Foreign Language Influence: A Case Study of English on Shop Signs in Taif City of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study investigates the presence of English as the business language in Taif, Saudi Arabia. It also explores the influence and familiarity of English in the business sector. Linguistic landscape of 162 photos of commercial shops and interview of seven shop owners were employed to analyze the language use of shop signs in the Taif market. The study results were classified into three major categories, bilingual, transliteration and monolingual signs. The research has revealed that English is used as a prestigious language that is necessary to attract customers. However, Arabic presence is inevitably needed because of the linguistic background of the customers. The study concluded that in relation to the extent of using English in shop signs, and the frequent use of English words, whether on the bilingual signs or the transliteration ones, there is a need of policy formulation and implementation for lexical assimilation of borrowed words of English.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, shop signs, business language, Taif, bilingualism

1. Introduction

Language offers an important role in all aspects of life, including communication, whether in a monolingual or multilingual society. English is one of the significant languages that has its presence in most societies. It includes linguistic landscape (LL, henceforth) in which it is used to guide the non-native speakers of the local language. Moreover, LL is an indication of people's linguistic patterns of any society. In general, language landscapes are sign language that is manifested on streets, signs, places and street names, shops, government buildings etc. Landry and Bourhis (1997) defined LL as the "Language visibility and excellence in public and commercial signs in a particular area or region" (p. 23). Based on this definition, the LL studies focus on analyzing all written materials of the physical space of a particular place. As Landry and Bourhis' definition is too broad, other scholars tried to determine what to be and not to be included in LL. For example, in his definition of the LL, Bakhaus (2007) highlighted the size of the sign that it is an LL, whether small as a sticker or a large one as a billboard and considered the transliterated signs as multilingual ones. Similarly, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) language visibility and excellence in public and commercial signs in a particular area or region.

Moreover, shop signs are the clear manifestation of semantic landscape of any locality. It helps measuring the linguistic choice of both the owners and the customers. Furthermore, symbol is an important object in LL. It is a sentence that describes information, warnings, instructions, etc. necessary to guide you to a specific place (Backhaus, 2007). More specifically, according to Landry and Bourhis (1997) or as termed by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), signs of LL are frequently divided into two categories: private and government signs, bottom-up and up-down signs. Nowadays, English occupies significant role in business communication, including LL signs. In the business sector, signs and their projections constitute a vital area. For instance, store use signs to display the names of the products and services that they generally offer.

In addition, it is important how the customer perceives each item on the sign, including language items. They give them an idea of the nature and type of transactions that the store offers. Therefore, the focus will be on the private or bottom-up signs of Taif city of Saudi Arabia. This study is the result of asynchronous analysis of Taif's trademark and recording the current situation and situation in English on the store name and display. Therefore, present study investigates the influence of English in Saudi society as represented by the linguistic materials shown on the shop signs of Taif. Based on the aim of the study, the following research questions have been formulated:

Q1. What are the functions that are exhibited by the English language on shop signs?

Q2. Does the choice of language depend on the owner/worker in the shop?

Q3. What is the owner's attitude towards English as a foreign language?

2. Literature Review

The language perspective has attracted the attention of scholars from different regions. They studied LL from various aspects. For example, Jordan Amer and Obeidat (2014) investigated shop signs in Aqaba, Jordan, to find out the influence of English on Arabic and what governs the presence of English in this context, and the attitudes of shop owners towards using English in the business context. The outcomes showed that most store signs are bilingual. Both Arabic and English are used. Conspicuously, the purpose of using English with Arabic is to provide information about the products and services they offer to non-native customers. Another advantage includes that it is associated with modernism and prestige. Shop owners indicated their positive attitudes towards using English as it affected their businesses positively. In Jordan, Al-Naimat (2020) also investigated the linguistic landscape that was characterized by the political discourse of the Jordanian protest on May 30, 2018. He explored the code choice on some of the signs of protest. The study results revealed that Jordanian Arabic language addresses the local audience, whereas English is used to manage the global audience, followed by Chinese. While examining the non-fixed signs, the author argued that the concept of place in the linguistic landscape disappeared from the protest scene. These are mobile signs that devote more importance to the motion of signs in the linguistic landscape.

LL is investigated to determine the types and functions of the signs. For instance, Al-Athwary (2017) studied 755 Arabic and English bilingual signboards in the public space of Yemen. The results of using Reh's (2004) multilingual typeface typology have shown that language landscapes are characterized by multilingual typeface duplication, fragmentation, duplication, and complementation strategies. In addition, Arabicized English, glocalization, and multifunctional signs comprised the aspects of the linguistic landscape in order to promote utilitarian objects, modernity and success. Hopkyns and van den Hoven (2021) investigated COVID-19 signage in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The authors focused on the languages used, spacing, location, audience and sociolinguistic implications. According to the analysis, the handmade COVID 19 signage was a single language using only English, and the alerts created by the community were bilingual using Arabic and English.

Despite the multilingual composition of the context, Korean was used as the only third language for COVID 19 signage. Aiming to investigate the impact of tourist destinations on the use of linguistic landscapes, Hamdiyah (2019) examined the linguistic landscape and multilingualism of Surabaya and Mojokerto's ancient places. Subsequently, the analysis exhibited the use of nine languages on the signs of four heritage sites, namely, Indonesian, English, Javanese, Arabic, Dutch, Latin, Sansekerta, Chinese and Madurese. The results also revealed six functions of the examined signs: directional, instructional, warning, names of buildings, informative and advertising. The purpose of using a language(s) on the signs encompassed facilitating local or foreign visitors and improving their knowledge, presenting facts and showing identity. The authors concluded that tourist spaces did not affect cultural heritage in the use of linguistic landscapes.

Kretzer and Kaschula (2021) investigated language policy and the linguistic landscape at several South African institutions to find the relationship between the two. The findings indicated that the schools surveyed had different language policies and landscapes on account of frequent use of English in language policy documents, language landscapes and mottos. In contrast, linguistic policy did not mention or define the role of languages in the linguistic landscape of the schools. Besides abovementioned regions, the Saudi context has attracted the attention of researchers in terms of the LL. For example, Blum (2014) studied the linguistic landscape of Jeddah to explore the use of bilingual/multilingual typographic signage and the language hierarchy and dominance. The study results showed that English is presented through the business identity and logo trademark followed by the Arabic translation.

On the other hand, Arabic takes priority over English in municipal signage, including highway and street signs, in which it appeared first then followed by the English translation. Another study dealing with the Saudi LL was conducted by Alfaifi (2015), who investigated the linguistic landscape in Khamis Mushait in two areas, namely, tourist destination (TD) and commercial zone (CZ). In one hand, the focus of the study, was on the usage of English at shops, streets, poster signs. While, on the other hand, it aimed to find out whether Arabic or English was the predominant language at the abovementioned places. The study results showed that in both locations (TD and CZ), the Arabic language is dominant. However, English appeared to have more influence on the signs of the CZ. The author attributed such an influence to globalisation.

Similarly, Alhaider (2018) contrasted with the linguistic landscape between two markets located in Abha: Souq Athulatha'a and Asir Mall. More precisely, the study aimed to contrast foreign languages with the use of native language. The results revealed that Souk Athulatha'a uses unilingual signs, whereas the signs of Asir Mall are multilingual ones. While the use of unilingual signs is marked by the indications of past literacy in which the traditional roles of men and women as customers and cultural conservatism are emphasized, the multilingual signs are obvious by the use of Arabic transliterations of brand names in English.

Almoaily (2019) studied the code choice in the virtual linguistic landscape of 400 businesses of Saudi entrepreneurs. The author has categorized the letters into Arabic single language, English single language, and multilingual. Multilingual ones were further categorized into duplication, complementation, fragmentation, and duplication. The study results figured out an inconsistency in the linguistic preference of the business owners; for example, the business names fall primarily under the category of duplicating, whereas the business logos were found under the category of English monolingual. However, the descriptions of the business mainly were found under the category of Arabic monolingual.

Aldosari and Alrefai (2020) studied the linguistic landscape of English in Saudi Arabia to find out how English came to be reorganized and negotiated in the Arabian context. The study was designed to elicit insights and implications for English education in Gulf countries in general and in Saudi Arabia in particular and the role that the linguistic landscape plays in the advancement of English as a global language. The study results concluded that road signs written in English could be a valuable resource for teaching English in Saudi Arabia once they are appropriately integrated with the national syllabi, easily accessible to students anywhere and anytime in their neighborhood.

3. Methodology

This study investigates the English language influence on LL of Taif city of Saudi Arabia represented by its shop signs to find out how English is presented in Taif LL and how it is presented. Focusing on the English language influence, all the Arabic monolingual signs were excluded from this study. For gathering data, the researcher used two data collection methods: observation and individual interviews. Through observation, data include the language items that appear on the shop signs. The researcher used his mobile phone's camera to capture each sign. The total number of signs captured through this method is 162 photos. Additionally, seven interviews with the shop owners were conducted for data collection wherein they were asked the reason for including English on their shop signs. More questions were added related to the linguistic materials shown on their signs.

4. Analysis and Results

For data analysis, the researcher classified the signs according to the items that appeared on shops; thus, established the categories i.e., bilinguals (English and Arabic), transliteration and monolinguals (English only). Furthermore, the category bilingual signs are subdivided into four subcategories according to the criteria proposed by Reh (2004). These subcategories are complementary, duplicating, overlapping and fragmentary. The observation data were categorized into three major categories: bilingual signs (46.3%), transliteration (48.1%) and English monolingual signs (5.6%), see Figure 1.
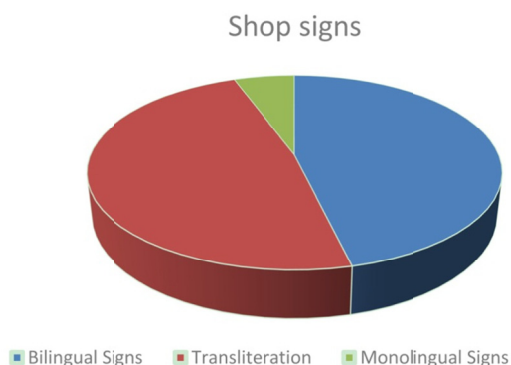

Figure 1. Major categories of signs

4.1 Bilingual Signs: English and Arabic

This category consists of the signs on which Arabic and English are shown on the same sign. They are further

classified into four subcategories: complementary, duplicating, overlapping and incomplete, according to Reh's (2004) criteria, see Figure 2.
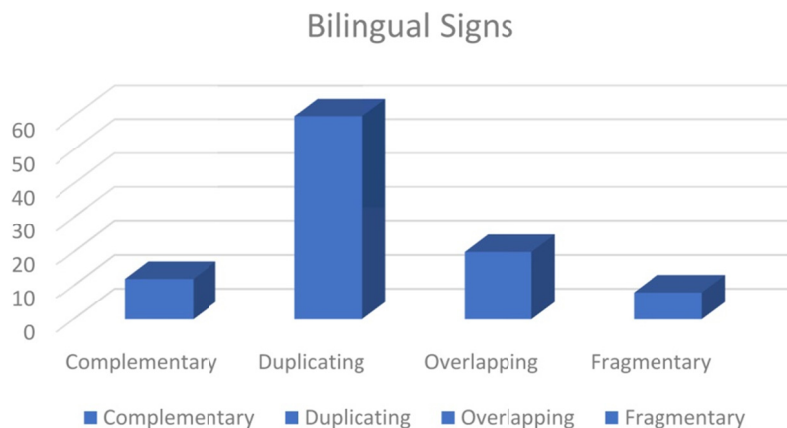

Figure 2. Distribution of subcategories of bilingual signs

4.1.1 Complementary

A sign is classified as complementary when the linguistic material is displayed in two or more languages. Some information is displayed in one language and the rest is displayed in another language. These signs can be understood by people who speak those languages. As far as this study is concerned, about 12% of the bilingual signs are classified as complementary. For example, on the sign MARENA Décor, the name of the shop is provided in English, while the nature and services provided by this shop is given in Arabic (المانيـــة مطــابخ), see Figure 3, below. Therefore, a reader who is only an Arabic monolingual or English monolingual will not have a complete access to the information provided on the sign.

Figure 3. A complementary bilingual shop sign

4.1.2 Duplicating

On duplicating signs, the whole displayed text is translated into another language, i.e., some information is displayed in one language and the rest is displayed in another language. In the context of this study, same information will be provided in Arabic and English. The study signs are that classified under this category, constitute 60% of the total bilingual signs. In Figure 4, the same linguistic material is presented in Arabic مذاق الملكــة and its translation in English QUEEN TASTE. So, equal access is provided by this sign for Arabic and English speakers.

Figure 4. A duplicating bilingual shop sign (1)

During the interview with its shop owner, he was asked the reason for using English besides Arabic on the sign; "he indicated their wish to cover Arabic and non-Arabic speakers". He also said, "We want to attract customers from different countries, and there are a lot of non-Arabic speakers around here". As for whether the reason is for prestige or keeping in line with globalization, he said "No, to attract as many customers as we can. It's business". Thus, it can be construed that the aim of including English on the shop sign is to improve business by attracting all types of customers.

Similar signs of duplicating bilingual signs include الورد بـــائع FLORIST in which the Arabic name is translated into English. Other examples include للاقمشـــة الجــــديعي Hebah Optics, للنظــارات هبه العـود نخبـة OUD ELITE, الرجاليـــة AlJedaie Men's Fabrics, المتحــدة صـــــيدلية UNITED PHARMACY and محمصة الرفـــاعي ROSTERY ALRIFAI. The last sign, محمصة الرفـــاعي ROSTERY ALRIFAI, shows disordering error in the English translation caused either by the interference of Arabic or by the design of the sign, see Figure 5.

Figure 5. A duplicating bilingual shop sign (2)

4.1.3 Overlapping

As the name suggests, overlapping bilingual signs have the information in one language and part is repeated in the other language. In this study, these signs make up one-fifth (20%) of the total number of the studied bilingual signs. The order of the two languages is not clear. For example, on the sign الرجاليـــة للخياطـــة مكس, the word مكس is repeated in English. Looking at the sign نيوترشــــن دكتــور, it can be found that it is repeated in English as clear from the abbreviation and the website, while المثـــالي الـوزن is not translated in English, see Figure 6.

In the interview, the shop owner said, "it is a brand name, and everybody knows that, and they target the high-class people, the ones whose income is more than 20 thousand Saudi riyals per month like doctors, businessmen and teachers. When asked whether this has anything to do with globalisation, he said 'maybe'.

Figure 6. An overlapping bilingual shop sign

4.1.4 Fragmentary

The information is displayed in one language on the fragmentary signs, and some parts are translated into the other language. In other words, the information is written in one language but some of the information is written in another language. In this study, the fragmentary category is the least among the bilingual signs as it forms only 8% of the total number. An example from the data is provided by the sign دار النظـــارات الســـــعودية, shown in Figure 7; it has the English translation of the name and further information is provided about the shop type by the English 'LOOK' as it appears on the right side of the sign.

Figure 7. A fragmentary bilingual shop sign

4.2 Transliteration

Transliteration is a kind of writing in which the writer employs the closest corresponding letters of a different alphabet or script of another language. It is frequent in representing names from one language into another. It is different from translation as the latter provides the meaning of words or text in another language. In contrast, the former does not offer any meaning but helps the reader pronounce such words or phrases using similar-sound characters. In this study, the transliteration category occupies the top of the list of the major categories as it constitutes 48.1% of the total number of signs studied, see Figure 1 above. Transliteration on these signs is either Arabic written in a Roman script or English written in an Arabic script.
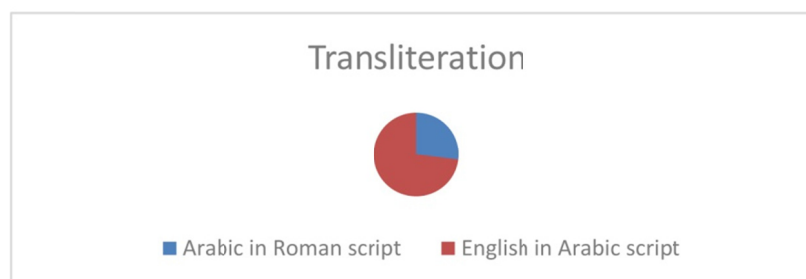

Figure 8. Distribution of subcategories of transliteration signs

4.2.1 Arabic in Roman Script

As clear from Figure 8, Arabic in Roman script signs makes up less than one-third of the transliteration signs (27%). The Arabic shop name is written in Arabic on these signs and further transliterated in Roman script. Examples of this type of transliteration include: الشـــياكة ALSHIAKA, الرمانـة AlRumanah and الـريف زهور zohoor alreef. In Arabic, the letter 'l' of the definite article {al-} is pronounced according to the following sound; based on this, the words ALSHIAKA, AlRumanah and alreef are expected to be ASHSHIAKA, ArRumanah and arreef, respectively. It indicates that the transliteration system from Arabic into another script seems to be based on the spelling of the Arabic word rather than its pronunciation.

The signs واحد فلافـــل -WAHED FALAFEL- and بــدون اسم BEDOON ESSM show Arabic written in Roman script beside the original Arabic name of the shop, see figures 9 and 10 respectively. The shop owner of واحد فلافـــل -WAHED FALAFEL- said that they designed the shop sign in this way because they "just [want] to go with the flow", and when asked whether they want to attract the non-Arabic speakers, he said, "No, because I want to attract Arabic speakers as English attracts them the most". This means that designing the sign with the transliteration of the Arabic name using English attracts the customers' attention and ultimately improves their business. Upon asking the shop owner of بــدون اسم BEDOON ESSM about the reason for including transliteration on the sign, he said: "to imitate others. Because most brand names are in English". As for the type of customers they target, he said that designing the sign in this way makes it easy for the customers to find the shop, especially non-Arabic speakers such as Pakistanis, Filipinos and Indians. He adds that it also attracts women, the main customers since English is a prestigious language. Other examples of Arabic in Roman script signs include ازاري ثــوب EZARI الرجاليـــة للخياطـــة and كلمـات حواء Kalemaat Hawwaa.

Figure 9. An Arabic in Roman script sign (1)

Figure 10. An Arabic in Roman script sign (2)

4.2.2 English in Arabic Script

Making up 73% of the total number of transliteration signs, English in Arabic signs indicate the preference of Arabic to English at Taif markets. On these signs, the English pronunciation of the shop name is transliterated using Arabic script. The writer used the Arabic letters equivalents or the closest ones if the English sound does not exist in Arabic. For example, the sign 'ICE-CREAM FACTORY' is transliterated into فــــاكتوري كــريم-ايــس , 'fine fair' is فـيـر فـايـن, 'Fresh Juice' is فـريش جوس, and 'THE BODY SHOP' is ذي بـودي شـوب. Moreover, the shop sign SIGNATURE is transliterated as سيجنتشــــر, in which the English /g/ is represented by Arabic /dʒ/ and English /tʃ/ by the Arabic combination of -tsh-; this is because these two English sounds are not available in Arabic, see Figure 11.

Figure 11. An English in Arabic script sign (1)

In the interview with the shop owner of Fresh Juice فـريش جوس, he was asked about the reason he designed the sign this way—having English written in Arabic letters, see Figure 12. He said, "My daughter asked me to design it this way. As she says, writing the sign both in Arabic and English is something preferable by the female customers, so she convinced me". Like the reason given by the owner of BEDOON ESSM shop, Fresh Juice's owner emphasized the connection between using English and female customers. This strengthens the view that using English, at least in business, has a kind of prestige as customers prefer, especially females.

Figure 12. An English in Arabic script sign (2)

The second interview on the signs of this category was conducted with the owner of THE BODY SHOP ذي بـودي شـوب who said that it is a brand name, and they want to attract customers from all regions: Arabs and non-Arabs. Furthermore, he said that English was essential and dominated the scene in certain contexts, and if they use the Arabic translation, محل الجسـم, it will not give the same meaning in this context, see Figure 13. Rest of the signs in this category are almost brand names such as centre point سـنتربوينت, Lifestyle لايـف سـتايل, Domino's and ToysRus ردغ تـاغ REDTAG كـير مذر mothercare نيـو مارك New Mark بيتزاهــت Pizza Hut دومينــوز سرآس ـزتوي.

Figure 13. An English in Arabic script sign (3)

4.3 Monolingual Signs: English Only

Monolingual signs are the last major category which is also the least number of signs among the major categories. It constitutes only 5.6% of the total number of the signs studied. As mentioned earlier, Arabic monolingual shop signs are excluded from this study since the central theme of the current study is the influence of foreign language, English in this case, on the shop signs materials. Therefore, the category 'monolingual' means the signs on which English is only used. Examples of this category include 'ProoF', Adidas, and TOP30. In the interview with the shop owner of 'TOP30', he was asked why he designed the shop sign this way; "he said that it is a new style to use English rather than Arabic and using English is "prestigious and global as well". As for customers, he said that it might not attract low-income customers because people think that brand names are expensive. TOP30 shop sign is shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14. An English monolingual shop sign

5. Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the influence of English on the business sector of Taif, represented by the linguistic items used on shop signs. It also explored the degree to which English is spread and the role it plays in the business sector. The current study formulated three research questions. The first research question entailed that what functions are exhibited by the English language on shop signs? The study results show that foreign language has a strong influence in the business sector as it is a means to have access to various cultures increasingly present in everyday life because customers are subjected to the influence of foreign images. Moreover, an increase in familiarity with foreign brands also improves the economic conditions as the locals of Taif perceive those brands as a symbol of great prestige and wealth. It values them more than the local brands as they can afford to buy the products willingly. This result is consistent with the results of Amer and Obeidat (2014), who discovered that English was used by shopkeepers to provide information about the products and services they offer to non-native customers. Besides, advantage of using English is that it is associated with modernism and prestige.

The second research question encompasses that does the choice of language depend on the owner in the shop? Having divided the shop signs into three major categories according to the linguistic items, about half of the signs (48.1%) are found under the transliteration category. The script of one language represents the other. The second category according to the frequency is the bilingual signs (46.3%), where English and Arabic are used simultaneously. The last category in this classification is the monolingual signs in which only English is used (5.6%). Let alone the monolingual Arabic signs that have not been selected for analysis in accordance with the

aim of the study, the major category is transliteration under which English in Arabic script made up 73% of this category which means that although English names are there, Arabic seems to be inevitably required for the customers, a reason for which the Arabic script is shown on these signs to facilitate the customers.

On the other hand, English is necessary for the business sector to attract non-Arabic speakers' attention, as indicated by some shop owners whom the researcher interviewed and some of the local customers, especially women who liked English as they believed it was a prestigious language. This result of the study is similar to the findings of a study conducted by Alfaifi (2015), who found that in tourist destinations and commercial zone, the Arabic language is dominant. In contrast, English appeared to have more influence on the signs of the commercial zone. This attribution is influenced by the impact of globalization. Thus, it is concluded that the choice of language was hinged on the owner in the shop as business sector perceived English as dominant language.

Answering the last research question, what is the owner's attitude towards English as a foreign language? The study found that some shop owners used English to attract foreign customers' attention. Other shop owners stated that they used Arabic and English because the latter is associated with prestige, modernization, and looks fancy. To sum, English language received a positive attitude as it improves their businesses. This finding is similar to a study conducted by Blum (2014), who found that English was used by shop owners more often as it became a symbol of business identity.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

This research focusses to investigate the influence of English on the business sector of Taif, represented by the linguistic items used on shop signs, to find out the degree to which English is spread and the role it plays in the business sector. The frequent use of English words, either on the bilingual signs or the transliteration ones, advocates that English is dominating commercial zones in Taif, Saudi Arabia. Moreover, English as foreign language has gained popularity and familiarity in the Saudi society. However, there is a need of policy formulation and implementation in order to adapt English for the lexical assimilation of borrowed or transliterated words under the local Saudi Arabic linguistic system used in the city. Further research on the role of English in road signs, signs, local newspapers, and television and radio programs are recommended to provide an overview of the existence of these foreign languages in Taif, Saudi Arabia.

7. Study Limitation

The study did not investigate monolingual Arabic signs for analysis.

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