To Translate or Not to Translate: The Case of Arabic and Foreign Shop Names in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT
The translatability of shop names constitutes a problem for translation students. To find out the status of shop name translation in Saudi Arabia, a sample of 271 shop names (clothing, accessories, beauty products, restaurants, cafes... etc.) was collected and analyzed to find out which shop names are translated, which ones are not, and which ones should be translated and to set some guidelines for shop-name translation. Results showed that 24% of the shops have pure Arabic names, 25% have international brand names (Starbucks, Burger King, McDonald’s, Pizza Hut, Monsoon, Zara, Sony); 39% have local English names (أوبريشن فلاد Operation Falafel, Brand Center Baby Shop); and 12% mixed names (Arabic + foreign). Only 6.7% of all shop names are fully translated (العربية للعود Arabian Oud; Sun & Sand Sports; Seven Degree Café and 90% are transliterated using Arabic letters (Bershka and MANGO). Many shop names are transliterated, although they are translatable, are difficult to decode as the grapheme sequence does not fit the Arabic graphological system (Dr Nutrition & Natural Touch). It was recommended that Franchised International brand names such as Debenhams & Samsung cannot be translated but transliterated. Some foreign shop names can be fully or partially translated rather than transliterated (Dr Nutrition; Natural Touch). The Arabic version is for Arab shoppers who do not know English and the English version is for foreigners. Shop names containing café, chocolate, garden and others can be partially translated (Caribou Café; Atayf Garden). French and Italian shop names should be transliterated according to their pronunciation in the source language, not in English (Parfois; Natural Touch). The word order in compounds should be correct, and the vowels, diphthongs and consonants should be transcribed accurately. The transliteration should be consistent for all shop branches. Further recommendations are given.

KEYWORDS
Shop name, brand names, international brands, Franchised shops, translated shop names, partially-translated shop names, transliterated shop names, shop name translation

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1. Introduction
The use of foreign shop names is a global phenomenon. However, in Arab countries, the adoption of foreign shop names is on the rise. Research on shop naming revealed numerous studies that focused on the linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and semiotic aspects of shop signs in foreign as well as Arab countries as Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Algeria, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. For example, analysis of a sample of 4070 signs from sixty streets in Irbid, Salt, Zarqa, Amman, Karak and Aqaba in Jordan by Alomoush (2015) showed that 49% of the shop signs were monolingual and 51% were multilingual. Standard Arabic and English are the dominant languages on the signs, because they are closely related to Arab nationalism and globalization, respectively. Mixed codes, Romanised Arabic and Arabicized English in Jordan reflect ‘glocalization’. French, Italian, Spanish, German, Turkish and
Russian are used in businesses and brand names for linguistic fetishes and tourism purposes. In another study, 36% of commercial store signs in Irbid, Jordan are monolingual (English), 36% are bilingual (English & Arabic), 18% are written in other foreign languages, such as French, and 9% are only in Arabic, although Arabic is the official language in Jordan (Qudeisat & Rababah, 2021).

In the West Bank, Palestine, analysis of 519 pictures of signage in the linguistic landscape in the main street of Ramallah revealed the dominance of English (L2) as opposed to Arabic (L1). Significant differences were noted between the language policies in the West Bank and the street reality as they do not abide by the official language policy which mandates that Arabic is the official language (Farran & Hortobágyi, 2020).

In Iraq, foreign names in shop signs are growingly used by shop owners. Shop signages are either monolingual or bilingual, i.e., Arabic, foreign, or Arabic + foreign, although Arabic is the official language in Baghdad, which helps the local people distinguish their signs from each other (Abdulkareem, 2021; Al-Obaidi, 2020).

In Saudi Arabia, English is the business language in Taif, with three major categories of commercial signs: monolingual, bilingual, and transliterated signs (Almakhuri, 2023). In Jeddah and Riyadh, 83.3% of the signs are bilingual, with few inconsistent and erroneous transliterations and spellings in 9.3% of the signs (Alotaibi & Alamri, 2022). Analysis of 500 shop names collected from an online directory of all the malls in Saudi Arabic, Al-Jarf (2022b) found that 64% of the shops have foreign names (25% international foreign names and 39% English local names); 24% have pure Arabic names and 12% have mixed names (Arabic+ foreign).

In Tizi-Ouzou Town Center in Algeria, the foreign languages that are mainly used for shop signs are English and French which are privileged in multilingual signboards due to the positive connotations associated with them like trendiness, high quality, reliability, etc, whereas Arabic and Tamazight names are underestimated because they do not serve commercial purposes. As a strategy that combines English and French, shop writers rely more on complimentary and duplicating information arrangements (Briki & Chebli, 2022).

Other aspects of the shop signs such as the semiotic construction of signs in the Jordanian linguistic landscapes displayed a wide range of interlingual Arabic-English blends, compounds, and affixed words. Different discourse cycles (economic, cultural, and trans)national) emerge from the use of Arabenglish in shop signs. Arabenglish code-mixing practices represent an index of global identities and contribute to the visual dominance of English in Jordan, although according to the constitution, Jordan is a predominantly monolingual country (Alomoush, 2021).

The translation of shop signs and linguistic weaknesses in shop signs in Arab countries have received some attention from few studies. In Aqaba, Jordan, 58.1% of the shop signs are in both Arabic and English. In most signs, the Arabic name is translated into English to give information about the goods and services provided to non-native speakers of Arabic (Amer and Obeidat, 2014). In addition, shop signs in Jordan have orthographic-translation errors, word-order translation errors, terminological-conceptual errors, reductionist translation and informativity errors, transliteration replacing translation and total avoidance via foreignization. These types of errors reflect linguistic (e.g., word-order, wrong lexical choice, and reductionist strategies), and extralinguistic (i.e., sociocultural and promotional) factors that lead to translation inappropriateness, lack of parallelisms, information skewing, and consequently serious semantic-conceptual problems in the target language translations (Al-Kharabsheh, Al-Azzam & Obeidat, 2008).

In Erbil, Iraq, shop signs fail to convey any relevant information to target language readers due to spelling, grammar, and word choice errors, with the grammatical errors having the highest frequency. The reasons behind these errors include translator’s language incompetence, translator’s carelessness, and the socio-cultural differences between English, Arabic, and Kurdish in the city (Abdulwahid, 2017).

Locally-coined English shop names and mixed shop names in Saudi Arabic showed that 69% of the Arabic transliterations of the compound shop nouns have syntactic and/or semantic anomalies, 22% have syntactic errors, 14% semantic errors, and 23% have both semantic and syntactic errors combined. Some compound shop names are meaningless because the two constituents of the compound are incongruous. Others have faulty word order, faulty use of the definite article, use of constituents in the compound with the same meaning from two foreign languages; the English plural /-s/ is added to few Arabic word; splitting words into syllables or two parts; and combining two words and spelling them as one lexeme (Al-Jarf 2023).

Regarding inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the Arabic transliterations of foreign shop names in Saudi Arabia, 52% of the inaccurate transliterations are in the vowels and diphthongs, 36% are inaccurate and inconsistent transliterations of consonants.
In 11.6% of the shop names, ch was reduced to sh; and /g/ was transliterated in three ways. 13% of the consonant transliteration errors occurred in words containing a silent letter as in French shop names. In 6%, the Arabic vowel was double. In 8%, compound shop names were spelled together (blended) in the Arabic transliteration. In 7%, French, Italian, Turkish and Japanese shop names were transliterated as they are pronounced in English, not as they are pronounced in the source language. Findings also showed variant spellings of the same name shop names especially those with French, Italian and Turkish names (Al-Jarf, 2022a).

In Yemen, Al-Athwary (2014) detected spelling, grammatical and lexical errors in shop signs in the streets of Sana’a with lexical errors having the highest frequency. Translation errors varied in their degree of seriousness. These translation errors may be caused by the translator’s language incompetence, translator’s carelessness, and the socio-cultural differences between English and Arabic.

Despite the plethora of research studies on the languages used in shop names and the linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and semiotic aspects of shop signs in Arab countries, and few studies analyzed grammatical, lexical, spelling and transliterations errors in shop sign, studies that define which kind of shop names should be translated and which ones should not are lacking especially in the Saudi context. Therefore, this study seeks to find out the status of shop name translation in Saudi Arabia, the errors and weaknesses found in shop name translation and to give guidelines as to which shop signs should be translated and which ones should be transliterated, and which translation and transliteration errors and weaknesses should be avoided.

The translation of shop signs constitutes a dilemma for students majoring in translation who always wonder which shop signs should be translated and which ones should not. This study also provides shop owners, shoppers, the Chambers of Commerce and Ministry of Commerce in Saudi Arabia with a global picture of the status of shop sign translation in Saudi Arabia and provides guidelines for translating them. Although English is the global language of business, Arabic, as Almathkuri declared, is inevitably needed because of the linguistic background of the customers in Arabic countries.

2. Data Collection and Analysis
A corpus of 500 shop names was collected from a Saudi Mall Directory. The corpus covered all malls in Riyadh, Makkah, Jeddah, Madinah, Dammam, Khobar, Dhahran, Jubail, Hassa, Tabuk, Abha and Taif. It included shops for clothing, shoes, accessories, beauty products, children’s toys, in addition to restaurants, cafes and amusement areas. Shop names were classified into 4 categories: (i) International franchised foreign shop names (international brand names); (ii) local shops with foreign names; (iii) shop names with a mixture of an Arabic and foreign name (English, French, Italian, Turkish, Indian, Chinese and Japanese); (iv) shops with pure Arabic names. Duplicate shop names were removed as well. Only shops with foreign names whether they are international brands/chains or local foreign names, were collected and subjected to further analysis. Thus, the final sample consisted of 271 foreign shop names together with their Arabic transliteration and or translation.

The status of shop name translation was classified into: (i) shop names that are translated from English/foreign language to Arabic and Arabic to English/foreign language; (ii) compound shop names that are partially translated where one part is translated and the other is not; (iii) shop names that are transliterated, i.e., Arabic names transliterated in Romanized script and English/foreign language names transliterated in Arabic script. The percentages of shop names in each category were calculate with examples given for illustration.

The translation and transliteration guidelines provided in this study are based on the author’s 30 years of experience in teaching translation, and translation and onomastic research as 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); dominance of foreign shop names over Arabic names in Saudi Arabia: Promotional, sociocultural and globalization issues (Al-Jarf, 2022b); linguistic-cultural characteristics of hotel names in Saudi Arabia: The case of Makkah, Madinah and Riyadh hotels (Al-Jarf, 2021b); 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); English spelling of Arabic compound personal names by educated Arabs on Facebook (Al-Jarf, 2023b); English spelling of the glottal stop and voiced pharyngeal fricative in Arabic personal names by educated Arabs on Facebook (Al-Jarf, 2023c); 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.
3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Distribution of Shop Names According to Language

Table 1 shows that 25% of the shop names are international brands; 39% are local English names created by local shop owners; 24% are pure Arabic names and 12% are mixed names (Arabic + Foreign language).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shop Name Type</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Names of international brands</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Starbucks, Burger King, McDonnalds, Pizza Hut, Monsoon, Bershka, Zara, H&amp;M, MANGO, Debenhams, MOTHER CARE, LC Waikiki, DKNY, Camaiou, Toys R Us, Dunkin Donuts, Tim Hortons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local English names created</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Brand Center, Baby Shop, Java Hour, Pink Blue Fashion, Java Chocolate, Surprise Gift, Grill &amp; Chill, Suit, Jori Coffec, Suitable Time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Pure Arabic names            | 24%  | • The Unified Company, • Al Mabrook Tailoring, • Elegant Necklace, • Al Mabrook Tailoring, • ماجيك |"
Moreover, many of the English local brands are transliterated as in The bay hall, Canelli lounge, Camellia lounge, and others. Results of a decoding test given to a sample of college students and faculty who have a low proficiency level in English indicated that they could decode shop names such as Pizza Hut, Monsoon, Zara, Bershka, Mango, GiorDano, Sony, Toshiba, Samsung, iPhone, and so on.

3.3 Guideline for Translating & Transliterating Shop Names

Regarding the translation of shop names in Saudi Arabia, this study recommends the following:

1) International franchised brand names (Proper Nouns) should be used as they are, e.g., should be transliterated, not translated as Pizza Hut, Monsoon, Zara, Bershka, Mango, GiorDano, Sony, Toshiba, Samsung, iPhone, and so on.

2) Shoppers who do not know English should be able to decode the the Arabic transliteration easily as in Burger King, Hardees, Costa, McDonald's, Starbucks, Mcdonald's, and others. The grapheme sequence in the transliterated name should be familiar to Arabic shoppers’ eye.

3) There should be one transliteration only in all branches of the same shop instead of two or more variant transliterations as in:

   - Burger > بيرجر
   - Burger King > بيرجر كينج
   - Spring > سيينج
   - Semit Sarai > سميت ساربكس
   - Chocolate > شوكلات
   - Chilli > تشيلي

4) International franchised brands or local shop with long names should be transliterated in a way to help shoppers who do not know EnLish decode them easily. Long names can be split into 2 or 3 parts as in:

   - Jiarilshar > جاريليشر
   - American Eagle Outfitters > أميركين إيل أوتفتيرز
   - Accessorize > أكسسوريز
   - Payless > باي لس
   - So Souffle > سو سوفلة
   - BBQ Tonight > باربيكيو تونايت
   - Blue Age > بلو أيج
   - Chuck E Cheese > تشيكي تشيزي
   - Shrimp Shack > شرميشاك

5) Transliterating vowels, diphthongs and consonants correctly as in:

   - Vowels and diphthongs: Onyx > أونيكس
   - Perfume > بيرفيوم
   - Event > أيننت
   - Burger Kitchen > بيرجر كيتشن
   - Muffin > مافين
   - Godiva > جوديفا
   - Cilantro > سيلانثرو
   - Merkato > ماركتو
   - Samsung > سامسونج

The current transliteration of foreign shop names has several errors and weaknesses especially in the Arabic transliteration of foreign shop names as revealed by a prior study by Al-Jarf (2022). In 6%, the Arabic vowel was double. In 8%, compound shop names were containing a silent letter. In 6%, the Arabic vowel was double. In 8%, compound shop names were spelled together (blended) in the Arabic transliteration; in 7%, French, Italian, Japanese, and Turkish shop names were transliterated as they are pronounced in English, not in the source language. Findings also showed variant spellings of the same shop names especially French, Italian and Turkish shop names (Parfois, Bershka, Semit Sarai).

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   - Samsung > سامسونج
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6) the Arabic definite article should be attached to the appositive noun in the compound shop name as in: 

7) Even when shop names are transliterated, the word order should be correct. For Arabic, the English word order should be reversed to match the Arabic word order as in:

8) Transliterators should pay attention to French & Italian shop names that they are not pronounced like English. They can check the pronunciation in Google Translate. The following are examples of mistransliterations and their corrections.

9) Some international shop names and most local shops with foreign names should be fully translated if they are meaningful. The Arabic translation will target Arabic-speaking shoppers who do not know English and the English version targets English-speaking shoppers as in the examples in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Examples of Shop Names That Should Be Fully Translated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Name</th>
<th>Arabic Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>الفناء</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atayf garden</td>
<td>حديقة أطاف</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBQ Tonight</td>
<td>باربكيو نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Tandoori</td>
<td>شاورما تاندورى</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Nutrition</td>
<td>دكتور التغذية</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lulu fashion store</td>
<td>مجمع لولو للملابس</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mama Batata</td>
<td>ماما باتاتا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Beauty</td>
<td>نطنز نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Look</td>
<td>نطنز نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Center</td>
<td>مركز الاحتراف</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lulu Celebrate</td>
<td>احتفالات لولو</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luxury Accessories</td>
<td>فاخرة الأكسسوارات</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghazal Almaha</td>
<td>غزال المها</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Name</th>
<th>Arabic Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Touch</td>
<td>نطنز نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Fashion</td>
<td>نطنز نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potato Corner</td>
<td>فضول نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potato Hut</td>
<td>فضول نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potato twist</td>
<td>فضول نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Sea Mall</td>
<td>مجمع البحر الأحمر</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riyadh Park</td>
<td>الرياض نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alwshah Afanii</td>
<td>الوضاح الأفاني</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Children's Place</td>
<td>مجمع الأطفال</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Shop</td>
<td>نطنز نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation Falafel</td>
<td>نطنز نايت</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Games</td>
<td>مستر كيمر</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al'ikhtyar akwasie&gt; Great Options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the examples in Table 4, the sequence of graphemes is difficult to decode because they have unfamiliar consonant and vowel sequences (combinations) that do not exist in Arabic and do not fit the Arabic graphemic system. Similarly, the Arabized version of chocolate can be used in Arabic versions but not in English. The same applies to Z Mart Accessories. The Arabicized word اكسسوريات that is commonly used in spoken Arabic, can be used instead of the transliterated English plural أكسسوريات as it can be easily decoded and pronounced.

10) Certain shop name components that frequently occur in international franchised names or local English names should be translated as café, chocolate, potato, park, plaza, collection, fashion, Azia, and مجمع.
Noami. Some of these words were Arabized long ago as chocolate. In all languages, coffee and café were originally borrowed from the Arabic words مقهى & قهوه. The equivalent to the Turkish Kaisari is مقهى كيصر. So it should be used. In addition, compound shop names containing common nouns such as “kitchen”, “bakery”, “garden”, “mart”, “chicken”, “shoes”, “potato” should be partially transliterated. The following are examples:

- coffee shop names as: Cafe Mamma Rotti; مقهى ماما روني; مقهى ماما روتي; Caribou Café
- Esquires Café; مقهى كريبو;
- Keisari Café; مقهى كيصر;
- Soprano café; مقهى أكرو كافيه;
- AlBasha Café; مقهى الباشا;
- Alko Café; مقهى الكو;
- Venus Café; مقهى فينو;
- Corsini café; مقهى كورسيني;
- Douh Café; مقهى دو;
- café d’Arabia; مقهى العربي

Specialty Shop names as: Laderach chocolate; فكوكا داديراخ;
- Java Chocolate;
- Eva Garden; حديقة إيفا;
- Damas collection; مجموعة داماس;
- Every collection;
- Flamingo Park; حديقة إيفا;
- Burger Kitchen; مطعم البرجر;
- Magnolia Bakery; مخبز ماغنوليا;
- Z Mart Accessories; سوق زي;
- Bijou Brigitte; المجوهرات بريجيت;
- Rieker Shoes; ريكري شوز;
- Orange bed & bath; اورنج نيد & باي;
- Texas chicken; دجاج تكساس;
- YALLA BOWLING; هيا الى البولينج

11) Avoiding duplicating lexical meaning such as mentioning the type of store although it is implied in the shop name as in:

- the name for the supermarket as “food”;
- the name for the shoe shop as “footwear”;
- the name for the beauty shop as “cosmetics”;
- the name for the lingerie shop as “lingerie”;
- the name for the luxury accessories shop as “luxury accessories”;

4. Recommendations and Conclusion

Due to the dominance of English in all walks of life such as social media, hotel names, shop names and the dominance of Arabic transliteration of English and foreign shop names, personal names, hotel names, street signs and so on, the transliteration errors committed will have a negative effect on Arabic, our National Language. This status quo will contribute to the marginalization and weakening of the Arabic language (Al-Jarf, 2016; Al-Jarf, 2011a; Al-Jarf, 2011b; Al-Jarf, 2008; Al-Jarf, 2005; Al-Jarf, 2018; Al-Jarf, 2021a; Al-Jarf, 2022b). Arab-speakers should be aware of the threats posed by the foreignization of shop names on the status of the Arabic language. Attractive Arabic names can be created and do exist in the Saudi market as Al-Baik, Al-Tazej, Al-Ghazali, Gazzaz, etc. It is the quality of products, the price and employee-customer relations that matter NOT the foreign name.

The transliteration errors of shop names are usually transliterated by foreign workers who are neither proficient in Arabic nor English. The absence of diacritics makes shop names difficult to decode by those who are not familiar with them.

The Ministry of Commerce & Chambers of Commerce should set standards for naming, translating and transliterating shop names. They should make sure that shop names are transliterated correctly, with a correct word order and correct definite article attachment. They should also play a key role in domesticating shop names and mandating that at least locally-coined foreign shop names be translated.

The domestication of foreign shop names by Saudi entrepreneurs requires that they get support from colleges of languages and in the kingdom in naming and translating the shop and products names to achieve local and international intelligibility. The mistranslations are not only evident in shop names, they are also evident in street signs and linguistic landscapes. Therefore this study recommends that translation errors in bilingual linguistic landscapes and public signs in Saudi Arabia be the subject of further research studies in the future.

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