



Glocalizing Identity: Linguistic and Semiotic Representations in the Urban Landscape of Qassim

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Abstract

This study investigates how verbal and visual patterns in coffee shop signage interact with business models and market conditions to construct an urban identity in the linguistic landscape of the cities of Unaizah and Buraydah in Saudi Arabia. The dataset comprises textual and visual data from 208 coffee shop signs selected through stratified random sampling and analyzed using the LL framework supported by ATLAS.ti–based thematic content analysis. Analysis identified common thematic trends and recurring linguistic and visual patterns, which were interpreted in relation to market saturation and business type. Findings suggest that in Unaizah’s highly saturated market, strong competition drives linguistic diversity, with English-only and transliteration-based bilingual signs functioning as strategies for differentiation, particularly in the sit-in cafés. In contrast, Buraydah’s less saturated market demonstrates greater reliance on monolingual Arabic, especially in traditional coffee shops, which emphasizes cultural continuity and local identity. In both cities, however, business type informs linguistic differentiation in coffee shop signage, and market saturation drives or constrains this diversification. If validated in other contexts in Qassim and beyond, these findings suggest that linguistic landscape is driven by economic dynamics and influenced as much by competition and market saturation as by cultural factors and language attitudes.

Keywords: Coffee shop signage, Identity, Linguistic landscape, Market saturation, Saudi Vision 2030.

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تغليب الطابع العالمي أم تعز يز الهوية المحلية: دراسة لغوية وسيميائية للهوية في المشهد الحضري بمنطقة القصيم

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة دور لافتات المقاهي في إبراز ملامح الهوية الحضرية في مدينتي عنيزة وبريدة في المملكة العربية السعودية، وذلك من خلال بحث العلاقة بين تصميم هذه اللافتات وطبيعة الأنشطة التجارية والظروف السائدة في السوق. واعتمدت الدراسة على تحليل 208 لافتة تم اختيارها باستخدام العينة العشوائية الطبقية، وتحليل محتواها باستخدام منهج المشهد اللغوي وتحليل المحتوى الموضوعي بمساعدة برنامج ATLAS.ti. وأظهرت النتائج وجود أنماط متكررة ترتبط بدرجة المنافسة في السوق وبطبيعة المقهى. ففي عنيزة، حيث يشهد قطاع المقاهي مستوى مرتفعاً من التشبع والمنافسة، اتجهت العديد من المقاهي إلى تنوع أساليبها اللغوية، فبرز استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية أو الأسماء المنقولة صوتياً بين العربية والإنجليزية كوسيلة للتميز وجذب العملاء، خاصة في المقاهي الحديثة. أما في بريدة، فقد بدأ الاعتماد على اللغة العربية أكثر حضوراً، ولا سيما في المقاهي التقليدية، بما يعكس تمسكاً أكبر بالهوية المحلية والمرجعية الثقافية للمجتمع. كما أوضحت الدراسة أن طبيعة النشاط التجاري تؤثر في الخيارات اللغوية المستخدمة، في حين تسهم درجة تشبع السوق في توسيع هذا التنوع أو الحد منه. وتشير هذه النتائج إلى أن المشهد اللغوي في المدن لا يتشكل بفعل الاعتبارات الثقافية واللغوية وحدها، بل يتأثر كذلك بالعوامل الاقتصادية ومستوى المنافسة بين الأنشطة التجارية، وهو ما قد يفسر كثيراً من الاختلافات في أنماط استخدام اللغة في الفضاء العام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: لافتات المقاهي، الهوية، المشهد اللغوي، تشبع السوق، رؤية المملكة 2030.

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يتقدم الباحثان بجزيل الشكر والتقدير لجامعة القصيم، ممثلةً بعمادة الدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي، على دعمها المادي لهذا البحث من خلال المنحة البحثية رقم (QU-ND95-2026).

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INTRODUCTION

The study of linguistic landscape is an important means of understanding how language use in public space reflects cultural, social, and political realities. First defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997) as “the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory,” linguistic landscape (LL) offers insight into how communities use verbal and visual signs to express identity and sense of belonging. Shop signs, in particular, are not only markers of commerce; they are performative acts that negotiate identity construction in relation to global forces and local traditions.

In Saudi Arabia, this negotiation is visible in the rapid expansion of the coffee culture. Once restricted to traditional Arabic coffee served in homes and on social occasions, coffee has transformed into a cultural symbol as well as an economic phenomenon. Its recognition within Vision 2030 as part of national heritage has facilitated the spread of international coffee chains and locally owned specialty cafés (Alotaibi & Alamri, 2022). Coffee shops today are not only commercial venues but also spaces where identity is constructed in relation to language, design, and atmosphere. As such, coffee shop signage serves as particularly fertile ground for exploring how Saudis employ language in the urban landscape to index modernity, authenticity, or global integration. English and Arabic are the two main languages used and are often found in mixed forms (Hazaea et al., 2024; Ahmed, 2023; Alotaibi & Alamri, 2022). Some signs rarely exclusively on English to convey modernity and appeal to an international audience, while others prioritize Arabic to emphasize heritage and local identity. Many combine the two through bilingual wording or transliteration, which creates a linguistic mixture that showcases the “glocal” negotiation of global and local cultural orientations (Alkhalil, 2025).

This interplay of language and identity in coffee shop signage reflects broader trends in Saudi Arabia, where research into the linguistic landscape generally has extended over the past ten years to cover public spaces in both major and regional cities. Research conducted in Mecca (Alsaif & Starks, 2020), Riyadh (Alotaibi & Alamri, 2022), Jeddah (Blum, 2014), Medina (Aljohani, 2019), Abha (Khan & Khan, 2023), Khamis Mushait (Alfaifi, 2015), and Najran (Al-Athwary, 2022) all show a clear trend: Arabic is the dominant, official language, while English functions as a secondary language and is commonly paired with Arabic in commercial contexts. Research has also explored virtual linguistic environments, such as entertainment event websites (Alkhalil, 2025) and university online sites (Laccina, 2024). In these contexts, multilingual signage is becoming the norm, with Arabic and English forming the main language pair in public contexts. In this broader context, coffee shop signage emerges as a significant site of identity formation, as businesses construct their commercial identity through their selections of verbal and visual signs.

Research on coffee shop signage in Saudi Arabia, in particular, indicates that Arabic maintains a prominent position despite the increasing influence of Anglicisation in commercial spaces. This observation is



validated in Hazaea and Qassem (2025), which examined coffee shop signage along the road from Najran to Mecca. The study reported that in monolingual signs, Arabic clearly dominates, with 42% of signs appear only in Arabic, mainly for local brands, while only 8% are exclusively in English, typically representing international brands. Overall, 58% of signs feature Arabic as a dominant element, either in monolingual Arabic or Arabic–English bilingual signage. At the same time, bilingual signage is increasingly common in specialty coffee shops, where Arabic–English combinations are used to balance global influences with expressions of local linguistic identity. Consistent with these findings, monolingual Arabic signage in the city of Najran is particularly prevalent in traditional coffee houses, while Arabic–English bilingual signs constitute around 34% of coffee shop signage (Hazaea et al., 2025).

Previous research in the area extended to cover various types of public places, such as malls (Laccina & Yeh, 2022), shop signs (Alotaibi & Alamri, 2022), tourist destinations (Hazaea et al., 2024), and entertainment events (Alkhalil, 2025). Geographically, these studies have concentrated on major cities such as Riyadh and Jeddah (Ahmed, 2023), while others have focused on smaller cities such as Jazan (Alfaifi & Mobarki, 2025) and Abha (Khan & Khan, 2023), or have used comparative approaches to discuss similarities and differences (Al-Athwary, 2025). Particularly relevant to our research context are the limited number of studies on coffee shop signage in the linguistic landscape, especially in smaller or peripheral urban settings such as Najran (Hazaea et al., 2025), or in comparative contexts (Ahmed, 2023; Al-Athwary, 2025).

Most existing studies are limited to single locations, and few have considered how broader market conditions shape linguistic choice in coffee shop signage. Methodologically, they have relied mainly on linguistic landscape analysis, or combined it with Critical Discourse Analysis, to examine how language use in public signage relates to identity, globalization, and power relations. While these approaches have produced valuable insights, they have focused mainly on linguistic features, with less attention to visual and multimodal aspects. Much of this research also remains largely descriptive by focusing on the presence and arrangement of languages.

The present study addresses these gaps by comparing coffee shop signage in two major cities in Qassim Province: Buraydah and Unaizah. The research context is unique, as Qassim combines strong cultural traditions with ongoing economic transformation. Although the two cities share cultural similarities, they differ in market structure, particularly in terms of coffee shop saturation and competition. This variation provides an opportunity to examine how linguistic and visual patterns are shaped not only by cultural factors, but also by economic conditions. From a methodological perspective, linguistic landscape analysis is combined with ATLAS.ti–based thematic content analysis to explore the distribution of verbal and visual patterns in signage. LL analysis describes how verbal and visual signs are displayed and distributed, while



thematic coding organizes linguistic and semiotic features into patterns to allow systematic comparison. However, both approaches are largely descriptive. To address this limitation, the study introduces market saturation and business type as analytical variables, which enables linguistic and semiotic variation to be interpreted in terms of competitive intensity and commercial strategy.

By integrating linguistic, visual, and economic perspectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive account of the role of coffee shop signage in constructing urban identity in Qassim. In doing so, the study goes beyond purely descriptive accounts of language distribution to examine how linguistic and semiotic choices are shaped by broader market dynamics. Accordingly, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

Q1: What linguistic (verbal) patterns characterize coffee shop signage in Buraydah and Unaizah, and how are these patterns distributed across business types?

Q2: What visual semiotic patterns accompany these linguistic choices, and how are these patterns distributed across business types?

Q3: How do linguistic and visual patterns interact to construct urban identities, and to what extent are these patterns shaped by market saturation and competition?

THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Linguistic landscape refers to the visibility and salience of languages in public space, including private signage (e.g., commercial shop signs, advertising) and official inscriptions (e.g., road signs, government buildings). In this vein, the language produced in public space is not only informative but also symbolic in nature. It indicates which languages are present, valued and dominant in a given landscape. As such, LL provides a framework for examining how identities are constructed and negotiated through everyday textual and visual practices (Gorter, 2006; Shohamy et al., 2010).

While early research in the area focused mainly on the nature and distribution of languages, more recent studies (e.g. Aini, 2026) have conceptualized public signage as a multimodal semiotic system in which linguistic and visual media (e.g., typography, color, layout, and spatial arrangement) interact to provide meaning. This interaction is of particular importance in commercial contexts. For example, in coffee shop signage, language choice, naming strategy, and visual design work together to create brand identity, signpost cultural orientation, and target potential customers.

Methodologically, LL studies involve the systematic documentation of signs within a defined geographical area, followed by their classification according to variables such as language choice, number of languages, and sign type. However, despite the analytical value of LL, research in this field has been widely regarded as mostly descriptive (Blommaert, 2013; Soler-Carbonell, 2016) and lacking standardization in how



patterns are identified and compared. Also, despite growing recognition of multimodality, there remains a gap in systematically analyzing the relationship between verbal and visual elements.

To address this limitation, the current study integrates ATLAS.ti for thematic content analysis as a complementary analytical tool. Linguistic and visual features are treated as units of meaning and clustered into larger thematic categories. Thus, rather than simply reducing descriptions, this approach strengthens LL analysis by providing a more systematic and replicable method for identifying patterns. It allows the analysis to move from isolated observations to formal regularities. The results then uncover repeated naming strategies, semantic orientations, and visual compositions in the dataset.

Furthermore, the research extends LL analysis by incorporating market saturation as an important explanatory dimension. The available LL-based research has interpreted linguistic choice in relation to globalization, language ideology, and domestic policies. Despite the importance of these perspectives, they do not fully account for variation in commercial signage, particularly in competitive urban contexts. By integrating business density in relation to population, this study situates linguistic and semiotic decisions within their economic context.

Market saturation is understood as the degree of competition in a given urban setting. In highly saturated settings, the pressure to differentiate is greater, which leads to increased linguistic and semiotic diversification. In relatively less competitive contexts, more stable, culturally grounded patterns tend to persist. From this perspective, signage is not merely symbolic, but also a resource through which businesses seek to gain an advantage in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

This unified approach reconceptualizes linguistic landscape in terms of economic dynamics. Language, imagery, and design function as means through which meanings are created and markets differentiated. ATLAS.ti-supported thematic coding and market-oriented interpretation of themes provide a structured approach to analyzing verbal and visual semiotic resources and how they combine to form urban identities in Qassim's coffee shop landscape.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative, multimodal linguistic landscape (LL) approach to examine how coffee shop signage constructs urban identity in Qassim. To enhance analytical transparency and consistency, LL analysis is complemented by ATLAS.ti-based thematic content analysis, which supports the systematic identification and grouping of recurring verbal and visual patterns.



Data and Sampling

The study focuses on two major cities in Qassim: Buraydah and Unaizah, selected for their contrasting market conditions and prominence as regional urban centers. According to official municipality records, the dataset consisted of 549 registered coffee shops (383 in Buraydah and 166 in Unaizah).

A stratified proportional sampling technique was used to ensure balanced representation in both cities. Based on standard sampling criteria (95% confidence level; 5% margin of error), a final sample of 208 coffee shop signs was selected and distributed proportionally between the two strata. This method minimizes sampling bias and preserves the relative distribution of coffee shops.

Data were collected through systematic digital documentation, including street-level imagery from Google Maps. Each sign was recorded within its natural urban context, and spatial, linguistic, visual, and contextual information (e.g., business type, commercial setting, and location) were documented. This approach allows for consistent coverage across a geographically dispersed area. Both researchers have extensive experience in the Qassim region and are familiar with its cultural and social context, which supported context-sensitive interpretation. This familiarity informed the analysis but did not function as an independent data source.

Coding Process

All sampled signs were compiled and imported into ATLAS.ti and coded using thematic content analysis. Initial open coding identified common linguistic structures and visual patterns, including language use (Arabic, bilingual Arabic-English), naming structure (single vs. multi-word), translation strategy (transliteration or semantic translation), and business category (traditional, sit-in café, drive-through/takeaway). Visual features were coded concurrently, including typography (font type, size, and weight), color and lighting, spatial organization (layout, prominence, positioning), and overall design complexity (minimalist vs. layered). Codes were refined and grouped into broader thematic categories to capture recurring semiotic patterns. To ensure reliability, both researchers independently coded a portion of the dataset, achieving high agreement (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.96$). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion to ensure consistency across the dataset.

Analytical Procedures

Analysis was conducted at three interrelated levels: linguistic patterns (distribution of monolingual and bilingual naming strategies and their semantic orientations), visual semiotic patterns (recurring design features and their alignment with linguistic choices), and contextual interpretation (the relationship between



semiotic patterns, business type, and market saturation). Market saturation was operationalized as the ratio of coffee shops to population across the two cities. This serves as an indicator of competitive intensity. Linguistic and visual variability are thus interpreted not only as cultural expressions but also as responses to market conditions.

RESULTS

The analysis is divided into two sections, each focusing on one city. Each section examines monolingual Arabic, monolingual English, and bilingual (symmetrical and asymmetrical) naming patterns, and analyzes how these patterns relate to business type, market saturation, and linguistic diversity.

Unaizah

The coffee shop landscape in Unaizah, a city with a population of 184,644 (General Authority for Statistics, 2022), provides insight into how language, culture, and market dynamics interact in an urban setting. With 166 coffee shops serving the population (approximately one per 1,112 people), the market is highly saturated. As a result, linguistic diversity in naming conventions becomes an important tool for competition. Coffee shops are categorized based on linguistic format (monolingual or bilingual), business type (sit-in, traditional, drive-through, takeaway), and semiotic composition.

Monolingual Arabic Names

Thematic content analysis of 13 monolingual Arabic coffee shop names in Unaizah reveals two distinct naming patterns. The first, minimalist (54%), uses single-word names to enhance memorability and convey contemporary appeal. The second (46%) uses multi-word names that emphasize heritage and authority. These patterns intersect with six semantic themes, including relational, historical, spiritual, sensory, coffee-specific, and place-oriented dimensions. Verbal strategies are reinforced visually through font style, size, color, and background design.

The first theme is social and relational positioning (30.8%), which includes names such as *آنسة* (*Anisa* – Miss), *قوم* (*Qaum* – “Community”), and *جار* (*Jar* – “Neighbor”), which emphasize social bonds and interpersonal warmth. Visually, this orientation is accompanied by softer lighting, warm color palettes, and textured backgrounds (e.g., wood), which creates an inviting and familiar atmosphere, see **Figure 1**. The second theme, abstract and contemplative (23.1%), includes names such as *رمز* (*Ramz* – “Symbol”) and *صمت* (*Samt* – “Silence”), is paired with minimalist typography, clean lines, and high-contrast lighting to express modernity, and conceptual depth, see **Figure 2**.



Figure 1. آنسة (Onsa)



Figure 2. رمز (Ramz)

The third theme is heritage and cultural identity (23.1%), exemplified by names such as ديوانية عالم ديم (*Diwaniyat Alam Deem* – “Deem World Coffee House”), بيت القهوة العربية (*Bayt al-Qahwa al-Arabiyya* – “House of Arabic Coffee”), and ديوانية القهوة السعودية (*Diwaniyat al-Qahwa al-Sa’udiyya* – “Saudi Coffee Council”), combines multi-word naming with traditional calligraphic fonts and decorative backgrounds under subdued lighting, see Figure 3. These visual features reinforce cultural continuity. The fourth theme, sensory and aesthetic naming (15.4%), including عذبة (*Athiah* – “Edenic”) and مهيلة الخزامى (*Muhailit al-Khuzama* – “Lavender Softness”), are supported by softer tones and visually appealing textures, see Figure 4, while coffee-specific and place-oriented names in the fifth and six themes, such as حصيد البن (*Hasif Al-Bun* – “Wise Coffee”) and عرين (*Areen* – “Den”), use controlled lighting and spatial framing to signal intimacy, see Figure 5.



Figure 3. ديوانية عالم ديم (Diwaniyat Alam Deem)



Figures 4. عذبة (Athiah)



Figure 5. عرين (Areen)

Monolingual English Names

Thematic content analysis of 21 monolingual English coffee shop names from Unaizah using ATLAS.ti also reveals two popular naming patterns: a minimalist style (76.2%), which adopts a name-specific approach to address contemporary consumers using single-word names as the main technique, and multi-word constructions as a different method for drawing new and unique visual cues (23.8%). These naming strategies also refer to five semantic themes that describe abstract, environmental, geometric, sensory, personal, and spatial orientations. As in the Arabic dataset, these verbal choices are reinforced by appropriate visual choices.

The most prominent of these themes relates to abstract, contemporary concepts (33.3%). The names evoke concepts such as beginnings (Alpha), transit spaces (Terminal), and abstract terms such as MLT, and Brio. Visually, this semantic orientation is reinforced visually through a minimalist design strategy that employs clean sans-serif fonts, high-contrast color schemes, and aesthetic design choices (white, silver, black), along with sharp lighting, all of which lend a sense of modernity, **see Figure 6**. These visual configurations, along with the verbal choices, construct these coffee shop spaces as sites of intellectual engagement that appeal to customers seeking experiential spaces.

The second primary theme, nature and environment (28.6%), is represented by names such as Reef, Wings, Wave, Oryx, Golden Tree, and Wooden. This theme anchors the brand identity in environment-related elements. Visually, these names are typically complemented by warmer colors (earth tones, gold, green, and ocean blue), textured backgrounds (natural wood, flora, etc.), and softer, diffused lighting, **see Figure 7**. The inclusion of culturally relevant names such as "Oryx" (the Arabian antelope) creates inviting spaces associated with relaxation and natural harmony. The third theme, geometric and numerical symbolism (19.0%), relies on numerical language to suggest precision and includes names such as Double Slash, Three Points, and Eleven. From a visual perspective, these names often employ sharp-angled typography and controlled lighting, **see**

Figure 8. The visual language reinforces the linguistic strategy of suggesting systematic thinking and modernity, which resonates with a younger, digitally oriented audience.



Figure 6. MLT



Figure 7. Wave



Figure 8. Double Slash

The fourth theme, sensory and experiential appeal, includes names such as Shiny, Sweet-berry, and Golden Tree, which emphasize sensory attraction. Bright and visually stimulating color palettes (gold accents, berry reds, and lustrous surfaces), glossy materials, and warm lighting enhance the aesthetic appeal, **see Figure 9.** Typography tends toward elegant, flowing styles that convey luxury and create atmospheres designed for pleasure. The final theme, represented by names such as Eric, Double X, and Vana, relates to personal connection. This approach humanizes the brand by grounding it in personal naming. Visually, these names are associated with softer fonts, appealing color schemes, and lighting that conveys a sense of intimacy, **see Figure 10.** The visual strategy creates the feeling that the customer is entering a personal, not a commercial space.



Figure 9. Shiny



Figure 10. Double X

Overall, the dominance of minimalist naming (76.2%) reflects a preference for memorability and contemporary accessibility. The integration of environmental and abstract themes suggests that these coffee shops position themselves as spaces offering sensory relaxation or intellectual engagement - aspirations that are reflected in both verbal branding and spatial design.

Bilingual Symmetrical Names

A clear division exists between phonetic transliteration (77.8%) and semantic translation (22.2%) as a result of different approaches to global branding and local market suitability. The dominant approach, phonetic transliteration, preserves the original pronunciation of brand names with little semantic change. For example, Dunkin / دانكن, CAMI / كامى, Kurt Cafe / كورت كافيه, Kyan / كيان, and ARS / ارس are English names reproduced in Arabic script with minor graphological adjustments. This strategy prioritizes brand recognition and aligns with global naming practices that emphasize accessibility and international branding. In contrast, the second pattern adopts semantic translation, whereby meaning, rather than pronunciation, shapes naming. Examples include Coffee Address / عنوان القهوة, UMQ Coffee / قهوة عمق, and Kawkab Alsharq / كوكب الشرق.

This alignment between linguistic economy and visual minimalism is illustrated in the case of Dunkin as an instance of the dominant phonetic transliteration pattern. The color scheme is distinctive yet controlled, relying on its signature pink and orange against neutral backgrounds, **see Figure 11**. This color palette operates within a high-contrast environment that enhances visibility and brand recognition. The consistency across English and Arabic scripts reinforces a unified brand identity that is not disrupted by transliteration. Typography further supports this approach through bold, sans-serif typefaces with rounded geometric forms. Dunkin and دانكن are rendered in closely aligned typographic styles to maintain visual symmetry. This

typographic parallelism allows the Arabic form to function as a phonetic extension of the English brand rather than as an independent semantic entity. The signage is centrally placed to ensure readability, and the overall layout directs attention toward the brand name as the primary semiotic element.

On the other hand, Coffee Address / عنوان القهوة exemplifies the pattern of semantic translation and locally grounded branding, where meaning rather than pronunciation guides the naming strategy. Unlike transliteration-based brands, the English name is semantically transparent and allows it to function without relying on strict phonetic equivalence. This linguistic approach is complemented by a minimalist design that reflects the simplicity of the name. The color palette consists of neutral tones such as black, white, and beige, which signal refinement and align with contemporary café positioning. Typography reinforces this positioning through the use of modern sans-serif fonts with balanced proportions and clean lines. Arabic is integrated in a complementary rather than identical typographic style to maintain visual consistency without enforcing strict symmetry between the two scripts. The signage is centrally positioned and scaled for direct readability, see Figure 12.



Figure 11. Dunkin



Figure 12. Coffee Address

Bilingual Asymmetrical Names

In bilingual asymmetrical signs, English and Arabic differ in size, placement, or visual prominence. The dominant strategy is phonetic transliteration (76.5%) which is evident in ISTANSOU/استانسو, CANTO/كانتو, LUCENT/لوسنت, RETO/ريتو, and PROBARISTA/بروبارستا. This naming pattern appeals to internationally oriented, English-literate customers, and signals local regulatory compliance through Arabic transliteration. One language is visually foregrounded through larger font size, greater central placement, or more intense illumination while the other is visually reduced or displaced. This asymmetry operates via design rather than

meaning. In contrast, some names are partly semantic and partly transliterated, such as GSQ/غسق (twilight) and KAWN/كون (existence), which convey abstract or philosophical significance, and Heem/هيم, which suggests emotional closeness. Others, like The Fourth Cup/الكوب الرابع and 6 O'CLOCK/الساعة السادسة, lean more on direct translation to foreground conceptual clarity.

The pattern of phonetic transliteration is clearly illustrated in transliterated signage such as ISTANSOU/استانسو, where the Arabic form closely follows English pronunciation but is visually subordinated. The typography hierarchy, often using bold contemporary Latin fonts set off with smaller or less conspicuous Arabic script, guides the viewer's attention first to English, which reinforces its role as the carrier of brand identity. Here, transliteration doesn't generate linguistic equivalence, but rather a layered semiotic structure, where Arabic acts as the supporting code, **see Figure 13.**

GSQ/غسق exemplifies the other pattern where transliteration intersects with semantic depth. The Arabic word carries poetic connotations, but the English-style abbreviation GSQ, a consonant-only abbreviation, is visually prominent. The asymmetry of the two scripts allows for a dual reading, as English indicates modernity and abstraction and Arabic roots the brand in the cultural experience. This is underlined visually by a subdued lighting, a gentle color palette, and environmental design choices that align with the semantic field of "twilight," positioning the café as a contemplative space within the urban environment, **see**

Figure 14.



Figure 13. ISTANSOU



Figure 14. GSQ

In general, asymmetric signs are strategic selections designed to portray transliteration not as genuine bilingualism but as an exercise of regulatory compliance and cultural accommodation under the layer of English dominant branding. The asymmetrical form on which these names are constructed, whether through size, location, or transliterations, inscribes power relations. This reflects the broader insight that asymmetrical bilingual signage is particularly ideological within the urban landscape (Eckon et al., 2026).

Buraydah

Buraydah's coffee shop market profile is a comparatively homogeneous and low-saturation environment, where language use evolves under the influence of a less aggressive competitive setting. With 383 coffee shops serving a population of 677,647 (one per 1,769 residents), the need for aggressive differentiation is lower compared to Unaizah. Arabic plays a central and often dominant role, even where English is present.

Monolingual Arabic Names

Thematic analysis of monolingual Arabic coffee shop names in Buraydah (N = 53) also identifies two dominant naming trends. A majority (73.6%) adopt a minimalist approach, while a smaller portion (26.4%) uses multi-word constructions. These naming patterns fall into five general semantic domains: abstract, personalized, heritage-based, sensory, and globalized, each supported by visual strategies that co-construct identity within the urban landscape.

The main domain is abstract and conceptual naming (30.2%), illustrated by examples such as أثر (athar – “trace”), رتم (ritim – “rhythm”), فيض (faydh – “abundance”), فناء (fina – “courtyard”), and عقد (iqd – “necklace”). These are semantically suggestive names. Their visual presence is enhanced by logo-like typographic representation, enlarged letterforms, and halo lighting that transform the word into a visual entity. Meaning shifts from communicative clarity to aesthetic experience, see Figure 15. The second cluster focuses on personalized naming (22.6%), such as علياء (Alya – “sublimity”), أدهم (Adham – “black”), and وجين (Wajin – “hard”). These names often pair with minimal visual design, which makes the name itself the main marker of identity, see Figure 16.

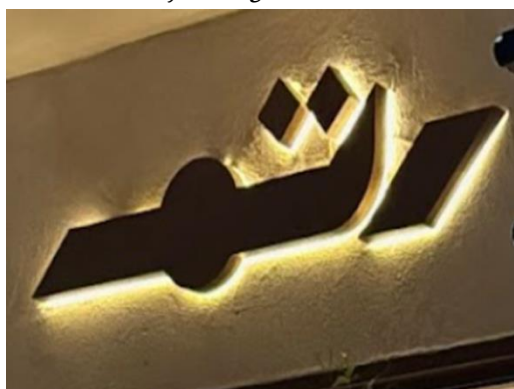


Figure 15. رتم (Ritim – rhythm)



Figure 16. وجين (Wajin-hard)

Heritage-oriented naming (20.8%) forms a third domain, with examples such as ديوانية العقيلات (diwaniyat al-uqaylat), دلة نجد (dallat najd), ديوانية الخاطر (diwaniyat al-khatir), and الكيف القديم (al-kayf al-

qadim). Linguistically, these names are rich in cultural references to Saudi hospitality, coffee rituals, and social gatherings. Visually, this semantic density is complemented by text-heavy signage and prominent cultural keywords (e.g., diwaniya), even when rendered with modern backlit illumination. The result is a modernized presentation of heritage, where tradition is preserved linguistically yet visually reframed, **see Figure 17**.

Sensory and affective naming (13.2%), seen in لحظات جميلة (lahzat jamilah – “beautiful moments”) and استكنان (istiknan – “serenity”), uses softer color palettes and visual aesthetics to evoke experience, **see Figure 18**. Finally, globalized or foreignized names (13.2%), such as ارابيكا ستار Arabica Star, سينابون Cinnabon, and الليبيرتا كافيه Liberta Café, function as transliterated or lexically borrowed forms. These names linguistically reflect a cosmopolitan identity, which is reinforced visually through minimalist design, including clean typography, reduced text, and high levels of illumination, **see Figure 19**.



Figure 17. ديوانية الخاطر (diwaniya al-khatir)



Figures 18. استكنان (istiknan – Serenity)



Figure 19. ارابيكا ستار (Arabica star)

Monolingual English Names

In the English dataset of Buraydah (N = 45), textual abstraction and visual minimalism are closely associated. It shows a preference for minimalist (77.8%) over multi-word names (22.2%). These naming patterns fall under five recurring semantic domains: abstract, personalized, globalized, product-oriented and symbolic, and are accompanied by coordinated visual design characteristics.

The largest category is abstract-phonetic and concept-driven names (31.1%), including Liger, Pooq, Ojn and Jomo. Such names have semantic opacity. The absence of linguistic significance is compensated by high visual intensity: single-word signage, strong background color, and typographic clarity, which makes the name itself a visual anchor. The relation is compensatory: less meaning leads to more visual presence, see Figure 20. The second group focuses on personal naming (20.0%), such as Camila, Anis and Aram, in which identity is anchored in personal reference. This orientation is visually captured by light, warmer and softer typographic styles, and by a moderate amount of lighting, see Figure 21.



Figure 20. Ojn



Figure 21. Camila

The third category of commercially oriented names (17.8%), including Starbucks, Coffee Way, and Crafted Sip, represents standardized branding conventions and is accompanied by illuminated signs and highly visible layouts that aim for maximal visibility, see Figure 22. For product-oriented names (15.6%) such as Dose and Caffeine Kick, the linguistic clarity is evident visually through higher descriptive descriptions and marginally denser text that preserves communicative function. However, there is a trend toward simplified designs, which indicates that visual branding is gradually overtaking descriptive naming, see Figure 23. Lastly, symbolic and stylized names (15.6%), such as ½ M or 3uf, draw on unconventional linguistic forms and visually expressed via experimental typography and non-traditional layouts that target younger, trend-oriented consumers, see Figure 24.



Figure 22. Way Coffee



Figure 23. Caffeine Kick



Figure 24. ½ million

Bilingual Symmetrical Names

Bilingual symmetrical signage in Buraydah is also patterned around phonetic transliteration (82.5%) and semantic translation (17.5%), to represent two mechanisms of negotiating the relationship between global branding and local accessibility. Transliteration, the dominant approach, is evident in such examples as دانكن /Dunkin, كافيين كلوب / Caffeine Club, and سلس /salis, which prioritize brand recognition by aligning with standardized naming practices. By contrast, a smaller class of names relies on semantic translation, where the focus shifts from sound to meaning. Examples like عنوان القهوة / Coffee Address, جودة القهوة /Quality Coffee, and نكهة المشروب / Drink's Aroma demonstrate naming foregrounds interpretive clarity and allows brands to connect more directly with local language practices.

The bilingual symmetrical dataset shows that what appears to be linguistic balance is a visually mediated distribution of roles. For example, in cases of symmetrical equivalences such as CANTO /كانتو and LUSTER/لوستير, textual equivalence is reinforced by visual symmetry: similar size, illumination, and typographic weight, which creates the appearance of equality, see **Figure 25**. This symmetry reinforces brand cohesion and ensures that the Arabic form functions as a direct extension of the English original.

In layered multilingual names such as فن جن كيف / Fan Jan Café, تاتل / Tatil Café, ريبيل / Ripple, textual layers create visual density, with multiple lines, varied fonts, and overlapping identities. Here, the more languages present, the more visually complex the sign becomes, see **Figure 26**. On the contrary, minimalist bilingual forms can be فيو / View or إم دي / M DEE reduce both text and design to their simplest form to align with global aesthetics. In these cases, symmetry is abandoned in favor of maximum visual clarity and brand neutrality, see **Figure 27**.



Figure 25. Luster



Figure 26. Fan Jan Café



Figure 27. MDEE

Bilingual Asymmetrical Names

Bilingual asymmetrical signage in Buraydah represents a structured hierarchy between Arabic and English. The main pattern is phonetic transliteration (66.7%), with instances of no translation (23.3%) and a smaller share of semantic translation (10.0%).

In English-dominant names, such as LA PIUMA and Tora, the linguistic dominance is also matched by visual dominance, e.g. enlarged size, central position, and stronger illumination, while Arabic is minimized or displaced. This alignment of text and design yields a clear emphasis on global identity, see **Figure 28**. In Arabic-dominant names like دار كيف / Dar Caif and رملة / Ramla, the reverse occurs: Arabic is visually foregrounded through scale, brightness, and central positioning, whereas English appears as a secondary layer of translation. cultural meaning is both linguistically and visually anchored, see **Figure 29**. Hybrid cases like وليف / Waleef and غوفيا / GOUVEIA showcase functional asymmetry, where English provides brand recognition and Arabic ensures accessibility or vice versa. This is visually realized through unequal size, placement, and emphasis, see **Figure 30**. To conclude, meaning in the contemporary café linguistic landscape

is not located in language alone, but emerges through the structured interaction between linguistic form and visual design.

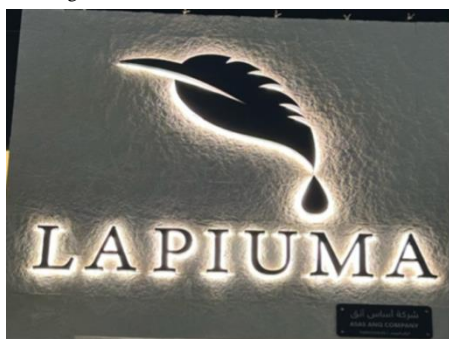


Figure 28. LA PIUMA



Figure 29. دار كيف (Dar Caif)



Figure 30. وليف (WALEEF)

DISCUSSION

By integrating thematic, linguistic, and typological analyses, Unaizah's linguistic strategy appears to be driven by business type, with market saturation contributing to increased linguistic diversity. Monolingual Arabic naming appears to be characteristic of traditional establishments (60%) and aligns with heritage-oriented, multi-word names and visually traditional features. In contrast, sit-in cafés, which are the largest segment of the market, are the most linguistically diverse, employing all four strategies. This diversification reflects an effort to address a heterogeneous customer base within a competitive landscape. Drive-through cafés, which operate in an efficiency-driven environment, tend to favor monolingual English and transliteration-based bilingual naming over cultural expression.

This distribution must be understood against the backdrop of Unaizah's overall market saturation (8.99 coffee shops per 10,000 residents), which is far above the regional average. High saturation is associated with increased linguistic diversification, particularly in sit-in cafés. Less saturated segments, such as drive-through and traditional cafés, show more limited linguistic variation. Therefore, a positive relationship



between saturation and diversification suggests that competitive intensity drives businesses to differentiate through language and semiotic positioning. However, this effect operates within the structural limits of business type: traditional cafés remain predominantly Arabic, while drive-through models generally exclude it, regardless of market conditions.

In all the categories, linguistic choices coordinate with naming structure, visual design, and thematic orientation. Sit-in cafés employ diverse lexical strategies to segment the market into globalist, hybrid, traditionalist, and cosmopolitan consumer groups, whereas traditional cafés reinforce heritage identity through Arabic monolingualism, and drive-through models prioritize efficiency through English-dominant branding. These results demonstrate that linguistic landscape variation in Unaizah emerges from the interaction between market saturation and business model, where saturation drives diversification and business type defines its limits.

In contrast, linguistic choice in Buraydah's coffee landscape is strongly conditioned by business model. Traditional cafés predominantly employ monolingual Arabic naming and draw on heritage-oriented references and Diwaniya-style hospitality through multi-word structures, calligraphic typography, and warm, subdued visual presentation. Sit-in cafés demonstrate the widest linguistic range. They incorporate monolingual Arabic, monolingual English, bilingual symmetrical, and bilingual asymmetrical strategies to address diverse customer profiles. Drive-through cafés, by contrast, tend to prioritize monolingual English and transliteration-based bilingual naming to emphasize speed, efficiency, and immediate recognizability over cultural references.

In all these categories, a functional division of linguistic roles emerges. In the context of monolingual and Arabic-dominant asymmetrical signage (approximately 70%), Arabic is always linked to tradition and identity. By contrast, English indexes modernity, minimalism and individualized consumption, especially in monolingual English and English-foregrounded asymmetrical signs. Bilingual symmetrical signage occupies an intermediate position and combines Arabic cultural grounding with English global readability. Even in mixed formats, however, visual hierarchy often privileges Arabic via greater scale, central placement or heavier typographic impact.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the linguistic landscape (LL) framework, complemented by ATLAS.ti-based thematic content analysis, the study analyzed 208 coffee shop signs in the cities of Buraydah and Unaizah in order to examine how signage reflects the negotiation between global and local identities through the interaction of linguistic and visual semiotic resources. By integrating linguistic patterns, visual design features, and market saturation as an explanatory dimension, the study moved beyond descriptive accounts to show how signage



operates as both a cultural and economic practice. The findings demonstrate that linguistic choices, visual configurations, and business models are systematically interrelated, and that variation in the two cities reflects not only cultural orientations but also levels of market competition.

Three research questions guided the analysis, the first of which relates to the distribution of linguistic patterns present in the dataset. Findings reveal that coffee shop signage in both cities is categorized into four major linguistic types: monolingual Arabic, monolingual English, bilingual symmetrical, and bilingual asymmetrical naming. These patterns relate closely to business type and reflect different positioning strategies. Traditional cafés, which rely heavily on monolingual Arabic, use multi-word and culturally dense names to emphasize heritage and communal identity. This observation aligns studies that identify Arabic as a marker for authenticity (Hazaea & Qassem, 2025; Al-Athwary, 2022, 2012). Drive-through cafés, by contrast, favor monolingual English and transliteration-based bilingual forms, which reflects a focus on speed and global recognizability. Sit-in cafés display the greatest diversity by combining multiple linguistic strategies to address heterogeneous customer base. These findings are consistent with Hazaea et. al. (2025). The comparison between Unaizah and Buraydah further shows that higher market saturation in Unaizah is associated with greater linguistic diversification, which supports the conclusion that language choice in commercial signage is shaped not only by identity narratives but also by competitive differentiation.

Minimalist single-word names, common in both Arabic and English datasets, are paired with clean typography, high-contrast color schemes, and strong illumination, which produces a contemporary aesthetic. In contrast, heritage-oriented Arabic names are reinforced through calligraphic fonts, warm tones, and textured materials that signal cultural continuity. These findings are consistent with previous LL research that emphasizes the multimodal nature of signage, where meaning emerges through the integration of language and visual design rather than through language alone (Alkhalil, 2025; Shohamy et al., 2010; Gorter, 2006). The study extends this insight by demonstrating systematic co-occurrence patterns: abstract or semantically opaque names tend to be visually intensified, while semantically dense names rely on more restrained visual presentation.

In answering the third research question, the study demonstrates that the interaction of linguistic and visual patterns produces differentiated identity constructions shaped by market saturation. In Unaizah's highly saturated market, businesses use diverse linguistic and visual strategies to differentiate customers as globally oriented, traditional or hybrid consumer groups. This supports the view that linguistic landscapes reflect not only sociolinguistic realities but also economic dynamics (Blommaert, 2013). In Buraydah, where saturation is lower, patterns are more stable, with Arabic maintaining structural and visual dominance even in bilingual signage. In both cities, a consistent division of semiotic roles emerges: Arabic indexes tradition and



collective identity, while English signals modernity and global orientation. These findings support earlier studies in Saudi contexts that identify Arabic as the primary symbolic resource and English as a secondary but increasingly influential code (Alfaifi & Mobarki, 2025; Alotaibi & Alamri, 2022) but also demonstrate that the relative prominence of each language is mediated by market structure.

In conclusion, this study suggests that the linguistic landscape of coffee shops in Qassim is an 'economic landscape' in which language and visual design operate as a strategic resource that is influenced by cultural expression and market dynamics. Although the integration of LL with ATLAS.ti has enhanced methodological accuracy and the introduction of economic variables has addressed the gaps in the literature, the study has its own limitations, including the reliance on static data and the focus on two cities, which may not capture changes over time or broader regional variation. Future research could analyze longitudinal data, customer perceptions, and smaller provincial cities to test the relationship between market saturation and linguistic diversification. From a practical perspective, the municipalities in Buraydah and Unaizah may adjust their urban planning policies to encourage balanced linguistic representation to ensure that rapid commercial growth does not erode the visibility of Arabic as a central component of the region's identity.

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