RELIGIOUS IDENTITY REPRESENTATION OF ARAB DIASPORA IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF SHOP SIGNS IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

One of the fascinating issues concerning the Arab diaspora is the way they represent their identity in the new environment in which they live, interacting with the indigenous and other communities. This identity representation can be expressed through language and religion. This study aimed at describing the language use and religious identity representation of Arab diaspora depicted from shop signs in Sydney. The data consisted of pictures that were collected from commercial shops along the Haldon Street of Sydney, Australia. The findings demonstrated that language choices are varied in the linguistic landscape of shop signs. English is the predominant language used, while Arabic is used in the domain related to religion. This study also found the use of Islamic expressions in commercial signage is not only informative but also a symbolic function. The use of Islamic expressions is intended to assert their Islamic identity representation through the linguistic landscape of shop signs.

Keywords: Arabic; Arab diaspora; commercial signage; linguistic landscape; religious identity

Introduction

The Arab communities are well known for their significant contribution in development of the global economy. They spread widely to almost all over the world through migration (Cainkar, 2013; Geddes, 2014). The global Arab diaspora phenomenon brings about influence in many aspects of culture, religion, and language and integrate them into the environments they live by (Mills, 2005). Several studies on the Arab diaspora have been conducted, for example regarding the Arab diaspora in Europe (Salameh & Alkatatsheh, 2019), the Arab diaspora in America (Liebert et al., 2020), the Arab diaspora in Australia (Abdel-Fattah, 2016), and the Arab diaspora community in Indonesia (Al Qurtuby, 2017). The Arab diaspora studies that have been done generally used social, political and economic approaches. In many ways, one of the important aspects of Arab diaspora migration is that the Arabs continue to hold and maintain their cultural, religious and linguistic identities into their new environment (Damanakis, 2018). One of the applications of identity that they show is through the practices of using their language in the commerce and business domain, specifically in shops. To figure out the interplay between language and identity, the use of language in shop sign is interesting for further study via the linguistic landscape approach.

Research on linguistic landscape was first pioneered by Landry and Bourhis (1997). In their study, it is stated that any form of visible sign can be considered as linguistic landscape. The linguistic landscape can be in the form of a poster, street name, etc. Furthermore, current research on linguistic landscape has been developing rapidly. Research on linguistic landscape has also attracted many scholars to investigate using a variety of fields, such as sociolinguistics, language teaching, architecture, and commercial signage.

In relation to commercial signage, linguistic landscapes deal with two functions, namely informative and symbolic. Informative means that the sign sends information about the product or goods being offered. Symbolic refers to the status of the language used. In addition, the use of language also reflects power, status and economic interests (Akindele, 2011), which is confirmed by Nikolaou (2017). Nikolaou (2017) explained that the use of language in commercial signs does not only have an information function to attract visitors and buyers, but rather a symbolic function that reflects a cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and trendy outlook.

Linguistic landscape studies on commercial signage, especially of which relate to shop signs, have been carried out in various countries, including China, Thailand, Greece, Maredonia, and the Middle East. In a study of shop signs in Wuhan, China, Guihang and Bingjie (2017) found that a number of languages contribute to multilingualism in Wuhan. English has an influence in the choice of language in

commercial sector. Meanwhile, Chinese is used to comply with the language policy that is applied to prevent the influences of Western culture and globalisation in China.

The linguistic landscape of shop signs in Bangkok, Thailand, displays certain peculiarities. Prapobratanakul's (2016) research findings showed that English has a strong influence on the shop signs at one of the local commercial areas in Bangkok. In addition, English lexical borrowing is used as a strategy from business owners to display signs on their shop. However, Thai script, lexicon, and syntax forms are also commonly found on Thai shop signs, which are also combined with the English script.

Dimova (2007) examined the language use of 346 shop signs in Veles, Macedonia. The shops included bakery, boutique (shoe, clothes), bar, butchery, restaurant, bank, Internet cafe, hardware store, watch repairer, flower shop, grocery shop, pharmacies, lottery or betting store, cell-phone store, and stores for furniture and electronic appliances. The results showed that English is the dominant language used after Macedonian. English is most widely used in Internet cafes and boutiques but less in butcheries, barbers, bakeries, and pharmacies.

In the Middle East, several studies on shop signs have demonstrated the phenomenon of linguistic identity. Buckingham (2015) investigated the linguistic landscapes of commercial signage all over Oman. The results indicated that apart from Arabic and South Asian languages, English is the lingua franca in Oman and used to reflect local cultural values and practices. The language has a significant contribution of its use in shop signs, which is manifested in the form of innovative lexemes creation.

Language choice is one of the important decisions that business owners have to make to attract potential customers. Manan et al. (2017) argued that the use of English in shop signs is usually connected to the economy and commercial commodities. Meanwhile, Lee (2019) highlighted the opposite. English does not represent the language of economy or business in some regions. In South Korea, Japanese and Chinese are considered languages that tend to be used in the economic and trading domains. In Singapore, apart from English, French has a special place, especially in the beauty and food businesses (Ong et al., 2013). Furthermore, the type of business may also influence the language choices. In Turkey, cafes, restaurants, cosmetic, and electronic shops tend to use English on their shop signs (Selvi, 2007). In Pakistan, business owners of electronics and technology services prefer to use English (Manan et al., 2017).

From the previous studies reviewed, most of the studies showed the predominance of English in the linguistic landscape of shop signs. However, linguistic landscape research that examine the aspects of linguistic landscape in revealing linguistic identity and religiosity in the economic domain has never been carried out, especially in relation to the Arab diaspora in Australia. This research is specifically different from what related studies that have previously done, such as that of Izadi (2016), who examined the Persian ethnic shop in Sydney. Izadi's research employed the Mediated Discourse Analysis and Nexus Analysis instead of a linguistic landscape approach. Most studies significantly neglect to uncover aspects of language use in the domain of economic activities that occurred when a diaspora life intersects with religion

and identity. Therefore, this present study is conducted to fill in the gap by examining the linguistic landscape of shop signs in Sydney, Australia.

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between language use and religious identity represented through the linguistic landscape of shop signs in Sydney. Specifically, this research is aimed at answering the following questions:

(1) How does the Arab diaspora construct their identity in commercial signage?
(2) What language is predominantly used in shop signs?
(3) What kind of religious identity is manifested in their shop signs?

Method

This research combined qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method was used to describe the linguistic landscape of shop signs in a commercial area in Sydney. In total, 124 pictures of shop signs were collected from stores along the Haldon Street in the Lakemba district of Sydney. A digital camera attached to the cellular phone was utilised to take the photographs. It is worth noting that all the images taken for this research have been granted permission by the shop owners.

The unit of analysis in this study was picture (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy & Waksman, 2009), that is, only signs displayed on shop windows or shop exteriors were taken into account. Hence, signs that were displayed inside the shop were not considered as a unit of analysis. This is in line with Edelman's (2010) study. Furthermore, each shop sign was considered as a single unit of analysis. If two or more signs have the same content, they were considered as one unit. However, if the sign is of different content, the sign was included in a different unit of analysis. This procedure is similar to the procedure carried out by Al Hyari and Hamdan (2019). The data were later classified based on their type of shops, languages, and Islamic text or symbols that occur. Finally, the results were analysed to answer the research questions.

Results

Type of Languages Used in Shop Signs

The findings in this section answer the first research question: how does the Arab diaspora construct their identity in commercial signage. The Haldon Street has various kinds of shops, ranging from food, clothing, service, to drug stores. On the basis of the observation and data collected, we classified the types of business in Haldon Street into three categories: services, food, and goods and stuff. Services is any shop that offer services, such as printing, money changer, salon, communication, travel agencies, and butchery. Food shops are any shop that provides food for daily needs, such as restaurant, groceries, supermarket, and sweet store. Goods and stuff are shops that sell goods and miscellaneous items like clothing, jewelry, bookstore, chemist, and pharmacies. In terms of number, the type of business in the form of restaurant is the most frequently found, with a total of 36 shops. This is followed by butcheries, with 20

stores found. Meanwhile, shop with the least number are services and goods and stuff types (see Table 1).

Table 1

Types of Business in Sydney

Shops	Number	Percentage
Restaurant	36	11.16
Groceries	12	3.72
Jewelry	8	2.48
Communication	4	1.24
Sweet shoop	4	1.24
Pharmacies	4	1.24
Butchery	20	6.2
Travel agency	8	2.48
Clothing	6	1.86
Chemist	2	0.62
Supermarket	6	1.86
Bookstore	2	0.62
Money changer	4	1.24
Printing	2	0.62
Salon	2	0.62
Misc.	4	1.24
N	124	100%

Each shop displays names and signs in front of their stores to attract potential buyers' attention, as well as to introduce their merchandise. The use of language on shop signs varies. As shown in Table 2, the patterns of language use of shop signs in Sydney consisted of monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual. Shop signs in monolingual pattern are found in almost all types of businesses. The monolingual form was mostly found in restaurants (33.3%). This is followed by groceries, jewelry, and clothing. Each of which were found in three monolingual forms. The bilingual form was found in all types of commerce, except for communication, clothing, and chemist shops. The highest number of shop signs were found in restaurants (28%). It is also interesting to note that out of 20 butchery shops, only four used multilingual shop signs.

Table 2

Patterns of Language Used in Shop Signs

Shops	Monolingual (N/%)	Bilingual (N/ /%)	Multilingual (N/%)
Restaurant	16/ 33.3 %	20/ 28 %	
Groceries	6/ 12.5 %	6/ 8.3 %	
Jewellery	6/ 12.5 %	2/ 2.8 %	
Communication	4/ 8.3 %		

Sweet shop		4/ 5.5 %	
Pharmacies	2/ 4.2 %	2/ 2.8 %	
Butchery	2/ 4.2 %	14/ 19.4 %	4/ 100 %
Travel agency		8/ 11 %	
Clothing	6/ 12.5 %		
Chemist	2/ 4.2 %		
Supermarket	4/ 8.3 %	2/ 2.8 %	
Bookstore		2/ 2.8 %	
Money changer		4/ 5.5 %	
Printing		2/ 2.8 %	
Salon		2/ 2.8 %	
Misc.		4/ 5.5 %	

The language used of shop signs shows a variety of language choices; namely Arabic, English, Indonesian, and Urdu. Table 3 depicts the number of languages used and the patterns of language used.

Table 3

The Number of Language Patterns Used in Shop Signs

Language patterns	Language	Number of shops
Monolingual	English	46
	Arabic	4
	Indonesia	2
Bilingual	Arabic-English	30
	English-Arabic	30
	English-Urdu	2
	English-Chinese	4
	Indonesia-English	2
	English-Indonesia	4
Multilingual	English, Arabic, Urdu, Persian	4

The Linguistic Patterns: Predominant Language

This section answers the second research question: what language is predominantly used in shop sign. In general, the data collected (see Table 4) reveal that English ranks first in terms of the frequency of usage with the most commonly used signs in commercial signage (59.8%). Arabic comes in as second with 56 signs displayed. Other languages, such as Indonesian, Urdu, Chinese, and Persian, occur less frequently than English or Arabic. Therefore, it could be concluded that English is the predominantly used language in the linguistic landscape of shop signs in Sydney.

Table 4
Most Frequent Language Used

Languages	Frequency	Percentage
Arabic	56	30.5 %
English	110	59.8 %
Indonesian	6	3.2 %
Urdu	4	2.2 %
Chinese	6	3.2 %
Persian	2	1.1 %
		100%

Monolingual sign

The data shows that there are three languages used in monolingual signs: English, Arabic, and Indonesia. English is the dominant language (46) and an example of the use of English in a monolingual sign could be seen in Figure 1. The image depicts an electronics store that sells, offers service, and repairs mobile phones. The use of English by the shop owner is inferred as a strategy to attract a wider range of customers.

Figure 1
Monolingual Sign in English

There are also shops displaying monolingual signs in Arabic, such as the supermarket shop, featured in Figure 2. This shop sells a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, and groceries. The use of the Arabic language strongly indicates that the target customers of this store are those from the Arab or Muslim communities.

Figure 2
Monolingual Sign in Arabic

The use of Indonesian language in monolingual sign in Sydney is also found in a shop selling daily necessities (Figure 3). This shop is named "Toko 45". From its name, the shop informs the passer by that it is an Indonesian store. Instead of using an English name for the shop, the owner uses Indonesian name, that is, “Toko”, which literally means shop, and “45” refers to the year of Indonesia's independence. Hence, it functions as a symbolic sign.

Figure 3
Monolingual Sign in Indonesian

Bilingual sign

The data collected from this study show that the bilingual combination of Arabic-English and English-Arabic language have the highest frequency of use; specifically 30 signs per each pairing. Apart from that, there are also bilingual signs consisting of English and Chinese, English and Indonesian, English and Urdu, and Indonesian and English. All signs indicate the dominance use of English, which is always juxtaposed with other languages. The placement of English and Arabic also occupies high frequency with the greatest number where English or Arabic is placed in a parallel or above position. In addition, Indonesian was also found to be placed at the top position in the placement of bilingual signs.

Arabic-English

Figure 4 depicts a travel agency that displays a bilingual sign written in Arabic-English. The Arabic script is placed at the top position, while English is seen at the bottom. The English expression underneath of the Arabic script is the translation of the Arabic sign.

Figure 4
Bilingual Sign in Arabic-English

English-Arabic

The use of a bilingual sign in English-Arabic form was found in one of the grocery stores. In the store sign, both the English and Arabic sentences are horizontally aligned. By placing the sentences in a parallel position, it is clear that this shop expects to draw both Arabs and non-Arabs as prospective customers.

Figure 1
Bilingual Sign in English-Arabic

English-Chinese

Another example of the data in the context of bilingual use is seen in a restaurant with an English-Chinese sign. The Roman script is bigger in size and more dominant than the Chinese script. The Chinese writing is placed at the upper left corner in smaller font size while the English words are at the bottom of the signage. However, the English sentence is parallel to its Chinese counterpart in terms of position and size.

Figure 2
Bilingual Sign in English-Chinese

Indonesian-English

A restaurant displaying a bilingual sign in Indonesian-English was also found in Sydney. In the Indonesian Language, this restaurant is called “DAPUR IBU ALYA”. In English, this could literally be translated into “Madam Alya’s Kitchen”. The Indonesian signage is located at the top of the English information “Indonesian Restaurant”. The placement of the Indonesian name at the top and the use of large fonts was meant to draw attention to the restaurant's local uniqueness.

Figure 3
Bilingual Sign of Indonesian-English

Multilingual sign

The multilingual sign was only found in two butchery shops. The languages used are English, Arabic, Urdu, and Persian (Figure 8). Meanwhile, no documentation of the use of Chinese or Indonesian in the context of multilingual signs was discovered. This

possibly suggests that the majority of customers in the butchery are the Arabs, Iranians, or South Asian origin. Meanwhile, the use of English functions as a lingua franca.

Figure 8

Multilingual Sign in English, Arabic, Urdu, and Persian

Islamic Representation and Identity

To answer the third research question pertaining the type of religious identity manifested in Arab diaspora shop signs, we present the following description. A number of shops use Arabic and Islamic expressions. Arabic is used in restaurants, groceries, and butcheries. The use of the term “halal” in the shop sign signifies an expression that refers to Islam. This word is placed in front of a shop or alongside a road to catch the attention of potential customers. The sign is strategically placed so that visitors can easily understand the message that the shop owner wishes to convey. The word “*halal*” in Islam refers to any food that is healthy and safe to consume (Al-Teinaz, 2020). The opposite of *“halal”* is “*haram”* referring to any food that is deemed unhealthy by Islam and should not be consumed, such as avoiding pork and all its derivative products (Armanios & Ergene, 2018).

Table 5

Islamic Expression of Identity

Language pattern	Expression	Languages
Monolingual	*Halal*	Indonesian, English, Arabic
	Bismillah Shalawat	Arabic
		Arabic
Bilingual	*Halal*	English, Arabic
		Arabic-English
Multilingual	*Halal*	English, Arabic, Urdu, Persian

Aside from the word "*halal,*" a number of shops have been found to use other types of Islamic expression. The word is "*Bismillah*". A shop that uses the expression on this shop sign was found in one of the fast food restaurants (Figure 9). "*Bismillah*"

means "in the name of God (Allah)". The complete sentence of this expression is بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم "*bismillah al rahman al rahim* which means "In the name of Allah, most gracious and most merciful". *Bismillah* is a verse in the Alquran, which is commonly uttered by Muslims in starting all their activities. *Bismillah* pragmatically has perlocution effect that is by buying at the shop, customers will obtain grace and blessing from Allah. This finding is in conjunction with the case of in Jordan (Al Hyari & Hamdan, 2019). The inclusion of Islamic symbols into shop names represent Jordan's official religion that is Islam (Alomoush, 2019). However, the use of Islamic references is meant to encourage not only religious identity but also the meaning associated with it, namely, "we are kind and truthful".

Figure 4

Bismillah Display in a Fast Food Restaurant

Apart from the use of the phrases *halal* and *bismillah,* this study also discovered another intriguing expression that asserts a representation of Islamic identity. This expression is *salawat*. *Salawat* refers to a sentence of praise containing greetings to the prophet Muhammad. This expression is usually said during the five daily prayers as well as when the Prophet Muhammad's name is mentioned. The *salawat* has various versions. The original basic sentence of *salawat* is generally read as صلى الله على محمد: */shalla allah ala muhammad/* which means "may pray and peace be upon Muhammad". In this study, however, another form of *salawat* was found in an extended version, as can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 5

Salawat Expression in Bilingual Sign

In the picture, the *salawat* phrase is combined with a sentence which indicates the testimony of the recognition of Islam to Allah and his messenger. The full version of this expression is: رضيت بالله رباً وبي الاسلام دينا وبمحمدٍ صلى الله عليه وسلم /*raditu bi allahi rabba wa bil islami dina wa bi muhammadin shalla allah alaihi wa sallam/*. The sentence is written in Arabic alphabets. This expression is given its English equivalent written on the left side, which is translated as: "I am content in Allah as God and in Islam as a religion, and in Muhammad as a messenger". The illocution effect of this expression means a total avowal of Allah, Islam as a religion and acknowledgment to his messenger. The perlocution effect indicates that the shop carries out Islamic teachings and hence, the seller of this shop is seen as trustable and so buying in the place is safe.

Discussion

As shown in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4, English is predominantly used in almost all types of business while Arabic dominates and tends to be used in restaurant and butchery signages. The language preference is achieved by placing one language above another, for example, by using large fonts or bright colours. This is in accordance with Scollon and Scollon's argument (as cited in Backhaus, 2005). Scollon and Scollon discern between two methods of language choice (as cited in Backhaus, 2005). The first is when languages are aligned vertically and the chosen language is at the top of the symbol. The second is when languages are aligned horizontally with the chosen language is located on the left side of the symbol. Since Arabic is written from right to left, this approach should be reversed. The supremacy is expressed in font size, order, and colour. When a text occupies the most space on the shop sign or when a language has been allocated the most, it is considered the preferred language. In terms of order, a language is considered to be the preferred language if it is placed at the top, right, or middle of a sign. Colour is also similar; when one text is printed in a different colour than another, particularly when printed in a stronger or darker colour than that of the other language on the sign. Thus, the dominance of English reflects the lingua franca (Alomoush & Al-

Naimat, 2020; Collins, 2012), while Arabic represents a religious symbol as the language of Islam (Bennett, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, the predominant language used in commercial signage in Sydney is English. It is not surprising since English is the national and official language of Australia (Lo Bianco, 2016), followed by Arabic (see Table 4). With 321,728 Australian speaking Arabic, making it the third most language spoken in Australia, after English and Mandarin as per the latest census report in 2016 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017). What is surprising is that Mandarin or Chinese only appears as both in monolingual or bilingual signs, as this language is the second most spoken language after English in Australia.

The use of Arabic in commercial signage is not only informative, but it is also symbolic. It is not only as an ethnic identity marker of the Arab diaspora community, but the use of Arabic also reflects a religious identity. The role of Arabic as a lingua franca in Arab countries generally serves as the language of everyday communication. Meanwhile, Arabic, as a religious language, is used within a certain boundary, namely in the domain of ritual and worship. Outside of the Arab countries, Arabic is perceived differently. Apart from being a language of Islam, Arabic is believed by some non-Arab Muslims as the language of heaven. The use of Arabic is thus associated with the Islamic identity, as emphasised by Yusuf (2017).

The expressions on shop signs that define Islamic identity are used in a number of languages. Arabic, English, Indonesian, Persian, and Urdu are among the languages employed. The Islamic identity is presented in monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual signs. Arabic is commonly used in both monolingual and bilingual signs. In this case, Arabic is often juxtaposed with English in its bilingual form. Arabic also coexists with other languages, i.e., English, Persian, and Urdu in multilingual form.

Shop signs in Arabic are used in almost all restaurant and groceries. The use of Indonesian only appears in one restaurant and one butchery. It is difficult to deny that this restaurant serves halal food due to the use of Indonesian. This is due to the fact that Indonesia is widely recognised as the country with the world's largest Muslim population. Furthermore, the use of Urdu is seen. Along with Arabic and English, Urdu is also used. Urdu is spoken by the Pakistani community. This serves as a reminder that the restaurant provides *halal* food. Similar to the use of Indonesian, Urdu is a marker of Islamic identity for Pakistanis. Meanwhile, although English is generally identified with being a technological and metropolitan language, it is used in this sense as a neutraliser or counterweight, as well as the lingua franca, in the context of religious identity representation of the Arab diaspora in Australia.

That is different from the context in the linguistic landscape of shop signs in Jordan (Alomoush, 2021). In Amman, the shop owners tend to use foreign languages to show that the products they sell are of high quality and of international standard. However, some shops also apply bilingual signs on their shops with strategies by involving foreign written in Roman alphabets accompanied with the transliterated forms of the same lexis in Arabic alphabets (Hussein et al., 2015). In Amman, Arabic is not used in any religious symbolic function or as an Islamic identity.

The use of foreign languages on shop signs basically aims to influence the behavior of potential customers or buyers, which has a pragmatic effect. The pragmatic effect that occurs is the perlocution, which means persuasion. Meanwhile, the illocution effect is information. The use of foreign elements is thus as information that the products or services are of high international quality. In the setting of Sydney, the information intended to build is that the products being sold do not violate the Islamic principles and values. This is in contrast to what happens in Greece. In Greece, the use of foreign languages in shop signs serves as symbolic, specifically in relation to a high cultural investment. English, which is commonly spoken there, is synonymous with, among other things, a free market economy, democracy, innovation, technology, and a certain way of life. Meanwhile, the Italian and French are equated with high culture, which is associated as a symbol of elegance, finesse, and haute culture (Nikolaou, 2017).

The use of foreign languages in Greece is not specifically targeted at foreign tourists. The presence of these languages, on the other hand, is intended as a symbolic expression and ideology associated with its culture. English, for example, is associated with sophistication, technology, and so on. In contrast to that, the foreign languages used on shop signs in Sydney, apart from being a symbolic expression, are also intended as an Islamic identity representation of the shop owners and are mostly aimed at local visitors, who mostly have an Arab background or Muslim communities.

Conclusion

This study suggests that, although quantitatively English appears to be the most widely used in commercial signage, it can be said that Arabic also has a very high dominance in conveying messages symbolically to visitors. The dominance of the Arabic language led to the emergence of a symbol of identity. The forms of language symbols can identify business actors or owners in the Sydney area, namely the Arab diaspora and other Muslim communities living in Australia. The form of linguistic dominance, displayed in shop signs in the linguistic landscape, identifies two forms of dominance, namely the dominance of English as a lingua franca and the dominance of Arabic as a representation of the Islamic identity of the Arab diaspora community. The findings of this study imply that further investigation of the Arab diaspora's identity representation in Australia using a mixed methodology is necessary to elucidate their strategies for retaining their identity. Further research is needed to determine how the Arab diaspora's identity is represented in different regions considering more diverse variables, such as ethnicity, culture, and identity so that the global profile of the Arab diaspora can be fully understood.

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