
RESEARCH ARTICLE

English Language Representation in Korean Linguistic Landscapes

Prof. Reima Al-Jarf

King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Corresponding Author: Prof. Reima Al-Jarf, **E-mail:** reima.al.jarf@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study sought to analyze English linguistic landscapes in South Korea to find out the kinds of businesses, shop, street and directional signs that are represented in English. A corpus of 500 public and commercial English signs (clothing, shoes, accessories, beauty products, children's toys restaurants, cafes, hotel names, supermarket, mall names and street names, tourist attractions and street names) was collected from some South Korean cities during the author's visit in September 2023. In addition, a sample of Korean colleagues who are university professors were surveyed to find out why the number of English signages has considerably increased compared to the status of English signs two decades ago. While most business and street signages are still in Korean, there are notably a good amount of English signages which represent international as well as local brand names. The most frequent businesses with English signs are food and beverage shops (27%), clothing, shoes, handbags, lingerie and beauty product shops (24%), hotel name signs (17%), directional signs (11%), malls, supermarkets and convenience stores (5%), entertainment shops, games, gyms, clubs, music, and theme parks (4%) and miscellaneous kinds of shop, businesses and public service names (5%). Businesses, shops, directional and service signs with English sign names include international hotel chains, clothing shops, cafes and Franchised shops with English names are Sheraton, Marriott, Starbucks, Burger King, McDonalds, Pizza Hut; local Korean brand names transliterated in English, and local English names created by the Korean shop owners. The Korean professors believe that use of foreign names attract shoppers' attention more than Korean names. More international tourists and foreigners who are residing in South Korea can be reached. They also gave globalization factors that affect the preference for English sign names. Recommendations for exploring the status of English sign names in non-English speaking countries as Russia, China, Indonesia and others are still needed in addition to studies that show how the national identity can be preserved in the commercial sector in the face of English-flooded linguistic landscapes around the world.

KEYWORDS

Korean linguistic landscapes, English signs, commodified English, English signs in Korea, mixed signages, international brands, local brands

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 25 July 2024

PUBLISHED: 02 August 2024

DOI: 10.32996/ijaas.2024.3.2.1

1. Introduction

Linguistic landscapes¹ refer to the "visibility and salience of languages on commercial and public signs in a given place or region. They cover² the language of commercial shop signs, commercial posters, street names, road signs, signs on government buildings, place names, public notices, advertising, billboards, notice boards, product information, façade names, posters, border signs,

¹ [Linguistic landscapes](#).

² <https://timorlesteanddiasporas.exeter.ac.uk/research-areas/linguistic-landscape/#:~:text=The%20linguistic%20landscape%20of%20a,signs%20on%20government%20buildings%2C%20etc.>

stickers, graffiti, commemorative plaques, and others. They also include³ exterior/outdoor signage as store brand/names, promotional deals and offers, informational, directional/wayfinding signs, sidewalk board signs, pylon signs, window graphics, banners, vehicle graphics, monument, pole, frame interior and construction site signs. Linguistic landscapes serve several purposes as providing clear communication, informing the public, wayfinding and store navigation, attracting and guiding customers, advertising and marketing, brand awareness, enhancing branding and increasing profits, establishing brand aesthetics, generating impulse sales and increasing purchase decisions (Al-Jarf, 2021b).

Linguistic landscapes existing in public spaces in all countries are usually written in the local language with some written in one or more foreign languages. The language of linguistic landscapes has been of interest to many researchers. A plethora of studies examined the impact and use of English in advertising, brand-naming, media, and TV commercials in many countries around the world with the aim of explaining the reasons and consequences of this phenomenon.

Although South Korea has a long reputation for being a monolingual, homogeneous society, current research results have revealed that it is facing transitions in language use and ethnic composition (Ding, Kim & Kang, 2020). Even though the dominant language used on shop signs is still Korean, many signs also include English, especially in urban areas and tourist destinations¹. While exploring the vibrant streets of South Korea, a mix of English and Korean can be noticed. English monolingual, Korean–English bilingual, and multilingual signs, as Landry & Bourhis (1997) declared, can be easily spotted in commercial shops, street names, advertising billboards, government buildings and place names to help visitors and new arrivals explore the environment without knowing the local language, i.e., Korean. The current English-flooded linguistic landscape of urban areas is well described by J. S. Lee's (2016) study, in which an elderly interviewee confirmed, *'Everywhere you go, you see English – banks, markets, and things'*. Kim (2022) added that when we go shopping these days, brand names and street signs are all in English.

An increasingly robust scholarly literature has examined the forms of publicly visible written texts (language) used in certain types of linguistic landscapes in South Korean as TV commercials, commercial signs, advertisements. A number of studies examined English mixing, identity construction and globalization in TV commercials in South Korea (Lee, 2006). Another study by Holmquist & Cudmore (2013) investigated the use, acceptance, functionality and characteristics of English in Korean magazine advertisements. About 59.5% of the advertisements contained English words, but the English names, titles, and catchphrases presented in advertisements do not necessarily target English-speaking clientele in South Korea. International and native Korean firms integrate English to be successful in the Korean market, to show style and appeal to Korean customers. English is well received in Korean promotions. About 58.5% of the business college students surveyed understand the twenty most commonly used English words in Korean magazine advertisements. Most students agreed that English is novel or exotic. Korean consumers find the use of English to be appealing regardless of their comprehension of English.

In a third study on advertisements, analysis of 800 digital photos of various signs and advertisements collected from four different urban contexts in South Korea in 2018–2020 revealed changes favoring multilingualism and pragmatic inequality in the public use of foreign languages and dimensions of language use, sets of norms, and ideological constructs underlying particular linguistic choices in certain spatial urban contexts in comparison with commodified English reflecting “foreignness,” and agentivity of new ethnically diverse speakers. This status quo challenges the dominance of a monolingual ideology (Fedorova & Nam, 2023).

Analysis of language use in 1,205 business signs in six high-volume areas of metropolitan Seoul revealed that English plays a special symbolic role in the linguistic landscape and serves some communicative functions. English and Roman scripts in signs symbolize positive affective notions as globalization, modernity, and Westernization in order to effectively appeal to the local community and to assist in the linguistic communication of Koreans, rather than being merely resourceful to the international community. English has a salient status in the Korean linguistic landscape and its use is based on the societal norms of a modern bilingual South Korea (Van Vlack's, 2011).

Based on sociolinguistic theories of social stratification, gravity and cascade models, Lawrence, (2012) examined the use of English, Korean, Konglish, and Chinese in public signs and found that English is used in the physical domains of main streets, foreign districts and amusement parks, in product domains of clothing, beer and wine, and in the sociolinguistic domains of youth luxury and modernity in all regions of Seoul and Korea. The researcher concluded that the Labov's gravity model proved to be accurate, but his social stratification and cascade models were moderately supported.

The functions and identities associated with English and Korean in bottom-up public signage (linguistic landscape) and how they relate to the statuses and ideologies associated with the two languages were examined by Tan and Tan (2015). Tan and Tan also

³ <https://www.apexsignage.com.au/signage-that-retailers-should-consider/#:~:text=Effective%20exterior%20retail%20signage%20works,information%2C%20either%20internal%20or%20external.>

examined sign content and the sign coding method to find out if there is a difference between information-giving and decorative signs, and whether English plays a communicative or symbolic function in South Korea. They found that Seoul's linguistic landscape reflects the city's careful and calculated use of English and Korean to maintain the different identities. Both English and Korean have symbolic and commercial value. The linguistic landscape in South Korea has become increasingly commodified.

It seems that the business type, intended sales and specialized marketing focus affect the business owners' linguistic choices. Commercial signs related to beauty and food in the Myeongdong and Insadong districts in Seoul demonstrated that the beauty industry relies heavily on English in general, but the power of K-Beauty popularized by 'Hallyu' (The Korean Wave) beyond Korea inevitably favors the use of Chinese and Japanese. The beauty business features a more prevalent use of English than the gastronomic business and the Insadong district displays more signs in Korean than the Myeongdong district (Lee, 2019).

Additionally, geopolitics, geoeconomics and identity seem to affect the linguistic landscape of Seoul, each of which has specific historical, cultural, political, and socioeconomic underpinnings. Ding, Kim & Kang (2020) highlighted the need to reconsider the increasing impact of geopolitics and geoeconomics, which continue to make their presence in the linguistic landscapes of Seoul and the contemporary debates regarding the Korean identity. The linguistic landscapes of Seoul revealed that maintaining identity in the face of pressures from internationalism can be difficult.

A variety of ways in which Koreanness, as Lee (2020) showed, is enregistered as a national identity or 'brand' and the role of language in nation branding, particularly nation branding as a phenomenon of linguistic invention and reinvention. Data collected from 23 sites of 'global' Korea between 2014 and 2017 reported three discrete, overlapping, strategies: (i) translation (the re-presentation of language resources in another language), (ii) transliteration (representation of language resources in the script of another language), and (iii) translanguaging (the blending of language resources that results in a condition of untransposability of conventional categories of 'languages').

In coffee shop signs near Seongsu Subway Station in Seoul, English is used to represent modernity, foreignness and cosmopolitanism as well as superior coffee and coffee-related knowledge. On the contrary, the absence of English can mark a more retro or less contemporary atmosphere and a more local orientation for coffee shops. Coffee shops with English-only menus have higher average prices, whereas those with Korean-only menus have lower average prices, and those with Korean-and-English menus have average prices that are between English-only and Korean-only menus. It seems that the menu language and the prices featured in coffee shops is related to the overall atmosphere, aesthetics, and style of coffee shop (Chesnut & Curran, 2022).

Seongsu-dong, where old industrial sites and new commercial places with multilingual linguistic landscapes made up of languages, visual materials, and built environments are indiscriminately juxtaposed. The languages, visual materials, and built environments, together with space users, create contrasting semiotic aggregates. These aggregates reflect a hierarchical tension between the commercial and the vernacular landscape in the neighbourhood. Commercial places highlight the local industrial heritage as globally trendy visual components, through the use of well-designed Romanized script or minimally inscribed Korean letters. This created a cosmopolitan commercial landscape. On the contrary, old industrial sites are filled with banal industrial texts in Korean, resulting in a vernacular landscape. The use of Western languages, and their cosmopolitan values and the visual representation of the trendy industrial heritage, together form a semiotic aggregate that reveals the underlying aspiration embedded in the town's nickname, as in the Brooklyn of Seoul (Kim & Ahn, 2024).

The use of English in further types of linguistic landscapes such as road signs, street names, commercial shop signs, public notices, façade names, signs on government buildings, store brand/name, pylon signs, directional/wayfinding, informational, monument, and frame sidewalk board signs, tourist attractions, and their purposes have not been investigated by prior research studies. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the kinds of businesses, shop, directional and service signs in which English is used in South Korea, the percentage of English signs for international and local brand names, the percentage of Korean transliterated local brand names, local Korean brands with pure English names, mixed names, i.e., "glocalizations" where English and Korean languages are used these linguistic landscapes. It also seeks to explore the factors that affect the increase in English linguistic landscapes in South Korea as perceived by a sample of Korean faculty specialized in linguistics and translation.

This study is significant as it is part of a series of onomastic studies that the author has conducted such as the dominance of foreign shop names over Arabic names in Saudi Arabia and the promotional, sociocultural and globalization factors that impact this phenomenon (Al-Jarf, 2022b); linguistic-cultural characteristics of hotel names in Makkah, Madinah and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia (Al-Jarf, 2021a); which Arabic and foreign shop names in Saudi Arabia are and should be translated and which ones should be transliterated (Al-Jarf, 2024b); semantic and syntactic anomalies of Arabic-transliterated compound shop names in Saudi Arabia (Al-Jarf, 2023d); deviant Arabic transliterations of foreign shop names in Saudi Arabia and decoding problems among shoppers (Al-Jarf, 2022a); whether Arabic product names should be definite or indefinite (Al-Jarf, 2024a); the interchange of personal names

in Muslim communities (Al-Jarf, 2023e); absence of vowels in the English spelling of Arabic personal names on social media (Al-Jarf, 2023a); the English spelling of Arabic compound personal names by educated Arabs on Facebook (Al-Jarf, 2023b); the English spelling of the glottal stop and voiced pharyngeal fricative in Arabic personal names by educated Arabs on Facebook (Al-Jarf, 2023c); the English transliteration of Arabic personal names with the definite article /al/ on Facebook (Al-Jarf, 2022c); gemination errors in Arabic-English transliteration of personal names on Facebook (Al-Jarf, 2022d); variant transliterations of the same Arabic personal names on Facebook (Al-Jarf, 2022e) and others.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

A sample of 500 business, street, directional and tourist English signages were collected during the author's visit to South Korea in September 2023. Some business and shop names were mainly selected from the Time Square English Directory in Seoul and digital pictures that the author took of street and shop signs in Seoul, Busan, Jeju Island and others. All the names were verified in Google Images to make sure that they are all in English as they appear on the shop or business front signs.

English business, shop, directional and tourist signages were grouped into restaurants, cafes, bars, clubs, bakeries, candy, gift, beauty, jewellery, shoes, household, supermarkets, convenience stores, entertainment, bookstore, gym/club, home accessories, sports, pet, pharmacies, beauty salons, luggage, electronics, train and bus stations, ferry terminals, hotels, tourist destinations and attractions, street names, theme parks, museums, clinics, petroleum & refinery company, banks, police and security station signs, directional and service signs, catch phrases used in public spaces and indoor directional words and phrases and identifiers.

The business, shop and tourist signages collected were also classified into 4 categories: (i) International franchised foreign shop names (international brand names); (ii) locally coined English names; (iii) mixed shop names with a transliterated Korean and foreign name (English, French, Italian, Chinese and Japanese, etc.); (iv) shops with pure transliterated Korean names. Duplicate shop names were removed as well. Only shops with English names whether they are international brands/chains or locally-coined English names were collected and subjected to further analysis. Those written in Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese script or any script other than Romanized script were excluded due to the author's unfamiliarity with those languages.

The percentages of shop names in each category were calculated with examples given for illustration. The percentage of signs having an English name in comparison with those written in Korean was impossible as the estimation of the total number of signs in Korean could not be made due to the author's unfamiliarity with the Korean language.

A sample of 10 Korean college Instructors who are native speakers of Korean and a good knowledge of English were surveyed to find out their views on the increasing number English signs in South Korea in the past 2 decades. Responses to the survey were compiled and subjected to further analysis. Responses were grouped into promotional, sociocultural, linguistic and globalization factors and lack of naming policies that affect the increasing numbers of foreign shop names in South Korea. Results are reported qualitatively.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Types of Businesses, Shops, directional and Services Using English Signs

Analysis of the sample of the English signs in the linguistic landscapes of South Korea showed that the most common type of business with an English sign name is food and beverage which constitute 27% of the English signs in the sample. 37.5% of the food and beverage shops are international brand names and 62.5% cover local Korean names transliterated in English or English coinages of local Korean brands. Examples of international restaurants and café brand names are Mahogany Coffee, Mamas, McDonald's McCafe, Starbucks, Sweetspot, Texas Beer Coffee, The Coffee Bean, The Lava PC & Café, Weeny Beeny, Auntie Anne's Pretzel, Baskin Robbins, Cafe Mamas, Café Pascucci, Club Malibi, Coffee @ works, Ediya coffee, Paris Baguette, Premium café, Outback Steakhouse, Saint Augustin, Colectivo, A Twosome Place, Shake Shack, Zettaplex,. There are French (Paris Baguette), Italian (Lotteria), Mexican (Cuchara), Chinese (P. F. Chang's), Japanese, Vietnamese (Cong caphe, Pho bay), Taiwan (Gong Cha), Malay (Genroku Udon), Thai (Kon Thai), Japanese (Jirou Ramen), and so on. Examples of transliterated local Korean brands are Mies Container, Pho bay, Gong Cha, Cuchara, P. F. Chang's, Jirou Ramen, 1964 Baek Mi Dang, Abiko Curry, Andong Jjim Dak Cocomapa, Bodol Seaweed, Cucor, Dal-Komm coffee, Damsot, Donburi Pasta, Ganga, Gye Baek Jin Shabu Shabu, Hanilkwan, Hao'sum, Jeokdang, Jumark, Mamadenjang, Muwol Table, Nakwontesando, Namdo Bunsik, Namyong Publisher, Nipong Naepong, Nolboo Budaejjigae & Kimchi Jjim, Onkijung, Poongkukmyeon, Saboten, Seoga & Cook, Sokcho-Kodari Cold Noodles, Soomtofu, Street Churros, Sushiro, Thingool Dining, Thingool Store, Tokkijung, Xin Chao Kitchen, Xinlongfu, Cofee Hanyakban, Yongho Nakji,. Some are mixed names consisting of a transliterated Korean name + an English name. Examples of locally-coined English names are House Steamed Beef, Egg Drop, Americantra, Ashley Queens, Brother café, Butterfinger pancakes, Coffee Libre & Maybell Bakery, Coffee Place, Daba South Asian, Dok2's 808 Coffee, Its Sushi, Jasmin coffee, Mad For Garlic, Modern House, Mom's touch, On The Border, Smoothie King, Spur, Angel-in-us Coffee, Sol-Bing Café.

Common English words referring to the specialty of the shop are used such as: bakery, bar, soup, world food, espresso & bakery, food café, burger & fries, grill & burger.

The second most common kind of business with English signs is clothing, shoes, handbags, lingerie and beauty product shops. These constitute 24% of the total shop signs in the sample, with 65% of these signs for International brands and 35% for local Korean transliterated and locally-coined English brands. Examples of international brand names are: Adidas, Burberry, Charles & Keith, Crocs, Fahrenheit, Fred Perry, Giordano, H&M, Lacoste, Levi's, Lloyd The Grace, Louis Vuitton, Newera, Nike, O'Neill, Olive O Young, Polo Ralph Lauren, Swarovski, The Body Shop, Zara, UniQLO, Birdie and Eagle. Examples of transliterated Korean brand names are: Carhartt, Hoka, Kangol, Mizuno, Moimoln, Namugrim (& Deulpul), Naning9, Onitsuka Tiger, Park Seungchol Hair Studio, Roem, Roem Girls, Shoopan, Spao, Tomsrun Hair, Topten Kids, Yasano Sports Entertainment, Ziozia, Chicor. Examples of locally-coined English names are 8 Seconds, Abc Kids Mart, Beaker, Beanpole, Champion The Black Belt, Chanel Beauty Boutique, Cheek, Clothing Repair Shop, Clovis, Clride. N, Codes Combine Innerwear, Converse, Covernat, Cool, Design Skin, Maquillee, Descente, Dr. Marten, Dream Line, Eblin, Entetee, Hazzys, Innis Free, Kolon Sporex, Le Coq Sportif, Luxury Brand Shoes & Bag Repair, Metrocity, Milibam, Mini Gold, Mixxo, Mont-Bell, New Balance, Platform Place, Remember Jane, Salomon, Shoe Marker, Sistina, STCO, The North Face, Vans, Who. A. U, Yellow Container, Zero Gravity.

The third most common type of business with English signs is hotels which constitute 17% of the total English linguistic landscapes in the sample. International English hotel names constitute 20%, and locally-coined English brand names constitute 80% of the total hotel names in the sample. 64% of the hotel names are mixed, i.e., consisting of an English name + a Korean name such as the name of the street or locality where the hotel is located. Examples of international hotel chains are InterContinental Seoul Coex, Dream Tower - Grand Hyatt, Best Western Premier Gangnam Hotel, Courtyard by Marriott Seoul Namdaemun, Fairfield by Marriott Seoul, Four Points by Sheraton, Holiday Inn Express Seoul Hongdae, ibis Ambassador Insadong, Mercure Ambassador Seoul Hongdae, Ramada, Sheraton, The Westin Josun Seoul Hotel, Travelodge Myeongdong Euljiro. In some cases a street or district name is added to the international name as an identifier. Examples of locally-coined English hotel names are: Aloft Seoul Gangnam, Amare Hotel, Amid Hotel Seoul, Crown Park Hotel, Hotel The Designers Seoul Station, Hotel Uri, L'Escape Hotel, Koreana Hotel, Oasis, Shilla Stay Guro, Shilla Stay Mapo of Samsung Group, Snowflower Guesthouse, Hotel Gracery Seoul, Glue Hotel, Seoul Riviera Hotel, 9 Brick Hot, Trang Blue Hotel, Imperial Palace Boutique Hotel, New Seoul Hotel, Asia Motel, CALL Motel, Brown dot hotel, Hamilton Hotel, Lotte, Gentle resort, Hazbin Hotel, Ocloud Hotel Gangnam. Examples of mixed hotel names are Hotel Kuretakeso Insadong, Baiton Seoul Dongdaemun, The Recenz Dongdaemun Hotel, Tong Tong Petit Hotel, Sotetsu Hotels The Splaisir Seoul Myeongdong, Stanford Hotel Myeongdong, The Grand Hotel Myeongdong, Toyoko Inn Seoul Gangnam. He Stay Classic Hotel Myeongdong, L7 Hongdae by LOTTE, MD Hotel Doksan (formerly Staz Hotel Doksan), Moxy Seoul Insadong, Moxy Seoul Myeongdong, ENA Suite Hotel Namdaemun, Faser Place Namdaemun Seoul, GLAD Gangnam COEX Center, Hotel Firststay Myeongdong, Hotel Midcity Myeongdong, Hotel Peyto Samseong, Hotel PJ Myeongdong, Hotel Skypark Central Myeongdong, Hotel President, Hotel Thomas Myeongdong, Dawoo House,

A fourth type is directional English signs which constitute 11% as in the following examples: (i) Transliterated major Korean street names: Provincial Office, Jeju Starlight World Park and Planetarium, Mysterious Road, Texas Street, Hwannyeong-daero, Halla College, Eorimok, Jungmun, Halla daehangro, Gwawonro, Iho Tewood Beach, Juk nok won. (ii) Directional signs for tourists: CHEONIL TOUR, Jeju City Tour, Yonghoman sightseeing boat terminal, Yed Tourist information, Seoul city tour bus, Busan Sealife Aquarium, Visit Pusan Pass, Jeju Dongnum Market, Negro beach, Jinro Beach, Dongbacksoem Island (Busan), Korean War photo display, Viking's Wharf, Canyon park, Jeju national National Museum, Halla Arboretum, Busan Sealife Aquarium, Information, Outside map, Snoopy Gard (on the bus), World Expo 2030. (iii) Airport, ferry terminal & station signs as Airport Limousine Bust stop, Hello Jeju – Jeju International airport, JEJU Island, Airport Limousine Bus Stop, Matson, Dongbu, Busan Station, B. Startup Station, Yonghoman sightseeing boat terminal, Jeju Port International Passenger Terminal.

Moreover, 5% of the English sign names are allocated to malls, supermarkets and convenience stores as: (i) Mall names: Jeju Jungang Shopping Mall, Hyundai Department store, Migliore Dongdaemun Shop, Shinsegae Department Store, Doota, Lotte Department Store, Hamilton shopping mall, DIOR Seongsu, Time Square Mall; and (ii) Supermarkets and convenience stores with English names as ABC Mart, emart, Nice to CU, GS25, 711, E-Mart, LOTTE MART, Top-MART, ABC-MART.

Furthermore, 4% of the English signs are allocated to entertainment shops, games, gyms, clubs, music, theme parks as in the following examples: Game land, 4D Gameland, CGV Starium with the world's largest cinema screen, Grand Stage, BAND In house, Study cube, Custom Gym, First Gym, Dallas gym, Vip Club, O64 Hip Hop Lounge, TinTin, Tinyville, Zoolung Zoolung.

An additional 5% of the English signs cover miscellaneous kinds of shop, businesses and public service signs in:

- Flower shops: RanRan Flower.
- Optical shops: Lenstown.

- Pet shops: LUV Pet.
- Pharmacies: Dream Pharmacy.
- Banks: KDB.
- Clinics: 4 Season Dermatology, Beseto Dental Clinic.
- Electronics shops: Frisbee, Samsung.
- Bookstores: Kyobo Book Centre, ARTBOX.
- Luggage stores: Mandarin Duck, Samsonite.
- Toy shops: Lego Store, Toys R Us
- Gift shops: Jelly Crew, Kakao Friends, Aimerfeel Japan, Hottracks, Gyor Gyor Store, Jeju gift shop,
- Home accessories: MUJI, Fxng.
- Businesses: Hyundai Oilbank, Soul Finance Career.
- Police: Jeju Provincial Police Agency, Police enforcement, Daishin Securities.

Finally, 7% of the English signs contain (i) catchphrases as Cool Sailing for life and freedom, Busan is Good, I love you earth, Hello Butter. You look wonderful today, Have a nice day YP Bookd, FOR a LONG LIFE, Welcome, Seoul My Soul, We love having you here; (ii) indoor directions as Open, 2F, Sale, Royal, Mobile, Km, 24 hours open, Entrance, Pharmacy, Floor guide, lunch set, Take out, Please come to Busan Eurasia Platform, Gate 10 (in Mall), NAIN and (iii) identifiers as Bar, Espresso Cocktail, Coffee, Eat & Drink, Bar, Food, Café.

3.2 Factors Affecting the Increase of English Signs in South Korea

Faculty's responses to the survey revealed several factors that led to the adoption of English shop names in Urban areas in South Korea. The subjects indicated that the number of English-speaking foreigners residing and doing business in Korea has dramatically increased in the past 15 years. English is used as a mean of communicating, facilitating and reaching out to foreign residents and foreign tourists in matters related to food, drink, shopping for clothes, hotel accommodation, getting from one place to another, visiting tourist destinations, getting around major areas of urban areas and so on.

They also indicated that English names are used for promotional purposes to attract foreign customers. They think it is more glamorous to use foreign names for stores, hotels, coffee shops, restaurants and so on. English shop names are associated with modernity, high quality openness, and elitism. They give foreign customers the impression that the store is up to date, fashionable, and keeping abreast of latest international markets. Foreign shoppers will be impressed by the English name. Both local and foreign customers prefer foreign merchandise and brand names to local ones. Adopting an English name enables new entrepreneurs to compete with other shops selling similar products.

The subjects added sociocultural factors. Being the lingua franca and global language, English sign names sound cooler, more sophisticated, and fancier and give customers a positive image and a high social status. Some consider using English sign names more prestigious and glamorous.

Moreover, the subjects mentioned linguistic factors. They indicated that some English names are characterized by brevity and conciseness, whereas some Korean ones have a long or explanatory equivalent. Translating the foreign shop name especially international franchised shops, to Korean will create a barrier between the customers and the foreign company as the original name is in English.

Finally, the respondents emphasized globalization factors which affect the preference for English names to Korean equivalents. Some shop owners like to imitate the West. English shop names are common in many countries around the world, especially International franchised brands. Even well-known Korean brands such as Lotte, Samsung, LG, Kakao, and Kia Motors are in English to facilitate global communication and marketing since such companies have branches in foreign countries all over the world whether they are English-speaking or not.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study has detected numerous types of businesses, shops and services that use English signs, some of which are international brands that are part of international hotel and store chains, some are Korean local brands, business and store names transliterated in English, some are locally-coined English brands, others are directional linguistic landscapes that mainly target tourists and foreign visitors/residents.

Findings of the current study are consistent with findings of prior studies that indicated that many signs also include **English**, especially in urban areas and tourist destinations despite the fact that Korean is the **dominant language** used on shop signs (Kim, 2022). English monolingual, Korean–English bilingual, and multilingual signs can be easily noticed in TV commercials (Ding, Kim &

Kang, 2020; Lee, 2006), advertisements (Holmquist & Cudmore, 2013; Fedorova & Nam, 2023; Fedorova & Nam, 2023), street names, place names, commercial shops and government buildings (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), banks, markets, and things. When we go shopping these days, brand names and street signs are all in English (Kim, 2022) to help visitors and new arrivals understand the environment without being literate in the local language, Korean. The current English-flooded linguistic landscape of urban areas is well described in J. S. Lee's (2016) study, in which an elderly interviewee confirms that 'Everywhere you go, you see English'; commercial signs related to beauty and food in the Myeongdong and Insadong districts in Seoul (Lee, 2019), and in coffee shop signs near Seongsu Subway Station in Seoul (Chesnut & Curran, 2022).

Likewise, findings of the current study are partially consistent with findings of a study by Al-Jarf (2022) which analyzed 500 shop names in 12 cities in Saudi Arabia and reported that 64% of the shops in a sample have foreign names (25% international foreign names and 39% local names); 24% have pure Arabic names and 12% have mixed names. An Arabic descriptor which is a translation of the foreign name is added to some shop names with a foreign name (عطورات بارفيوم). Foreign names are used in some shop and mall names although Arabic equivalents exist. Similarly, Lee (2020) reported three discrete, overlapping, strategies in shop naming as translation, transliteration, and translanguaging.

Regarding the factors that affect the adoption of an English inscription on sign names of shops, restaurants, cafes, attire, hotels, and directional signs in the current study, they are also consistent with findings of prior studies by (Fedorova & Nam, 2023) who mentioned the use of commodified English which reflect "foreignness," and agentivity of new ethnically diverse speakers. English and Roman scripts in signs serve some communicative functions and symbolize positive affective notions as globalization, modernity, and Westernization in order to effectively appeal to the local community and to assist in the linguistic communication of Koreans, rather than being merely resourceful to the international community (Van Vlack, 2011). Both English and Korean have symbolic and commercial values. The linguistic landscape in South Korea has become increasingly commodified (Tan and Tan, 2015; Han & Shang, 2024). The business type, intended sales and specialized marketing focus affect the business owners' linguistic choices (Lee, 2019). Geopolitics, geoeconomics and identity seem to affect the linguistic landscape of Seoul, each of which has specific historical, cultural, political, and socioeconomic underpinnings (Ding, Kim & Kang, 2020).

Other aspects related to the language of linguistic landscapes need to be explored such as which foreign shop names in South Korea are/should be translated and which ones are/should be transliterated; the semantic and syntactic anomalies of English-transliterated compound shop names, and deviant transliterations of foreign shop names in South Korea and decoding problems among shoppers in South Korea. As in the case of South Korea, the increase in English business, shop, street, and directional sign names in non-English-speaking countries as Russia, China, Indonesia, Iran, Turkey and others is dramatic. Therefore, studies that investigate the status of English in the linguistic landscape of such countries are open for further investigation. Studies that focus on the role of language in nation branding, and how the national identity and the native language can be preserved in commercial sector in the face of English-flooded linguistic landscape are still open for further investigation by researchers in the future.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6255-1305>

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors' and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, editors and reviewers

References

- [1] Al-Jarf, R. (2024a). Definite or indefinite? The case of Arabic product names as judged by student translators. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 7(3), 83-92. [Google Scholar](#)
- [2] Al-Jarf, R. (2024b). To translate or not to translate: The case of Arabic and foreign shop names in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Translation and Interpretation Studies*, 4(1), 33-40. DOI: 10.32996/ijtis.2024.4.1.5. [Google Scholar](#)
- [3] Al-Jarf, R. (2023a). Absence of vowels in the English spelling of Arabic personal names on social media. *International Journal of English Language Studies (IJELS)*, 5(4), 88-97. Doi: 10.32996/ijels.2023.5.4.7. ERIC ED633828. [Google Scholar](#)
- [4] Al-Jarf, R. (2023b). English spelling of Arabic compound personal names by educated Arabs on Facebook. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies (JHSCS)*, 5(1), 53-64. DOI: 10.32996/jhss.2023.5.1.8. [Google Scholar](#)
- [5] Al-Jarf, R. (2023c). English spelling of the glottal stop and voiced pharyngeal fricative in Arabic personal names by educated Arabs on Facebook. *International Journal of English Language Studies*, 5(1), 11-22. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijels.2023.5.1.2>. [Google Scholar](#)
- [6] Al-Jarf, R. (2023d). Semantic and syntactic anomalies of Arabic-transliterated compound shop names in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities Studies (IAHS)*, 3(1), 1-8. DOI: 10.32996/ijahs.2023.3.1.1. [Google Scholar](#)
- [7] Al-Jarf, R. (2023e). The interchange of personal names in Muslim communities: An onomastic study. *Journal of Gender, Culture and Literature*, 3(1), 42-56. DOI: 10.32996/jgcs.2023.3.1.5. [Google scholar](#)
- [8] Al-Jarf, R. (2022a). Deviant Arabic transliterations of foreign shop names in Saudi Arabia and decoding problems among shoppers. *International Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 1(1), 17-30. [Google Scholar](#)

- [9] Al-Jarf, R. (2022b). Dominance of foreign shop names over Arabic names in Saudi Arabia: Promotional, sociocultural and globalization issues. *International Journal of Middle Eastern Research*, 1(1), 33-43. [Google Scholar](#)
- [10] Al-Jarf, R. (2022c). English transliteration of Arabic personal names with the definite article /al/ on Facebook. *British Journal of Applied Linguistics (BJAL)*, 2(2), 23-37. DOI: 10.31926/but.pcs.2022.64.15.2.2. [Google Scholar](#)
- [11] Al-Jarf, R. (2022d). Gemination errors in Arabic-English transliteration of personal names on Facebook. *International Journal of Linguistics Studies (IJLS)*, 2(2), 163-170. DOI: 10.32996/ijls.2022.2.2.18. [Google Scholar](#)
- [12] Al-Jarf, R. (2022e). Variant transliterations of the same Arabic personal names on Facebook. *International Journal of English Language Studies (IJELS)*, 4(4), 79-90. DOI: 10.32996/ijels.2022.4.4.11. [Google Scholar](#)
- [13] Al-Jarf, R. (2021a). Linguistic-cultural characteristics of hotel names in Saudi Arabia: The case of Makkah, Madinah and Riyadh hotels. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT)*, 4(8), 160-170. DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.8.23. [Google Scholar](#)
- [14] Al-Jarf, R. (2021b). Teaching English with linguistic landscapes to Saudi students studying abroad. *Asian Journal of Language, literature and Culture Studies (AJL2CS)*, 4 (3), 1-12. ERIC ED619894. [Google Scholar](#)
- [15] Ben-Rafael, E., & Ben-Rafael, M. (2018). *Multiple globalizations: Linguistic landscapes in world-cities* (Vol. 39). Brill.
- [16] Chesnut, M. & Curran, N. (2022). Americano, latte, or English: What do menu languages in Korean coffee shops tell us about the meaning of English today? *English Today*, 38(1), 38-51.
- [17] Ding, S., Kim, H. & Kang, Y. (2020). Imagined homogeneity: Identity and geopolitical and geoeconomic influences in the linguistic landscape of Seoul. *Lingua*, 244, 102851.
- [18] Fedorova, K., & Nam, H. (2023). "Multilingual islands in the monolingual sea": Foreign languages in the South Korean linguistic landscape. *Open Linguistics*, 9(1), 20220238.
- [19] Han, Y., & Shang, G. (2024). Displaying and commodifying English on shop name signs. In *The Linguistic Landscape in China: Commodification, Image Construction, Contestations and Negotiations* (pp. 25-47). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- [20] Holmquist, J. & Cudmore, B. (2013). English in Korean advertising: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 5(3), 94.
- [21] Kim, S. (2022). Blurring the boundaries: English-Korean bilingual creativity manifested in the linguistic landscape of South Korea. *English Today*, 38(2), 123-131.
- [22] Kim, T. & Ahn, J. (2024). Celebrating local heritage while marginalizing local language: the multilingual linguistic landscapes of Seongsu-dong in Seoul. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 1-19.
- [23] Lawrence, C. (2012). The Korean English linguistic landscape. *World Englishes*, 31(1), 70-92. Cite 194
- [24] Lee, J. (2006). Linguistic constructions of modernity: English mixing in Korean television commercials. *Language in Society*, 35, 59-91.
- [25] Lee, J. (2019). Multilingual advertising in the linguistic landscape of Seoul. *World Englishes*, 38(3), 500-518.
- [26] Lee, J. (2020). On the possibilities of 'Korea' in the linguistic landscape. *Research Companion to Language and Country Branding*, 259.
- [27] Tan, S. & Tan, Y. (2015). Examining the functions and identities associated with English and Korean in South Korea: A linguistic landscape study. *Asian Englishes*, 17(1), 59-79.
- [28] Van Vlack, S. (2011). English in the South Korean linguistic landscape: Varied patterns of use and status. *언어*, 36(2), 559-583.

Appendix: Sample Linguistic Landscapes in English and Korean



