Linguistic Landscape in Najran: A Sociolinguistic Approach

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Abstract—**This study attempts to investigate the linguistic landscape (LL) of the city of Najran, a city located in the southern region of Saudi Arabia. To achieve this objective, a sample of more than 450 signs is examined. The study focuses on the shop signs which are usually known as bottom-up signs (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Ben-Rafael, 2009). The analysis reveals that Najran's LL is more multilingual than expected. In addition to Arabic and English, it displays some foreign expatriate languages such as Malayalam, Bengali, Tamil, and Hindi. Arabic appears to be the most dominant language followed by English, with the former having both informational and symbolic (cultural) roles while the latter has a commercial and advertising function through which shop owners want to appear more fashionable and more prestigious. The use of the expatriate languages of the Indian subcontinent serves mainly as a psychological tendency to compensate for the feeling of being homesick, and partially performs an informational function directed to the expatriate group.**

Index Terms—**linguistic landscape, shop signs, Najran, expatriates, Indian subcontinent**

I. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic landscape (hereinafter LL) is considered a recent field of research in sociolinguistics. This term was first coined by Landry and Bourhis (1997). According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), the term LL refers to language or languages that are displayed in the public space of a given territory or region; this includes public road signs, commercials shop signs, streets names, advertising billboards, and public signs on government buildings. The definition implies that the study of LL covers many issues such as multilingualism, language policy, language minorities, cultural geography, and social psychology. In the last two decades, there have been many LL studies that were devoted to examining the different types of signs stated above from various perspectives like sign classification, language diversity, signage functions, social and cultural tendencies, and so on (e.g. Backhaus, 2005; Ben-Rafael, 2009; Blackwood, 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Nikolaou, 2017). In the present study, the focus is on the commercial shop signs in the city of Najran, Saudi Arabia. They are usually called bottom-up (non-official or private) signs in the literature as opposed to top-down (official or public) signs (Ben-Rafael, 2009).

The city of Najran is located in the south of Saudi Arabia. It is the capital of Najran Province, 930 km southwest of Riyadh. The region of Najran has long borders with the neighboring country, Yemen. It is an ancient city with an old agricultural history. Najran is one of the fastest-developing cities in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia with a population of 505,652 (the province) and 344379 (the city) (General Authority for Statistics, 2017). This census includes both Saudis and non-Saudis.

Najran's society is very conservative in comparison with other larger cities like Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam which are much more open and more modernized. Like other cities of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf cities, Najran is accommodated by a large number of foreigners, the majority of whom are expatriates from the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. This creates a particular type of linguistic diversity in this region. The settled expatriates are in majority male due to the transient character of foreign workers. Expatriate communities are of lower economic status. Although (Saudi spoken) Arabic is the official language, the expatriates alternatively use a jargon of Arabic or what is called Saudi pidginized Arabic (Al-Zubeiry, 2015) as a lingua franca to communicate with native inhabitants and other non-Saudi Arab expatriates. It is worth mentioning that this jargon is mainly spoken and has never been attested on the public signage of Najran (except for one sign as a secondary text which says: *?irḥibu:* 'welcome'). The presence of traditional Indian and Asian food, spices, and other commodities usually attracts crowds of expatriates who usually reside in such areas or come for shopping in the evenings and weekends. As for the relationship between locals (native Saudis) and expatriates, no overt racial tendencies are noticed. In other Gulf countries, such racist attitudes of the local residents against migrants are obvious due to the influence of the increasing global racial trends (Karolak, 2020). The speech community in the city of Najran is monolingual in Arabic. However, the outdoor linguistic landscape appears to be more multilingual than it seems to be. Many shop signs and road signs are usually bilingual in Arabic and English. In addition, many shop signs show some other additional languages like Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil, and Bengali which are specifically spoken in the Indian subcontinent. These languages are used among the foreign expatriates who live in Najran and run the majority of stores in the city.

According to Cenoz and Gorter (2006), multilingualism is a common phenomenon, which can be studied from different perspectives including the use of languages in the sociolinguistic context. One of the possibilities is to analyze

languages in context by focusing on the written information that is available on language signs in a specific area. The present study addresses the issue of written multilingualism in the different language signs that are used in the streets and neighborhoods of Najran. In other words, the purpose is to show the extent to which English and other expatriate languages compete with Arabic and how much space they occupy in Najran's LL. Another topic that pertains to LL is the order of code preference in the process of sign writing (see Backhaus, 2005; Shang & Zhao, 2017). The functions of Najran's LL are also investigated. It is expected that the use of English on shop signs, for example, is not meant for getting information but rather to show that the shop owners are more modern and more fashionable. Another expected function is that most shop signs are used for advertising the owners' commercial commodities and services.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The LL of the city of Najran has not been undertaken yet. The present study comes to address certain questions concerning the LL of this city. As mentioned above, the society in Najran is very conservative in comparison with other larger cities like Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam which are more open and more modernized. Therefore, in such a less divergent and more conservative city to the process of globalization and modernization, the proper aim of this article is to figure out how LL looks like in Najran and what are its main characteristics. In other words and in light of LL approaches, the present study addresses the following research questions: 1) How multilingual is Najran's LL?, 2) In terms of code preference, which language is given priority on bilingual and multilingual signs?, and 3) What are the naming styles of both monolingual and bilingual signs?

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over more than two decades, studies on LL have increased tremendously since the term LL was first introduced by Landry and Bourhis (1997). Some of them have been devoted to establishing and theorizing the issue of LL (Ben-Ravael, 2009; Blackwood, 2015; Fabiszak et al., 2021; Gorter, 2006), and others have been some kind of case studies on LL in different speech communities all over the world (Bruyèl-Olmedoa & Juan-Garau, 2015; Karolak, 2020; Shang & Zhao, 2017; Troyer, 2012).

Being a young field of research, LL has been investigated from different perspectives. Issues like multilingualism, code preference, signage categorization, signage layering, LL functions, language dominance, language minorities, and LL of religious places have been investigated worldwide. At the very beginning, research on LL has been restricted to the investigation of outdoor signage on streets and shopfronts. Recently, many LL studies have been extended their scope to include the analysis of LL in educational spaces like schools, universities, etc. (Krompàk et al., 2022; Suuriniemi & Satokangas, 2021; Wang, 2015; Wu et al., 2021), religious and sacred places (Alsaif & Starsk, 2019; Coluzzi & Kitade, 2015), and even the LL of the Internet (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009; Troyer, 2012).

In the context of Arab countries, LL has been touched upon by some studies. These include Al-Athwary (2017), Alomoush (2019), Buckingham and Al-Athwary (2016), Hopkyns and Hoven (2021), Karolak (2020), and Tuzlukova and Mehta (2020), which were conducted in Yemen, Jordan, Oman and Yemen, Oman, and United Arab Emirates, respectively. As for LL in Saudi Arabia, two studies are carried out, namely Alsaif and Starsk (2019, 2021). Both of them investigate the LL of the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

Alsaif and Starks (2019) examine the linguistic signs displayed in the Grand Mosque in Mecca and attempt to classify them into certain domains: the public sphere, workplace, local governance, holiness, and education. They demonstrate how each domain has its LL and its preferred medium. They conclude that the medium of Arabic is omnipresent across all domains. They also argue that Arabic inscriptions in the mosque have only an aesthetic function. This conclusion, however, contradicts the informative and communicative nature of Arabic writings on the various linguistic signs posted all over the mosque. After all, the findings of the study direct our attention to the importance of the Grand Mosque of Mecca as a separate and unique LL. The other study, i.e. Alsaif and Starks (2021), is also devoted to the issue of LL of the Grand Mosque. It is an extension of their previous study. In this study, they differentiate between two other domains: the sacred domain and the banal domain. This would mean that the focus here is on the semiotic function of the Grand Mosque's LL in light of Fishmanian insights of domains as clusters of people, aural behaviors, activities, and artifacts. It illustrates how the sacred and the banal are interrelated in terms of languages, participants, and activities in the public space of this mosque.

Thus, to the best of my knowledge, no studies have been done on the LL of Najran city. This study, therefore, comes to fill this gap in the sociolinguistic research of LL.

IV. METHODS

The unit of analysis in LL research is the linguistic sign found in the public space of a given territory. Therefore, the practice in LL studies is to collect signs from a given territory (usually streets and shop fronts) by taking pictures via a digital camera. The main target place in the present study is the city of Najran, more specifically King Abdulaziz Road. It is the longest and the most crowded street in the city. It extends over more than 15 kilometers from the western to the eastern part of the city. In addition, data are collected from two neighborhoods which are located near King Abdulaziz Road. These two areas are mainly resided by foreign expatriates, especially from the Indian subcontinent and Southeast

Asia. Almost 90% of the display boards are involved in the data collection process. As a result, more than 450 linguistic signs have been collected. Only the outdoor signs which are found in the public space are documented rather than the indoor ones. Similarly, it is intended to include only those signs which are relatively more permanent (like shop signs, street signs, etc.) rather than the temporary ones (like stickers, advertisements, billboards, etc.). It is believed that the permanent signs represent a given LL more authentically and stably and reflect the practices of a given speech community in a better way.

Following Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) and Ben-Rafael (2009), the collected signs are classified into top-down (official/ public) signs and bottom-up (non-official/ private) signs. Official or top-down linguistic signs are not included in the analysis. Apart from being small in number, top-down signs don't usually show that kind of linguistic diversity as bottom-up language signs do because they (the official signs) are designed according to certain language policies applied by the local authorities in terms of language choice (number and order of languages to be displayed). For the bottom-up signs, the language policy is usually open and the shop owners are free in the process of shop name selection and the number of languages displayed as well.

Similarly, Nikolaou's (2017) approach to distinguishing between primary texts and secondary texts of the sign is adopted. Only display boards having primary texts (the main shop signs) are included in the study sample while the secondary ones are excluded (e.g. opening timings, stickers, etc.). To determine which language (script) is more dominant on the linguistic sign, Scollon and Scollon's (2003) approach to code preference is applied. According to this approach, preference is related to the order of script and size of the font: the 'preferred' language is that one which comes on the top of the sign and occupies the most or the largest space of the sign.

The collected data are analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively by using excel sheets in such a way that helps answer the research questions addressed above. In presenting the content of signs which are used as illustrative examples, the practice is as follows: information given in Arabic script is transliterated using Latin characters and put in italics. The content in English is, of course, presented as it is. For other languages like Malayalam, Hindi, Bengali, etc., the original script of each language is used with the help of Google Translate and by consulting native speakers of these languages.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The whole corpus is statistically and qualitatively analyzed by using computer excel sheets. As stated above, the majority of the data are collected from King Abdulaziz Road, and from two areas that are included in the study sample, Al-Khalidiya, and Shakwan. These neighborhoods are mainly populated by foreign expatriates, especially those who come from the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). The total number of language signs that are collected from the public space of the city of Najran is 510 signs. The number of linguistic signs used in the analysis is 474. All of them are bottom-up (non-official) signs, and more specifically shop signs. The top-down or official signs and the temporary signs like advertisements and stickers which constitute 36 signs in number have been excluded because they are beyond the scope of the current study as explained in the methodology section above.

The 474 private shop signs are then categorized in terms of the number of languages that are used in the LL of Najran city. Moreover, the content of these display boards is further examined in order to identify the linguistic and sociolinguistic features reflected by the public space of this city. The primary analysis shows that the collected sample is featured by several linguistic phenomena such as specific naming styles, code preference, transliteration as well as the informative and symbolic functions of such public space items which are looked at in the sections below.

The analysis of Najran's LL has revealed that it is more multilingual than we expected (see Tables 1 and 2 below and Figures 1- 12 in the Appendix). In addition to Arabic, which is the official language of the country and the language spoken by Saudi nationals, languages like English, Malayalam, Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, and French are encountered with varying degrees of occurrence. As Table 1 shows, Arabic appears to be the most dominant language in Najran's LL as it exists in 96% of the whole corpus, either alone or together with other foreign languages. English comes in the second position where it is displayed on more than half of the collected data (about 53%). More surprisingly, English is attested as the sole language in 12 signs. All these suggest that English is occupying a good status in a conservative society like that of the Najran region, and is competing with the Arabic language, the native language of the locals.

TABLE 1
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF LANGUAGE USE IN NAJRAN'S LL

LL languages	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
Arabic	457	96.41%
	- 227 (bilingual with English)	
	- 220 (Arabic only)	
	-10 (multilingual)	
English	251	52.95%
	- 227 (bilingual with Arabic)	
	- 12 English only	
	- 2 (with Malayalam)	
	- 10 (multilingual)	
Malayalam	8	1.69%
Bengali	4	0.84%
Hindi	1	0.21%
Tamil	1	0.21%
French	1	0.21%

Regional languages of the Indian subcontinent have a marginal position in the LL of Najran. The salient presence of Malayalam, however, is striking; it is featured on 8 shop signs in Al-khalidiyah neighborhood. Moreover, and to use Nikolaou's (2017) terms, all these languages are used as primary texts of the display boards rather than secondary texts.

Almost all shop signs displaying Asian languages are encountered in Al-Khalidiyah area. This can be explained by the fact that Al-Khalidiya is highly populated by expatriates from the Indian subcontinent; Al-Khalidiyah is relatively old and the house rents are relatively cheap, so it attracts a lot of these low-income workers to live in. Surprisingly enough, although the majority of expatriates from the Indian subcontinent are Muslims, Urdu (script) is not attested in the collected data.

TABLE 2
THE MULTILINGUAL SCENE IN THE LL OF NAJRAN CITY

LL languages	Number of signs	Percentage
Multilingual= 241		
Arabic-English	227	47.89%
Malayalam-English	2	0.42%
Arabic- French	1	0.21%
Arabic- Bengali	1	0.21%
trilingual	8	1.70%
quadrilingual	2	0.42%
Monolingual= 233		
in Arabic	220	46.41%
in English	12	2.53%
in Bengali	1	0.21%
Total	474	100%

A. Styles of Shop Naming

One of the interesting findings of this study is the way shop owners follow in naming their shops and business enterprises. The practice is that they more often use compound names (two-word structures). A large number of signs are characterized by this style of naming: 112 in Arabic-only signs and 69 in multilingual signs. It is found in the various types of commercial activities including companies, small businesses, supermarkets, restaurants, pharmacies, furniture, perfume and cosmetics, electronics, barber's, etc., and not specific to certain types of commercial activities. The examples in (1) and Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix will be sufficient:

(1)   Shop name   Translation
a.   ***biyu:t að- ðahab** lil-ʔaθa:θ*   - **the houses of gold** for furniture
b.   ***gimmat al-gaṣr** libayʕ mawa:d al-bina:ʔ*   - **the top of the palace** for construction materials
c.   ***ʔusṭu:rat Najran** lil-ʔitiṣa:la:t*   - **the legend of Najran** for telecommunication
d.   *biga:lat **ǧiða:ʔ al- ʕa:ʔilah***   - **the food of family** grocery

The compound names are in bold in the examples in (1) above. This syntactic structure usually comes in the form of genitive construction (ʔidha:fa), i.e. like that one corresponds to the English 'noun of noun' as illustrated in bold in (1a - d). There is no apparent explanation for this phenomenon, but it seems that business proprietors resort to this type of name in order to be more attractive, and unique as well as to avoid the repetition of names. In many cases (15), the name 'Najran' is a part of the compound noun like in (1c). Other compound names start with *bin/ ?ibn* 'the son of', e.g. *bin Yaʕla liṣ-ṣira:fah* 'Bin yaala for exchange', *ʔibn šarya:n li-zuja:j as-sayya:ra:t* 'Ibn Sharyan for auto glass service'. As opposed to compound names, single-word names refer to those store names which are designated only as one-word names. For example, the shop sign *markiz **šamsan** lil-xiya:ṭah ar-rija:liyyah* 'Shamsan center for gents' tailoring' has a single name which is *šamsan*, other inscriptions are indicating the type of shop or business activity.

Another style of sign naming is to include two advertising names (15 in number) on the same board: one refers to the operating company and the second one to the shop name. The shop name is usually more visible and more prominent while the operating name is attached with a small font at the bottom of the display board. The example in (2) and Figure 5 illustrate this style:

(2) *o: tu: zid*   A to Z
  mala:bis wa ?iksiswa:ra:t ?iliktru:niyyah
  Clothes & Electronics
  mu?assasat hama:yil ?al- ʕarabiyyah ?al-tija:riyyah

The name on the top is the name of the shop and the one at the bottom is the name of the company operating this shop which is written in Arabic only; it translates as 'Hama:yil Arabic Trading Establishment'. Note that the first part of the top line is mistakenly transliterated as *o:* for 'A' while it should be transliterated as *ay* (see Figure 5). In all the 15 signs, it is noticed that the shop name is always bilingual in Arabic and English while the company operating name is always monolingual in Arabic. See also Figure 10 as another example.

B. Code Preference

In bilingual and multilingual signs, languages are usually considered "preferred" when their scripts are given more space, larger font size, and specific positions on the display board. In the LL literature, this practice is referred to as code preference or code priority or even sometimes as language dominance (Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Backhaus, 2005; Shang & Zhao, 2017). Scollon and Scollon (2003), for example, maintain that if the language script appears on top, on the left, or in the center of a given sign, it is said that that language is more predominant than other languages. In the case of Arabic, this statement can be modified as "on the right" because the Arabic script is written from right to left. Following this approach, the 241 bilingual and multilingual signs are analyzed. Although there are many competing languages in Najrans's LL, it seems that the code priority is either given to Arabic or English. Arabic appears as the dominant language on 218 signs while English appears on 23 signs as the preferred language (see Figures 6 and 7). Other languages, namely Malayalam, Bengali, Hindi, and Tamil are always assigned the last position on the multilingual signs. The only exception is a Malayalam-English bilingual sign where Malayalam appears on the top of the sign and in a larger font than English (see Figure 8).

C. The Symbolic Function of LL

In addition to the informational function, LL may also have a symbolic function. Landry and Bourhis (1997) maintain that terms and concepts brought from other cultures usually perform a "symbolic function". In the context of Najran's LL, this function is manifested in many ways. The first way is the use of foreign expressions as names for the stores. The general practice is that the sign designers or shop owners select certain attractive foreign tokens and transliterate them from English into Arabic either in monolingual or multilingual signs. A total of around 80 shop signs (25 on monolingual signs and 55 on multilingual signs) are characterized by this tendency, constituting the fourth of the whole corpus. For example, expressions like 'sweet land', 'Royal Park', 'TOP CENTER', 'easy store', 'Little Caesars', 'BEAUTY ZONE', 'TOWN TEAM', etc. are employed as shop names and transliterated into Arabic. This process also involves the use of some symbolic elements in the names of shop signs taken from foreign cultures like Europe and America such as *mi:la:nu* (Milan, a city in Italy, i.e. Milano, or the name of the football club A. C. Milan), *nilu:far ba:ri:s* (Nilufer Paris), *ġirna:ṭah* (Granada), *wu:l ?istiri:t* (Wall Street), etc. The illustrations in (3) below provide full sign inscriptions which contain such cultural foreign elements. See also Figures 10 and 11.

	(3) Monolingual signs (in Arabic)		Multilingual signs
a.	*suwi:t la:nd lil-?ajnihah al-mafru:šah*	e.	*wu:l ?istri:t ?ingliš*
	(lit. sweet land for the furnished suits)		Wall Street English
b.	*min ?ajlik*	f.	OUD MILANO
	jast fu:r yu:		*u:d mila:nu*
	(lit. Just for you)		
c.	*ma?ku:la:t gu:d*	g.	*Biyu:ti zu:n*
	(lit. Good for food/ meals)		BEAUTY ZONE
d.	*ġirna:ṭah lil waḥada:t as-sakaniyyah*	h.	*maṭʕam numa:n*
	(lit. Granada for accommodation units)		NOMAN HOTEL
			নোমান হোটেলে

It is worth mentioning that the translations in multilingual signs (3e- h) are presented as they appear in the sign inscriptions, hence they may involve some syntactic or lexical errors like in (3f) (the word order should be 'MILANO OUD' instead of OUD MILANO) and (3h) (the correct equivalent for Arabic *maṭʕam* is 'restaurant' not 'hotel').

The monolingual signs in Arabic which contain transliterated words from English into Arabic like those in (3a-d) are only meant for customers who know Arabic because they don't contain any translation to any other languages. However, the sign in (3b) involves translation and transliteration at the same time. In this sign, the first inscription is in Arabic meaning 'just for you'. Then, the translation itself is transliterated into Arabic in the second line. This means that this sign is monolingual in Arabic and only directed to those who know Arabic. It is an example of language mixing.

Another striking example is the sign in (3c). Since the sign is monolingual, it is not certain whether the word *gu:d* (or even *ju:d*) refers to the Arabic noun which means 'generosity' or to the English adjective 'good'. It is an example of a false friend which may lead to ambiguity on the part of the reader. Shop owners resort to the technique of English-to-Arabic transliteration in order to attract the customers' attention and also to show that they are more prestigious and more modern.

Another way which may indicate the symbolic function of Najran's LL is the involvement of elements from the local culture. Terms like *ga:filah* 'a caravan', *saha:ra* 'deserts', *sadd* 'a dam', *?al-?uxdu:d* 'a historical place' appear on many signs and refer to places and objects that are associated with the history and culture of the Najran region. The use of tribe names such as *Al-MisSid*, *Al-Fahaid*, *Ya:m*, etc. is very common and indicative of the tribal nature of the community of this region. Related to this is the use of some religious and cultural expressions below or above the shop signs as secondary texts (11 cases). These include expressions like *ma: ša:? ?alla:h taba:raka alla:h*, lit. 'as Allah wills, blessed be Allah', *la: guwwata ?illa bi-la:h*, lit. 'there is no power but God', *?arħibu:*, lit. 'you are welcome' (see the example in Figure 11). Such expressions are used for seeking Allah's blessings and to drive away the eyes of the envious and the wicked.

D. Foreign Expatriates and LL

All signs displaying languages other than Arabic and English are encountered in Al-Khalidiyyah neighborhood except one bilingual sign in Arabic and French which is found on the main street, i.e. King Abdulaziz Street. The main reason is that many foreign expatriates dwell in this area. The overwhelming majority of the non-Arab expatriates belong to the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) and Southeast Asia (the Philippines, Indonesia, and China). The Southeast Asians, however, are much fewer in number than those who come from the Indian subcontinent, and none of their languages are encountered in Najran's LL in general and in Al-Khalidiyah in particular. In the context of communication in the marketplace, written English is used as a lingua franca between the two groups. Consequently, a few monolingual signs (2 cases) in English are found in the windows of groceries and restaurants run by expatriates from the first group as well as a Malayalam-English bilingual sign (see figures 12 and 8, respectively). It is obvious that information in English on such signs is meant for Southeast Asians. Expatriate languages like Malayalam, Bengali, and Hindi are only found on the signs of certain types of business, namely restaurants and groceries. The reason is obvious; these stores usually serve food and provide life necessities and they are visited repeatedly by Asian expatriates.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results show that the LL of Najran is more multilingual than we expected, not only in Arabic and English but also in other languages which are related to the expatriate workforce like Malayalam, Bengali, and Hindi. The language diversity attested in the collected data is much higher than it seems to be, especially in a small city like Najran. Moreover, these foreign languages are displayed as the main texts, i.e. as a part of the content of the sign not as secondary or additional texts. This may be compared to the situation in Souq Naif in Dubai where Karolak (2020) reports that "the diversity of languages encountered in the sample was much lower than expected as only a few examples [...] of languages other than Arabic and English placed as additional notices either on the wall of a building or shop windows were found" (p.7).

The study reveals that the Arabic language is the most dominant in the LL of Najran followed by English as the second dominant language. This is also the case in some other public spaces of other cities like the capital city of Sana'a in Yemen as reported by Al-Athwary (2012). However, in the LL of other Arab cities like Jerash in Jordan and Dubai in the UAE, English has become the most dominant language (see Alomosh, 2021; Karolak, 2020). Arabic is not only dominant in terms of frequency of occurrence, but also in terms of code preference. The dominance of Arabic can be attributed to the informational, commercial, and symbolic functions that it performs; the symbolic function is motivated by the tendency of nationalism and loyalty to one's language. The competing and increasing use of English on commercial shop signs could be explained as mainly symbolic. By using English, the local shop owners tend to show that they are more modern, fashionable, and prestigious. The informational function of English is marginal or rather absent.

Although they represent a small proportion of the whole sample, the inclusion of languages (other than Arabic or English) like Malayalam, Bengali, and Hindi in the primary texts of the shop signs is indicative of some ethnic tendency on the part of the expatriates to impose their identities in a society where they feel far away from their homelands. They also have an informative function as they are read by speakers of these languages. As a matter of fact, this is not the practice in other foreign migrant areas like Souk Naif in Dubai where such languages "figure as side notices mostly on shop windows, i.e. as secondary text" (Karolak, 2020, p. 19).

Almost all shop signs displaying languages of the Indian subcontinent exist in Al-Khalidiya district. They are only found on the signs of certain shops, namely restaurants and groceries. This can be explained by the fact that Al-Khalidiya is an old neighborhood and the house rents are relatively cheap, so it is inhabited by many expatriates, most of them from South Asian countries.

In her study of LL of Souq Naif in Dubai, Karolak (2020) explains the absence of languages of the Indian subcontinent in the shop signs of that area by saying that "the vast majority of shopkeepers come from the Indian

subcontinent and speak regional languages. As such, there is probably no need to post additional information on the display windows as customers who are also in majority from that region, can walk up to the shops and speak their mother tongues inside" (p. 21). The situation, however, is different in Al-Khalidiyyah neighborhood. Although most of the stores are run by expatriates from the Indian subcontinent and can communicate by using their mother tongues inside such stores, we find that the main texts of shop signs are displayed in Malayalam, Bengali, and Hindi. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that the use of these regional languages serves another purpose. They resort to it to satisfy a psychological and emotional tendency which is related to homesickness. It is a kind of compensation that helps them feel that they are in their homelands, and in their own countries.

The absence of the Urdu language in the public space of Najran is somehow strange, especially if we come to know that the majority of the expatriates from the Indian subcontinent are Muslim and Muslims usually use Urdu script as an indication of their Muslim identity. In fact, there is no clear reason behind that, but one may refer it to the fact that Urdu is written in Arabic characters so speakers of Urdu don't find it difficult to figure out what is displayed on commercial signs, especially almost all of them can speak Saudi pidginized Arabic as a lingua franca.

This attempt is a general exploration of Najran's LL. It leaves the door open for further research on the LL of other metropolitan cities in Saudi Arabia such as Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam, and so on. Comparative studies can be also conducted, either between the LLs of these cities or between Saudi cities and other Gulf and Arab cities. LL aspects like the advertising role of English, the position and role of minority and expatriate languages, the effect of the competing and increasing presence of additional languages on the LL of Arab cities, etc. may be involved.

APPENDIX

The following figures are some examples of shop signs in the LL of Najran.

Figure 1. A Monolingual Sign in Arabic Having a Compound Name

Figure 2. A Bilingual Sign: Arabic-English Having a Compound Name

Figure 3. A Monolingual Sign in English

Figure 4. A Monolingual Sign in Bengali

Figure 5. A Shop Name With an Operating Company Name in Arabic (*mu?assasat hama:yil ?al- ʕarabiyyah ?al-tija:riyyah*, lit. Hama:yil Arabic Trading Est.)

Figure 6. Code Preference: Dominance of Arabic (trilingual sign: Arabic-English-Malayalam)

Figure 7. Code Preference: Dominance of English (bilingual sign: English-Arabic)

Figure 8. Code Preference: Dominance of Malayalam (bilingual sign: Malayalam-English)

Figure 9. A Four-language Sign: Arabic-English-Malayalam-Tamil

Figure 10. Transliteration From English Into Arabic With an Operating Company Name in Arabic (*ṭawg al-jama:l li-tija:rah*, lit. 'ṭawg al-jama:l for Trading')

Figure 11. Cultural Elements (*ġirna:ṭah* and *ma: ša:? ?alla:h*, lit. Granada and as Allah wills)

Figure 12. A Monolingual Sign in English Directed to East Asian Customers

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