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Linguistic Landscaping in Shop Naming Practices in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Objectives: This study adopts Spolsky's (2004) definition of language policy to examine language distribution in shop signs across Saudi Arabia, with a focus on the role of English within both de jure and de facto language policies.

Methods: A total of 276 shop signs from mainstream streets were analyzed and categorized as monolingual or bilingual. Monolingual signs included Arabic-only and English-only, while bilingual signs were further classified as translated signs, Englishized Arabic signs, Arabized English signs, or signs in other languages.

Results: The linguistic landscape is predominantly bilingual, with English widely used despite its unofficial status. Most bilingual signs are direct translations, accommodating both local and international audiences. Englishized and Arabized signs often aim to influence consumer perception rather than convey meaning, as words are re-scripted without enhancing accessibility.

Conclusions: Arabic remains dominant in monolingual signage, yet English emerges as an unofficial second language in bilingual displays. English frequently appears first, suggesting a growing preference driven by its perceived prestige. While no explicit government policy promotes English, its presence signals modernity and global alignment. This symbolic use of English highlights its ideological appeal, reinforcing its cultural influence in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Linguistic landscaping; de jure policies; de facto policies; shop signs; language policy.

المناظرُ اللُّغَوِيَّةُ في لافتات المحلّات التجاريَّة في المملكة العربيَّة السعوديَّة

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ملخّص

الأهداف: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الوقوف على توزيع اللغات في لافتات المحلّات التجاريَّة في المملكة العربيَّة السعوديَّة عبر استخدام تعريف سبولسكي (2004) لسياسة اللغة ، مع التركيز على أدوار اللغة الإنجليزيَّة في سياق السياسات اللغويَّة الرسميَّة والفعليَّة.

المنهجيَّة: حُلِّلَت 276 لافتة لمحلّات تجاريَّة في الشوارع الرئيسة، جرى تصنيفها إلى لافتات أُحاديَّةِ اللغة وأُخرى ثنائيَّة اللغة. شملت اللافتاتُ أُحاديَّةُ اللغةِ اللغةَ العربيَّة فقط أو اللغة الإنجليزيَّة فقط، بينما قُسِّمَت اللافتاتُ ثنائيَّةُ اللغةِ إلى فئات: اللافتات المترجمة، واللافتات العربيَّة بأحرف إنجليزيَّة، واللافتات الإنجليزيَّة المُعَرَّبة، إضافةً إلى لغات أُخرى.

النتائج: يسود المشهدُ اللغويُّ في الشوارع الرئيسة طابعَ ثنائيّ اللغة؛ حيث تُستخدم اللغةُ الإنجليزيَّةُ على نحوٍ واسع رغم عدم كونها لغةً رسميَّةً في المملكة العربيَّة السعوديَّة. تُظهر البياناتُ أنَّ معظم اللافتات ثنائيَّة اللغة هي ترجمات تهدفُ إلى تلبية حاجات العملاء المحليين والأجانب. كما أنَّ اللافتات المُعَرَّبة وتلك التي تكون بأحرف إنجليزيَّة تؤثّرُ في انطباعات المستهلكين، لكنَّها لا تُقدِّمُ وضوحًا دلاليًّا؛ إذ تجري إعادة كتابة الكلمات نفسِها بأحرف اللغة الأخرى؛ مما يَحُدُّ من إمكان الفهم للأشخاص غير الملمّين باللغة الأصليَّة.

الخلاصة: تظلُّ اللغةُ العربيَّةُ اللغةَ الأساسيَّةَ في لافتات المحلّات التجارية أُحاديَّة اللغة، بينما تُعَدُّ اللغةُ الإنجليزيَّةُ لغةً ثانية غيرَ رسميَّة في اللافتات ثنائيَّة اللغة. تُفضِّلُ العديدُ من المحلّات المحليَّة استخدامَ اللغة الإنجليزيَّة، وغالبًا ما تُعرَضُ الأسماءُ باللغة الإنجليزيَّة أوّلاً؛ مما يُشيرُ إلى تزايد مكانتها في المجتمع. رغم عدم وجود أيّ تفضيل لُغويّ في السياسات الرسميَّة فإنَّ اللغة الإنجليزيَّة تظلُّ مُهيمنةً في الواقع الفعلي. تُستخدم هذه اللغةُ في اللافتات لأغراض أيديولوجيَّة تعكسُ الحداثة والرُّقيّ؛ مما يُبرزُ دورَها كرمز للعولمة ويعزِّزُ جاذبيَّتَها الثقافيَّة في المجتمع السعودي؛ كونها تُستخدم أكثرَ لأغراض أُسلوبيَّة بدلاً من كونها وسيلةَ تواصل فعلي.

الكلمات الدالَّة: المناظر اللغويَّة، السياسات الرسميَّة، السياسات الفعليَّة، لافتات المحلّات، السياسة اللغويَّة.

Introduction

Language as a form of communication allows interlocutors to express themselves and their attitudes. Such communications include verbal interactions, written forms, and sign language, as well. Language in shop signs, i.e., the shop naming practices in store labels, can be considered as one example of the different illustrations of the uses of language, also described as linguistic landscaping (Bourhis, 1997). Thus, language in shop signs or the linguistic landscape of a country can be seen as "language policy mechanisms" (Tang, 2016, p.1) that are employed "mostly (but not exclusively) by those in authority to perpetuate ideologies about language and language users and eventually contribute to creating 'de facto language policies, i.e., language practices" (Shohamy, 2006, p. xv). In this respect, the shop signs appearing in the linguistic landscape of a certain country can propagate a de jure language policy, which refers to the official naming practices issued by the national government and a de facto language policy, which means the actual naming practices of the community in accordance with or in spite of the de jure language policy.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) refer to linguistic landscape as "the language of public road signs, street names, [and] shop names... [that] form the linguistic landscape of a given territory or region" (p. 25). Backhaus (2006) offers two more meanings of linguistic landscape, as follows: "an object, quality, or event that indicates the probable presence or occurrence of something else," and "a notice on public display that gives information or instruction in a written or symbolic form" (p. 4). Research on linguistic landscape has gained momentum, (Tang, 2016). Signs can communicate information about communities and reflect issues such as status and power of languages used in the country.

Traditionally, shop signs inform potential customers of the types of business or commodities being sold in a shop. Besides being informative, signs can also serve the pragmatic function of attracting and persuading buyers to buy from one shop and not from another. In other words, owners of shops can optimally use their signs to lure buyers to enter their respective establishments. This is done through the design of the signages, the colours and lighting employed to highlight them, as well as the language(s) used in terms of style and choice. Ideologically, shop signs can promote ideas about the significance of a certain language when it appears extensively in the linguistic landscape of a given country (Tang, 2016). Research on linguistic landscaping aims mainly to investigate shop naming practices as an arena for promoting certain languages and ideologies while demoting others (Griffin, 2004; McArthur, 2000; Ross, 1997; Schlick, 2002, 2003; Thonus, 1991). Research indicates that English is one of the prominent languages in shop naming across the world even though English is a foreign language in the countries examined (Harrman, 1984; Ross, 1997). This ideological widespread use of English has led to the idea of the "imperialism of English" (Bems et al., 1998; Knowles, 2001; Phillipson, 1992) in such countries. English imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) refers to the extensive use of English as an international language in countries where English is regarded as either a second or foreign language.

Background of the Study

Saudi Arabia is a religious country where Arabic is "not only viewed as the country's first language but as a holy language" since Arabic is the language of the Holy Qur'an (Payne & Almansour, 2003, p. 330). In schools, students study subjects in Arabic and thus are discouraged from reading and writing in any language but Arabic (Payne & Almansour, 2003). English is, nevertheless, the only foreign language promoted by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Saudi Arabia (Elyas & Badawood, 2016; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

Indeed, English enjoys a significant and high status not only in education but also in commerce and economics (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). In Saudi Arabia, training is performed in English in many organizations and companies, such as Saudi Airlines, Saudi Aramco, and Saudi Telecommunication Company (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). This indicates that foreign language planning in Saudi Arabia can be considered synonymous with English language planning. English language proficiency is not only encouraged by macro language policies, i.e., policies issued by the national government but also by micro language policies, i.e., policies made in the community itself (Payne & Almansour, 2003). In other words, the attainment of English is not just planned and encouraged by governmental authorities but is also an aspiration of Saudi individuals.

Nevertheless, the promotion of English in Saudi Arabia has led some scholars to ponder the position of Arabic in the Saudi community (Asiri, 2017). Although the Saudi government advocates the attainment of good proficiency in English, they also maintain that it should not be at the expense of Arabic or Islam (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). The Saudi Ministry for Commerce and Investment (MCI) specifies that names on commercial registers must be in Arabic only. According to the MCI (2005, Article 3),

The trade name shall consist of Arabic or Arabized words, and may not include foreign words, excepted from this provision are: names of foreign companies registered abroad, companies with well-known international names, and companies of mixed capital, to be specified by a decision issued by the Minister of Commerce.

This indicates that MCI is concerned about using only Arabic in names in commercial registers. However, with regard to the trademark or the name that appears in shop signs, the MCI does not require the use of Arabic only. In fact, with regard to trademarks, Saudi Arabia, like all other Gulf countries, does not specify that a certain language is to be used in its linguistic landscape. According to the MCI (2004, Article 2),

Trademark: Shall be considered a trademark anything having a distinctive form such as names, words, signatures, letters, figures, drawings, logos, titles, hallmarks, seals, pictures, engravings, packs, or any other mark or group of marks if used or intended to be used either to distinguish goods, products, or services of a facility or other facilities, or to indicate the rendering of a service or the control of inspection of goods or services. The voice or odor shall be considered as part of the trademark.

Thus, it can be inferred that the MCI does not have a strong position on the use of only Arabic in its linguistic landscape. The fact that no language is specified in the policy shows an implicit language policy to accept the use of any language in the linguistic landscape of not just Saudi Arabia but all Gulf countries since the trademark policies are uniform throughout the Gulf countries. The present study thus seeks to determine whether the de jure language policy stated by the MCI regarding trademarks is applied to encourage language diversity or whether the de facto language policies or linguistic practices are more directed toward employing English in shop signs more often than Arabic and other languages.

Purpose of Study

This paper examines the role and niches of English in Saudi Arabia in shop naming practices. It also investigates whether there is a compatibility between de jure and de facto policies with respect to the linguistic landscape of Saudi Arabia. It also seeks to discover whether this role promotes the linguistic imperialism of English. This study adopts linguistic landscaping as its analytical tool and components of Spolsky's (2004) definition of language policy as its theoretical framework to achieve such aims. Spolsky (2004) maintains that language policy consists of a community's linguistic practices and ideologies and the intentional efforts of some authoritative bodies to improve the linguistic situation of the country.

` The research questions that guided the study are**:**

1. What is the distribution of naming practices of retail businesses in the selected street in Riyadh by language and type?
2. Do the naming practices adhere to the national language policies?
3. Does the choice of language(s) for the shop naming indicate Arabic maintenance or English imperialism?

Literature Review

Linguistic Landscaping

Linguistic Landscaping in Monolingual Settings

The use of English in shop signs in non-English speaking countries has been a subject of research in recent literature, starting with Harrman (1984) and Thonus (1991), who investigated the reasons for naming shops in English in Japan and Brazil, respectively, where English is regarded as a foreign language. Both concluded that English is used to attract

customers and tourists because the foreign name would stand out among native names. Additionally, Ross (1997) examined the same phenomenon in Italy but concluded that the widespread use of English could not serve instrumental purposes as suggested by Harrman and Thonus. Ross maintains that English is used to evoke prestigious, stylistic, and modern values usually associated with English and its culture. MacGregor (2003) also examined the linguistic landscape of Japan, but from a different perspective. He started his study with the hypothesis that Japan is free from the widespread dominance of English in shop naming practices. MacGregor analyzed 120 shop signs close to downtown Tokyo to prove his claim. The study indicates, however, that almost half of the signs use English, especially in fashion-related stores.

Other studies have been carried out using the same method of linguistic landscaping, but with different focuses. Selvi (2011) and Gorgulu (2017), for example, aimed to provide a linguistic categorization of shop signs. Selvi explored English's influence in Turkey's linguistic landscape, focusing on the non-Turkish linguistic elements in shop names. He categorized the practices into three linguistic categories: (a) foreign signs, which could be English or another language; (b) hybrid signs, which use Turkish elements and other foreign elements together; and (c) Englishized Turkish signs, which use English orthography to spell the Turkish signs. Selvi concluded his dissertation by indicating that although the last category is less prominent in Turkish business discourse, its existence indicates certain serious effects of the English language on Turkish culture, language, and business discourse.

Gorgulu (2017) also examined the influence of English lexical elements on shop naming in Turkey. His findings indicated that the influence of English signs is not only reflected in their widespread use, but also in possible changes to the structure of the Turkish language. Selvi's (2011) categorization was adopted in the study by adding one more category that describes the shop signs as less native: "consonant duplication." This refers to a process based on English where a consonant is duplicated in the middle of a Turkish word and is accompanied by an English functional word, such as a determiner or a pronoun. He maintains that the structure of Turkish is changing since some linguistic elements of English are entering Turkish shop signs.

Other linguistic landscaping studies measure owners' attitudes towards the English names found in shop signs. For instance, Obeidat and Amer (2014) examined the linguistic landscape of Aqaba, Jordan, and the effects of English on the maintenance of Arabic, and studied whether the use of English depends on the type of shop. The findings of the study indicate that more than half of the shops in Aqaba have signage in both English and Arabic. Some shop owners indicated that they use English in shop signs to communicate with non-native speakers of Arabic. Other owners, however, argued that the use of English was for ideological purposes since English is more prestigious and associated with modernity and globalization. The study concludes that a possible effect of these English names in shop signs is that they will become loanwords in Arabic business discourse, especially since English is favored in the Jordanian context, and which can lead thereby to the dropping of Arabic names.

Linguistic landscape in multilingual settings

Research has also investigated linguistic landscaping in multilingual countries where English is widely used alongside the native language. For example, McArthur (2000) examined shop naming practices using English in the downtown areas of Zurich, Switzerland, and Uppsala, Sweden. McArthur's findings indicate that English is used extensively either by itself or with other languages, such as German and French, and he believes there is a future tendency in the Swiss context toward the use of English. This study concluded by highlighting the dominance of English in shop naming practices regardless of the languages with which it co-occurs.

The ecology of language refers to "the value of all languages as resources in multilingual settings" (Johanson, 2013, p. 51). Applying the concept, Tang (2016) studied how the four official languages in Singapore, Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, and English, are employed in shop naming practices, and explored the niches of each language in the Singaporean context, as well as whether there is a possible shift towards English with regard to the de jure and de facto policies. The data included 1,555 photos taken from different stations. The findings indicated a preference for using only English over the other three languages, with 63 per cent of the signs being monolingual. With respect to bilingual and multilingual signs, Tang found that English usually occupies first place in the visual hierarchy. The analysis also showed a possible language shift toward

English in shop signs all over the country, and Tang argued that even though the de jure language policy in Singapore promotes the ecology of language paradigm, the de facto language policy appears to encourage the diffusion of English, which promotes monolingualism and English as a national language.

Linguistic landscaping in Saudi Arabia.

Alsubhi (2011) investigated shop signs in three malls to see if there is a relationship between the language on shop signs and the location of the shopping area. Alsubhi (2011) selected three malls that are representative of upper-class shopping areas, middle-class shopping areas, and traditional *souqs*. She collected photos from the three malls and categorized them according to the name of the mall, the type of product, and the language used. Alsubhi (2011) also analyzed the data in terms of various features, such as repetition, size, color, focus, and foregrounding. The findings of her study indicate that the dominant language varies according to the location of the shopping area. In other words, the hegemony of English was more perceivable in the upper-class mall than in the traditional *souq*. Alfaifi (2015) also examined shop naming practices in two vital areas of Khamis Mushait. The results of Alfaifi's study show that the commercial zone seems to be affected by globalization and modernization, as shown by the significant use of English there.

To sum up, the use of English in shop-naming practices around the world appears to be a well-researched topic in the literature. These studies conclude that English is used mainly for ideological and instrumental purposes. In other words, some scholars attribute the use of English to its modern and prestigious status (Ross, 1997), and others consider English a global and international language (Lanza & Woldemariam, 2009). Additionally, some studies have concluded with a concern for possible changes to the structure of the native language due to the spread of English (Gorgulu, 2017), while others are concerned that English words might be borrowed into the native language (Obeidat & Amer, 2014). Nevertheless, the literature review also shows a dearth of research in the area of giving shop names on shop signs in the context of EFL, such as Saudi Arabia. The study of language policy as a theoretical framework for studying such names is even rarer and more noticeably absent. Thus, the author of this paper hopes to make a further modest contribution to this aspect of store naming by employing concepts such as linguistic imperialism, de jure and de facto policies, and language ideology.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs concepts in the field of language policy as its theoretical framework for analysis. The language policy of a speech community is defined by Spolsky (2004) as having three components. The first component is the "language practices or the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its linguistic repertoire" (p. 5). In other words, language policy can refer to the community's practices and choices to use a certain language in a certain context. The second part of Spolsky's language policy definition pertains to the community's "language beliefs and ideology" (p. 5). This aspect of the definition concerns the beliefs and ideology that people hold regarding language and language use as a language policy in itself. The third component of language policy refers to "any specific efforts to modify or influence that practice by any kind of language intervention, planning, or management" (Spolsky, 2004, p. 5). This refers to the intentional practices usually carried out by the national government or any other authoritative body to change or modify the previous two components. In this respect, the third component can be considered a de jure language policy, whereas the first two components can be regarded as de facto language policies.

De Jure and De Facto Policies

De jure and de facto policies illuminate the distinction between policy in law and policy in practice (Johanson, 2013). The former examines a policy as officially documented in writing by the national government, while the latter refers to locally produced practices that take place in accordance with or despite the de jure policies. Shohamy (2006) further argues that de jure and de facto language policies are diverse mechanisms that affect and construct linguistic practices. In other words, Shohamy (2006) argues that different language policies, practices, and regulations can be seen as "overt and covert (i.e., hidden) devices used as means of affecting, creating and perpetuating language practices, hence, de facto language policies" (p. 57). Thus, it can be inferred that ideology affects linguistic practice, i.e., de facto language policy and practice affects ideology.

Language Ideology

According to Van Dijk (1998), ideology is described as "the shared framework(s) of social beliefs that organize and coordinate the social interpretations and practices of groups and their members" (p.8). Silverstein (1992) further suggests that all societies have ideologies and that "there is no possible *absolutely* pre-ideological, i.e., zero-order, social semiotic" (p.315). In other words, ideology can be defined as a common belief among a given society which can organize their interpretation of reality. When ideological frameworks become permanent shared discourse, they become viewed as natural and commonsense (Fairclough, 2015). Regarding language ideology, Rumsey (1990) characterizes it as "shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world" (p. 346). Language ideologies can be seen as the shared beliefs and attitudes that people hold towards certain languages. In this respect, language can be employed as a covert tool to construct social control and power due to its connections with economic and social ideologies (Tang, 2016). Johanson (2013) further argues that language ideologies perpetuate values that position certain languages as more "natural" and "normal." In this respect, language ideology is hegemonic in nature because what the believers see as common sense is actually perceived as ideologies by analysts. For instance, English is ideologically perceived as a global language over the world, which has led to the concept of English imperialism (Phillipson, 1992).

Linguistic Imperialism and Globalization

Phillipson's (1992) theory of linguistic imperialism looks at issues of why some languages come to be used more than others and what ideologies underlie such processes by examining the linguistic hierarchization of languages. Similarly, Knowles (2001) examines the transfer of a "dominant language" to other countries and further argues that it is not only for military reasons but also for economic purposes. Usually, the culture of the language is transferred along with the language, and the adoption of this culture is not imposed, but rather "demanded by the people who adopted the dominant language" (p. 262), as it is perceived as more beautiful, logical, and advantageous." According to Bems et al. (1998), the discussion of linguistic imperialism mostly concerns the ideological and social issues related to the spread of English in "outer circle" countries (Kachru, 1985), where English is spoken as a second language, such as Singapore and India. It is also related to the "expanding circle" (Kachru, 1985) countries where English is spoken as a foreign language, such as Saudi Arabia and Japan. One of these issues includes a discussion of the hegemonic power exerted on such countries due to the widespread dominance of English (Friedrich, 2001). For instance, Pan (2011) examined the ideological hegemony associated with the imperialism of English in China, focusing on how language ideologies related to the increasing prevalence of English in Chinese foreign language planning have in turn positioned English as a "neutral endeavor that is a benefit to both the Chinese state and Chinese citizens" (Pan, 2001). He concluded that the belief that English can facilitate social and economic success is a fallacy.

Al-Issa (2011) explored how globalization is reshaping language dynamics, particularly the rising influence of English and its impact on Arabic in the United Arab Emirates. Al-Issa painted a vivid picture of English as a global lingua franca, facilitating communication and connections across cultures. However, he raised important concerns about the cost of this linguistic shift, arguing that as English gains prominence, Arabic risks being pushed to the sidelines, becoming endangered in its own homeland. While English opens doors to international opportunities and modernity, it also threatens the rich heritage of the Arabic language. Al-Issa observed that younger generations, in particular, are increasingly viewing English as essential for success in education and careers, leading to a gradual erosion of their connection to Arabic. This shift signals a broader trend in globalization, where local languages often struggle to hold their ground against the overwhelming influence of English. Al-Issa advocated for a balanced approach that encourages bilingualism without sacrificing the value of Arabic. He emphasized that preserving Arabic is crucial for maintaining the cultural identity. By promoting a model that nurtures proficiency in both languages, students can not only succeed in a globalized world but also stay connected to their roots.

Al-Issa and Dahan (2021) provided a thorough analysis of the challenges associated with language loss in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT). They articulated the urgent need for ELT professionals to recognize the implications of language endangerment, emphasizing the interconnectedness of language, culture, and identity. By examining the sociolinguistic factors contributing to language loss, the authors highlighted how globalization, urbanization, and the

dominance of English have led to the marginalization of many local languages. They argued that ELT professionals hold a pivotal role in fostering linguistic diversity and cultural awareness, thereby encouraging students to appreciate their linguistic heritage and the significance of preserving endangered languages.

On ther other hand, Pennycook (2017) contends that the presence of English in linguistic landscapes should not be interpreted solely as a manifestation of imperialism, but rather as a reflection of global interconnectedness and cultural exchange. This perspective acknowledges the complexities of language dynamics in our increasingly globalized world. While the dominance of English can indeed perpetuate inequalities and cultural hegemony, it can also serve as a bridge that facilitates communication among individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. For instance, in many urban centers around the world, English appears alongside local languages in signage, advertisements, and public communication. This multilingualism can promote inclusivity and accessibility, allowing non-native speakers of a local language to engage in social, economic, and cultural exchanges. A notable example is the use of English in South Africa, where it coexists with 11 official languages. In this context, English serves as a lingua franca, enabling communication in a linguistically diverse society and fostering connections among people from different cultural backgrounds.

Elyas et al., (2020) discussed the significant influence of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 on the role of the English language in the country. They highlighted the historical context of Saudi Arabia’s economic reliance on oil and the recent shift towards diversification under Vision 2030, which aims to create a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. While the vision emphasizes the importance of the Arabic language, the authors suggested that the increasing integration of English is implied through educational reforms and the recognition of its necessity for global communication and economic development. Current educational policies reflect this, as English is being introduced earlier in schools. Some private schools and kindergartens provide English as an optional extracurricular activity whenever feasible (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2017). Subjects like mathematics and chemistry incorporate English terminologies, indicating an acknowledgment of its importance for producing globally competent graduates.

Elyas et al., (2020) also addressed the cultural dynamics at play in Saudi Arabia, where religion and tradition have historically shaped societal norms. With the modernization prompted by Vision 2030, there is a growing openness among Saudi youth to engage with global cultures, including the English language. However, this embrace of modernity is intertwined with a cautious approach to Westernization, as fears about losing cultural identity persist. The presence of a multicultural environment due to expatriates further positions English as a vital medium for instruction and employment in the private sector. The authors suggest that Saudi Arabia should not only adopt English but also adapt it to reflect its unique cultural identity, similar to the evolution of Indian English, thus balancing globalization with the preservation of its Islamic heritage.

The concept of Saudi English has garnered significant attention from researchers, including Elyas et al., (2020), who recognize it as an evolving variety shaped by local linguistic and cultural factors. This variety reflects the sociolinguistic dynamics of Saudi Arabia, where English is increasingly used across various domains, such as education and business. Bukhari (2019) introduced the notion of Saudi ELF (English as a Lingua Franca), highlighting its role in transcultural contexts and suggesting that Saudi English serves as a legitimate means of communication, facilitating identity negotiation among speakers. Linguistically, Saudi English exhibits features influenced by Arabic, such as the overuse of the definite article the while omitting indefinite articles. Culturally, the influence of Islam profoundly impacts English usage in Saudi Arabia, with many expressions reflecting Islamic teachings. Studies indicate that Saudi speakers adeptly navigate local and global contexts, adapting their language to suit different audiences. Additionally, Aljuaythin and Almoaily (under review) found that while Saudis generally prefer American English, they often hold a negative view toward Saudi English, suggesting a complex relationship with this localized variety. This tension highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing localized forms of English while navigating the broader landscape of global Englishes.

Methodology

Data Collection and Sampling

There are different approaches employed in linguistic landscaping research, such as the "main street" approach (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Huebner, 2006; Hult, 2009, 2014) and the "central station" approach (Backhaus, 2006; Tang, 2016). In terms of the streets of Riyadh, which is the context of the present study, they can be categorized on a continuum on one end of which mostly appear non-local brands, such as Prince Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Street, also known popularly as Tahliyah Street. The other end of the continuum mostly includes local trademarks, such as any street in a nearby neighborhood. Since the present study differentiates between local and non-local trademarks (Backhaus, 2006; Huebner, 2006; Tang, 2016) as a supplementary aim, it analyzes the linguistic landscape of a "mainstream street." The "mainstream street" in this context refers to a street with both local and non-local trademarks. Thus, due to the nature of Riyadh and the focus of the study, the "main street" approach was adopted to collect data with reference to a "mainstream street." Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Street was chosen after consulting 10 Saudis living in Riyadh for the past 20 years because it was indicated as having the characteristics specified above.

Following Backhaus's (2006) approach to linguistic landscaping research, all the shop signs on this street were photographed and analyzed. Backhaus (2006) argues for the advantage of this type of sampling since "it guarantees a unified, non-biased determination of survey areas" (p. 66). The data consists of 276 shops signs of different types of shops, such as restaurants, mini markets, clothes shops, jewelry shops, gift shops and laundries.

Procedure

The labels on the shop signs were compiled, coded and categorized. The unit of analysis was adopted from Backhaus (2006), which maintains that "each sign was counted as one item, irrespective of its size" (p. 55). Thus, in the case of a shop with many signs, all of them were taken into consideration individually because each of them conveyed a certain message through the language used (Tang, 2016). The linguistic coding scheme was adapted with minor changes from Selvi (2011), as follows:

a. Monolingual:
   1. Arabic only,
   2. English only,

b. Bilingual:
   1. Translated signs,
   2. Englishized Arabic signs (signs that have both Arabic labels, followed by English spellings)
   3. Arabized English signs (signs that have English labels, followed by Arabic spellings),
   4. Other (languages other than English and Arabic).

The signs were further coded depending on the type of shops or products sold in order to examine the relationship between types of shops and language preference. Local and non-local brands were also compared in the present study. Local shops refer to businesses started in Saudi Arabia and owned by Saudis, whereas non-local shops refer to international chains or non-local businesses. In this respect, the type of commodity sold in the shops has nothing to do with their categorization, i.e., a shop can sell pizzas and burgers and still be considered local as long as it started in Saudi Arabia and is owned by a Saudi. A Google search confirmed the international status of the shops in the study.

RESULTS

Distribution of Shop Names by Type and Language

The distribution of shops by type is given in Table 1. Unsurprisingly, most of the shops on the mainstream street are local, accounting for 237 out of a total of 276 shops, and non-local shops account for only 39. In this street, the non-local shops are largely food-related shops, such as restaurants, cafés, and chocolate and sweets shops. The category "Others" consisted of a multi-variety of different non-local shops. Local shops predominate all categories of businesses.

Table 1. Distribution of shops by type

Types of shops	Local	%	Non-local	%
Food	69	72	27	28
Apparel	39	93	3	7
Barber/salons	14	100	0	0
Laundromat	9	100	0	0
Hardware and electronic supplies	19	100	0	0
DVD & studios	8	100	0	0
Others	79	100	9	0
Total	237	86	39	14

In terms of languages, only three languages occur in the data, Arabic, English, and French. Signs on this mainstream street, as shown in Table 2, are categorized as either monolingual or bilingual. The former having only one language shown on the signages, while the latter shows more than one, often two.

Table 2. Bilingual and Monolingual Signs

Languages	Number	%
Monolingual (Arabic or English)	85	31
Bilingual	191	69

The table shows that the linguistic landscape of the mainstream street can be seen as more bilingual than monolingual as 69% of the shops use both English and Arabic on their sign boards, while only 31% of the shops have monolingual signs. Arabic is usually used in shop signs either on its own or with English. This also indicates that although English is not an official second language in SA, the data show it is used extensively. The monolingual signs are further divided into Arabic only and English only. Table 3 shows that almost 95% of the monolingual signs are written in Arabic only, whereas 4% are written in English only.

Table 3. Distribution of Monolingual Signs

Monolingual signs	Number	%	Example
Arabic	81	95	مطعم زيت و زعتر *(Zait & Zattar Restaurant)*
English	3	4	*Let's Pizza*
English in Arabic script	1	1	روود، أمريكان داينر *(Road, American Diner).*

Bilingual signs are further divided into four main categories, "Translated signs," "Arabized English signs," "Englishized Arabic signs," and "Others", as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Bilingual Signs

Bilingual signs	Number	%	Example
Translated	115	60	*On One Barber Shop,* (عالواحد للحلاقة)
Arabized English signs	43	23	*Piedays café* (بايدايز).
Englishized Arabic signs	25	13	*Temryat* (تمريات).
French- Arabic	8	4	*De la vie* (دلافيه)

According to the table, most of the bilingual signs fall under the category of "translated," accounting for 60% of the signs, where the shop sign is provided in Arabic and its English translation. The second category is "Arabized English shop signs," where the English name is also spelled with Arabic letters. This category accounts for 23% of the bilingual signs. The third category is "Englishized Arabic signs," where the Arabic name is given with its English spelling. This category accounts for 13% of the total bilingual signs. "Others" includes bilingual shop signs using languages other than English and Arabic. In the present data, French is the only language that appears besides English and Arabic.

The language used on shop labels may also be affected by the type of shop or the product sold. Table 5 summarizes the types of shops and their products related to the study.

Table 5. Types of shops and the languages used

Type of Business	Only Arabic No (%)	Only English No (%)	Bilingual (Translated) No (%)	Bilingual (Arabized) No (%)	Bilingual (Englishized) No (%)
Butcher	3 (4)	0	0	0	0
Local Bakery	3 (4)	0	0	0	0
Bakery	0	1(25)	1 (1)	0	0
Coffee shop	2 (2)	1(25)	2 (2)	5 (12)	0
Eateries	6 (7)	2(50)	14 (12)	17 (40)	9 (36)
Confectinary	0	0	7 (6)	10 (32)	5 (20)
Shoes	5 (6)	0	2 (2)	0	2 (8)
Men's apparel	7 (8)	0	1 (1)	0	0
Sports supplies	1 (1)	0	0	0	0
Women's tailor	2 (2)	0	3 (2)	0	0
Men's tailor	13 (15)	0	1 (1)	0	1 (4)
Apparel	0	0	1 (1)	3 (7)	1 (4)
Fountain	1 (1)	0	1 (1)	0	0
Barber shop	3 (4)	0	8 (7)	0	0
Hardware and electronics	1 (1)	0	15 (13)	0	0
Swimming pool	0	0	1 (1)	0	0
Laundromat	1 (1)	0	8 (7)	0	0

Different types of shops are seen there and Arabic, English, and French are the only languages used in their sign boards. The latter is not included in the table, as they were few and concentrated only in Confectionary. As mentioned earlier, monolingual shop signs are mainly divided into two categories: Arabic and English. Monolingual Arabic shop signs are used by local businesses related to Saudi traditional items, such as men's tailor shops and men's apparel, as shown in the data. As such, these local businesses tend to cater to locals rather than foreign customers. On the other hand, businesses in monolingual English are all related to the food industry, such as cafés and restaurants, which are all international chains.

Bilingual signs are divided into four categories: "Translation," "Arabization," "Englishization," and "Others." The "translation category" accounts for a significant number of the shop signs. The signs of 15 hardware supplies, 14 restaurants, 8 barber shops, and 8 laundromats are given in both Arabic and their respective English translation.

With regard to the "Arabized English signs" category, where the source word is given in English followed by Arabic scripts, 17 restaurants and 10 confectionaries are Arabized. In the "Englishized Arabic signs" category, where the names are given in Arabic and then Roman script, 10 eateries and 5 confectionaries fall within this group.

It can be argued that stores in the "Translation category" expect both foreign and local customers and hence their signs are written in both English and Arabic, while the "Arabized category" and the "Englishized category" are used to affect the sentiments of buyers. This is because the practice of Arabization or Englishization does not seem to serve a semantic function since the same words are respelled using two different orthographies, and hence cannot be accessed by those who cannot understand the source language. This indicates that consumers might be affected by the use of either English or Arabic and not the content itself.

The last category in the bilingual signs is the category "other," which includes signs written in French and Arabic. In fact, all of these signs relate to confectionary and are international.

The status of the business, that is whether the products are local or non-local, is seen as an important factor of consideration in explaining the languages preferred on the signboards. The results are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Status of business and languages used

Linguistic category	Local	%	Non-local	%
Monolingual Arabic	81	100	0	0
Monolingual English	0	0	4	100
Bilingual "translated"	101	88	14	12
Bilingual "Arabized"	28	65	15	35
Bilingual "Englishized"	25	100	0	0
Bilingual "otherwise"	0	0	8	100

According to the table, monolingual Arabic shop signs showcase exclusively local brands, while monolingual English signs are used for non-local brands. Moreover, 88% of the bilingual "translated category" and 100% of the bilingual "Englishized category" are constituted by local businesses, while 65% of the shops in the "Arabization category" are local businesses.

Discussion

There are numerous findings worth discussing before linking them with the theoretical framework. First, in line with the findings of Alfaifi (2015), Arabic is still the first language in monolingual shop signs on the mainstream street. Nevertheless, even though English is not an official second language in Saudi Arabia, English seems to be an official second language in bilingual shop signs, according to the present study. While Alfaifi's (2015) study found that monolingualism (Arabic or English) exceeded bilingualism (Arabic and English), where only 38% of the shop signs in Khamis Mushait were bilingual, the data in the present study show that almost 70% of the signs are bilingual. Second, English seems to be the preferred language in shop signs, as a high number of local shops write their names in English first and then Arabize it by writing the same name in Arabic script. The English language is given a higher status than Arabic here in terms of attracting not only expatriate customers but also locals from higher socio-economic groups as they tend to read and understand English. They are also well-travelled and would be familiar with international brands. In this case, the preference appear to be a purely business decision, but exposing and familiarizing the society to a foreign language may cause repercussions in other areas such as the native language and culture. Although the policy accepts linguistic diversity, no languages other than Arabic and English dominate the linguistic landscaping in the studied mainstream street. Nevertheless, when English appears in shop signs, it is because Saudi shop owners prefer to use English in their signs. Third, it can be argued that there is governmental support for linguistic diversity since no language is specified in the national policy for shop names. However, the de facto language policy in the mainstream street seems to incline to use English. It also seems that unlike other domains in Saudi Arabia, where English seems to be used as a lingua franca, English in shop signs in this study are used more for ideological purposes of style and sophistication to attract customers.

English Imperialism or Arabic Maintenance

The hegemony of English seems dominant in shop signs because many shops are using English in their signs either monolingually or together with Arabic. This appears to be the trend. The results presented in the "Arabization category" further provides evidence regarding the dominance of English in the linguistic landscape of the mainstream street. This is because in this category, shop owners who are mostly Saudis have deliberately chosen English names for their shops and then rewrite them using Arabic script. The names retained their English sounds. According to Table 6, most of the shops in this category are local; therefore, it seems that the "Arabization category" clearly showcases Saudis' inclination toward the English language. This could perhaps be a strong indicator of Saudis' positive attitude towards the English language.

There appears to be no attempt at translating the name of the eateries in Arabised English signs. Examples of such shop signs include *Lemont Restaurant Burger 12*(برجر 12), *Hot & Cold Restaurant*(مطعم هوت اند كولد), *Magical Café*(ماجيكال كافيه), *Marvel Chocolates*(مارفل تشوكليتس) , and *Chocoline* (شوكولاين). Examples of non-local trademarks include *Monsoon Clothes Shop* (مونسون), *Dunkin Donuts* (دانكن دونتس), and *Blessing Chocolates*(بليسنج تشوكوليتس). However, the choice of including Arabic orthography leans toward attracting the conservative locals who firstly do not read Arabic and secondly may not prefer to enter shops that have only signs using English words or written in English. Although this appears to be a business decision, the need to include Arabic may indicate respect for the language and the people who speak it. It also signals that the business owners have not forgotten that they are also Saudis and imparting this sentiment to potential customers.

English Language Policy According to Spolsky (2004)

Linguistic Practices and Choices

In line with Spolsky's (2004) first component of a language policy, it seems that the Saudi business community prefers to use English in its linguistic landscape in addition to Arabic. The government policy does not specify any second language, yet owners of shop signs in this study frequently chose to use English. Although a very small number of shops employ French, they are actually international chains. However, the hegemony of English in the linguistic landscape of the mainstream street can be observed. This is perhaps most apparent when so many Saudis prefer to name their shops in English rather than Arabic. Faruk (2014) argues that Saudis have a positive attitude towards English, as the Saudi English Language Education Policies (SELEP) continues to make English acceptable and desired through ascriptions of its high status in most official documents. To illustrate, the second page of all Saudi EFL textbooks acknowledges that English is "one of the most widely used languages in the world" and is an "international language of communication" (Ministry of Education, 2004, pp. 6-7). English is perceived as the means of "acquiring knowledge in the fields of sciences, arts and new inventions" and of "transferring knowledge and the sciences to other communities" (Alamri, 2008, pp. 11–12, 13–14).

Language Ideology

The discussion above of aspects of the choice to utilize English leads to a discussion of language ideology, which is the second component of a language policy (Spolsky, 2004). English seems to be perceived ideologically by Saudis as a prestigious and modern language. This ideology could be the reason for the widespread dominance of English in the present study. In line with the findings of Phillipson (1992), English is regarded as an imperialistic language in the mainstream street because it is used extensively in its linguistic landscaping. Although the MCI policy accepts any language, only English is being used for ideological purposes. These ideologies have positioned English as more prestigious and stylistic and hence not only promoted in shop signs but also desired within Saudi society.

In fact, the niches of English in Saudi Arabia were found to be consistent with those in other countries where English is spoken as a foreign language. Crystal (1997) argues that although the semantic function of English shop signs might not be comprehensible for some, they appear attractive enough due to the perceived prestige and wealth that people in general want to be associated with. The role of English in shop signs in the present study is also ideological. English is used in this study to evoke style, sophistication, and global functions. Even though most shops are considered local businesses, there seems to be a preference for English shop signs or Arabic signs written in English. The latter shows that content may not be the main attraction, as it is overshadowed by the choice of orthography: preferring even English letters to Arabic.

Instead of utilizing English as a lingua franca for communication with those who cannot read Arabic, English "serves more of a symbolic purpose such as indexing values associated with globalization" and "may be linked with, *inter alia*, discourses of the world economy (as a *lingua economica*)" (Hult, 2009, pp. 100, 101). In this respect English naming serves not only an ideological function but also an economic one. English naming not only proves sophistication, but also guarantees future economic success. Owners of shop signs seem to believe that English can help attract more customers and expand their businesses. Two local shops that are exported outside Saudi Arabia also have their names in Arabized English: *Soft Dreams (سوفت دريمز)* and *Sleep High (سليب هاي)*.

Moreover, Cenoz and Gorter (2006) argue that "[t]he use of English in commercial signs does not seem to be intended to transmit factual information but is used for its connotational value … activat[ing] values such as international orientation, future orientation, success, sophistication or fun orientation" (p. 70). Hence, this ideological use of English depicts it as a global language that serves functions and values that the local language, Arabic, cannot provide. In this sense, the ideological function of English corresponds to the owners' preference for their business to be identified with English and its culture in addition to the native Arabic culture. This is evidenced by the fact that the shops in lines of business related to Saudi culture use Arabic, such as those highlighted in Table 5, while local businesses that relate to western culture, such as restaurants that sell pizzas and burgers, for example, employ English, like *Burger 12 (برجر12)*.

Government Intervention

The third component of Spolsky's (2004) definition relates to intervention by the government to modify linguistic practices. There seems to be no intervention by any authoritative body in Saudi Arabia, since the Saudi government policy accepts any language. Thus, the de jure language policy seems to accept linguistic diversity, while the de facto language policy seems to be inclined to use English in the linguistic landscape of the mainstream street in addition to Arabic. The extensive use of English can affect the significant status that English enjoys in Saudi Arabia, not only in education but also in commerce and economics (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). The fact that English proficiency is supported not only by governmental authorities but also aspired to by Saudi individuals (Payne & Almansour, 2003) can probably explain why there has been no intervention to stop English hegemony. This hegemonic inclination towards the use of English on shop signs further demonstrates its imperialism in Saudi Arabia and its ideological hegemony. In addition, in line with the findings of Shohamy (2006), the linguistic practice of using English extensively has further strengthened and supported ideologies regarding the position of English as a global language.

Conclusion

By applying linguistic landscaping as an analytical framework and Spolsky's (2004) three components of language policy as a theoretical framework, this study aimed to investigate the linguistic landscaping in shop signs on a typical mainstream street in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It also examined whether English imperialism is being promoted and whether the de facto language policies are consistent with the de jure language policies. To do so, all the shop signs on Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Street were collected and coded linguistically.

The findings reveal that although Arabic is prominent in these signs, English also appears and, to some extent, prevails. This is because bilingual signs in Arabic and English outnumbered monolingual signs in either language. The findings also show that Saudis prefer naming their shops in English. Moreover, the results indicate that English is perceived as reflecting sophistication and globalism—an ideology that the local language, Arabic, does not convey. Finally, a comparison between the government's de jure policy for naming shops and the de facto language policy of the actual linguistic practices followed in naming shops suggests that naming a shop in any language is acceptable to the government.

With regard to policy, this research implies that serious action is needed to modify the national policy of shop naming. In other words, the policy should require the strict inclusion of Arabic as the primary language in all shop signs to maintain its use. Mother tongue maintenance is considered crucial to prevent language loss. Sridhar (1994) argues that all languages should be "maintained" (p. 628). Governments play a fundamental role in preventing language loss by determining linguistic policy (Gupta, 1985). In fact, policymakers in Saudi Arabia can play a significant role not only in preventing the

loss of the mother tongue but also in promoting and supporting the native language. This role can be fulfilled by encouraging shop owners to use Arabic names. Government policies can also prevent the appearance of foreign names and, if needed, ensure that they are appropriately transliterated into Arabic as well. Unfortunately, government policy in Saudi Arabia currently requires only that commercial registers be in Arabic, while the choice of language for shop names is left to the owners' preferences. Consequently, English is extensively and increasingly used in the linguistic landscape of Saudi Arabia. This widespread prevalence of English seems to pose a serious threat to the use of Arabic in such contexts.

This study focused on one street to provide a detailed and thorough analysis of the linguistic landscape in a specific context. By concentrating on a single commercial street, the research allowed for an in-depth examination of shop-naming practices and the dynamics of language use in a representative urban setting in Riyadh. This focused approach enabled a clearer understanding of the nuances in language policy and the sociolinguistic factors at play. While the findings offered valuable insights, they also suggested the need for broader investigations. Future research could expand the scope to include shop signs from various streets across different cities. This would help assess regional variations in naming practices and further enrich our understanding of the linguistic landscape in Saudi Arabia. Future studies might also cover a larger scope, examining different streets and types of signs. Research directions could include conducting comparative analyses across multiple cities to assess regional variations in shop-naming practices. Additionally, a diachronic investigation could examine whether the prominence of English in shop signs is increasing or stabilizing over time. Exploring the impact of language choices on shop signs could also provide valuable insights into readers' perceptions and the broader implications for language policy in Saudi Arabia.

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