Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667



East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences
eajass.eanso.org
Volume 8, Issue 3, 2025
Print ISSN: 2707-4277 | Online ISSN: 2707-4285
Title DOI: https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-4285

EAST AFRICAN NATURE & SCIENCE ORGANIZATION

Original Article

Language Choice and Accommodation in Environmental Signs in Nyanza, Kenya: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective

Cecilia Wanjala[1*], *Peter Mose, PhD*[1] *& Robert Omari, PhD*[1]

[1] Kisii University, P. O. Box 408-40200, Kisii, Kenya.
[*] Author for Correspondence ORCID ID; https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3062-563X; Email: cecil.maruti7@gmail.com@gmail.com

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

Date Published:

18 September 2025

Keywords:

Environmental signs, Language choice, Monolingual, Code switching, English, Swahili, Indigenous.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to examine patterns of language choice in environmental signage in Nyanza, Kenya. While environmental signs are essential tools of communication for conveying ecological messages to target audiences, the focus here is not on accommodation strategies per se but on how linguistic diversity is reflected in the choices of language used. Environmentalists employ signage as a medium to reach varied audiences, and this study seeks to uncover the underlying patterns of language selection that shape the communicative effectiveness of these signs. Given that Nyanza, Kenya, is a multilingual region, developers of environmental signs in this region must choose the language to use. Thus, the main objective of this study was to analyse the functional implications of the linguistic choices of developers of environmental signs in Nyanza, Kenya. Data were collected from 100 environmental signs in the urban and peri-urban areas of three counties, including Kisumu, Kisii and Migori counties. The environmental signs were photographed, after which the texts written on them were transcribed for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Findings reveal that most environmental signs in Nyanza, Kenya, are written in English. Swahili-only environmental signs came second to English-only environmental signs. There were also significant instances of English-Swahili code switching. Indigenous languages were featured only in the environmental signs that were studied. The study is significant because it highlights the functional state of language in environmental conservation in Nyanza, Kenya. An analysis of the language of environmental preservation is vital, given the multilingual state of the study area. The study triggers deep insights into the linkages between language and the environment.

APA CITATION

Wanjala, C., Mose, P. & Omari, R. (2025). Language Choice and Accommodation in Environmental Signs in Nyanza, Kenya: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, *8*(3), 487-498. https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

CHICAGO CITATION

Wanjala, Cecilia, Peter Mose and Robert Omari. 2025. "Language Choice and Accommodation in Environmental Signs in Nyanza, Kenya: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective." *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 8 (3), 487-498. https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667.

HARVARD CITATION

Wanjala, C., Mose, P. & Omari, R. (2025), "Language Choice and Accommodation in Environmental Signs in Nyanza, Kenya: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective", *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 8(3), pp. 487-498. doi: 10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667.

IEEE CITATION

C., Wanjala, P., Mose & R., Omari "Language Choice and Accommodation in Environmental Signs in Nyanza, Kenya: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective", *EAJASS*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 487-498, Sep. 2025.

MLA CITATION

Wanjala, Cecilia, Peter Mose & Robert Omari. "Language Choice and Accommodation in Environmental Signs in Nyanza, Kenya: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, no. 3, Sep. 2025, pp. 487-498, doi:10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

INTRODUCTION

Language choice and accommodation are central concerns in linguistic and semiotic studies, especially in contexts where communication is intended for diverse audiences. Scholarship on accommodation has consistently underscored its implications for inclusivity, power, and effectiveness. Burke (2017), for example, highlights how signed language interpreting demonstrates the tension between providing alternatives and the absence of real agency, showing that accommodation is rarely a neutral process. Similarly, Smith (2022) frames the "language of accommodation" as a dynamic process conditioned by communicative, structural, and environmental factors. These insights demonstrate that language choices are not arbitrary; they are embedded in broader negotiations of accessibility and social positioning.

In multimodal and environmental communication, the role of context in shaping meaning has also been emphasised. Dunham (1989) points out that the transparency of manual signs varies according to linguistic and nonlinguistic environments, a reminder that meaning-making is co-determined by ecological and social surroundings. Maran (2017) reinforces this through a typological analysis of environmental signs, showing their diversity and embeddedness within ecological and cultural systems. This perspective situates environmental signs not just as carriers of information but as semiotic resources deeply interwoven with social and environmental life.

Norton (1996) extends this discussion by examining how safari tourism discourse in East Africa reproduces specific ways of experiencing and relating to nature. His work illustrates how language and signs in environmental contexts often serve ideological purposes, shaping perceptions and behaviours toward the environment. In multilingual societies such as Nyanza, Kenya, this interplay between language, environment, and ideology is particularly complex, given the co-existence of English, Kiswahili, and indigenous languages, each carrying different social meanings and symbolic power.

Though environmentalists in Nyanza, Kenya, use environmental signs to communicate, the effectiveness of these signs is not yet fully understood. The choice of language in environmental signs plays a major role in shaping people's conduct toward the environment, as the information presented must be read, interpreted, and acted upon by intended audiences. Despite the visible presence of environmental signs in the region, there are widespread violations of the messages inscribed on them. Otieno, Owuor and Opata (2012) cited a 2010 UN-habitat report, which revealed the persistence of environmental challenges such as pollution in Nyanza despite

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

ongoing efforts to alleviate them. Specifically, waste from hotels, offices, markets, households, institutions and commercial spaces is poorly managed in Nyanza (Otieno, Owuor and Opata, 2012). The report suggests a possible disconnection between language choice and communicative effectiveness. This warrants a closer investigation of the language of environmental signs in Nyanza, particularly in relation to how accommodation strategies and linguistic resources are employed.

In this study, environmental signs are understood as physical forms developed to communicate environment-related information. Language choice, therefore, refers to the deliberate selection of English, Kiswahili, or indigenous languages, or combinations thereof, on these signs. Monolingual signs typically employ only one language, while bilingual or code-switched signs alternate between two or more languages to reflect the linguistic diversity of the region. Given that Nyanza is marked by high levels of multilingualism, this study adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as an appropriate framework for examining environmental signs. SFL is particularly suited to this context because it views language as a social semiotic resource, foregrounding how meaning is constructed and negotiated in real communicative settings. By focusing on Halliday's three metafunctions, ideational, interpersonal, and textual, the framework enables the analysis of how language choice not only conveys environmental information but also positions readers, builds relationships with audiences, and organises messages for maximum clarity and impact. This orientation makes it possible to assess whether and how the linguistic diversity of Nyanza's urban and peri-urban spaces is reflected in environmental signage, and to uncover the strategies of accommodation employed to reach heterogeneous audiences. SFL allows the study to move beyond a descriptive cataloguing of language use and instead interrogate the functional effectiveness of multilingual communication in shaping environmental awareness and action.

Statement of the Problem

Although environmental communication has been widely studied in Africa, most works (e.g., Nhamo, 2013; Mwaura, 2017) focus on policy frameworks and ecological awareness campaigns rather than the linguistic choices employed in environmental signs. Research on language and signage in Kenya (see Mazrui & Mazrui, 1995; Kembo-Sure, 2003) has demonstrated that language choice impacts accessibility and interpretation; however, little attention has been paid to how environmental signs cater to diverse audiences in multilingual contexts, such as Nyanza. Existing studies on Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) demonstrate how texts construct meaning, but their application to environmental signage in Kenya remains underexplored. This gap necessitates an investigation into how language choice and accommodation in environmental signs influence comprehension and engagement, thereby determining their effectiveness in shaping environmental behaviour in Nyanza.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Linguistic Diversity in Kenya

Despite the lack of consensus on the exact number of languages spoken in Kenya, there is general agreement that the country is distinctly multilingual. Barasa (2023) identifies about 74 languages in the Kenyan linguistic landscape, while Dwivedi (2014) estimates the number at 42, and Muriungi and Mudogo (2021) suggest 69. These variations result from varying categorisations of dialects. While scholars like Barasa (2023) and Muriungi and Mudogo (2021) position dialects as independent languages, Dwivedi (2014) merges dialects. The variations highlight the difficulty of quantifying Kenya's linguistic diversity but affirm its multilingual character. Although these studies provide valuable insights into the breadth of linguistic plurality in Kenya, they focus primarily on documenting the number of languages rather than examining how this multilingualism manifests

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

in specific communicative domains such as environmental signage. Consequently, there is limited scholarly attention on how language choice and accommodation are negotiated in public signage, particularly within ecologically sensitive contexts such as Nyanza. This study, therefore, seeks to extend the discourse by applying a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective to investigate how environmental signs draw on multilingual resources to achieve communicative effectiveness and shape environmental consciousness.

The multilingual state of Kenya has been the source of controversies surrounding the dominance of certain languages over others. Specifically, Dwivedi (2014) states that despite Kenya's population speaking numerous languages, English remains dominant.

Given that environmental signs play a crucial role in relaying information, linguists must examine the language in use. This is because language is linked to the environment, as suggested by Haugen and Halliday (Zhang, 2022). The choice of language in environmental discourse is crucial because it serves as the main tool for communicating specific messages (Maseko & Siziba, 2024). When a language is chosen for discourse, it shapes information packaging, which in turn influences the audience's understanding of specific environmental issues and influences sustainability actions (Prodanovska-Poposka, 2024).

Language as a Multimodal Element in Discourse

Environmental signs are multimodal in nature, and the written language in them constitutes one of the most crucial means of conveying information. Liu (2013) noted that as a semiotic mode, language creates meaning through the organisation of text. Those who choose to develop environmental signs choose words aimed at fulfilling communicative metafunctions, including the ideational (relating to ideas by the author of the text), textual (relating to the meaning created by textual organisation), and interpersonal (relating to author-audience interactions) metafunctions (Liu, 2013). Exploring the linguistic choices of environmentalists in Nyanza, Kenya, reveals their preferred textual semiotic mode within the broad multilingual context. As a semiotic mode, language is vital because it shapes the meanings created by authors of different semiotic forms.

Monolingual versus Code-Switched Semiotic Modes

When multilinguals address monolinguals, they often choose monolingual modes that are understood by the monolinguals (Christison & Krulatz, 2025). In the Kenyan context, however, most people are multilingual because, according to Muriungi and Mudogo (2021), most individuals speak at least one indigenous language in addition to English and Swahili. Thus, the developers of environmental signs have opportunities to choose one of many languages out of the available linguistic repertoire depending on the audience's multicompetence. Of relevance in this case is that when environmental signs are monolingual, they are bound to express ideas aligned to the linguistic regime adopted (Youvan, 2024). People's perception of their surroundings is mediated by language (Youvan, 2024). As a result, when one language is chosen for use in a multilingual context like Nyanza, Kenya, the audience's perception of the environment and environmental issues is likely to be conditioned by that language only.

Semiotic modes that feature code switching usually involve picking at least two languages from the available linguistic repertoire and using these languages to represent messages. Code switching can be either formal or informal (Nazri & Kassim, 2023). Its use in different contexts may be motivated by the need for emphasis, solidarity, or social identity. Liu (2008) noted that while code switching may be advantageous, its interpretation is dependent on the audience's ability to interpret the different codes being transmitted. In this case, for environmental signs that feature code switching to

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

communicate effectively, the target audiences must be in a position to understand the codes in question.

Indigenous Languages in Discourse

Onebunne and Chinazom (2024) observe that Africa is continuously losing its indigenous languages. Dwivedi (2014) notes that in Kenya, English has overtaken Swahili and indigenous languages. The latter languages have taken a subordinate position in most spheres of language use. Thus, though most people who live in Nyanza, Kenya, speak at least one indigenous language, as stated by Muriungi and Mudogo (2021), most of the indigenous languages in the country are not used in discourse.

The Ecolinguistic Approach

Language choice as it relates to environmental communication is vital because, in 1972, Haugen originated the concept of ecolinguistics, which suggests that language is linked to the environment (Zhang, 2022). Specifically, Haugen suggested that aspects of language, such as its status, diversity, development, survival, and ontology, are linked to the environment (Zhang, 2022). In the early 1990s, Halliday developed a corresponding ecolinguistic model, which suggests that language affects the environment (Zhang, 2022). In Kenya, the multilingual state of the country suggests that the languages in use shape the environment. As a result, by examining the dynamics of language choice in environmental discourse, deeper understandings of the links between language choice and the environment can be unravelled.

This study applied two models, one being language ecology by Haugen (Haugen, 1972). Haugen's model ideally supports the study of the links between different languages and the environments in which they are used. Thus, language used in environmental discourse is shaped by the linguistic ecosystem. As such, considerations of the audience and multilingualism play important roles in shaping language choice in environmental discourse. The second model applied is Halliday's systemic functional approach, part of which touches on the way the use of language shapes the environment and the way language reflects people's relationship with the environment (Halliday, 1990; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was adopted for the study. A total of 100 environmental signs were sampled for the study. 100 signs were chosen to attain representativeness across the study area. Moreover, 100 signs were adequate for thematic saturation and still allowed in-depth analysis of the signs. The urban and peri-urban areas of three counties in Nyanza, Kenya, including Kisii, Migori, and Kisumu, were chosen for the study. Purposive sampling of the signs was conducted to ensure all the signs were relevant to the study. Each of the three counties produced at least 30 environmental signs to ensure the sample was adequately representative of the study area. The chosen number of signs for each county ensured that the thematic saturation attained would reflect reality for the whole region. The researcher used observation to identify environmental signs. The relevant signs were photographed. Thereafter, the text on each environmental sign was transcribed and tabulated. Translation was done for signs that were written in languages other than English. After translation, the researcher established the relative frequency of each language used in the environmental signs to determine the extent to which each one of them was used. Thematic analysis was conducted to establish specific trends that characterise language choice among environmentalists in Nyanza, Kenya.

FINDINGS

Languages Featured in Environmental Signs in Nyanza, Kenya

English Monolingual Signs

The current study found that most of the environmental signs across Kisumu, Kisii, and Migori were written exclusively in English (see Figures 1 and 2 for examples). In line with the tenets of ecolinguistics, this finding indicates that

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

environmental cues in the studied context predominantly condition audiences to process information through English. Even though the majority of the population speaks Swahili and indigenous languages, audiences are expected to perceive and interpret environmental messages primarily in English.

The choice of English reflects the dominance of the language in Kenya's institutional and public spheres. Developers of the signs, such as Figure 1 and Figure 2, encode environmental meanings through English, thereby aligning the representation of environmental issues with official and formal registers. Figures 1 and 2 are environmental signs with strong institutional affiliations. Their reliance on English, like most formal environmental signs that were studied, reveals a preference for English in processing environmental messages. The signs reveal institutions' perception of English as the best language for communication.

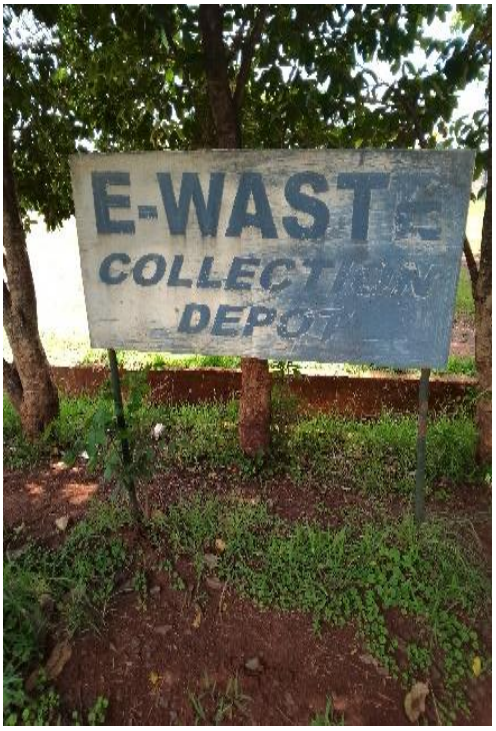
The reliance on English positions audiences in a less egalitarian communicative relationship. When an audience member reads "E-Waste collection depot" (see Figure 2), he/she must process the information in English or fail to do so completely if he/she cannot decode it. The producers of the signs assume an authoritative stance by privileging English, which implicitly constructs social distance between institutions and the local audience, many of whom are more conversant in Swahili and indigenous languages.

Furthermore, the consistent use of English organises the semiotic environment into a monolingual communicative order. This textual choice conditions addressor–addressee interactions by constraining the flow of environmental information within the boundaries of English-only discourse (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). The result is a linguistic landscape that marginalises local codes and reinforces the institutional authority of English. This implies an understanding of environmental issues in the region is aligned with the ideologies of the dominant linguistic regime, which is English.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Swahili Monolingual Signs

Some of the studied signs were written in Swahili only (see figures 3 and 4). Despite Swahili holding dual status as Kenya's official and national

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

language, its use was less prominent in the environmental signs than English.

Despite Swahili featuring in environmental signs, its subordinate position to English reinforces the fact that people are more likely to think about environment-related issues in English than in Swahili.

An additional observation is that despite Swahili serving as an official language, its use was more prominent in informal environmental signs than formal ones. The informal environmental signs, which cannot be linked to specific institutions or authorship, demonstrated a marked preference for Swahili. This stands in contrast to formal signs, typically associated with learning institutions, non-governmental organisations, and government agencies, which predominantly employ English.

This linguistic choice reflects the different social processes and institutional roles encoded in the signs: Swahili indexes community-based, everyday communication of environmental messages, while English represents institutional authority and official discourse in communicating about the environment. In Figures 3, 4, and 5, the environmental messages target communities outside formal institutions. The use of Swahili in community-based environmental signs suggests that within these communities, developers of environmental signs view the language as more relatable and effective.

The reliance on Swahili in informal signage suggests an attempt by sign producers to establish solidarity and closeness with local audiences, thereby construing a more egalitarian relationship. For example, in Figure 3, "*Tafadhali usitupe taka taka hapa*" (Please!!! Do not throw garbage in here) reduces the social distance between the sign and the audience by using Swahili. Being that Swahili is more widely spoken than English in the study area, the environmental sign not only capitalises on the author's authority but also makes the message more relatable.

Additionally, the patterning of Swahili in informal contexts and English in formal contexts creates a clear thematic distinction in the linguistic landscape, organising the environment into domains of communal versus institutional authority. Thus, language choice in environmental signage not only encodes content but also enacts and organises social relations within the ecological context of communication. For instance, "*Usitupe takataka hapa*" (See Figure 4) (Do not throw garbage here) not only captures the recurrent challenge of poor garbage disposal, but also communal relations.

Examples

Figure 3



"Please!!!

Do not throw garbage in here."

Figure 4



"Do not throw garbage here."

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

Figure 5



"Throw and find yourself in trouble."

English-Swahili Code-Switched Signs

Some of the studied environmental signs featured English-Swahili code-switching (see Figure 6 and Figure 7). The code-switching occurred in two ways, one of them being the use of Swahili words alongside English words and the other being the use of Swahili words and English numerals. English numerals were used to list behavioural expectations in relation to the environment and to quantify the fines that would be imposed on those who violate different behavioural expectations. The presence of English–Swahili code-switched environmental signs reflects a hybrid communicative strategy within the linguistic landscape. Unlike monolingual signs, these bilingual cues simultaneously draw on both the local and institutional linguistic repertoires.

Code-switching enables sign producers to encode environmental meanings across multiple semiotic domains. English contributes institutional authority and formal register, while Swahili anchors the message in local, everyday experiences. For example, in Figure 6, the words "Fine 85,000" are written in English while the words "*usikojoe hapa*" (do not urinate here) are written in Swahili. This dual encoding broadens the semiotic reach of the message by making it intelligible and relatable to diverse audiences.

Code-switched signs mediate the social distance observed in monolingual signage. By blending English and Swahili, developers of the signs, such as Figure 6, enact both authority and solidarity: authority through English as the language of governance and education, and solidarity through Swahili as the language of community interaction. This linguistic hybridity allows sign producers to negotiate a more inclusive relationship with audiences.

The alternation between English and Swahili also organises the message into layered communicative segments. English often frames the technical or formal aspects of the environmental message, such as numbering and fines, such as "Fine 85,000," while Swahili conveys affective or action-oriented appeals such as "*usikojoe hapa*" (do not urinate here) (see Figure 6). This structuring creates textual cohesion that resonates with multiple readerships, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of environmental communication.

Figure 6



"Fine 85,000/=

Warning: "Do not urinate here!"

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

Figure 7



"Warning!!! Warning!!!

1. Do not urinate
2. Do not throw garbage in this area.

Take care of the environment, patriot."

Indigenous Language Signs

Current findings show that most environmental signs in Nyanza, Kenya, do not use indigenous languages. Only two of the identified environmental signs featured Dholuo (see Figure 8 and Figure 9). No other indigenous language was featured in environmental signs that were studied. The implication is that environmentalists in Nyanza, Kenya, seldom view indigenous languages as a major resource for communicating environment-related messages. As a result, the authors of environmental discourse in the region condition audiences to perceive environmental issues from the perspective of English, which is the dominant language. Those who read the environmental signs are more likely to think about environmental issues from the point of view of the dominant linguistic regime than languages such as Dholuo, Kuria and Ekegusii, which they speak.

Figure 8



"Warning

This water is not for consumption."

Figure 9



"The garden of Nembi

Small but clean"

DISCUSSION

Use of English

The findings of the current study on the dominance of English in environmental signs are aligned with observations made by Dwivedi (2014), who noted that English has attained a supreme position over all other languages in Kenya. The current findings are also similar to those recorded earlier by Barasa (2023). Though Barasa (2023) did not focus on

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

environmental signs, the researcher reported the dominance of English as a Lingua Franca in Kenya. Moreover, a study by Muriungi and Mudogo (2021), which explored the language used in Kenyan public signs, showed that the authors of those signs mainly use English. A little further to the North of Africa results by Akindele (2011) revealed a similar trend following a study on public signs. The emergent trend is that English is the dominant language of discourse in Kenya and beyond.

Use of Swahili

Findings on the development of Swahili monolingual environmental signs are supported by Barasa (2023), who noted that Swahili is more utilised than Kenyan native languages because it is spoken by many people in the country. Swahili features prominently in Kenya's language policies because it works alongside English as an official language and is the country's national language (Barasa, 2023). Despite holding these two positions, Swahili lags in its use in environmental signs in Nyanza, Kenya.

In a different study, Benedicto (2022), who studied hospital signs in Tanzania, found that the dominance of Swahili on the signs was shaped by the large number of individuals who speak the language. Though Kenya also boasts of a large Swahili-speaking population, the language does not dominate environmental signs.

The situation in Kenya is unique because part of the history of Swahili captures its side-lined status in the formal contexts such as schools and government institutions, and this has contributed to its association with informal settings. History shows that though Swahili is a regional Lingua Franca spoken in East Africa and Central Africa, English has remained dominant because it is the language of instruction for most subjects, and Swahili remains a subject of study (Mose & Kaschula, 2019). This is unlike Tanzania, where Swahili is the language of instruction (Mose & Kaschula, 2019).

Code Switching

Giuffre (2016) links the use of numerals to relationships between different codes. For instance, Swahili words may be better listed and enumerated using English numerals than Swahili words. Moreover, fines are written in numerals rather than Swahili words. Giuffre (2016) explains that in discourse development, the use of numerals supports structuring. Numerals also condition reasoning to the specific discourse context (Giuffre, 2016). This implies that the choice of Swahili words and English numerals in environmental signs not only facilitates organisation but also interpretation.

Indigenous Languages

Though indigenous languages are spoken by the majority of the Kenyan population, these languages have not attained the same status as English and Swahili over the years. In Kenya, part of the early language policy required teachers to use Swahili as a language of instruction to teach early literacy (Mose & Kaschula, 2019). None of the indigenous languages of Kenya has attained the same status that Swahili has as a Lingua Franca.

Kenya's historical relegation of indigenous languages to the background in policy making has shaped their use even in discourse. Nyanza is home to dominant indigenous languages such as Ekegusii and Dholuo, alongside Kuria, which is also widely spoken. Despite the dominance of these languages in the region, the limited use of these languages in environmental signs exemplifies what Onebunne and Chinazom (2024) call diminished use of indigenous languages, which is taking place not just in Kenya but also in other parts of Africa.

CONCLUSION

The choice of language in environmental signs is vital because it influences effectiveness. In essence, language implementation takes place in the language that is used in environmental discourse. Audiences are likely to perceive language and understand meanings as conditioned by the

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

language in use. The implication is that meanings that are embedded in indigenous languages are left out and may eventually be lost when these languages are not used in environmental discourse. The findings have important implications, one of them being the development of policies to guide the selection of the language used to develop environmental signs. Policy can guide linguistic choices that favour balanced use of languages and limit the over-reliance on English, which may leave out meanings that are embedded in indigenous languages. Shukurova (2025) acknowledges that within the traditional setting, ecological practices are tied to language. Extensive reliance on nonindigenous languages leads to the loss of those ecological practices tied to indigenous languages. Such loss is linked to the loss of indigenous terms that contribute to environmental conservation. Environmental signs that are written in indigenous languages can be translated when necessary in the context of globalisation. Additionally, developers of environmental signs can be offered support by the government, linguists and non-governmental organisations. Support can be directed toward the development of environmental signs whose language choices reflect the cultural understandings of the environment and, in turn, increase the potential impact of the signs.

REFERENCES

Akindele, O. D. (2011). Linguistic Landscapes as Public Communication: A Study of Public Signage in Gaborone, Botswana. *International Journal of Linguistics, 3* (11-11.

Barasa, D. (2023). Language ideologies, policies, and practices within the multilingual Kenyan context. *Journal of Linguistics, Literary and Communication Studies, 2* (1), 55-62.

Benedicto, G. (2022). Linguistic landscape of referral hospitals in Tanzania: Reasons for language choice on signage. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences, 7* (2), 148-157.

Burke, Teresa Blankmeyer. "Choosing Accommodations: Signed Language Interpreting and the Absence of Choice." *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, vol. 27, no. 2, June 2017, pp. 267-299. DOI: 10.1353/ken.2017.0018

Christison, M., & Krulatz, A. (2025). *Promoting multilingual practices for linguistically diverse learners in global contexts*. Tylor & Francis.

Dwivedi, A. V. (2014). Linguistic realities in Kenya: A Preliminary Survey. *Ghana Journal of Linguistics, 3* (2), 25-32.

Dunham, J. (1989). The Transparency of Manual Signs in a Linguistic and an Environmental Nonlinguistic Context. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 5* (4), 214-225. DOI: 10.1080/07434618912331275266

Giuffre, M. (2016). Numerical Expressions in Everyday Language. *Languages and Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Linguistics, 1* (4), 1-6.

Halliday, M. (1990). New ways of meaning: The challenge to applied linguistics. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *6,* 7–36.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. (2014). *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 4th edn, London: Routledge.

Haugen, E. (1972). *The ecology of language.* Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

Kembo-Sure. (2003). Language and the public sphere in Kenya: The case of the *English* phenomenon. In A. Ojo & L. Moshi (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Conference of the African Linguistics Association* (pp. 89-98). Africa World Press.

Liu, J. (2013). Visual images interpretive strategies in multimodal texts. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 4* (6), 1259-1263.

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3667

Liu, P. (2008). *Code-switching and code-mixing*. GRIN Verlag.

Maseko, B., & Siziba, L. (2024). Environmental Conservation and the Bulawayo CBD as a Linguistic Landscape Construction: An Ecolinguistics Perspective. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00219096241291054

Mose, N. P., & Kaschula, H. R. (2019). A case study for the adoption of Swahili as a language of early school literacy instruction in Ekegusii-speaking areas of western Kenya. *Nordic Journal of African Studies, 28* (2), 1-26.

Muriungi, S., & Mudogo, B. (2021). Linguistic diversity in a multilingual context: A case of Kenyan universities. *LLT Journal on Language and Language Teaching, 24* (2), 450-460.

Nazri, S. N., & Kassim, A. (2023). Issues and functions of code-switching in studies on popular culture: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Language Education and Applied Linguistics, 13* (2):7-18.

Maran, T. (2017). Towards an integrated methodology of ecosemiotics: The concept of nature-text. *Sign Systems Studies, 45* (1/2), 88–110. https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2017.45.1-2.04

Mazrui, A. A., & Mazrui, A. M. (1995). *Swahili state and society: The political economy of an African language*. East African Educational Publishers.

Mwaura, P. (2017). *Communication and environmental governance in Africa: A comparative study*. Routledge.

Nhamo, G. (2013). *Green governance and environmental policy in Africa: A transformative agenda*. Africa Institute of South Africa.

Norton, A. (1996). Experiencing nature: The reproduction of environmental discourse in safari tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research, 23* (2), 355-371. https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(95)00065-8

Onebunne, I. J., & Chinazom, E. S. (2024). African languages and the global future. *AKU, 5* (2), 107-122.

Otieno, J. P., Owuor, O., & Opata, G. (2012). Coping with environmental challenges in the medium size town of Ahero in Nyanza province, Kenya. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies, 3* (6), 856-862.

Prodanovska-Poposka, V. (2024). Exploring the intersection of ecological language awareness and sustainability: Implications for environmental discourse. *International Journal of Advanced Natural Sciences and Engineering Research*, *8* (4), 454–459.

Shukurova, Z. (2025). The interconnection between language and environment: A linguistic ecology perspective. *International Journal of Education, Social Science & Humanities, 13* (2), 92-96.

Smith, A. N (2022). *Language of Accommodation*. Virginia Tech.

Youvan, D. C. (2024). *The semiotics of newspeak: Language, power, and thought control in Orwell's 1984*. DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.32611.57128

Zhang, W. (2022). Language, culture, and ecology: An exploration of language ecology in pragmatics. *English Language Teaching, 15* (6), 80-87.

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.