

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**The Negative Linguistic Effect of English as a Global Language on Arabic with a Particular Reference to Bilingual Public 'Guidence' Signs in Iraq (Basrah)(\*)**

**Prof. Zeineb Sami Hawel<sup>1</sup> and Asst. Lect. Ahmed Falih Rabea<sup>2</sup> ✉**

<sup>1,2</sup>*Department of Translation, College of Arts, University of Basrah, Iraq*

**Corresponding Author:** Ahmed Falih Rabea, **E-mail:** [ahmed.falih71@gmail.com](mailto:ahmed.falih71@gmail.com)

---

**ABSTRACT**

Globalisation has had an enormous impact on our lives and cultures. At the same time, it has great effects on language, which is considered an important tool for enhancing understanding and communication between cultures. Though many languages have benefited from globalization, English is the first among those languages. Its use is an important trend in world communication, which implies various aspects. Such communication leads to acculturation, which is a process of culture learning and behavioural adaptation that takes place when individuals are exposed to a new culture. Consequently, as a part of this process, individuals may undergo changes in language use, personality, identity, and attitude. These changes affect, to some extent, the identity of the country that is exposed to the culture of the other one. So, one of the novel phenomena of globalization in Arab countries today is the desire to inoculate everyday conversations and talks with foreign words, especially English. Such a case is obvious in Arab countries. The people of those countries tend to flavour their talks with many English words on the pretext that it is civilized and prestigious as opposed to their mother language, which is inferior. Most of the names of supermarkets, streets and airports are written in a language called by some linguists (Arablyziya), which is considered the main reason behind the haste towards the West and the blind imitation with the loss of identity, namely that of the original language. This study is devoted to shedding light on some landmarks that contain erroneous bilingual public signs in different regions and /or districts in Iraq (Basrah) and the suggested solutions to overcome errors resulting from Anglicizing Arabic and errors in translation when English and Arabic are used in the same sign and, thus, leads to mistranslating. A sample of such landmarks of bilingual public signs gathered from these regions and districts is introduced in this study.

**KEYWORDS**

Global Language, Arabic, Bilingual Public 'Guidence' Signs, Globalisation

**ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 01 October 2023

**PUBLISHED:** 17 October 2023

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijtis.2023.3.4.3

---

**1. Introduction**

As the world has become borderless, people nowadays would like to make use of globalization enormously for business, education, travel, etc. It is undoubting that governments have to get ready to encounter any arising needs due to the fact that the world is now a small village. Governments have to get consultations from relevant bodies as far as public signs are concerned. Bilingual public signs are directions to expatriate travellers to arrive at their destinations, where any misspelled or meaningless names would lead to reputation spoilage. Therefore, there should be a mutual understanding between authorities concerned about how significant it is that much attention shall be focused on the industry of bilingual public signs. Countries across the world investigate and allocate large amounts of money to public signs. They consider public signs a cultural identity on which they have to invest big amounts of bucks for their fame and futurity.

Qiannan, in a study conducted in 2012, made clear that non-stop economic development, economic collaboration and unity among borderless countries and international harmony are the main causes for paying much more care to public signs and posters. She

added that the translation of public signs has had a growing significance day by day, without which, as she stated, the city image would be at risk.

It is promising to see thousands of bilingual public signs scattered in different parts of a country and a large number of such signs mostly placed in big and famous cities. The bad effects of mistranslating public signs and posters are not the doors if no endeavors are paid to this phenomenon. Locals and expatriate travellers alike are the beneficiaries of public signs. However, locals could abstain from the bad effects of mistranslated signs in one way or another. The case is frustrating for expatriate travellers where misleading translating could lead an expat to get lost somewhere around or closer to a target destination.

Also, Hao (2018) brought to light that "cultural exchange", the rise of the economy on a global basis and the unmistakable use of Englishness are keys to a certain city's reputation and an outstanding rank internationally. He added that there always shall be plans at hand to bridge the gap, despite the fact that your community is not ready yet to curb serious problems encountering the industry of public sign and poster translation.

## 2. Literature Review

Not much research has been done on the significance of cross-international communication. This can be depicted in the need for an industry of commercial and public signboard translation globally. Globalization and economic welfare have so far expedited the need for an indispensable reflection of a certain society's set of destinations, whether publically or commercially. In a study conducted by Qiannan in 2012, it was made clear that when translators pay no attention to pragmatic equivalent, there are many public signboards of incorrect information, which in turn would cause incomprehensible communication. It was disclosed that the translation of public signs is a form of translation where the message delivered should be understandable to the readership. As defined, public signs are words written in large print for target language people to read or view for their intent (Ko, 2010:23). Governmental bodies/departments direly focus on the need for an iceberg language that helps expatriates roaming outside their home country to get their destination easily with not being gone astray. This can be viewed in the public signs translation, a language for a special communication purpose ( Luo & Li, 2006:12). In a study carried out by Yang in 2005, it was disclosed that due to international events such as Beijing's Olympic Games held in 2008 and Shanghai's World Expo in 2010, much light had been shed on the industry of the official sign language translation. It is true that many mistakes in the translation of official/governmental, institutional signs can be ascribed to some problems. Ding (2006) emphasized that mistakes made in the translation of governmental signboards were the results of "spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, mistranslation and unclear or lost translation" (p.43).

Yang, in a study published in 2019, stated that the puzzlement of readership visiting a non-native-speaking country was due to spelling mistakes in translating official institutional signboards. Therefore, Yang stressed the need for double check after translation and before publication. Yang went further, pinpointing that due to non-stop economic welfare and development and communication, there should be a cultural gap in translating official, institutional or commercial signboards. Without this in mind, translators would not be able to assist foreign readers in getting to their destination comfortably.

Also, why there is a cry for bilingual or readership-targeted signboards, officially or commercially, Liang (2019) justified that the world nowadays is no more than a tiny village, and people travel globally around the clock, as airports nowadays are non-sleep travel means. Hence, he brought to light that in order to arrive at internationalism, those in charge of big or small cities have to use qualified translations in this newly born industry; otherwise, the reputation of a certain city hit by a non-qualified signboard translation would be in danger, regionally and more than this, globally.

Governments, regionally or locally, are responsible for the management of the signboard translation. There should be an eye open on this industry, without which being under supervision, the result could be catastrophic, not merely on the local level but further to the international level. Those in charge shall hold training on how to translate official and institutional signboards before the start of a translation mission. As indicated by Liang (2019), any letter dropped, letter repeated, or alphabetical inversion costs not only funds lost but also faces loss and reputation downfall.

Besides, Liang (2019) stressed that recent life cannot be convenient without the industry of signboard translation. Life now is with no borders due to the fact that our world is being globalized and internationalized. Hence, communication among people has become a must. By the same token, international travel puts the burden on the shoulders of governments to take the industry of governmental signboards into consideration, so this would be a good reference to a certain country's economic promotion and national development.

In the 2022 study conducted by Ganggui and Hongguo, it was emphasized the necessity of qualified official/public signboards. The qualified translation of this industry is because it is a mirror for expatriate visitors, without which the said visitors would go

astray or lose. Therefore, to be approved as a translation, there is a need to pay much attention to linguistic, communicative and cultural transformation in the process of translation from the source language to the target one.

In an attempt to shed light on grammatical errors and their damaging impact on the readership, in their study, Zhi-hui & Guang-hui in 2008, it was disclosed that errors in translating governmental signboards are mainly due to the lack of the translator's competence. That is why there is always a need to get translators trained on aspects of grammatical issues before the commencement of translation.

Newmark (1988) brought to light the importance of the communicative translation approach, where the target language readership would be of the same understanding and conceptualization in the target text as same as the source language readership in the source language, all for one tip is the identity of effect, and in the end, the delivery of translation would be complete and effective.

In a study published in 2012, Guo made it quite clear that signboards, be institutional or public, have a realistic purpose, without which tourists or those on business become blind even in big cities. Such signboards show directions to places as destinations. Therefore, signboards translated into a target language are of tremendous help to travellers of different purposes. It equals oral communication. As pinpointed by Shi (2014), it was believed that signboards translated into written form are of utmost assistance to expatriate travellers. Shi paid much attention to the term "equivalence" as a strategy for translating institutional signboards, where an equivalence functionally could bring about success in translating signboards.

As far as consistency is concerned, competent translators assigned to the task of signboard translation have to consider borrowing from native-speaking nations signboards ready-made for the same purposes or resort to much relied on signboard translation to get rid of any ambiguity that might accompany a certain translation. There is also a chance to make use of magazines. Papers or even internet-accredited websites. Another point mentioned here is that names of streets, governmental departments, directorates or ministries should be of consolidated translation for expatriate travellers' easiness and convenience (Liu and Xu, 2008).

Baker (1992) had conceptualized "conditioning texts" for the sake of a pragmatic equivalence. This means the information found on a signboard to be translated into a target language is not disturbing when an expatriate visitor reads. Besides, Halliday (2000) proposed that as long as the language function varies, language, in turn, varies. As it is noted, signboards, whether official or public, are designed to show directions, addresses or destinations. As long as there is a re-contextualization in the target language, there is a change in the language used for this purpose.

Researchers like Liang (2009) and Zhang and Guo (2020) came up with reasons for mistranslation and made suggestions to abstain apart from bad governmental signboards translation. They requested that each of the following in charge or participating in the process of signboard translation, including translators, signboard makers, community officials and management, have to keep an eye widely open on their product of translation; otherwise, expatriate travellers will maintain a bad imagination on their own society.

### **3. English as a Global Language**

It is a common understanding that English has had its own charisma among other languages. It is the language of economics, the internet, trade and cultural exchange internationally. People around the world allocate a lot of time just to learn as much as they can. It is the language that you have to grasp before applying for any position in a certain company or association. None can deny that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has displayed the advent of technological gadgets such as mobile phones, tablets, iPods, etc. Such gadgets would help learn English if well planned; why do people feel sad if there is no place for them in the new window to the digital world? It is so because people would think they are backward and, to some extent, neglected. Around a billion people speak English, and their level roams between an advanced and basic level (Gohil, 2013: 8). It can be weighed that English is a must for the best communication among societies and cultures. If well acquired and grasped, English language obstacles among different cultures would be overcome, and people would become closer and closer than ever before.

As Rao stated in 2019, English has become more prevalent across the world. It has inspired those who are within the scope of linguistic studies to identify it as an "international language". It is the language of communication, cultural exchange, diplomacy, the internet and other corners of life. There is a shared need for a common language to be used as a means of communication among people of different cultures. This means that people become closer day by day as much as they endeavor to learn and handle English to some extent necessary for approachable communication.

### **4. The Negative Effects of Mistranslating: Bilingual Public Signs as an Example**

As a prestigious language, it is observed that English as a global one has affected Arab countries and societies in general and Arabic language in particular. So, cross-cultural communication, trade exchange, tourism and medical treatment led to expanded

travelling between the two sides, Arab and foreign countries, where certain effects arose. Iraq is one of those countries that have been affected by one of those effects, which is negative, i.e. the blind imitation of Englishness. So, concerning this imitation, it is observed that one of the hard effects is that of translating.

It is worth mentioning that there are many erroneous bilingual public or guidance signs scattered in different regions and /or districts in Iraq. This study is devoted to shed light on signs in Basrah. Such a phenomenon leads to a bad impression for observers 'citizens' and/or visitors in case they observe and understand what these signs and landmarks mean.

As far as public signs and posters are concerned, mistranslation or poor one would get people laughed at because such misleading translation causes unwanted guidance to expatriate people. It is common that mistranslating occurrences on the linguistic level have had their echoes. Also, as Guo made it clear in 2012, cultural mistranslations shall be taken into account due to agreed-upon notions that translation is a means of cultural and linguistic communication from one community to another. Therefore, much light shall be shed on the avoidance of mistranslations, whether due to linguistic or cultural features. On the same token, he added that disregarding the type of mistranslation's occurrence, whether to be due to spelling mistakes, a word missing or cultural ambiguity, such errors have effects on the meaning and then readership. Hence, there must always be a bunch of solutions on which translators are reliant for the benefit of the community.

### 5. Methodology

Methodology "is inevitably interwoven with and emerges from the nature of particular disciplines" (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 191). It is the way by which the steps of the practical side of any study are done. Methodology differs from method. In their book *Principles and Ethics in Research*, Gabriela Saldanha and Sharon O'Brien state that "a methodology is a general approach to studying a phenomenon whereas a method is a specific research technique" (13). "[The] model is a representation of the 'reality' of your research topic or domain" (Saldanha and O'Brien 12). Through the search process to find a model that matches the purpose of this study, several models were thought of to be the model according to which the study will be conducted.

In the methodology of the study, it is necessary to clarify specifically every method that will be used. It has to state whether the study is inductive or deductive. Saldanha and O'Brien (2018) add that induction involves the development of theories and hypotheses from the data collected (it moves from particular instances to general statements), whereas deduction involves the testing of existing theories or hypotheses through data (it moves from general statements to specific instances). This study uses the induction strategy where, after selecting and analysing specific extracts, general statements will be stated. This chapter is devoted to stating the methodology of the study. It also shows whether the study is based on a qualitative, a quantitative or a mixed method. Besides, it implies the model on which the data analysis of this study is based.

This study is based upon Kussmaul's (1995) model of translation quality assessment, which implies describing and analyzing the errors found in the translation, and here, the ones written in the bilingual public (guidance) signs. A questionnaire will be done. Then, the researchers state the reasons behind these errors and then the recommendations that must be taken into consideration to handle such a case, the bad effects, and to solve the problem through certain opinions and recommendations.



FIGURE 1

### 6. Data Analysis

In this study, the researchers have gathered a number of bilingual public 'guidance' signs from different regions, streets, and road intersections and the ones that are attributed to governmental buildings and/or institutions in Iraq, specifically in Basrah governorate, to be analyzed in terms of Kussmaul's (1995) model of translation quality assessment as regards error analysis. The last has been done linguistically on different levels, i.e. grammatical, lexical, semantic, spelling, etc., which will be stated and arranged in tables as regards the qualitative, quantitative or mixed method. The following examples illustrate some of the samples of the study:

So, the mistranslation in the bilingual sign in (Figure 1) is evident where 'hay' is stated as an equivalent for the Arabic 'حي', which is supposed to be 'Al Muhallab District' since the English 'hay' means 'قش / تبن' in Arabic, which in turn, leads to the observer's contumely or wonder. The same case is with (Figure 2) as regards 'حي الخليج وحى الحسين'.



**FIGURE 2**

Clearly, (Figure 3) shows that there are three errors in translation; two of them are related to the spelling 'collge, educatin', and the other is related to the semantic one, i.e. 'women'.



**FIGURE 3**

### 6.1 Data Analysis Discussion

Discussions have been carried out as per the following tables:

**Table 1 – The Erroneous Semantic Translation**

ST	TT	Supposed Translation	
حي السيف	Hay Al Seef	Al Seef Quarter	
حي الجهاد	Hay Al Jihad	Al Jihad Quarter	
حي الجامعة	Hay Al Jamiah	Al Jamiah Quarter	
حي الطويسة	Hay Al Twaisa(h)	Al Twaisa(h) Quarter	
حي الحسين	Hay Al Hussein	Al Hussein Quarter	
حي المعلمين	Hay Al Mualimeen	Al Mualimeen Quarter	
سوق البصرة	Suq Al Basra	Basrah Market	

**The Negative Linguistic Effect of English as a Global Language on Arabic with a Particular Reference to Bilingual Public 'Guidance' Signs in Iraq (Basrah)(\*)**

البصرة القديمة	Basrah Al Qadimah	Old Basra	
-------------------	----------------------	-----------	--

**Table 2 – The Erroneous (Spelling Mistakes) Translation**

ST	TT	Supposed Translation	
المعهد التقني	Technical Institute	Technical Institute	
الجمهورية أبي الخصيب	Al Jamhawriyeh Abil Khaseeb Abi Al Khaseeb	Abi Al – Khaseeb/ Abu Al-Khaseeb	
شارع الزبير	Al Zubair St.	Al-Zubair St.	
الزبير	Al - Zubayr	Al-Zubair	

عمارة / ناصرية	Naseriyah/Amarah	Naseriya / Amara	
جسر العشار	Ashar Bridge	Al-Ashar Bridge	

Table 3 – The Erroneous (Grammatical Mistakes) Translation

ST	TT	Supposed Translation	
المدينة الرياضية	Sports City	Sport City	
مستشفى البصرة التخصصي للأطفال	Basrah Special Child Hospital / Basrah Children Specialty Hospital	Basrah Maternity Specialty Hospital / Basrah Specialized Hospital for Children	
صناعية حمدان	Hamadan Industrial	Hamdan Industrial City	



موقف سيارات الملعب الرئيسي (خليجي بصرة)	Main Barking Stadium	Stadium Main Parking	
موقف السيارات الغربي	West Barking Lot	Western Parking	

As disclosed in Tables 1, 2 & 3, there are mistakes made while translating public signboards, whether to be semantic, spelling or grammatical. It brings to light that such mistakes are catastrophic not only to those visiting our country and looking for a direct address of some public figures but to the reputation of the whole nation. Therefore, this study has been prepared to shed light on different levels of mistakes and suggest proposed translations as stated above.

First, as far as semantic errors are concerned, those who decided to translate حي الجامعة as Hay Al Jamiah made a mistake. Because the use of (Hay) is semantically improper, we have proposed (Al Jamiah Quarter) is more fit and semantically acceptable.

As for spelling errors, the signboard printed (Technical Inestitute) is an example of spelling errors committed by those in charge of such big tasks. They had to double check before publishing publically.

Besides, grammatical mistakes were there on some signboards, which reflect misuse of English as a language of communication and translation as a means of cultural ice-breaking tool. For example, they used (Hamdan Industrial), which is undoubtedly wrong. Instead, they had to use (Hamdan Industrial City), which is much more acceptable and grammatically correct.

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendation

### 7.1. Conclusions

The researchers have arrived at certain conclusions. These conclusions can be summarized in the following points :

1. There are many erroneous translations of the bilingual public 'guidance' signs in Iraq, here, Basrawi regions, streets, road intersections and the ones that are attributed to governmental buildings and/or institutions in Iraq.
2. The erroneous translations result either from the translator's ignorance or from setting the translations by non-specialist persons.
3. Because of the negative sides of globalization, Englishness has affected Arabic to a large extent; one of these sides is the blind imitation of English and, in our case, the mistranslating of public signs.

### 7.2. A Recommendations

Depending on the above conclusions, the researchers have stated the following recommendations :

First of all, there must be a competent committee containing a number of specialist members of translation in each municipality responsible for translating the contents of the public signs and scrutinizing the ones that are mistranslated to correct those translations.

Secondly, as far as translating public signs and posters is concerned, there should be a kind of cooperation between the State departments. This can help build up and lead to non-stop coordination for the benefit of the community and its fame.

Thirdly, it is beneficial that all the state departments consult the Departments of Translation across the country for zero-translation errors, and this, undoubtedly, would boost the community and its fame.

Finally, before publishing public signs and posters, a joint committee of those concerned shall be formed to inspect such public signs and posters.

#### Notes:

(\*) This study is based on a research, " The Negative Linguistic Effect of English as a Global Language on Arabic with a Particular Reference to a Sample of Signs and Posters ", presented by the first researcher in a symposium entitled " Translation and Acculturation الترجمة والمثاقفة " held in the Department of Translation/College of Arts/University of Basrah in 11/1/2010, and an interview with also the first researcher, set by Alsharqiya News Channel in 2020.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**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, the editors and the reviewers.

#### References

- [1] Baker, M. (1992). *In Other Words. A Coursebook on Translation*. London: Routledge.
- [2] Ding, H. (2006). (Endeavour to improve public signs and gradually develop reference translations).|| *Chinese Translators Journal* 27 (6), 42-46.
- [3] Gohil, P. P. (2013). English as a Global Language. *International Journal for Research in Education*. 2. [www.rajimr.com](http://www.rajimr.com).
- [4] Guba, G. Egon, and Yvonna S. L. (2005). Paradigmatic Controversies, 207 Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences." *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 3rd ed. USA: California, 2005. 191-215. Web. 13 July. 2018.
- [5] Hao, P. (2018). An Analysis on the Translation of Public Signs in Wuhan. 8th International Conference on Social Network, Communication and Education (SNCE 2018). *Advances in Computer Science Research*, e 83.
- [6] Halliday, M.A.K. (2000). *An Introduction of Functional Grammar*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching Research Press.
- [7] He, X. (2019). The Study of Chinese-English Public Signs Translation. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 286-291.
- [8] Kussmaul, P. (1995). *Training the Translator*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: BenjaminsnPublishing Company.
- [9] Ganggui, Y. and Hongguo, X. (2022). Translation of Public Signs Using Three-dimensional Transformation Theory from Eco-Translatology. *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science*. [www.ijlass.org](http://www.ijlass.org).
- [10] Guo, M. (2012). Analysis on the English- translation errors of public signs. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(6), 1214-1219. doi:10.4304/tpls.2.6.1214-1219.
- [11] Ko, L. (2010). Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs for Tourism. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*. 13.
- [12] Rao, P. S. (2019). The Role of English as a Global Language. *Research Journal Of English (RJOE)* 4(1). Retrieved on Feb. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021 from: [www.rjoe.org.in](http://www.rjoe.org.in)
- [13] Liu, F. G. and Xu, B. J. (2008). Exploration into C-E translation principles of public signs. *Foreign Languages And Their Teaching*, 227(2): 47-50.
- [14] Liang, L. (2019). Analysis and Strategy of Public Signs Translation. 2019 3rd International Seminar on Education, Management and Social Sciences. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, volume 345
- [15] Luo, X and Tuwang L (2006). Translating public signs: Some observations. *Chinese Translators Journal* 27 (4), 66-69.
- [16] Newmark, P. (1988) . *A Textbook of Translation*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- [17] Qinnan, M. (2012). Research on the Translation of Public Signs. *English language teaching*. 5(4). doi:10.5539/elt.v5n4p168.
- [18] Saldanha, G and O'Brien, S (2018). *Research Methodologies in Translation Studies*. USA: Routledge. Web. 20 Sept.
- [19] Shi, X. (2014). Chinese-English translation strategies of public signs based on functional equivalence theory. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(4), 873- 877.
- [20] Yang, Z. (2019). On the Acceptability of English Translation of Public Signs. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 9(10). 1315-1319.
- [21] Zhi-hui, L. & Guang-hui, M. (2008) . Pragmatic Failure in Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs - A Case Study of Nanjing Data of Culture and Education 8, 46 - 47.