

Full Length Article

Article Number 286

Analysis of Linguistic Landscape of Selected Towns in Oromia: The Case of Policy and Practice Gap

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Citation: Alemayehu Fekede & Wondowsen Tesfaye (2019). Analysis of Linguistic Landscape of Selected Towns in Oromia: The Case of Policy and Practice Gap Vol.6.No.2, pp.3-25
eISSN: 2408-9532; pISSN: 2412-5180. Web link: http://journals.ju.edu.et/index.php/ejssls
Publication history: Received in revised form 10 Sep2019; Published online: December 24, 2019
Subscription (electronics): Submission fee: Free of payment ; Accessing fee: Free of payment
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Abstract

The main purpose of the study was to investigate language use practices in the linguistic landscape (LL) of purposively selected towns in Oromia focusing on policy divergence and convergence, de facto and/or de jure. The study employed a theoretical concept called structuration principle from sociology. The main data sources were signs collected from purposively selected towns, policy related documents and interview with owners of signs and government bodies. Accordingly, visual data consisting of 1500 photographs of signs were collected from the main streets of Adama, Jimma and Sebeta towns, 500 from each town. The data collected were systematically recorded, organized and classified for quantitative and qualitative analysis. The analysis demonstrated that some top- down and most of bottom-up signs showed the gap in policy issues. As used by federal government, Afan Oromo has no place on signs, but, Amharic and English. In the same environment, signs related to Oromia government use languages, Amharic and Afan Oromo and less frequently, English. The absence of clear policy of language use on signs at both federal and regional levels has sometimes resulted into conflicts. This is due to the fact that sign owners oppose the LL regulators in the towns. In fact, the municipality officials are careful in their monitoring of language use practices. Both for communication and symbolic values of the languages on signs, both the federal and regional governments need to have commitment and clear public policies to avoid linguistic and diversity marginalizing practices.

Keywords: /LinguisticLandscape/Oromia/Policyand Practice/Sign/Principle/Structuration/

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Language use on signs in public space has been the concern of officially bilingual and multilingual countries. Even, officially monolingual countries have also given attention to languages on signs (Backhaus, 2007). As a result, some countries have endorsed policies of language use on signs erected in urban environments under the umbrella of general language policy. International organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1996), have also ratified the issue of language use on sign so that nation states formulate policies addressing such language issues as one of the basic areas of human right. Particularly, the UNESCO declaration states that “all language communities have the right for their language to occupy a pre-eminent place in advertising, signs, external signposting, and in the image of the country as a whole” (Article 50.1). This shows that it is an obligation to use signs in a language familiar to the community in varied contexts. Broadly speaking, all these are among the areas of inquiry in a linguistic landscape (hereafter, LL).

In the Ethiopian context the issue of language or languages on sign has never been a big issue. It was after 1991, following the collapse of one of the linguistic assimilationist regimes, the Dergue, Ethiopia drafted a law that recognizes the linguistic plurality of the country and has tried to put it into practice (Constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995, Article 5). AsDu Plessis (2011, p. 194) shows, “regime changes involve the introduction of an additional language to the language environment, as occurred in Wales and elsewhere. Such changes become conspicuous on public signs that display the ‘added’ language(s) alongside the ‘established’.” Yet, the issue of language has become hot potatoes in the country. As a result, there is no adequate language policy overtly ratified, despite some favourable broad constitutional statements about language. Of course, the question of language is not a resolved issue in Ethiopia. Some oppose the current relative linguistic rights viewing it as an obstacle to social cohesion and mobility (Lanza & Hirut, 2013, p. 6) and others still claim further linguistic right.

LL as a research area has attracted many theorists from different fields including “linguistics, sociology, semiotics, communication and applied linguists” (Shohamy & Gorter 2009, p. 1). The focus of this study is on policy and practice issues as far as LL is concerned. From the languageplanning and policy perspective, LL helps to understand how government policies are realized by the language expression in written form in the public space, particularly on public sign displays, whether it is used by government or private agencies.

Though the great majority of people living in Oromia are Oromo, like many other federal regions of Ethiopia, it is also a home to other ethnic-linguistic groups. The Oromo are indigenous people who belong to the Cushitic language-speaking family of people, and who are known to have been living for thousands of years in

what is called today Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa (Mohammed, 1994, p. 77). Afan Oromo is one of the major languages in Africa and it is also the third Afro-Asiatic language in the world after Arabic and Hausa (Mohammed, 1994, p. 78).

Yet, it lacks well “developed literature and has less printed materials than any language with a comparable number of speakers anywhere in the world (Mohammed, 1994, p. 78). The main reason for this was the suppression of the language by successive Ethiopian rulers to create a homogenous state through their hidden assimilation process (Mekuria, 1994, p. 110). Afan Oromo, a family of Cushitic language, is an indigenous language spoken as mother tongue by people close to 34.4 per cent of the Ethiopian population, and can thus be regarded as the largest indigenous language in Ethiopia, compared with Amharic, a Semitic language, spoken by 27 per cent of the Ethiopian population (ECA, 2007). Currently, the official working language of Oromia is Afan Oromo. The official working language of the region, Afan Oromo is written with a modified Latin alphabet, called Qubee, which was believed more suitable to represent the Oromo phonemic structure (Amanuel, 2012, p. 219).

One of the research sites, Jimma town is located in the South-Western part of the country and it is a fertile area for such research due to its proximity to the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Region (SNNPR), which makes possible the coming together of varied ethno linguistic groups. As a result, according to Ethiopian Statistical Agency (ESA, 2007), from the total population of 120,960 residents of the town, speakers of Afan Oromo 46.7%, Amharic 17.1%, Dawuro 10%, Gurage 6.4% and etc. are living in Jimma town. On the other hand, from the 222,212 total population of Adama, speakers of Afan Oromo 38.6%, Amharic 34.2% Guragigna 11.8% and Tigrigna 3.3% and etc. are living in the town (CSA, 2007).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to Getachew and Derib (2006), “One of the primary issues that concern today’s Ethiopia is the question of language.”(p.38). This is caused not only due to the country’s linguistic diversity, but also its politics, ideology and administrative structures are based on this fact. Yet, the language policy challenges in relation to LL are not given attention by scholars. At global level, as Gorter (2005) observes, one of the main research interests of many scholars should be on the relationship of LL and official language policies, the interaction between top-down (signs used by public institutions) and bottom-up (signs used by private institutions) realities. Therefore, the current study takes the direction of the discrepancy on policy as reflected on signs.

Ethiopia has a huge potential for such research in different regions of the country, not only to promote the indigenous languages and identify language use problems, but also to implement linguistic policies and to take corrective measure where there is a deviation. From this viewpoint, there is a gap in LL research not only in Ethiopia, but also worldwide. The previous study such as Amanuel (2012) focused on the attitudes of LL inscribers in Jimma town, and it is another dimension of LL

research in a limited environment in the form of case studies. In the same way, LL research by Alemayehu and Takele (2016) is about ethno linguistic vitality issue which is the power and strength of languages in urban areas of Oromia.

Hence, not only at Oromia level, but also in Ethiopia, there is a gap in policy research that focus on LL. In fact, as LL research is on its infant stage and this study attempts to contribute the reality of towns in Oromia. Yet, LL is a dynamic sociolinguistic area that undergoes change every day; hence, this study reveals the realities of pre-political reform of Ethiopia, i.e. 2018 and before. Therefore, this study tries to address this gap by selecting three towns from Oromia (Jimma, Adama and Sebeta). Based on this, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the policy divergence and convergence among the regional and federal governments' signs and private signs in their language uses and choices in the LLs?
2. How is the assumed language use policy challenged by sign owners?
3. How is the government of Oromia reacting towards the language choices in the LLs?

2. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework

According to Coulmas (2009, p. 13) LL "is as old as writing." He argues that the creation of writing and urbanization stimulated one another, and the growth of urbanization demanded the use of languages on signs for smooth communication. For him, this was the origin of writing in the public space or LL. In definitions of Landry and Bourhis "public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs" were listed as elements of LL (1997, p. 23).

The visibility of languages on signs, or their absence has a direct link with language policy issues, and therefore, research on LL should have a room for investigating the relationship between the two. Though many countries have a general language policy, developing specific language policy, such as for languages on signs in public space hasn't got attention to now. As Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 24) note, the language planners in Brussels-Belgium and Canada-Québec were the first to write policies concerning the use of language on signs.

Shohamy (2006, p. 55) makes clear that the association between language policy and LL is unavoidable. According to her, it is through language policy in a particular country or region that one finds out how in general languages ought to be used in society in different domains, and especially, on public signs. The discrepancy between the government sign and the public sign in terms of language choice heralds the policy discord on language use. "It is in the difference between the "top-down" (government signs) and the "bottom-up" (non-government signs) in the use of the different languages that one can see how the public space serves as an arena where

language battles are taking place”, despite the fact that there is an official regulation (Shohamy, 2006, p. 110). The top-down signs confirm the policy’s language inclination, which everybody should take as a model.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) were the first scholars to coin the term LL and have categorized the basic functions of LL into two, informative and symbolic. In fact, there is no clear-cut difference between the two, as there is a kind of overlap. As informative function, LL provides evidence as to the demographic composition and linguistic make-up of residents in a particular area and its regional or national boundaries. In connection with this the LL can also serve as a cue to the type of language used as a communication in a particular environment. On the other hand, the symbolic function of LL adds a further layer of meaning in addition to its informative function and elucidates the relative status and power of language and linguistic groups and also the ethno-linguistic vitality of different inhabitants in a given area (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 27).

Language policy. According to Myers-Scotton (2004, p. 379) language policy is a civil war of languages. This shows how much the language policy issue is firmly connected with politics. For Spolsky (2009, p. 1) “Language policy is all about choices. If you are bilingual or plurilingual, you have to choose which language to use. Even if you speak only one language, you have choices of dialects and styles.” He also stresses that language policy issues are determined mostly considering social or political facts rather than linguistic realities (p. 1). Language policy depends on “specific documents, laws, regulations or policy documents that specify different language behaviours (Shohamy, 2006, p. 45).

However, language policy may not be always written. In other words, the real language policy of a political and social entity can be understood not only based on officially declared policy statements, but there are other devices that are used to indicate the hidden language policy, from the language practices of different language users, usually “in covert and implicit ways” (Shohamy, 2006, p. 45). Many countries have clearly stated, or de jure language policy. There are also countries with de facto or covert language policy. In some countries monolingual language policy is considered as a base for creating a homogenous strong nation, regardless of the linguistic rights of minorities. Yet, others chose multilingual and inclusive policies based on the existing realities. Therefore, there are “political and ideological forces behind language policies” (Shohamy, 2006, p. 48).

For some countries, language policy is very detailed to the extent that explains all language use related issues. For example, in Canada, Quebec the language policy states not only the basic principles, but also specific intervention and implementation strategies of the law. The main objective is to protect language shift among the French speaking majority who are under the influence of English that has many speakers in the whole of Canada. Therefore, the Quebec language policy has included how language should be used on signs (Shohamy, 2006, p. 50). In some countries, there is an implicit language policy which is usually called de facto policy. Such countries do not have overt policies that are declared in official documents. For instance, there is

no explicitly stated language policy that declares or states the status and uses of the English language in America. But, from the practice of the government and others, it is possible to understand the de fact language policy of the county (Shohamy, 2006, p. 50).

Ethiopian Language Policy. As Mesfin (2014, p. 18) states, the history of Ethiopian language policy has two stages: de facto and de jury. According to his category, the de facto language policy of Ethiopia was the practice of the pre-1955, which was related to the revision of the then constitution in 1955. Hence, the latter could be taken as the first overt language policy of Ethiopia though it lacks depth as a policy. The de jury language policy of the time had given Amharic, practically, the status of a national language. The constitution of the 1955 as the super legal document confirmed the status of Amharic, and since then, Amharic enjoyed the highest status in Ethiopia (Mesfin, 2014. p. 18). This had its own impact on other languages of the country to date.

The language policy of the imperial regime (Haileselassie) was intended to promote the use of one language, which is Amharic. According to some scholars, it was in line with the assumption that the use of one language is useful in bringing about national unification (Mekuria, 1994, p. 100; Getachew, Derib, 2006, p. 44) and during the time such practice had been common in other parts of Africa too. Furthermore, in 1955, Amharic was affirmed as the official language (national language) of Ethiopia, (article 125) following the revision of the 1931 constitution. The language policy of the imperial government was criticized and opposed because it had the goal of assimilation, as it favoured the use of only one language throughout the country despite the existing linguistic diversity.

Of course, the declaration was motivated to legally limit the use of other languages in formal settings. As a result, Amharic has been used in all the public sectors: in education, media, judiciary and administration, in all linguistic areas of the country.

Under the socialist dictatorship of the Dergue, there was some movement away from full linguistic domination. But overall, the centralist bent of the regime and the ethno-linguistic composition of the Dergue itself contributed to a perpetuation of Amharic language dominance at all levels and certainly the continued local perception of Amharic dominance (Smith, 2008, p. 220). To strengthen this idea Getachew and Derib (2006, p. 48) comment about the Dergue's constitution of 1987 as "Practically, there was no other Ethiopian languages given any official status, nor there was any implication in the constitution that other Ethiopian language could be used for official purposes" (Mekuria 1994, p. 107). The only attempt of the time was the adult literacy program in nationality languages. Gradually, as power rested on the president Mengistu, Ethno-linguistically-based groups claiming the earlier promises were labelled as "counter-revolutionary and narrow nationalists". Despite the rhetoric, the Dergue merged its socialist ideology with the imperialist ideology of the past emperors and "continued with their politics of centralization and homogenization of the multinational and multi-cultural empire" (Mekuria, 1994, p. 346).

Ethiopia for the first time experienced an unprecedented sociolinguistic change all across the nation following the 1991 demise of the Dergue and the coming to power of the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front). Immediately, all languages of Ethiopia were given equal recognition as stated in the transitional charter of the new government. Following this, Amharic which had been the only prestigious and national language was reduced to the status of the federal working language.

According to Smith (2008, p. 214), under current Ethiopian government, the issue of language policy is a highly contentious matter, due to historical partialities that has exerted its influence under the present language policy arrangement. Therefore, despite fundamental language policy changes observed under EPRDF government, the question of language is not a concluded agenda in Ethiopia.

Generally, even though Ethiopia is a home to many languages, in the history of Ethiopian language policy, there has never been a clear and detail overt language policy that describes how and in what domains the language function, except a brief statement in the constitutions. Particularly, there has never been a single statement in the constitutions about LL, or policies that exclusively devoted to the language use of signs, from the point of view of de jure policy.

2.2 Literature Review

In Ethiopia the works of Lanza and Hirut (2009; 2011) and Hirut and Lanza (2012) can be taken as a pioneering contribution in studying the LL of some towns in Ethiopia. Hence, the introduction of LL research in Ethiopia could be credited to these two scholars. Lanza and Hirut (2009) studied the LL of Mekele, Tigray National and Regional State from the viewpoint of language use ideology. However, their study is far from the current one as its focus is on the ideological dimension of signs within the recent Ethiopian socio-politics.

There is also another study by Lanza and Hirut (2011) that focuses on language contact and the roles of Amharic and English in Ethiopia, as observed from different literary practices, including LL practices in Tigray and Oromia. This study reveals that, the influence of Amharic is still in place in a covert form, both in Tigrigna and Afan Oromo "in spite of the new policy of ethnic federalism" that 'promotes' all languages (p. 296). According to this study, the influence of Amharic is not limited to the surface level of LL signs, "but also on the abstract grammatical level," such as in the word order of the languages on signs and also in textbook and on broadcast media. Yet, the study focus is different from the present one.

As far as the Oromia National Regional State context is concerned, one case study by Amanuel (2012) could be mentioned. Though Amanuel's work could be taken as a good start, it solely focuses on the attitude of LL inscribers' in writing in Afan Oromo in the LL of Jimma town, which means other languages were not included and signs as research objects were not included.

Besides, Hirut and Lanza (2012) have worked on LL from the perspective of religious contestations, particularly among different Christian religions in Addis

Ababa. They used a corpus of LL data and supported it with textual discourses collected from internet (p. 172). Their study has shown how the study of LL serves to influence the public in an attempt to attract potential new believers towards their religion, and also to maintain the followers of their own faith from being converted to the other. In their study, varied religious discourses were included using qualitative ethnographic methods (p. 172).

Moges and Blackwood (2016) have also explored the LL of the ancient city of Harar, focusing on how ethno-linguistic identity construction of Harari is projected through language in the public spaces (p. 131). This particular research setting is unique because its focus was on a minority Semitic language surrounded, and has co-existed with the majority Cushitic language. Hence the study attempted to examine how much the Harari language in the LL stands the influence of the relatively powerful groups, both numerically and politically “such as the Oromo, Amhara, and Tigray” (p. 131).

As a whole, though signs on display in public space are plentiful in Ethiopia, they have seldom been considered for analysis by specialists of language, communication and discourse, from the point of view of language policy-de facto or de jure. The available works so far have focused on ideology, religious contestation and attitude. Given complex sociolinguistic issues and highly diverse languages, LL research in Ethiopia is meagre and it is at its early stage. Hence, their studies are a base for the current study. Meanwhile, the current study is different widely not only with regard to the linguistic makeup of the research setting, but also with the underlying research focus, analytical tools and the methodology applied.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

“LL facts” are “characterized by dynamics of its own contingent on the nature of its linguistic, social, cultural, and political contexts” (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy and Barni, 2010, p. xix). Based on this assumption, this study employed a structuration principle of sociology as a theoretical framework for analysis (Ben-Rafael, 2009; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Barni 2010). From the point of view of the sociology-of-language, language use facts that represent the public space are reflections of social facts; and the variations observed have relation to general social phenomena (Ben-Rafael, 2009, p. 40).

Therefore, the basic assumption of the sociological study of linguistic landscapes is a focus on the communication using linguistic symbols in the public space, and the forces behind their moulding. Thus, analysing languages on signs from this perspective is important. The society living in certain urban environment can directly or indirectly influence how and what languages should be used on signs. The languages on signs also influence the society or readers. Therefore, bidirectional relationship exists between sociolinguistic context and LL. This is because the LL of a certain area signifies not only the relative power and status of different languages, but also it contributes to the creation of such sociolinguistic

context that can influence the society through its visual images (Cenoz & Gorter, 2009, p. 67-68).

Applying this “sociological theory [...] might guide investigations by encouraging researchers to focus systematically on specific contexts and circumstances, inquiring about, and elaborating on, LL society relations” (Ben-Rafael, 2009, p. 48), as LL is a product of social and political action. These sociological principles are: presentation of self, good reasons, power relations, and collective identity.

3. Methods

This study employed mixed methods. As Backhaus (2007, p. 146) recommends “... much can be learned from linguistic landscape research, particularly when qualitative and quantitative issues are dealt with in combination.” Supporting this fact, Blackwood (2015) argues “a symbiotic approach, where the quantitative and qualitative approaches feed into one another, is an ideal *modus operandi*” (p. 40).

The three towns were purposively selected because they have relatively large population and they are the only towns with the status of special zone. At each town level, the sampling was carried out by selecting the major streets taking to the busiest business areas based on purposive sampling method, so as to make the sample signs representative of each town. This was due to the fact that signs are more concentrated to the left and right of the main roads in the cities or towns. Private signs (bottom-up) are so dense in every major street.

In the same vein, top-down (government) signs, were collected on the base of taking a sign based on its more visibility. As many public offices are located not on major roads, attempts were made to get their signs, wherever they were situated. This was purposefully done, because public signs (regional or federal government) are relatively limited in number, compared with the private signs. Totally, 1500 signs were collected regardless of their language content.

Furthermore, to get data from LL actors, sign owners of private businesses participated through interview. As LL and languages on signs have strong links with policy issues (overt or covert), regional regulatory bodies and municipality officials and concerned officials of federal government of Ethiopia were interviewed. Accordingly, the interviews of 17 informants were considered in this study. As a whole, the data were collected for a year, four months in each town from December 2014 to December 2015.

In addition to photograph of sign and interview, the other data collecting tool used was policy document. In fact, as the focus of this study was on LL from the point of view of policy, government documents that concerns language use in general and the how of using language in public space had a central role. Hence, both federal and regional level documents were used as deemed important to the research objective. For quantitative analysis, simple descriptive statistics was made and concurrently presented with qualitative data from interview and policy documents in line with emerged themes.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Existing Policy Related Documents

This section presents the results of policy data, numerical analysis of LL items and analysis of interview data. Both constitutions' (federal and regional) policy statements about languages havenothing to say explicitly pertaining to urban signage in any domain of use, except the federalproclamation on advertisement (No. 759/2012). However, there are some decisions at a municipallevel by the CTO (Culture and Tourism Office) based on minor documents. These lower level regulatory documents give the primary position to the regional language, Afan Oromo as it is theregional official working language. Besides, the policy in the towns makes provision for theinclusion of additional languages such as Amharic and English to supplement the regional languagewith no precise mention of which language to follow Afan Oromo from the two languages (Amharicand English).

Hence, this section is devoted to the presentation of the data collected for the study throughpicture of the signs, policy documents and interview. The data related to official documents are presented first. This is because the data from the policy documents are the base for the otherquantitative data; in fact, the quantitative data by itself is generated from the qualitative data (thelanguages on signs).

Table 1: Language Related Decisions in Ethiopian Constitution

Type of Document and Year or Date Ratified	Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995)		
Domain	Languages and Rights of Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples		
Reference	Preamble	Chapter One, General Provisions, Article 5	Part Two, Democratic Rights Article, 39
The Statements	We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia:	All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition. Amharic shall be the workinglanguage of the Federal Government. Members of the Federation may bylaw determine their respectiveworking languages.	Every Nation, Nationality and People inEthiopia has the right to speak, to write and todevelop its own language;to express, to develop andto promote its culture;and to preserve its history.

In Table1, the 'year' or 'date' is referring to the time when the legal document was approved or published by the authorities. 'Domain' refers to the area of the application of the policy/declaration. Additionally, reference means part of the big document where exactly the policy statement aboutlanguage use is found, and it includes the section numbers and articles that are relevant to languagelegislation. And, the statement stands for what is exactly stated in the official document. As far

as language is concerned, this is the only point mentioned in the current Ethiopian Constitution. This can be taken only as an advisory that aims to provide a general background to guide the use of languages across various domains where languages are used in such areas as education, courts, administration, and others in Ethiopia and in Federal regions.

There are countries with no visible policy when it comes to a clear pronouncement on language policy. In some cases, the existence of a policy can only be inferred on the basis of a vague and inarticulate implicit principle or tradition. Of course, the lack of a policy might actually in itself comprise an intentional and well-calculated “policy of no policy”, geared towards the maintenance of a status quo (Chumbow, 2010, p 4). There are also countries with some form of limited policy statement, which is restricted to one or two articles in a state explicit law, regarding language and language use as expressed and recorded in the current constitution of Ethiopia, for instance.

There is no distinct law on language and language issues that spells out the various considerations in the policy formulation or status planning decisions. As a result, there is no separate language policy implementation procedure at any level in the country that specifies obligations and responsibilities as far as languages on signs are concerned.

Table 2: LL Issue in a Proclamation on Advertisement

Type of Document and Year or Date Ratified	Federal Negarit Gazeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 27th August, 2012		
Domain	A proclamation on Advertisement, Proclamation No. 759/2012		
Reference	Part One: General Provision, Article 12 and Article 36	Part Five: Article 21, Outdoor Advertisement (No. 2 and 3)	Part Eight: Article 35, Penalty
The Statements	Any advertisement a) disseminated by using billboard, electronic screen or moving picture; b) written or affixed to a building or any structure or transport vehicle; c) disseminated by using banner, poster, sticker, brochure, leaflets or flier; d) disseminated through audiocassette, loud speaker; e) disseminated through any other related means of dissemination. Regions may issue regulations and directives necessary for implementation of this proclamation with respect to outdoor advertisement.	Any outdoor advertisement may not be placed in such a way as to be confused with traffic or direction signs, obstruct views, hamper or undermine traffic movement or safety, or spoil the beauty of the scenery. Any outdoor advertisement placed in accordance with this Article shall be written in local language or alphabet, or if it is written in local and foreign languages or alphabets, the local language or alphabet shall appear before or above the foreign language or alphabet.	... any person found guilty of violating Article 21 of This proclamation shall be punishable with a fine not less than Birr 10,000 and not exceeding Birr 100,000.

The proclamation on advertisement was ratified at the federal level for different types of advertisements such as mass media, telecom, postal, internet, outdoor advertisements and the like. Of these, the outdoor advertisement part is directly relevant to this study. Because, though the proclamation's focus is so broad, and it gives little room for outdoor advertisement, it has included the issue of what and how languages should be used on the outdoor advertisement, which is the object of this study. According to Du Plessis (2011, p. 197) "Outdoor advertising in its broadest interpretation that includes all signs erected and displayed on the roads for the purpose of providing information, ranging from the simple ones such as "beware of the dog" signs on garden gates to the more familiar giant billboards that advertise commercial products." Therefore, all of the signs used as a research object in this study can be included under this category.

As a result, the proclamation has briefly touched the area of foreign and local languages and alphabets. By alphabet it means the coming together of the Latin, Ge'ez and others. According to this proclamation, outdoor advertisement refers to billboard, digital electronic screen, and advertisements written on buildings, banner,

poster, and etc. These are among the components of LL signs as Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 25) mentioned it. However, outdoor advertisement is more of commercial oriented as it can be deduced from the intention of the proclamation. Hence, only the private commercial signs could be categorized under it. Of course, as urban environments are centers of commerce, the great majority of the signs collected as data for this research are also outdoor advertisement.

One important data from this proclamation regarding language use for advertisement is that "... if the text is written in local and foreign languages or alphabets, the local language or alphabet shall appear before or above the foreign language or alphabet." Violating this decision also leads to punishment, as clearly put under Article 35 of the proclamation. Moreover, this federal level proclamation has left open that the regions can have their own "regulations and directives" according to their contexts. Unfortunately, there is no such legal document in Oromia, but common-sense practice.

According to the proclamation, where the local language is used on signs, it should get the prominent position. In this case, the outdoor advertisements used by anybody, private or/and government are obliged to use Afan Oromo as a local and working language in these towns. Because, though both Amharic and Afan Oromo are local languages, from the point of view of the proclamation, Afan Oromo becomes more local in the context of these advertisement proclamations and the study area (selected Oromia towns).

Though indirectly, a declaration on outdoor advertisement that the federal government has commenced has covered the policy of language use on signs with a regulation establishing the local languages as the dominant language on signs (Table 2). Particularly, article 21 of the proclamation no. 759/2012 mentions the specific choice of the language on signs and the script when including the case foreign languages are used. Despite this policy specification, data from the LL reveal that, 16.20% and 10.40% of the signs respectively totally exclude Afan Oromo and Amharic languages respectively.

However, the actual practice of the federal government on its outdoor advertisement is far from the statement of the proclamation. The foreign language, English is given the second status, and Amharic, the second local language in the study setting has become the primary language of signs. And Afan Oromo, the primary local language in the study areas, is totally absent from the advertisements of this federal government posted in the towns. The proclamation states that the violation of respecting the local languages results in punishment of up to 100,000 though there was no data obtained regarding the implementation of the fines.

This is an indication of policy discord as there is inconsistency between policy and the actual practice in the region's towns by the federal government that declared the proclamation. This is basically due to two reasons. One, responsible body, Oromia Culture Tourism is not aware of the presence of this law as confirmed through the interview. Second, there is a power imbalance in administration structure between

the federal institutions based in the towns and the concerned bodies in the towns' municipal administrations.

Policy and Practice Gap. Based on existing written related policy documents and some de jure practices of sign owners, comprehensive data and analysis is presented below.

Table 3: General Sample Count of Languages and Signs in the LL of the Three Towns

Language on signs		Examined Towns							
		Adama		Jimma		Sebeta		Grand Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Multilingual	Afan Oromo, Amharic & English	151	30.2	107	21.4	91	18.2	349	23.3
	Afan Oromo, Amharic & Arabic	3	0.6	0	0	1	0.2	4	0.27
	Chinese, English & Amharic	0	0	0	0	2	0.4	2	0.13
Bilingual	Afan Oromo & Amharic	244	48.8	188	37.6	313	62.6	745	49.7
	Afan Oromo & English	12	2.4	13	2.6	4	0.8	29	1.93
	Amharic & English	32	6.4	91	18.2	23	4.6	146	9.73
Monolingual	Afan Oromo	7	1.4	6	1.2	12	2.4	25	1.67
	Amharic	27	5.4	64	12.8	41	8.2	132	8.8
	English	22	4.4	31	6.2	13	2.6	66	4.4
	'Others'	2	0.4	0	0	0	0	2	0.13
Total		500	100	500	100	500	100	1500	100

As a whole there are ten categories of languages on the signs in the LLs of the towns, which can be further divided into three main types. These are multilingual signs that contain three categories and bilingual signs that also contain three types of co-visible languages. And the third one is monolingual sign that contains four different types of languages written separately (Table 3). From this much category, it is possible to conclude that there is no LL regulation based on a policy neither at regional level nor at municipality level.

Such difference on the figure of monolingual signs is due to a feeling among sign owners that Amharic is better read by their customers. There is also attitude related issue associated with the linguistic history of the country. Moreover, there are sign owners who do not want to identify themselves through their language uses. Such sign users choose English than Amharic and Afan Oromo. In fact, the role of English as world's lingua franca and associating it with quality, up-to-date and modernity has also its share. This was confirmed from the interview data. To supplement with the interview of one of the government bodies (regional) data, the following quote show

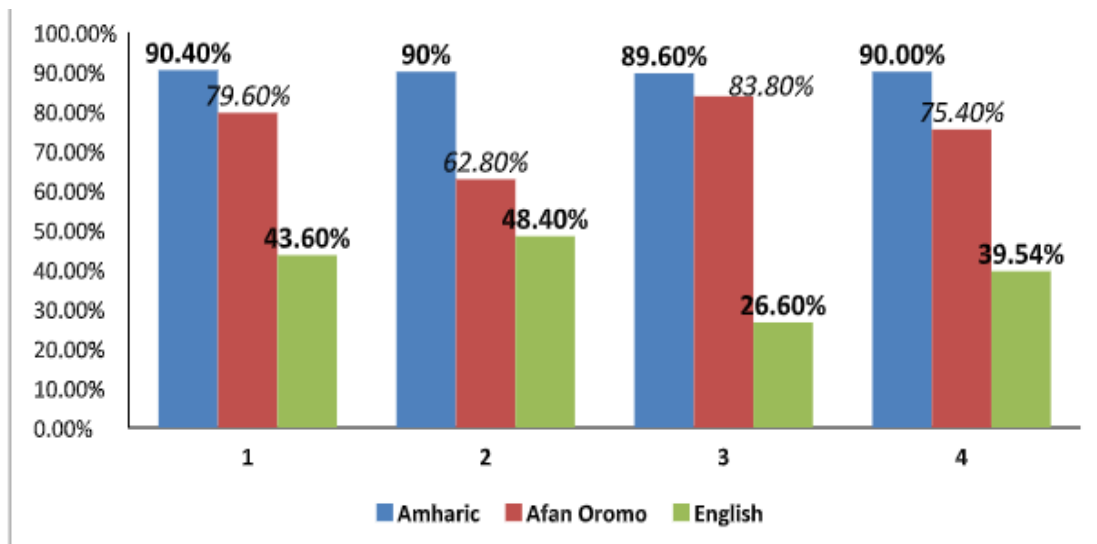
how much the private sign owners and the government bodies in the towns challenge each other.

We do not simply force them to include Afan Oromo on their sign. We first tell them what the proclamation says, what the constitution says, and the right given to develop their languages. And when we let them write in this language [Afan Oromo] they reduce its font that is almost invisible and unreadable. In contrast, we observe them writing in Amharic using a bigger font. To that matter, they argue to declare that that 'it is our right' (HS, Translation from Afan Oromo).

The results of the quantitative analysis also truly reflect the challenge the interviewee is stating. From the total signs (1500) collected, the majority were bilingual Afan Oromo and Amharic (49.67%) followed by multilingual Afan Oromo, Amharic and English signs (23.27%). Though there is a big gap between the towns in terms of the amount of multilingual, bilingual and monolingual signs, the tendency is similar in that in all the towns the bilingual, Afan Oromo and Amharic, are more dominant. In the same way, multilingual languages on signs comprising Afan Oromo, Amharic and English are the second frequently observed signs in the three towns. Amharic-English bilingual signs (9.73%) are more frequent than Afan Oromo-English bilingual signs (1.67%). This is also uniformly observed in the three towns, but with varying figures. Similarly, monolingual Amharic (8.80%) and English (4.40) signs are observed more than monolingual Afan Oromo sign (1.67%) uniformly in the three towns.

'Others' in Table 3 stands for signs of monolingual foreign languages, namely Chinese and Arabic which are observed on a sign posted by private sign owners involving in supermarket business and Muslim restaurant, respectively, in Adama town. There was another Arabic case (private restaurant visited and owned by Muslims) appearing with Afan Oromo and English as a multilingual sign in Adama. Other than Afan Oromo and Amharic, no other Ethiopian language is visible on signs in the town even though there are significant numbers of many ethno-linguistic groups living there. It is usually common to hear different Ethiopian languages spoken among people who know each other. But this is not reflected in the LLs if only languages on signs are considered.

As Table 3 shows, the difference between the towns is clear. Multilingual signs were observed more in Adama town (30.8%), whereas it is 21.40% and 18.4% in Jimma and Sebeta towns respectively. But, bilingual Afan Oromo-Amharic signs are more observable in Sebeta (62.6%) followed by Adama (48.8%) and Jimma (37.6%). The main difference between the towns stems from the level of intervention the municipality administrators have in each town. Yet, it seems that there is an inclination of giving priority to Afan Oromo and Amharic as this figure shows. But, what matters most are not just writing bilingual or multilingual sign, but the amount of information presented in all of the languages used on the signs (Reh, 2004) and other visual influences.



Challenge from sign owners. Though not clearly written as a policy, the regional government of Oromia expects all sign users in the region to give priority to Afan Oromo, the official working language of the region. However, the data in the three towns showed that Afan Oromo has a secondary position. This is also against Ethiopia's policy of outdoor advertisement that clearly states signs shall be "written in local language or alphabet, or if it is written in local and foreign languages or alphabets, the local language or alphabet shall appear before or above the foreign language or alphabet." Therefore, there is observable policy and practice gap. To improve the visibility of Afan Oromo in the town, Adama Culture and Tourism office has developed a guideline for sign owners. As an obligatory, the Adama CTO demands the following five points to be included on the signs by the sign owners:

1. Afan Oromo as the region's official working language comes first and then if possible, and not obligatory to use any language next to it.
2. The font size for all the languages on the signs must be equal.
3. Reducing some information from the first language (Afan Oromo) or adding additional content through the course of translation or transliteration is forbidden.
4. The standard and quality of a sign must be congruent with the standard of the town.
5. After getting the approval of the CTO town, the required money should be paid to the government before posting the sign.

For example, the following sign was delectated and taken down because it fails to comply with the guideline set. However, the sign owners have kept it there for long without the required improvement. This seemed an objection on the action taken on their sign.



Picture 1: Private Multilingual Sign Marked as Inappropriate and Taken Down

According to Shohamy (2006, p. 110), the language used on signs in urban environments can be good scenery for ideological battles among languages and LL actors. She further argues the presence and absence of language(s) on signs displayed in the LL communicate a message, “intentional or not, conscious or not, that affects, manipulates or imposes de facto language policy practice.” In the towns, particularly in Adama and Sebeta, many ‘old signs’ that were either monolingual Amharic or bilingual Amharic-English only were removed or deleted from the LL by CTO workers. This is basically because such signs are not congruent with the expected addition of Afan Oromo on the signs in the LL following the government and language regime change.

This is unlike the post-Soviet countries where the new language regime completely removes the already existing language from the LL (Du Plessis, 2011, p. 194). Hence, the removal is not primarily aimed to remove the other languages from the signs but to let the sign owners accommodate the local language both for communication and ideological ends. The action was a meeting point of the past and the present linguistic ideology of the country for transition to a new language use order. The base of such language ideologies are historical and can be overt through policy decisions, or can be covert and reflected through various mechanisms such as LL and leading to de facto language policy.

Furthermore, as picture 1 shows, the de-emphasizing of Afan Oromo by itself also results in the deletion of the other prominent language. Hence, this is how the grass root practice is in friction with the local authorities who manage of the language use in the public space. This is because the sign owners resist such deletion and removal as against their right. Though, the sign owners were ordered to remove, or replace with the ‘appropriate’ sign a year before, it is still there. From the point of view of the regulators, this is an act of intentional resistance. On the other hand, the sign owners attribute two cases: to linguistic right and financial limitation to incorporate different languages as required. Therefore, as Shohamy (2006, p. 111) argues, language in the public space “serves as a mechanism to affect, manipulate and impose de facto language practices in hidden and covert ways ... [yet] can also serve

as an arena for protest and negotiations.” The sign owners show their protest by keeping their deleted signs without change as shown above. On the other hand, the regulators are focusing more on convincing than taking further actions if there is any, which is an act of negotiation.

In Ethiopia, some indigenous languages have started competing among themselves and with the English language, that has assumed the status of a global linguistic code, in public space since regime change in 1991. However, as a multilingual country, the country has only the constitutional promise; not comprehensive and detailed language policy that enables harmonized use of languages on the signs in various domains in the towns. The delay of the policy might be due to the fact that the country is a conglomerate of many languages that makes the choice of indigenous languages difficult as there are diverse interests. Currently, there is an effort to ratify a general language policy at the federal level that also adequately included the specific language use policy on signs according to the interviewee with concerned federal government bodies. Hence, for the last 25 years, the language use practices on signs have been based more on the de facto policy. As a result, a clear policy gap is observed between different domains of sign using bodies in the towns and has become an obstacle to intervene for regulation of the signs in the LL.

Oromia regional government believes that the statements in the constitutions of the federal government are adequate to be considered as a policy and could also enforce the practice in the LL. In fact, except the advertisement policy presented earlier, the constitution says nothing about written language uses in the public spaces. Therefore, there is a gap in common understanding between those who regulate the LL at the municipality level in the towns of the region.

The problem is not only the absence of clear general language policy and a specific policy for LL both at federal and regional government levels, but also there is no alignment of practice between different domains of sign users in the towns viewed from the point of view of the available linguistic data or de facto language use practice. There is no harmony among signs as used by the federal, regional/municipal, private, religious and NGOs. Hence, there is no sign use alignment among the main LL-actors. This could be mainly due to the absence of clear holistic language use policy specifically concerning how languages should be used and regulated on signs in various parts of the country. And from the point of view of de facto policy, the language use practice is full of discord when the practices of the various domains are considered.

As a regulation and correction, two of the towns (Adama and Sebeta) are trying their best with their own initiation, but without adequate legal and policy base. Yet, there is Amharic and English languages erasure, where Afan Oromo is not included or de-emphasized through different means.



Picture 2: Private Sign Marked 'X' for Inappropriate Use of Languages

As a de facto policy, the regional government and the municipality administrators of Oromia demand all public signs to include Afan Oromo at the top of another language/s. The language written at the bottom of Afan Oromo could be Amharic, English, or any other. If sign owners are going against this rule, language experts in municipalities inform and advise the sign owners to correct it within a given fixed time limit. The advice is given both orally and in written form; and the written one includes the correct form of spelling, grammar and translation as a way of correcting the observed problems of the text in Afan Oromo. If the correction is not made within the time frame given, the sign will be marked 'X' by red ink as picture 2 shows. And, the final step is taking down, or removing the sign using daily labourers. The sign was marked inappropriate because it has given prominent position to Amharic.

Nevertheless, as the quantitative and the qualitative data (signs and interview) show, the practices of the majority of LL actors favour Amharic as a language of communication among diverse ethno-linguistic groups. This can be concluded from the covert practice of different sign owners or domain of sign use in the LL rather than from other policy documents. Despite the fact that Ethiopia had not experienced a colonial history associated with the English language, its gradual progress towards replacing the local languages at least in urban areas is a paradox. Compared to the federal government and religious institutions, the private sign owners are relatively using languages on the sign in the public space according to the law. But the body that has ratified the law, federal government is far from the practice. Hence, language belief and practice are rarely congruent (Spolsky, 2009; 2008). Of course, the towns are under Oromia regional government where Afan Oromo has the status of the official working language. But, as Shohamy (2006, p. 112) notes, languages on signs "clearly communicate the message of who is in power in that territory".

As the symbolic role of languages on signs, the power imbalance between the federal and regional government is in conflict in this situation. This has distorted the de jure status of the languages on signs in the towns. This marks a policy discord between the language use practice of the federal government based in the Oromia towns and the regional government offices.

According to UNESCO's declaration of linguistic rights, the subordination of local languages and the direct imposition of other local languages and a foreign language, in this case English distort the residents' perceptions of the value of languages and results in hierarchical linguistic attitudes. Gradually, this also leads to covert language substitution. Therefore, the Ethiopian federal government policy has theoretically granted the right to use local languages on signs regardless of the domains of use, but practically not implemented it. This is against UNESCO's (1996, Article, 50.1) convention that local languages should occupy a paramount position on the signs. This is a concern because, "within the territory of his/her language community everyone has the right to receive full ... written information on the products and services proposed by commercial advertisements..." (UNESCO, 1996, Article, 50. 2).

5. Conclusion

Afan Oromo has overt political support, at least from the regional government to have better visibility in Oromia towns. This is evident from the documents presented and the practical activities of the regional government. Of course, the interview data also confirms this fact. As one focus area of sociolinguistics, political decision and intervention on deciding the status and visibility of languages on signs cannot be overlooked. Hence, the analysis of the data from the LL signs as used by different domains was aimed at establishing the role of each LL actor in the towns in influencing the language use practice on signs. From the available data the role of government agencies such as the federal (as external role-player), regional/municipal government (as internal role-player) and private business owners, religious institutions and NGOs (conditional role-players) were distinguished. The federal government is an external role-player in the region because it has already empowered the regions to manage the issue of language use according to their own contexts and has less impact on enforcing what language to use. And the others are conditional role-players as their language use in the LL is based more of on their own rational consideration and local authorities' approach of regulating.

The absence of clear and detail language policy in general, and adequate policy of language use on signs in particular at both federal and regional level, has contributed to the major differences in the towns and among LL actors in the towns in their language uses on signs. As a result, in the same region Oromia, the towns with the status of Special Zones, and directly accountable to Oromia, regulate their towns' language use on signs differently. Hence, policy gap resulted in varied practices.

To improve the visibility of Afan Oromo as official regional working language, the concerned officials try to convince different sign owners to include Afan Oromo per the standard set. However, many of the sign owners are less willing. As a result, conflict is observed due to the CTO workers' action of erasing and putting down signs. Though the signs that the regional regulators erase for inappropriately excluding Afan Oromo or de-emphasizing it were very common, the sign owners

have not corrected even after a year. According to the sign owners, the reason was that including the required language based on the standard demands them extra cost despite their minimal interest. Sometimes, the sign owners ask the CTO workers to pay them money for the signs they erased and uprooted for rewriting. These practices of the private sign owners are an indication of “objecting and resenting the top-down policy” enforcement (Shohamy, 2015, p. 161).

Acknowledgements

The researchers acknowledge the generous support we received from the following institutions and individuals: The Federal Culture and Tourism Minister (CTM), Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau (OCTB) and the staffs of the Culture & Tourism Offices and the municipal administrators in the three towns and the staffs and the sign owners of public and private institutions. On top of that we are very grateful to Addis Ababa University for financial support for the PhD Dissertation. Without their support and co-operation, we could not have made it.

Authors’ contributions

Author1: PhD advisee, designed the study, reviewed literature, defined the research problem, analysed data and prepared the manuscript.

Author2: An advisor, conducted fieldwork, analysed data and edited the manuscript. Both authors read, edited and approved the manuscript.

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Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Consent for publication

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

Funding: The corresponding author disclosed that he has received funding from Addis Ababa University for this work, which is part of PhD dissertation.

Publisher’s Note

Jimma University is neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published figures and institutional affiliations.

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