (Backhaus 2007; Huebner 2006), we focused on three aspects, namely, (i) the language choice in the COVID-19 banners, signposts, and public notices; (ii) the lining and font choices for the deliverance of the intended messages, and (iii) extra-linguistic information embedded in the signposts of COVID-19.

The onset of literature about language usage during the COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 crisis caused the rise of new research grounds for the subject matter of language use in Africa. In Africa and beyond, different scholars have approached this subject matter from the sociolinguistic angle of multilingualism (Rudwick et al. 2021; Schroeder, Chen 2021). Others look at it through pragmatic approaches to communication strategies during the crisis (Basch et al. 2021; Mohlman – Basch 2021), an alteration of the cultural-based language usage due to social distancing trends (Boswell 2020), and the fight against COVID-19 manifesting in artistic works (Otieno 2021), among other attention. We review these studies in this section and then highlight areas that require further illumination from the findings obtained in universities in Tanzania.

On the imposition of language issues by COVID-19 on the sociolinguistics of multilingualism, RUDWICK et al. (2021) present a scenario in which four ministers switch between the many national languages of South Africa. The main languages used in the speeches include Afrikaans, English, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu and SeSotho. An important point to underscore here concerns switching to another language to deliver the emphatic message to the intended audience. For instance, Rudwick et al. (2021, 251) point out that "the Minister of Transport Fikile Mbalula addressed taxi drivers who in the majority are known not to be fluent in English. Therefore, he switched into

¹ Although the intent of the investigation reported herein was not quantitative in nature, by July 2021, the amount of signposts placed on the main campuses of the University of Dar es Salaam and Sokoine University of Agriculture exceeds by far the amount of messages placed on the main campuses of Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences and the University of Dodoma.

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IsiZulu, communicating directly to his core target audience." Therefore, the choice of the language to use is paramount in investigating the language of public space in the education institutions in Tanzania because both English and Kiswahili are the official languages of formal communication.

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic is associated with the choice of words (terms) used by personnel from the central government, local authorities, and (public) government institutions. Studies show that some specific categories of words are selected and used to communicate the COVID-19 messages (Basch et al. 2021; Mohlman, Basch 2021). Mohlman and Basch (2021, 3), for instance, provide these categories attested on the websites for universities in the United States of America: anxiety (*worried, nervous, concerned*), insight (*decide, know, interpret*), positive emotion/resilience (*perseverance, support, safety*), sadness (*loss, sad, grief*), social (*community, public, shared*) etc. The variation in the choice of terms manifests in the websites investigated by Mohlman and Basch (2021). Therefore, the choice of diction in the messaging of the COVID-19 information becomes necessary to investigate the public institutions of higher education in Tanzania.

The COVID-19 pandemic is associated with social distancing, a phenomenon in which laws restrict physical contact of people to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (Bashizi et al. 2021; Boswell 2020; Gittings et al. 2021). Boswell (2020) reports that language usage built on social gatherings in churches, festivals, weddings etc. had been fully disrupted for the Creoles of Mauritius. Also, the penetration of expressions such as 'social distancing' had appeared already due to COVID-19. But Tanzania experienced a brief lockdown during the John Pombe Magufuli Government between late March 2020 and early June 2020 (Mumbu, Hugo 2020); as a result, the physical contact of people continued. Furthermore, universities in Tanzania and other education institutions re-opened on the 1st of June 2020 (Mumbu, Hugo 2020), making physical contact with students, university lecturers, and administrative personnel continue. Nonetheless, the language of the public spaces changed due to the instructions provided by the central government, local authorities, and public institutions to the public in general and the university populations. This paper reports on changes in public signage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The specific case for this paper involves the language of communication in universities worldwide, which appear to have changed drastically due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the changes could be associated with the decline

in social words due to the social distancing phenomenon. In the United States of America, Mohlman and Basch (2021, 2) investigated the language used in the websites of "the most relevant university communications related to closures during the COVID-19 outbreak from 151 universities in the New York City metropolitan area." The study did not find increased social words in messages from larger universities. This may be due to the limits on interpersonal activities and larger gatherings, which were gradually being discouraged, restricted, and eventually banned" (Mohlman, Basch 2021, 3).

The choice of the words is another area highly likely to be changed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mohlman and Basch (2021, 3) found that "it was also expected that the target word type categories and enrolment would be positively associated with the presence of a COVID update on the university's homepage within three months. We did find this association with positive emotion/resilience words but not social or power/organisational words."

The fight against the spread of COVID-19 disease has been represented in artistic works, which indicates that the information about the pandemic is getting entrenched in society. Otieno (2021) presents the contents of the specific songs about the pandemic as produced in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Regarding Tanzania, Otieno (2021) reports the song by Mrisho Mpoto, which contains information about the essence of the pandemic, its mechanisms of spreading, and mitigation measures. The famous music artist makes the required choice of diction, e.g., *korona*=Corona, *kukataa kukusanyika*=social distancing, *hatushikani mikono*=no hand shaking etc., like the choice of words reported elsewhere in the literature (Mohlman, Basch 2021).

The state of COVID-19 in Tanzania

The recording of the COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania appears mostly from mass media: printed newspapers, radio stations, and television services (Bashizi et al. 2021; Gruenbaum 2021; Mumbu, Hugo 2020; Rapisarda, Byrne 2020). Some of the facts assembled in previous publications include the announcement of the lockdown by Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa. As of the 17th of March 2020, the Government of Tanzania announced the first control measures for COVID-19 local transmission: (i) "closure of all school levels and ban of all public or social gatherings while on the subsequent date, the order was extended to colleges and higher education

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institutions for indefinite close"; (ii) on the 23rd of March 2020, "the Government declared that all incoming travellers from COVID-19 affected countries to be quarantined for two weeks at their costs"; (iii) the Government of Tanzania announced "self-isolation at home or hospitals and wearing face masks in crowded areas were compulsory to any who suspects any COVID-19 symptoms to avoid more spread of the virus" (Mumbu, Hugo 2020, 749). This is the kind of lockdown institutionalised in April and May 2020 in Tanzania.

On a specific note, Rapisarda – Byrne (2020, 914) reports three efforts established by the Government of Tanzania to fight against the spread of COVID-19 in prisons and jails, i.e., "temporary suspension of all visitations", "handwashing stations installed within prisons and jails" and "release of nearly 4,000 inmates into the community in April 2020". In addition, the second strategy used to combat the spread of COVID-19 has been implemented in public universities in Tanzania.

The state of lockdown was revoked by the beginning of June 2020 (Gruenbaum 2021; Mumbu, Hugo 2020). Specifically, Mumbu and Hugo (2020, 749) assembled the information that "although there is no biological evidence for the disappearing of the disease, the President on the 21st of May 2020 declared that all colleges and high school students to re-open with effect from the 1st of June 2020." Furthermore, the Government of Tanzania re-opened sports and international flights without any quarantine (Mumbu, Hugo 2020). While the socialisation in the country was reverted to normalcy in June 2020, instructions about COVID-19 prevailed. Mumbu and Hugo (2020) report on the usage of face masks, sanitisation of hands, use of running water for sanitation, social distancing etc.

The strategies utilised to combat the spread of COVID-19 had been issued by the Government of Tanzania (Mumbu, Hugo 2020). As a result, the banners, signposts and notice boards appear to have produced the top-down structures presented in previous studies (Legère, Rosendal 2019; Mdukula 2018; Lusekelo – Mdukula 2021). Nonetheless, the contents and portraits of the signposts had not been investigated. This is the lacuna that the current study covers.

The language in banners and signposts for COVID-19 in Tanzania

Language in top-down signage in universities

The Government of Tanzania issued a statement that demanded education institutions to institutionalise the COVID-19 protocols. However, based on the characterisation in Backhaus (2007) and Cenoz, Gorter (2006), the signage that emanates from such instructions is typically top-down. The nature of such signposts and the language contained therein is the core of the discussion hereunder.



Figure 1: Signpost at the entrance to the Administration Block of the University of Dar es Salaam.
Photo: authors (June 2021)

The positioning of the COVID-19 signposts, which is intended to target public consumption, is found to be important. The universities require an important platform to submit and share the information about COVID-19, as Mohlman and Basch (2021, 2) states that "identification of the "most relevant" communication occurred by identifying where COVID-19 messages were housed on each university website." Higher education institutions did not lock down in Tanzania, unlike other universities

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worldwide, where lockdown has been the norm, and online teaching was adopted (Radić et al. 2021). Nonetheless, numerous banners, public notices and signposts containing COVID-19 related information were placed in strategic public spaces on campuses.



Figure 2: Signpost at the main entrance to Sokoine University of Agriculture.
Photo: authors (July 2021)

The main entrance and administration building remain important in providing the first impression of instructions that an institution ought to stand for. In this article, we argue that the COVID-19 pandemic altered the primary public inscriptions on the walls of the administration blocks and main entrances of the institutions of higher education, which appeared in previous publications that used signposts captured before the year 2019 (see Legère, Rosendal 2019; Mdukula 2018; Lusekelo, Mdukula 2021). For instance, at the University of Dar es Salaam, the main entrance

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to the administration block², which is usually stationed with an Auxiliary Police Officer to enforce the laws and regulations, provides an impetus to the instructions about COVID-19 (Figure 1). Likewise, COVID-19 banners are placed at the main entrance gate of the Sokoine University of Agriculture, which is also guarded by security personnel (Figure 2).

The colouring of the banners is another fascinating point to make here. The universities adopted specific colours for their banners and signposts. For instance, the colours in Figure 1 (namely blueish and goldish) are typical of the University of Dar es Salaam. Likewise, greenish, and yellowish colours are used in the logos, banners, and signposts for Sokoine University of Agriculture. With the evidence at hand, we argue that although COVID-19 altered the language of the public spaces in the universities of Tanzania, it has not changed the colours adopted by the universities. Instead, the universities incorporated the colours in the banners and signposts for COVID-19.

The choices of the language of communication of COVID-19 messages contribute to understanding the information passed to the public. In the multilingual setting of the United States of America, Schroeder and Chen (2021) argues that English as a second language has been a useful vehicular communication of COVID-19 message to second-language speakers of Latinx descent. But most of the signposts are provided in Kiswahili-only, which is very contrary to the findings obtained in higher education institutions in Tanzania. For example, Mdukula (2018) found that the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences in Tanzania uses both English and Kiswahili languages. Likewise, Legère and Rosendal (2019) found the dominance of English and Kiswahili at the University of Dar es Salaam. In Figures 1 and 2, the usage of the Kiswahili-only has the main target to communicate the required COVID-19 message to the public in Tanzania. We argue that the choice of Kiswahili-only COVID-19 message is based on the competence and performance of Tanzanians in the language, rather than English which is preferred in the formal universities' businesses in the country. Our argument is consonant with Peterson

² By 3rd July 2021, the main administration office of the Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS) did not contain any signpost for COVID-19 message. Likewise, by 3rd July 2021, the two main entrance gates at the University of Dar es Salaam, namely Maji and Ardhi Gates, did not contain any COVID-19 message.

(2014), who examined bottom-up signposts and found that the utility of a Kiswahili-only message is central in passing the message to the public of Tanzanians who mainly command Kiswahili than English fluently.

The foregrounding of the texts is also an important line of investigation in the language of public space because the fonts add extra information (Backhaus 2007; Cenoz, Gorter 2006). Similarly, Lusekelo and Mdukula (2021) found that in urban Tanzania, catchy words, or phrases in texts of signposts are bolded and/or provided with a separate font in order to pass the intended message clearly. The evidence is attested in Figure 1, which partakes one clause divided into two lines, one on top of the other at the bottom. The first line (top) reads "HII NI SILAHA MUHIMU" [This is an important weapon]. The second line (bottom) reads "USIIACHE" [Do not abandon it]. Each of the lines is provided in a different font, which is an indication that it is foregrounded. Making a general observation, one may establish that the entire text bears important information to be passed wholesome to the public. Further evidence is attested in Figure 2, which contains one foregrounded message which reads: „COVID-19, CHUKUA TAHADHARI“ [COVID-19, take care]. The public is warned of the need to take care against the spread of COVID-19.

The signpost from Sokoine University of Agriculture also comprises a loaded message which is given in this long line in sentence case (Figure 2): „*Tafadhari nawa mikono kwa maji tiririka na sabuni kabla ya kuingia na wakati wa kutoka Ofisini, Darasani, maeneo ya kujifunzia na maeneo ya Malazi*“ [Please, wash hands with running water and soap before entering and while exiting offices, classrooms, study areas and dormitories]. Then the short message is provided underneath: „*Jilinde, Mlinda, Tujilinde*“ [Protect yourself, Protect other, Let us protect ourselves]. These texts contain Kiswahili words associated with motivation or encouragement (*tafadhari*=please), warning or caution (*nawa mikono*=wash hands) and safety (*jilinde*=protect oneself), which is partly like the findings in the study by Mohlman and Basch (2021).

In the language of public space, the picture on the signpost reinforces the message that the whole signpost wants to deliver to the public (Bwenge 2009; Huebner 2006). For instance, based on signposts gathered in Tanzania, (Bwenge 2009, 158) highlights that "billboards are large outdoor signboards posted in places with high traffic and typically show large, textual materials printed alongside alluring pictures, which are intended to be memorable, enjoyable, or amusing." The alluring image on the signpost at the University of Dar es Salaam is a face mask, which is claimed to

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be a protective gear. In East Africa, mask-wearing had been enforced, and failure to abide by the regulations that required mask-wearing resulted in punishment (Bashizi et al. 2021). Therefore, in Figure 1, a picture of a mask is provided to allow the public to see it. The face mask is assumed to be a weapon to fight against COVID-19. Likewise, Figure 2 shows pictures of people washing their hands, which is one of the strategies instituted by the Government of Tanzania (Boswell 2020; Gruenbaum 2021; Mumbu – Hugo 2020).

Further information is shared on *Daladala*³ 'bus stops' on the University of Dar es Salaam campus. Figure 3 portrays two pictures of COVID-19 messages. To the left, the signpost contains a message in capital letters provided in two lines that read: „TUKUMBUSHANE“ [Let us remind one another] and „OSHA MIKONO“ [Wash hands]. The first line is provided in goldish colour, while the second line is whitish. Both the colouring and use of high caps add to the foregrounding of the message in the signpost. In Figure 3, the left signpost contains a picture that portrays the washing of human hands. The picture reinforces the statement given in the text.

The fight against COVID-19 is another linguistic area worth investigating. OPPONG et al. (2021) report that the African healthcare systems are under-equipped and under-staffed to face COVID-19. The capacity to provide critical care is the lowest in the world. The situation is acute regarding "the shortage of ventilators is particularly acute in Africa" and "over-dependence on imported medical technology and pharmaceuticals" (OPPONG et al. 2021: 3). To be safe from COVID-19, citizens are advised to exercise. Figure 3 contains the picture to the right, which constitutes the sentence: „*Tujikinga kwa kufanya mazoezi*“ [Let us protect ourselves by exercising]. Apart from the text's message, the image also contains pictures of eleven persons doing a running sport. The pictures contribute to the understanding of the message contained in the signpost.

³ *Daladala* is a popular name for the commuter mini-buses in the city of Dar es Salaam (Schotsman, Bryceson 2006). By July 2021, a number of commuter mini-buses (*Daladala buses*) commute between Mawasiliano and Makumbusho terminals via the Main Campus of the University of Dar es Salaam.

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Figure 3: COVID-19 signpost at a Daladala bus stop on the Mlimani Campus of the University of Dar es Salaam. Photo: authors (July 2021)

Other public places where COVID-19 information could be obtained in universities of Tanzania include main entrances and areas allocated for cafeteria services. Figure 4 contains two foot-operated handwashing machines. The inscriptions are worn out to the left, perhaps because of the weather conditions. Based on this image, this service must have been placed during the first waves of COVID-19 in Tanzania, which occurred in March 2020 (Bashizi et al. 2021; Mumbu, Hugo 2020).

The choice of the language here provides an interesting point. The whole message is given in English only. However, according to the URT (2003), English is one of the languages authorised for publication communication in Tanzania. Therefore, the use of English does not violate any regulations in the country.

An entrance to the Savings and Credits Cooperation Society (SACCOS) at the University of Dodoma also provides a message that washing hands using clean water is mandatory in higher education institutions in Tanzania. Figure 5 shows the notice provided at UDOM SACCOS Ltd., which offers financial services to the University of Dodoma members.

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Figure 4: Handwashing machines at Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences.

Photo: authors (July 2021)

The same message, which the Government of Tanzania shares with the public, is placed at the main entrance via UN Road to Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences. Both Kiswahili and English are used. However, the notice contains 36 Kiswahili words, which outnumber by far the five English words. The predominance of both English and Kiswahili in Dodoma is already reported by Lusekelo and Mdukula (2021). But in this COVID-19 notice, the usage of Kiswahili is preferred, perhaps because the administration at the university realised that the language could serve the purpose of serving the message efficiently to the public.

The sticker provided in Figure 5 is typically simple top-down signage as it manifests in almost all campuses of the universities surveyed by the current researchers. In the sticker ring, the name of the ministry responsible is provided in Kiswahili-only, namely „WIZARA YA AFYA, MAENDELEO YA JAMII, JINSIA, WAZEE NA WATOTO“ [Ministry of Health, Social Development, Gender, Elderly and Children]. Even the department responsible is provided in Kiswahili-only, namely, „IDARA YA

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KINGA, KITENGO CHA ELIMU YA AFYA KWA UMMA“ [Department of Prevention, the Section of Public Health Education]. The choice of Kiswahili aims to target the public, which speaks more Kiswahili than English (Puja 2003; Lusekelo, Mdukula 2021).



Figure 5: English-Kiswahili notice at the University of Dodoma. Photo: authors (June 2021)

The contents of the messages involve the standard practice for the precautions associated with the prevention of COVID-19. For example, one of the lines reads: „KARIBU. Tafadhali Nawa Mikono kwa Maji Tiririka na Sabuni“ [WELCOME: Please Wash Hands with Running Water and Soap]. First, the message is in Kiswahili-only. Second, the message is provided in a red strip, which underscores the message in the language of the public space (Backhaus 2007; Huebner 2006). The choice of Kiswahili, providing the red ribbon, and choice of words contribute to the prominence of the prevention message.

Another line is provided in capital letters: „JIKINGE, WAKINGE NA WENGINE“ [Protect yourself, protect others]. This line is followed by the line that reads: „*Corona inazuilika*“ [Corona is preventable]. Both lines contain the message associated with prevention. Nonetheless, the capital letters foreground the message about the prevention from COVID-19. In the literature, capital letters help to underline a specific message (Backhaus 2007; Huebner 2006).

Two other lines read: „Piga 199 Bure“ [Dial 199 free] and „Afya Call Center“ [Health Call Centre]. The first line is in Kiswahili-only, while the second is bilingual in Kiswahili-and-English. This is because both languages are formally authorised in the education sector in the country (Puja 2003). Nonetheless, the English words are for the names of Call Center and UDOM SACCOS Ltd. It is the assumption that the prominence of Kiswahili emanates from the utility of the language in passing important information about the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

The fight against COVID-19 also involved herbaceous medication in Africa. Nevertheless, some institutions managed to produce COVID-19 medicine in Africa (Bashizi et al., 2021). For example, the University of Dar es Salaam produced medication for the pandemic.

Turning to the language of communication in the health sector, Mdukula (2018) found that prescriptions appear in English only. But COVID-19 disrupted the situation as medication for the pandemic appeared in bilingual Kiswahili-and-English instructions. For instance, Figure 6 shows „FUKiZA UDANOL“, which constitutes two words. The name of the trademark is „FUKiZA' = vapour bath; human treatment with fumes' and UDANOL, which is a coinage of UDA- 'University of Dar es Salaam' and the conventional technical label -NOL.

The banner for the drug bears the clause „KORONA BADO IPO Tuchukue Tahadhari“ [CORONA still prevails, Let us take precautions]. The first part of the clause is in capital letters to make the message more prominent, as discussed for the other datasets obtained in Tanzania by Lusekelo and Mdukula (2021). The second part of the clause, which gives caution to the public, is provided in the title case. In this arrangement, it bears second rate prominence in the banner.

Moreover, Figure 6 also contains three pictures: a single bottle of the FUKiZA medicine, three containers of hand sanitisers, and someone sanitising him/herself. These pictures contribute to a better understanding of the COVID-19 situation as the pictures show the prevention through sanitisation and treatment by the FUKiZA drug.

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Put in the words of HUEBNER (2006), the images reinforce the message provided about the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 6: The banner for the COVID-19 medicine manufactured at the University of Dar es Salaam.
Photo: authors (May 2021)

Furthermore, Figure 6 also contains a picture of a young person holding a blanket or towel over him. The picture also contains a bucket of FUKiZA UNADOL. The picture points toward the utility procedures for the medication.

The nature of bottom-up signage in universities in Tanzania

Some signposts reveal bottom-up features provided in Backhaus (2007) and Genoz, Gorter (2006). Each college administration or faculty leadership envisaged notices to be shared with the public through the notice boards or entrances to offices. Since this signage is localised in each university, we analysed them as bottom-up signposts.

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The first characteristic feature of the localised COVID-19 signage is the dominance of Kiswahili-only messages (see Figures 7 – 8). This is quite different from the features of bottom-up signage analysed from streets of Tanzania, in that English-only and English-and-Kiswahili signage dominate (Lusekelo – Alphonce 2018; Peterson 2014).

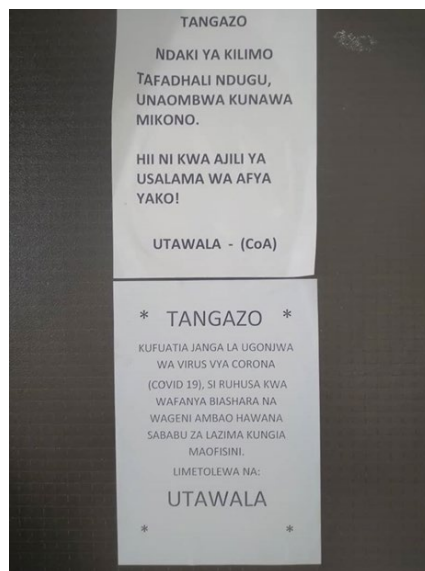


Figure 7: A notice at the main entrance to the College of Agriculture at Sokoine University of Agriculture. Photo: authors (July 2021)

The first paper of Figure 7 comprises two main themes⁴: „TAFADHARI NDUGU UNAOMBWA KUNAWA MIKONO“ [Please, you are asked to wash hands]. „HII NI KWA AJILI YA USALAMA WA AFYA YAKO“ [This is for the safety of your health]. The second paper of Figure 7 contains the main theme of prohibition: „SI RUHUSA KWA WAFANYABIASHARA NA WAGENI AMBAO HAWANA SABABU ZA LAZIMA KUNGIA MAOFISINI“ [It is disallowed for business people to enter into offices

⁴ For the purpose of meeting the demand of the target of this paper, the choices of the words CORONA and COVID-19 in Figure 8 are covered in another research work.

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without dire need]. Also, both papers bear the words „TANGAZO“ [announcement] and „UTAWALA“ [administration], which is another indicator that these make localised signage.

Figure 8 illustrates a Kiswahili-only notice placed at the main entrance to the building for the University of Dar es Salaam School of Business. The message reads: „VAA BARAKOA UINGIAPO HUMU NDANI“ [Wear face-mask when entering inside]. Since the message is provided in Kiswahili-only, it is plausible to argue that the university's administration assumes correctly that the public easily understands the message given in Kiswahili rather than in English.

In the literature, the choice of words appears to express anxiety, sadness, positive emotion etc. (Mohlman, Basch 2021; Basch et al. 2021). For example, in the text of Figure 8, the message contains the verb „VAA BARAKOA“ [wear face-mask], which is instructing the entrants to put on face-masks. Another instruction is about „UINGIAPO HUMU NDANI“ [when entering inside], which indicates that wearing a face mask is mandatory.



Figure 8: A notice at the main entrance to the University of Dar es Salaam School of Business.
Photo: authors (June 2021)

Conclusion

The present article had intended to expand the nature of the linguistic landscape of Tanzania. YANG (2014) stipulated that many actors are at play when the linguistic landscape of Tanzania is concerned. The current actors are the central Government of Tanzania, which issues banners with specific content about observing the COVID-19 protocols in public places. The are attested in the public universities investigated for the purpose of this contribution. Nonetheless, each faculty or college envisages localised notices, comprising banners the bottom-up signage.

Another issue discussed in this paper is the language of public space in Tanzania, which is increasingly reported to be dominated by English in the bottom-up signage for the maintenance of the higher status quo, while the utility of Kiswahili predominates for the top-down signposts that aim to pass information to the public quickly (Bwenge 2009; Lusekelo, Mdukula 2021; Peterson 2014; Yang 2014). In this paper, we argued that although the literature shows the utility of Kiswahili is skewed towards the communicating intended message, the COVID-19 crisis in Tanzania expanded the utility of Kiswahili in the public universities in the country. This is contrary to the suggestion proposed by Lema (2021) that English is pushing further into the domains of Kiswahili usage. This investigation finds that the universities' communities communicate easily in Kiswahili for the imperative information related to the COVID-19 pandemic. If English had been the vehicular communication of vital information, public universities would not have opted for Kiswahili to address COVID-19 issues.

Another discussion revolved around the contents of the expressions about the COVID-19 pandemic. We argued that the expressions in statements selected specific Kiswahili words which are primarily associated with some clusters provided in Basch et al. (2021) and Mohlman and Basch (2021): warning (e.g. „tafadhari nawa mikono“=please wash hands), caution (e.g. VAA barakoa=wear face-mask), safety („tujilinde“=let us protect ourselves; „hii ni silaha muhimu usiache“=this is an important weapon, do not abandon it, etc. Unfortunately, we found no English word features in these signposts that express the key terms provided in the references cited above.

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