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### LANGUAGE USE IN OUTLET SIGNBOARDS: A COMPARATIVE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE STUDY IN RAHIM YAR KHAN

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines the linguistic landscape of commercial signboards across the four tehsils of Rahim Yar Khan district, focusing on the semiotic strategies used to engage customers and communicate socio-cultural values. The study begins by exploring the primary languages displayed on these signboards, shedding light on local language preferences and the socio-cultural dynamics within the district. Acknowledging the critical role of linguistic landscapes in public spaces, this research illustrates how commercial signage becomes an essential medium of interaction, merging functional communication with cultural representation. The research addresses two main questions: Which languages are predominantly used on the signboards in Rahim Yar Khan district? Which semiotic elements—such as promotions, logos, slogans, and icons—are strategically employed to entice customers to purchase goods? In line with these questions, the study's objectives are to determine the dominant languages, examine the commercial signboards' semiotic features, and compare typographic and stylistic differences across the district. Employing the triadic model of semiotics as its central methodology, this study conducts an in-depth analysis of signboards collected from each tehsil, capturing the layers of meaning conveyed through linguistic and visual elements. The findings reveal that language choice and semiotic features on these signboards are not only functional but serve to shape consumer perception and reinforce socio-cultural identity. English frequently signals modernity and status, while Urdu emphasizes national identity, and local dialects connect with community roots. This research concludes that the linguistic and semiotic characteristics of Rahim Yar Khan's signage significantly mirror local identity and consumer engagement, contributing to broader insights within linguistic landscape studies on how language and symbolism intersect to shape public spaces in multicultural regions. The study suggests that language choice and the semiotic elements of signboards are not pragmatic but key in constructing consumer perception and perpetuating socio-cultural identity. For instance, the pervasiveness of the use of the English language

manifests modernity; the widespread use of the Urdu language depicts a sense of national cohesion and local dialects denote ties to the community. The study concludes that the linguistic and semiotic features of commercial signage in Rahim Yar Khan are profoundly connected with local identity and consumer involvement, thus making it very important research for grasping the association between language and culture in public spaces. The flowing study helps in the growing area of The linguistic landscape studies, as the insights could be applied to other multicultural regions with diverse linguistic landscapes.

**Keywords:** Linguistics Landscape (LL), Semiotics, Language, Sicio- Cultural, Identity, Multicultural

## Introduction

It may be defined as the written systems and languages pruned in any given area for signifying the languages and worth of the community. The definitions of language with regard to the linguistic landscape provided by Landry and Bourhis (1997) refer to the latter as all the written texts broadcast in public and business areas and all the signboards of a given region that participate in the construction of the region's language personality. Amongst them, signboards are a significant component for the linguistic identity of a place as they contain cultural, social and economic features of language in use. With reference to outlet signboards within the business environment, societies of people these signboards are a tool of business identification; on the same note they point out linguistic tendencies within that particular region. The present research purpose is to focus on an analysis of the outlet signboards in the Rahim Yar Khan district of Pakistan, a multilingual region and complete a comparative study on commercial linguistic landscapes.

This paper aims to view how different languages are utilized in the Rahim Yar Khan town that is culturally diverse and host a multilingual population. The sociolistic factors in the district include the multilingual nature of the language in this district and the ability of the local, national and global languages to interrelate. These include Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Seraiki and English and using signboards, it is evidence a language use/choice, language identity and language domination/power relationship (Gorter 2006). This research proposal will focus on investigating on sociolinguistic factors that underpin the selection of linguistic features on the outlet signboards located in various commercial zones of Rahim Yar Khan by a close analysis of the linguistic features on the outlet signboards. One of the major purposes of this study is to determine the domination of some languages in the commercial signages of Rahim Yar Khan. The study will address questions such as: To what extent does the frequency of English, Spanish, German, Italian and French in outlet signboards vary? It rises further questions: 'How specific language preferences may differ across various types of businesses and areas? Why is such linguistic variation seen in public signs and what social-cultural, and economical factors can explain this? Past studies have discussed that the understanding of the language represented in the supplied avenues may uncover something as power relations, language polity, or cultural profiles within the community (Backhaus, 2007; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). Thus, it is proposed that the

present investigation is to ground these general debates in the specific context of Rahim Yar Khan.

Knowledge about the language use in the signboards of the outlets is crucial for the study of other social phenomena, such as globalization, language policies and identities (Cenoz and Gorter 2008). Consequently, the results of this study will complement current knowledge of linguistic landscapes and Language use in commercial spaces for the localized society. Furthermore, this study will demonstrate how signage informs and construct language visibility and accessibility currently reserved for the majority languages in developed urban spaces. Finally the study intends to provide insights that might be useful to policy makers, owners of businesses, and language planners to provide an enriching understanding of the current linguistic behaviors occurring in the context of Rahim Yar Khan.

### **Significance of the Study**

First of all, the results of this study can be academically valuable for the development of sociolinguistics as a discipline as well as practical for understanding the specific linguistic situation in the area of interest, Rahim Yar Khan. Thus, through the analysis of the language use on outlet signboards across different business districts, the study explores the linguistic behaviour and tendencies of a complex society. The research outcomes will contribute towards understanding of; sociolinguistic factors that affect language visibility in public domains that would inform English language learners about the relationship between language, culture, and identity in the local contexts.

In the academic context, the investigation strengthens the field of linguistic landscapes by offering a localized sample derived from an ethnolinguistically diverse district in Pakistan. The study will demonstrate that language depicted in commercial signs is not arbitrary but rather a product of globalisation, language policy and the expressions of power in society. In this sense, Consistent with the arguments of Landry & Bourhis (1997), Language visibility the public context, plays an important role on the vitality of the language and on identity construction process in a certain community.

In the social aspect, the study is relevant to grasp the cultural and language distribution of Rahim Yar Khan. This will be useful in understanding how different languages are appreciated and thereby give a clue on how such languages as depicted in public forums be appreciated in order to help in language conservation. Thus, for the integration of multilingual societies, it is important that their languages are visible, and represented in school and public environment (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

In practical terms, the research has relevance to language planners, policymakers and business people who require edited texts. The results will be beneficial in order to create useful templates for language policies which can give attention to the linguistic rights of various populations. They can also prove rewarding when business owners master how language affects customers' responses and their own business's image. Cultivating the use of the area's languages makes a business more relatable to the people and helps in the conservation of as many languages as possible.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are drawn from the theoretical construct known as the linguistic landscape (LL), with special reference to the perspectives of the visual mode of language that is signboards placed in public domains. The study of linguistic landscape is originated with the work of Landry and Bourhis (1997) where the linguistic landscape is described as the presence and prominence of the languages on the public and commercial signs of a particular area. This framework assumes that the languages used in given areas concern the sociolinguistic realities of the given communities regarding language choice, language individualization, or language politics.

Another crucial hypothesis of this research is Ethnolinguistic Vitality that states that Language Visibility works to either enhance or, possibly, reduce the viability of ethnolinguistic communities. In Giles, Bourhis, And Taylor's (1977) view, language use in public domain contributes to positive result by enhancing the identity of a specific community and within the same pretext preserving the linguistic culture. In Rahim Yar Khan where Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Seraiki and English are used, such an analysis reveals how people of the region perceive and regard the distinct languages and how they are accorded and employed in business.

The study also draws on Spolsky and Cooper's (1991) theory of language choice in public signage, which identifies three main factors influencing language use: There are the language of the intended audience, the language of the sign creators, and the symbolism of the intended languages. Following is the theoretical framework: This theory is quite useful to comprehend the actual use of specific language by the business owners in Rahim Yar Khan and how they consciously or otherwise taking into consideration social, cultural and economical aspects. Another level which affects the linguistic landscape is globalization theory. In their research, Cenoz and Gorter(2008) pointed out that as one of the world's languages English has gained prominence and people from different countries use the English language in posting signages. This phenomenon creates discussions on the extent to which local languages and global languages are used in the commercial domain which this study intends to achieve.

In addition, the paper uses the concept of linguistic commodification as elaborated by Heller (2010). Linguistic commodification encompasses rendering language as economic valuable, especially in business-related manufacturing. Without this concept it is very hard to grasp how language works on the outlet signboards to gain customers and to portray a particular image of the brand.

Therefore, this study attempts to incorporate and adopt these theoretical approaches in order to develop a systematic and clear understanding of the linguistic situation of Rahim Yar Khan. It will examine how sociolinguistic patterns of identifying oneself, globalizing, and language as a commodity manifest themselves in designation of outlet signs. The following theoretical framework will help in the analysis of the linguistic visibility, agency along with symbolic signification of the commercial signs of the district.

## **Literature Review**

Linguistic landscapes (LL) are significant in a manner of organizing visuals and culture in the public spheres. Linguistic landscape has been defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997) as the visibility of language inside a geographical area within public /commercial rehabilitation signs. I have therefore postulated that these signs constitute visible expressions of sociolinguistic processes and relations in a region, such as power relations, language practices, and cultural affiliations. Since the extent to which languages are present in public space is a measure of their vitality, outlet signboards that are visible to the consumers provide an inside view of language policies, tendencies in consumption, and cultural preferences.

Several past investigations have underlined the language choices in commercial signboards. The signs at the outlet are not mere business information messages; they represent the social and ethnic culture of a community (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). As the second language, signboards in the multilingual context mirror the existing language of communication, thus capturing power relations and language bias. For example, Cenoz and Gorter (2006) explained that English can be observed in such commercials, as English literacy is the part of the world's culture, and English is used as a lingua franca to disseminate advertisements and other information.

There are similarities, which are; whether it is signboards of different outlets, the languages used are as follows: As noted by Reh (2004), in the urban areas the companies use bilingual or multilingual means of advertising due to different target consumer population. But such dominance or lack of it signifies either acculturation or a rebellion against the imperialism of a particular language or a language group. Piller (2001) observed that use of English on the signboards symbolizes the aspects of modernity, professionalism and global access. On the other hand, indigenous languages have meanings that can be associated with localization and maintenance of an indigenous image. Nevertheless, it is also equally important to understand semiotic aspects of signboards, pertaining to Linguistic Landscapes. Kress and van Leeuwen also asserted that such features as size, colouring and spatial arrangement of text also have meaning and can affect how the messages are received within various communities. For example, English words put together with a local language may have the same meaning as both signs belong to the global and local domain respectively. This semiotic perspective enables consideration of not only the words employed in the signboards but also the general layout and emblematical significance of the boards (Scollon and Scollon 2003).

Cross-sectional work shows who people use language and differences within various cultures present in linguistic landscapes. Backhaus (2007) also researched on Tokyo whereby he pointed out that the language most used on signs even though Japanese is the most common language in that country is English. Likewise, Huebner (2006) has also focused on another South-East Asian capital-city Bangkok and has pointed out that English was employed commonly in ways that appealed to the tourists and expatriates. By expanding these studies, it is possible to show that by choosing language on the signboards of outlets, people take into account not only the need

for communication that will occur in the near future, but also the overall system of cultural values.

Therefore, this study of language use in outlet signboards with the aid of a comparative linguistic landscape view provides useful information in matters to do with cultural identity, language policy and social relations. Signboards make for good research objects as they offer an insight into how language, both local and global works in public domains. Further studies should investigate the effects that result from usage of the digital media and the social role of language in business contexts.

### **Research Questions**

1. Which languages are predominantly used on the signboards in Rahim Yar Khan District?
2. Which semiotic elements are used on the commercial signboards of RYK district for enticing the customers to purchase goods?

### **Research Objectives**

1. In which language, mostly English, Urdu or both, is prominently written on the signboards in Rahim Yar Khan District?
2. To examine the commercial sign boards of RYK district semiotically (brand's semiotic elements such as promotions, logos, slogans and icons, etc).

### **Research Methodology**

The study investigates the linguistic landscape of signboards in four tehsils of Rahim Yar Khan using a mixed-methods approach. It focuses on analyzing language usage on outlet signs, including restaurants, supermarkets, clothing brands, and fashion shops. The research examines both textual and visual elements of shop signage, categorizing languages as English, Urdu, and mixed forms. Data was collected through photographs of signboards taken in 2024 and analyzed for color, fonts, styles, and borrowed words. Peirce's semiotic theory is applied to interpret the meaning and cultural significance of the signs.

### **Research Design**

By combining the collection of quantitative data with qualitative observations, the mixed-method design enables a robust analysis. This dual approach permits statistical analysis of observed patterns across the selected tehsils and allows for a comprehensive investigation of language use in signboards.

### **Sample Selection**

A random sampling technique was used to choose 60 shops, 15 shops (from a specific market) from each of the four tehsils of the district Rahim Yar Khan (Liaqatpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Khanpur, and Sadiqabad). This approach ensures that all forms of stores are covered in different categories such as supermarkets, retail clothing stores, eateries and regional handicraft stores.

### **Photographic Documentation**

- The primary data source used for this study is photographs that can help document texts, colors, fonts, logos, and the overall context of signboards. These visual features shed some light into semiotic aspects of the signs.

- Location Context: To investigate the connection of language and space, signs are differentiated according to location: business premises, government buildings, school, or private residence.
- Language(s) Used: This documents whether signs are monolingual or multilingual, analyzing language hierarchies and their positioning to understand social power dynamics.
- Semiotic Resources: Visual elements such as symbols, colors, and fonts are examined for their cultural and social significance.
- Intended Audience: The target audience (e.g., locals, tourists, or shoppers) is identified to understand how linguistic choices cater to specific social groups.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Permissions are obtained from relevant authorities for photography. Confidentiality is assured for any responses collected, with participants informed about the academic use of their data.

### **Triadic Semiotic Model Analysis Framework**

Based on Charles Sanders Peirce's model, this framework interprets signs through three components:

- Sign: The visible text, colors, or symbols.
- Object: The entity the sign refers to (e.g., a green background with a crescent symbolizing national pride).
- Interpretant: The audience's perception, shaped by cultural and linguistic familiarity.

### **Local Interpretation Survey**

A small-scale survey collects community perceptions about multilingual signage, exploring their interpretations and preferences. This helps understand the sociolinguistic impact of the signs.

### **Quantitative Method**

The quantitative approach involves collecting structured data on various signboard features through an observation checklist. This checklist ensures that specific details about language, themes, and cultural elements are systematically recorded for comparison.

### **Key Observations**

Language Usage: Identifies whether the signboards use Urdu, English, or a combination of both.

### **Themes**

Categorizes the type of business (e.g., food outlets, fashion stores, or service providers) to identify recurring themes. Cultural Elements. Any visual symbols, colors, or images that reflect regional cultural values and traditions. The collected data is organized into tables to facilitate comparative analysis across the four tehsils. This method follows Gorter's (2006) approach to structured observation in the study of multilingual signboards, emphasizing the importance of systematic data collection for understanding language patterns in public spaces.

### **Qualitative Method**

The qualitative analysis uses the framework grounding on Triadic Model of Semiotics developed by Charles Sanders Peirce in order to explicate the meanings associated with signboards. The triadic model includes three interconnected components:

**Representamen (Sign)**

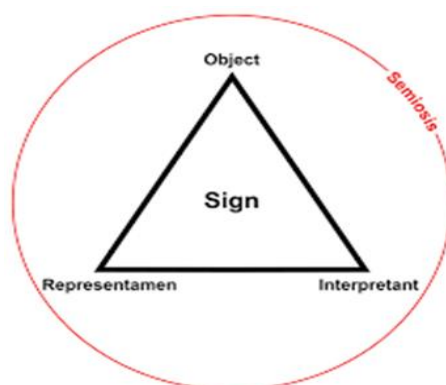
The aspects of the signboard that refer mainly to the colours, the style of the characters, the images and symbols incorporated in the signboard design.

**Object**

The real-world reference or concept that the signboard represents, such as products, services, or cultural references. For instance, a green background with a crescent moon may symbolize national identity in Pakistan.

**Interpretant**

The audience's perception and interpretation of the sign's meaning, influenced by the sociocultural context of each tehsil. This includes how residents perceive language choices and visual elements on the signs.



Peirce's Triadic Model of Semiotics (Bergman, 2016)

The approaches outlined in (Backhaus, 2007) and (Pavlenko, 2008), which emphasize the triadic model's usefulness in examining linguistic landscapes and comprehending the underlying cultural dynamics, lend support to its application.

The collected data is organized and managed and coded using computer-assisted qualitative data categorization software like NVivo or Atlas.ti for photographic and observational data, whereby each sign can easily be tagged with relevant descriptors, such as language and color scheme, symbols; the triadic model informs the interpretation of semiotic features, and the sociolinguistic patterns are analyzed by examining the choice and visibility of the language with its usage frequency.

Collected Data





Figure 4.1

As in figure 4.1, The semiotic analysis of the signboard for "زین کلاتھ ہاؤس" (Zain Cloth House) discloses the presence of three essential semiotic categories: Representamen, Object, and Interpretant. The text "زین کلاتھ ہاؤس" in Urdu, with a picture of dresses, works as the Representamen, signaling that the store deals in clothing. The Object, or referent, is Zain Cloth House, a local business offering fabric and apparel, while the image of dresses points directly to the store's product range. The Interpretant, or interpretation, suggests the store's identity as a clothing shop and clearly communicates its offerings to potential customers.

Table 1

| Semiotic Category           | Description  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Representamen (Sign)</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Text: "زین کلاتھ ہاؤس" (Zain Cloth House) — the name of the store in Urdu, indicating its business in clothing and fabric.</li> <li>2. Image: A photo of dresses, indicating the store's offerings of clothing.</li> </ol> |
| <b>Object (Referent)</b>    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Store: Refers to Zain Cloth House, a business selling clothing or fabric.</li> <li>2. Products: The image of dresses refers directly to the store's product offerings.</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Interpretant</b>         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Store identity: The text and image shows that it is a local shop.</li> <li>2.Product offering: The image shows that it is a garment shop.</li> </ol>  |

Zain Cloth House



**Figure 2**

In the fig no.4.2, the semiotic analysis of "الغازی گارمنٹس اینڈ جنرل سٹور" signifies how it clearly communicates its meaning via text and image. This is because the Representamen is the name of the store in Urdu, showing both directions; it sells garments and items in a general store. The Object is the clothes, which is the actual product category, and in the background, there may be other general merchandise available. The Interpretant conveys about the shop, an identity of a local shop selling mainly garments, successfully appealing through its name and visual representation.

**Table 2**

| Semiotic Category                    | Description   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Representamen (Sign)</b>          | 1.Text: "الغازی گارمنٹس اینڈ جنرل سٹور" (Al Ghazi Garments and General Store) — the store's name in Urdu, indicating that it sells garments and general store items. 2. Image: A collection of clothing displayed, showing the store's focus on garments. |
| <b>Object (Referent)</b>             | Store: Refers to Al Ghazi Garments, specializing in clothing and possibly other general store products. 2. Products: The image of clothing directly points to the store's offerings.  |
| <b>Interpretant (Interpretation)</b> | 1. Store Identity: The text and image suggest that Al Ghazi Garments is a local shop selling clothing. 2. Product Offering: The image of clothing and the store's name indicate a focus on garments and possibly other general goods.                     |

Al-Ghazi Garments and General Store



Figure 3

In the fig no.4.3, the semiotic elements of "The Grill Yard" effectively communicate its identity as a grill-focused eatery. The Representamen includes the name "The Grill Yard," a slogan, "WHERE TASTE TAKES FLAME," which emphasizes the flavor and quality of grilled dishes, and images of food like steaks and burgers. The Object refers to the restaurant and its specialty in grilled cuisine. The Interpretant reinforces its identity as a dining destination for grilled dishes, visually enticing customers with its focus on taste and presentation.

Table 3

| Semiotic Category                    | Description  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Representamen (Sign)</b>          | 1. Text: "The Grill Yard" — the store’s name, suggesting a focus on grilled food. 2. Slogan: "WHERE TASTE TAKES FLAME" — emphasizing the quality and flavor of grilled food. 3. Image: Photos of grilled food (steak, burgers), visually reinforcing the store's offering of grilled dishes. |
| <b>Object (Referent)</b>             | 1. Store: Refers to "The Grill Yard", a restaurant specializing in grilled food. 2. Products: The images of steak, burgers, and other grilled items directly refer to the restaurant's food offerings.   |
| <b>Interpretant (Interpretation)</b> | Store Identity: The text and images position "The Grill Yard" as a premium place for grilled food. 2. Product Offering: The images and slogan together reinforce the idea that the restaurant specializes in flavorful, high-quality grilled dishes  |

The Grill Yard



**Figure 4.4**

In the fig no.4.4 , "No Diet Today" effectively highlights the playfully indulgent branding of the restaurant. The Representamen includes the name of the restaurant, which portrays the nonchalance with regard to eating, and an image of a pizza directly representing the restaurant's primary offering. Object refers to the restaurant itself, as well as its concentration on indulgent foods, mainly pizza. The Interpretant says that the restaurant is trying to promote a relaxed and pleasurable dining experience in which customers would momentarily put aside their dietary restrictions to indulge in pizza.

Table 4

| Semiotic Category                    | Description   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Representamen (Sign)</b>          | 1. Text: "No Diet Today" — the name of the restaurant, conveying a playful and indulgent message, suggesting freedom from dietary restrictions.<br>2. Image: A picture of a pizza — directly representing the food offered by the restaurant.   |
| <b>Object (Referent)</b>             | Restaurant: Refers to the business called "No Diet Today," a place specializing in pizza or indulgent foods.<br>2. Products: The image of pizza refers directly to the food offerings, specifically pizza, that the restaurant sells.   |
| <b>Interpretant (Interpretation)</b> | 1. Restaurant Identity: The name "No Diet Today" communicates a casual, fun, and perhaps indulgent food culture, inviting customers to relax and enjoy without worry.<br>2. Product Offering: The image of the pizza clearly communicates that the restaurant specializes in pizzas, reinforcing the theme of indulgence. |

No Diet Today





Figure 4.5



Figure 4.6

In the figure 6, the semiotic analysis of "Dawat Restaurant" highlights its quality and authenticity. The Representamen is the name of the restaurant and the Urdu tagline "امدہ کھانوں کا مرکز", with images of Karahi and Seekh kabab, representing its traditional offerings. The Object is the restaurant itself, famous for serving superior Pakistani cuisine, and its highlighted dishes. The Interpretant conveys the restaurant's character as a high-quality, flavor-afore all traditional restaurant catering to customers who crave dining with authenticity.

Table 5

| Semiotic Category           | Description  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Representamen (Sign)</b> | 1. Text: "Dawat Restaurant" and "امدہ کھانوں کا مرکز" — the name and tagline in Urdu, where "Umda" (امدہ) means "excellent," suggesting high-quality food.<br>2. Image: Pictures of Karahi and Seekh kabab — traditional Pakistani dishes, directly representing the restaurant's offerings. |
| <b>Object (Referent)</b>    | Restaurant: Dawat Restaurant, known for serving superior, authentic food.  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <p>2. Food: The image of Karahi and Seekh kabab highlights the traditional, flavorful dishes served.</p>  |
| <p><b>Interpretant (Interpretation)</b></p> | <p>1. Restaurant Identity: The name and tagline position the restaurant as offering exceptional, authentic cuisine, with "Umda" emphasizing the quality of the food.</p> <p>2. Product Offering: The images of Karahi and Seekh kabab reinforce the message that the restaurant specializes in rich, flavorful, traditional dishes.</p> |

Pictorial Evidence of LL



Figure 4.7



Figure 4.8



Figure 4.9



Figure 4.10

In the figure 4.10, the semiotic analysis of "SAYA" focuses on the modern and stylish brand identity. Representamen includes the brand name "SAYA," which is simple, elegant, and memorable; it reflects sophistication and premium quality. Images of accompanying clothing items reflect the brand's high-quality, fashion-forward offerings. Object refers to SAYA as a clothing brand, famous for its modern designs, and its various garments that fit the taste of trend-conscious people. The Interpretant explains that the brand is a representation of modernity and style, targeted towards the client who wants elegance and the latest in vogue.

Table 6

| Semiotic Category           | Description   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Representamen (Sign)</b> | Text: "SAYA" — the brand name, simple and elegant, possibly suggesting sophistication and style. The name is short and easy to remember, conveying modernity and premium quality.<br>2. Image: Clothing items, typically shown in |



|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
|                          | marketing materials, reflecting the brand's fashion-forward, high-quality offerings  |
| <b>Object (Referent)</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brand: SAYA, a clothing brand known for stylish, contemporary fashion.</li> <li>2. Products: The clothing items represent the diverse range of garments offered, likely targeting fashionable, trend-conscious individuals.</li> </ol> |

SAYA



**Figure 12**

In the figure 4.12, The semiotic analysis of "میاخیل کلاتھ ہاؤس" focuses on the traditional and community-oriented brand identity. The Representamen includes the name in Urdu, "میاخیل کلاتھ ہاؤس" (Miankhel Cloth House), which reflects a familial or regional connection appealing to local customers. The phrase "کلاتھ ہاؤس" clearly indicates the business focus on textiles and garments. The Object refers to the store itself, specializing in clothing and fabric sales. The Interpretant: She renders the store as a strong, community-based business that speaks of tradition and trust since it's centered on good quality clothing and textiles.

Table No.7

| Semiotic Category           | Description  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Representamen (Sign)</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Text: "میاخیل کلاتھ ہاؤس" — The name "Miankhel Cloth House" in Urdu suggests a locally oriented, traditional business. The use of "میاخیل" (Miankhel) could reflect a familial or regional identity, which may appeal to the local community. "کلاتھ ہاؤس" (Cloth House) indicates a shop selling textiles or garments.</li> </ol> |



|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Object (Referent)</b>             | Clothing Store: Refers to a store specializing in fabrics and garments, emphasizing the sale of clothing items and textiles.   |
| <b>Interpretant (Interpretation)</b> | Store Identity: The name "میاخیل کلاتھ ہاؤس" evokes a sense of tradition, community, and reliability. It suggests a store rooted in a specific region or family, fostering trust. The term "کلاتھ ہاؤس" clearly communicates the business as a clothing or textile shop. |

Figure 1

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved both qualitative and quantitative statistical analysis.



The data gathered from the observation checklist was tabulated in order to get an overview of the distribution of the language, topics and culture portrayed in the selected areas of the four tehsils. The methodology used for the quantitative observation of language on signboards across the four tehsils of Rahim Yar Khan has been adapted from the approaches outlined by (Farooq ,2016), in his dissertation Linguistic Landscape of Commercial Signboards: In their article Multilingualism Across the Urban Landscape: A Analysis of Signages in Two Pakistani Cities and Ahmad (2019) in his Master’s thesis titled Semiotic Analysis of Signboards in Multilingual Cities: A Comparative Study of Karachi and Lahore. Each paper relied on a systematic approach of contextualising and measuring the languages used in the commercial signboards, with an emphasis on the social and linguistic signification of language presence. In this research, we applied a similar approach, focusing on three primary languages: Urdu and English. They collected data from fifteen shops of each of the four tehsils, Rahim Yar Khan, Sadiqabad, Khanpur, and Liaqatpur and noted down the language on signs. This analysis helps to establish patterns in the linguistic landscape and offers a clear perception of which languages are most prominent in commercial signs in Rahim Yar Khan’s diversified tehsils. The following table gives an account of language distribution

| Tehsil                | Total Shops Sampled | Urdu Used   | English Used | Punjabi Used | Other Languages | Predominant Language |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| <b>Rahim Yar Khan</b> | 15                  | 10 (66.67%) | 3 (20%)      | 2 (13.33%)   | 0 (0%)          | Urdu                 |
| <b>Sadiqabad</b>      | 15                  | 9 (60%)     | 4 (26.67%)   | 2 (13.33%)   | 0 (0%)          | Urdu                 |
| <b>Khanpur</b>        | 15                  | 11 (73.33%) | 2 (13.33%)   | 2 (13.33%)   | 0 (0%)          | Urdu                 |
| <b>Liaquatpur</b>     | 15                  | 8 (53.33%)  | 6 (40%)      | 1 (6.67%)    | 0 (0%)          | Urdu                 |

in the selected signboards where the percentage usage of the respective language is also indicated at Tehsil level.

Quantitative Observation of Language Use in Signboards across Four Tehsils of Rahim Yar Khan

The qualitative observation focuses on the **semiotic elements** found in signboards of businesses in Rahim Yar Khan. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols in communication, and for this research, we used **Charles Sanders Peirce's Triadic Model of Semiotics**. This model is divided into three key components;

Signifier

The physical element of the sign, such as the images, words, or symbols.

Signified

The meaning or concept that the signifier represents, based on context and cultural understanding.

Interpretant

The interpretation or understanding of the sign by the audience.

By analyzing the linguistic (text), iconic (images), and indexical (contextual clues) components of the signboards, we aimed to understand how businesses communicate their message to the public. The approach is inspired by methodologies from earlier studies on semiotic analysis, including works by: (**Kress & van Leeuwen ,2006**) in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* - They discuss how various visual elements like color, image, and typography contribute to meaning.

**Shohamy (2006)** in *Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery* - This study uses semiotic analysis to explore how public signs reflect societal norms and power dynamics in urban spaces.

Analysis of Categories of Shops Across Four Tehsils of Rahim Yar Khan

This chapter provides an in-depth investigation of the linguistic landscape and other features of 60 shops in four tehsils of Rahim Yar Khan: Rahim Yar Khan (RYK), Khanpur, Sadiqabad, and Liaquatpur. Using a mixed-methods research design, I systematically combined some quantitative and qualitative methods for an all-around assessment of shop signboards, the language they use, cultural symbols they embody, and their semiotic meaning.

**Quantitative Analysis**

### **Data Collection and Observations**

For the quantitative part of the research, data were gathered from 15 shops in each tehsil that sums up to 60 shops. The main categories analyzed in every tehsil were:

#### **Shop Types**

Grocery stores, clothing outlets, restaurants, electronic shops, local crafts, and service-based shops (tailors, barbers, etc.).

#### **Language Use**

Signboards were analyzed for the use of Urdu, English, Punjabi, or a combination of these languages.

#### **Cultural Symbols**

Images, logos, and symbols representing local traditions, religion, and culture.

#### **Visual Elements**

Colors, fonts, and themes of the signboards.

I recorded observations in structured tables that summarized the frequency of each feature within the signboards. Data analysis entailed categorizing and comparing the linguistic landscape across the four tehsils. A checklist method was used to count the occurrences of each language, cultural symbol, and theme across the shops.

### **Rahim Yar Khan (RYK) Tehsil**

#### **Shop Types**

Most shops in RYK were clothing outlets, with grocery stores and service-based shops coming second at 20 percent each. The rest were restaurants and electronic shops.

#### **Language Use**

Urdu was the prevalent language: it dominated signboards with 70%, shop signs at 40 percent were customarily placed in conjunction with English and the rest 10 percent featured only in Punjabi.

#### **Cultural Symbols**

Religious symbols such as crescents and local craft images dominated half the signboards.

#### **Visual Features**

Vibrant colors such as red and green made the signboards seem culturally vibrant. The general fonts used were bold, modern-style fonts (sans-serif, which indicated being clear and seeing).

### **Khanpur Tehsil**

#### **Shop Types**

In Khanpur, grocery stores, and craft shops were locally more prominent at 35% and 25%, respectively, compared to clothing and service-based shops.

#### **Language Use**

Urdu was seen to dominate 80% of signboards, followed by English (30% of signs were in English, frequently in combination with Urdu) and a tiny 5% that used Punjabi.

#### **Cultural Symbols**

Shops mainly displayed motifs of agriculture, or local festivals, which reflected the agrarian economy that prevailed in Khanpur.

#### **Visual Elements**

The darker colors, blue and brown, dominated, making the signboards seem to have a more traditional aspect. The fonts were either serif or handwritten, conveying the sense of tradition and authenticity.

Sadiqabad Tehsil

### **Shop Types**

Service-based shops 40% in Sadiqabad, and restaurants were also 20%. The next were grocery and clothes shops.

### **Language Use**

On 75% of the signboards, the use of Urdu was seen. Here English usage was much more common. The usage was seen on 45% of the shops. Punjabi usage was seen on 15% of the signboards.

### **Cultural Icons**

Religious images and native iconography were utilized-an element that featured in 65% of the stores.

### **Visual Elements**

Vibrant orange and purple color was commonly seen. Fonts were often modern and playful, signalling the town's economy was full of energy.

### **Liaqatpur Tehsil**

*Shop Types*

Liaqatpur was characterized by a higher percentage of crafts outlets(40%)and grocery stores (30%)Restaurants and service-based shops had a minimal presence.

*Language Use*

Urdu was used by 85% of shops, with English present in 35%.Punjabiwas rare, appearing on only 5% of the signboards.

*Cultural Symbols*

The representation of local and rural motifs was dominant, with 75% of signboards featuring symbols of rural life.

*Visual Elements*

Colors such as beige and green were common, reflecting the town's rural and agricultural background. Fonts were serif and traditional, signifying a respect for local heritage.

### **Qualitative Analysis (Using the Triadic Model of Semiotics)**

For the qualitative analysis, I applied the **triadic model of semiotics** proposed by **Charles Peirce**, which consists of three core components:

*Representamen*

The form the sign takes (e.g., text, font, color).

*Object*

The actual concept or item the sign refers to.

*Interpretant*

The meaning derived from the sign by viewers.

The use of this model allowed for a deeper exploration of how visual and linguistic elements on signboards communicate socio-cultural identities and economic priorities across the four tehsils.

### **Rahim Yar Khan (RYK) Tehsil**

#### *Representamen*

The use of bold, bright-colored fonts in Urdu and English highlights the emphasis on clarity and appeal in this commercial hub. Red and green were used to catch attention and symbolize prosperity.

#### *Object*

The predominance of clothing outlets and services signified RYK's role as a commercial center catering to both local and regional customers.

#### *Interpretant*

The linguistic landscape of RYK reflects a diverse and competitive market, where the combination of Urdu and English is used to cater to a bilingual audience, signaling modernity alongside tradition.

### **Khanpur Tehsil**

#### *Representamen*

The prevalence of agricultural and traditional motifs on signboards and the use of darker, earthy colors suggests a closer connection to rural and agrarian lifestyles.

#### *Object*

The objects represented—local crafts and grocery stores—indicate a focus on agriculture and daily necessities, with a clear emphasis on local economic activities.

#### *Interpretant*

The linguistic and visual elements here indicate a community strongly tied to its roots, where the use of Urdu dominates to connect with local customers. English is used less frequently, reflecting a more localized audience.

### **Sadiqabad Tehsil**

#### *Representamen*

The color palette of both texts is bright and modern, and different fonts – playful and active depict an original, dynamic economy. The high frequency of the language used is attributed to commercial expansion and overall development in the tehsil.

#### *Object*

Such objects in service based shops and restaurants point at the growing service industry, to support a growing population.

#### *Interpretant*

It appears that usage of English on signboards here indicates readiness of the community to embrace changes, as much as a number of businesses seem to be trying to get a wider and probably an educated customer base.

### **Liaqatpur Tehsil**

#### *Representamen*

. Serif fonts and traditional designs are applied in order to show the respect for the local and rural origins. Green and beige colors are clearly evidenced as the representative of agriculture and the need for simplicity.

#### *Object*

Self-employed and local trades rather than modern services are suggested by the crafts and grocery outlets.

## Interpretant

From the semiotic perspective the use of language in the context of Liaquatpur makes quite clear noting that the linguistic signs are highly connected with the rural setting; Urdu is coming across most frequently with nearly no mentions of English which may point to the more localized and traditional consumers

## **Findings and Suggestions**

### **Findings of the Research Question 1**

The study of the linguistic aspects of the Rahim Yar Khan district means that Urdu language is primary written in the signs of the tehsils' commercial objects. This conclusion is derived from an analysis of information gathered from 15 shops in each of the tehsils: Rahim Yar Khan, Sadiqabad, Khanpur and Liaquatpur. In all these tehsils, Urdu is used more than even English and bilingual with frequencies of 66.67%, 60%, 73.33% and 53.33% respectively. This ever continuing tendency is quite indicative of the fact that among all the languages used on the public signs of these commercial enterprises, it is Urdu which dominates. More emphasis on Urdu language is because it had declared as the national language of Pakistan which serves as second tier language for communication the people of different linguistic background.. The presence of the Urdu language on signboards points not only to language preference among the local population, but also to its ability to shape the cultural identity and social identity of a region, in this case, the Rahim Yar Khan district. This is quite consistent with the views of (Landry and Bourhis, 1997) work stating that language used in the public sphere reflects the sociocultural realities of any given region, often revealing dominating cultural forces at work. Furthermore, the study by (Ben-Rafael, 2009) supports this claim: commercial signage serves as branding mechanisms and identity formation, and in this regard, language remains a key tool for capturing consumers. The high levels of Urdu in the commercial landscape of Rahim Yar Khan precisely demonstrate its crucial role in the economic, social, and cultural life of the district. From the results of the study, it is attested that Urdu is the primary mode of communication within the commercial sphere and also outlines its significance in the cultural sphere.

### **Findings of the Research Question 2**

This research used Peirce's Triadic Model of Semiosis to analyze semiotic elements of signboards found on 15 shops of four tehsils of Rahim Yar Khan District, namely, Rahim Yar Khan, Sadiqabad, Khanpur, and Liaquatpur. This model includes three salient aspects: Representamen or the sign itself, the Object which the sign represents, and the Interpretant which is obtained from the sign in its meaning. The Representamen comprises the written; for instance, the business name, besides graphical like images and signs. These signs are people-oriented passersby attention-seeking but giving crucial information to prospective clients about the company. The second part of the analysis is the establishment of the Object. An object is a concrete and tangible entity that the sign points towards. It can refer to the product, service, or place. The Object is essentially related to the Representamen; more precisely, words and images on the sign have a direct relation to the products being offered by the business. This will

include products, services, or the business as an entirety, where the Object is explicitly communicated through the sign. Lastly, we considered the Interpretant; this is the meaning or interpretation that the observer derives from reflection on the sign. The Interpretant stems out from how the words used and illustrations combined could eventually give out an impression towards the firm and its offerings. A combination impacts client expectations and decisions to transact with that business. This was how Peirce's Triadic Model came in handy in analyzing the signboards methodically to further clarify the interplay of both the textual and visual elements in the conveyance of messages. In fact, the signboard has made use of all these semiotic elements to present informational and symbolic content. The text and images work together to communicate meaning. Images in advertisement signages are a great semiotics tool that amplify the message of products delivered by a business. Commercial apparel stores use images of apparels, coffee shops use pictures of beverages, and restaurants display pictorial representations of food to clearly communicate what they are selling. The interplay of these visual elements alongside textual information significantly influences consumers' perceptions, captures their interest, and establishes anticipations regarding the products and services offered by the enterprise.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this linguistic landscape study of signboards in the four tehsils of Rahim Yar Khan district offers a meaningful insight from the perspective of semiotic elements into the cultural and linguistic diversity of the region. Using the triadic model of semiotics, this analysis brings into focus a complex relationship of signifiers with their cultural, social, and linguistic connotations within public spaces. What such a comparative study carried out in the four aforementioned tehsils with varying demography and linguistic predispositions unveils is that language used on signboards emerges as a utilitarian sign but simultaneously declares one's region and linguistic status. The linguistic characteristic features in these domains include the use of a variety of languages, ranging from Urdu, English to regional dialects or South Asian languages to meet the linguistic needs of different clientele and at the same time, reproduce social distinctions. For instance, English is associated with elitism and the multiple modernities; Urdu stands for the national languages; the local varieties are a sign of community languages and traditions. Colour, typeface and placement also subsumes semiotically onto these meanings to amplify some other social message and value. Thus, this research helps underpin the notion that in the field of linguistic landscape, language and semiotic choices express values and identities important to the community. It does it here as it compares signboards on tehsil. Future studies can also explore how these landscapes are changing over time, as linguistic practices are changing and adapting to new influences. This makes it possible to broaden the understanding of semiotic and linguistic interplay in multicultural settings.

### **Suggestions**

Several directions emerge from this study for future research and practical applications in the arena of linguistic landscapes. Expanding from Rahim Yar Khan to include other districts or provinces could provide a rich comparative understanding of linguistic and

cultural dynamics across Pakistan. Such research could shed light on regional patterns, hierarchies of languages, and socio-economic factors influencing language use on signboards at the national level. The rapidly changing nature of linguistic landscapes, especially with globalization and the full-scale promotion of digitalization, would be best served by longitudinal studies. The impact of urbanization, migration, and changes in consumer preferences can be seen in time-patterned changes over the usage of language and semiotics in public spaces.

### **Promote Multilingual Signage**

Authorities and businesses in Rahim Yar Khan should encourage the use of multiple languages on signboards to cater to the diverse linguistic needs of the population while preserving regional languages.

### **Enhance Cultural Representation**

Semiotic elements such as icons, slogans, and imagery on signboards should reflect the cultural identity of each tehsil, fostering a sense of local pride and inclusivity. Support Local Businesses: Training workshops on effective use of semiotics and local language preferences should be provided to small and medium-sized enterprises to improve their marketing strategies.

### **Conduct Community Engagement**

Surveys or focus groups should be conducted with residents and business owners to understand their preferences and perspectives regarding language and semiotic elements on signboards.

### **Encourage Policy Development**

Local governments should draft policies to promote linguistic inclusivity and ensure the representation of regional languages alongside national and global languages in public and commercial signage.

### **Integrate Technology in Analysis**

Future studies should utilize automated tools for analyzing the linguistic and semiotic elements across different tehsils, allowing for more detailed and efficient research. In addition, advanced machinery, such as tools related to automated image recognition, could make data collection and analysis easier and contribute to the analysis of larger datasets with increased accuracy. Future research could also tap into the role of audience perception in producing the linguistic landscape. Although this study adopted a linguistic and semiotic perspective on signboards, the ways in which different age groups, genders, ethnicities, and so on interpret and react to these signs might provide an added dimension to the results. Surveys or interviews with local residents and business owners, as well as consumers, could bring out the cultural, economic, and affective values associated with the selection of language on signboards.

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