

Examining the Communicative Value of Sign X in the Public Space in Tanzania: The Case of Swahili Context

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Abstract

This paper investigates the multifaceted communicative value of sign X in the Swahili context in Tanzania, encompassing both physical and virtual spaces. Cities around us are marked by many semiotic signs which present different communication cues and experiences. These signs are imagery symbols which are assigned meaning by the people who use them to communicate different concepts, ideas, beliefs and experiences. To dissect the diverse connotations associated with sign X as it operates within Tanzania's Swahili context, this study used two distinct datasets: narrative data sourced from survey questionnaires completed by a cohort of 103 participants and collection of 47 photographic data featuring sign X that were captured through digital camera across the physical and virtual public spaces. The study employed Socio-Semiotic Theory to analyse the communicative value of sign X in the studied public space. The theory focuses on how meanings are constructed and communicated through various signs and symbols within Swahili context in Tanzania. The study findings revealed that sign X was employed to communicate multiple meanings in the Swahili context. These include warnings, prohibitions, calls for demolition, removal instructions, misinformation and fake news, cancellations, deletions, hidden value, protocols to observe, marker of death, expression of love and sexuality, and poignant reminders of personal experiences from the past.

1.0 Introduction

Cities around us are marked by many semiotic signs which present to us different communication cues and experiences. These semiotic resources range from colour-scapes, music-scapes, and other sign-scapes. However, some of these semiotic signs have already received a significant attention in semiotic research (cf. Bishop, 2000; Green, 2006; Blommaert, 2013; Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010; Leeman and Modan, 2009; Moriarty, 2002; Pawito, 2007). The importance of semiotic signs in the urban environment has also received a tremendous attention in scholarly

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research since its inception (cf. Pamporis and Micheli, 2022; Lou, 2016; Menezes and Vieira, 2019; Zhang and Wang, 2018). Employing the social semiotic theory, the current study focuses on examining the communicative meaning of a semiotic resources, among many others, the sign X. These semiotic signs are imagery symbols which are assigned meaning by the people who use them to communicate different concepts, ideas, experiences, and beliefs in their day to day social interactions. It is a fact that, in our daily social interactions throughout the day, we are confronted with a constant supply of symbolic images, functional and informational signs that reflect our political, economic, social and cultural experiences. This suggests that it is not easy to live or do away with semiotic signs in the Swahili context and other public spaces as they facilitate our communication and interpretation of life experiences. The present paper uses yet another sign-scape called 'X' to explore the meanings it communicates in the public space in Tanzanian Swahili context. This sign is just a letter when studied along other alphabetical letters, but when studied along other signs, it is treated as a semiotic sign in socio-semiotic studies; hence called sign X (cf. Bishop, 2000; Green, 2006). Although letter X is sparingly used in language dictionaries, still it is associated with many meanings in public spaces, linguistic landscapes and cyber spaces as will be unfolded in the data analysis section.

The motivation to study sign X as a semiotic resource and not just like other letters in language dictionary came along after witnessing its use in different public spaces in Tanzania. For example, this semiotic resource became very popular when demolition of buildings and facilities in the country dominated the news in the mainstream and social media between 2016 and 2020 (Swai, 2016; Mhache, 2017; The Citizen, 2017). During this time, construction of roads and other governmental facilities was on the rise and everything that was on the road reserve was marked with sign X to indicate that it was to be demolished to pave way for the project construction. So, government buildings, prayer houses, water infrastructures, electricity infrastructures, shops, markets, petrol filling stations and residential houses in the road reserve were marked with sign X. This practice was more visible along Morogoro Road in Dar es Salaam during the construction of the Kimara-Kibaha eight lane road.

In addition to this, in 2018 the researcher attended a linguistic landscape conference at the University of Bern in Switzerland, which was marking its 10th year of existence since its inception. The symbol of the conference was X-scape, meaning it was the tenth conference. From there, the researcher developed curiosity and motivation to study this sign in the Tanzanian context after having seen it in many spaces but failed to exploit its various meanings it represented in the public space. So, studying the communicative value of this sign brings to light some pertinent social and cultural issues which some people take for granted in the public space in Tanzania.

1.1 Linguistic and Semiotic Landscape Studies

It should be noted here that studies in semiotics as a field of study came as an extension of linguistic landscape studies (Landry and Bourhis, 1997; Spolsky, 2009; Leeman and Modan, 2009; Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010; Blommaert, 2013). Thus, in its early manifestations, linguistic landscape meant “the language of public road signs, advertising, billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings” (Landry and Bourhis, 1997: 25). However, the present research is focusing more on sophisticated notions of signs and what they mean in the social context as meanings of signs are shaped by social narratives and other symbols used on the sign in which such symbols index particular qualities, attitudes, ideas, interests, effects and set of assumptions associated with those symbols (Leeman and Modan, 2009; Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010; Blommaert, 2013).

In light of this backdrop, social semiotics as a field of study emerged to deal with meaning making as people make interactions with semiotic resources in their public spaces (Zhang and Wang, 2018; Menezes and Vieira, 2019; Bezemer and Cowan, 2021). The field studies the media of dissemination and the methods of communication that actors employ to represent their understanding of the world around them. In the same line, the use of sign X in Swahili context seems to fulfill this function. This, in some way, it shapes the actors’ power relations with others within the terrain of social fabric and government agencies. Jaworski and Thurlow (2010: 2) in their study used the term *semiotic landscape* to mean “any (public) space with visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making”. This definition somehow fits closely in explaining the communicative value of sign X in the Swahili context in Tanzania as it highlights the interplay between visual discourse (semiotic material), spatial practices and dimensions of social interactions (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010). Similarly, Jackson (1947) as cited in Birch (2010) defined public space as a place accessible to all citizens, for their use and enjoyment. This definition did not capture the scope of public space they were referring to. However, in the context of this study, public space is conceptualized as a multifaceted environment accessible by all people (both physical and virtual arenas) where public discourse and interaction occur. This means, public space is not merely a geographic location but a dynamic platform used by people for social engagement and exchange of ideas.

The communicative value of signs is not confined to Tanzanian Swahili context alone as studies on linguistic landscape and social semiotic over time have revealed various meanings that can be represented by semiotic resources (Landry and Bourhis, 1997; Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010; Jaworski, 2015). Thus, this study argues that sign X, like other signs in the public spaces, can be used to communicate different values depending on the context, users and intentions. The present study expands on the scenery of linguistic landscape to explore the use of sign X in the Tanzanian Swahili context in meaning-making as well as to

communicate and express various feelings, ideas and experiences in the public space.

1.2 The Concept of Sign in Semiotic and Communication Studies

In attempting to understand the concept of sign in semiotic and communication studies, this study reviewed the works of other scholars who examined a sign from three perspectives. Firstly, as a symbol, where the connection between the signifier and the signified is subjective or conventional (Spolsky, 2009; Bezemer and Cowan, 2021). This relationship requires agreement and learning, such as in language, numbers, traffic lights and national flags. Secondly, as an index, where the signifier is directly connected to the signified through a physical or causal link, irrespective of intention (Sobur, 2004; Ibrahim and Sulaiman, 2020). This connection can be observed or inferred, as seen in natural signs, medical symptoms, measuring instruments, signals, pointers and recordings. Lastly, as an icon, where the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified, possessing some of its qualities (Moriarty, 2002; Pawito, 2007). This includes portraits, cartoons, scale models, onomatopoeia, metaphors, and realistic sounds in various forms of media. However, the focus of the present study is on the first two categories; namely symbolic and indexical meanings as represented by a specific sign in the public space in Tanzania.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study employed a Social Semiotic Theory to study and analyse sign X in Tanzanian Swahili context. The theory focuses on how meanings are constructed and communicated through various signs and symbols within social contexts. Pioneered by scholars such as Michael Halliday (1970s), who introduced Systemic Functional Linguistics, and further developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1990s). This approach examines how linguistic and non-linguistic signs (such as images and gestures) are used in society (here referred as Swahili context) to convey different meanings (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). The theory also emphasizes the importance of the audience and context in the communication process by recognizing that different groups may interpret signs in different ways based on their cultural, social and individual backgrounds (Scollon and Scollon, 2003; Menezes and Vieira, 2019). This perspective highlights the dynamic nature of communication, where meanings are not fixed but negotiated among participants in a given context. By applying Social Semiotic Theory in studying sign X in Tanzanian Swahili context, the study aimed to uncover the layered and complex ways in which this sign operates in the public space in Tanzania. This approach, therefore, not only examines the sign itself but also considers the broader socio-cultural and historical factors that influence its interpretation and use in a Swahili context.

2.0 Methodology

This study employed a social semiotic approach to study and analyse the communicative value as represented by the sign X in the Swahili context in Tanzania. It used two sets of data: narrative data obtained through survey questionnaires that were distributed to participants (see Table 1) and photographic data collected through observation method (see Table 2).

2.1 Sampling, Sample Size and Methods of Data Collection

The study employed random and purposive sampling procedures to get the required number of the sample from both survey questionnaires and photographic data. Thus, any first-year student studying communication skills for Social Sciences and Humanities and who was ready to participate by filling in an open questionnaire was asked to list all of the meanings that were associated with sign X in the Swahili context based on their experience. This survey was conducted in 2022 in which all participants filled the open-ended question that asked: “What are the communicative values of sign X in the Swahili context in Dar es Salaam?” Table 1 shows the respondents’ profile as they participated in filling the questionnaire survey:

Table 1: Questionnaire Respondents’ Profile

Age of respondents	Respondents (N=103)	Percentages (%)
18-20 years	35	34
21-22 years	47	45.6
23- above	21	20.4
Total	103	100.00

Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 1 shows that 103 first year students who were taking Communication Skills course for Social Sciences and Humanities in the class of 2022 participated in the survey. These students aged between 18-23 years. This suggests that they were mature enough to be involved and contribute significant ideas on the study. The choice of first year students and who were taking Communication Skills course was strategic due to several factors, including the fact that their course was highly relevant and potentially enhancing their awareness and understanding of communicative practices. Also, group’s accessibility and willingness to participate made them a practical choice. In addition, the homogeneity of the sample could simplify data analysis. On the other hand, observation method was used to collect photographic data. A total of 47 photographic images with sign X were purposively sampled. The criteria for the sign to be included in the sample was to have a sign X on its frame with text in Kiswahili or without additional text. The studied sign X were mainly found online and offline platforms on temporal and permanent buildings, mobile vehicles, advertisements, and online posters in the

Swahili context in Tanzania. Table 2 shows the distribution of sources of data as used in this study:

Table 2: Sources of Data

Type of Data		Source	Number of Items	Total Number of Themes Generated
A: Photographic data		Public space (online/virtual)	28	10
		Public space (physical)	19	9
Total			47	19
B: Text narrative data		Questionnaire survey	103	25
Total (A+B)			150	44

Source: Field Data (2022)

In Table 2, it is revealed that a total of 47 items were collected, which generated 19 themes. On the other hand, a total of 103 survey questionnaires that were distributed to participants generated 25 themes, making a total of 44 themes generated from both photographic and survey questionnaire data. These themes were then compared, grouped and finally they formed seven (7) major themes as many of them were recurring (see Table 3).

2.2 Data Analysis

According to Scollon and Scollon (2003) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), there are crucial steps that have to be followed in analysing signs in social semiotic studies. These include: identification of the sign to determine what is the sign about and its potential meanings within the context it appears (virtual or physical). Two, multimodality analysis which examines how the sign interacts with other modes of communication (text and visuals) to convey meaning in the public space. Three, functional analysis that aims to investigate the roles of the sign in communication, focusing on its ideational and textual functions within the context it is used. Four, interpretation and representation. This step involves interpreting the sign in relation to what it represents, whether ideas, experiences, practices, identities or social relationships. The last step is critical engagement where the researcher critically assesses the power dynamics surrounding the sign by questioning who controls its creation and distribution, and how it may influence social structures and relationships. The present study adopted all these steps in its analysis.

The collected data from survey questionnaires were analysed through thematic analysis and the photographic data were analysed through social semiotic analysis by observing the steps listed above. Semiotic analysis was treated as the

main method of data analysis for this study because it is an approach and strategy that enables researchers in (visual) communication studies, linguistic landscape studies and semiotic studies to investigate systematic relationships between social constructs (realities) and signs, discourses and texts (Sobur, 2004; Pawito, 2007; Ibrahim and Sulaiman, 2020). All of these are qualitative approaches that are essentially used in analysis of data in semiotic and communication studies (Tracy, 2020).

3.0 Results

This section presents the findings on the communicative value of sign X in Swahili context in Dar es Salaam's public space. By analysing the signs, it shows how this sign is perceived by the people in the studied spaces and its impact on social interactions and urban communication as can be seen in the following subsections that explain the themes emerged during data analysis.

3.1 Communicative Value and Interpretations of Sign X in the Swahili Context

The interpretation of the communicative value of sign X in the Swahili context in Dar es Salaam was derived from a rigorous analysis of various fields that employed this sign. These fields include: Construction industry, love, sexuality and pornography, education, health, news and information, government interventions, and death. The employment of sign X across multiple fields illustrates its rich tapestry of meaning making, where its conceptualization and perceived experience are informed by the social fabric of Tanzania. The data, bolstered by visual evidence, highlights the diverse uses of sign X to communicate specific narratives or regulations within the social realm. Table 3 shows the fields that employed the use of sign X in the public space in Tanzania.

Table 3: Communicative Themes of Sign X as Generated from the Collected Data

S/N	Field Represented by Sign X	Communicative Meaning as Marked by Sign X
1.	Construction industry	• Communicating demolition, removal, or unfinished construction work
2.	Love, sexuality and pornography	• Communicating sex chromosome, an ended sexual relationship, symbol for adult films/movies and rated rentals
3.	Education	• Communicating error or mistake, sign of multiplication, hidden value, mysterious, 10th value, size of measurements
4.	Health	• Communicating health protocols, attention, avoidance, emphasis
5.	News and information	• Communicating fake news or

6.	Government interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • misinformation
7.	Death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marking stoppage, prohibition, not appropriate, cessation • Communicating death when marked on a person in a group photo it means that person is dead • Implies taking a life/death oath

Source: Field Data (2022)

The data summarized in Table 3 outlines seven distinct fields/themes where sign X was employed in the public space (both offline and online), illustrating a diverse range of communicative value of the sign. Each field showcases specific uses of sign X in the Swahili context. These uses exemplify how the sign acts as a versatile semiotic tool. The sign is adapted into various Swahili contexts to convey crucial meanings that influence behaviour and perceptions in the society. These fields/themes and their supporting evidences are further exemplified in the next subsections.

3.1.1 Construction Industry

Sign X in this field gained a public attention between 2015 and 2021 during the reign of the Tanzanian fifth president, His Excellency the Late President Magufuli. President Magufuli had introduced a big road project around the country, the notable one being in Dar es Salaam City with eight lane road running from Kimara to Kibaha in the Coast Region. This made many houses and other facilities such as shops and petroleum filling stations to be marked with red sign X within the range of 112 metres along the Morogoro Road on both sides. Data from the field showed that the sprayed red sign X meant that the residents in the designated area had to vacate or demolish their properties to give room for a construction of the new road, failure of which represented danger. Since then, wherever the red sign X with or without the word '*bomoa*' (demolish) or '*ondoa*' (remove) is seen it is associated with danger. That anytime the owners of the facility will be visited by the government authorities and if they fail to comply within a given frame of time, a squad of armed people will do the job of demolishing or removing the facility as a way of clearing the area for government projects (see Figure 1 and 2).



Figure 1: Sign X Marking Demolition of a Fish Sales Facility at Mbezi Mwisho, Dar es Salaam (2022)



Figure 2: Sign X Indicating the Need for Removal of the Facility in Temeke, Dar es Salaam (2022)

Field observations consistently showed that sign X is commonly spray-painted on the walls of buildings or facilities to indicate that such facilities are not needed and should be removed or demolished. This practice is exemplified in the provided Figures 1 and 2. Remarkably, both photographs indicate that these signs were applied by the Tanzania Roads Agency, commonly known as TANROADS, which signifies their official nature. In Figure 1, the sign bears the inscription 'bomoja' (demolish), while the sign in Figure 2 reads 'ondoa' (remove). Although conveying a similar message, these signs differ in their context and meaning focus. Sign X is used to indicate demolition when the facility in question is permanently

constructed (Figure 1). Conversely, the same sign is used to signify removal when the facility is temporarily built and not intended for long-term use (Figure 2).

Furthermore, research findings revealed that sign X was also used to mark unfinished constructions or buildings/facilities that are awaiting completion before they can be occupied/opened. This can be observed in Figure 3, where a window is marked with X sign, indicating that the work is in progress and nearing its final stage.



Figure 3: Sign X Indicating Unfinished Work in Kigamboni, Dar es Salaam (2022)

3.1.2 Love, Sexuality and Pornography

Research analysis on the theme of love, sexuality and pornography indicated that sign X has gained significant popularity within the adult film industry (pornography), where it is used as a symbol to represent adult films/movies and rated rentals (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Sign X Indicating Adult Film

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=iFJU-aaUQtg>

Figure 4 reveals that symbol "X" is being accompanied with the word '*karudi*' suggesting that this is an explicit or graphic sexual content meant for mature audience; that is why it is written 18+. In addition, the use of sign X and the word '*karudi*' in this Swahili context indicates the one who was a partner to someone but departed has now returned back. While these films are intended for mature audiences, it is disconcerting to note their surging popularity among young individuals, including college students in Tanzania is alarming. This age group, not being bound by rules from their homes or guardians, seems particularly drawn to such material. This was eminent during the field study whereby more than 90% of college students who responded to the questionnaire survey on the communicative value of X listed this as one of the meanings communicated by sign X. This content is explicitly seen in the public space, particularly in the vast realm of internet media, where millions of extreme pornographic films bear this designation (see Figure 4).

In addition, sign X gained an elevated meaning in the Tanzanian public space during the social campaign on homosexuality issues that happened in 2023. Those who were on opposition side devised different strategies to advocate for or against the practice by using semiotic signs, especially sign X to express their social stance on the matter. This expression is exemplified by the sign in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Sign X indicating not allowed practices

<https://www.youtube.com/live/6IiyVm47TWQ?si=JIDWCsXHGFU2bXed>

Looking at Figure 5, the sign X poster was posted online to express people's grievances when the motion of homosexuality rights emerged in Tanzania in early May 2023. The campaign was accompanied with a heated debate on social media and other physical public spaces on what should be the right move in dealing with homosexuality matters in the country. This campaign meant to underscore the intersection of cultural, political, and social dynamics in the discourse on homosexuality. The sign is accompanied with a text in the Swahili language which states "*Tanzania bila ushoga inawezekana*" (Tanzania without homosexuality is possible) which encapsulates a strong anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment within certain segments of the Tanzanian population. Generally, the sign X on the poster seems to communicate one important figurative message. Thus, it signifies that homosexuality is not allowed and has no space in Tanzania and this is done by crossing over the flag used by gay and transgender community for their identity.

3.1.3 Education

This was another field that emerged profoundly during data analysis especially from survey questionnaire. It was a theme that was mentioned by many participants (80%) of the study. Figure 6 illustrates the use of sign X in educational context:



Figure 6: Sign X Indicating a Hidden Value

<https://m.facebook.com/1622899228012945/photos/a.1627356477567220/1844791975823668/?type=3>

Data analysis in Figure 6 indicated that sign X was used to mark a hidden value that has to be unfolded. In most cases it is used to locate the hidden value in mathematics, especially when students are asked to find the value of something unknown as can be seen in Figure 6; it asks “*tafuta thamani ya X*” (which means “find the value of X” in the given mathematical problem). On the other hand, findings from participants showed that when marked on a script or work of a student in the education context, it means an error or else the candidate did not get the question right. This is one of the experiences most of the participants in questionnaire survey appreciated to have encountered during their studies at different levels of education from kindergarten to university. I remember to have firstly encountered the communicative value of sign X during his first grade in 1990. It was a sign that I got wrong one of the given assignments.

In mathematics, X is a Roman number 10. The sign is also used to mark multiplication of numbers in mathematics. This was evident in the analysed data, thus, multiplication cannot be possible without this sign. Furthermore, research findings showed that sign X was used to mark size of clothes by tailors in tailoring industry. For example, clothes were observed to be marked with X to mean small, XL medium and XXL to mean extra-large.

3.1.4 Health

Sign X gained an extension of meaning in the health field in the Tanzanian public space and beyond during the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic as it was used to

mark inappropriate health protocols to be avoided by the general public. Most of the posters that were designed to display the health protocols employed the use of sign X, especially in raising awareness to the public on what was appropriate and what was not appropriate (see Figure 7):



Figure 7: Sign X at the University of Dar es Salaam (Main Campus) Health Centre Indicating Things to Avoid (2022)

The poster in Figure 7 was designed by the University of Dar es Salaam as a tool for educating its community about what to avoid during the pandemic caused by Corona virus. The first line of the poster shows the protocols that one has to follow in order to be safe and on the second line there are protocols that are marked by red sign X - demonstrating things to avoid in order to be safe from COVID-19. These include: *epuka kushikana mikono* (avoid shaking hands), *funga mdomo unapokohoa* (close mouth when coughing), *zingatia kukaa umbali* (observe social distance), *epuka kuchangamana na wanyama* (avoid contact with animals), and *epuka safari zisizo za lazima* (and avoid unnecessary travels). So, the meaning extension on this poster shows that sign X was used as an avoidance mark.

3.1.5 News and Information

Sign X was revealed to have opened doors in the news and information studies. The data analysis showed that when sign X is crossed over a photo or text, it means that the information presented by the text or image is not factual or simply fake news; hence, it should be ignored (see Figures 8).



Figure 8: Sign X indicating Fake News

<https://images.app.goo.gl/gHRQtmUfXuWQ8X8eA>

Analysis on Figure 8 suggests that the image presented with a crossed over by sign X is a falsified official document stamped with "FAKE" to signal its inauthenticity, a practice that has become increasingly common in the spread of fake news in Tanzanian public spaces, especially through online platforms. The image bears what appears to be official government symbols and uses formal language to mimic a genuine announcement, including contact information and a sense of urgency regarding deadlines and fees, tactics designed to deceive and potentially exploit the public. This instance underscores the urgent need for heightened public vigilance, improved digital literacy, official verification

processes, and secure communication channels to combat the proliferation of fake news and maintain trust in public institutions. The use of visual marker (sign X), prominently stamped across the document, serves to immediately alert viewers to the illegitimacy of the content. This practice is part of a broader thematic effort to combat misinformation as presented further in Figure 9.



Figure 9: Sign X indicating fake news

<https://x.com/tanescoyetutz/status/1704765582623523227?s=20>

Figure 9 depicts a notice from the Tanzania National Electricity Company (TANESCO) addressing misinformation circulated on social media. TANESCO's response to the viral fake news highlights the challenges organizations face in managing public perception and information accuracy in Tanzanian context. The sign exemplifies the broader issue of fake news and its impact on public institutions and their communication with the populace.

3.1.6 Government Intervention

Data analysis showed that sign X was also used to mark government intervention. This category includes interpretations such as prohibition, cessation, and stoppage as depicted on Figure 10:



Figure 10: Sign X Indicating Prohibition of Middlemen

<https://twitter.com/Kifuru3/status/1590857894991626240?s=20>

The use of sign X in Figure 10 signifies the prohibition or cessation of the practice involving brokers or middlemen in accessing services from TANESCO. Middlemen were said to be individuals who illicitly charge customers in exchange for connecting them with TANESCO officials for the aim of accessing services from the company, despite lacking authorization as official employees. This circumstance had resulted into public complaints. Consequently, as a response to the public outcry, the crossed-out depiction of the middle person by sign X on the poster signifies that their involvement is prohibited.

3.1.7 Death

Findings also showed that sign X was used to mark the demise of an individual in a group photo. Thus, when encountering a group photo with an individual designated by sign X, it serves as a poignant reminder that the marked person is no longer among the living. Figure 10 exemplifies this scenario:



DIAMOND ATUMIA NGUVU NYINGI
KUOMBOLEZA KIFO cha MSANII CO...

Figure 10: Sign X Marking Death in a Group Photo

<https://images.app.goo.gl/yKi7atosbAkRGgiV9>

Looking at the two group photos in Figure 13, one can infer that Diamond, a popular *bongo* flavour musician from Tanzania, is deeply mourning the demise of his very best friend. The caption text in Swahili reads “Diamond *atumia nguvu nyingi kuomboleza kifo cha msanii*” which can be translated as “Diamond uses a lot of energy to mourn the death of an artist”. The red sign X is placed on the image of the deceased person to indicate that he is no more.

4.0 Discussion

This paper has explored the communicative value of sign X in the Swahili context in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. As a semiotic resource, it has been revealed that sign X represents various communication cues that reflect what the society believes, experiences, practices or lives for. These findings are in line with the results by Tulchinskii (2021) who noted that the meanings of semiotic signs are socially constructed as they represent the social constructs of the actors at that particular moment and they are subject to changes from one social setting to another. Similarly, the analysed data have showed that the communicative value of sign X was determined by its ability to convey meaning and facilitate communication between individuals or groups. This means that the meanings communicated in this study are not inherent in the sign X itself but they are socially constructed and they are dependent on the shared understanding and interpretation of sign X within the Swahili context or culture.

Research findings have generally showed that, among the 8 fields established in studying the communicative value of sign X in the Swahili context in Tanzania, the construction field was leading on the list. This finding suggests that sign X is the most preferred sign to denote issues related to construction. The sign X was overly used in the studied public space to communicate demolition or removal of facilities. However, its use was noted to have caused much frictions between the state and the general public- who complained that the government was not considerate in the exercise of demolition of their houses. Many were left without any support or shelter. Same observation was noted by Mhache (2017) and The Citizen (2017) in their studies as they showed that the government was blamed and accused to have interfered the life style of the people and others dared to sue the government. This, in some way, had an implication in shaping the power relations within the terrain of the social fabric and government agencies.

Findings unfolded further that actors who employed the use of sign X in the public space in Tanzania were grouped into two categories: bottom-up and top-down categories. Top-down actors were represented by bodies working on behalf of the government. In this context, bodies like TANROADS, hospitals, TANESCO, Tanzania Railway Corporation (TRC), and universities as revealed by sign X in the Tanzanian public space were categorised as top-down actors as they were representing government authorities. On the other hand, bottom-up actors were individuals or private companies which were not controlled or regulated by any government agency. This category was represented by individuals in the society, petrol stations, business people and bloggers who posted different signs to showcase their voices. These findings are in line with previous studies (Backhaus, 2009; Spolsky, 2009; Gorter, 2006; Lusekelo and Mdukula, 2021; Mdukula, 2021) which found out that public signs were categorised as either bottom up or top-down signs based on who posted the sign in the public space. For example, X signage that portrayed warning, prohibition, demolition, removal, giving protocols and notice for fake news were all from top-down category while X signage that portrayed death, love, sexuality and pornography were mostly from bottom-up category, meaning that they were just signed by individuals at their capacity and not as government agencies.

The current study has focused mainly on two types of signs as categorised by indexing and symbolic parameters in the Swahili context while previous studies (Moriarty, 2002; Pawito, 2007; Spolsky, 2009; Bezemer and Cowan, 2021) focused on the three types of signs: indexing, symbolic and iconic. The findings of the present study suggest that actors in the Swahili context in Tanzania employ the use of sign X as semiotic resource to represent and meet their informational or symbolic needs. These findings are in correlation with what Yiping *et al* (2023) observed in their study about linguistic landscape and place-making on a resort island in China. Yiping *et al* emphasized that linguistic landscapes serve as a reflection of sociocultural dynamics, where signage and symbols play a crucial

role in shaping the perceptions and interactions within a particular environment. Similarly, in Tanzanian context, the use of sign X being supported by Kiswahili words signifies a deliberate efforts by actors in the studied public space to convey specific messages or meet symbolic needs related to prohibition, fake news, hidden value, and safety and health protocols. The findings of this study regarding the employment of sign X as a semiotic resource resonate with the observations made by other studies cited. Together, these insights underscore the multifaceted nature of communication in the Swahili context and public spaces in general, whereby visual and linguistic elements converge to convey information, express identity and shape the lived experiences of individuals within their respective contexts.

5.0 Conclusion

This study has found that sign X serves as a powerful means of communication within the Swahili context in Tanzania. The sign was revealed to convey a wide range of ideas, concepts, lived experiences, practices and social dynamism in the studied context. This exploration revealed further that sign X's layered meanings and its significant role in the Swahili public discourse, offers insights into the broader implications of urban signage. The key findings have highlighted the diverse messages associated with sign X, encompassing notions of prohibition, demolition, removal, fake news, deletion, warnings, protocols observation, death, sexuality, and its role as a symbol that evokes past experiences. The study has contributed significantly to the field of social semiotic studies, both in a general sense and with specific relevance to Swahili context in Tanzania. By unravelling the communicative value of sign X in Swahili context in Tanzania, the study has enriched our understanding of the intricate nature of semiotic signs and their multifaceted roles that are influenced by social and cultural experiences and which we cannot do away or live without them. The insights gained from this research are particularly valuable in interpreting the complexities of sign X and other semiotic signs and their implication in various contexts. As such, this study serves as a critical resource for deciphering the nuanced meanings and functions that sign X embodies; hence, contributing to more informed and culturally sensitive interpretations. In conclusion, the investigation into communicative potential of sign X has illuminated its significance as a dynamic and context-dependent semiotic sign. As the meanings revealed should be interpreted with reference to the context in which the sign was used. As an invaluable addition to the body of knowledge in social semiotics, this study provides a foundation for further exploration and inquiry into the multifarious ways in which sign X shapes and reflects the social fabric of Tanzanian society and beyond. The study has broader implications for semiotic studies beyond Tanzania as it has highlighted that sign X is a powerful means of communication within the public space.

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