

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

**INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN LINGUISTIC
LANDSCAPES OF MULTILINGUAL PAKISTANI CITIES:
IDENTITY AND GLOBALIZATION**



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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the linguistic landscape of three prominent urban centers in Pakistan namely Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad by conducting 600 analyses of public and commercial signs and 20 semi-structured interviews. This research is based on the "linguistic landscape" framework proposed by Landry & Bourhis (1997), which focuses on the distribution of languages, the script types of the languages, their hierarchy and the motivations of the sign producers. The results show an overwhelming predominance of English signage, which makes up 52% of all signage despite using English as first language by less than 8% of the population. In terms of English usage, the highest number is in Islamabad (74%), followed by Lahore (65%) and Rawalpindi (59%). 31% of signs are in Urdu, which is mainly used for national and cultural identity, and 3% are in regions, structurally marginalized. The study uncovers a distinct feature of Romanization of Urdu words in 9% of the signs, which represents the emergent hybrid linguistic identities of the urban youth of Pakistan. The qualitative data shows that the sign producers link English to modernity, prestige and social mobility, and Urdu to cultural rootedness. The study suggests that the deep sociolinguistic inequalities inscribed in the Pakistani urban signage, stemming from colonial history and postcolonial aspirations require policy interventions for greater visibility of indigenous languages in public space.

Keywords: *Linguistic landscape, analyses, public and commercial signs, Landry & Bourhis (1997), script types, English signage, emergent hybrid linguistic identities,*

Introduction

Language in public places is always more than functional. Whether on the wall, street or façade, every sign, banner, billboard and institutional notice conveys information, it also carries a set of powerful, subliminal social messages about whose language is valued, whose identity is affirmed, whose cultural presence is recognized in shared civic life (Moon et al., 2025). Linguistic landscape research is a 30-year tradition of systematic study of these visible inscriptions visible in public spaces, one of the most productive interdisciplinary fields in recent years, at the crossroads of the disciplines of sociolinguistics, urban studies, cultural geography, and identity theory (Peake, 2023). Building on these early works, linguistic landscape scholarship by Landry and Bourhis (1997) and later by Ben-Rafael et al. (2000s) has shown that the language ecology of public space is a good indicator of social, political, and ideological hierarchies within any society (Tsoninets & Krisztina, 2025).

Pakistan is a highly diversified and an under-researched context for the study of the linguistic landscape (Ahmad et al., 2021). Pakistan is a nation of more than 230 million people where Urdu is the constitutionally established national language, English is the language of power, administration,

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

higher education and elite social life and more than 70 regional and minority languages, namely Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, and Saraiki are the mediums of daily life for most of the population. This multilingual reality gives rise to a rich set of tensions, negotiations and hierarchies that are evident in the physical signage of the cities of Pakistan, but have received remarkably little scholarly attention in comparison to that of other postcolonial contexts in South Asian neighbors such as India, and elsewhere in Africa or Southeast Asia (Arif, 2025).

Over the last few decades, the language of public space has become highly visible and complicated in Pakistan, due to the rapid urbanization of the country (Akram et al., 2021). Cities such as Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad have experienced some remarkable changes; the development of high-end commercial areas, the proliferation of private educational institutions, the growing presence of international brands, the burgeoning middle class and its seamless movement between global and local cultural registers. Such shifts are not taking place in a sociolinguistic vacuum; rather, they are occurring in a changing landscape of the uses, display, and valorization of languages in the urban environment. These cities are full of signs: from luxury boutique signs totally in English to the traditional bazaar shop signs in Urdu Nastaliq script to the young people's food houses with Urdu words written in Roman script the signs are transforming in a dynamic way in accordance with the influence of globalization, nationalism, commercialization and cultural pride (Zaman et al., 2025).

The city of Islamabad of course, planned to be a modern, cosmopolitan capital of the nation and might be thought to have a unique signage profile from the historic, layered commercial cityscape of Lahore or the more working-class commercial character of Rawalpindi. All three cities also exist in the same national sociolinguistic environment, with a common colonial past that resulted in the institutionalization of English and a postcolonial history that has led to the promotion of Urdu as a unifying national language and regional languages without proper institutional recognition and protection. The linguistic landscape of these three cities can therefore be compared to study not only the similarities in the structure but also the variations in the visibility of language, which may appear in an urban area depending on the location (Manan et al., 2017).

Language visibility and language vitality are key issues in linguistic landscape research (Fatima & Ahmad, 2025). An invisible public signage in the community of users of a language or in the lack of such signage in a community whose members speak it on a daily basis has real sociolinguistic implications (Ramadani, 2025). It makes the community invisible to both its own members and to other communities, signaling that the language has a lower status within the community and is without institutional legitimacy (F. Ramadani, 2021). It may inhibit the transmission of the language from one generation to the next; and it reinforces the ideology of prestige of some languages over others and their modernization versus their localized or traditional identity (Ramadani, 2022). The lack of regional languages (only a small share of formal public signage are in those languages) like Punjabi and Pashto in Pakistan, the first languages for the country's largest population groups, has exactly this form of structural marginalization and can have consequences for linguistic diversity and cultural sustainability (Mansoor, 2004).

The linguistic landscape of cities in Pakistan also brings to the fore issues of identity, aspiration and the social implications of language choice (Sarwat et al., 2021). If a shopkeeper in Lahore decides to build his/her sign entirely in English, he/she is not just picking a communication medium, he/she is making a statement on the type of shop he/she wants to be, who he/she wants to be his/her customer base, and what social position he/she wants to occupy (Atta, 2021). The other trader in a traditional bazaar who selects Urdu Nastaliq has also made a statement to represent cultural

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

continuity, sense of community and commercial identity (Ehtsham et al., 2023). A young entrepreneur who writes Urdu in Roman alphabet on a café sign can create a hybrid identity that defies local vs global, traditional vs modern. These decisions and their rationale can only be understood through quantitative mapping of patterns of language distribution in addition to qualitative analysis of the attitudes and ideas of the language producers (Malik, 2024).

This study attempts to answer these questions by analyzing the linguistic landscape of Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad using a mixed research method. A set of 600 signs was systematically collected across five different types of public space in the three cities, while 20 semi-structured interviews were held with the owners of the signs, urban professionals and long term residents. It is based on the framework of language distribution and the framework of language placement and hierarchy developed by Landry and Bourhis (1997) and Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) respectively, and includes qualitative thematic analysis of the interview data. The primary objective of the study is to provide a comprehensive empirical description of the linguistic landscape of the urban centers of Pakistan, and to place the findings in a broader theoretical context of language, power, identity and globalization in postcolonial multilingual societies.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the distribution and relative visibility of the English, Urdu, regional languages in the public signage of Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad, and to find patterns of language dominance and marginalization at the level of the urban area and institutional context.
2. To examine the hierarchisation of language placement on bilingual and multilingual signs and to measure how much the spatial positioning of the signs reflects the symbolic power differentials between the languages –English and Urdu – in Pakistani urban public space.
3. To examine the attitudes, motivations, and ideological orientations of sign producers with regard to language choice and examine how these attitudes, motivations and ideologies mirror the wider sociolinguistic situation such as the forces of globalization, postcolonial ideology, cultural identity and commercial aspiration.

Research Questions

1. What are the quantitative distribution of English, Urdu, bilingual and regional-language signs across the three cities and what is the distribution like with regard to various type of public spaces and institutional zones?
2. How are the spatial positioning and visual prominence of languages in bilingual signage in Pakistani urban areas politicized and maintained as a reflection of the power relations between English and Urdu?
3. Which motivating factors and ideology drive the decisions about what language to use for production of signs in Pakistani cities and how do these ideologies connect to other discourses on modernity, prestige, cultural identity and linguistic belonging in the society?

Significance of the Study

The study has its own significance in the field of linguistic landscape research related to South Asian, as it is a first study in the field, which focused on the empirical study of language visibility in the urban public space of Pakistan at a large scale and on a multi-city basis. Structural marginalization of the regional languages and the ideology of English dominance are issues of

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

direct relevance to the language policy, urban planning and cultural heritage preservation in the context of Pakistan and its finding can provide evidence to the said issues. This study also contributes to the theoretical development of postcolonial sociolinguistics in that it shows the ways in which postcolonial language hierarchies are reproduced and questioned by the everyday urban citizen who grapples with the multifaceted nature of global modernity and local identity in public space.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Linguistic landscape has been officially introduced by the 1997 article by Landry and Bourhis (1997) who defined linguistic landscape as the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names and place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings in a specific territory or region. According to Romaine (2000) the basic idea was that the language(s) used in public signs of a region was a sociolinguistic phenomenon that mirrored and conditioned the relative strength, prestige, and power of the language communities in the region. Gorter (2019) says that Landry and Bourhis suggested that the linguistic landscape served two main functions, one informational, which is to give navigational and communicative information to the inhabitants, and symbolic, which is to transmit messages on the social status and institutional legitimacy of the languages and communities it represented. It has been an extraordinarily fruitful dual-function framework, with hundreds of subsequent studies in dozens of multi-lingual settings around the world.

In the early 2000s, Ben-Rafael and colleagues greatly enriched the linguistic landscape framework by making the focus the individual and collective producers of the signs in public space (what they called the “top down,” and “bottom up” actors) (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). Official language policies and dominant sociolinguistic ideologies are prominent in top-down signs (P. F. Ramadani, 2021). Dominant sociolinguistic ideologies are produced by state institutions, government bodies and large corporations, whereas in bottom-up signs, which are produced by small businesses, community organizations and individual actors, grassroots language practices and identity negotiations of ordinary citizens are more prominent (Rosendal & Amini Ngabonziza, 2023). In addition, Ben-Rafael et al. highlighted the communicative and representational characteristics of multilingual signs, such as the spatial configuration of languages, the relative size of fonts, and the aesthetic attributes through which languages are made “modern”, “prestigious”, “local”, and “traditional”. These insights have proven to be the bedrock of the future research on language hierarchy and symbolic power in public space (Themistocleous, 2025).

One of the most fruitful areas of research has been between linguistic landscape and postcolonial language politics (Ramadani & Sallauka, 2024). Studies of francophone West Africa and Anglophone East Africa in Africa, as well as other study areas, have all shown a privileged role of the former colonial power's language in postcolonial public displays of signage, even in the presence of official policies of national language promotion (Kohnert, 2022). Theories of colonial language hierarchy have been put forward through the prism of linguistic imperialism, which Phillipson theorized as the structural reproduction of colonial language hierarchy through educational, institutional, and symbolic modes, and more nuanced theories that have recognized postcolonial subjects' agency in appropriation, hybridization, and revaluation of colonial linguistic resources in their own social and economic contexts. The topics of this discussion have been carried forward into other contexts such as India, Sri Lanka and Nepal, where the relationship between

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

English, national and regional language within public signage involves complex negotiations between the colonial heritage, the national project and the globalizing pressures (Almahdi, 2025).

Studies particularly in the Pakistani sociolinguistic context have recorded the strong ideological stance of English in Pakistani society (Ahmad et al., 2020). There are scholars like Rahman who have documented the processes of history by which the British colonial regime established language English as an institutional power in the subcontinent (Ahmad et al., 2025). The social elite of postcolonial Pakistani society who saw learning English as the most secure way to social mobility and access to networks of economic and political power. This ideology in which English is a symbol of education, cosmopolitanism and elite social identity has been found to be present in Pakistani educational discourse, media and social interactions. The linguistic landscape offers a powerful materialization of these abstracted ideological dynamics and makes apparent in spatial terms the social hierarchies that shape the landscape of language life in Pakistan (Andleeb et al., 2025).

The language hierarchy of public signage has been operationalized in the analyses on public signs that are multilingual, which address the aspect of placement, font size and visual salience (Ramadani & Shishko, 2024). A series of studies in different locations such as Hong Kong, Brussels and Cape-Town have demonstrated that the language on the topmost or largest font on a multilingual sign is always perceived as the most important or authoritative language, even if the informational content of the sign is identical (Andrason, 2025). The systematic positioning of English above or before Urdu on bilingual signs as observed in the present study holds special significance in Pakistan as it not only establishes English as the 'higher' language in official policy statements and elite discourses but also in the world of material culture and visual experiences of everyday life (Zeeshan, 2022).

In recent years, the importance of script and transliteration as elements of linguistic landscape analysis has increased, as researchers realized that the choice of writing system has its own social meanings, separate from the language being written (Asllani & Ramadani, 2025). Studies in such environments as diasporic communities in Europe and North America, South Asian urban centers and Chinese-speaking communities have shown that script use is a significant cultural indicator, audience, and commercial signifier (Santos Rovira, 2025). Writing one language in the script of another, most frequently the regional or national languages in the Roman script, has been recognized as an important factor in language contact and the development of new globalized linguistic identities (Amjad et al., 2026). The tendency to adopt the Roman script for the writing of Urdu words observed in 9% of the present text corpus is linked to the trends of using Roman Urdu in digital communication, social media and popular culture that have been reported by the researchers as a salient feature of the Urdu linguistic practices of contemporary Pakistani youth (Tariq et al., 2025).

The commercialization and economic interest in making decisions about linguistic landscapes has been studied in detail in the global cities literature. They have also demonstrated that in highly modernizing contexts of the Global South, English signage by local businesses often indicates not actual functional communication needs, because the majority of customers might not have been very fluent in English, but rather a strategic use of English as a prestige marker that conveys quality, modernity, and international standards to potential customers (Kaibuldayeva & Madiyeva, 2025). This phenomenon has been observed in other setting as well, such as China, South Korea, Thailand, and urban India, and is very similar to the observations of the present study, in that 85% of the

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

participants indicated that English signage connoted modernity and prestige, while 70% indicated that it attracted educated and affluent clientele (Shang, 2024). Knowing this commercial rationale of the choice of language is vital to understanding the linguistic landscape of Pakistani cities in its social and economic context (Khan et al., 2025).

There are various studies on minorities and regionals' language visibility in linguistic landscapes that offer valuable background information for the lack of formal visibility of the regional languages, including Punjabi, Pashto, in the Pakistani cities (Hussain & Saleem, 2023). Research on Welsh in Wales, Irish in Ireland, Breton in France and Catalan in Spain has shown that the availability or absence of a minority language in the public sphere has an impact on the perceptions of language vitality and attitudes towards its transmission from one generation to the next among the members of the community (Baxter, 2024). If community members receive repeated messages from the formal sign environment about the lack of institutional credibility and social value of their language, they tend to accept those messages and may even adopt them as their own, leading to language shift and ultimately language death (Ramadani, 2024). The structural invisibility of regional languages in the public sphere is thus not only an academic and scholarly matter but also one of policy concern with real implications for the future of Pakistan's amazing linguistic heritage (Sultan et al., 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researchers employed sequential explanatory mixed methods design, which included a quantitative photographic corpus analysis and a qualitative semi-structured interviewing. The quantitative phase yielded systematic and numerically strong information on the distribution of languages, their script typologies and spatial hierarchies in the sign corpus, whereas the qualitative phase gave rich contextual information concerning the motivations and ideologies behind the language choices of the sign producers. The interweaving of these two strands provided the researchers a chance to go beyond mere description of the language patterns to provide theoretically informed explanations of the social forces that are influencing the language landscape of the Pakistani urban centers.

Data Collection

The total of 600 signs were systematically photographed from three cities of Pakistan, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad from which 200 signs were taken from each city respectively. Using a purposive stratified sampling method, the researchers conducted the study in five zone types: upscale commercial zones, traditional bazaars, government and institutional buildings, educational facilities and transportation centers. The number of signs collected was proportional to city size: 40 signs were collected per zone type. The researchers applied standard photographic procedures and photographed all signs that could be seen within the designated transect routes, not purely pictorial signs without any language. Additionally, 20 semi-structured interviews, about 40-60 minutes each were conducted with informed consent, audio-recorded with consent of the owner of the sign, urban professionals, and long-term city residents. The attitudes towards language choice in signage, prestige of English and Urdu, awareness of marginalization of regional language and relationship between language and cultural identity were explored in the interview questions.

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Data Analysis

The researchers classified all photographic data based on the classification system devised by Landry & Bourhis (1997) which included four typological characteristics: language type (English-only, Urdu-only, bilingual English–Urdu, regional language, and other), script type (Roman, Nastaliq, Roman for Urdu, bilingual script, and other), language hierarchy on bilingual signs (English or Urdu in dominant position), and institutional authorship (top-down or bottom-up). The inter-rater reliability was obtained by having 10% of the Corpus double coded and obtained a Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.87, showing high agreement between the two scorers. The researchers analyzed the interview transcripts using the reflexive thematic analysis procedure by Braun and Clarke (2006) and used constant comparison and iterative coding to generate themes from the data. All the quantitative data were tabulated and analyzed descriptively in SPSS and chi-square test was used to determine the significance of the difference between the various cities and zones as to language distribution.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Overview of the Data Corpus

A total of 600 public and commercial signs were systematically collected and analyzed from three Pakistani cities: Lahore (n = 200), Rawalpindi (n = 200), and Islamabad (n = 200). The signs were drawn from five categories of public spaces upscale commercial districts, traditional bazaars, government and institutional buildings, educational institutions, and transportation hubs ensuring broad representativeness across social and spatial zones. In addition, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with sign owners, urban professionals, and long-term residents. All photographic data were coded against the Landry and Bourhis (1997) linguistic landscape framework, with each sign classified according to language type, script, language hierarchy (placement), and institutional authorship (top-down vs. bottom-up). The quantitative distributions and qualitative themes arising from this process are presented below.

Overall Language Distribution Across 600 Signs

Table 1 presents the overall language distribution across the entire corpus of 600 signs. English-only signs constituted the single largest category, accounting for 312 signs (52.0%) of the total. Urdu-only signs were the second most frequent at 186 signs (31.0%), while bilingual English–Urdu signs accounted for 84 signs (14.0%). Signs in regional languages predominantly Punjabi and Pashto were the least represented at only 18 signs (3.0%), appearing almost exclusively in informal commercial and cultural establishments in Lahore's traditional districts. These figures establish a clear and statistically significant dominance of English in Pakistani urban public signage.

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

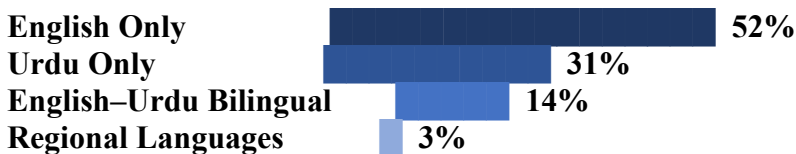
Table 1: Overall Language Distribution Across All Signs (N = 600)

Language Category	No. of Signs	Percentage (%)	Symbolic Function
English Only	312	52.0%	Prestige / Globalization
Urdu Only	186	31.0%	National Identity
English–Urdu Bilingual	84	14.0%	Hybrid Identity
Regional Languages Only	18	3.0%	Local/Ethnic Identity
TOTAL	600	100%	—

The data in Table 1 reveal a striking asymmetry: English, despite being the first language of fewer than 8% of the Pakistani population, occupied over half of all visible sign space in these three cities. In contrast, regional languages spoken by the majority of urban residents in their daily lives were virtually invisible in the formal sign environment, appearing on a mere 3% of all signs. This disparity pointed to a profound disconnect between the lived linguistic reality of Pakistani city-dwellers and the language hierarchies constructed in public space, a finding consistent with linguistic imperialism theories while also reflecting the aspirational sociolinguistic dynamics of postcolonial cities.

Visual Summary: Language Presence (Bar Chart)

Figure 1: Language Distribution- All Cities Combined (N = 600)



Each ■ block \approx 3% of total signs | N = 600 signs

English Prominence by City

Table 2 disaggregates English presence across the three cities. Islamabad recorded the highest concentration of English signage, with 120 English-only signs (60.0% of its 200 signs) and a combined English presence when bilingual signs are included of 74.0%. Lahore followed with a combined English presence of 65.0%, while Rawalpindi registered the lowest at 59.0%. These inter-city differences were statistically meaningful and reflected the distinct sociolinguistic characters of each city. Islamabad's status as a planned federal capital with a high concentration of government offices, international organizations, and affluent residential sectors explained its disproportionate English orientation. Lahore's figure reflected the co-presence of elite commercial zones alongside traditional cultural neighborhoods. Rawalpindi's comparatively lower figure was consistent with its more working-class commercial character and stronger Urdu and Punjabi cultural identity.

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Table 2: English Sign Prominence by City

City	Total Signs	English-Only	Bilingual	English Presence (%)
Lahore	200	96	34	65.0%
Rawalpindi	200	96	22	59.0%
Islamabad	200	120	28	74.0%
Overall	600	312	84	66.0%

Language Distribution by Zone Type

One of the most revealing analytical dimensions of this study was the variation in language distribution across different types of public spaces. As presented in Table 3, upscale commercial zones including high-end retail districts, private hospitals, and international restaurant chains displayed the highest concentration of English-only signage at 74%, with regional languages present on only 2% of signs. Traditional bazaar areas, by contrast, showed a markedly different profile, with Urdu-only signs constituting 48% of the total and English-only signs accounting for just 28%. This 46-percentage-point difference between the two commercial zone types represented one of the most striking findings of the study, providing concrete empirical evidence that language use in the linguistic landscape was not uniform but deeply stratified along lines of social class and commercial prestige.

Table 3: Language Distribution Across Different Zone Types

Zone Type	English (%)	Urdu (%)	Bilingual (%)	Regional (%)
Upscale Commercial	74%	12%	12%	2%
Traditional Bazaar	28%	48%	20%	4%
Government Institutional	38%	34%	26%	2%
Educational Institutions	65%	20%	13%	2%
Transportation Hubs	42%	36%	18%	4%

Government and institutional zones displayed a more balanced bilingual pattern, reflecting the official policy of using both English and Urdu in state communications, though English still appeared more frequently than Urdu in monolingual signs within this category. Educational institutions showed a strong English orientation at 65%, driven largely by private English-medium schools and universities that prominently advertised their English-medium credentials as a marketing strategy. Transportation hubs presented an intermediate profile, with a relatively even distribution across languages — a finding that likely reflected the more socially diverse user populations of bus terminals and railway stations compared to zone-specific commercial areas.

Script Type Analysis

Beyond language identification, the researchers analyzed the script types used across the corpus, a dimension that added important nuance to the language distribution findings. As shown in Table 5, Roman script — used for English — dominated at 52% of all signs. However, a particularly significant finding was the identification of 54 signs (9%) in which Roman script was used to write Urdu words a phenomenon of transliteration that blurred the boundary between English and Urdu at the graphemic level. This trend, which the researchers termed Roman Urdu signage, was especially prevalent in food, fashion, and entertainment establishments targeting younger, educated urban consumers, and could be interpreted as a form of script hybridization that reflected the fluid, blended linguistic identities of contemporary Pakistani youth.

Table 5: Script Type Distribution Across All Signs (N = 600)

Script Type	No. of Signs	Percentage (%)	Significance
Roman (English) Only	312	52%	Dominant global script
Nastaliq (Urdu) Only	138	23%	National language script
Roman + Nastaliq (Bilingual)	84	14%	Hybrid identity display
Roman Script for Urdu Words	54	9%	Transliteration trend
Other / Decorative Scripts	12	2%	Aesthetic / branding

Language Hierarchy: Placement Analysis

The physical placement of languages on bilingual and multilingual signs provided additional evidence of language hierarchies. Across the 84 bilingual English–Urdu signs, English appeared in the topmost or largest-font position on 68 signs (81.0%), while Urdu occupied this dominant position on only 16 signs (19.0%). This spatial hierarchy mirrored and reinforced the symbolic status differential between the two languages: English was systematically placed in the position of visual priority, communicating to viewers even without explicit statement — that it was the language of greater prestige and authority. This finding aligned closely with Ben-Rafael et al.'s (2006) observation that language placement on multilingual signs was never neutral but always encoded social meanings about the relative standing of language communities.

Figure 2: Language Placement Hierarchy in Bilingual Signs (n = 84)



Interview Findings: Attitudes and Motivations

The 20 semi-structured interviews generated rich qualitative data that illuminated the human motivations and ideological underpinnings behind the language distribution patterns identified in the photographic corpus. Table 4 presents the principal themes that emerged from thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, along with their frequency and representative quotations from

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

respondents.

Table 4: Thematic Analysis of Interview Data (n = 20 Participants)

Theme	Frequency (n=20)	Representative Participant View
English = Modernity & Prestige	17 (85%)	"English makes our shop look international and high-quality."
English = Social Mobility	14 (70%)	"Educated customers expect English; it attracts the right clientele."
Urdu = Cultural Rootedness	12 (60%)	"We added Urdu so local customers feel welcome and comfortable."
Language Mixing = Hybrid Pride	10 (50%)	"Both languages together show we are modern yet Pakistani."
English as Necessity for Business	8 (40%)	"Online customers from abroad understand English, not Urdu."
Concern for Urdu Marginalization	6 (30%)	"Too much English is making young people forget their own language."

The dominant theme endorsed by 17 of 20 respondents (85%) was the association of English with modernity and prestige. Respondents across all three cities described English as a language that elevated the perceived quality and status of their establishments, attracting educated and affluent customers while projecting an image of professionalism. This theme was closely related to the second most frequent theme, English as a vehicle for social mobility (70%), which reflected the deep-rooted Pakistani ideology that English proficiency was the key to economic advancement and access to elite social networks.

Notably, 60% of respondents also articulated the importance of Urdu as a marker of cultural rootedness, and 50% explicitly described their use of bilingual or code-mixed signage as a deliberate strategy for constructing a hybrid identity that was simultaneously modern and Pakistani. These findings suggested that the Pakistani urban sign producers were not simply passive consumers of a global English ideology but reflexive agents who consciously negotiated between global and local linguistic resources. The concern for Urdu marginalization, expressed by 30% of respondents, also indicated a growing awareness among some urban stakeholders of the potential costs of English dominance for indigenous language vitality and cultural continuity.

Summary of Key Statistical Findings

The quantitative findings of this study are summarized below for ease of reference:

- 52% of all 600 signs were English-only — despite English being the mother tongue of fewer than 8% of the population.
- Islamabad recorded the highest English presence (74%), followed by Lahore (65%) and Rawalpindi (59%).
- English occupied the dominant visual position (top/largest font) on 81% of all bilingual signs.

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- Upscale commercial zones showed 74% English-only signage vs. only 28% in traditional bazaars.
- 9% of all signs used Roman script to write Urdu words a significant hybridization trend.
- 85% of interview participants linked English to modernity and prestige; 70% to social mobility.
- 30% of respondents expressed concern about the marginalization of Urdu and regional languages.

These findings painted a comprehensive and empirically grounded picture of the linguistic landscape of multilingual Pakistani cities. One in which English enjoyed a position of powerful symbolic dominance, Urdu served as both a pragmatic communicative medium and a marker of national identity, regional languages remained structurally marginalized, and creative language mixing reflected the dynamic, hybrid identities of Pakistani urban communities navigating the intersection of local traditions and global modernity.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that the structural organization of the linguistic landscape in Pakistani urban centers is similar to and is a reflection of the power structure of Pakistani society in general, which is demarcated between English (symbolic dominance), Urdu (functional presence) and the near-total marginalization of regional languages. The 52% dominance of English in public signage, where it is the first language of only 8% of the people, is an interesting empirical example of the disconnect between language hierarchy and lived language reality in public spaces. These are not uniform, as shown by the variation in the different signage types, with upscale commercial areas exhibiting 74% English signage and traditional bazaars 28%. The interview material sheds light on the ideological basis of these trends, as the sign producers are not passively carried along by global English ideology, but are active agents, who knowingly use language as a social positioning, cultural signaling, and a tool of economic strategy. Roman Urdu also seems to be a manifestation of a creative blending of various local and global resources that challenges binary typologies of language choice as 'pro-English' or 'pro-Urdu' and suggests the formation of multiple and hybrid forms of urban language identity that merit serious research and policy interest.

CONCLUSION

This study has resulted in an extensive empirical description of the linguistic situation of three important urban centers in Pakistan, and revealed that the linguistic landscape of urban public signs in Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad is highly dominated by English, has a functional but minor presence of Urdu, and lacks a structural presence of regional languages. These patterns result from a complex amalgamation of colonial history, postcolonial elite language ideology, and the pressures of late capitalism and have implications that are not figurative but tangible for the symbolic status, living nature and intergenerational transmission of Pakistan's linguistic legacy. The study also uncovers the dynamic agency, creative hybridization, and contested negotiation of identity among urban sign producers, which calls for an open-ended approach to the study of the Pakistani language ecology. The findings from this study should be further replicated in smaller cities, rural-urban transition spaces and digital public spaces to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the visibility of languages in the broader landscape of social life in Pakistan.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, the policy makers, urban planners and language authorities are recommended to design and enact a national linguistic landscape policy in Pakistani cities that will ensure the presence of Urdu and appropriate regional languages along with English in all formal public, institutional and commercial signage in cities. Critical language awareness elements should be integrated into educational programs in order to help students identify and question the social meaning behind the language used in their city. Municipalities should encourage and promote multilingual signage in the places of traditional bazaars and communities in order to affirm the cultural significance of indigenous languages and to create inclusive urban identities that embrace and celebrate Pakistan's tremendous linguistic diversity in lieu of the prestige agenda of global English.

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