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## Examining the Linguistic Landscapes of the New Juaben Municipality, Ghana

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### Abstract

Linguistics landscape is a new dimension in the field of linguistics that has recently received a considerable amount of researches. This paper aimed at examining the language used on the billboards; what motivates the choice of language and the meaning that such writings convey to the people of New Juaben in the Eastern region of Ghana. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in this research. The paper is limited to writings on the billboards in New Juaben geographical area. During the data collection, cameras and recorders were used. The result indicated that English is dominant language among the languages used to write on the billboards.

**Keywords:** dimension, Juaben, landscape, linguistics, sociolinguistics



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## **1.0 Introduction**

The New Juaben Municipality falls within Eastern Region of Ghana. The New Juaben Municipality covers an estimated area of 110 square kilometers constituting 0.57% of the total land area of Eastern Region. A predominant natural feature in Koforidua is the 'ObuoTabri' Mountain, which is considered sacred. Nearby is Akosombo Dam which holds Lake Volta, the world's largest man-made lake. Waterfalls in the area such as Akan Falls, Boti Falls and the Umbrella Rock have attracted tourists to New-Juaben Municipal and Eastern Region. Language is one unique thing that gives a distinction between people living in a certain geographical location, which portrays the culture, values and norms of that society. In our world, we normally come across written signs which include public announcement, town names, posters, stickers on vehicles, advertisement among others. The study on the linguistic landscape is equally recent phenomenon that begun around 1970 but only gained attention in the late 1990s with an article by Landry and Bourhis (1997) titled "Linguistic Landscape and Ethno linguistic Vitality, an Empirical Study." Since then, the field of linguistic landscape research has expanded and grown and is becoming an important aspect of sociolinguistic research. Prominent among these researchers include Landry & Bourhis (1997) themselves who considered the linguistic landscape as certain context of sociolinguistic processes. Backhaus (2007) also discovered the empirical study of multilingual signs in Tokyo. Cenoz & Gorter (2006) also studied the linguistic landscape of two streets in two multilingual cities and analyzed the use of languages relating to language policy. Li & Xia (2016) postulates that studies of linguistic landscape primarily deals with languages in written forms in public places or spaces. They contended that on the whole, the research of linguistic landscape has become one of the researchable topics. This paper therefore is a close study of the linguistic landscape of Juaben billboard writings



**Figure 1:** A map view of the New Juaben and its environments

All the text found on the billboards were photographed and coded based on the languages found on them. With these results, the paper aimed at answering the following questions:

- a. What is the dominant language on the New Juaben billboards?
- b. What factors influence the choice of a particular language?
- c. Why do they choose to write their names on the billboards?
- e. Was there any multimodality approach?

## **2.0 Problem Statement**

The study of Linguistics Landscape has attracted a lot of academic attention in the world as a whole. Generally, studies in landscape like that of street names, inscriptions on vehicles, writings on bill boards and many others has been researched into by academicians of languages from the dimensions and view point that is more encompassing to them. Many researchers have researched on linguistic landscape in areas like street names, inscriptions on vehicles etc. However, the concentration has been on Studying Languages in the Linguistic Landscape of a geographical area (Xia & Li, 2016, Landry and Bourhis (1997), Gray (1996), Walden (2012), Akindele, 2011 etc.) inscriptions on vehicles, street names, etc. There is a vacuum which needs to be filled. It is upon this that the researcher seeks to research into this topic to strategically and systematically come out with empirical data to address the issue. Upon my frequent observation and interviews made in the New Juaben area, I realized that there were various writings with different languages on the billboards which needs to be analyzed. The purpose behind

these choice of a particular language is unknown. These writings were not randomly chosen by the owners. There are some motives that permit them to choose a particular language.

### **3.0 Literature review**

#### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper will be examined by using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. Some researchers including, Theo Van- Leeuwen, Kress R. Gunther, Kay L. O'Halloran Kress Gunther and many more are pioneers of this theory. According to Labov (1984), for sociolinguists, one important goal is to construct a record of overt attitudes towards language, linguistic features and linguistic stereotypes". This means, studying language attitudes attract sociolinguists. In this vein, (Coulmas, 2013) posited that, language is an „indicator of identity group affiliation by means of stereotypes and identity manifestation is a matter of relative choice, “relative” because group membership is a social process involving the individual member and the group”. Gorter (2006 as cited in Xia & Li, 2016) also pointed out that “the study of the linguistic landscape is a relatively new development”. This researcher opposes that the research of linguistic landscape appeared recently in the field of sociolinguistics and began to enjoy a growing interest in sociolinguistics. It is only since the end of 1990s that linguistic landscape has been received growing attention as a topic for research within sociolinguistics. Landry & Bourhis (1997; 25), defines linguistic landscape as the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape (henceforth, LL) of a given territory, region. To them they perceive linguistic landscape as the perceptibility of languages on public and commercial signs in a giving territory or region, the visual manifestation of the language of that particular environment or speech community. Landry & Bourhis later investigated the role of linguistic landscape in ethnolinguistic vitality and language maintenance and their relations in Canada. They wanted to discuss the concept of linguistic landscape as it relates to the notion of ethnolinguistic vitality (EV) and to conclude, they presented result exploring how experience with the linguistic landscape is related to the vitality perceptions and language behaviors of French Canadian minorities across Canada.

Malinowski (2009) study, for example, analyzed Korean American business owners" understandings and perceptions of the multilingual commercial signs that were part of their commercial initiatives and the larger neighborhood. Chesnut (2013) also

researched on laboratory literacy practices, involving the linguistic landscape of notices and white-boards within a laboratory “situates LL2 within the context of academic literacy and as such may typify a broadening range of research questions to which LL research is applicable”. Sebba (2010) advocates the inclusion of mobile and unfixed signs in the study of the LL. He argues that the inclusion of signs on moving vehicles (e.g. buses), stickers, pamphlets, banknotes, etc., also plays a role in the interpretation of the world around us as more fixed and stable signage does. The issue of the materiality of the sign has also been identified as an important aspect of the LL. From this perspective, the diversity and variation of fonts, colours, design and texture, as well as the resources used to create the sign, make the materiality of LL. The materiality of a sign enables a sign to be contextualized as it may index its history and thus enables a more accurate reading of the sign.

#### **4.0 Methodology**

##### **4.1 Data Collection and Sampling**

Interviews were also conducted to find out the factors that influence the choice of a particular language, the reason why they choose to use their names on it. The areas sampled were based on a purposeful sampling technique since most billboards are found in the cities and towns. The writings and interviewees were however randomly selected. The data were collected from different locations inside the New Juaben district from December, 2019 till 10th January, 2020. Written texts were then classified into a set of categories that will be discussed below.

##### **4.2 Classification and Categorization**

This part of the work discusses the language used on the billboards. New Juaben is known to be an Akan speaking community, Akuapem to be precise. The categorization this section was based on:

- a. The language used
- b. Material used
- c. Billboards that have names on it.
- d. Multimodality usage.

**SOME OF THE DATA COLLECTED**

God is king

Fa wo ho bɔ Yesu

Yesu Mogyɛ

Abankesee

Enyɛ wo a

Yesu moo Dacosta phones

Me ne wonnye fine

Adom

Yesu nko ara

Rasta man

Jah guide

Enne nko ara

Abusuakronkron

Fast track

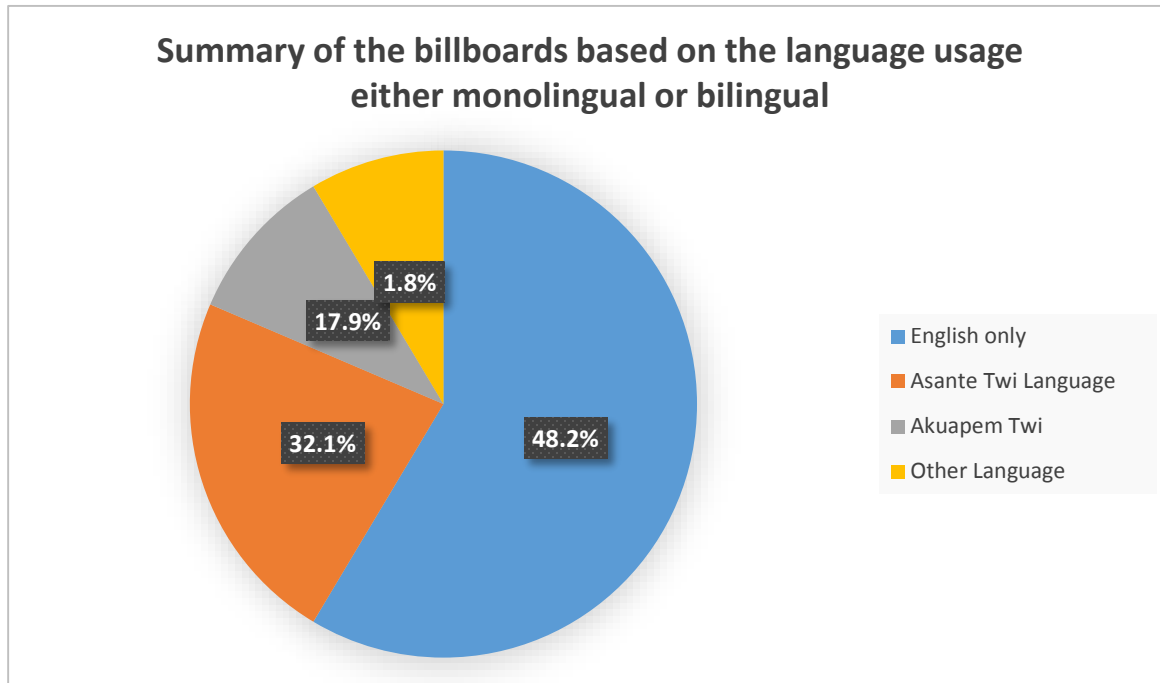
Benedicta

Sunkwa

**Table 1.0 Summary of the billboards based on the language usage either monolingual or bilingual.**

Language type	Total Number	Percentage
<b>Akuapem or Twi</b>	10	17.9%
<b>English</b>	27	48.2%
<b>English and Twi</b>	18	32.1%
<b>Other Language</b>	1	1.8%
<b>Total</b>	56	100%

The above table depicts that, majority of the writings are bilingual billboards. It distributed on the chart below indicating the various portions.



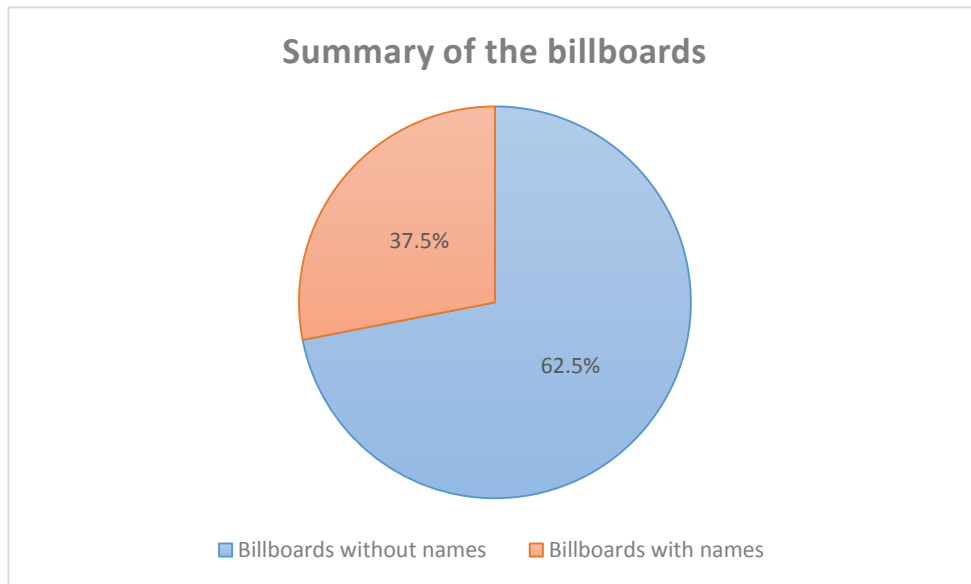
Definitely, New Juaben is monolingual when it comes to the language used on the billboards. A few billboards were seen with the local languages used on it. With regards to the multimodality approach, the images are also combine with images which add more meaning to the information conveying to the general public.

**Table 2. Summary of the billboards**

Billboard	Number	Percentage
Billboards with names	21	37.5%
Billboards without names	25	62.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100%</b>

With regards to the names on the billboards, they gave the following reasons for it; 1. It helps for easily identification. Once the person knows your, he/she will easily get to know that this is your shop. 2. It helps to maintain their family heritage. They explain that, even if all the family members dies, people will still remember the name and it will serve as an area name. 3. People also see it as prestigious. Having their names on the boards makes

them popular. We could see from the table that quite number of the billboard owners prefer to use their names. But majority of them used the normal text which will just sell their products to the general public. They asserted that, the main focus is the products not your personality or popularity. Let's check from the chart below. There is a representation of it in a chart form



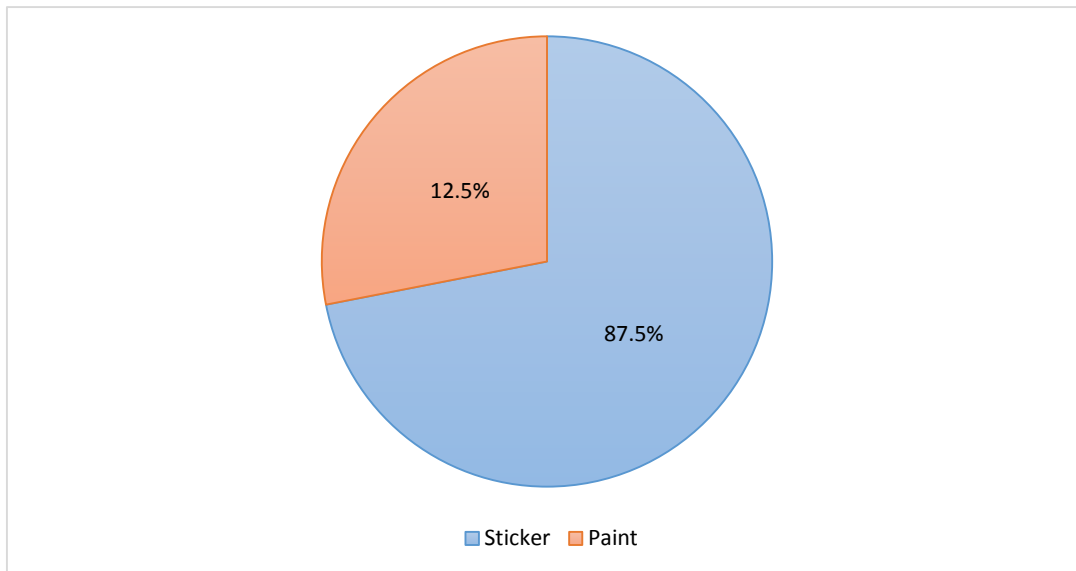
From the chart, billboards with names covers 37.5% while those without names covers 62.5%. This signifies that, majority of them prefer not to use their names on the billboards. Sample of such incidents are seen be

**Table 3. Summary of the inscriptions based on material used.**

Material type	Number	Percentage
Sticker	49	87.5%
Paint	7	12.5%
Total	56	100%



**Chart 3. A representation of inscriptions with stickers as against paint**



This table confirms that, paint sign posts are diminishing. Only a few sign posts were captured with that. Their reasons for the sticker sign post was that, i. They are quick to be made. ii. It is easy to remove iii. They can be designed to your satisfaction

### **5.0 Conclusion**

This study investigated sign post of New Juaben municipality. Through running a quantitative analysis of (56) sign post, the study showed that with regard to the language used, majority were bilingual. Multimodality was adequately represented. According to the hypothesis indicated in the various tables, it made it known that, the mixture of English and Twi dominated. Again, it indicated that, the painting sign posts is fading out and is been replaced with the modern sticker which is easy to remove, cheap, affordable and less time consuming. Finally, people choose to use their names on the sign post just to gain popularity but majority of them were against that. In conclusion, the above responds indicate that a whole lot of things undergo in the sign post mounting in New Juaben.

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