
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Investigation into the Linguistic Landscape of Shop Signs in Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf Governorate: A Sociolinguistic Study

Lect. Mohammed Jassim Dakhil Al-Ghizy (PhD)

Ministry of Education, Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf Directorate, Iraq

Corresponding Author: Lect. Mohammed Jassim Dakhil Al-Ghizy (PhD), **E-mail:** mohannedjassim7@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

The topic of the linguistic landscape is an increasingly researched area within the domain of sociolinguistics as it has the potentiality of exposing the languages used in a specific community and the views and ideologies associated with them. One of the demonstrations of the linguistic landscape is via the shop signs in the streets and markets of a certain community. Thus, this study attempts at cultivating the use of English in the shop signs of Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf Governorate centre, which is located in the southwest of the capital, Baghdad. It basically aims at investigating the distribution of shop signs that demonstrate the use of English in central and peripheral areas, as well as investigating the factors that have the potentiality of being responsible for using English from the point of view of shop owners. The data are collected from three areas starting from the city centre to the peripheral areas. The method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method by giving a detailed description of the types and functions of the linguistic landscapes used in the shop signs. The results show that English is used in the central areas as in Al-Rawan and Al-Muthanaa streets more than the peripheral ones as in Al-Wafaa and Al-Askarii area. Besides, the targeted customers, English competency and the educational level of the shop owner, effect of main trading cities, and creating a name that is easily remembered by customers due to its association with the products and services provided by the shop, the prestigious social class inhabiting the center of the city, their educational level and high economic income are the main factors that affect the choice of English in shop signage.

| KEYWORDS

Linguistic Landscape, Their Types, Functions, Shop Signs, Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 15 January 2026

PUBLISHED: 05 February 2026

DOI: 10.32996/jhsss.2026.8.2.10

1. Introduction

One special characteristic of language is its potentiality of being displayed and exposed, at times for practical reasons, at other times for symbolic ones. What is constituted via language being exposed in the public sphere is referred to in sociolinguistics as the linguistic landscape (henceforth LL). The LL has recently gained the attention of academics and researchers who endeavor to understand and perceive its symbolism, message, value and context. The LL, as ubiquitous language use, is directly associated with people since they are the ones who create it and decide how to represent and exhibit it in various settings (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009, p. 1).

However, one fundamental representation of language in the public sphere is shop signs. Shop signage is investigated from a sociolinguistic perspective as it is primarily concerned with language in relation to society. Shop signage plays a crucial role in how language is used in public. The first stage in establishing a popular brand in marketizing and developing a solid reputation for a fresh initiation in one's practical life is giving a shop a name. So, this stage requires a lot of focus. The naming of stores can be addressed in terms of socially driven decisions made to increase economic benefits (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

Worldwide, English is regarded as the universal language and is spoken by millions of people. It has been used in various areas, but is most frequently employed for demonstrating prestigious business (Danaci, 2005, p. 24). Moreover, since language is a crucial component of culture, it is acceptable for one culture to adopt elements of other languages in order to innovate in the fields of culture, technology, or society. Hence, with the purpose of accomplishing particular economic, social, or personal aims, there is a discernible movement in the names of shops in English in the governorate of Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf, Southwest Iraq. In a monolingual Arabic Governorate like Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf, it has been noticed that English is increasingly used in shop signage, creating a multilingual landscape. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the use of English language that appears in commercial shop signs in the city centre of Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf Governorate. It sheds light on how English is used in the formulation of shop signs and the sort of areas that are often associated with such language use, as well as types and functions of LLs in each area. It also investigates the factors that drive shop owners to use English in their shop signs.

2.Theoretical Background

2.1.Language in Society

Ironically, Chomsky's emphasis on removing language from context in the 1960s led to the creation of a crucial area of sociolinguistics that was at odds with his theory of language. Chomsky summarized the linguists' focus on an idealized competence in the sense that theoretical linguistics is mainly associated with ideal speakers and listeners, in a totally consistent and regular speech community, who know its linguistic code in a perfect way and is uninfluenced by such non-relevant grammatical conditions as memory shortcomings, distractions, attentional shifting and excitement, and randomly or characteristically occurring errors in the application of their knowledge of the linguistic code to real life performances (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3).

The theory of syntax and phonology benefited greatly from such an approach, but many academics believed that doing so served only restricted purposes that did not allow for the development of a comprehensive theory of human language. This time witnessed a divergence between sociolinguists with interests in language being contextualized within the human society and proponents of the Chomskyan generative paradigm (with their interests in an idealized, unsocial, psycholinguistic competency) (Mesthrie et al., 2009). The sociolinguistic approach attempts to account for what may be said in a language, by whom, to whom, in whose presence, when and where, in what manner, and under what social circumstances, whereas the Chomskyan paradigm concentrates on structures that could be formed in language and by what means (Saville-Troike, 1982, p. 8). For sociolinguists, language is a social activity that only takes place in social interaction as well as a cognitively based process that involves the activation of certain predispositions in the human brain.

Sociolinguists are concerned with investigating the relationship between language and society. They are required to explain why language users speak distinctively in various social settings, and they are required to identify the socially based functionalities of language and the way language is employed for conveying social meanings. Investigating how individuals employ language in various social settings has the potentiality of providing considerable information concerning how it works, as well as the societal relations existing in a certain community, and how individuals show and create certain aspects of their social identities via employing language (Holmes, 2013, p. 1).

Crystal (2008) states that sociolinguistics studies such issues as the linguistic identities of socially based groups, societal attitudes towards language, standardized and non-standardized linguistic forms, the patternings and necessities of nationwide language use, sociolinguistic variation and the societal foundations of multilingual situations, and so on. Hence, it is concerns itself with approaching language use as a socially based phenomenon and, where possible, it attempts at establishing causal relationships holding between language and society, attempting to pursue the interconnected queries into what language can contribute to rendering communities possible and how communities construct their linguistic systems via employing them. As sociolinguistic investigations are meeting grounds for linguists and sociologists, some of whom attempt at understanding the societal manifestations of language while others are principally involved in linguistically based manifestations of society, it is not astonishing that there are two gravitational centers, known as micro- and macro-sociolinguistics.

However, one basic area that is investigated within the realm of sociolinguistics is the representation of language in the public space, constituting the LL. Nowadays, language is all around us, no matter where we are in the world. It can be found in the signs of the names of buildings, streets, and stores, as well as in a variety of other contexts including directions and warnings. The maximum number of such signs can be seen in cities and towns.

2.2.Linguistic Landscape

One of the recent emerged area of study in sociolinguistics of multilingual is the topic of *linguistic landscape* (LL), which can be defined as the display of languages in public spaces including signs, billboards, advertisements, and graffiti. A LL is not a straightforward reflection of the official statuses of the languages used, the linguistic diversity present in the city, nor the relationship between languages. Rather, how languages appear in public space provides evidence about underlying ideologies concerning particular codes and their speakers. Hence, the ways in which languages are used both reflects and impacts their perceived values (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015, p. 86). Every urban environment is a myriad of written messages on public display: office and shop signs, billboards and neon advertisements, traffic signs, topographic information and area maps, emergency guidance and political poster campaigns, stone inscriptions, and enigmatic graffiti discourse, all these constitute what is called a linguistic landscape (Backhaus, 2007, p. 1)

Recently, the study of the LL, which is the investigation of the existence, representations, meanings, and interpretations of language shown in communal areas, has developed into a vibrant field of study. In addition to being spoken and heard, languages are also displayed and depicted, sometimes for practical necessities and other times for symbolic functions. These products provide abundant and engaging texts on various levels, including single words with complex meanings and common knowledge, vibrant visuals, audible sounds, moving objects, advertisement bill-boarding, wall writings, as well as a range of text types presented in cyberspace, open but not actually present. All these elements construct the linguistic ecology in regional and worldwide settings and in multiple linguistic systems. Most sociolinguistic investigations of the LL are based on a definition introduced by Landry and Bourhis who state that it is "*the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration*" (1997, p. 25).

Yet, as humans are the ones who are concerned with hanging the signs, displaying the posters, and designing the adverts; these projected languages of the public realm are strongly tied to people. These linguistic displays are also read, attended to, decoded, and interpreted by humans, albeit occasionally they are chosen to be overlooked, disregarded, or even erased. Actually, work on linguistic landscaping not only concentrates on signs per se, but on how the community interacts with them (Shohamy, 2012, p. 538).

The primary objective of linguistic landscaping investigations is the description and identification of systematically established patterns of the presentness and absentness of languages in public spheres as well as to the comprehension of motivations, demands, ideological stances, reactions, and decision-making processes of people with regard to the development of public signing. In other words, language in public settings is not arbitrarily and randomly based. LL researchers work to identify and analyze numerous forms of representation while also exploring systematically based patternings in the linking between the LL and societies, individuals, political stances, ideologies, economical situations, policies, social classes, identities, multilingualism, and multimodalities. Sociolinguistic studies, applied linguistics, language planning as well as sociological, educational, semiotic, literacy, architectural, critical geographical and economic studies are only a few of the research areas that have contributed to the foundation of research on linguistic landscaping. As a result, the methodological design used in the LL studies, which is based on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, is based on these research areas. Broader definitions of the concept of the LL have drawn more attention in recent years. It has been proposed that LL research should include visuals, sounds, drawings, and movement in accordance with contemporary notions regarding multimodality, in addition to the various text kinds exhibited in public places of written languages on signs (Shohamy, 2012, pp. 538-9).

2.3. Types of the Linguistic Landscape

There are many types of the LL such as visible/invisible, permanent/temporary, top-down/bottom-up, etc. However, the types that have a major concern in this study are (monolingual, bilingual and multilingual) LLs.

- a. **Monolingual:** this type is common in linguistically homogeneous societies that use only one language. This sort refers to all public, visible linguistic items including road signs, billboards, shop signs, public notices, and graffiti that are displayed in one single language. It reinforces the power and authority of the **linguistic dominance** of one language in that space. It may also index **cultural homogeneity** or the lack of recognition for linguistic minorities (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015).
- b. **Bilingual:** this type often reflects official bilingualism or local community needs and it demands two languages. This sort refers to the visible use of signage language in public spaces including street signs, billboards, government buildings and shops where two languages are in daily use due to **official policy, cultural diversity, or multilingual communities**. It is often tied to **language policy** like official bilingualism, minority language rights, tourism, and it can sometimes serve practical purposes like communication or symbolic ones like identity and inclusion (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015).

- c. Multilingual: this type is common in multicultural or globalized spaces, and it demand three or more languages. This sort refers public signage, texts, or other written displays that contain **three or more languages**, either on the same sign or across a shared environment. It usually emerges in **multicultural societies, tourist areas, border regions, or international cities** where several languages are used for communication and symbolic recognition. It implicates a **high linguistic diversity** and multicultural coexistence, demands efforts **to accommodate different groups** (locals, minorities, tourists, expatriates), and highlights **globalization** and **mobility** (migration, trade, tourism) (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015) .

2.4. Functions of the Linguistic Landscape

There are two basic functions that are associated with the LL. These are the indexical and symbolic functions.

2.4.1. Indexical Function

The LL's primary function is indexing the existence of particular communities. For Landry and Bourhis (1997), the LL serves as a source of information. On the one hand, they contend that a language's predominance on signs suggests that it is actually used in both public and private settings. On the other hand, the variety of languages found on signs may reveal a territory's sociolinguistic formulation. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), the LL is a crucial sociolinguistic component that is distinct from other kinds of language connections and contributes to the survival of competing ethno-linguistic groups in situations with many languages. In the same vein, bilingual indications in the LL may be seen as a reflection of bilingualism in a society or community (Dal Negro, 2009, p. 206). Yet, because it is assumed that people's views, governmental policies, and personal strategies could all have an impact on the establishment of the LL, such a reading of the LL's function might be seen as overly basic. Barni and Bagna (2010, p. 15) draw the conclusion that there is no definite relationship between the existence of immigrant languages, their vitality, and their appearance in the LL based on a corpus of signs amassed and studied in Italy. Nonetheless, a language's potential for vitality increases with how noticeable it is in the LL. Immigrant languages may be more visible in public settings due to a variety of circumstances. The foremost among these are speakers' favorable feelings about their native tongues, the characteristics of the location in which immigrants dwell, and how long they have lived there (Barni & Bagna, 2010, p. 16).

In their investigation of LL items, Scollon and Scollon (2003) address this function in the context of indexicality. In this regard, the authors (2003, p. 119) suggest that codes are used on signs for indexing specific communities in the sense that *"A code may be chosen because it indexes the point in the world where it is placed- this is an Arabic speaking community (or business or nation) ... this is a Chinese restaurant because there is Chinese writing in the shop sign"*.

According to Scollon & Scollon (2003), the relation between language associations in the LL and the compositions of societal linguistic repertoires may reflect the linguistic variation found in a society, but it can also be affected and controlled by administrative and nonadministrative language policies, individuals' attitudes, and mutual ideological stances taken by the members of the society.

2.4.2. Symbolic Function

Landry and Bourhis (1997) view the linguistic code in the public realm as a crucial indication of language attitudes. The symbolic function, according to them, denotes that the use of one's own language on signs may help one feel as though that language has value and prestige within the sociolinguistic context. According to Scollon & Scollon (2003, p. 119), symbolism differs from indexicality. These show how sign codes can represent things that have nothing to do with where people actually live. To evaluate if the languages that appear on specific LL items are indexical or symbolic, the authors show that there should be evidence outside of these indicators. Certain codes may be used on commercial signage symbolically rather than indexically. For example, using English in the LL of a Japanese society has the potentiality of symbolizing foreign tastes and manners. Numerous LL investigations have emphasized how the LL is used as a space of language instrumentalism. So, it would appear that the employment of non-territorial languages in the LL is more associated with instrumental aims of commodification than with indexical ones (Heller, 2003). Griffin (2004, p. 3) sees that *"English is a juggernaut whose sweep across the globe is marked not only by the ever-swelling ranks of those who speak it as a second language, but also by its intrusion into other languages and culture"*. Businesses attempt at boosting their profits via making use of English, which is highly driven by economic factors in the LL (Cenoz & Gorter, 2009, p. 57).

2.5. Globalization and English in the Linguistic Landscape

The LL could offer a proof of how globalization has affected a community's language(s) and business competition (Huebner, 2006, p. 32). In addition, it might signal support for globalization by employing the international tongue of English. Looking through the plethora of studies within the research area the LL, much sociolinguistic investigations have been accredited to the high significance of English in this research area. This is clearly shown in Tokyo, whose LL has the potentiality of indexing multilingualism (Gorter, 2006, p. 81). English highly used in the Japanese LL despite the fact that the Japan is

considered one of the basic prototypical monolingual communities. Spreading of English as a lingua franca is highly observable in many cosmopolitan cities.

Gorter (2006) discusses two distinct mechanisms in this sociolinguistic research area. On the one hand, he emphasizes the importance of English as the code of globalization in the LL. On the other hand, he takes into consideration the appearances of regionalization or localization, a term which emphasizes both regional identities and regional codes. The streets of the towns of Ljouwert/Leeuwarden in Friesland and Donostia/San Sebastian in the Basque Country have been analyzed to present a corroborating proof of the existence of these two sociolinguistic mechanisms operating concurrently.

The leading factors behind the wide use of English alongside the waning powers of other languages in signage have been specifically taken into account within the field of sociolinguistics. From Cenoz and Gorter's point of view (2009, p. 57), the vibrant use of English on private and public signs is *"one of the most obvious markers of the process of globalization"*. Correspondingly, one of the most obvious aspects of the LL in Portugal, according to Torkington (2009), is the predominance of English. This is explained by the economic importance of English in world commerce. In tourist destinations, company owners employ English as a communication language to boost their work. Similarly, Edelman (2010) shows that, on the one hand, Dutch and English are the most common codes in the LL of Amsterdam and Friesland and that, after Dutch, English has been the second most common language used in signs. Minority languages, on the other hand, hardly ever influence the LL of these two field sites. According to Edelman, there are three main reasons why English is being used more frequently on private and public signs in the Netherlands: tourism, the importance of Amsterdam as an international trading and cultural hub, and the fact that English is the global code for many recent immigrant groups.

Moreover, attention has been drawn to the expanding function of English in the LL. For example, Muth (2008, p. 143) shows that English is frequently used on LL signs in the LL of Vilnius, despite the fact that English proficiency among Lithuanians is not sufficiently reliable. As far as private spheres are concerned, English is used on a high number of LL items. With accordance to the writer (2008, p. 144), in this region of the world, English is considered as *"the language of upward social mobility, as new, prestigious and desirable to learn"*. The fall of Russian is the most obvious aspect of Lithuania in general and the LL of Vilnius in particular. This is brought on by *"language policy, power structures within society and ethnocentric nationalism"* (Muth, 2008, p. 145).

With reference to the area of language planning and policy, LL studies reflect language hierarchy, power structures, and diversity of languages in different territories and regions across the globe. Along with overt and covert language attitudes, the LL may also examine official and unofficial language policy.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive method which is represented by conducting conversational semi-structured interviews with some shop owners to elicit their perceptions about the factors influencing the choice of using English or Arabic monolingually or bilingually in the shop signs of Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf city. Since, there are no statistical or counted results, there is no need to adopt quantitative method. By adopting qualitative method, we will get a **comprehensive, straightforward description of a phenomenon of linguistic landscape** based on participants' perspectives and naturally occurring data.

3.1. Data Collection

a. Survey of Shop Signs

As a matter of fact, it is difficult to gather and study all shop signs in Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf Governorate, so that the researcher purposively selected three neighbored areas starting from the centre of the city to the surrounding areas. The first area is Al-Rawan and Al-Muthanaa streets. These two streets were selectively chosen as they are characterized by a prestigious sophisticated commercial vitality. The other is located in the neighbored districts of the first area including Al-Addab and Al-Ghadeer streets, these two streets are also characterized by prestigious sophisticated vitality but less than the first area. The third area is located in northern neighbored popular districts including Al-Jamiea street alongside to Al-Wafaa and Al-Askari street. This area is characterized by less prestigious, inhabited by low class people and less commercial than the two previous areas. However, the samples of the study consisted of 30 shop signs, 10 signs for each area. The shop signs were purposefully surveyed in each area. In this way, the researcher keeps a sense of equalization of the data. Among these shop signs, the researcher collected and noticed the signs that show use of English, whether monolingually or bilingually.

b. Shop Owners Interviews

The next step in gathering data is that the researcher told the shop owners about the purpose of the study to take permission and to interview some of them to elicit the factors that can be responsible for using English in the signs of shops. The conversational semi-interviews were held after the conduction of the survey of the shop signs in the two commercial streets. However, three shop owners from each area were selected for these conversational semi-structured interviews. The interview involved a conversational interaction concerning the English or Arabic competency and educational level of the shop

owner, the customers targeted by the products and services of the shop, effect of other cities, English in relation to the goods and services provided by the shop, the class of customers and their economic income.

4. Analysis and Result

The analysis is carried out through analyzing and describing the LLs qualitatively in the three purposively selected areas in Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf Governorate. In addition, types and functions of LLs will also be categorized in each area.

a. The Survey of Shop Signs

The survey of the first area which is Al-Rawan and Al-Muthanaa streets which represents the central area of the city, shows that most shop signs simultaneously display either English only or Arabic only. This means that this area is considered as a monolingual, and it is noticeable that monolingual English signs are used more than monolingual Arabic because English can be used for exposing the details of the goods and services that are provided by the shops and frequented by tourists from other areas. Since the local and official language in Al-Najaf city is Arabic, it normally monolingual Arabic signs are but in different proportions. However, the following shop signs (see figures 1, 2) show monolingual English and Arabic signs in this area.



Figure 1. A Monolingual English Shop Sign (1st Area)



Figure 2. A Monolingual Arabic Shop Sign (1st Area)

As far as the distribution of these signs is concerned, it is clear that the central two streets in this area show more use of English. The main reason might be related to the prestigious social class inhabiting the center of the city. People inhabiting the central part of the city are often of urban origin and often have a sophisticated educational level and high economic income. Thus, the demographic factor is a central and decisive one; it has the potentiality of driving shop owners to name their shops using English. However, the shop signs that make use of English monolingually always belong to modern cafes and prestigious restaurants which provide western sorts of food.

Moreover, the monolingual English shop signs may have a symbolic function related to cultural and educational values in this area because Al-Najaf city is considered as one of main Islamic cities that receives many tourists from all around the world. As for monolingual Arabic signs, they may have both symbolic and indexical functions that reflect ideology, Arabic and Islamic identity, belonging and tradition, and the expected audience and interaction.

The survey of the second area which is nearby the first area including Al-Addab and Al-Ghadeer streets shows that most shop signs simultaneously display either monolingual Arabic or bilingual English and Arabic. It is also noticed that bilingual shop signs are used more than monolingual Arabic. Hence, this area demonstrates a dynamic interplay between Arabic monolingualism and Arabic-English bilingualism. This means that the further you are from the city centre, the less English is used.



Figure 3. A Monolingual Arabic Shop Sign (2nd Area)



Figure 4. A Bilingual English-Arabic Shop Sign (2nd Area)

While monolingual Arabic signage reinforces the symbolic value of Arabic that reflects the religious and cultural identity of Al-Najaf, bilingual English-Arabic signs simultaneously function as both symbolic and indexical resources, symbolizing prestige and global modernity while indexing accessibility for international visitors. The coexistence of these practices highlights Najaf's position at the intersection of tradition and globalization. In addition, monolingual Arabic in this area reinforces solidarity of local people and symbolize tradition. It also indexes the intended audience (local speakers), and marks Al-Najaf as a **religious city with a strong Arab-Islamic identity**. As for bilingual English-Arabic signs, they symbolize **modernity, prestige, and globalization**, and index and act English as a bridge to non-Arabic speakers and foreign visitors. The use of English in this area might also be related to the prestigious social class, educational level and high economic income, but less than the first area.

As for the third area which is the neighboring districts of the second area including Al-Jamiea street alongside to Al-Wafaa and Al-Askarii street, the survey of this area shows that most shop signs are monolingual (in Arabic only) and few signs are bilingual (English-Arabic). This indicates that the case is different with the peripheral areas which are always

inhabited by people of new comers from rural or suburban districts. Generally, their educational level, prestige, and economic income are less than those of the central areas and nearby.



Figure 5. A Monolingual Arabic of Shop Signs (3rd Area)

The dominant of monolingual Arabic in this area may carry a **symbolic function** by projecting identity and solidarity and it also **indexes** that the **primary audience** is local Arabic-speaking.

b. The Shop Owners' Interviews

The factors elicited from the conversational semi-interviews with the shop owners concerning the use of English in their shop's signs are stated as follows:

1. English signs are used to be remembered easily by the customers

One factor that it has the potentiality of driving shop owners to use English in the signs of their shops is to be easily remembered by their customers. Using an English name that is associated with the products the shop provides can result remembering the shop easily by the customers. One of the shop owners reported that he named his shop as *violet* (see Figure 1) because it is associated with the color of the products he sells (clothes, fashions). Thus, the name will be remember easily the customers to the beauty, luxury, and femininity of the products and services.

2. Effect of main trading cities

Another factor that shop owners believe to be essential in the choice of English in constructing shop signs is represented by the effect of the trade centers in the capital Baghdad and other governorates. One shop owner stated that he noticed that many cafes and restaurants copy English names that are famous in Baghdad or that these cafes and restaurants establish their branches in Al-Najaf along with their English names. Moreover, he stated that he noticed the tendency of shop owners in Baghdad to name their shops using English so that some Najafi shop owners attempt to imitate them concerning shop signage. From his point of view, naming a shop using English is the trend in the Capital. Such a trend is related to how people might feel concerning a name that is not presented in a traditional manner. It is a matter of fashion that is pervasive in the Capital.

3. English competency and educational level

One intriguing factor that has a significant effect on using English in the shop signs of the English competency possessed the shop owners. The shop owners interviewed have a sophisticated level of English. This sophisticated level of English has its own root in their educational level. One of the shop owners stated that he has a bachelor degree in English and another one stated that he has a bachelor degree in civil engineering. This means that experiencing the English language and its cultural and prestigious and global dimensions has a decisive role in using English in the shop signs.

4. The targeted customers

The specific group of customers that shop owners attempt at targeting with their products and services plays a central role in affecting using English in the shop sign. English is seen as a prestigious language that has the potentiality of attracting certain groups of people. One of the shop owners stated that he noticed the increasing use of English in the new coffee shops in the city center because they target teenagers and young adult who seek prestigious places to pass time. Thus, the first thing about the high prestige is the name of the place and the way it is exposed. This factor is highly important and it is always associated with the monolingual use of English in the shop signs in the city center. Another one stated that teenagers and

young adults always post their images being in prestigious places to reflect a sense of modernity and urbanity so that the language of the sign is of a high necessity for constructing such a sense. He added that such places are always attended by individuals and families who consider themselves as a high class. Moreover, places with traditional and local Arabic names are rarely attended by such type of people as they tend to attend restaurants for constructing a modern identity.

5. Conclusions

Although the LL of shop signs in Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf is basically dominated by Arabic as it is the native language of the population, there is a clear direction in the use of English in the shop signs. However, the use of English in Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf city serves a symbolic value that is highly associated with economically and demographically based dimensions. The most important aspect to be mentioned about the linguistic landscape of the shop signs associated with the use of English is the geographically based distribution as the English signs are usually displayed in the central areas of the city of Al-Najaf. This is essentially related to the nature of the social fabric of the central and peripheral areas. On the one hand, people inhabiting and attending the central part of the city are often more associated with urbanization and often have better educational background and better financial security. On the other hand, people living in the peripheries of the city are usually of rural origin with unsophisticated sense of urbanization or have recently migrated to the city. Thus, the multilingualism of the LL tends to exist in the more urbanized areas.

Concerning types and functions of the LLs found in selected three areas are as follows: the type of LLs in the first area which is Al-Rawan and Al-Muthanaa streets is either monolingual English which has symbolic function or monolingual Arabic which has both symbolic and indexical functions, but English is widely used. The second area which is Al-Addab and Al-Ghadeer streets shows that most shop signs simultaneously display either monolingual Arabic which has a symbolic function or bilingual English-Arabic which has both symbolic and indexical functions. As for the third area which Al-Jamiea street alongside to Al-Wafaa and Al-Askarii street, this area shows that most shop signs are monolingual (Arabic only) and few signs are bilingual (English-Arabic).

Moreover, there are a number of factors that have the potentiality of driving shop owners to use English in the shop signs. First, shop owners tend to create a name that can be remembered easily by customers in the sense that such a name is associated with the products and services provided by the shop. Second, main trading cities like the capital Baghdad play a central role in affecting the LL of shop signs in Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf city. Third, the English competency and educational level of the shop owners are also correlated with using English in shop signage as they are a main source for the familiarity the globalization of English as well as its prestigious value. Finally and most importantly, the targeted customers of shops have the potential to affect the orchestration of the use of English in the shop signs in the sense that shop owners attempt at coming up with names that satisfies the social and prestigious requirements of their targeted customers as it is highly obvious in the case of modern cafes which are attended by adolescents and young adults.

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]. Backhaus, P. (2007). *Linguistic landscapes: a comparative study of urban and multilingualism in Tokyo*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- [2]. Barni, M., & Bagna, C. (2009). A Mapping technique and the LL. In Gorter, D. & Shohamy, E. (eds.) *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery* (pp. 13-24). New York: Routledge.
- [3]. Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2009) Language economy and linguistic landscape. In Gorter, D. & Shohamy, E. (eds.) *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery* (pp. 55-69). New York: Routledge.
- [4]. Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [5]. Coulmas, F. (2008). Linguistic landscaping and the seed of the public sphere. In Shohamy, E. & Gorter, D. (eds.) *Linguistic landscape* (pp. 21-32). New York: Routledge.
- [6]. Crystal, D. (2008). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics* (6th ed.). Malden: Blackwell.
- [7]. Dal Negro, S. (2009). Local policy modelling the linguistic landscape. In Gorter, D. & Shohamy, E. (eds.) *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery* (pp. 206-218). New York: Routledge.
- [8]. Danaci, G. (2005). The foreign language influence in the process of shop naming. *Dil Dergisi*, (129), 23-33.
- [9]. Edelman, L. (2010) *Linguistic landscapes in the Netherlands: a study of multilingualism in Amsterdam and Friesland* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Amsterdam).
- [10]. Gorter, D. (2006). *Introduction: The study of the linguistic landscape as a new approach to multilingualism*. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 3(1), 1-6.
- [11]. Griffin, J. (2004). The written presence of English on the streets of Rome. *English Today*, 20 (2), pp. 3-8.

- [12]. Habermas, J. (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [13]. Heller, M. (2003). Globalization, the new economy and the commodification of language. *Journal of sociolinguistics*, 7 (4), pp. 473-492.
- [14]. Holmes, J. (2013). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. New York: Routledge.
- [15]. Huebner, T. (2006). Bangkok's linguistic landscapes: environmental print, codemixing and language change. In Gorter, D. (ed.) *Linguistic landscape: A new approach to multilingualism* (pp. 31-51). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- [16]. Hult, F. M. (2008). Language ecology and linguistic landscape analysis. In Gorter, D. & Shohamy, E. (eds.) *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery* (pp. 96-144). New York: Routledge.
- [17]. Landry, R., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1997). *Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study*. *Journal of language and social psychology*, 16(1), 23-49.
- [18]. Mesthrie, R. Swann, J. Deumert, A. & Leap, W. (2009). *Introducing sociolinguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- [19]. Muth, S. (2008) Multiethnic but multilingual as well? The Linguistic Landscapes of Vilnius. *Norddeutsches Linguistisches Kolloquium*, 9, pp. 121-146.
- [20]. Saville-Troike, M. (1985). The place of silence in an integrated theory of communication. In D. Tannen and M. Saville-Troike (eds), *Perspectives on Silence* pp. (pp. 3-18). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- [21]. Scollon, R., and Scollon, S.W. (2003). *Discourses in place: Language in the material world*. New York: Routledge.
- [22]. Shohamy, E. (2012). Linguistic landscapes and multilingualism. In M. Martin-Jones, A. Blackledge, & A. Creese (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of multilingualism* (pp. 538-551). London: Routledge.
- [23]. Shohamy, E. and Gorter, D. (2009). Introduction. In Gorter, D. & Shohamy, E. (eds.) *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery* (pp. 1-10). New York: Routledge.
- [24]. Torkington, K. (2009). Exploring the linguistic landscape: the case of 'Golden Triangle' in the Algarve, Portugal. *Linguistics and language teaching*, 3, pp. 122-145.
- [25]. Wardhaugh, R. and Fuller, J.M. (2015). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (7th ed.). London: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.