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The impact of translated films on the sociolinguistic landscape of Uganda

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine the impact of translated films on the sociolinguistic landscape of Uganda, a multilingual society where audiovisual media (translated films) serve as a powerful tool for cultural transmission and societal change. It explores how translated films influence language use, linguistic attitudes, and cultural perceptions among Ugandan audiences. It also investigates the causes of the unacceptability of these films among certain demographic groups, focusing on translation quality, cultural dissonance and other factors that may hinder audience engagement. Two questions were raised: 1) what is the impact of the translated films on the sociolinguistics of Uganda? 2) How can translated movies be improved to target a plurality of viewers in the Ugandan context? The study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data is collected from individuals across different educational, regional, and linguistic backgrounds in Uganda. Questionnaires and interviews are used to capture diverse perspectives on the reception of translated films, their sociolinguistic impact, and potential areas of improvement. This study is guided by key theoretical frameworks, including Polysystem Theory, Language Contact Theory, and Skopos theory. From the findings, it can be noted that translated films elevate the prestige of local languages such as Luganda, thereby enhancing language attitudes, language use and societal perceptions. However, challenges such as poor translation accuracy, lack of cultural adaptation, and technical flaws were cited as primary concerns affecting audience engagement, with most respondents emphasizing the need for accurate translations. Recommendations include improving the accuracy of translations, ensuring cultural relevance, and enhancing the technical quality of the films and mastery of the languages by the translators to broaden their appeal and foster inclusivity among diverse Ugandan audiences. By addressing these aspects, the study offers practical strategies for improving the reach and acceptability of translated audiovisual content, contributing to a more inclusive and dynamic sociolinguistic landscape in Uganda.

Keywords:

Translated films, Sociolinguistics, Audiovisual media, Cultural transmission, Language use, Linguistic attitudes.

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Uganda is a multilingual country in East Africa with over 70 spoken languages, 43 of its living languagesfall into four main families Bantu, Nilotic and Central Sudanic and Kuliak (Uganda SIL international, 2023). Entertainment is part and parcel of Uganda and translation has played a big role in the entertainment industry for decades through translated films (Sheier, 2006). The most popular type of translated films in Uganda is those that are voiceovers, popularly known as translated films/movies. In these films, an interpreter known as video jockey (VJ) does the translation. In other words, he interprets what is happening in the context of the movie, all the actions and the language. The original voices in the films are not replaced but he interprets what the actors say. According to Scheier (2006), veejaying is now a central of local entertainment but the art involves much more than translation. Part sports announcer, part street preacher, part comedian, a vee-jay must fill in cultural gaps and keep the audience engaged, which for many vee-jays often means taking a considerable creative license. According to Scheier, video halls mushroomed around the country in the mid-1980s, when a measure of relative peace and prosperity made copies of foreign movies more accessible. But since most of their patrons did not speak English well, owners brought in translators, who usually sat near the TV set, ideally with a microphone.These films that are loved by most of the natives have been popular since that kind of translation was introduced, given that most of the films in Uganda are in English hence translated into the local language. The impact of translated movies is not only a rich area of research but also a subject of considerable debate among scholars, translators, and audiences. This debate revolves around several key issues: the fidelity of translations, the choice between subtitles and dubbing, and the cultural implications of translation choices. One major point of contention is the balance between fidelity to the original text and the need for cultural adaptation. Scholars like Venuti (1995) argue for a foreignizing approach to translation, which aims to preserve the foreign elements of the source text, thereby enriching the target culture with new perspectives. Venuti (1995) criticizes domesticating translations that make foreign texts conform to the cultural norms of the target audience, arguing that this practice can lead to a loss of the original's cultural richness.

While there is extensive research on the impact of translated movies, especially focusing on subtitling and dubbing in various global contexts, one specific area that remains underexplored is the use of voice-overs in certain regions including parts of Africa (Nornes, 2007). This niche represents a significant gap in the current literature, considering the unique linguistic and cultural landscape of Uganda. Research on audiovisual translation has predominantly concentrated on major languages and regions, such as English, French, Spanish, and Mandarin, and on popular methods like subtitling and dubbing (Gambier, 2003). Studies by Venuti (1995) on foreignization and domestication in translation, and by Chaume (2012) on the impact of dubbing on audience perception have provided valuable insights into how translation choices affect viewer experience and cultural exchange. However, the specific technique of voice-over, particularly in the context of African languages and cultures, has not received comparable scholarly attention. While subtitling and dubbing are common in the West and Asia, voice-overs are a preferred method in Uganda due to their cost-effectiveness and the high levels of illiteracy that make subtitling less viable.

Despite the prevalence of voice-overs in Ugandan cinema, there is a noticeable absence of focused research on this practice, especially in Ugandan translated movies. The use of voice-overs in this context warrants specific investigation to understand its impact on:

a) Audience Reception: How Ugandan audiences perceive and engage with voice-over translations compared to other methods. If there are differences in comprehension, enjoyment, or cultural connection. If they influence the language attitudes, identity, and the interplay of multiple languages in Uganda.

b) In the case of technical and artistic quality: If there are the technical challenges and artistic considerations in producing high-quality voice-over translations in the movies and how these factors influence the overall quality and authenticity of the translated films.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The translated films have been translated to entertain the general public: both the literate and illiterate. It is important to analyze their significant impact on the sociolinguistic situation in Uganda, that is, language use and attitudes. It is rather sad and unfortunate to observe that some people do not watch the films. Therefore concerns remain regarding the unacceptability of the films to a certain group of people that may not be satisfied with the translation of the films into the local languages hence having limited viewers.

1.2 Research objectives

The objectives of this research study are to:

a) Identify, describe and explain the impact of translated films on the sociolinguistics of Uganda.

b) Explore the strategies to ameliorate the translated films to have a plurality of Ugandan viewers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a review of the literature related to the study: the conceptual review, the theoretical review and the empirical review.

2.1 Conceptual Review

This work employs a conceptual framework that helps to examine the impact of translated films on the sociolinguistic landscape of Uganda. These concepts include translation, audiovisual translation and sociolinguistics.

2.1.1. Translation

Bassnett (1980, 2013) defines translation as the rendering of a text from one language into another so as to ensure that the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar, and

the structures of the source language will be preserved as closely as possible. Basnett's definition emphasizes fidelity to meaning and structure, which is crucial when analyzing how films translated into Ugandan languages retain (or lose) original meaning while adapting to local linguistic and cultural contexts. This allows us to study how the preservation of original meanings or changes in structure impacts Ugandan viewers and their sociolinguistic interactions. Venuti (1995, 2017) defines translation as a process of rewriting, where the translator negotiates between the foreignness of the source language and the reader's culture, sometimes domesticating the content to fit local contexts. Venuti's concept of domestication and foreignization is highly relevant to this study. Translated films in Uganda may either be adapted to fit local languages and cultural references (domestication) or retain elements of the original language and culture (foreignization). This dynamic is central to exploring how translated films can reshape language use and cultural identity in Uganda.

2.1.2 Audiovisual translation

Díaz Cintas and Remael (2020)define Audiovisual Translation as a form of translation that takes place in audiovisual media, where messages are transmitted through a combination of images and sounds, and not only through written or spoken words. This definition emphasizes that AVT is not just about language but the combination of multiple semiotic channels (visuals, audio, and language). This is crucial for Uganda's sociolinguistic landscape, where local audiences may interpret both the language used in translations and the imagery from foreign cultures in unique ways. Understanding the combination of sound, language, and visuals is key to evaluating how global media adapts to local Ugandan contexts. According to Karamitroglou (2000), Audiovisual Translation is the transfer of verbal components in a multimedia product, where the meaning is conveyed not only through the spoken word but also through images and sound. Karamitroglou's definition underscores the multimedia aspect of AVT, which includes not just the spoken word but also images and sounds. In Uganda, the "revoicing" tradition (such as veejays adding commentary in local languages) is part of how films are translated and adapted. This definition allows for analysis of how the verbal translation (subtitling or dubbing) interacts with other audiovisual elements to influence sociolinguistic dynamics in Uganda.

2.1.3. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics can be defined as "the study of language in its social context" (Labov, 1972). Labov (1972) emphasizes how language varies and changes in different social contexts. He is known for his research on language variation and change in urban environments, highlighting the influence of social factors such as class, ethnicity, and gender on linguistic behavior. Hymes (1974) in his works, presents the ways in which language serves and is shaped by the social nature of human beings. He also introduced the concept of communicative competence, which includes not only grammatical knowledge but also the social rules of language use. In this study, we adapt Labov (1972) definition "Sociolinguistics is the study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used, and the effects of language use on society." Labov is a pioneering figure in sociolinguistics, and his definition focuses on the mutual relationship

between language and society, which is key to analyzing how translated films influence language practices and cultural expectations in Uganda. His approach considers how societal changes—such as the introduction of foreign films—affect language use, making it relevant for examining how translated movies impact linguistic behavior and cultural norms.

2.2 Theoretical Review

This study draws insight from the following theories: Polysystem Theory, Language Contact Theory and Skopos Theory. The reason for this choice is that these theories will lay the ground work for this work as well as in analysis of data and interpretation of the results in this study.

2.2.1 Polysystem Theory

Polysystem theory is a concept developed by Israeli scholar Itamar Even-Zohar in the 1970s. It is a framework used primarily in literary and translation studies to understand the complex interactions between different cultural and literary systems within a society. The theory suggests that literary works and translations do not exist in isolation but are part of a larger cultural system that is dynamic and hierarchical. The Polysystem theory is relevant to this study due to the fact that it encapsulates much of the aspect that we need to cover regarding this study. This theory views literature (including translated literature) as part of a larger social, cultural, and literary system that interacts dynamically. The theory suggests that translated works can occupy central or peripheral positions in the literary polysystem and influence the target culture and language in significant ways hence Translated movies can become central to the cultural polysystem in Uganda, influencing local cultural norms, values, and social practices. As translated films are integrated into Ugandan society, they can shape language use, introducing new vocabulary, expressions, and possibly even altering language hierarchies within the sociolinguistic landscape of Uganda.

2.2.2 Language Contact Theory

Language contact theory studies the effects of languages influencing each other when speakers of different languages interact regularly. This theory explains various linguistic phenomena, such as borrowing, code-switching, pidginization, creolization, and language shift. Language contact theory is a field within sociolinguistics that studies the effects of languages coming into contact with one another. Weinreich (1953), one of the main proponents of this theory, laid the groundwork for understanding the systematic outcomes of language contact, including borrowing, code-switching, and language convergence. Another proponent of this theory is Haugen (1953), who focused on the sociolinguistic aspects of language contact, particularly the phenomena of language maintenance and shift in immigrant communities. He introduced concepts such as language planning and the stages of language contact, including initial contact, bilingualism, and language death. The theory is relevant to this study as often introduce new words and phrases from the source language into the target language. Code-Switching that is exposure to multiple languages through translated films increases instances of code-switching among Ugandan speakers.

2.2.3 Skopos Theory

Skopos theory is a translation theory developed in 1989 by Hans Vermeer. He emphasized that the purpose (Skopos) of the translation determines the methods and strategies used in the translation process. This theory emphasizes the purpose (or "skopos") of a translation as the primary factor guiding translation strategies and decisions. It asserts that the intended function of a translated text in the target culture should dictate how it is translated, prioritizing the audience's needs and expectations. With the objective of this study to target a plurality of Viewers, recognizing that translations may serve multiple purposes for different audience segments is essential. Targeting a plurality of viewers in Uganda means considering the interests of various demographic groups for example the youth, professionals, rural communities.

2.3 Empirical Review

This section reviews other studies relevant to the present studies which were carried out by other scholars in different contexts.

Gottlieb (1994) examined subtitling practices in Denmark, focusing on how subtitles convey meaning and cultural context. The study highlighted the importance of brevity and the need to balance fidelity to the source text with the readability of subtitles. It underscored that subtitling can enhance cultural understanding but may also lead to loss of nuances. Gottlieb (1994) aimed to analyze the practice of subtitling in film and television, focusing on the strategies and linguistic challenges involved in creating effective subtitles. He sought to understand how subtitling could convey meaning and cultural context while maintaining the essence of the original dialogue. Gottlieb analyzed a selection of films and television programs that had been subtitled, examining both the original and subtitled versions. He focused on various aspects of subtitle construction, such as timing, readability, and the preservation of the source text's meaning. Specific examples of subtitled works were used to illustrate effective and ineffective subtitling practices. Gottlieb considered how audiences interpret and respond to subtitled films, emphasizing the importance of cultural familiarity and linguistic background.

Baker (2006) explored the role of audiovisual translation in conflict scenarios, focusing on how media representations can shape perceptions of cultural identities in various countries (including the Middle East). Baker's research emphasized the power of translated media in influencing sociopolitical narratives and audience perceptions, particularly in regions of conflict, suggesting that translation can either bridge or widen cultural divides. The study investigates how audio visual translations can influence public understanding and attitudes toward different cultural identities, particularly in contexts of political conflict.

Yoon (2011) studied how voice-over translation affects comprehension and engagement with audiovisual content among Korean audiences. The study found that voice-over can facilitate comprehension of foreign content, but it may also lead to disconnection if the voice-over does not match the original tone and emotion of the actors. Yoon's study (2002) aimed to investigate how voice-over translation affects the comprehension and engagement of

audiences with foreign audio visual content, particularly in the context of Korean viewers. The objective was to assess whether voice-over translation enhances or hinders the understanding of narrative and cultural nuances in films.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodological procedures that were used to collect and analyze data. It further provides information on the research approaches employed in the study, followed by the research design for the study. This chapter describes the participants, research design, sample size, methods of data processing and analysis.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted quantitative and qualitative of data collection. Therefore, questionnaire and interviews were the tools used to collect data. This study area was appropriate for research. It is also the most appropriate area as it is inhabited by people from different tribes and ethnic groups including the gender, education, age and profession.

3.2 Targeted population

Based on the nature of this study, the targeted demographic consists of Ugandans that reside in Kampala, both literate and illiterate, from various tribes. Kampala is the ideal location for the study because it is home to Ugandans from all across the country.

3.3 Sample size

This study collected data from respondents from various tribes and education background. A total of 61 respondents were purposely selected for an in-depth understanding of the impact of translated movies on the sociolinguistics of Uganda. The questionnaires were administered to 55 people and 6 people were interviewed.

### 3.4 Data Processing and Analysis Method

In this study, the data collected from different people that are residing in the same area of study, including the literate and illiterate. The quantitative data collected using open ended and close ended questions were analyzed using the descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The descriptive statistical tools used are frequency count, and percentages. To test hypotheses of the study, particularly hypotheses one and two, the Chi-Square test (Inferential statistics) was used to depict for significant differences. On the other hand, the few qualitative data derived from the few open ended questions were analysed thematically using themes and quotations. Themes are the main idea derived from respondents' direct statements (quotation).In the qualitative data analysis derived from interviews, coding was used to transform the raw data into structured, analytical information in order to identify themes, patterns or categories. To carry out the qualitative coding (or open coding) of the texts transcribed from the interview data, detailed and descriptive codes were applied to the various sentences or parts of sentences that describe the impact, unacceptability and recommendations of translated films in the Ugandan context.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. The impact of translated films on the sociolinguistic landscape of Uganda.

The impact of translated films on Uganda's sociolinguistic landscape is profound, affecting how individuals perceive and use language in daily interactions. This analysis below explores how translated films influence the prestige of languages, patterns of language mixing, language learning, and the strengthening of cultural identity. Drawing on survey data, interviews, and other qualitative insights, the findings highlight the complex interplay between media and language in Uganda.

Figure 1: Watching Translated Films and Prestige of Languages
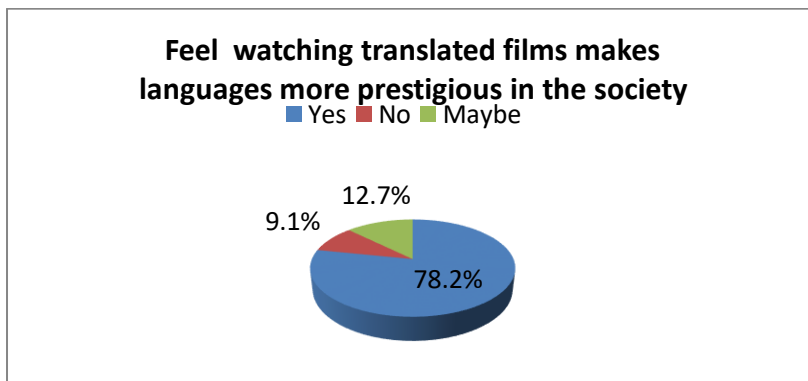
Regarding the prestigious of languages in the society due to watching of translated films, 78.2% (43) of respondents indicated that watching translated films has makes languages more prestigious in the society while 9.1% (5) denied and 12.7% (7) uncertain. This could be attributed to the way languages, particularly foreign ones, are portrayed in translated films as vehicles of modernity, sophistication, or global culture. Local languages also gain visibility when they are used in translations, leading to increased appreciation within communities. This is why majority of the respondents feel that prestige of certain languages is elevated.

Table 1: Respondents Opinion on Noticing Changes in How People Speak After Watching Translated Movies

Have noticed changes in how people speak for example phrases, slang, and pronunciation after watching translated movies.	Frequency	Percentage	Some expressions given
Yes	52	94.5	Have learned some good words
No	3	5.5	

|			
Total	55	100	Learn new words and phrases

As depicted findings, majority of respondents 94.5% (52) indicated that they have notice changes in the way people speak after watching translated movies while 5.5% (3) denied and it was reported by some that the changes are due to learning of some good/new words or phrases while some attributed it to inaccurate translation. These changes often include the adoption of new phrases, slang, and pronunciation styles. Such adaptations could stem from exposure to characters, storylines, or cultural expressions embedded in the films. However, inaccuracies in translation were also noted as a contributing factor to these linguistic shifts.

Figure 2:Mixing Languages After Exposed to Translated Films
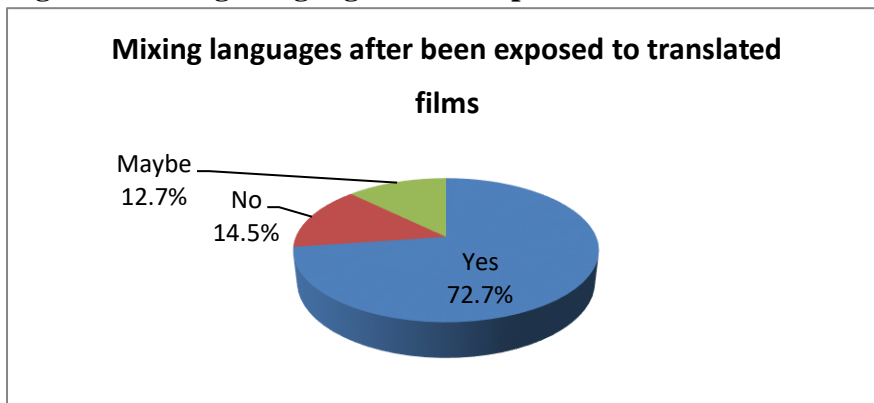
Moreover, regarding mixing languages, majority of respondents 72.7% (40) accepted that the find themselves and others mixing languages more often after being exposed to translated movies while 14.5% (8) denied and 12.7% (7) uncertain. Exposure to translated films appears to encourage language mixing, with 72.7% of respondents acknowledging that they or others tend to blend local and foreign languages more frequently. This linguistic phenomenon may reflect the influence of media that seamlessly integrates multiple languages, making code-switching a common feature of communication.

Figure 3: Translated Movies and Language Learning
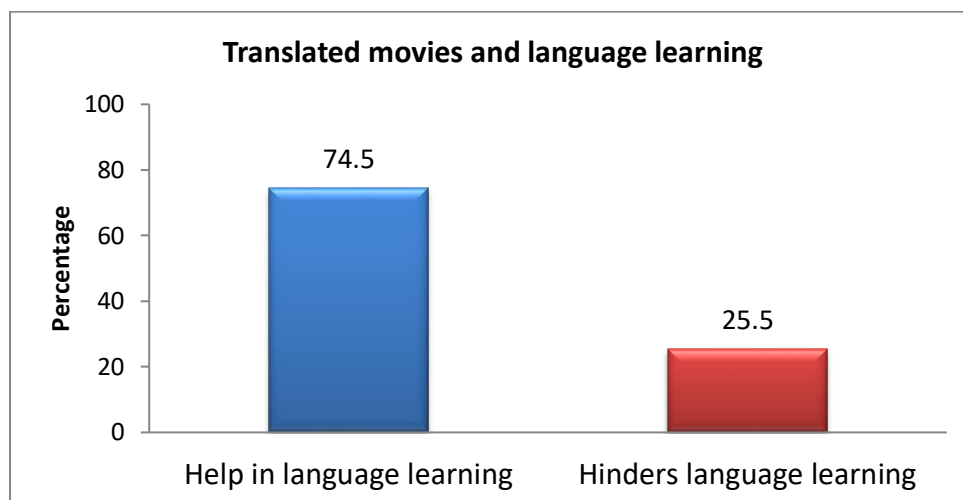
Furthermore, regarding translated movies and language learning, majority of respondents 74.5% (41) reported that translated movies help in language learning while 25.5% (14) said it hinders it.The shows that translated films introduce viewers to new vocabulary and expressions, facilitating informal education. Both foreign and local languages, benefit as they are showcased to audiences that are unfamiliar with them.

4.1.2 Data collected from interviews

Table 2: Impact of translated films on the sociolinguistic landscape of Uganda.

Category	Code	Description
Impact of translated films on the sociolinguistic landscape of Uganda.	Influence of translated movies on language preference/ use	Both the local and foreign languages. Yes, foreign languages. For those who are not proficient, they can get learned. Most movies are always in English... it is the English language that is always translated. People who do not know English, they can learn a certain language as if watching the translated movies. Foreign languages, of course. Some people can learn a local language that they didn't know

		well.
	Strengthening cultural identity through language	It has strengthened the language. It has strengthened and some languages have gained popularity. Watching translated movies... makes me feel proud about my language. It has strengthened my cultural identity in one way or another. It has strengthened language ways as people get to learn the local language more. It has strengthened my cultural identity and language.
	Changes in language use after exposure to translated movies	They use slangs. People mix languages and use languages from movies. You might end up forgetting that little English... being more familiar with using the local language. People will lag on the translated movies... use of slangs. Changes in communication skills... mixing of languages, use of slangs from the translated movies.

Based on the above findings, translated films are seen as significant tools in influencing both local and foreign language preferences. When it comes to local Languages, some respondents noted that translated films helped them learn local languages they were not proficient in, enhancing linguistic diversity and local identity. Secondly there were many responses reflected a sense of cultural pride and reinforcement of identity due to exposure to local language translations, thereby strengthening cultural identity. Lastly, the respondents observed shifts in communication styles, including mixing Languages: "People mix languages and use languages from films" and use of Slangs: slogans and slang from

translated movies were integrated into daily speech indicating a cultural blend of local and foreign influences.

4.2 How to ameliorate the translated films to target more viewers

Table: 3 Changes Recommended for Voice Overs Translated Movies to Appeal Wider Audience

Themes	Quotations
Good /accurate translation	"Translators experience."
	"Translation."
	"Translating right information."
	"Accurate translations
	"Accurate translations."
	"If only they followed the movie as it went on some translators are good but the majority need help."
No original language at background	"If the original language is completely not heard in the background."
	"Complete hiding of the original voice."
	"The one making the translation really matters to me, the voice, in how he or she translates the content in the film."
Understanding	"Voice over in a language I understand."
Improved translation	"Improving the quality of translation
	Improved translation of words said originally."
Authenticity	"If they are authentic, honest, and interesting."
Subtitle	"If they also had subtitles."
No addition	"Concentrate on translating what is really spoken by the actors and actresses in the movie and not exaggerate.'
Speed	"Speed of translation."
Reduce voice volume	"To reduce the volume of their voices.

Finally, based on recommendations to make voice over translated movies appeal a wider audience, many of the respondents recommended for accurate translation. Other

recommendations were translators been able to be creative, no background voice, training of translators, mastering of many languages by translators, improved sound quality, clarity and precision, no exaggeration, entertaining from translators, focus from translators, reduce advertisement during translation, use of subtitle, improve English skills from translation, improved marketing, and translation should translate everything.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings of the study on the impact of translated films on the sociolinguistic landscape of Uganda, they suggest that translated films serve as a powerful tool in the dissemination of global cultures and languages, contributing to both the promotion and the marginalization of local languages. The widespread consumption of translated content in Uganda, particularly in urban areas, has led to the increased prominence of global languages like English, but it has also sparked a renewed interest in local languages and cultures, especially when films are translated into indigenous languages. This study has demonstrated that the impact of translated films is not only linguistic but also cultural. Exposure to films in different languages has reshaped the way Ugandans view their own language practices, creating a dynamic sociolinguistic landscape. However, challenges such as unequal access to translated films for example in the rural areas, low-quality translations still present barriers to fully harnessing the potential benefits of translated films.

Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of high-quality, culturally sensitive translation practices and the need for greater accessibility to ensure that translated films contribute positively to Uganda's linguistic diversity and cultural heritage. By addressing these challenges and implementing recommendations for improvement, Uganda can fully leverage the power of translated films to enhance its sociolinguistic landscape and promote linguistic and cultural diversity.

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