

Linguistic Landscape of Bilingual Shop Signs in Saudi Arabia

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Received: 12/29/2021

Accepted: 2/14/2022

Published: 3/24/2022

Abstract

Shop signs are a visible indication of the linguistic landscape of a place, hence the need for public policies to control, particularly, bottom-up signs in situations where there are issues, such as ensuring consistency and correct representation in the second language. To investigate the linguistic landscape of bilingual shop signs in Saudi Arabia, this study examines the lettering in bilingual shop signs in shopping malls in Riyadh and Jeddah in terms of relative size, information, and the quality of English-Arabic (E-A) and Arabic-English (A-E) transliteration or translation. This was done in view of the national policy in Saudi Arabia which aims to ensure correct Arabisation when inconsistencies have been observed in the Arab world. Moreover, it gives an indication of the linguistic landscape, which is necessary given the need to prepare the kingdom for the Saudi 2030 Vision and cater to the growing number of international visitors. Altogether, 184 signboards were observed and categorised, of which 68 were shortlisted for further analysis. Of these, 54 were A-E signs and 17 were E-A signs, with two in both categories. The majority (83.3%) of signs were bilingual with slight variation in relative size and display of information. Same sized lettering was displayed in 66.7%, and the same information in 64.8%. Remedial suggestions are given for language policy-makers to address the issue found of a few inconsistent and erroneous transliterations and spellings, which together accounted for 9.3%. Overall, the case is not as bad in Saudi Arabia as noted in some other Arab countries.

Keywords: English- Arabic transliteration, English-Arabic translation, bilingual shop signs, language policy, linguistic landscape

Cite as: Alotaibi, W. J., & Alamri, O. (2022). Linguistic Landscape of Bilingual Shop Signs in Saudi Arabia *Arab World English Journal*, 13 (1) 426-449

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol13no1.28>

Introduction

As we go about our daily lives, we are surrounded by language everywhere. We see it on large commercial boards shop signs, road signs, other buildings, and in the form of instructions. Such signs represent the cultural, social, historical, political and economic state of the place where they are displayed. In view of their significance, some governments set regulations on the public use of language, and they devise a language policy to control how language is used in public. This control over language use has attracted the attention of researchers in different fields.

Studies refer to the language observed in the public sphere in specific places as a “linguistic landscape” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Less commonly, it is also referred to as “semiotic landscape” (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). Studying these linguistic landscapes, public signs have often been focused on for exploring the phenomenon of linguistic construction, and to resolve potential communication gaps resulting from inaccurate or inconsistent signage.

Linguistic landscape has been studied as early as the 1990s by Landry and Bourhis (1997) in their empirical study on “linguistic landscape and ethno-linguistic vitality.” Linguistic landscape was referred to as “the visibility of languages on objects that mark the public space in a given territory” (Gorter, 2006, p. 8), such as road signs, street names, shop signs, names on buildings, advertising billboards, and personal visiting cards. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), the linguistic landscape serves as both an informational marker and a symbolic marker for communicating the status and relative power of linguistic communities in a particular place. It is the scene where public life takes place.

The various objects that shape a linguistic landscape may be categorised into top-down and bottom-up objects. In this scheme, shop signs are bottom-up because they are made by individual social actors, namely shop owners and companies, rather than by national and public institutions in the case of top-down signs. However, public policies that seek to control shop signs bear an influence on how bottom-up objects are arranged. Further classification could be according to type of object, the area of activity and geographical locality. In the case of the present study, the examination is of shop signs as bottom-up objects influenced by public policy, initially those in Riyadh and Jeddah, and of all areas of activity. Within this context, namely the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Arabic is the official language. Still, English is widely spoken, and among the non-Saudi population, many speak Urdu, Hindi, Tagalog, Indonesian, Turkish and more. Differences between Arabic dialects are not considered.

The study aims to describe the linguistic landscape of bilingual shop signs in view of the current language policy in Saudi Arabia. This initiative taken to investigate the linguistic landscape of bilingual shop signs in Saudi Arabia was approved by the Governorate of Makkah ~~point~~ to support the “correct Arabisation” of English words used on them. A website was created for this purpose; to introduce the initiative and to collect more data from other areas of Saudi Arabia through an online survey. The Saudi Ministry of Commerce insists on the correctness of the Arabic language used on shop signs, as well as on receipts, bills, cards and menus. Strict conditions have been outlined on their website, which, if violated, a penalty of up to fifty thousand riyals could be applied (Akhbaar24, 2020). Customers can also file reports on such violations. The following is stated on the Ministry’s website for displaying trading names: “The trading name should consist of Arabic or Arabized words/phrases, and it should not contain any

foreign words.” (Ministry of Commerce, 2020, article 3) Exceptions are only made for international companies registered abroad, well-known companies with international brands, and those with shared capital and nominated by the Minister.

The drive to use Arabic or Arabising language in public is also strongly present in other sectors in Saudi Arabia, including education and sports. For instance, mobile applications made for educational, health and shopping purposes are typically in Arabic, and, most recently, names of football players on the shirts they wear are in Arabic. The sports minister legislated using the Arabic language for football players’ names as an echo for the initiation of using Arabic in most sectors. This move is considered a vital source to save the Arabic language and culture (2020, Al-Jazeera Newspaper). Despite these attempts, however, the ground reality in the Arab world reflects widespread breach and misuse of the language rules and regulations (Al-Athwary, 2014; Alomoush, 2015; Jamoussi & Roche, 2017). Many shops continue to disregard them by using other non-Arabic languages. The present study has attempted to shed light on these linguistic breaches, if any are found to exist in Saudi Arabia, to offer remedial suggestions and to address the growing deviation with respect to bilingual shop signs.

In 2016, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced the implementation of its 2030 vision. Its main goals include diversifying the economy, and developing public service sectors, particularly health, education, infrastructure, recreation and tourism. People living in Saudi Arabia are currently witnessing the impact of globalisation as the vision or plan is being implemented. For instance, more foreign investors are being attracted to establish their businesses in the country, and many tourists worldwide are keener than before to explore its historical gems. To address this diversity, many public spaces display bilingual linguistic objects to guide local and the growing number of international passers-by. However, some contain inaccuracies and inconsistencies in translation and/or transliteration. Therefore, this research focuses on the following two aspects of the linguistic landscape in Saudi Arabia from which the research questions can be derived:

- Describing and analysing the current linguistic state of bilingual shop signs translated from English into Arabic and vice versa in a sample of shopping malls in Riyadh and Jeddah.
- Suggesting remedial work for language policy-makers.

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What is the present linguistic landscape of English-Arabic and Arabic-English bilingual shop signs in Saudi Arabia like?
2. What issues are observed in terms of transliteration and translation, if any?
3. What remedial suggestions can be made for language policy-makers to address these issues?

The research addresses the gap in the literature of recent studies in Saudi Arabia focused on shop signage, and examines the linguistic features and issues of transliteration and translation.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of bilingual shop signs in linguistic landscapes has been studied previously. Those conducted in specific areas include Ben-Rafael, E., Shohamy, E., Amara, M. H., and Trumper-Hecht, N. (2006) on Jerusalem; Dimova (2007) on Veles in Macedonia;

Backhaus (2007) on Tokyo in Japan; Jingjing (2013) on Beijing in China; Al-Athwary (2014) on Sana'a in Yemen; Amer and Obeidat (2014) on Aqaba in Jordan; Alomoush (2015) also in Jordan; Nikolaou (2017) on Athens in Greece; Shang and Guo (2017) on Singapore, and Bianco (2018) on Turin in Italy. Similar studies on the linguistic landscape of a different set of bilingual signs include those by Guo (2012) on public signs in various places, and Jamoussi and Roche (2017) on road signs in Oman, Wafa and Wijayanti (2018) on multilingual signs in religious areas in Indonesia, Lu, Li, & Xu (2020) on rural tourist destinations in China, and Yang & Kim (2021) on road signs in South Korean and Japan. Studies conducted generally on linguistic landscapes with a comparative view include Ben-Rafael, et al. (2006) on Jerusalem. The focus of these aforementioned studies has typically been on gaining insight into multilingualism, exploring the extent of the presence and usage of multilingual signs, their impact, and examining reasons for making them or errors or inconsistencies in them.

Studies in non-Arab countries

In the Far East, Backhaus (2007) aimed to provide insights into multilingualism in Tokyo in terms of the language used on signs to see what can be gained on language contact. The study defined a linguistic landscape as capable of telling us:

In an instant where on earth you are and what languages you are supposed to know... [and] provides a unique perspective on the coexistence and competition of different languages and their scripts, and how they interact and interfere with each other (p.145)

Furthermore, the researcher identified a city as “a place of language contact” (p.145), given the observation that signs in public spaces are the most visible reminder of the languages used. Highlighting this prominence of the concept of language contact and the role of signs in revealing a linguistic landscape may have prompted the further investigations in this field of linguistics.

A few European studies, namely Dimova (2007), Alexander (2017) and Nikolaou (2017), allow for some comparisons to be drawn based on separate investigations in neighbouring countries. These studies examined only shop signs for the extent to which English is used in the commercial context. Dimova examined the English used in names, slogans, headlines, and notes in shop signs in Veles to see whether the type of shop is a factor. This was confirmed, as more technical business types were more likely to use English than non-technical or essential shops. All internet cafes used English words and expressions. This was followed by bars at 88%, boutiques at 48%, 33% of restaurants, and barbers, and bakeries and grocery shops at 20- 25%. There was no case of anglicization among the butchers and pharmacies present in Veles.

Greece is officially a monolingual country, but there is a significant number of shops that employ languages other than Greek in their signage. (Nikolaou, 2017) This is often done creatively, either monolingually, or in combination with Greek, “resulting in a situation of written multilingualism, with English emerging as the strongest linguistic player.” (p.160) The sample comprised 621 shop signs. Notably, the study results strongly suggested that the multilingual character of commercial signs is more symbolic than informational. This could reflect a desire to project a sophisticated, trendy and cosmopolitan outlook. That is, the presence

of multilingual signs was not significantly accounted for by tourism; rather, they expressed “values and ideologies associated with the cultures” they represented, and English emerged as the most popular due to its “unrivalled position among the foreign languages present.” (p.175)

The linguistic landscape in Beijing is similar, where different foreign elements have been combined creatively with the native Chinese flavour creating a “a harmonious linguistic environment.” (Jingjing, 2013) The majority of shop signs were monolingual, in Chinese. These accounted for 72% of the signs in their sample. Signs additionally containing English accounted for a little over half at 52%. Notably, shop signage in China is managed under the Republic’s language policy, which seeks to standardise Chinese while propagating English and promoting minority languages. The policy, as the author quotes it, specifies how language is to be used in signs:

Standardised Chinese characters shall be used as the basic characters in the service trade where both a foreign language and the Chinese language are used in signboards, advertisements, bulletins, signs, etc., as is needed by the trade, the standardized Chinese characters shall be used as far as the Chinese language is concerned. (Article 13)

This situation is in contrast with Singapore, where Chinese also dominates the linguistic landscape of shop signs, but English is almost compulsory on all signs as well (Shang & Guo, 2017). Chinese-English bilingual signs are common, but there is also a lesser presence of the Malay, Tamil and other minority languages on shop signs in the country. The shop signs were observed in neighbourhood centres to discover how local shop owners address multilingualism in Singapore’s ethnically heterogeneous and linguistically hybrid society. Chinese text is typically positioned on the top in a larger font size to make it prominent as the primary shop name. The researchers (Shang & Guo, 2017) argue that this linguistic landscape in Singapore shows the importance of “social factors such as the state’s macro language policy, demographic structure, as well as ethnic and cultural identity construction” (p.183).

The national language policy, in this case, prioritises English in Singapore, which ties with its role in domestic communication and alignment with globalisation. In the government’s official signage, English is dominant rather than Chinese, and the deviation from this in non-official signage reflects the assertion of local cultural identity by the population. Tokyo provides a more extreme case in comparison with China and Singapore (Backhaus, 2007), although the study was conducted much earlier. The city has a largely monolingual society in which only 3.6% of residents are registered as foreign. Despite this, the landscape comprising non-official signs is still multilingual, but at the same time, Japanese predominates heavily on official signs accounting for 99.1% of top-down signs. As may be expected, a translation or transliteration is given in multilingual signs for the sake of foreigners, and its absence indicates the signs are for the native Japanese population.

The study in Jerusalem conducted by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) shows the potential divisive role of language and how linguistic landscapes can be expressions of sociopolitical influences. Their study gathered data from both public and private areas and it highlighted certain effects of the language used in signs on Arab-Jewish identity and multilingualism, and the driving forces behind how language is used in those signs. As may be expected, Hebrew is

predominant in Jewish and Israeli-Palestinian localities, whereas Arabic is the predominant language in East Jerusalem where there is resistance to using Hebrew. This demarcation of the linguistic landscape is closely aligned along cultural or religious lines, which is also evident by the limited use of immigrant languages like Russian in some Jewish neighbourhoods. Likewise, the global status of English is apparent in both Arab and Jewish localities, and its usage reflects its third position among the three main languages of Hebrew, Arabic and English despite English not being recognised as an official language. Bilingual and multilingual signs are mostly prevalent in East Jerusalem, where Arabic dominates. There, two-thirds of signs were trilingual as Arabic-English-Hebrew, 50% were found to be bilingual as Arabic-English, and 21% were Arabic only.

The diversity of linguistic landscapes within the same city through the use of language in signage is even more significant in Turin where several major and minor languages coexist (Bianco, 2018). Her study examined shop signs related to commerce or the presence of Italian, English and minority languages in monolingual, bilingual and multilingual signs. The role of social actors was also considered in the construction and perception of the public sphere. As in the study of Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), linguistic landscapes in specific areas are aligned with culture. Italian dominates the city, but English is the most frequent language. Multilingual and multi-ethnic areas exhibited other local languages. As for the role of actors, this was found to depend on context-dependent choices made based on identity, motivations, the cultural environment, socio-economic interests including external influences, and other indexical considerations.

Notably, although there is no national policy in place to affect the linguistic landscape in Italy, there are local regulations in some Italian cities, such as in Florence and Bologna, where non-Italian languages are regulated for commercial signs. These regulations require an Italian translation in case of making signs in foreign languages except for loan words that have already entered Italian. The population largely favours the use of English on signs. In Turin itself, there are similar but less stringent regulations that also require including an Italian translation for signs written in a foreign language.

Studies in Arab countries

Of the few studies conducted in Arabic-speaking countries other than Saudi Arabia (Al-Athwary, 2014; Amer & Obeidat, 2014; Alomoush, 2015; Jamoussi & Roche, 2017), Al-Athwary examined errors in translation of bilingual shop signs in the streets of Sana'a. He found that almost a third (130 signs out of 398) contained translation errors, which were then classified into errors relating to spelling, grammar and lexicon.

Similarly, road signs in Oman have also been found to contain inconsistencies in their romanisation (Jamoussi & Roche, 2017). The main source of these inconsistencies is believed to be hesitancy between local and standard varieties of the language. This has arisen due to contradictory principles of romanisation. However, the researchers do not consider harmonisation of these principles alone to be sufficient. They emphasise the need for "carefully thought out decisions with broader linguistic policy overtones" (p.58) and favour transcription over transliteration.

The first Jordan study centred on Aqaba tried to show the present status of English in the

city, reveal why English is used and the attitudes of shop owners towards English as a foreign language, and explore the influence of English on the language used in the local business sector and whether English is also used elsewhere (Amer & Obeidat, 2014). Most of the shop signs in the selected sample were found to be in both Arabic and English. However, English was more commonly used to attract the attention of foreign customers, and was found to be associated with globalisation, modernity, prestige and decor. Compared to Arabic, English is viewed more positively, and is becoming more familiar in the city. Since many English words have already been adopted in the local Arabic dialect, Arabic transliterations were present on some signs instead of their Arabic equivalents.

The second study conducted in urban Jordan by Alomoush (2015) was extensive, involving analysis of over 8,000 street signs around half of each were found to be monolingual and multilingual. The languages used were MSA Arabic and English, whereas minority languages were significantly marginalised on both top-down and bottom-up signs. As such, the findings conform to those in the first Jordan study of Amer and Obeidat (2014), but an additional noteworthy finding was the absence of native Jordanian Arabic on top-down signs. On bottom-up signs however, Jordanian Arabic is used to emphasise local culture, and various minority languages also appear on them in commercial and cultural contexts. As for the use of English, there is a stark difference between top-down and bottom-up signs in terms of the rationale for doing so. Whereas the government favours English to support economic development, communication with foreign tourists, and education, the use of English by shopkeepers is more for “appealing purposes” besides communicative and symbolic purposes. Bilingual signs, which are also popular, are justified “to advocate linguistic tolerance and global identity, promote local names and cultural references, meet the social needs of people and avoid taboo expressions in Arabic” (Alomoush, 2015, p.230)

Some previous studies are notable for having been conducted in the same context of Saudi Arabia as the present study: Aldholmi (2010), Blum (2014) and Alfaifi (2015), on signage in general but the latter including shop signs as well in particular. Aldholmi’s (2010) study examined the linguistic landscape of Riyadh with respect to signs in various places that included offices, businesses, government buildings, and as found on instructions. The purpose of the study was to ascertain why and how English is used in signage and identify differences between three parts of the same city. Two key reasons emerged in this study; the signs were written in English to attract wealthy and foreign customers, and due to English being the dominant global language. Further analysis showed that many of the signs do not comply with the government’s language policy. Linguistic differences were also apparent within Riyadh, as English was used differently from one area to another. There were differences in attitude toward the use of English in signs among business owners from different areas of the city. In some cases, these differences were in conflict with each other.

The study by Alfaifi (2015), examined a variety of signs (shop, street, road and billboard) in Khamis Mushait, in the southwest of the kingdom. The focus of his study was to examine how English is used in signage, and to find out whether Arabic or English outweighed the other in two different locations. A difference was noted between a tourist area and the non-tourist central commercial zone. The tourist area was dominated by the Arabic language where 37% of the signs were exclusively in Arabic and there were no signs exclusively in English. Even in

bilingual signs, English was only used for common words to indicate the type of place, such as parks, restaurants and pharmacies. In contrast, the commercial zone was visibly affected by globalization, given that English was more widely used in signage there compared to Arabic. Within this zone, bilingual signs were more common, and monolingual signs in Arabic were fewer at 20%.

The greater use of English was justified on the basis that the commercial zone had many shops selling technological appliances and other things considered essential for both local citizens and foreigners. The researcher identified the following causes: urbanisation, prestige, modernity and globalisation. Further analysis of all the signs in both places showed that full translation in English was more common at 57% compared to transliterations, and the use of bilingualism was not influenced solely by the dominance of English, but rather, for adhering to regulations. However, the researcher advocated for a clearer government policy to make an official stance concerning use of the native language of Arabic and to systematise the use of foreign languages.

Language Policies

Language policies are typically arranged to protect the native language, whether it is a majority language, or as in the case of Basque a minority language (Cenoz & Gorter, 2009). It usually has three components: one that deals with language practices; the language choices made with respect to beliefs, opinions and ideologies, and language management in terms of planning and intervention (Spolsky, 2004). The latter may be explicit or implicit, and directed at either reinforcing or changing beliefs and practices related to language.

As far as signage in Arabic and English is concerned, both languages have what May (2006) described as ‘instrumental values’ based on their examination of Jordan’s state policy, as both are important languages compared to minority languages with only ‘sentimental values’. Arabic remains the dominant language, but whether English constitutes a language having instrumental values in Saudi Arabia as well remains to be seen. In Jordan, their language policy was designed to protect other minority languages and prevent their loss of Arabic. Language policies therefore have a role to play to protect minority languages.

In Jordan, however, there is also an issue of the use of non-standard varieties of English in both official and non-official signage. English is promoted like in Japan while simultaneously advocating for Arab nationality. These needs have shaped its policies to ensure conservatism and linguistic purism, and effectively making it a multilingual language policy. The recognition of translation and transliteration errors or inconsistencies in signage, and variations in the use of signage even within the same city or area, specifically signage in a foreign language, also suggests the need for controlling them and targeting language policies at signs in public places. The existence of language policies also rises the issue of how effective they are, that is, the extent to which signs comply with these policies or not, and the purpose behind the policies, which would indicate what the government hopes to achieve.

Huebner (2006), who undertook an examination of the linguistic landscape of 15 Bangkok neighbourhoods, highlighted how variations in linguistic landscapes reflect “a disconnect between official versus de facto language policy” (p.37). Despite the government of

Thailand offering a tax incentive for including Thai on commercial signs, not everyone takes advantage of such incentives. If they do add text in Thai, it is typically in small print and in a corner. This situation reflects the position where the government seeks to promote Thai as the official national language, but English is the de facto language of wider global communication. However, the variations are also indicative of social status, relative power and the nature of the commercial activity. In Japan, the situation is different where Japanese is adequate for daily life. Still, a language policy has been implemented to promote communication skills in English in recognition of it as an international language.

A more successful implementation of a language policy can be seen in places like the Basque region of Spain (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006). Cenoz and Gorter compared the linguistic landscapes of Friesland and Basque where majority and minority languages exist alongside each other with the language policies taking place and in a situation where the dominance of English is becoming increasingly pervasive. The analysis of over 975 signs showed a stark contrast between the two places on the use of minority languages. The majority languages of Dutch and Spanish remain prominent in signs in both places respectively in terms of usage, size and position of text. However, the language policy arranged to protect the minority language is more visible in Basque than in Frisian where the use of bilingual signs is common. Where English is present, it is used in commercial signs as information for foreign visitors, but it also serves an increasing symbolic function in both populations, and because it is claimed to increase profits for businesses. Moreover, the researchers deem the widespread use of English in public as “one of the most obvious markers of the process of globalisation” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2009, p 57). The researchers concluded that linguistic landscape serves more to provide information about written communication among language users than it does to reflect language use in oral communication.

According to Al Zumor (2019), language issues have always been of central concern in Saudi Arabia, and “various policy statements have attempted to cover status, corpus, acquisition, and prestige planning” (p. 409). Notably, the rationale behind these policies in Saudi Arabia has typically been on “coping with economic, social, political, and educational changes” while also maintaining the integrity of the kingdom’s cultural, national and religious identity (p. 409). This, it is claimed, has been the guiding principle, but it remains to be seen when the sub-landscape of bilingual shop signs has been shaped and impacted by its policies.

Theoretical Perspectives

The shaping of linguistic landscape according to society, culture, public policy, etc. suggests the existence of relationships and influences, which some scholars have pointed out. For instance, the Bourdieusard perspective on codes in the linguistic landscape claims that the one which dominates and others that have secondary importance should be explainable in terms of the power relations between dominant and subordinate groups. This is evident from those studies where power relations are important, such as Ben-Raefel, et al. (2006) on signs in Jerusalem, and where the global importance of English has been established, such as Aldholmi (2010), Amer and Obeidat (2014), and Alfaifi (2015) in Arab countries including Saudi Arabia.

Methods

Instruments

The present study takes a descriptive approach to illustrate the linguistic landscape of shop signs. Data for the study were collected from a select number of Saudi shopping malls located in Riyadh and Jeddah, the two largest and most populated cities in Saudi Arabia, during the year 2020. The shop signs were photographed using smartphone devices, and the lettering was later categorised and analysed.

Procedures

The signs were classified as either A-E (Arabic to English), E-A (English to Arabic) of Arab local brands, and E-A of English international brands. The latter were excluded from this study since the policy does not apply to them. The following codes were then used in analysing the data on each signboard:

- **Ln (number of languages):** M – monolingual (one); B – bilingual (two); T – trilingual (three), or more than three
- **Lu (language used):** A – Arabic only; E – English only; AE – Arabic & English; AO – Arabic & other non-English; EO – English & other non-Arabic; O – other (neither Arabic nor English)
- **S (relative size of the lettering in non-monolingual signs):** S – same; A – Arabic is larger; E – English is larger; O – other non-Arabic/English is larger
- **I (relative information in non-monolingual signs):** S – same; A – more in Arabic; E – more in English; O – more in other non-Arabic/English
- **Tlit (quality of transliteration on transliterated signs):** C – clear/readable; N – non-standard/variable/questionable or not so clear; E – erroneous/ambiguous/unclear
- **Tlat (quality of translation on translated signs):** C – correct/readable; N – non-standard/variable; E – erroneous/ambiguous/unclear

Results

A summary of the results of this study is presented in Table 1 below. A total of 184 signboards were observed, of which 68 signs were included in the shorter sample for subjecting them to further analysis. Out of this selected sub-sample, 54 were classified as A-E signs, 17 as E-A signs of Arab local brands, and 2 appear in both categories. The remainder 116 signs classified as E-A of English brands were excluded from further analysis, as explained further below:

Table 1: Summarised results of the study

Type of Signs	Language		Size & Information (non-monolingual signs)		Quality	
	Ln	Lu	S	I	Tlit	Tlat
A-E signs	M=9	A=9	A=7	A=8	C=27	C=16
	B=45	E=0	E=2	E=2	N=2	N=0
	T=0	AE=45	S=36	S=35	E=2	E=1
		O=0	O=0	O=0	Total=32	Total=16
E-A signs of Arab	M=0	A=0	A=0	A=0	C=16	C=1

brands	B=17	E=0	E=1	E=0	N=0	N=0
	T=0	AE=17	S=16	S=17	E=0	E=0
		O=0	O=0	O=0		

The results for the category of A-E signs show that the majority of signboards (45 out of 54, or 83.3%) are bilingual by displaying in both Arabic and English, with the remainder (9 or 16.7%) making up monolingual signs in the native language of Arabic only. There was no sign in any other language. There are neither any monolingual signs in English nor any trilingual signs or use of lettering from any other languages besides Arabic and English.

In terms of relative size, most signs display the Arabic and English lettering in about the same size (36 or 66.7%). Otherwise, most of the disproportionate letterings give prominence to Arabic (7 or 12.9%), with only a couple of signs on which English was displayed larger (2 or 3.7%). In terms of relative display of information, again, this is about the same in most of the signs (35 or 64.8%). However, there were some signs with extra information in Arabic (8 or 14.8%), and a couple with more in English (2 or 3.7%).

With respect to transliteration and translation, twice as many signs have transliterations rather than translations (32 compared to 16). Also, the transliteration or translation was evident both ways. On some signs, the Arabic wording was original and either transliterated or translated into English, and on others, it was vice versa. Considering the transliterated and translated signs together, while the majority of them are correctly transliterated or translated in the other second language (43 or 79.6%), there are a few cases where the quality is questionable (2 or 3.7%), and a few also where it is erroneous (3 or 5.6%).

Examples of A-E signs

The majority of signs examined were bilingual. In a typical bilingual sign, only the name is displayed and equal importance is given to both Arabic and English in terms of size:



Figure 1. Alshaya

The name, most often in Arabic, is simply transliterated (*Figure 1.*). There is no need to translate them in these cases. Where there is extra information, it is usually to make the type of shop clear, and a translation included in English, as in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Magrabi

Whereas almost all of the bilingual signs display the Arabic and English lettering separately, there was one sign in the sample with an unusual bilingual display where the two letterings overlapped each other giving a creative impression (*Figure 3.*) (here the words are translations of each other):



Figure 3. Faces

For some reason, jewellery shops are the ones more likely to have a monolingual sign, as in *Figure 4.* below, which proudly displays its name exclusively in the native Arabic language with no English on it at all:



Figure 4. Majuhuraat Almuhyasan

In comparison, another jewellery shop has a bilingual display with Arabic much larger than English (*Figure 5.*), although the fact that it is a jewellery shop is only made explicit in English, albeit in small size. It is an extreme case of text displayed disproportionately smaller in the second language.



Figure 5. Sulaiman Al Othaim Jewellery

In a similar but opposite case, Al-Rifai Bakery has only written its name Al-Rifai in English in a smaller size (*Figure 6.*), whereas the fact that it is a bakery is only mentioned in

Arabic and is therefore extra information in the primary language that is not evident in English.



Figure 6. Alrifai

Figure 7. below is another good example of a rare bilingual sign in which Arabic is prioritised both in terms of size, and to a larger extent, in terms of additional information:



Figure 7. Armal

One of the rare opposite cases can be seen below in which the extra information is in English although the relative sizes of the main text are the same:



Figure 8. Shaden

Transliteration is evident in both ways. Whereas some transliterations are in Arabic, others are in English. For example, words such as 'Express' and 'Baby' are English words transliterated into Arabic. This shows that the more widely recognised English forms have been used in favour of their Arabic alternatives, which would be 'Tifl' (طفل) in the case of 'Baby Fitaihi':



Figure 9. Baby Fatih

The case is similar for words such as ‘Mobily,’ ‘Nayomi’ and ‘Zain,’ but this is understandable since they are internationally recognised brand names. Words such as ‘electronics’ are also retained by transliterating them in Arabic:



Figure 10. Play phone Electronics

Errors in transliteration or translation are not common, but among the few cases are two, which happen to be jewellery shops (Al-Alamyyah and Al-Shalawi). It suggests that jewellery shops tend to have the most issues when trying to transliterate or translate into English. Not all jewellery shops have erroneous spellings though. There are many without any such an issue, as in the case of Damas, Danat and Dorar. Incidentally, Danat and Dorar are both plural forms of the words *danah* دانة and *durrah* درة respectively, which mean a pearl, so the use of these words are benefitting for the type of shop. In the case of Al Shalawi, the error is evident in the spelling of ‘jewellery’ with the second or middle ‘e’ missing in the UK spelling:



Figure 11. Alshalawi Jewellery

E-A Signs of Arab Local Brands

A total of 17 further signs observed were classified as E-A signs of Arab brands with only two exceptions, namely Early Learning Centre (Figure 12.) and Balabala (Figure 13.) Almost all the signs (88%) are bilingual, display lettering in Arabic and English in about the same size, give the same information in both languages, and give transliterations that are all clear. The sign in Figure 13. is exceptional for displaying its English lettering in a relatively larger size than the Arabic lettering, whereas all other signs display both in about the same size.



Figure 12. Early Learning Centre



Figure 13. Balabala

The sign for Grill and Chill (Figure 14.) is one where, like Early Learning Centre (Figure 12.), the English and Arabic sizes and information are the same. Still, like a few others, the logo is exclusively in English lettering. Additionally, this particular sign is one in which the English name contains sounds that are not present in Arabic (/g/ and /tʃ/). Consequently, the Arabic transliteration uses the nearest Arabic equivalents, which can be considered unavoidable without using additional foreign characters. There are two other similar cases: /f/ is substituted for /v/ in ‘Velton.’



Figure 14. Grill & Chill

E-A Signs of English International Brands

A further 116 signs observed were classified as E-A signs of English brands. These signs were not analysed because they are not local brands and are therefore exempted from following the Ministry of Commerce rules to use Arabic names, or to provide a transliteration or translation in Arabic. They use brand names in the international language of English for consistent global recognition, and analysing these signs is not the focus of this paper.

Additional Observations

A closer examination of the type of shops in the sample revealed other remarks than initially anticipated. As mentioned before, jewellery shops are the ones more likely to have monolingual signs. When they do display bilingual signs, Arabic is displayed more prominently, i.e. larger in size, and they are more likely to make errors in translating. Monolingual signs are also common among local telecom or technology companies, given that two in the selected sample fit this description, namely Fifa Lilitsalaat and Hamzah Lilitsalaat.

Al-Alamyah, Arabian Oud, and Coffee and Crispy stand out for including both a transliteration and a translation, whereas in all other signs, the primary language is either transliterated or translated in the secondary language. Oud refers to a stick or aroma in Arabia, so the choice of word is befitting for perfumery, but the phrase is only half-translated, where Arabian is a translation of Alarabiyyah ‘العربية’ /alʕarabi:ya/, but Oud is transliterated instead. This aligns with its adoption by other non-Arabic brands globally. Except in the case of Coffee and Crispy, however, the quality of the transliteration or translation is questionable. A further three signs also have transliterations or translations assessed as being non-standard or erroneous, and three more signs are included in Table two below, where letter substitutions have been made:

Table 2: Signs with questionable or unusual transliteration or translation

No.	Full Name on Signboard		Direction	Comment
	In Arabic	In English		
1.	العالمية	Al-Alamyah or International	A to E	Product names also have spelling issues. No equivalent for the voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/. Sound is substituted by /a/
2.	مجوهرات الشلوي	Al Shalawi Jewellery	A to E	Jewellery is misspelled.
3.	العربية للعود	Arabian Oud	A to E	No equivalent for the voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/ sound in both words, one substituted by /a/ and the second by /u/
4.	تشو	Cho	A to E	'ch' is substituted for 't'.
5.	جريل اند تشيل	Grill & Chill	E to A	The two first letters have been substituted.
6.	لمى	LMA	A to E	Looks like an acronym.
7.	تيرانوفا	Terranova	E to A	A non-standard letter is used.
8.	فيلتون	Velton	E to A	The first letter has been substituted.
9.	جراج	Garage	E to A	The first letter has been substituted.

In Al-Alamyah's signboard (Figure 15.), English is a non-standard transliteration of what should be transliterated from Arabic as 'العالمية' /alʕalami:ah/ 'Al-Alamiyah' although the additional translation of 'international' is correct. Furthermore, the translations of its three key products as extra information provided, also have spelling issues. 'Jewellery' is spelt as 'Jewelery', 'Watches' as 'Swatch,' and 'Diamonds' as 'Diamond.' This sign, therefore, has issues in both transliteration and translation. It is also noted that the voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/ sound, which has no equivalent in English, is usually either replaced by the glottal stop /ʔ/, or substituted by the letter A or U.



Figure 15. . Al-Alamiyah

The signboard of 'Terranova' (Figure 16.) is a unique example of where instead of substituting a letter for its nearest equivalent, as in the case of /ʕ/, /g/, /tʃ/ [ch] and /v/ substituted by /ʔ/, /ʒ/ [j], /tʃ/ [tʃh] and /f/ respectively in the signs of 'Al-Alamiyah', 'Grill & Chill' and 'Velton', a non-standard letter is used. Unlike Velton, where /f/ is used for the /v/ sound, /v/ itself is used, albeit represented by <ف>, which looks like a 'faa' <ف> with three dots instead of one. This is an allophone of the Arabic phoneme 'faa' sometimes used to write foreign names and loanwords. It has the correct /v/ sound required and is used to avoid writing with /f/ as an alternative which is not quite the same.



Figure 16. Terranova

As for the sound /g/, Figure 17. shows how an Arabic transliteration can be misleading and incorrect. The word ‘garage’ is transliterated in Arabic as جراج /dzaraadz/ by using the Arabic letter <ج> for /dʒ/, whereas it should be pronounced closer to /garaʒ/. The Arabic Language Virtual Academy (ALVA) devised the symbol <ڨ> to represent this /g/ sound in 2014 (ALVA, 2014), but it has not been widely adopted outside of academic circles.

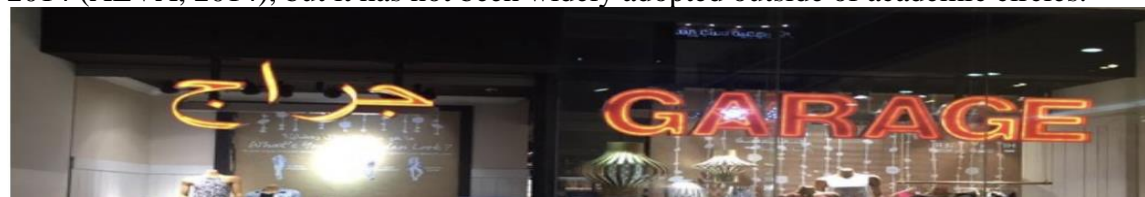


Figure 17. 17. Garage

Discussion

The present study extends the research conducted previously by Aldholmi (2010) and Alfaifi (2015) in Saudi Arabia. The former focused more on the underlying reasons for using English on signage, and found differences in attitude to using English, and found widespread non-compliance with the government’s language policy. The second investigated and noted differences between two different locations, and advocated for a more explicit government policy and systematisation on using foreign languages. In comparison, the present study did not investigate reasons for using English, nor differences between locations. However, non-compliance was not found to be an issue; rather, some minor inconsistencies and erroneous transliterations and spellings were noted.

Assessment of the Policy

The national language policy governing signage in the Saudi Arabia aims to ensure “correct Arabisation” of the English words used in them. The requirement is to have the trading name in Arabic or using “Arabized words/phrases” without any foreign words except in the case of international companies and brands. The observations, for which the data is presented in the appendix, noted that all 68 of the signs in the sub-sample of those analysed further, which were of only local/Arab brands, were either bilingual in the majority of cases, or monolingual in Arabic only where no English has been used.

The Present Linguistic Landscape

Previous studies on shop signs in linguistic landscapes show a conflict between two forces in non-English countries. On one hand, nationalism encourages use of the native or national language, and on the other hand, the pressure of globalisation demands to use English. However, countries have accepted making bilingual signs, thereby protecting the local language while also benefiting from global recognition. The linguistic landscape of shop signs in Saudi Arabia falls into this latter category of countries, where the situation is similar to that reported in Jordan (Amer et al., 2014; Alomoush, 2015) for bottom-up signs.

As far as the signboards of Arabic brands in both the A-E and E-A categories is concerned, all of them conform to the policy by including their brand name in Arabic. None of these signs are displayed exclusively in English. Instead, 17% of them in the first category are exclusively in Arabic, with no English displayed on them at all. If the aim of the policy is to protect Arabic, then the policy has been successful. No shop in the sample examined dared to contravene it. There are issues only as far as the quality of Arabisation is concerned. There are two types of issues: erroneous transliterations and translations giving an unprofessional impression and inconsistent transliterations resulting in a lack of standardisation. In Table two, numbers one, two, three and six are examples of the former, and four, five, seven, eight and nine are examples of the latter case. Notably however, the situation in Saudi Arabia is not as bad as it is in places like Sana'a (Al-Athwary, 2014).

Need for Standardisation and Other Issues

The present study shows that either the sub-landscape of bilingual shop signs has escaped the attention of public language policy-makers in the kingdom, or more likely, their policies have not achieved widespread impact. If the policy-makers want to ensure this landscape is managed well by ensuring greater consistency and standardisation, and ready for the Saudi 2030 Vision, which Al Zumor's (2019) findings suggest would be true, the issues highlighted in the present study would have to be addressed. The examples of Grill & Chill, Terranova and Velton show that shops face an issue when they need to transliterate to or from Arabic where the letters with equivalent sounds are not present in Arabic. The first and third of the aforementioned shops substituted using the nearest equivalents, but these resulted in unsatisfactory transliterations, and Terranova adopted a different approach by using a non-standard Arabic letter from a variant alphabet based on the Arabic script. Although this resulted in a correct rendering of the sound, the letter is not widely recognised in the region. This highlights a situation where the linguistic landscape could benefit from standardisation. It is not known which of the two approaches is more common, but based on the small selected sample, substitution by the nearest equivalent is more popular, which raises a quality or discrepancy issue. Policy-makers may like to consider this carefully.

Remedial Suggestions

Either the policy-makers should enforce the practice of using the nearest equivalent letter from the existing standard Arabic alphabet, at the risk of creating this quality issue, or they should allow using non-standard letters for greater accuracy, but at the risk of causing confusion due to lack of widespread recognition. In the latter case, there would need to be an accompanying drive to promote recognition of the additional letters. In the long-term, this could lead to their formal inclusion in the Arabic alphabet itself, although if this were ever to happen, this major change would have repercussions and would be opposed by language purists. Given that a similar situation has been reported in Oman (Jamoussi et al., 2017), there is scope for further investigation into how it is being dealt with, thereby favouring transcription over transliteration to indicate correct pronunciation. The recent designation of <ﻍ> for the sound /g/ by the ALVA could help to pronounce the English words containing this letter correctly without replacing or substituting the English sounds in them with other nearest equivalents in Arabic. It thus satisfies a vital need to prevent mispronunciation. The study has shown that designations for the sounds /p/, /v/ and /tʃ/ should also be considered for adding as new Arabic sounds for the sake of facilitating pronunciation closer to the original in English.

Conclusion

The linguistic landscape of 184 shop signs were examined in shopping malls in two urban areas of Riyadh and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia in view of the Saudi public policy governing signboards. They were all bottom-up signs because they were designed and erected by individual shop owners. After categorising them into A-E signs, E-A of Arab brands and E-A of English brands and excluding the latter to which the policy does not apply, 68 of the signs were then subjected to further analysis to describe their lettering in terms of relative size and information, and the quality of transliteration or translation. The study sought to ascertain the linguistic state of bilingual shop signs under the current language policy that seeks to ensure proper Arabisation

Limitations and Research Recommendations

The study was not conducted outside major cities, so differences with rural areas or areas where non-natives predominate were not ascertained. It may be that monolingual signs exclusively in Arabic are more common in the second, and signs including languages other than Arabic and English in the third. The issue that emerged in the data resulting in a lack of standardisation in transliterating is also worth exploring further from a larger sample to see which is more or less common. This would be necessary before an informed decision on which approach to promote. The Ministry of Trade may consider implementing legislation for the language used in shop signs to be more tightly controlled, and for their owners to seek approval from an authenticated translation office where Anglicisation for Arabic words, or Arabisation of English words, would not differ significantly, and would thus convey the pronunciation and meaning in both languages effectively.

Acknowledgment:

This work was funded by the program of Institutional Funding for Research and Development under the grant number (IFPAS-052-270-2020). Therefore, authors gratefully acknowledge technical and financial support from the Ministry of Education and King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Analysis of the Selected Shortlisted Signs

Table 3: Analysis of shop signs of Arab local brands in the A-E category

No.	Name on Signboard	Type of Shop	Language		Size & Information		Quality (non-monolingual signs)	
			Ln	Lu	S	I	Tlit	Tlat
1.	Abdul Samad Al-Quarshi	perfumery	B	AE	S	S	C	-
2.	Adawliah	electronic appliances	B	AE	S	S	C	-
3.	Al-Alamyah	electronic appliances	B	AE	A	S	N	C
4.	Aldaham Watches	watches	B	AE	S	S	-	C
5.	Al Ghazali	watches	B	AE	S	S	C	-

6.	Alhomaidhi	watches	B	AE	S	S	-	C
7.	Alrifai	dry fruits /herbalist	B	AE	A	A	C	-
8.	Al Shalawi	jewellery	B	AE	A	S	-	E
9.	Alshaya	watches	B	AE	S	S	C	-
10	Alyashmac	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
.								
11	Arabian Oud	perfumery	B	AE	S	S	E	C
.								
12	Baby Fatihi	baby jewellery	B	AE	A	A	C	-
.								
13	Bannotti	lady's accessories	B	AE	S	S	C	-
.								
14	Barakat Optical	optical store	B	AE	S	S	-	C
.								
15	Bassem Al Qassem	perfumery	B	AE	S	S	C	-
.								
16	Bedoon Essm	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
.								
17	Bilaye Phone	mobile phones	M	A	-	-	-	-
.								
18	Bukanaan	clothing	M	A	-	-	-	-
.								
19	Cho	cafe	B	AE	S	S	E	-
.								
20	Coffee and Crispy	coffee shop	B	AE	A	S	C	C
.								
21	Dakayek Express	mobile devices	B	AE	E	A	C	-
.								
22	Damas	jewellery	B	AE	S	S	C	-
.								
23	Danat	jewellery	B	AE	S	S	C	-
.								
24	Dorar	jewellery	B	AE	S	S	C	-
.								
25	Early Learning Centre	educational institute	B	AE	S	S	-	C
.								
26	Faces	beauty products	B	AE	S	S	-	C
.								
27	Fantastic House	jewellery	B	AE	S	S	-	C
.								
28	Fifa Lilitsalaat	telecom/technology	M	A	-	-	-	-
.								
29	Hamzah Lilitsalaat	telecom/technology	M	A	-	-	-	-
.								
30	Kasheer	Sign of casher	M	A	-	-	-	-
.								
31	Khameel	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
.								
32	La Creperie	bakery	B	AE	S	A	C	-
.								
33	Lamar Castle	perfumery	B	AE	S	S	-	C
.								
34	LMA	clothing	B	AE	S	S	N	-

35	Magrabi	eyewear	B	AE	S	S	-	C
36	Mahyaar	men's clothing	M	A	-	-	-	-
37	Majuhuraat Almuhyasan	jewellery	M	A	-	-	-	-
38	Marahil Alamumah	clothing (maternity)	M	A	-	-	-	-
39	Mikyajy	cosmetics	B	AE	S	S	C	-
40	Mobily	mobile phones	B	AE	S	S	C	-
41	Nawadir Alsafwa	jewellery	M	A	-	-	-	-
42	Lilmajumraat Nawadir Alzamrud	jewellery	B	AE	S	S	-	C
43	Lilmajumraat Nayomi	lady's clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
44	Rina	clothing	B	AE	E	A	C	-
45	Shaden	watches/sunglasses	B	AE	S	E	C	-
46	She	clothing	B	AE	S	S	-	C
47	Suliman Al-Othaim	jewellery	B	AE	A	E	C	-
48	Sun and Sand Sports	sports	B	AE	S	S	-	C
49	Swiss Corner	watches	B	AE	S	S	-	C
50	Tair Al-Layl	abaya clothing	B	AE	A	A	-	C
51	Tawuniyah	insurance	B	AE	S	A	C	-
52	Twaila	abaya clothing	B	AE	S	A	C	-
53	Wahat Aljalabiya	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
54	Zain	mobile phones	B	AE	S	S	C	-
			M=9	A=9	A=7	A=8	C=27	C=16
	TOTALS		B=45	E=0	E=2	E=2	N=2	N=0
			T=0	AE=45	S=36	S=35	E=2	E=1
				O=0	O=0	O=0		

Table 4. Analysis of shop signs of Arab brands in the E-A category

No.	Name on Signboard	Type of Shop	Language		Size & Information		Quality (non-monolingual signs)	
			Ln	Lu	S	I	Tlit	Tlat
1.	Attitude	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
2.	Balabala	children's clothing	B	AE	E	S	C	-
3.	BCBG Maxazaria	lady's clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
4.	Boboli	lady's clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
5.	Dadak	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
6.	Early Learning Centre	educational institute	B	AE	S	S	-	C
7.	Etam	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
8.	Grill & Chill	fast food	B	AE	S	S	C	-
9.	IKKS	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
10.	Mobily	mobile phones	B	AE	S	S	C	-
11.	Montania	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
12.	Socks Collection	socks	B	AE	S	S	C	-
13.	Soo Be	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
14.	Terranova	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
15.	Toms	apparel	B	AE	S	S	C	-
16.	Tours	suitcases/travel goods	B	AE	S	S	C	-
17.	Velton	clothing	B	AE	S	S	C	-
			M=0	A=0	A=0	A=0	C=16	C=1
			B=17	E=0	E=1	E=0	N=0	N=0
			T=0	AE=17	S=16	S=17	E=0	E=0
				O=0	O=0	O=0		
-	TOTALS							