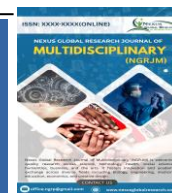




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## Research Article

### Public Notices as Social Commentary: An Analysis of Thematic Concerns from Linguistic Faults on Signage in Kenya

Dr. D. Macharia Maina,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer, Kabarak University, Nakuru.

#### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the thematic concerns that arise from linguistic errors found in public signage. Essentially, it seeks to analyse the veiled emerging and topical issues surrounding the author which makes him/her commit such linguistic blunders in their signage that subsequently interfere with the entire communication process. There is some concern as to why authors make linguistic errors in their signage; but it has not been considered from the perspective of the public signage themselves. Therefore, this paper scrutinises the public signage in an attempt to identify some of these elusive concerns. To assist in this analysis, the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as propounded by Halliday (1994) is applied to twenty-three public signage collected from around the country on both on-line and off-line platform. The sampling procedure was purposefully selected to cover various parts of the country catering for their unique people and features. It was important to select only those public signage which contained linguistic errors which reflected emerging themes found in the society. Tabular representation was used to portray the relationship of various components of societal commentary present in the respective signage. The study sought to enhance specific areas of linguistics by identifying fundamental aspects therein including the relationship between language, society and culture. Similarly, the education sector would greatly benefit by reviewing language competence and performance tasks in students to avoid such linguistic errors in future.*

**Key terms:** Context/sociolinguistic situation/ setting: environment surrounding the author of the public notices

Discourse analysis: to determine meaning through text and context analysis

Linguistic errors: mistakes associated with language performance

Linguistic Competence: proper knowledge of rules and grammar of language

Linguistic Performance: proper usage of language through writing

Linguistic landscape: environment including public notices

Public Notices: messages hang, printed or printed for purposes of public consumption

Social Commentary/thematic concerns/ topical issues: topics emanating from the society about lifestyle of the citizens.

## INTRODUCTION

Any commercial enterprise requires advertising for their goods and services to their customers. Similarly, it would be important to inform the citizenry or/and warn them about some possible danger lurking within. This requires a drafting of public notices for the above singular purposes. The authors vary from professional to small-scale including others who do not have a clue on what they are writing. Therefore, there are numerous public notices out there that do

not communicate as a result of different linguistic errors. Whereas scholars would rush to study these errors, they ignore the veiled communication that lies within them. However, with the analysis of the different signage, a social commentary appears to arise from the signage in form of subtle thematic concerns which seems to highlight fundamental issues arising in the society.

Therefore, this paper sought to analyse these incidental topical issues arising from public

**Corresponding author: Dr. Daniel Macharia Mania**

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notices which subsequently seem to cause the linguistic errors exhibited by the authors of the signage. It was important to understand what pressures and aspects contributed to his/her making linguistic errors which acted as obstacles to the entire communication process. Linguists, especially sociolinguists, ethno linguists, semanticists and discourse analysts would greatly benefit from this paper since the analysis of the signage is an eye opener to the unique relationship between texts and context, language and culture, language and society, competence and performance among others. For that reason the stake holders, including the government, would identify the thematic and emerging issues and plan accurately to address them. Similarly, the educationalists, specifically language teachers, may plan to address the linguistic errors made by authors; more so those areas involving wrong spellings, poor punctuation and faulty language structure that can be applied, corrected and emphasised in schools to improve linguistic competence and performance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Analysing the selected public notices in this paper allows a sneak preview of the environment that the author operates from. Therefore, the linguistic errors committed by the author shed some interesting light on some essential issues affecting the citizenry allowing us to comprehend some of the errors therein. It is imperative then to review the discourse components surrounding the signage in order to understand the subtle thematic concerns emanating from the society. Similarly, other important components include linguistic errors, linguistic context and linguistic landscape.

### Public Notices as Linguistic Landscape

This paper involves the analysis of the genre of public notices. According to Swales (1990), a genre denotes a unique category of discourse of any type; hence, a public notice is a type of genre with a different length and function.

Barnes (2012) argues that a lot of creativity is needed in the signage's initial formulation as well as their subsequent design, if only but to communicate effectively and efficiently to the target audience. Since most of these notices are not written in the source language (SL), translation gaps may arise in the target language (TL), thereby, interrupting and interfering with the communication process.

Linguistic landscape (LL) indicates the language used in public space including the language employed in advertisements, place and street names, shop and road signs (Landry & Bourhis 1997; Gorter, 2012). It simply refers to all "visible semiotic signs in public space" including on-line and off-line (Blommaert & Maly, 2016:23). Off-line data denotes the physical notices that are photographed by the researcher, while on-line data are collected from the internet. The "sign" is considered the basic unit of analysis in linguistic landscaping (Gorter, 2012). Therefore, studies involved in investigating this type of language, especially written language, on either official or non-official signage in the public space are captured under LL studies (Gorter, 2012). According to Gorter (2006:83), the word "landscape" seems to originate partly from English and partly from Dutch eliciting the sense of a "tract of land" to the former and "a painting depicting a scenery on land" from the latter. Therefore, this paper applied and utilised the concept of LL from the above explanation by considering the rich LL in Kenya; especially, as related to written public notices containing translational errors.

### Discourse Analysis and Linguistic Context

To allow the authors of different signage to clearly communicate their message across requires a proper understanding of the subtle emerging concerns. This requires a clear analysis of the text and the entire discourse to correctly identify these themes. Discourse analysis (DA) can be conducted anywhere since language occurs in different situations and with any analysis of a text (Cook, 1990). The study

of DA is a cognitive process and studies language use in everyday life. The analysis of language used in text and context, which is higher than the sentence, is linguistically referred to as discourse analysis (Dakowska, 2001). These two components of “text” and “context” are fundamental for this paper. Specifically, Discourse Analysis (DA) is a branch of Applied Linguistics (Cook, 1990). The term discourse originates from a Latin word *discursus* that means “conversation” or “speech”.

Even though originally the term was applied only to the spoken version, Dakowska (2001) has argued for the meaning of discourse to be extended to include the written version as well. Furthermore, she declares for the use of “text” to be manifested almost interchangeably with “discourse”. Similarly, Cook (1990) seems to concur with the above argument since he contends that discourse typology are either written or spoken texts. This extended meaning of discourse resonates very well with the current research, since this study deals entirely with written texts in the form of public notices.

Moreover, discourse can be categorised using the Organon model as either informative, discursive or argumentative (Cook 1990). As a result, informative discourse expresses some explanation, whereas discursive discourse emphasises on a “symptom aspect”; while argumentative discourse stresses on a “signal aspect” (Cook 1990:156). Alternatively speaking, according to Carter (1993:23): “the branch of applied linguistics dealing with the examination of discourse attempted to find patterns in communicative products as well as and their correlation with the circumstances in which they occurred, which were not explainable at the grammatical level”. Clearly, this implicates the component of situation, which this research puts into perspective to understand the unique humour under study.

A conversational implicature deriving its name from the verb to “imply”, is another critical

constituent in pragmatic analysis. Specifically, implicatures refer to words and phrases as well as their pragmatic force that are necessary for elucidation of speaker meaning without which it would be impossible to arrive at the overall meaning; that is, meaning beyond what is said and the implied versus what is literally stated. Similarly, conversational implicatures can be used to express hidden meanings. Linguistic context (co-text) and physical context go a long way to help the reader arrive at the author’s intention and consequently interpret correctly the public notice under consideration.

Al-Hindawi & Saffah (2017) argues that context is dynamic and includes co text, situation context and cultural context. The first applies to the linguistic context where words, phrases and sentences relate to each other. The second relate to the physical setting including place and time where language is used: whereas, the last refers to the background knowledge which is “common” or “mutual” to the locals and used to create meanings where people from another culture may not understand. According to Halliday & Hassan (1990), it is clearly known that language constitutes human culture and is always understood in its relationship to social culture since it is the most important, comprehensive and all-embracing way of meaning.

### Translation Errors as Social Commentary

The linguistic errors in public notices give an insight into the thematic concerns emanating from the society. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse these errors which probably occur as a result of translation problems because of the differences in the SL and TL of the authors. Specifically, these errors seem to occur as a result of a fault in either of the following:

- i) the function of the translation
- ii) the coherence of the text
- iii) the text type or text form
- iv) linguistic conventions
- v) culture- and situation-specific conventions and conditions

vi) the language system.

(Sigrid

Kupsch-Losereit in Nord, 2018: 73)

Evidently, errors on translation are caused when problems including “misunderstanding”, inaccuracy, flaws, interference, and mistakes occur during “transfer” and “movement” from source language (henceforth SL) to target language (henceforth TL) as espoused by Hansen (2010:385). Similarly, faults in translation are produced because of the “non-equivalence” between TL and SL (Baker in Hansen, 2010:386).

An author requires translation competence in order to arrive at the correct version of a signage. Unfortunately, translation competence varies from one individual to another. Pym (1990) refers to translation competence as the capacity to produce target text that exactly arrives at the correct meaning from a source text. Apparently, the sender and the recipient of the message in any translation process are significant factors.

Ostensibly, during any translation process, there is bound to be wrong translation resulting to errors. For Baker (1992), translation errors refer to “non-equivalence” in text where the author is translating from SL to TL. Where the author has limited linguistic and encyclopaedic knowledge of the SL and TL, translation errors are produced. Clearly, these errors distort the resultant message and according to Sigrid Kupsch-Losereit (cited in Nord, 1997: 73) are a big transgression to many aspects. Noticeably, different levels of text coherence, text type, translation function, linguistic conventions, language system and cultural conventions are offended.

To understand errors of translation, they need to be categorised into four categories (Nord, 1997:75). Firstly, linguistics translations errors are brought by faulty linguistic structures. Secondly, pragmatic translation errors occur where the reader may invoke a different understanding of the text as a result of different interpretation. Text-specific translation errors

occur when the reader interprets the wrong function of the text to arrive at an altered meaning. Finally, cultural translation errors occur where the reader fails to decipher conventions of a certain culture. Evidently, when a comma is omitted, it may completely alter the meaning of a text as seen later when analysing different signage. Interestingly, even though omitting a comma is a linguistic error, it may reflect on the pragmatics as well as culture thereby creating pragmatic errors and cultural errors.

There are certain reasons why authors and readers make translation errors. Firstly, the reader may incorrectly read a text and transfer the error to his/her writing creating a “miscue” (Goodman, 1969). Similarly, the writer may pick a word with two antonyms and select the wrong meaning creating an “error in propositional meaning” (Baker, 1992). Finally, the author may employ an idiom wrongly resulting into a faulty interpretation.

### **Competence and Performance as Sources of Errors**

For authors to perform in a language well, they require a mastery of its grammar and vocabulary, that is, linguistic competence (Chomsky, 1965). Similarly, one needs to know how to organize their writing to avoid misunderstanding and identify, as well as, compensate for any difficulty: strategic competence. Even though the knowledge of the internal structure of a language is necessary, the appropriateness in the use of language is more important (Hymes, cited in Zalta, 2012; Chomsky, 1965). Communicative and pragmatic competence are also crucial for language performance.

In this respect, the public notice author wants to communicate his/her message across in the best way possible. Obviously, he/she knows what he/she wants to pass across, but his/her linguistic competence in the target language is limited; therefore, this affects his/her linguistic performance thereby yielding errors.

Unfortunately, these errors sometimes elicit a different interpretation altogether defeating the very purpose of communication. The resultant meaning is comical because it has completely distorted the original intended message (Maina, in Press). Whereas the author should be commended for attempting to perform in a foreign language, this is usually not the case: in fact, his/her hard work usually becomes the target of humour. It is possible that there are people who understand his/her message and sympathise with his/her lack of linguistic competence, but the majority would merely laugh at the whole endeavour.

### THEORETICAL BRIEF

This paper is guided by the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as propounded by Halliday (1994) who argues that language is a “system of meanings”, that is, language is used by people to express meaning. In his model, Halliday (1994) emphasises the strong relationship between linguistic and the sociolinguistic environment outlining important components comprising of genre, register, discourse semantics and lexicogrammar.

Thus, “genre” refers to the text under study (Munday, 2010:91), possibly pinpointing to the writings on the public notices themselves. Above the component of genre is an all-encompassing controlling element called the “sociocultural environment”, which, for all intents and purpose, is equivalent to the context. Then, this is followed by “register” which elicits three other critical components namely field, tenor and mode. Hence, “field” refers to the content and the message to be communicated while “tenor” refers to the participants, that is, the sender and the recipient of the message; whereas, “mode” refers to the form in which communication takes place.

Notably, each of the above elements contains a specific “strand” of meaning which when combined forms the “discourse semantics” of a text (Munday, 2010:91). Further, this creates the meta-functions which is realised by the

component “lexicogrammar” referring to the way lexical items are chosen and how sentences are constructed by the sender (Munday, 2010:91). Thus, Halliday (1994) classifies language use into three “meta-functions”:

- i) Ideational function
- ii) Interpersonal function
- iii) Textual function

The ideational function helps people to understand themselves and their environment properly; whereas the interpersonal function entails a one-to-one relationship where an individual get one to do something. The textual function deals with how information is organised to relate one linguistic item with another one. Consequently, the ideational function is associated with the “field” of a text recognised through “transitivity patterns”; the interpersonal function is related to the “tenor” of a text through “modality” while the textual function is connected to the “mode” of a text through “thematic/informational structure” and “cohesion”. Ostensibly, these three functions are supposed to operate simultaneously (thus systemic) in a communicative event to express meaning in a holistic nature.

### METHODOLOGY

The paper employed a descriptive research design involving the depiction of the errors during translation emerging from selected public notices around the country. The description of the signage in this study was unique since there seemed to exist an underlying message behind the errors made by the author.

The population included all static signage hang, printed or bound for public consumption. Specifically, they should be comprising of linguistic errors espousing an underlying message emerging in the society. The sample size consisted of a minimum of twenty signage representing a variety of thematic aspects collected from different counties. Since this is a descriptive research, the number was deemed enough as generalisations could be made to reflect a nationwide existence.

Collection of data was done mostly by photographing the signage from their physical existence in the various counties but where there were some from the on-line platforms which exhibited the required thematic aspects, they were also considered. The Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach was utilised for this study. It seemed to allow the documentation of social commentary since it involved the analysis of different linguistic

structures and their function in the texts allowing the demarcation of errors and the subsequent identification of thematic aspects.

### FINDINGS

The following table summarises the themes identified from the interpretations of translational errors identified from selected signage.

Table 1: Thematic Realisation

|     | PUBLIC NOTICE                                                              | THEMES                                    |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | <i>We do...man cure... penicure</i>                                        | literacy levels, economic concerns        |
| 2.  | <i>For personal problems like... remarriage...manpower and women power</i> | literacy levels, marital problems         |
| 3.  | <i>Sony erection</i>                                                       | literacy levels, economic concerns        |
| 4.  | <i>Anti-natal clinic</i>                                                   | health, maternity services                |
| 5.  | <i>The Frying Squad</i>                                                    | ethnicity, economic concerns              |
| 6.  | <i>Youraino</i>                                                            | ethnicity, economic concerns              |
| 7.  | <i>Nyaribo butherey</i>                                                    | ethnicity, agriculture, economic concerns |
| 8.  | <i>Gloz gate with "badlok"</i>                                             | ethnicity, insecurity                     |
| 9.  | <i>Cold drings is now available</i>                                        | ethnicity, economic concerns              |
| 10. | <i>Ladies: you are requested not to have children in the bar</i>           | economic concerns, etiquette              |
| 11. | <i>wild animals please remain in your vehicle</i>                          | economic concerns, insecurity             |
| 12. | <i>Male Girls High School</i>                                              | economic concerns, education              |
| 13. | <i>We beat carjackers at their games!</i>                                  | economic concerns, etiquette, insecurity  |
| 14. | <i>Customers are cushioned from stealing anything in this shop</i>         | economic concerns, etiquette              |
| 15. | <i>vacant three bedroom master in suit</i>                                 | economic concerns                         |
| 16. | <i>No swimming if you can't swim</i>                                       | economic concerns                         |
| 17. | <i>Strictly no children hallowed</i>                                       | health, maternity services                |
| 18. | <i>Customers who find our waitresses rude ought to see the manager</i>     | etiquette, economic concerns              |
| 19. | <i>Why go elsewhere to be cheated, when you can come here</i>              | economic concerns                         |
| 20. | <i>In trust we God</i>                                                     | religion                                  |
| 21. | <i>..Wairimu Farm</i>                                                      | agriculture, economic concerns            |
| 22. | <i>No trespassing without permission</i>                                   | insecurity                                |
| 23. | <i>Security please do not panic</i>                                        | insecurity                                |

## DISCUSSION

Different circumstances surrounding the author forced him/her to produce faulty signage which in turn generated unintended humour. These unique conditions explained the authors' tenacity to make errors as well as highlighted fundamental emerging societal issues.

### a) Education and Literacy Levels

Notably, the author's level of education went a long way to determine whether his/her signage will contain linguistic errors. As expected, the higher the level of education, the less the signage author made blunders; however, the reverse was also true since a few learned authors also made silly mistakes. Obviously, some were errors and others mistakes where according to Brown, (2007), grossness of transgressions was linked to errors and was conversely associated with those authors of a lower level of education; whilst, mistakes were minor transgressions performed by authors not because of linguistic incompetence but as a result of a momentarily lapse of the mind. Therefore, Chomsky's (1965) concepts of competence and performance were essential and directly related to the literacy level of the author. Interestingly, inadequate linguistic competence automatically led to poor linguistic performance and was a result of poor academic background (Brown, 2007) as explained below.

Evidently, the usage of the words "remarriage", "manpower" and "women power" in (2): *For personal problems like... remarriage...manpower and women power*

suggested a lack of proper grounding in the English language which indicated a poor literacy level of the author. Equally, the use of "man cure" and the non-existent word "penicure" in (1): *We do...man cure... penicure* did not really portray someone who was well grounded in proper English and education. In addition, the use of "erection" in signage (3): *"Sony erection"* instead of the correct mobile phone brand name "Sony Eriksson", was a clear indicator that the author might not have known how to write the correct name, probably, as a result of some poor educational background. Consequently, the authors' poor level of education in some public notices effected lexical incongruities which when resolved produced unintended humour (Maina, in Press).

Similarly, "anti-" and "ante-" are prefixes that should not be confused by any person well-grounded in English since their meanings are known to be worlds apart: anti= against, while ante= before. Therefore in (4): *Anti-natal clinic*, the script arising from this signage advocated for "against" instead of "before" thereby losing the reader completely. It can be attributed to the literacy level of the author which as could be seen was wanting. Likewise, for the author to be against the welfare of expected women and even having the audacity to proclaim it on signage was a recipe for disaster. Indeed, disaster did arise from the misinterpretation which brought a communication breakdown.

### b) Ethnicity

The state of belonging to a social group with a common national or cultural tradition is

considered as ethnicity. A word can be enunciated in different ways by various individuals or groups, depending on one's ethnic grouping. In Kenya, different ethnic communities have different idiosyncratic ways of sound articulation which resulted into pronunciation slips (Nabea, 2009). As a result there was bound to be some phonetic-related errors producing incongruities that were stereotypically-oriented. Therefore, depending on their first language, the readers were bound to manifest some sound-related problems since their native language alphabet was markedly different from their TL.

Generally, the Mount Kenya region residents, would practically manifest errors associated with sounds /r/ and /l/. Thus, in signage (5): *The Frying Squad*, the word "flying" was written as "frying" as a result of the this ethnic manifestation. Thus, more often than not when these sounds are interchanged, it would be a matter of ethnic-relation stereotypes than pronunciation problems. In their alphabet, most probably, these sounds are used interchangeably and words comprising of them would mostly be misspelled as a result. In addition, (7): *Nyaribo butherey* the sound /f/ is problematic to articulate in this region and more often than not a resident from this region would instead use /θ/.

Thus, in (7): *Nyaribo butherey*, this ethnic-related sound problem would be a norm, especially to people of the lower class. To cap it all, the signage in (6): *Youraino* appeared to be a typical attempt at the author's attempt to enunciate a TL word using an SL pronunciation

technique by allowing a consonant-vowel combination reminiscent of the local language characteristics. Thus, "urinal" became "Youraino", probably because the author thought that the "U" was written as "you" since it sounded similar to the local languages.

Similarly, the residents of Western region of Kenya, especially the Luhya, possess a related problem of articulating English sounds, similar to their counterparts in Mount Kenya region, albeit with different sounds. Hence, the typical problem for this ethnic group would most likely revolve around the substitution of /b/ with /p/. Thus, the word "padlock" would mostly likely be pronounced with a /b/ instead of a /p/ like "badlock" as seen in (8): *Gloz gate with "badlok"*.

Another potential ethnic manifestation associated with this ethnic community was a substitution of /k/ for /g/ e.g. "gloz" instead of "Close" as seen in (8). Thus, the above sounds appeared to be problematic to the residents of this region. However, it was worth noting that not all residents committed the above errors. It seemed that those with a lower education background as well as the lower social status committed more errors than their more educated and higher status ones.

Additionally, the Rift Valley region was not left behind in this sound inconsistency problem. A prominent ethnic community in this region appeared to experience a sound problem consisting of /k/ replacing it with /g/. For example, in signage (9): *"Cold drings is now available"*, "drinks" was written as "drings"

substituting /k/ with /g/ producing a phonological, lexical and semantic incongruity. Besides, in signage (8), the word “close” was written as “gloz” allowing another sound-related incongruity where a substitution of /k/ to /g/ took place. As such, it could be understood that where such a sound was incongruous, it was as a result of the author’s ethnicity. Subsequently, with the above examples, the researcher was able to identify the ethnic origin of the public notice author as being a potential chief cause of translational errors when the notices consisted of the above sound-related mistakes.

### c) Economic Concerns

Different public notices revealed the diverse economic nature of the residents. There were several components that determined the economic status of the citizenry. This included social status and class, resource distribution, poverty level and standard of living among others. Therefore, the presence of shops (3, 9), bars (10: *Ladies: you are requested not to have children in the bar*), safari parks (11: *wild animals please remain in your vehicle*) and schools (12: *Male Girls High School*) would suggest a steady flow of money associated with a middle to high class citizenry. Specifically, the presence of spare-parts shops (13: *We beat carjackers at their games!*) indicated the dwellers were in possession of cars which definitely could not be acquired by the lower class. However, the suggestion that there might be carjackers around (13) and the cautioning of shoplifters (14: *Customers are cushioned from stealing anything in this shop*) portrayed some

pockets of criminality which indicated some level of poverty in this society.

Similarly, the sale of expensive phones (3), a magnificent big house (15: *vacant three bedroom master in suit*), a beauty parlour (1) and a swimming pool (16: *No swimming if you can't swim*) show some sophistication associated with people of a middle or high class. Certainly, the use of *Sony Erickson* brand of mobile smartphones, three-bedroomed house, manicure and pedicure is uniquely classy and expensive. In addition, the idea of the citizens visiting entertainment spots (10) and safari parks (11) indicates the ability to incur an extra expenditure, not on the basic needs, but for a little leisure and pleasure associated with the affluent.

Interestingly, the presence of a middle-higher class populace did not rule out a people associated with a lower standard of living. As indicated above, the existence of petty crimes (14) where some people had to engage in felonious activities in order to make ends meet suggested elements of poverty. Also, where car alarms and trackers were advertised for sale (13) buttresses the point. Generally, the translational errors on the public notices were traced to the lower class who were trying to cash in on the deficiency of the middle class. The reason being that the middle/high class group were more sophisticated in their education ruling out them producing the notices. Consequently, the poor were deficient of a better education and produce error-prone notices which did not communicate but elicited unintentional humour.

Economic-related themes were the second major concern in this section and seemed to be distributed at around 40%. This was because some public notices appeared to reflect both social and economic themes, thus the duplicity in interpretation. Clearly, the concept of social class arose from two perspectives: what the notice indicated and the author's background. The latter seemed to reflect upon the attempts by the author to operate in a higher class than him/her. If s/he was operating from the same social class, then the translational errors would be absent in the first place. A higher social class implied the literacy levels should also be high. Similarly, the author operated in a certain environment where the goods and services that s/he advertised, informed or warned were bound to appeal to a certain audience. Therefore, the public notice reflected the economic status of the author as well as his/her anticipated client.

Interestingly, it looked like the majority of the authors were operating in a middle social class environment as a result of the targets of their public notices. This was evident by the goods and services that were indicated by the notices: spare part shops, saloons and entertainment joints. These notices represented over 80% distribution in this study. It gave the impressions that with time the author would be promoted in the higher social class if his/her business became successful. It remained a matter of speculation if this promotion would improve his/her language performance in the TL and the subsequent reduction of translational errors in their notices.

#### d) Other Thematic Concerns

There were other important societal concerns captured in this research that did not directly affect the author in their drafting of the public notices but appeared to reveal fundamental issues emerging and revolving around where the author resided. For instance, there seemed to exist some marital problems as portrayed in (2) affecting members of the society which probably needed special attention and an urgent quick fix. Undoubtedly, issues of "power" with reference to masculinity and femininity are quite sensitive and personal; therefore, for there to be a notice on remedying them implied a serious pandemic. For there to be an advertisement of such nature suggested that the residents were desperate to address such a catastrophe and nip it at the bud. Also, it signified that it was no longer a personal issue where residents were hiding but a humongous one that needed to be taken by the horns. Unfortunately, the way the signage was written left a lot to be desired since the "power" to be resolved was quite obscure from the signage eliciting some hilarious interpretation.

Moreover, there was an impression given that respect and piety for special groups (especially, children, the elderly, the pregnant and the disabled) was expected of all citizens; thus, some services were set apart specifically for them. Likewise, etiquette and good manners were virtues that were extolled and demanded of all residents (10, 14). For example, being accompanied by children to the bar was considered impolite (10), rudeness by waiters to patrons was not entertained (18: *Customers*

who find our waitresses rude ought to see the manager), “stealing” was condemned in (13) and “cheating” in businesses was frowned down upon (14). Nonetheless, the way the public notices were written resulted to varied initial interpretations farther away from the intention of the author. For example, in (10) it appeared as if the author implied giving birth to children in the bar was prohibited. In (18) it seemed as if the author wanted to portray the manager as being ruder than the waitress while in (14) and (19: *Why go elsewhere to be cheated, when you can come here*) it looked like the author was advocating for “stealing” and “cheating” respectively. All these initial interpretations were faulty even while different thematic aspects arose producing humour.

In relation to the above, religion was also a concept that was extolled in this society (20: *In trust we God*). Even though the author missed the whole point while trying to communicate his intention in (20), the importance about the concept of religion was highlighted. Even though it was not clear which religion was indicated, it was a general reference indicating belief in a supreme being. Thus, the word “God” was not indicative of any specific religion but still indicated the theme of religion. On the same note, the good manners, etiquette, respect and piety as discussed in the previous paragraph were virtues attributed to religion even though not directly specified. Nevertheless, the signage appeared to indicate the significance of “trust” which was not very clear as to what it referred to since the interpretations were varied.

Even though just implied was the theme of insecurity as seen in (8: *Gloz gate with “badlok”*); where the reader was advised to close the gate using a padlock. This was supposed to lock out unwanted persons in the vicinity presupposing that there normally exist trespassers who should be locked out. In addition, signage (22: *No trespassing without permission*) banned trespassers implying there were unwanted people who might have caused a security breach. On the same note, notice (23: *Security please do not panic*) insisted on security measures being placed as a result of probably suspicious characters who might have bad intentions. These three signage might imply presence of elements of insecurity, even though the extent was clearly unsubstantiated.

Similarly, it could also be argued that signage (13) implied insecurity since car-jacking would be categorised as criminality. The only problem was the ambiguity created by the author in his signage erroneously presupposing that he was supposedly involved in car-jacking himself creating quite a worrying implicature which produced humour. Clearly, insecurity was not only human-to-human and not solely initiated by humans; but it looked like animals were also a big threat to the security of humans as could be seen in signage (11). However, the setting was a safari park which was presumably well protected and less worrying for people outside the park. Nevertheless, signage (11) instead incredulously and humorously appeared to be directed at the animals as if they could read. Since the signage implying insecurity appeared in the three regions under study, it might imply

that insecurity was a major concern in throughout the country.

The concerns about health were not left out as far as the signage under this study were concerned. Specifically, public notice (4) gave the impression that expectant mothers did receive special treatment and care since there existed specific facilities for their usage. Thus, it was worrying when the signage appeared to be against (instead of supporting) the welfare of expectant women when the author used the prefix “anti-” instead of “ante-”. Also, in (17) there existed maternity services specifically to ensure the safety of the mother and the baby during child birth. Thus, it was disturbing when it appeared to look as if the author was forbidding children from accessing the maternity wing implying that the he could be against the birth of new-borns.

Another quite significant but not directly mentioned theme was that associated with agriculture. Whereas the author wanted to advertise about his agricultural produce to the clients in (21), the messaging backfired as a result of translational errors. Ostensibly, “Wairimu” and “Farm” are species of locally grown beans very common around that locality. Thus, the beans could be sold both for purposes of consumption at home and/or for farmers to plant in their field and the author had all rights to make them available in the market. However, the way the signage was framed allowed for misinterpretations from the readers since it appeared to mean “the farm belonging to Wairimu”. Correspondingly, signage (7) was set in a butchery which sold different types of

meat including beef, veal, mutton and chicken among others. Presumably, the butchery was set in the catchment area where these types of animals were bred which then implied that animal/bird farming could have been carried out in the locale. Unfortunately, all these could be lost since the signage contained translational errors whose script provoked a faulty but humorous interpretation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The linguistic errors in the selected public signage in this paper gave the researcher a clear sneak peek into the pertinent issues surrounding Kenyans. Specifically, the translational mistakes found in the selected signage pointed into certain directions that allowed for the identification of peculiar thematic items. Interestingly, it made it possible for the researcher to identify the underlying overall themes found in the society. The linguistic errors committed are basic and language teachers should be wary of such errors and purpose to seek remedies in their students to avoid them in future.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) Apart from the written textual aspect of a signage, research can be conducted to other fundamental components of a text including colour, shape, surface, calligraphy among others that can also elicit a lot of social commentary.
- ii) There is a sort of unique type of humour arising from the signage under study here that may require

further scrutiny to understand its mechanisms.

The different signage comprise peculiar linguistic characteristics that can be further interrogated.

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