



GLOBAL ENGLISH, LOCAL TRUST: ETHNOLINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES OF LAHORE'S MALLS AND MARKETS THROUGH ELLA 2.0

Shafqet Yasmin – (Corresponding Author) (shfaq.fatima@gmail.com)

PhD Scholar, University of Education, Lahore

Prof. Dr. Ahsan Bashir

Director, Division of Arts and Social Science, University of Education, Lahore

Abstract

*This study examines the linguistic landscape of urban Lahore as a **semiotically stratified system shaped by distinct retail ecologies**, rather than a homogeneous or binary field. Drawing on a qualitative corpus of 12 commercial signs collected from five key sites—Emporium Mall, Packages Mall, Fortress Square, Liberty Market, and Model Town Market—the analysis applies an Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis (ELLA 2.0) framework across five layers: linguistic, visual-semiotic, spatial/geosemiotic, social/identity, and ethnographic/interactional. The findings reveal that **English dominates all primary signage**, while Urdu is largely absent from main displays. However, this dominance does not produce uniform meanings. Instead, English performs differentiated semiotic functions across retail environments: it generates **affective, cosmopolitan brand aura in malls, trust and professional credibility in street markets, and hybrid aspirational identities in transitional plazas**. The study further demonstrates that naming strategies, material forms, and spatial placement contribute to the construction of distinct identity registers, including global-corporate, localized entrepreneurial, and hybrid local-modern branding. Personal names emerge as key mechanisms of trust within English-dominant commerce, while material differences encode temporal meanings such as novelty, continuity, and reliability. These findings support a model of **Urban Retail Semiotic Stratification**, highlighting how malls, plazas, and markets operate as differentiated semiotic regimes rather than points along a linear modern/traditional continuum. The study contributes to linguistic landscape research by advancing a **comparative intra-city approach** and by emphasizing the need to analyze retail ecologies as key sites of meaning-making in contemporary urban contexts.*

Keywords: Linguistic landscape; English dominance; urban semiotics; retail ecology; Lahore; ELLA 2.0; geosemiotics; multimodality; symbolic capital; globalization and localization

1. Introduction

Lahore's contemporary urban landscape cannot be adequately understood as a singular linguistic or semiotic field; rather, it must be approached as a stratified constellation of retail environments, each governed by distinct regimes of visibility, language use, and social meaning. Recent linguistic landscape (LL) scholarship has emphasized that public signage operates not merely as informational text but as a symbolic resource that indexes power, identity, and belonging within specific spatial contexts (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Gorter, 2006). Extending this perspective, the present study conceptualizes Lahore as a layered semiotic terrain in which malls, hybrid plazas, and street markets produce differentiated communicative orders. The uploaded dataset—comprising 12 signs across Emporium Mall, Packages Mall, Fortress Square, Liberty Market, and Model Town—demonstrates that English overwhelmingly dominates primary signage, while Urdu is nearly absent from main storefront displays. This pattern signals not a simple linguistic shift but a reorganization of urban semiotics along classed and spatial lines, where language, materiality, and placement converge to produce distinct forms of urban experience.

The problem addressed in this article is not one of linguistic loss or heritage erasure, but of semiotic differentiation structured by retail ecology. Existing debates in sociolinguistics often frame English expansion in postcolonial contexts as either cultural dominance or globalization-driven homogenization (Pennycook, 2017; Park & Wee, 2013). However, such binary framings obscure how English operates differently across urban micro-contexts. In Lahore, English functions as a flexible semiotic resource that organizes multiple forms of social belonging: it



produces aspirational cosmopolitanism within curated mall environments, facilitates reputational trust and service credibility in street markets, and enables hybrid identity negotiations in transitional commercial spaces. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, this study argues that English in Lahore is not uniformly deployed but strategically mobilized in relation to specific economic and spatial conditions. Thus, the central issue is how language, visual design, and spatial arrangement collectively construct differentiated urban subjectivities rather than a single homogenized linguistic order.

Despite a growing body of LL research globally and within South Asia, there remains a significant gap in comparative intra-city analyses that examine how different retail ecologies produce distinct semiotic regimes. Studies of Pakistan's linguistic landscape have documented the prominence of English and its role in signaling modernity and globalization (Manan et al., 2017), yet they have largely treated urban space as a relatively uniform field. Similarly, work on commodified language and urban signage has highlighted how linguistic resources are mobilized for economic value (Leeman & Modan, 2009; Lou, 2016), but has not sufficiently accounted for variation across spatial-commercial typologies within a single city. The present study addresses this gap by applying an Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis (ELLA 2.0) framework to a small but analytically rich corpus, enabling a comparative reading of malls, plazas, and markets within Lahore. By foregrounding differences in materiality, placement, and naming strategies, the study advances LL research beyond language counts toward a more context-sensitive understanding of urban semiotics.

Building on this framework, the article is guided by four research questions that structure the analysis. First, how is English distributed across the sampled signs, and what symbolic functions does it perform in different retail contexts? Second, how do materiality and spatial placement distinguish mall, plaza, and market signage regimes? Third, how do naming strategies construct global-corporate, localized entrepreneurial, and hybrid identities within these spaces? Finally, how do these signs index different interactional economies, including browsing-oriented consumption, trust-based transactions, service assurance, and experiential engagement? Together, these questions enable a systematic investigation of how Lahore's urban signage operates as a semiotic system that is both globally oriented and locally embedded, revealing a المدينة (city) structured not by simple binaries but by layered and negotiated forms of meaning-making.

1.2 Problem Statement

This study addresses the problem of **semiotic differentiation across classed retail environments** rather than linguistic loss or heritage decline. While English dominates primary signage across all sampled sites in Lahore, its meanings vary significantly depending on spatial and material context. In malls, English is embedded in polished, architecturally integrated signage that produces aspirational cosmopolitanism; in street markets, it combines with personal naming and practical design to generate trust and service credibility; and in transitional plazas, it supports hybrid forms of identity negotiation.

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, alongside Park and Wee's (2012) notion of English as a marketized resource and Pennycook's (2017) cultural politics of English, the problem is therefore not language dominance itself but **how English, materiality, placement, and naming strategies organize distinct forms of urban belonging and interactional economies** within the city.

1.3 Research Gap

Existing linguistic landscape studies in Pakistan document the prominence of English and its association with modernity (Manan et al., 2017), yet they largely treat urban space as a uniform



field. At the same time, broader scholarship on commodified language (Leeman & Modan, 2009) and ethnographic signage analysis (Lou, 2016) has not sufficiently examined **variation across intra-city retail ecologies**.

This study addresses that gap by offering a **comparative analysis of malls, hybrid plazas, and street markets within Lahore under a unified ELLA 2.0 framework**, demonstrating that linguistic landscapes are not only multilingual but also **internally stratified by commercial environment**.

1.4 Research questions

1. How is English distributed and what symbolic work does it perform across the 12 signs?
2. How do materiality and placement distinguish mall, plaza, and market signage regimes?
3. How do naming strategies construct global-corporate, localized entrepreneurial, and hybrid identities?
4. How do these signs index different interactional economies: browsing, trust, service assurance, and experiential consumption?

2. Literature Review

2.1 From Linguistic Landscape to ELLA 2.0

The field of linguistic landscape (LL) studies has undergone a significant conceptual shift from early descriptive approaches toward more complex, context-sensitive frameworks that account for the social life of signs. Foundational work by Landry and Bourhis (1997) defined the linguistic landscape as the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signage, establishing a basis for measuring ethnolinguistic vitality. Subsequent scholarship consolidated this approach by emphasizing systematic documentation and categorization of signs across urban environments (Gorter, 2006; Backhaus, 2006; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). However, these early models have been critiqued for privileging quantitative inventories—such as language counts—while underestimating the sociocultural, spatial, and interactional dimensions through which signage acquires meaning (Pennycook, 2009; Huebner, 2006; Blackwood & Tufi, 2015). In response, more recent work has reconceptualized linguistic landscapes as dynamic semiotic assemblages embedded within broader processes of globalization, mobility, and superdiversity (Blommaert, 2013; Vertovec, 2013; Androutsopoulos, 2015).

This shift is particularly evident in the development of ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis, often operationalized through frameworks such as ELLA 2.0. Rather than treating signs as static objects, ELLA approaches interpret them as socially situated practices that intersect with histories, identities, and interactional contexts (Blommaert & Maly, 2016; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009; Peck & Banda, 2014; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Malinowski, 2009). This perspective is especially relevant to the present study, where the dataset reveals not only the dominance of English but also the differentiated ways in which signage is embedded in distinct retail ecologies across Lahore (Bhatti et al., 2020). By moving beyond surface-level linguistic description, ELLA 2.0 enables a layered analysis encompassing linguistic form, visual design, spatial emplacement, identity construction, and everyday interaction. Consequently, the study aligns with contemporary LL scholarship that prioritizes interpretive depth and contextual sensitivity over purely quantitative representation (Blommaert, 2013; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010).

2.2 Geosemiotics and Emplacement

A central development in linguistic landscape research is the integration of geosemiotics, which foregrounds the spatial organization and material placement of signs as key to their meaning-making potential. Scollon and Scollon (2003) argue that signage cannot be understood



independently of its emplacement within physical environments, as factors such as height, orientation, visibility, and architectural integration shape how signs are read and interpreted. This spatial perspective is further extended in studies of semiotic landscapes that emphasize the interplay between language, image, and space in the production of urban meaning (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Nickolson-Smith, 1991; Tuan, 1977; Cresswell, 2004). More recent research has also linked linguistic landscapes to processes of place-making, demonstrating how signage contributes to the construction of spatial identity and user experience (Li et al., 2024; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Li, Mai, & Lau, 2023).

The relevance of geosemiotics is particularly pronounced in the Lahore dataset, where clear distinctions emerge between mall, plaza, and market environments. Mall signage is typically elevated, backlit, and architecturally integrated, producing a controlled and aesthetically cohesive visual field. In contrast, street-market signage is denser, more heterogeneous, and often directly mounted onto shopfronts, reflecting a competitive and visibility-driven environment. Transitional spaces such as Fortress Square exhibit features of both regimes, combining large-scale façade displays with more localized branding strategies. These spatial differences are not merely aesthetic but index distinct interactional logics—ranging from leisurely browsing in malls to trust-oriented transactions in markets—underscoring the importance of emplacement in understanding urban semiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Lou, 2016).

2.3 English as Prestige, Capital, and Class Signal

The dominance of English in global and postcolonial linguistic landscapes has been widely documented, often interpreted as a marker of prestige, modernity, and socioeconomic mobility. Bourdieu's (1991) notion of linguistic capital provides a foundational framework for understanding how certain languages acquire symbolic power within specific social fields. Building on this, Park and Wee (2013) conceptualize English as a commodified resource circulating within global markets, where its value is tied to economic participation and aspirational identity formation. Pennycook (2017) further emphasizes the cultural politics of English, highlighting its role in shaping subjectivities and reinforcing global hierarchies. Within the Pakistani context, Manan et al. (2017) demonstrate how English is localized—or “glocalized”—to negotiate both global alignment and local relevance (Rahman, 2002; Mahboob, 2009; Abbas et al., 2021; Coleman, 2010; Bolton, 2012).

In the present study, English emerges as the universal code of primary signage across all 12 sampled images, functioning not merely as a communicative medium but as a marker of legitimacy, professionalism, and category authority. Importantly, this dominance does not produce uniform meanings across contexts. In mall environments, English operates as a language of affective branding and cosmopolitan aspiration, often detached from immediate transactional concerns. In contrast, in street markets and neighborhood retail spaces, English is mobilized to signal reliability, expertise, and service competence. Even when local or personal names are used, they are typically rendered in Roman script rather than Urdu, indicating that English orthography itself carries symbolic value. Thus, English in Lahore's linguistic landscape functions as a stratified resource, mediating different forms of social positioning across retail environments (Canagarajah, 2013; Pennycook, 2010; Park & Wee, 2013).

2.4 Multimodality, Retail Atmospherics, and Visual Grammar

Contemporary linguistic landscape research increasingly recognizes that meaning-making in urban signage extends beyond language to encompass a range of visual and material elements. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) theory of visual grammar provides a systematic framework for analyzing how color, typography, layout, and imagery contribute to the construction of



meaning. Similarly, Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) emphasize the multimodal nature of semiotic landscapes, where linguistic and visual resources interact to produce complex communicative effects (Ledin & Machin, 2020; Jewitt, 2009; Bateman, Wildfeuer, & Hiippala, 2017). Ethnographic approaches further highlight how these multimodal features are embedded within specific commercial and cultural contexts, shaping how spaces are experienced and interpreted (Lou, 2016; Norris, 2004).

The dataset analyzed in this study illustrates stark contrasts in multimodal design across different retail settings. Mall signage is characterized by minimalism, controlled spacing, high-quality materials, and strategic illumination, creating an atmosphere of exclusivity and aesthetic coherence. In contrast, signage in Liberty and Model Town markets tends to prioritize visibility and informational density, often combining text, color, and iconography to maximize communicative efficiency. These differences reflect not only divergent aesthetic preferences but also distinct commercial logics: malls emphasize experiential consumption and brand aura, while markets focus on clarity, accessibility, and immediate recognition. As such, multimodality is integral to understanding how signage operates within broader retail atmospherics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010).

2.5 Commodified Language, Neoliberal Urbanism, and Non-Place

The commodification of language is a key theme in sociolinguistic analyses of contemporary urban environments, particularly in relation to neoliberal forms of economic organization. Leeman and Modan (2009) argue that linguistic resources are increasingly deployed as marketable assets, contributing to the branding and commercialization of urban spaces. Heller (2011) similarly highlights how language becomes a site of economic value in late capitalist contexts, where identity and communication are intertwined with processes of commodification. These dynamics are closely linked to broader transformations in urban space under neoliberalism, as described by Harvey (2007), where standardization, privatization, and consumption-oriented development reshape the city (Peck, 2010; Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Zukin, 1995).

Within this framework, malls can be understood as “non-places” in Augé’s (1995) sense—spaces characterized by transience, standardization, and the erosion of localized social relations. However, the Lahore dataset complicates this notion by revealing variations within and across retail environments. While mall signage often aligns with global corporate aesthetics and standardized branding, street markets and hybrid spaces retain elements of localized identity and interpersonal trust. This suggests that commodification does not produce uniform outcomes but interacts with existing social and spatial structures to generate diverse semiotic forms (Zukin, 2010; De Certeau, 1984). Consequently, the study adopts a nuanced view of neoliberal urbanism, focusing on how different retail regimes mediate the relationship between global capital and local practice.

2.6 Pakistani and South Asian Linguistic Landscape Context

Situating the study within the broader South Asian context is essential for understanding the specific dynamics of Lahore’s linguistic landscape. Research on Pakistan has consistently highlighted the prominence of English as a marker of education, modernity, and upward mobility, often coexisting with Urdu and regional languages in complex ways (Manan et al., 2017; Rahman, 2002; Mahboob, 2009; Coleman, 2010). However, much of this work has focused on general patterns of language use rather than comparative analyses of specific urban subspaces. As a result, there is limited understanding of how different commercial environments within a single city produce distinct semiotic configurations.



The present study contributes to this emerging area by offering a comparative intra-city analysis that foregrounds variation across retail ecologies. By examining malls, plazas, and markets within a unified analytical framework, it demonstrates that Lahore’s linguistic landscape is not homogeneous but internally differentiated along spatial, economic, and social lines. This approach aligns with recent calls in LL research to move beyond aggregate descriptions toward more fine-grained, contextually grounded analyses (Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, & Barni, 2010; Blackwood & Tufi, 2015). In doing so, the study not only extends existing work on Pakistan’s linguistic landscape but also provides a model for future research in South Asian urban contexts.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 ELLA 2.0 as the Principal Analytic Model

This study adopts an **Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis (ELLA 2.0)** framework to interpret urban signage as a socially embedded semiotic assemblage operating across multiple interrelated layers. Moving beyond earlier linguistic landscape approaches that prioritized surface-level description or language quantification (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Gorter, 2006), ELLA 2.0 conceptualizes signage as a site where language, materiality, spatiality, and social practice intersect. In line with developments in ethnographic and superdiversity-oriented scholarship (Blommaert, 2013; Blommaert & Maly, 2016), this approach enables a shift from descriptive inventories toward **contextualized, layered interpretation**, where meaning is understood as emergent from situated interaction rather than fixed textual presence.

Operationally, ELLA 2.0 in this study is structured around five analytic layers: **(1) linguistic, (2) visual-semiotic, (3) spatial/geosemiotic, (4) social/identity, and (5) ethnographic/interactional**. The linguistic layer examines language choice, script, and textual composition, particularly the dominance of English and the marginality of Urdu in primary signage. The visual-semiotic layer analyzes design elements such as typography, color, illumination, and layout, drawing on multimodal frameworks (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). The spatial/geosemiotic layer, informed by Scollon and Scollon (2003), considers placement, scale, and integration within the built environment, highlighting how meaning is shaped by emplacement. The social/identity layer interprets how signage constructs and indexes identities—global-corporate, localized entrepreneurial, or hybrid—while the ethnographic/interactional layer examines how signs anticipate and structure patterns of engagement, such as browsing, trust-building, or service-oriented interaction.

This layered model is particularly suited to the present dataset, where the same linguistic code—English—performs different semiotic functions across retail environments. By integrating multiple dimensions of analysis, ELLA 2.0 allows for a systematic account of how signage operates within broader socio-economic and spatial configurations, rather than treating it as isolated textual data. In this sense, the framework aligns with contemporary LL scholarship that emphasizes complexity, indexicality, and the embeddedness of language in material and social worlds.

3.2 Urban Retail Semiotic Stratification Model

To account for the patterned variation observed across the dataset, this study proposes an **Urban Retail Semiotic Stratification Model**, replacing the “Triadic Collision Model” used in heritage-focused analyses with a framework more appropriate to contemporary commercial environments. While earlier triadic models emphasize tensions between tradition, regulation, and globalization, the present corpus instead reveals a **stratified organization of urban**



semiotics shaped by retail ecology. This model identifies three primary regimes: (1) **Mall-Corporate Regime**, (2) **Hybrid Plaza Regime**, and (3) **Street-Market Trust Regime**.

The **Mall-Corporate Regime** is characterized by curated, English-dominant signage that is architecturally integrated, visually disciplined, and oriented toward experiential consumption. Signs in this regime prioritize minimalism, illumination, and brand coherence, producing what can be understood as an affective environment of cosmopolitan aspiration. This aligns with Scollon and Scollon's (2003) emphasis on regulated emplacement and with broader accounts of commodified language in globalized retail spaces (Leeman & Modan, 2009). The **Hybrid Plaza Regime**, exemplified by transitional spaces such as Fortress Square, combines elements of corporate branding with localized entrepreneurial signaling. Here, English remains dominant, but naming strategies and visual design introduce hybrid identities that mediate between global and local orientations. Finally, the **Street-Market Trust Regime** is defined by signage that foregrounds personal names, durability, and functional clarity. In these environments, English is deployed less for cosmopolitan display and more as a marker of credibility and service assurance, often in conjunction with locally meaningful naming practices.

Theoretically, this stratification reflects broader sociolinguistic processes in which language operates as a resource within differentiated economic and spatial fields (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2011). It also resonates with Blommaert's (2013) notion of layered sociolinguistic orders, where meaning emerges from the interaction of global and local scales. By foregrounding retail ecology as a key organizing principle, the model provides a more precise account of how urban semiotics are structured in Lahore, avoiding overgeneralized binaries and instead highlighting **systematic variation across commercial environments**.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a **qualitative-dominant mixed-method design**, drawing methodological inspiration from recent ethnographic linguistic landscape research. While the primary emphasis is on interpretive, context-sensitive analysis, limited quantitative description is incorporated to support comparative claims across sites. This design reflects a shift within LL studies toward integrating systematic documentation with ethnographic depth (Blommaert & Maly, 2016). The approach is particularly appropriate for the present research, where the objective is not to generalize statistically but to **analyze semiotic patterns across distinct retail environments** using a small, carefully selected corpus.

The design prioritizes analytical rigor through structured observation, consistent categorization, and theoretically informed interpretation. Rather than treating signs as isolated units, the study situates them within their spatial and social contexts, enabling a holistic understanding of how meaning is produced across different layers of analysis.

4.2 Corpus and Site Profile

The empirical corpus consists of **12 photographic images of commercial signage** collected from five urban retail sites in Lahore: **Emporium Mall (n = 3)**, **Packages Mall (n = 3)**, **Fortress Square (n = 2)**, **Liberty Market (n = 2)**, and **Model Town Market (n = 2)**. These sites were selected to represent three distinct retail ecologies: indoor corporate malls, transitional plaza environments, and open street or neighborhood markets.

The distribution of images allows for **comparative qualitative analysis** across these environments, capturing variation in linguistic choice, visual design, spatial placement, and identity construction. While the sample size is limited, it is analytically sufficient to identify recurring patterns and contrasts, particularly given the depth of the ELLA 2.0 framework.



Importantly, the corpus is not intended to be statistically representative of Lahore as a whole, but rather to provide a **focused, theory-driven examination of semiotic stratification within the city.**

4.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis follows a structured, multi-layered procedure based on the five components of the ELLA 2.0 framework:

- **Linguistic analysis** examines language choice, script usage, and textual hierarchy, with particular attention to the dominance of English and the marginal presence of Urdu.
- **Visual-semiotic analysis** focuses on design features such as typography, color schemes, illumination, and layout, drawing on multimodal theory to interpret their communicative effects.
- **Spatial/geosemiotic analysis** considers the placement, scale, and environmental integration of signage, analyzing how spatial positioning shapes visibility and meaning (Scollon & Scollon, 2003).
- **Social/identity analysis** interprets how signs construct and index identities, including global-corporate branding, localized entrepreneurial identity, and hybrid forms of self-presentation.
- **Ethnographic/interactional analysis** examines how signage anticipates and structures user interaction, such as browsing behavior in malls or trust-based engagement in markets.

This layered procedure ensures that each sign is analyzed comprehensively, allowing for cross-site comparison while maintaining sensitivity to contextual variation.

4.4 Rigor and Analytical Transparency

Rigor in this study is ensured through **systematic documentation, theoretical triangulation, and analytic transparency.** Each sign is examined across the same five analytic layers, providing consistency in interpretation and facilitating comparison across sites. The use of established theoretical frameworks—such as geosemiotics, multimodality, and linguistic capital—serves as a form of conceptual triangulation, strengthening the validity of the analysis. At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations. Given the qualitative and interpretive nature of the research, claims are grounded in **analytical depth rather than statistical generalization.** No inter-coder reliability measures are reported, as the analysis was conducted by a single researcher; instead, transparency is maintained through explicit description of analytical categories and procedures. This approach aligns with best practices in qualitative LL research, methodological rigor is achieved through clarity, consistency, and theoretical grounding rather than purely quantitative validation.

5. Results

This section presents the findings in two stages: first, a set of **descriptive tables** outlining the structure of the corpus, and second, **interpretive subsections** that analyze patterns across linguistic, visual, spatial, and social dimensions. The tables are based on the 12-image dataset and are intended as **analytical summaries of the sample**, not as generalizable claims about the entire city.

5.1 Corpus Profile and Site Distribution

Table 1. Corpus Composition by Site (N = 12)

| Site | Images (n) | % of Corpus | Dominant Retail Ecology |
|---------------|------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| Emporium Mall | 3 | 25.0 | Curated mall branding |
| Packages Mall | 3 | 25.0 | Mall branding with hybrid variation |



| Site | Images (n) | % of Corpus | Dominant Retail Ecology |
|-------------------|------------|-------------|---|
| Fortress Square | 2 | 16.7 | Transitional plaza / semi-formal retail |
| Liberty Market | 2 | 16.7 | Legacy street-market retail |
| Model Town Market | 2 | 16.7 | Neighborhood service retail |

Note. The corpus is balanced enough to support comparative qualitative interpretation across three spatial regimes: mall, hybrid plaza, and street-market.

The dataset is deliberately distributed across five urban commercial sites in Lahore, enabling a structured comparison between **indoor malls, transitional plazas, and open markets**. While limited in size, the corpus captures sufficient variation to reveal systematic differences in semiotic organization. The near-equal representation of mall and non-mall environments strengthens the analytical claim that Lahore’s linguistic landscape is internally differentiated rather than homogeneous.

5.2 Linguistic Dominance and Script Politics

Table 2. Primary Language and Script Distribution in the Sample

| Category | n | % |
|--|----|-------|
| Primary signage in English/Roman script | 12 | 100.0 |
| Primary signage in Urdu script | 0 | 0.0 |
| Secondary Urdu visible somewhere in the sign environment | 1 | 8.3 |
| Signs using local/personal names in Roman script | 5 | 41.7 |

Examples of local/personal naming: Shayan Ali, Arshad, Iqbal, Talha, dhanak.

The most striking finding is the **complete dominance of English in primary signage**, with all 12 signs using Roman script as the main display medium. Urdu, despite its national status, appears only marginally and primarily in secondary or supplementary textual elements. This supports foundational LL arguments that linguistic visibility reflects underlying power relations (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), as well as Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of language as symbolic capital.

However, the dataset complicates a simple narrative of linguistic replacement. While Urdu script is largely absent, **local identity re-enters through naming practices rather than script choice**. Personal and culturally resonant names appear in Romanized form, indicating that English orthography itself has become the dominant medium through which both global and local meanings are expressed. This aligns with Park and Wee’s (2012) argument that English operates within market logics, and with Manan et al.’s (2017) observation that English in Pakistan is localized rather than purely external.

5.3 Mall Modernity versus Street-Market Memory

One of the most analytically significant findings is the contrast between **mall modernity and street-market memory** as distinct semiotic regimes. Mall environments such as Emporium and Packages are characterized by **disciplined, luminous, and aesthetically controlled signage**, where design coherence, minimalism, and illumination create a curated visual field. Signs are typically integrated into architectural structures, producing what can be described as a **brand aura** oriented toward browsing and experiential consumption. This reflects geosemiotic principles of regulated placement (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) and multimodal design strategies that emphasize visual hierarchy and affect (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).



In contrast, Liberty Market and Model Town Market exhibit a **layered and materially diverse signage environment**, where multiple visual styles coexist within dense spatial arrangements. Here, signs prioritize visibility, clarity, and recognizability over aesthetic uniformity. The presence of older materials, varied typographies, and direct façade mounting contributes to a sense of **temporal continuity and accumulated commercial memory**. Rather than producing a unified brand experience, these spaces operate through **trust-intensive semiotics**, where familiarity and repetition play a central role. This distinction demonstrates that urban semiotics in Lahore are not organized along a simple modern/traditional binary but through **differentiated regimes of visual and spatial practice**.

5.4 Naming Economies: Global-Corporate, Localized Entrepreneurial, Hybrid Local-Modern

Table 3. Identity Register Typology Across the 12 Signs

| Identity Register | Representative Signs | n % |
|--|--|------------|
| Global-corporate modernity ideas, SAMSUNG, BANDANA | | 3 25.0 |
| Experiential / themed global branding | LAMA, HOWDY! | 2 16.7 |
| Localized entrepreneurial identity | SHAYAN ALI Interior, ARSHAD JEWELLERS, IQBAL JEWELLERS, TALHA OPTICALS | 4 33.3 |
| Hybrid local-modern branding | MoltyOrtho, dhanak | 2 16.7 |
| Functional service-institutional identity | PUBLIX PHARMACY | 1 8.3 |

The dataset reveals a structured **economy of naming practices** that aligns with broader processes of commodification and identity construction (Leeman & Modan, 2009; Heller, 2011). Global-corporate names rely on abstraction and brand recognition, often detached from local specificity. In contrast, localized entrepreneurial signage foregrounds personal names, which function as **trust markers and reputational anchors** within competitive market environments.

Hybrid forms—such as *dhanak* or *MoltyOrtho*—demonstrate a **negotiated semiotic strategy**, combining local semantic resonance with global branding conventions. These findings support Pennycook’s (2017) argument that English operates as a site of cultural negotiation rather than simple imposition. Importantly, the coexistence of these naming regimes indicates that Lahore’s linguistic landscape is not dominated by a single identity logic but is instead characterized by **plural and context-dependent identity constructions**.

5.5 Material Temporality: Polish, Wear, and Credibility

Table 5. Materiality and Temporal Indexicality

| Material/Display Form | Representative Signs | Semiotic Effect |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Backlit / 3D mall signage | LAMA, HOWDY!, BANDANA, dhanak | ideas, polish, curated modernity, lifestyle consumption |
| Promotional branded kiosk | MoltyOrtho | sales activation, product persuasion |
| Printed board / billboard signage | SAMSUNG, SHAYAN ALI Interior, TALHA OPTICALS | practical authority, category clarity |



| Material/Display Form | Representative Signs | Semiotic Effect |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Legacy neon / aged sign | IQBAL JEWELLERS | continuity, reputational memory |
| Service-intensive illuminated fascia | PUBLIX PHARMACY | urgency, reliability, accessibility |

Material differences across signage types index distinct **temporal orientations and credibility structures**. Mall signage, with its polished surfaces and LED illumination, signals **novelty and curated modernity**, aligning with consumption-driven temporalities. In contrast, legacy signage such as neon boards conveys **durability and historical continuity**, functioning as a visual marker of long-standing trust.

Service-oriented signage, particularly in pharmacies and optical shops, emphasizes **urgency and accessibility**, often through bright illumination and clear textual hierarchy. These findings support geosemiotic arguments that materiality is not neutral but encodes social meaning (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), as well as multimodal perspectives on the semiotic role of design features (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). The dataset thus demonstrates that **material form operates as a temporal index**, shaping how businesses position themselves in relation to past, present, and future-oriented identities.

5.6 Digital Extension and Phygital Retail

Table 6. Digital Extension and Contactability

| Digital/Extended Marker | Visible Sample | in Example Signs | Interpretive Function |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Social media icons / handles | 2 | ARSHAD JEWELLERS, TALHA OPTICALS | cross-platform identity |
| Email / website | 1 | ARSHAD JEWELLERS | formal credibility |
| Phone/contact emphasis | 2–3 | ARSHAD JEWELLERS, TALHA OPTICALS | accessibility and trust |
| No visible digital extension | majority | most mall storefronts | brand-first orientation |

Digital extension is present but **not a dominant feature across the corpus**. A subset of signs—particularly in jewelry and service sectors—incorporates social media handles, email addresses, and phone numbers, extending the brand beyond the physical storefront. These elements function as **trust-enhancing mechanisms**, signaling accessibility and transparency in customer interaction.

In contrast, most mall-based signage does not display direct contact information, instead relying on **brand recognition and in-situ experience**. This suggests a distinction between **phygital engagement in service-oriented retail** and **aura-based branding in corporate mall environments**. Consistent with Blommaert and Maly’s (2016) work on online-offline semiotic integration, these findings indicate that digital extension is selectively deployed based on the interactional needs of different retail contexts.



6. Discussion

6.1 Urban Semiotic Stratification Beyond the Traditional/Modern Binary

The findings of this study challenge the widespread tendency to interpret urban linguistic landscapes through a binary opposition between “traditional” and “modern.” Rather than reflecting a linear transition from local to global or from Urdu to English, Lahore’s commercial signage reveals a **stratified semiotic order structured by retail ecology**. The coexistence of mall, plaza, and street-market regimes demonstrates that different forms of modernity and locality are simultaneously produced and maintained within the same المدينة (city). This aligns with Blommaert’s (2013) argument that linguistic landscapes are layered and polycentric, shaped by multiple interacting scales rather than a single dominant trajectory.

From a spatial-semiotic perspective, malls do not simply represent “modernity” in opposition to “traditional” markets; instead, they constitute a **specific regime of controlled visibility, aesthetic discipline, and affective consumption**, while markets represent a different but equally structured regime grounded in density, repetition, and trust. This interpretation is consistent with recent work on urban semiotics that emphasizes the coexistence of heterogeneous spatial logics within globalizing cities (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015). Consequently, the data suggests that Lahore’s linguistic landscape is better understood as **internally differentiated and stratified**, rather than undergoing a unidirectional transformation.

6.2 English as Universal Prestige, but Not Socially Uniform

While English is uniformly dominant across the dataset, its functions are **not socially or semiotically uniform**. Instead, English operates as a **context-dependent resource** whose meaning shifts across retail environments. In mall settings, English contributes to what can be described as a **semiotic aura**, where minimal text, stylized typography, and architectural integration produce an atmosphere of cosmopolitan consumption. Here, English is less about direct communication and more about signaling alignment with global brand culture.

In contrast, in street-market and neighborhood retail contexts, English serves a more **instrumental and trust-oriented function**, signaling professionalism, expertise, and service reliability. This reflects Bourdieu’s (1991) notion that linguistic capital acquires value differently across social fields, as well as Park and Wee’s (2012) argument that English operates within differentiated “markets.” Transitional spaces such as plazas occupy an intermediate position, where English enables **hybrid aspiration**, combining elements of global branding with localized identity markers.

This variability supports arguments in World Englishes scholarship that English is not a monolithic global language but a **plural and contextually embedded resource** (Canagarajah, 2013). In Lahore’s linguistic landscape, English functions simultaneously as a marker of global belonging, a tool of commercial credibility, and a medium for hybrid identity construction.

6.3 Personal Names as Trust Capital

One of the most significant contributions of this study is the identification of **personal naming as a form of trust capital within English-dominant signage**. Names such as *Arshad*, *Iqbal*, *Talha*, and *Shayan Ali* are not merely residual markers of local identity; rather, they function as **active semiotic strategies** that anchor businesses within networks of familiarity, reputation, and accountability. Importantly, these names are consistently rendered in Roman script, indicating that local identity is being expressed through the dominant linguistic medium rather than in opposition to it.

This finding extends existing work on commodified language by demonstrating that **personalization and localization can coexist with, and even reinforce, English dominance**



(Leeman & Modan, 2009; Heller, 2011). It also resonates with sociolinguistic research on naming practices, which highlights how names function as indexical signs linking individuals, communities, and social values (Alia, 2007). In the context of Lahore's markets, personal names operate as **semiotic guarantees of authenticity and reliability**, particularly in sectors such as jewelry, optics, and interior services where trust is central to commercial exchange. Thus, rather than viewing local naming as a residue of pre-globalization practices, it should be understood as a **strategically deployed resource within contemporary urban economies**, enabling businesses to differentiate themselves within competitive environments while maintaining cultural resonance.

6.4 Localized Cosmopolitanism and Hybrid Branding

The presence of hybrid branding forms—most notably exemplified by *dhanak*—illustrates a process of **localized cosmopolitanism**, where global and local semiotic resources are combined to produce new forms of identity. In this case, a culturally resonant Urdu term is rendered in Roman script and placed within the highly curated aesthetic environment of a shopping mall. This combination allows the brand to simultaneously signal **local authenticity and global sophistication**, appealing to consumers who navigate both cultural registers.

Such practices align with theories of globalization that emphasize hybridity and localization rather than homogenization (Appadurai, 1996). They also reflect Pennycook's (2017) argument that English operates as a site of cultural negotiation, where local meanings are rearticulated within global frameworks. In the context of Lahore, localized cosmopolitanism suggests that **global retail spaces are not culturally neutral but are actively reshaped by local semiotic practices**.

This finding complicates the notion of malls as “non-places” (Augé, 1995), indicating that even highly standardized environments can accommodate localized forms of meaning-making. Rather than erasing local identity, these spaces enable its **reconfiguration within globalized aesthetic and commercial logics**, producing hybrid forms that are neither purely global nor purely local.

6.5 Implications for Linguistic Landscape Studies in Pakistan

The findings of this study have several implications for future LL research in Pakistan. First, they demonstrate the limitations of approaches that focus primarily on **language distribution or code frequency** without accounting for spatial and socio-economic variation. As the dataset shows, English dominance alone does not adequately capture the complexity of urban semiotics; instead, meaning emerges through the interaction of language with materiality, placement, and identity construction.

Second, the study highlights the importance of **comparing distinct retail ecologies within the same urban context**. Future research should move beyond aggregate city-wide analyses to examine specific environments such as **mall interiors, transitional plazas, traditional markets, and neighborhood service corridors**. Each of these spaces operates according to different semiotic and interactional logics, and their comparison can yield more nuanced insights into the relationship between language, economy, and urban life.

Finally, the application of ELLA 2.0 demonstrates the value of **multi-layered, ethnographically informed analysis** in capturing the complexity of linguistic landscapes. By integrating linguistic, visual, spatial, and social dimensions, such approaches can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is produced in contemporary urban settings. In the Pakistani context, this suggests a shift toward **context-sensitive, comparative, and theoretically grounded LL research**, capable of addressing the diverse and stratified nature of urban semiotics.



7. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how linguistic, visual, and spatial resources organize meaning across different retail environments in Lahore. The findings demonstrate that **urban Lahore is not a uniform linguistic landscape but a semiotically stratified field**, structured by distinct retail ecologies including malls, hybrid plazas, and street markets. Rather than reflecting a simple shift toward globalization or English dominance, the data reveals a layered organization in which different spaces produce different semiotic logics and interactional economies.

Across all 12 sampled signs, **English emerges as the dominant language of primary display**, confirming its status as a key form of symbolic capital in the urban commercial sphere. However, this dominance is not uniform in its social function. In mall environments, English operates as a medium of **affective and corporate modernity**, embedded within polished, architecturally integrated signage that prioritizes brand aura and experiential consumption. In contrast, in street-market and neighborhood contexts, English is mobilized as a **tool of professionalism and trust**, often combined with personal naming strategies that reinforce reputational continuity and local credibility. Hybrid spaces such as plazas occupy an intermediate position, where English facilitates **negotiation between global branding and localized identity**, rather than replacing one with the other.

These findings directly address the research questions by showing that linguistic distribution alone cannot account for the complexity of urban signage. Instead, **materiality, spatial placement, and naming practices play a central role in differentiating semiotic regimes**. Naming strategies construct distinct identity registers—global-corporate, localized entrepreneurial, and hybrid—while material forms index different temporalities, from polished novelty to enduring credibility. Interactionally, signage anticipates and structures different modes of engagement, including browsing, trust-building, and service-oriented exchange.

In sum, the study demonstrates that Lahore's linguistic landscape is best understood not as a site of linguistic replacement or binary opposition, but as a **dynamic system of stratified semiotic practices**, where global and local resources are continuously reconfigured across spatial and economic contexts.

References

- Alia, V. (2007). *Names and nunavut: Culture and identity in Inuit communities*. Berghahn Books.
- Androutsopoulos, J. (2015). Networked multilingualism: Some language practices on Facebook and their implications. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 19(2), 185–205.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Augé, M. (1995). *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. Verso.
- Abbas, F., Rana, A. M. K., Bashir, I., & Bhatti, A. M. (2021). The English language proficiency as a global employment skill: the viewpoint of Pakistani academia. *Humanities and Social Sciences Review*, 9(3), 1071-1077.
- Backhaus, P. (2006). *Linguistic landscapes: A comparative study of urban multilingualism in Tokyo*. Multilingual Matters.
- Bateman, J., Wildfeuer, J., & Hiippala, T. (2017). *Multimodality: Foundations, research and analysis—A problem-oriented introduction*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.
- Ben-Rafael, E., Shohamy, E., Hasan Amara, M., & Trumper-Hecht, N. (2006). Linguistic landscape as symbolic construction of the public space: The case of Israel. *International journal of multilingualism*, 3(1), 7-30.



- Bhatti, A. M., Azhar, M. A., & Jalil, M. K. (2020). Hybridity in TV Commercials constructing the modernity: A critical discourse analysis approach. *Competitive Social Sciences Research Journal (CSSRJ)*, 1(1), 39-59. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3986678>
- Blackwood, R. J., & Tufi, S. (2015). An Introduction to Mediterranean Linguistic Landscapes. In *The Linguistic Landscape of the Mediterranean: French and Italian Coastal Cities* (pp. 1-17). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Blommaert, J. (2013). *Ethnography, superdiversity and linguistic landscapes: Chronicles of complexity* (Vol. 18). Multilingual Matters.
- Blommaert, J., & Maly, I. (2016). Ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis and social change: A case study. In K. Arnaut, J. Blommaert, B. Rampton, & M. Spotti (Eds.), *Language and superdiversity* (pp. 191–211). Routledge.
- Bolton, K. (2012). World Englishes and linguistic landscapes. *World Englishes*, 31(1), 30-33.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard university press.
- Brenner, N., & Theodore, N. (2002). Cities and the geographies of “actually existing neoliberalism”. *Antipode*, 34(3), 349-379.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2013). *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*. Routledge.
- Coleman, H. (2010). Teaching and learning in Pakistan: The role of language in education. Islamabad: *The British Council, 2010*, 1-56.
- Cresswell, T. (2004). *Place: A short introduction*. Blackwell.
- De Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press.
- Gorter, D. (Ed.). (2006). *Linguistic landscape: A new approach to multilingualism*. Multilingual Matters.
- Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Heller, M. (2011). *Paths to post-nationalism: A critical ethnography of language and identity*. Oxford University Press.
- Huebner, T. (2006). Bangkok's linguistic landscapes: Environmental print, codemixing and language change. *International journal of multilingualism*, 3(1), 31-51.
- Jaworski, A., & Thurlow, C. (Eds.). (2010). *Semiotic landscapes: Language, image, space*. A&C Black.
- Jewitt, C. (Ed.). (2009). *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis* (Vol. 1). London: Routledge.
- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2020). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. Routledge.
- Landry, R., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1997). Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study. *Journal of language and social psychology*, 16(1), 23-49.
- Ledin, P., & Machin, D. (2020). *Introduction to multimodal analysis*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Leeman, J., & Modan, G. (2009). Commodified language in Chinatown: A contextualized approach to linguistic landscape 1. *Journal of sociolinguistics*, 13(3), 332-362.
- Li, C., Lu, S., Long, C., & Zhu, J. (2024). Linguistic landscape and its impacts on place-making in mountain destination: A case of Mogan Mountain Town of Huzhou City, China. *Journal of Mountain Science*, 21(5), 1613-1629.
- Li, Y., Mai, Z., & Lau, C. (2023). Linguistic landscape and place-making on a resort island in China. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 21(5), 605-622.
- Lou, J. J. (2016). *The Linguistic Landscape of Chinatown: A Sociolinguistic Ethnography*. Multilingual Matters.



- Mahboob, A. (2009). English as an Islamic language: A case study of Pakistani English. *World Englishes*, 28(2), 175-189.
- Malinowski, D. (2008). Authorship in the linguistic landscape: A multimodal-performative view. In E. Shohamy, & D. Gorter (Eds.), *Linguistic Landscape* (pp. 107–125). Routledge.
- Manan, S. A., David, M. K., Dumanig, F. P., & Channa, L. A. (2017). The glocalization of English in the Pakistan linguistic landscape. *World Englishes*, 36(4), 645-665.
- Nicholson-Smith, D. (1991). *The production of space* (p. 85). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Limited.
- Norris, S. (2004). *Analyzing multimodal interaction: A methodological framework*. Routledge.
- Park, J. S. Y., & Wee, L. (2013). *Markets of English: Linguistic capital and language policy in a globalizing world*. Routledge.
- Peck, A., & Banda, F. (2014). Observatory's linguistic landscape: Semiotic appropriation and the reinvention of space. *Social semiotics*, 24(3), 302-323.
- Peck, J. (2010). *Constructions of neoliberal reason*. Oxford University Press.
- Pennycook, A. (2017). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. Routledge.
- Pennycook, A., & Otsuji, E. (2015). *Metrolingualism: Language in the city*. Routledge.
- Rahman, T. (2002). *Language, ideology and power: Language-learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India*. Oxford University Press.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (2003). *Discourses in place: Language in the material world*. Routledge.
- Shohamy, E. G., Rafael, E. B., & Barni, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Linguistic landscape in the city*. Multilingual Matters.
- Shohamy, E., & Gorter, D. (2009). *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery*. Routledge.
- Stroud, C., & Mpendukana, S. (2009). Towards a material ethnography of linguistic landscape: Multilingualism, mobility and space in a South African township 1. *Journal of sociolinguistics*, 13(3), 363-386.
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Vertovec, S. (2013). Super-diversity and its implications. In *Anthropology of migration and multiculturalism* (pp. 65-95). Routledge.
- Zukin, S. (1995). *The Cultures of Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Zukin, S. (2010). *Naked city: The death and life of authentic urban places*. Oxford University Press.