Bilingual Typography: Study of the Linguistic Landscape of Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract: With the rise of globalization and the spread of Western culture across the globe, the use of English as an "international" language is often represented in bilingual and multilingual typographic signage. Throughout the Middle East North Africa and Gulf region, the integration of Arabic and Latin letterforms is commonly viewed within the signage of storefronts, street signs, advertising billboards, and informational materials. This paper explores the use of bilingual/multilingual typography within the linguistic landscape of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: visual communication, bilingual typography, linguistic landscape, globalization

Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The city of Jeddah is located on the West Coast of Saudi Arabia on the Red Sea, directly across from Egypt and Sudan. Known as the "Queen of the Red Sea," Jeddah is an important commercial hub and major destination for those traveling to Mecca or Medina, Islam's holy cities. Traditionally Arab, Jeddah is the second largest city in Saudi Arabia (after Riyadh), and is ranked as one of the fastest growing cities in the world.

Since World War II and the discovery of oil within Saudi Arabia, Jeddah has experienced major growth and expansion. Utilizing Western corporations and an international labor force, Jeddah's infrastructure and culture has developed and modernized. Throughout Jeddah, this

Western influence can be witnessed within the city's linguistic landscape in the use of bilingual/multilingual typographic signage.

Linguistic Landscape/English as an International Language

The linguistic landscape is "the language within an environment, words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces."[1,2] It is the visual language of public written texts, including road signs, advertising billboards, place names, street names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on governmental buildings.[3,4] The study of linguistic landscapes is the realm of anthropologists, cultural theorists, and sociolinguistics, as it has the potential to shine a light on specific environments and cultures beyond linguistic studies.[5] Through the concentration of the written word and language, linguistic landscapes of all environments are developed through the structure of typography, the study and use of letterform and text design.

The linguistic landscape of Jeddah, KSA is a presentation of bilingual/multilingual typographic communication. Primarily Arabic and English in its nature, this integration of languages exhibits the city's globalized character and occurs in various genres of exterior and interior public spaces, such as consumer advertising billboards and posters, store signs, street signs, information signage, graffiti, and vehicle display.

[1] E. Shohamy and D. Gorter, editors, *Linguistic Landscape. Expanding the Scenery,* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1.
[2] L.A. Kasanga, "English in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *World Englishes* 31, no. 1 (2012): 48.
[3] R. Landry and R.Y. Blourihis, "Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 16, no. 1 (1997): 25.
[4] C. Stroud and S. Mpendukana, "Multilingual Signage: A Multimodal Approach to Discourses of Consumption in a South African Township," *Social Semiotics* 20, no. 5 (2010): 472.
[5] Kingsley Bolton, "World Englishes and Linguistic Landscapes," *World Englishes* 31, no. 1 (2012): 30-33.

In *World Englishes and Linguistic Landscapes*, Kingsley Bolton describes globalization as the "cultural, economic, and political force increasing 'Americanization'—pop culture, consumer culture, and lifestyles."[6] Bolton explains that through globalization, the world has become increasingly familiar in different locations and therefore "more connected, more consumerist, increasingly corporatized, and often, increasingly mundane."[7] According to Bolton, globalization has created an amplified use of English in public spaces worldwide.[8]

The use of English as an international language has developed as a consequence of post-colonialism, globalization, and the rise of Western influence throughout the East. This phenomenon has contributed to the increasing use of bilingual and multilingual typography on signage within various cities around the globe,[9] including Jeddah. Bilingual and multilingual signs have become a commonality of our world, and it is typical to view typographic signage where English letterforms are presented alongside another dominant local or national language text.[10] The influx of the English language within the Middle East, North Africa, and Gulf region occurred in the early 19th century with the formation of the oil industry throughout the area. Additional elements that contributed to this linguistic change included mass media in Arabic and English, high investment in Western education, and employment patterns, where Middle East North African (MENA) nationals worked in jobs doing business with Western corporations and

[6] Bolton, "Englishes," 30.
[7] Ibid., 30.
[8] Ibid., 32.
[9] A. Hojati, "A Study of Errors in Bilingual Road, Street and Shop Signs in Iran," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 4 (2013): 607.
[10] Ibid., 607.

institutions.[11] Bilingual and multilingual language speaking and texts, primarily merging Arabic and English, became common in the region as a result.

Code-mixing and Arabizi

Thomas Milo, in *Balancing Arabic and Latin Typography* states, "For most parts of the world, the reality is that multilingualism is not going away anytime soon".[12] Bilingual/multilingual typography and code-mixing has been utilized throughout history. Two examples include: Rosetta Stone, in which a single document is written in multiple language scripts, and the Plantin's polyglot bible, a single text written in multiple languages.[13]

According to Clive D. Holes, in *Language and Identity in the Arabian Gulf,* the development of the oil industry in the early 19th century brought an influx of the English language within the gulf region.[14] Other elements which contribute to this influence include mass media in Arabic and English, high investment in western education within the gulf and abroad, and employment patterns, where gulf nationals are working in white collar jobs doing business with western corporations and institutions. Holes writes, "on a trip down any shopping mall in Dubai, Bahrain, Kuwait, or Doha, one hears Gulf Arabs conversing in a bewildering mixture of Arabic, Arabic and English, or just English".[15]

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[11] C.D. Holes, "Language and Identity in the Arabian Gulf," *Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea* 1, no. 2 (2011): 129-145.
[12] T. Milo, "Balancing Arabic and Latin Typography," *Intellect Limited* 1, no. 2 (2011): 239-254.
[13] Ibid., 240.
[14] C.D. Holes, "Language and Identity in the Arabian Gulf," *Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea* 1, no. 2 (2011): 129-145.
[15] Ibid., 135

The code-switching language system, which has developed by merging both English and Arabic languages, is often used in Jeddah, KSA, and is called "Arabizi," from the Arabic words, "arabi" and "inglizi." Holes[16] claims that people who speak this way fit a specific socioeconomic profile – middle class, educated in English international schools, or University universities, often times in countries such as the US or UK. He views Arabizi as a type of "linguistic showing off," which is used not only within the Gulf region, but also throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa[17].

Code-switching linguistics such as Arabizi may be used verbally, as well as visually. According to Mohammad Ali Yaghan[18] in *Arabizi: A Contemporary Style of Arabic Slang*, Arabizi is not only the mixing of Arabic and English in oral dialogue, but also exists in written form. He defines Arabizi as "slang", created by Arabic speaking communities, out of necessity, when mobile and Internet devices did not contain Arabic text, requiring users to use Latin letterforms and numbers to spell out Arabic words.[19]

Integrating Arabic and Latin Typography

When utilizing bilingual typography and integrating Arabic and Latin letterforms for the purpose of visual communication signage, a designer faces the challenge of merging the two dissimilar character systems. Neither letter types are precisely proportionate, meaning that Latin letters written out at the same size will often appear massive compared to the Arabic.[20] Tension

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[16] Ibid., 130
[17] Ibid., 129-145.
[18] Yaghan, Mohammad Ali. ""Arabizi": A contemporary style of Arabic Slang." *Design Issues* 24, no. 2 (2008): 39-52.
[19] Ibid., 39-52
[20] T. Milo, "Balancing Arabic and Latin Typography," *Intellect Limited* 1, no. 2 (2011): 239-254.

often occurs between Arabic and Latin letters,[21] which are two different writing systems from two different cultural systems. Arabic is horizontally aligned and connected with a calligraphic flow. Latin letterforms are vertically sized, linear shapes, separated from one another allowing for space between each form, presenting a Western personality of individualism, production, and communication.[22]

When studying the multilingual linguistic landscape of Jeddah, signage that integrates Latin and Arabic writing systems is examined through the typographic presentation, asking the following questions: How is the text laid out? Is the text written symmetrical or asymmetrical? What is the dominant language being presented? What are similar elements taking place? Color? Size? Strength? Spacing? The answers to these questions will determine the purpose and understandability of the sign.[23]

Method

This visual communication project was documented via photographs taken from a smart phone/mobile device. Since Jeddah is not a walking city and women are not permitted to drive, most of the photos were shot from the back-passenger seat of a car or bus. Hundreds of images were collected over the span of several months, and they include billboards, shop signs, advertisement posters, street/road signs, graffiti, and informative signs.

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[21] S. Blankenship, "Cultural Considerations: Arabic Calligraphy and Latin Typography," *Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Design Issues* 19, no. 2 (2003): 60-63.
[22] Ibid., 61.
[23] M. Sebba, "Multilingualism in Written Discourse: An Approach to the Analysis of Multilingual Texts," *International Journal of Bilingualism* 17, no. 1 (2012): 97-118.

Cases

Figure 1 shows an image of two billboards located on Andulus Street near King Abdulaziz University. Both signage examples are advertising new technologies; the billboard to the left exhibits an advertisement for a "Media Pad," while the billboard to the right advertises the "Lenovo Vibex Smart Phone." Each billboard presents code mixing, an integration of two or more languages used in dialect and text, of English and Arabic typography. The presentation of the English linguistic letterforms, however, lacks symmetry, and most of the Latin characters only appear to represent and spell out the corporate identity of the product and company.

Brand identity, defines a product's purpose, character, and value as stated in the brand's mission and representation to a market. The logo is the visual image of a brand, representing the product's image and character in simplified context using color, typography, and symbol. The mark is presented in repetition on all product and marketing materials so that an audience learns to identitfy the brand. The logo for Media Pad is a word-mark, by which it is fully typographic, utilizing italicized Latin serif type spelled out in red and black. The Jarir Bookstore logo is combination, an integration of type and symbol, in which it has been designed incorporating both Arabic and English. The text is written in a tall, all capital, san serif typeface, and is perfectly aligned with the Arabic translation written above. When comparing the two typographic languages, the Arabic letters appear much shorter, smaller, and delicate in contrast to the larger, structured Latin letterforms.

Figure 1

The two billboards exhibit a mixing of red and black type throughout the surface of the advertisement. On the right billboard, the red Jarir Bookstore logo is located at the lower left-hand corner directly diagonal from the red "Possible" logo. "MediaPad" is written out, with "Media" written in black and "Pad" in red. In both cases, the corporate identity is written in Latin letterforms, while the advertisement message is presented as secondary in Arabic.

Within this mixing of Arabic and English, the hierarchy of text puts the product advertised in a place of importance. "MediaPad," written in English, is primary in type design, size, spacing, location, and color. The corporate identity of "Jarir Bookstore" and "Possible" are secondary, with slightly reduced size, location, and color. The advertisement message appears least important, written in small, black Arabic characters that are difficult to read at a glance.

The right billboard for the "Lenovo Vibex Smartphone" is also an example of code mixing, which utilizes bilingual typography of English and Arabic letterforms. The company's "Lenovo" logo, as well as the logo of the product, "Lenovo Vibex Smartphone," are written in English type. All letterforms are san serif styled in capitals. Directly diagonal in the upper left-hand area, "Lenovo Vibex Smartphone" is written in its Arabic translation. These Arabic letterforms are colored in red and imitate the English san serif typeface's simplicity, line width, and linear element. Below this is Arabic type written in black, completely aligned with the red letterforms above. The characters in this line are significantly smaller and are secondary to the red text.

Figure 2

The Danube grocery store (Figure 2) located on Medina Road, one of the most popular streets in Jeddah, has a storefront that utilizes both English and Arabic typography. The Danube

logo and corporate identity is written in a blue Blackletter typeface, a script invented by monastic scribes during the Middle Ages. The company's name is spelled out with even tracking, space between letterforms, as intended by the Blackletter design. On the same line, aligned right, is the Danube name spelled in Arabic script, appropriating the Blackletter typeface by imitating the sharp points, angular curves and distinct serifs. Similar to MediaPad, the Danube logo is a word-mark, in which the logo is designed by using a refined typeface to spell out the name of the brand, and the visual identity is appropriated in both English and Arabic letterforms.

Above the entrance of the store is a banner that reads the Danube slogan, "Your family partner." Unlike the Danube Blackletter logo, the phrase appears in English using a generic san serif bold typeface written in white. These letterforms are un-styled, with the first letter capitalized followed by lowercase. Opposite is the phrase, "Your family partner" written in Arabic. The typeface imitates the Latin san serif in color, line width, and curves. Both the English and Arabic iterations of the phrase are written in equal size and are legible to a viewer driving by.

The storefront signage for "United Rent a Car" (Figure 3) exhibits a haphazard mixture of English and Arabic typography throughout the surface, causing letterforms to be difficult to read for the viewer. There is an attempted three column design within the sign, however, the size of the text and the presentation of information, exhibits a lack of organization through, typographic hierarchy, layout/grid structure and spacing. The unprofessional presentation makes the sign not only difficult to read but also difficult to view.

Figure 3

The word, "United" is written in massive red san serif capital letters, while the words "Rent a Car" are spelled out significantly smaller, in blue, with the first letter of the words, *rent* and *car*, capitalized. Above the Latin letterforms is the Arabic translation, written from right to left. Here we see the letter design approach flipped, with the first Arabic word ("United") written in extensive black letterforms, followed by the second phrase ("Rent a Car") written in smaller red letterforms—the exact opposite of its English counterpart. Lexus and BMW logos are placed at the lower margin of the surface, on either side of the business telephone number. The placement of the logos, indicates the business need to inform the sign viewer of the car brands available for rent. The amount of content in which the sign aims to present, creates confusion for the viewer's eye, defeating the purpose of listed content and extensively sized letterforms.

The lack of margining around the edges of the United Rent-a-Car sign, creates further tension and confusion for the viewer. Initially, it appears that the sign is representing one car rental service, United, however, with a closer look, the viewer will see two signs for two rent-a-car businesses, flushed next to each other.

In modern countries, highway and road signs follow an international design developed by engineers, in which information is presented with clarity and ease. Typographic letterforms are designed for readability and properly sized and spaced for ideal viewing by a reader moving at a speed while driving within a car. During the 1950's Swiss designers, formulated the concept of international design when inventing a pictographic system, to signify universal objects such as: first aid, rest stop, beach, hotel.

Figure 4 shows a highway sign following the international design for bilingual road signage. Located at the top of the sign are pictograms: an arrow indicating the direction of the street, a pictograph signifying the direction of the beach or cornice, and two route icons representing two different route options. The exits/street names and distance are written in Arabic from right to left, aligned right. The typography is an even curvilinear scripting with steady line width and soft curves at the edges. The spacing between icons and language text is even, allowing for viewer flow and comprehension.

Underneath is the English translation, written from left to right. The Latin letterforms are spelled out using a basic san serif typeface, also with consistent line width and soft curves and edges. While Arabic and Latin letterform sizing remains equal, the Arabic letterforms appearing above the English words in an organized and systematic manner indicate the importance of the Arabic type and its dominance over the English letterforms.

Figure 4

The working hours' signage for the Danube grocery store (Figure 5) is located outside of its entrance at the Red Sea Mall location. In this informative poster, the viewer sees the Danube corporate identity/logo written in English in the upper left-hand corner, with the the company slogan, "You Family Partner," center-justified just below. Directly across from it in the upper right-hand corner is the corporate identity, written in Arabic, also followed by the company slogan aligned to the right. Again, the viewer is presented with a mirroring between English and Arabic letterforms. The Danube logo uses a Blackletter Latin typeface, and the Arabic logo letters are formed with the same signifying curves, angles, and edges.

Below the corporate identity, the next line is written in full Arabic, with the English translation ("Direct Entrance Working Hours") underneath written in Latin san serif letterforms and styled in all capitals. The English is not perfectly aligned with the Arabic, as it extends further on either side. Under this spacing are the working hours. The first listing is Saturday to Tuesday, and the second listing is Wednesday to Friday. Both time tables represent the information with Arabic type listed above the Latin type. Each table is centered and aligned with its translation.

Figure 5

Conclusion

The rise of globalization and the development of business and government relationships between the MENA region and the West has produced an environment within Jeddah, KSA where the mixing of the Arabic and English languages is a commonality. This bilingual system is viewed within the linguistic landscape and typographic signage within the urban community. At times, as in the case of marketing and advertising, English typography is displayed via corporate identity and logo trademark. Here, it is often followed by the Arabic translation, typically designed with typographic letterforms that imitate the English corporate identity.

When reviewing the signage within any linguistic landscape, the overall presentation of textual information indicates language hierarchy and dominance. As in the case of Jeddah, often times the Arabic language and letterforms take priority over English language and Latin text because of its national connection. This structure is presented in municipal signage, such as highway and street signs, where Arabic appears first, followed by the English translation. In other examples, there appears to be no hierarchy system, since the typography from both languages is intermixed in a chaotic display of information. This example is displayed in Figure 3, where the typographic organization follows no typographic hierarchy and grid structure. The overlapping of two "Rent-a-Car" business signage, creates additional tension for the reader through the cluttering of content. The lack of margins and white-space, obstructs information, and the viewing process is difficult towards the eye.

The paper examines a selection of images which provide examples of the variation in signage observed within a linguistic landscape. Research of this subject within Jeddah is limited, and additional observations will have to be made to further comprehend the integration of bilingual and multilingual typography within the linguistic landscape of this developing urban

environment. Since the project produced a number of images, the materials will be used to

revisit the subject in further studies.

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