

Linguistic-cultural Characteristics of Hotels Names in Saudi Arabia: The Case of Makkah, Madinah and Riyadh

Prof. Reima Al-Jarf 

Full Professor of ELT, ESP and Translation, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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

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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to analyze and compare hotel names (HNs) in Makkah, Madinah and Riyadh to find out if they differ in their linguistic and cultural features. Results of the data analysis showed that linguistically, most HNs in the three cities consist of two-word compounds. Culturally, HNs in Makkah and Madinah are loaded with meaning and reflect the country's rich past and present Islamic cultures and heritage. Most HNs in the two holy cities contain words and phrases from the Quran (Elaf, AlFurqan); notable events in Islamic history (Al-Hijra, Al-Fath); ancient Islamic place names (AlSakifa, Ohod); use of other names of Makkah and Madinah (Bakka, Umm AlQura, Taiba); and words with spiritual connotations (Alhuda, AlEman, AlEhsan). Islamic and spiritual words are even combined with names of international hotels as in Dar Al-Eman/Dar AlTaqwa/Dar AlHijra Intercontinental. The word 'Dar' which means 'house' is added to HNs to make hotel residents feel at home in the company of other Muslim visitors. In Riyadh, HNs mostly consist of single- and two-word compounds, but none of them has an Islamic or religious denotative or connotative meaning. Rather, they reflect the local mundane Saudi culture. They utilize typical Saudi eponyms (AlMutlaq, AlGhanem); toponyms (AlYamamah, AlJanaderia). Diyafa (hospitality) and Raha (Rest) impart a sense of generosity and comfort; and AlMokhmalia, Amjad, Asala, Qasr and Royal give a sense of grandeur and prestige. Global culture is reflected in retaining the names of international hotel chains such as "Hilton, Marriott, Sheraton"; or combining a local designation with the English and French descriptors such as "Plaza, Palace Tower, Royale, Crowne, Coral" as in (AlFanan Palace, AlFahd Crown; Coral AlHamra. Results of the analysis are reported in detail.

1. Introduction

A hotel² is an establishment whose purpose is to host guests overnight. Hotels are classified³ according to ownership, affiliation, location, size, capacity (number of rooms), facilities provided, and levels of service. They are also classified according to the Star, Crown, or Diamond system, depending on their geographic location. Hotel names⁴ (HNs) usually describe the design, theme, or type of accommodation (resort, motel, aparthotel, hotel apartment, boutique hotel, bed and breakfast, suites, hotel & spa, resort & casino, villa, bungalow, holiday village, holiday house, family hotel, residence, backpackers' hostel, youth hostel, guest house, homestay, chalets, cottage, hut, or log cabin), and sometimes the hotel location (seaside, beach, mountain, lake, river, countryside, urban and others). Classification of hotels is important because it helps prospective guests get an overview of a hotel without having to stay at it. It facilitates business by serving as an intermediary, providing trust between clients and hotels. The hotel location is usually added for marketing purposes, especially online marketing, as it makes the hotel easier to find when searching the internet for accommodation (Hannan, 2021; Susanto, 2015).

² <https://www.xotels.com/en/glossary/hotel>

³ <https://www.xotels.com/en/glossary/hotel-classification>

⁴ <https://www.fantasynamgenerators.com/hotel-names.php>

Furthermore, a HN⁵ is an essential component of the hotel's characteristics. It gives the hotel property an identity and distinguishes hotels from each other. The HN is considered a brand name which can build the property's brand identity and credibility, giving customers a good reason for getting attracted to a particular hotel and for preferring it to other competing hotels. The choice of a hotel brand name is an essential feature of a hotel that conveys its identity, uniqueness, and value proposition. A hotel brand name has an impact on its awareness, discoverability while searching the internet and how people perceive a particular hotel. In brief, the choice of a proper hotel brand name is an important aspect of the marketing strategy of travel, tourism, and hospitality firms (Rofled, 2008; Rutz & Bucklin, 2011; Wänke, Herrmann & Schaffner, 2007).

Due to the importance of HNs in marketing and market communication, a review of the literature has shown some review studies of hotel research. For example, Dev (ND) analyzed 115 academic papers published between 1984 to 2009 which focus on research themes and trends in China. The findings revealed that the most frequently examined theme by researchers is hotel management and performance, followed by hotel development strategies, and hotel business environment analysis respectively. Another study by Chu (2014) conducted a content analysis of research articles on luxury hotels published between 1994 and 2014 and found that the most popular research themes in those studies were: marketing, finance, human resources, strategic management, food science, service quality, human resources, tourism, and technology.

The second line of research investigated the impact of HNs on hotel selection by customers prior to their stay. A study by Wänke, Herrmann & Schaffner (2007) surveyed 400 customers of a travel agency and indicated that hotels were rated higher on attributes consistent with the semantic associations of the name than on inconsistent attributes. Customers used brand names as an evaluative and selection tool while searching for a hotel. Similarly, Lahapa, Ramlib, Saidc, Radzid & Zaine (2015) studied the importance of brand image in influencing customers' satisfaction in the context of the Malaysian hotel industry. Results showed that a brand image was among the first constituents that customers resort to when selecting a hotel. It also has a strong influence on customers' satisfaction. The researchers recommended that hotel operators plan, formulate, and decide to what extent they should improve their brand image to compete with other hotels in the industry.

In Croatia, Plenković, Galičić and Kučič (2010) analysed the names of all hotel categories to explore how guests choose hotels. They found that HNs are used to enhance and improve their performance and used in the gastronomic, cultural, and entertainment hotel-and tourism-product promotion.

Based on a systematic literature review of 26 studies, Górska-Warsewicz and Kulykovets (2020) analyzed hotel brand loyalty and found that brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and models of brand equity determine the guest/tourist loyalty to hotel brands. In addition, a survey of 101 companies by Kohli & LaBahn (1995) revealed that brand names are critical to the success of new products and consumer and industrial goods. Brand names with strong images can influence clients' choices and give such choices a premium position in the marketplace. A brand name is the basis of a brand's image. Brand managers realize that a carefully created and chosen name can bring immediate and inherent value to the brand, even though brand images can be built with advertising.

The third line of research focused on HN categories. In Bulgaria, Ivanov and Dimitrova (2018) and Mihailov (2016) categorized 5932 hotel properties according to the following name categories: animals; flowers, plants and trees; country, city, village, continent, mountain sea, ocean, river, lake and dam; nature; male, female, and family names; colors; objects and materials; emotions, expressions, and expectations; luxury and quality; geographical directions; locations; time period; typical Bulgarian names; and names with no specific meaning. They concluded that names of hotels in Bulgaria are very diverse but are heavily concentrated in a few categories that included female, male and family names (34.6%), and geographic toponyms (10.6%). Most of the names are typical Bulgarian words, which appeal to domestic tourists and contribute to the distinctive cultural and linguistic landscape of the destination but are difficult to translate and understand by international tourists. Likewise, Ivanov, Seyitoğlu & Dimitrova (2021) found that male, female, family names, and geographic toponyms make up 50% of all HNs in Bulgaria. Plants, emotions, and quality-related words are also used a lot. The hotel category, location, size, and type of accommodation influence the naming of hotels. Although Bulgarian names are common, foreign HNs are widely used in urban, higher category, and larger hotel properties.

The fourth line of research examined the language chosen in HNs. In Indonesia, Susanto (2015) examined the names of 224-star hotels in Bali and discovered that the use of native HNs has declined from 39% of the hotels established before 1990s to 11% of the hotels established in 2010s. Foreign hotel brand names have increased from 34% before 1990s to 77% in the 2010s. The use of mixed languages in HNs have been common since the 1950s and has continued since then. The choice of accommodation

⁵ <https://www.xotels.com/en/glossary/hotel-brand>

type descriptors has increased and is being used freely. Descriptors such as 'Cottage' and 'Resort' have been overshadowed by the more recent popular descriptors such as 'Villa' and 'Estate'.

In Japan, Sora (2015) investigated the number of words, word types, and composition (language, building, place name) of HNs in Tokyo. The researcher found that "English + English + Japanese" is the most frequent HN structure. In addition, "English + Japanese", "English + English", "Chinese", "English + Zou + Japanese" and "English + English + English + Japanese" are the second most frequent. The structure "word + word + place name" is the most common. In the case of three-word structures, 7% more place names are used at the end rather than at the beginning of a HN. The place name is not used in "Low" and "Medium" class HNs but is used when the end of the name is the location name, and "High" is used when the Capital name "Tokyo" is used.

Finally, linguistic, and cultural aspects of HNs in Norfolk Island, Australia were examined by Nash (2016) who studied a list of 52 HNs and found that HNs have a long-lasting effect on tourism and cultural areas in Norfolk. These names appear as an accurate or erroneous rendition of the past in terms of the present, and the current seen in the light of temporally and geographically distant and distinct fabrications. HNs and their naturally occurring stories illuminate and at the same time, obscure socially driven truths, and reveal a complex cultural history. HNs seem to unite several controversial linguistic and cultural aspects of Norfolk. What is more important is who, where, and for how long tourists check in and check out of the island's many hotels, not the linguistic aspects of Norfolk's HNs.

In Saudi Arabia (SA), the literature review showed a lack of studies that investigate the effect of HNs on hotel selection by customers planning to visit the Kingdom, especially those who plan to visit the holy cities for pilgrimage and/or Umrah. No studies that analyze HN categories, and the language chosen in HNs in SA were found. Being a popular destination for mass religious tourism by Muslim visitors coming from different Islamic countries and international business visitors who speak many languages, and due to the importance of a HN as an important marketing and market communication tool, this study aims to analyse and compare HNs in Makkah, Madinah and Riyadh to find out: (i) the linguistic structure of HNs in Makkah, Madinah, and Riyadh; (ii) the components of HNs and whether they contain the type of accommodation, locality, foreign toponyms, synonymous names of Makkah and Madinah, eponyms, and feature names; (iii) whether HNs reflect the Islamic, local Saudi and global cultures; (iv) which languages are used in HNs, whether there are any inaccuracies in translating, transliterating, and spelling HNs, and whether there are word order and semantic problems; and (v) the kinds of semantic associations exhibited in HNs.

Analysis of HNs in Mecca, Madinah, and Riyadh is significant for tourism and language research in SA because a HNs determines success in attracting Muslims and businessmen wishing to visit the Kingdom. The Saudi Tourism Authority, Ministry of Commerce, and hotel operators will gain knowledge about hotel naming in SA and which names are better suited for attracting customers.

2. Study Samples

2.1 Sample of cities

Makkah

Makkah or Mecca is an ancient city. It is the birthplace of Islam, henceforth the holiest city for Muslims. Millions of Muslims from all over the world visit Makkah for Hajj (pilgrimage) and Umrah all year round. It hosts Al-Masjid Al-Haram, Kaaba, the Black Stone, Maqam Ibrahim, Safa and Marwa, Zamzam Well, Mount Arafat, Mina and Muzdalifa, Masjid Aisha, Masjid Taneem, Masjid Al Khayf, Hira Cave, Jabal Al-Nur, Jabal Thawr and other holy and historical places. It is 70 km away from Jeddah. The Makkah area is surrounded by mountains and contains the valleys of Abqar, Bakkah, and Al Taneem. As of 2015, Makkah has a population of 1,578,722.

Madinah

Madinah, Medina or Madina is the second holiest city for Muslims. It is the city where Prophet Mohammed immigrated. It hosts the Prophet's Mosque, numerous ancient mosques such as *Quba*, *Al-Qiblatayn*, *Al-Ghamama*, *Al-Miqat*; *Baqi Cemetery*; *Uhud Mountain*; *Saqeefa Bani Saeda*; *Tomb of Salman AlFarsi* and others. Madinah is a desert oasis surrounded by Hejaz Mountains and volcanic hills. It is situated on a flat mountain plateau among the valleys of AlHimdh, Al'aqiq and Al 'Aql. The soil surrounding Madinah is mainly composed of basalt, while the hills are volcanic ash and there are large green areas (oases) amidst a dry deserted mountainous region. In 2020, Madinah had a population of 1,488,782.

Riyadh

Riyadh is the capital and largest city in SA, with a population of 7,676,654. It is one of the world's fastest-growing cities in population and is home to many foreign workers. Riyadh has been designated a cosmopolitan city. It is the political and

administrative center of SA. The King, Council of Ministers, Shura Council (the Consultative Assembly), and Judicial Council are all situated in Riyadh. It is the headquarters of governmental bodies, foreign embassies, major firms, and banks. It is located in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula, in a region largely characterized by a rocky plateau landscape. The soil in and around Riyadh is made up of alluvium of gravel, sand, silt, clay deposits, and limestone subsoil.

2.2 The hotel corpus

A corpus of 564 hotel properties in Mecca (171) and Medina (73) and Riyadh (320), was collected from the Booking.com website in 2019. Duplicate hotel property names were excluded. The corpus included any type of accommodation listed on Booking.com, such as hotels, motels, aparthotel, apartments, bed and breakfast, guest houses, suites and others. It also included all hotel classes (all-star ratings). Hotels not listed on Booking.com were not included in the analysis.

3. Data Analysis

First, the linguistic structure of HNs in Makkah, Madinah, and Riyadh was analyzed as to whether they consist of single words, compounds consisting of 2, 3 or more words, and whether HNs consist of adjectives, singular or plural nouns, or genitive structures. Here, the word 'hotel' and the city names (Makkah, Madinah and Riyadh) were excluded from the count.

Second, HNs were classified into the following components: (i) Type of accommodation, i.e., *house, home, apartment, motel, residence, tower, or inn*; (ii) Habitation (locality), i.e., homestead, town or city quarter (district); (iii) Old names of Makkah, Madinah, and Riyadh; (iv) foreign toponyms, i.e., foreign city names, countries, or landmarks; (v) eponyms, i.e., male, female, and family names; (vi) feature names, i.e., natural or physical features of the landscape such as mountains, deserts, seas, lakes, rivers, meadows, glades.

Third, HNs were analyzed according to the Islamic, local Saudi, and global cultures reflected in them as follows: (i) Islamic names, i.e., words with a religious connotation, words from the Holy Quran, names of notable events or historical places; (ii) international chain names: *Intercontinental, Marriott, Sheraton, Holiday Inn, Novotel, etc.*; (iii) international descriptors: *Palace, Park, Plaza, Coral, Tower, Royal or Grand*; (iv) foreign names such as *Golden Tulip, Rest Night, Armada Palace, Bronze Suites*; (v) local brand names such as *Boudl, Makarem, Drr Ramh, Elaf*; and (vi) Typical Saudi names: *Al-Yamamah, AUanaderia, Al-Fahad, AlWaha, Al-Jawhara* and others.

Fourth, the semantic associations of HNs were analyzed in terms of emotional words, reference to luxury/quality, reference to certain time periods, natural phenomenon, flora and fauna, colours, objects or materials; semantic ambiguity; use of meaningless names and pleonasm.

Fifth, the languages used in HNs were analyzed into Arabic only, English only, or both English and Arabic. Inaccuracies in translating, transliterating, and spelling of Arabic and English HNs were identified as follows: spelling errors in English names; variations in transliterating the same Arabic name; translation inaccuracies from Arabic to English and vice versa; word order errors; and semantic ambiguities.

Only linguistic and cultural aspects of HNs in Riyadh, Makkah and Madinah were considered. Hotels were not classified according to their characteristics such as star rating, size, capacity (number of rooms), class, ownership, affiliation, facilities provided, or levels of service. The impact of various property characteristics like category, size, type, or location on the choice of a HN were disregarded.

A quantitative as well as qualitative approach was followed in analyzing HNs linguistically, and culturally.

4. Reliability

A random sample of 30% of the hotel names in the corpus was selected and analyzed by a colleague who has a Ph.D. degree in linguistics using the categories described in the previous section. There was a 96% agreement between the two analysts. Disagreements were resolved by discussion.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Linguistic structure of hotel names in makkah, and madinah and riyadh

Data analysis has shown that most HNs in Makkah, Madinah and Riyadh are compounds consisting of 2 or more words. As Table 1 shows, 70% of HNs in Makkah, 61% in Madinah and 56% in Riyadh consist of 2 words. In addition, 40% of HNs in Riyadh consist of single words as opposed to 11% in Makkah and Madinah. The following are examples:

- One-word names: *AlMassa; AlSakifa; AlShohada* in Makkah and Madinah and *Taleen; Teyan; Tiara; Samaya* in Riyadh.

- Two-words compounds: *Elaf Bakkah; Forsan AlAseel; Maasaat AlAseel; Pullman ZamZam; Multaqa AlZowar; Wonder Plaza; Taj AlYarmouk; Shams AlKhayal.*
- Three-words compounds: *AlKhozama Manazel AlAin; Bab AlMultazam Concorde; Nasamat AlRayyan Concorde; Jawhra White Palace; Taleen Durrat AlNakhil; Tulip Inn AlReef; Holiday Inn Meydan.*
- Four- and six-word compounds: *Dyafat AlHaramen Dar AlMotakeen, and Best Western Plus AlMassa Awan Hotel in Makkah.* However, none of the HNs in Madinah and Riyadh consist of more than 3 words.

These findings are partially consistent with the structure of HNs in Japan which also consist of 3- and 4-word compounds (Sora, 2015).

In addition, 35% of the HNs in Makkah and 31% in Madinah consist of plural nouns such as *AlMotakeen, Nasamat, Buotat, AlShohada, Forsan, Manafe, AlAnsar, AlSafwah, AlSalheen, Dar AlFaazin, AlShakreen.* On the contrary, only 4% of HNs in Riyadh contain plural nouns. Another feature is that most compound HNs in Makkah, Madinah and Riyadh are genitive constructions as in *Dar AlShakreen, Makarim Ajyad, Elaf Bakkah.*

Table 1: Structure of Hotel Names

	Makkah	Madinah	Riyadh
One word	11.6%	11.7%	40%
Two words	70%	61.6%	56%
Three words	14%	26.7%	4%
Four & more words	.4%	-----	----
Use of plural nouns	35%	31%	4%
Total	121	60	275

5.2 Hotel name components

Results of the data analysis revealed that 54% of the HNs in Riyadh, 10% in Makkah and 10% in Madinah mentioned the type of accommodation such as apartment, residence, tower, suites or inn. The rest contained the word "hotel".

As for the habitation or locality, 49% of the hotels in Makkah mentioned the city quarter (district) where the hotel is located compared to 44% in Riyadh, and 39% in Madinah, because Makkah and Riyadh are larger cities with some hotels having several branches in different city quarters. The city is mentioned in 33% of Madinah hotels, 29% in Makkah, and 13% in Riyadh. 7% of the HNs in Riyadh, 3% in Makkah and 3% Madinah contain foreign toponyms. For example:

- Quarter + city name: *Coral Riyadh Suliemaniah, Hilton Garden Inn Riyadh Olaya.*
- City name: *Makarim Riyadh, Manazilna Apts Riyadh, AlMadina Kareem Hotel, Al Madinah Harmony Hotel, Anwar AlMadinah Mövenpick; Concorde Makkah Hotel; Al Massa Hotel Makkah; Holiday Palace Makkah.*
- Foreign toponyms: *ManDarin Hotel Apts; Manazel Beirut Apts, Berlin chalet, and Venice.*

In addition, 29% of HNs in Makkah and 23% in Madinah contain other historical (old) names of Makkah (*Umm AlQura, Bakka*) and *Taiba/Taibah* for Madinah. Riyadh has no old names.

Feature names are not frequently reflected in HNs in the 3 cities (6% in Riyadh, 3% in Madinah and 1.6% in Makkah). Words like *Waha* (Oasis) and *Palm* appeared in *Wahat AlNafil, AlWaha Palace Hotel, Hilton Garden Inn Riyadh Olaya, Janatna (our Eden) furnished Apts, Taleen Durrat AlNakhil (Palm Jewel), Narges and Narcissus* appeared in 6% of the HNs in Riyadh, in 2 instances in Madinah (*AlBustan* (the garden) and *Thimar* (fruit), and 2 instances in Makkah (*AlSafwa Royale Orchid*). However, these names are just names and have no connection with the hotel environment. Flowers such as *narcissus* and *orchids* are not grown in SA.

Interestingly, some hotels in Riyadh, which is located in the desert and is not near any sea, harbor, river or lake, are called *Land Beach, Marasicom (your docks) Suites, Marina Apt, Rokn Almarsa (dock's corner), Spa, Chalet.* Few other HNs contain *Resort* although the hotel features, services and location are not like those of a resort hotel that are usually located in places intended for recreation or relaxation, such as seashores, beaches, historic or scenic areas, spas and ski parks. Such names are used for marketing purposes and for attracting visitors.

Moreover, HNs in the three cities contain eponyms with varying frequencies. Riyadh HNs have more eponyms (13%) than Makkah and Madinah (7.5% & 5%, respectively). Examples are given in section 4.3.

The components of HNs reported in the present study are partially consistent with findings of studies by Ivanov, Seyitoğlu & Dimitrova (2021), Ivanov and Dimitrova (2018) and Mihailov (2016), who found that HNs in Bulgaria are concentrated in female, male and family names constitute (34.6%), and geographic toponyms (10.6%). Plants, emotions, and quality-related words are also widely used in HNs in Bulgaria.

5.3 Representation of local and global cultures

Table 2 shows that culturally, HNs in the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah reflect the country's past and present Islamic cultures. Being the birthplace of Islam and the meeting place of millions of Muslims, most HNs in these two holy cities contain:

- 1) Words from the Holy Quran: *Elaf, AlFurqan, Al-Salam, Al-Taqwa, Al-Huda, Eiman, Ihsan, AlNoor, AlKawther*.
- 2) Words that refer to notable events in Islamic history: *Al-Hijra, Ohod, Al-Saqifah, AlNadwa*.
- 3) Words that refer to ancient Islamic place names: *AlRawda, Ohod, AlMaqam, AlKawther, AlAndalus, AlMashaer, AlQiblah, Zamzam, AlHaramain, AlMarwa*.
- 4) Other names (synonyms) for Makkah and Madinah: *Bakkah, Um Al-Qura, Taiba, Taibah*.
- 5) Words with spiritual connotations: *AlHuda, AlAnsar, AlEiman, Al-Ehsan, Makarim, AlSalam, AlMotakeen, AlShohada, AlSalheen, Dar AlFaazin, AlShakreen, AlMesk, Rayhaan*.
- 6) Islamic and spiritual words are even combined with names of international chains (brand names) or foreign HNs as in *Dar AlHijra/Dar Allman/Dar Al-Tawhid/Dar AlTaqwa Intercontinental; Anwar AlMadinah Mövenpick, Ramada Dar AlFaazin Hotel*.

On the contrary, none of the HNs in Riyadh has an Islamic or religious denotative or connotative meaning. Rather, they reflect the local mundane Saudi and/or global cultures as follows:

- A. They utilize typical Saudi eponyms: *AlMutlaq, Jawhara, AlFahad, Janadriya, Alanood, AlTayyar, Al-Muhaideb, Al-Farhan*.
- B. They contain Arabic and foreign toponyms as in *AlQuds, Palestine, Lebanon, Beirut, Andalus, Ishbeelyah, Ghornata, AlHamra, Mandarin, Berlin, Venice*.
- C. Global culture is reflected in retaining the names of foreign and international hotel brand names such as *Intercontinental, Hyatt, Hilton, Marriott, Sheraton, Fairmont, Raffles, Mercure, Movenpick, Swissotel, Novotel, Ramada* and *Comfort Inn*.
 - o Using a hybrid compound noun consisting of a local Arabic name and English descriptor such as *Crown, Coral, Palace, Royal, Park, Tower, Grand, Boutique, Residence, Executive* as in *Al-Fahd Crown, Coral Al-Hamra, Fanar Palace, Sama Park, Royal Park, Al-Safwah Towers Hotel, AlMadinah Harmony, AlMadinah Palace, Grand Plaza, Grand Coral, Grand Residence, Coral Riyadh, Plaza Inn*.
- D. Use of a totally foreign name, which is not an international brand name: *Romance Hotel, Ronza Land, Roseline Hotel Suites, Harmony House, Golden Tulip, Refal Kempinski, Wonder Plaza, Quiet Seasons, Pearls Venice Hotel Apts, Rest Place, Marina, Dior, Dellmon, Vera, Vivienda, Dilara, Mocador* and from French: *Le Park Corncorde, Berlin Chalet, Hier suites, Le Meridien Towers*.
- E. Use of a local brand name whether Islamic or non-Islamic: *Boudl, Rest Night, Makarem, Al-Safwa Royale Orchid, Dar Al-Eiman Royal, Elaf (Elaf Ajyad, Elaf AlMashaer, Elaf AlSalam, Elaf Bakkah, Elaf Kinda, Elaf Mina); Diyafat AlHaramain; Taleen; Rest Night, Rawaq Suites; Najmat Manami; Drr Ramh Hotel Apts; and AlYamama Palace*.

Table 2: Cultural Features of Hotel Names

Cultural Features	Makkah	Madinah	Riyadh
Islamic name	40%	59%	-
Totally foreign name (International chain or all foreign)	17%	28%	32%
Partially foreign name (foreign + Islamic/Arabic)	19%	13%	29%
Containing Palace, Park, Plaza, Executive, Coral, Tower, Royal, Coral,	29%	15%	33%

Grand...etc.			
Local brand name	27%	13%	32%
Unfamiliar names	2.5%	13%	16%

These findings are consistent with findings of studies by Ivanov, Seyitoğlu and Dimitrova's study (2021) who found that Bulgarian names are more common in HNs in rural areas, whereas foreign HNs are more prevalent in urban, higher category, and larger hotel properties. Most of HNs that use typical Bulgarian words appeal to domestic tourists and contribute to the distinctive cultural and linguistic landscape of the property. Similarly, Arabic and Islamic names are more common in Makkah and Madinah, whereas fully or partially foreign HNs are more common in Riyadh. Use of Islamic words in HNs appeal to Arab as well as International Muslim tourists/visitors and contribute to the distinctive Islamic cultural, historical, and linguistic landscape of the holy cities, whereas hotels with foreign names in Riyadh appeal to international businessmen.

As in the current study, Susanto (2015) indicated that the use of native hotel brand names in Bali, Indonesia, has declined from 39% of the hotels built prior to 1990s to 11% of the hotel built in 2010s. Foreign hotel brand names have increased from 34% before 1990s to 77% in the 2010s. The use of mixed languages in HNs has been common since the 1950s and has continued since then. The choice of accommodation type descriptors has widened and is being used freely. Descriptors such as 'Cottage' and 'Resort' have been overshadowed by the more recent popular descriptors such as 'Villa' and 'Estate'. As in Susanto's study, the percentage of foreign HNs in the current study is somewhat high.

Finally, the cultural features of HNs in Makkah and Madinah are consistent with the findings of Nash's study (2016) about HNs in Northfolk Island. As in Nash's study, hotel names in the holy cities contain a mixture of past and present Islamic names. It also seems that it is more important who, where, and for how long tourists check-in and check out of the many hotels, not the linguistic aspects of HNs in the Holy cities.

5.4 Semantic associations of hotel names

Results of the analysis of HNs in Makkah, Madinah have revealed unique semantic associations. Some HNs reflect expressions, emotional words and reference to comfort, luxury and quality as follows:

- [1] 12% of the HNs in Riyadh, 10% in Madinah and 9% in Makkah contain the word 'Dar' or other Arabic equivalents *Bait, dar, maskn, masaken, manazel, manazilna, nozol, buotat, diyar, manzel* in the singular or plural form to make hotel guests feel at home as in *Dar AlHijra/Dar AlTawhid/Dar AlTaqwa InterContinental, Dar Allman Royal*.
- [2] 14% of HNs in Makkah (but not Mainah and Riyadh) contain the word *Diyafa* (hospitality) and 12% of the HNs in Riyadh (but not Makkah and Madinah) contain the word "rest" or "rahaty". Such words reflect an important aspect of Arabic culture. Some examples are: *Diyafat AlHaramain, Dyafat AlHaramen Dar AlMotakeen, Dyafat ALSafwah, Diyafat AlHaramain Dar AlAyad, Hala w Ghala, Deep Sleep, Rest Night, Rest Home, Dalal*
- [3] Common nouns with a romantic connotation appear in 14% of HNs in Madinah, 12% in Riyadh, and 9% in Makkah: *Aseel, Murjan, Shams AlKhayal (Sun of Imagination); Ajmal Masaa (Most Beautiful Evening); Nassma (Breeze); Asala (originality), Abeer (fragrance), Narges (narcissus), Orchid*.
- [4] Words that give a sense of grandeur and prestige:
 - o *AlMokhmalia (velvet); fakhama (grandeur); rafahiya (luxury); Ajmalal Masaken (most beautiful residences); Qemmat Rafaa (utmost highness).*
 - o *Names of Jewels (in 16% of HNs in Makkah, 4% in Riyadh but none in Madinah): massa (diamond), zomorodet (emeralds), Murjanat (corals), Masaat (diamonds), cristalaat (crystals), dorrat (pearls), Loaloo, Jawaheer (jewels), Jawharet (jewel), Jawhra, durar, Drr Ramh, Durr Bader, Durrat AlAkso.*
 - o *Hayat (life): Hayat Home, Burj AlHayat, Hayat Ishbelia* which give a hint to the *Hayatt Regency Hotel*.
 - o *Najmat (star): Najmat Manami (Star of My Sleep); Najmat Siwar (Star of Siwar); Azha Star (Brightest Star).*
- [5] Reference to old-time periods in Islamic, Arabic or Saudi history as in:
 - o From Islamic history: *Arac, Ohod, Al-Sakifa, Al-Ansar, Bakkah, Taiba.,*
 - o Arabic history: *Hawazen, Kinda.*
 - o Arabic city names in Spain: *Ishbelia (Seville), Ghornata (Granada), Andalus (Andalusia).*
 - o Saudi history: *Deriyya, Al-Yamamah, Janadriyya.*

- [6] Some HNs, especially single-word HNs in Riyadh, are meaningless as in: *Reefaf; Teyan; Refal; Revan; Towlan; Minar; Tooq; Madareem, Boudl, Vinas, Vivienda, Rina, Rafa, Obaer, Merfal, Rokn Rahid*. Few examples exist in Makkah and Madinah hotels, whether in single or multi-word names: *Nawazi Watheer; Drnef; Thrawat Dar AlKhalil AlRushad Hotel Mecca; AlMarwa Rayhaan; LEADER AlMuna Kareem Hotel Madinah*.
- [7] Some long HNs show semantic incongruity such as: *Best Western Plus AlMassa Awan Hotel; AlKhozama Manazel AlAin; Arjaan Aladle; Beach Land*. The whole structure does not make sense to the Arab native speaker, probably because of the faulty agreement in definiteness/indefiniteness and lack of collocability between words.
- [8] Some HNs are funny as in: *Deep Sleep; Hier Suites (Yesterday suites); Najmat Manami (Star of My Sleep)*.
- [9] Some long HNs, especially in the holy cities, show pleonasm as in:
- *Best Western Plus AlMassa Awan Hotel*
 - *Thrawat Dar AlKhalil AlRushad Hotel Mecca*
 - *Dyafat AlHaramen Dar AlMotakeen*
 - *Golden Tulip Dar AlKhalil Hotel Mecca*.

Such names with a meaningless string of nouns are unnecessarily long, and might be difficult to translate, understand and remember by non-Arab and non-Muslim visitors. Hotel operators probably create long HNs, because they believe they are unique.

Semantic associations, Wänke, Herrmann & Schaffner (2007) indicated, are important because they were rated higher on attributes consistent with the semantic associations of the name. Customers use brand names as an evaluative and selection tool while searching for a hotel. HNs also create a brand image that influences customers' satisfaction and is the first constituent customers adhere to when selecting a hotel (Lahapa, Ramlib, Saidc, Radzid & Zaine (2015). The researchers recommended that hotel operators plan, formulate, and decide to what extent they should improve their brand image to compete with other hotels in the industry.

5.5 Languages used, transliteration, translation, and grammatical accuracy

Almost all HNs in the three cities use both Arabic and English. This means that Arabic HNs have been translated and/or transliterated. Data analysis of the HNs in the corpus showed some problems:

In some HNs, the same Arabic word was transliterated differently as in the following examples:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ○ <i>AlFaisaliah, AlFaisalya</i> | ○ <i>Ishbeelyah, Ishbilyah, Ishbelia</i> |
| ○ <i>AlHaramain AlHaramen</i> | ○ <i>Hayat, hayatt, hyatt</i> |
| ○ <i>Alkhaleej, AlKhaliej</i> | ○ <i>Loaloo, Loloat</i> |
| ○ <i>AlMuruj, AlMurooj, AlMoroj, AlMorouj</i> | ○ <i>Manazel, Manazilna, Manazl</i> |
| ○ <i>AlOrouba, Arrubah</i> | ○ <i>Masaat, Maasaat</i> |
| ○ <i>AlSaqefah, AlSakifa</i> | ○ <i>Murjanat Morjanat</i> |
| ○ <i>Azifyah, Dyafat, Diyafat</i> | ○ <i>Rahati, Rahaty, Rahty</i> |
| ○ <i>Allman, AlEiman</i> | ○ <i>Rokn Rahati, Rokn Rahaty, Rukon Buotat, Rokon Rahid</i> |
| ○ <i>Dorrat, Durar, Drr, Durr, Durrat</i> | ○ <i>Thahabyia, Aldhabiah, AlZahab</i> |
| ○ <i>Dyar, Diyar</i> | ○ <i>Qurtoba, Qurtubah</i> |

There are also faulty transliterations of Arabic words, where short vowels in the Arabic words are deleted in the English transliteration such as:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| ○ <i>Al-Areed AlTaiba (Al-Ard Al-Tayyiba)</i> | ○ <i>Durr (durar)</i> |
| ○ <i>Arjaan Aladle (Arjan AlAdl)</i> | ○ <i>Elaf AlModn (Modon)</i> |
| ○ <i>Arrubah (Al-Uruba)</i> | ○ <i>Janaderia (Janadriyya)</i> |
| ○ <i>Boudl (Boodle)</i> | ○ <i>Loloat (Lolowat)</i> |
| ○ <i>Buotat (Buyoutat)</i> | ○ <i>Raies (Rayes)</i> |
| ○ <i>Daryaah (Diriyaa)</i> | ○ <i>Thrawat (Tharawat)</i> |
| ○ <i>Drr Ramh (Durar Rama)</i> | ○ <i>Yarmukh (Yarmuk)</i> |

There were even misspellings of English words as *Vanas* instead of *Venus* and *Orkid* instead of *orchid*; and *Nelover* instead of *Nilufer*. Errors in transliterating Arabic words reflect mispronunciations of Arabic words, whereas misspellings in English words reflect a lack of knowledge of sound-symbol associations and spelling words phonetically.

Further problems are in word order. The English word order is retained in English HNs borrowed from English and the Arabic word order is retained when an Arabic HN is translated to English. In other cases, different word orders are used when the same foreign HN is used. For example: In *Riyadh Marriott*; *Makkah Hilton*, the city name is at the beginning, whereas in *Ramada Riyadh*; *Sheraton Riyadh*; *Hayatt International Madina*; *Hilton Suites Makkah*; *Swissotel Makkah*; *Millennium Taiba*; *Dar ALTawhid Intercontinental Makkah*, the city names is at the end. The long examples of HNs below are meaningless because they consist of words strung together in a random word order that does not make sense:

- *Golden Tulip AlQasr; LEADER AlMuna Kareem Hotel Madinah.*
- *Throat Dar AlKhalil AlRushad Hotel Mecca.*
- *Best Western Plus AlMassa Awan Hotel*
- *Pearls Venice Hotel Apts*
- *Al-Safwah Towers Hotel Dar Al-Ghufra*
- *AlOlayan AlKhalil Makkah Hotel*

Moreover, some HNs lack agreement between the component parts of the compound name in gender and definiteness/indefiniteness as in *Manafe Althahabiya*; *Fal Aljadeed*; *Dar AlKhalil AlRushad*, *Najmat Sewar*; *Jawharet Dyar*.

Errors in word order and agreement are similar to those committed by Google Translate (GT). Al-Jarf (2021) found that in 60% of the compounds in the sample, GT gives Arabic equivalents with a reversed word order, i.e. a left-to-right rather than the Arabic right-to-left word order as in *arctic archaeology* علم الآثار القطب الشمالي; *plastic money* المال البلاستيك, *security system* امن النظام. Here, GT follows a linear left-to-right direction (sequence) in translating an English compound which is contrary to the natural Arabic word order. Like GT, the Arabic definite article, in transliterated hotel names, is sometimes hyphenated and sometimes separated from the word.

Transliteration errors may be due to the fact that those who transliterated hotel names are sometimes non-native speakers of Arabic, who cannot pronounce Arabic sounds and words correctly and hence transliterated according to their faulty pronunciation. At other time, HNs were transliterated by Arabic native speakers who are not sufficiently proficient in English and delete short vowels from English transliterations as they are represented by diacritics in Arabic that are not usually shown in Arabic spelling used in signs. Arabic native speakers also spell some consonants the way they pronounce them in their local dialect. For example, Narges is pronounced with a /g/ in Egyptian Arabic but Narjes in Standard Arabic and Saudi Arabic. The same applies to errors in word order and agreement errors because non-native speakers do not know the definiteness/indefiniteness agreement rules and word order in Arabic.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings of the current study show that most HNs consist of two-word compounds. Culturally, HNs in Makkah and Madinah reflect the country's rich Islamic culture. Being the birthplace of Islam and the meeting place of millions of Muslims all year round, most HNs contain words from the Quran, notable events in Islamic history, ancient Islamic place names, and words with spiritual connotations. Islamic and spiritual words are even combined with names of international hotels. The word '*Dar*' meaning '*house*' is added to HNs to make hotel residents feel at home. On the contrary, none of HNs in Riyadh has an Islamic or religious denotative or connotative meaning. Rather, they reflect the local mundane Saudi culture. They utilize typical Saudi eponyms; localities; common nouns with a romantic connotation such as *Diyafa* and *rahaty (rest)* which imparts a sense of generosity and comfort. *AlMokhmalia*, *Amjad*, and *Asala* give a sense of grandeur and prestige. Global culture is reflected in retaining the names of international hotels such as "*Hilton, Marriott and Sheraton*", or using a hybrid compound consisting of a local designation added to descriptors adopted from English such as "*Plaza, Palace Tower, Royal, Crown, and Coral*".

Despite the uniqueness of HNs in Makkah and Madinah, in particular, there are some transliteration, translation and spelling errors and inconsistencies. To improve their brand image, hotels in Makkah, Madinah, and Riyadh should use, as Robertson (1989) recommends, simple, comprehensible, distinctive, meaningful, and emotional words that form a mental image. Such names would bring immediate and inherent value to the hotel brands. A maximum of 3-word compound should be used in HNs to make it easy for non-native speakers to pronounce and remember the HNS. Thus, *Dar AlTaqwa*; *Dar AlShakireen*; *Makarim Ajjad*, *Elaf Bakkah* would be more comprehensible and memorable than longer names (Al-Jarf, 2004).

Since Riyadh, Makkah, Madinah, and Riyadh are cosmopolitan cities and are visited by tourists from all over the world, using English and Arabic in HN signs is indispensable. This requires the phonetic transfer, i.e., transliteration and translation of HNs. The accurate transliteration and translation of HNs requires at least some degree of bilingualism in those who transliterate and translate the HNs as a means of oral and written communication. In transliterating HNs, hotel operators should pay attention to the fact that short vowels in Arabic should be represented by vowels in English and consonants should be substituted by correct English graphemes (Al-Jarf, 2015; Al-Jarf, 1994; Al-Jarf, 1990). To avoid confusion and miscommunication, transliteration of the

same name should be standardized by the Saudi Ministry of Commerce⁶ who sets the standards for selecting and registering brand names, including HNs. In translating hotel names from English to Arabic and Arabic to English, word order should be changed to agree with the natural/standard word order of English or Arabic as they are not identical in word order (Al-Jarf, 2007). Agreement in gender and in using the definite article /al-/ in the modifier and modified noun and elements of a compound should be taken into consideration as well (Al-Jarf, 2001).

Since a HN is an essential component of a hotel's characteristics, HNs in Makkah and Madinah give hotel properties an identity and distinguish them from each other in the same city and from other hotels in other cities in the kingdom and abroad. Such names help hotels in the holy cities build a hotel brand identity and convey uniqueness and value proposition, and compete with other hotels in the industry. To reflect the local culture, hotels in Riyadh need to use names that contain local eponyms and toponyms, local plant, animal, and feature names rather than using more international chain, foreign and unfamiliar foreign names.

Finally, due to the effect of a HN brand on hotel selection, more research is needed in hotel tourism and hotel naming in SA. Future research on hotel naming should investigate the impact of HNs on visitors' evaluation of the hotels prior to their stay, how visitors of Makkah and Madinah choose hotels, the impact of HNs on the hotel brand awareness, discoverability while searching the internet and how visitors perceive a particular hotel. This way, the choice of a proper hotel brand name will play an important role in the marketing strategy of travel, tourism, and hospitality firms and agencies in SA. The impact of various property characteristics like category, size, type, location, star rating, size, capacity (number of rooms), class, ownership, affiliation, facilities provided, or levels of service on the choice of a HN are still open for further investigation by future research.

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⁶ <https://mc.gov.sa/ar/guides/MerchantGuide/Pages/TradeName.aspx>

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