

THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF RAMALLAH, PALESTINE: A CASE STUDY OF ANALYSING THE DOMINANCE OF ENGLISH VS. ARABIC AS L1 IN THE MAIN STREET OF THE CITY

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Abstract

The study investigates whether the Linguistic Landscape (LL) in the main street of Ramallah, Palestine should be considered a situational variable of the English language in the country or a treat-like variable and exclusive to this city. The analysed data include over 519 pictures of signage so as to determine the number of languages used on the signs, the signs genre, their taxonomies, and the number of languages. Findings evince that there are significant differences between language policies and the street reality. The linguistic landscape in the street is not abided by the official language policy regarding the state language (Arabic) nor does it employ any minority language. The results of the study may contribute to ameliorating the situation through the policymakers to rectify the state language status. Further studies are expected to arrive upon other factors that influenced the status quo.

Keywords: Arabic, English, minority languages, linguistic landscape, Palestine.

1. Introduction

Human language is represented in many forms, expressions and interaction incidents. From a semiotic perspective, language is seen as an ever-changing living system without distinct or fixed sememes. Signage can be considered as part of this developing system from a linguistic point of view. This study in Linguistic Landscape (LL) focuses on Rukab Street - originally AL RA'EESY "The Main" St. (Figure 1) - in Ramallah and what follows of the discussion and analysis of the geo-semiotic representation of the street from a wholistic perspective, which represents the city in general. The street selected for this study (Rukab St.) is one of the central commercial and shopping streets in the centre of Ramallah, approximately 1100-metre long.

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Figure 1. The Original Name of Rukab St

In this case study, the majority and minority languages in the public sphere in Palestine are investigated and analysed wherever applicable according to their occurrence in the linguistic landscape. According to the latest censuses by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2017), the primary language spoken in Palestine, among Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities, is Arabic. However, historically speaking, Aramaic, Greek, and Syriac were also spoken in Palestine (Amara, 2003). Nevertheless, currently, a few Samaritans, Kurdish, Circassian, Armenians, Assyrians, and Aramean minorities are living there but are speaking Arabic predominantly.

By analysing written language in public space, it is possible to render assumptions concerning the functional domains, status, and spread of languages especially that of minorities, whether properly displayed or not, if present in bi/multilingual settings. This study covers various LL dimensions such as billboards, shop signs, street names or any other written displays visible to the public and accessible to everyone. It is hypothesized that language policy in advertising is enforced by the government, and Arabic, as the state language, is the dominant language in the street. To address these issues, the study examines the human artefacts and signage within the aforementioned street from the perspective of Hymes' (1972) ethnography of communication. While signs' genre is the starting point for the discussion, the study additionally addresses and thrives to introduce additional dimensions to the components of Hymes' framework for the interaction of language and social life. In the research process, it discusses and analyzes the signage components of the street both top-down and bottom-up as suggested by Scollon and Scollon-Wong (2003) with reference to geosemiotics. This study, besides the "traditional" methods of analysis, introduces a useful tool which helps to visualize the density of the information with an innovative 3D elevation.

According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), linguistic landscape is the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on buildings, which combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. Conceptually defined, Landry and Bourhis (1997) state that LL includes a compelling construct and documented visual records of identities values and their relationship in a certain area. However, Gorter (2006: 3) narrows this concept and focuses on “the challenges posed by the sampling of empirical data, the complex task of defining a unit of analysis and subsequently devising categorization and coding schemes of the signs studied”. Gorter observes that “one may say that the linguistic landscape refers to linguistic objects that mark the public space but the question is what constitutes such an object or sign?” (2006: 3). According to Backhaus (2006: 55), a “sign” is defined as “any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame”. Scollon and Scollon-Wong (2003) refer to geosemiotics as the social meanings of the material placement of signs (semiosis, to use Peirce’s term) particularly in reference to the material world of the users of signs. Dubbing Schaefer (2000: 5-10), the concept of minority is a group that experiences a narrowing of opportunities (success, education, wealth, etc.) that is disproportionately low compared to their numbers in the society, or a subordinate group whose members have significantly less control or power over their lives than the members of a dominant or majority group.

2. Literature review

Among the pioneering scholars in LL, Shohamy (2006) argues that linguistic landscape may be interpreted as one domain within the language of the public space as it refers to certain languages and objects that mark the public sphere and are seen as one case that includes road signs, advertising and commercial billboards, instructions as well as shops’ names and public signs. This perspective presents most if not all the components of the linguistic landscape of any geographical area. Additionally, it should be noted that contemporary information culture can be thought of as parallel to visual culture, as “information is presented on different cultural sites and objects, such as road signs, displays in airports and train stations...the interior designs of banks, hotels, commercial and leisure places.” (Hortobagyi, 2013: 120).

The issue of sampling and representativeness has been long discussed when deciding whether a certain area of a country would represent its identity or provide sufficient data for analysis. According to Gorter (2006: 3) “data are not meant to indicate the linguistic composition of the city as a whole, but simply as an illustration of the linguistic diversity”. There are numerous studies that tackle this issue in big cities where researchers analyzed signage and arrangement of information after discussing factors affecting their judgments. Other studies tackled LL from different perspectives. There have been studies that address certain streets

of a city such as, Rosenbawn et al. (1977) who analyse the Keren Kayemet street in Jerusalem, which is limited to the study of Roman and Hebrew scripts on signs. More recently following Rosenbawn et al (1977), Cenoz and Gorter (2006) address two streets in two multilingual cities of the Basque Country (Spain) and Friesland (Netherlands). Cenoz and Gorter (2006) compare language use patterns of the central shopping districts of two provincial European cities concerning linguistic landscape and minority languages. Cenoz and Gorter (2006) analyse the use of the minority language (Frisian or Basque), the state language (Dutch or Spanish) and English as an international language on language signs. Backhaus (2006: 54) analyzes Tokyo train lines to render a single “multilayered picture of the centre, including business and shopping districts, as well as less busy sites such as parks and residential areas”. Additionally, Lay (2015) study the presence of different languages in Bosnia’s two main streets; and Coluzzi (2016) analyses one of the main streets in the capital of Brunei, Bandar Seri Begawan.

There are also some studies that focus on advertising per se such as Holmes (2005). However, Shohamy (2006) mentions that to comprehend the meanings and negations of the sign, a theoretical framework is needed to be taken into consideration. Therefore, Hymes’ (1972) ethnography of communication is deployed in this study for such purposes. As a theoretical perspective, Hymes (1972) provides a spectrum of terms for understanding the process of communication in any available scene and/or community. Moreover, as a methodological tool, it puts forward procedures for systematically analyzing communicative incidents and realizations as components of social life. This framework is highlighting the linguistic resources used by people within their contexts. It also tackles the wide spectrum of media tools used in communication providing comparative analysis for them. Finally, Carbaugh (as cited in Donsbach, 2015: 182) is tackling “the way verbal and nonverbal signs create and reveal social codes of identity, relationships, emotions, place, and communication itself.”

Language can be used as a policy-making tool in the top-down signage where governments manifest their regulations and represent their authority. In addition, advertising language is subject to the countries’ regulations and laws. For instance, at the beginning of 2019, the Qatar government sat a royal act (7, 2019) which states that all governmental and non-governmental organizations are committed to supporting the Arabic language. Moreover, international and local companies and institutions whose names or names of products are internationally recognized may retain the foreign name provided that they are written in Arabic alongside the foreign language (Qatar government, Law no. 7 of 2019). For our case study, we are focused on Palestine. The Advertisement Law in Palestine (2015) concerning the *Use of Foreign Language in Advertising under Act IV, Banners Contents Law*

clearly states that shop owners are compelled to position the Arabic language in a salient position, and first in order of any other language on the shopfront, banner, or any item used for advertising inside the local areas.

المادة (4): محتويات اللافتة : على الشخص الذي يمارس حرفة أو مهنة ضمن منطقة الهيئة المحلية أن يضع على باب المحل أو جسم المبنى الذي يمارس فيه هذه المهنة أو الحرفة لافتة من النوع الأول مكتوباً عليها اسم المحل ونوع الحرفة أو المهنة على أن تكون اللغة العربية هي اللغة البارزة وتعلو أي لغة أخرى.
(Original Arabic text)

The Language Policy (LP) for banners clearly indicates the importance of Arabic as the mother tongue of the country and the state language. However, as the results show in section *Data Analysis*, the percentage of monolingual English banners supersedes the Arabic language in total with great disparity. The issue of identity is directly and consciously threatened as people are capable of shifting between the two languages, English and Arabic, without the risk of losing characters of identity at all, since the majority are literate (see below) and capable to communicate in both languages. Nevertheless, for the overall picture, the question remains whether the LL in Palestine represents the identity of the country as an Arab state surrounded by neighbouring Arab and Muslim countries.

Gorter (2006: 64) state that “the linguistic landscape contributes to the construction of the sociolinguistic context” because people process the visual information that comes to them, and the languages in which signs are written can certainly influence their perception of the status of the different languages and even affect their own linguistic behaviour. The linguistic landscape or parts of the linguistic landscape can have an influence on language use. The impact of different religions, and the languages associated with them, are particularly evident in Palestine. Amara (2006) investigates the changes in Bethlehem as it fluctuated between different eras of religious influence including Muslims, the Crusaders, the British Mandate, Jordan and Israel. Shohamy and Gorter (2009) state that each of these eras has put its own stamp on the linguistic landscape. According to Minority Rights Organization website (2019) in the city of Nablus in Palestine, “They are ³*Arabic* speakers who use Aramaic as a liturgical language. They live in semi-isolation, usually only marrying within the community.” According to Shohamy (2006: xvi) “Language is commonly viewed by policymakers as a closed and finite system, as it is often used as a symbolic tool for the manipulation of political, social, educational and economic agendas”. Therefore, it is believed that in the process of compiling advertising laws, multilingualism throughout any country must be taken into consideration and maintained by the country’s language policy. According to the UNDP report (2017) concerning education in Palestine, the latest statistics on literacy status in Palestine show that 96.3% of the population is literate. This rate is even higher than that of the UNDP 2014 Human Development Index category

³ Italics for emphasis by the author

average. Accordingly, the majority of the population are able to read and write in both Arabic and English according to the latest UNDP reports.

3. Data analysis

As mentioned in the previous section, the overwhelming majority in Palestine speaks Arabic as L1 and English as FL. This section starts by drawing on Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotic systems and Reh (2004), who provides the following taxonomy of types for multilingual information arrangement. This taxonomy includes: (1) Duplicating, in which all of the information is presented in both languages; (2) Fragmentary (or partial translation) is used for multilingual writing in which the full information is given only in one language, but in which selected parts have been translated into an additional language; (3) Overlapping, in which some but not all of the information contained in one language is equally contained in the other(s) i.e. the two language versions offer partially the same information, yet both offer additional content; and (4) Complementary, in which two or more languages convey completely different contents. In the results section, there is a part devoted to this taxonomy as part of the research analysis process of the gathered data.

Concerning the brand names categorization, it will incur different implications on the analysis process and coding of signs in the street. According to the study analysis of this research, a standalone category is more proportionate since no English fluency is demanded on the part of the observers. In other words, the meaning of the global brand names is understood and this meaning reflects the psychological and social level that the observers aspire to through the geosemiotic and commercial contexts of the names. As for the business owners, brand names - mainly in English - reflect excellence in trade and commerce and cast back prestigious taste especially for the wealthy customers. On a second thought, this inclination of prioritizing certain society classes comes with a price of ruling out a big population of other different social classes, socially and financially. According to Edelman (2009), brand names in linguistics landscapes are not meant to be written in a fully comprehensible language for observers because they do not transmit factual but rather sensual information.

3.1 Tokens

Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) mention many types of signage as components of the LL in streets which include but are not limited to street signs, commercial signs, billboards, signs on national and municipal institutions, trade names, and personal study plates or public notices. This study analyzes these items, mentioned later as a token of LL in Rukab Street in Ramallah. The study also tackles all verbal and non-

verbal signage and analyzes them both in quantitative and qualitative modes. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2006), an entire shopfront is considered as a single token or frame. Wherever a sign is not a part of the shopfront, the signs themselves are tokens. These categorizations are not providing a systematic process for organizing tokens because measurements, scales, and shopfronts' contents differ. Henceforth in this study, each frame is considered a token for analysis.

In linguistic landscape research, there is a clear stratification between top-down (official) and bottom-up (non-official) signs Pavlenko (2009) categorizes them. Top-down signs including street and official buildings names, road signs, warnings and ban signs are labelled as governmental signs which can reflect the language policy of a country. On the other hand, bottom-up signs include signs on shops and private companies, advertisements which are placed by the community, and shops owners. These signs reflect non-official language preferences as provided in Cenoz and Gorter, (2008); Bátyi, (2015); Bátyi et al, (2019).

After collecting visual and verbal signage data, the following was found: 519 tokens were the total of the LL frames found in the street, which varied according to top-down and bottom-up types as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1. LL signage count and percentages in the street

Type	Count	Percentage
Total Bottom-up	475	91.52%
Total Top-down	44	08.48%
Total	519	100%

Apart from data collection techniques, the representation of data has also developed. In this study, there is a new technique of representing signage density that underpins dividing the street into even squared areas where the number of signage in each area is added up in a vertical column. Accordingly, Rukab Street, almost 1100-metre long, was divided into even 45m areas (24.5m each) to be considered as sufficient focal point distance for the human eye. Then, after feeding the data into MS Excel 3D maps plug-in, the final results are shown in graph 1. This initiative aims to ameliorate the representation of data and to aid policymakers in making decisions towards more necessary and balanced corrections concerning signage distribution and accessibility of information. Further studies are expected to support this technique in this field and to develop it in terms of automatic positioning as well as in expanding this technique to include other aspects of LL.



Graph 1. 3D elevation of the information density of signage in Rukab Street

In Graph 1, the density of information of signage is distributed along the street and normally distributed with more density on both sides of the street because they are attached to other streets' intersections or roundabouts. Both bottom-up (blue) and top-down (yellow) signage are represented and distributed according to their geological locations in the street. Such a technique of representing the density of information could help policymakers or shop owners in planning and positioning their signs. This technique could also be used in pinpointing different types of signage, the number of languages used and their contents to uncover the overall reality of the street and what needs to be done to maintain the language policy of the country in the streets.

3.2 Bottom-up signage

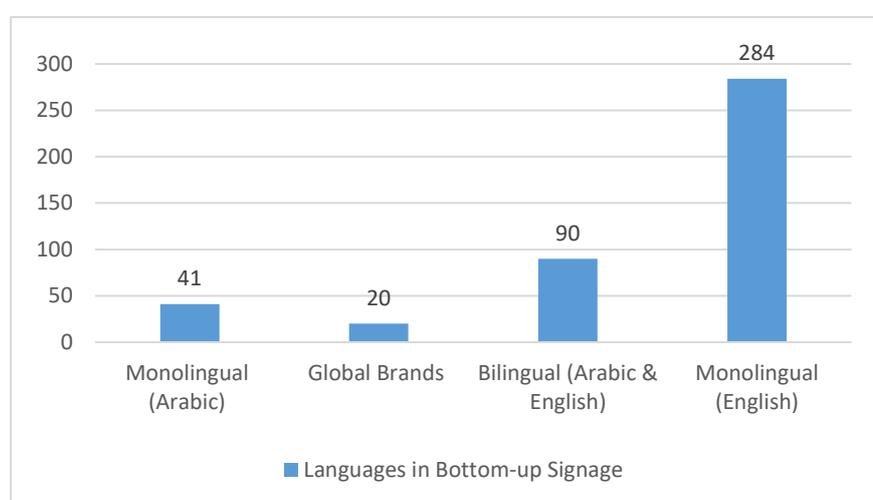
The bottom-up signs are then analyzed according to three criteria, i.e. commercials, non-commercial, and graffiti based to the languages employed in each frame. The following tables are illustrating the statistics for these two categories separately. Moreover, Scollon and Scollon (2003) see graffiti as examples of “transgressive discourse” aiming at challenging social authority and commonly held expectations. The art of graffiti is considered a very important language mechanism by which individuals outreach against top-down signage.

In Rukab Street, graffiti is present in different angles of the streets as listed below in the statistics. Both Arabic and English were used in graffiti with more dominance of Arabic. Table 2 below represents the amount of each type in this categorization.

Table 2 commercial, non-commercial, and graffiti signs present in Rukab Street

Bottom-up types	Count	Percentage
Commercial	435	91.57%
Graffiti	10	2.11%
Noncommercial	30	6.32%
Total	475	100%

According to this table, the majority of bottom-up signs are commercial with 91.57%, and there are 10 graffiti draws on walls and shopfronts with 2.11%. All the bottom-up signs were divided into these three categories and there are 30 non-commercial posters in the named street that belong to the bottom-up category, which contains mourns for martyrs. Graph 2 illustrates the languages used in the bottom-up category as follows:

**Graph 2. Languages in Bottom-up Signage**

According to this graph, most bottom-up signs are monolingual English with 65.21% despite the fact that the city belongs to a majority Arabic speaking society and is neighbored by Arab and Muslim countries. The next in order, after all the English monolingual signs, are the global brands, which mainly come in English but cannot be categorized as monolingual English signs but rather as descendants of a globally shared language according to Gorter (2006) and count only 4.54% of the total percentage of signage in the street.



Figure 2. Various Monolingual English Banners

Minority languages can be of great influence if empowered in branding and marketing, more elaboration on this matter can be found in Pietikäinen et al. (2019). Moreover, the bilingual Arabic/English banners favour more English with 20.83% of the signage. The monolingual Arabic signs are found in 9.42% of the incidences only, despite the governmental legislation concerning the Arabic language and its display on banners. The status quo shows insufficient Arabic representation in the Palestinian LL and a breach of the Palestinian Advertising Law especially Act IV of the year 2015.

Bilingual signs in the street are exclusive to Arabic and English with more dominance of English in this stratum. No other language is employed and there is no presence of any minority language such as Armenian, Assyrian, or Abyssinian, which have small-size denominization in Jerusalem and Bethlehem according to Amara (2003). In other words, Arabic is not well represented in the street either as L1 or as the dominant language. However, with this low presentation in the bottom-up category, Arabic has an equal display with English in the top-down category, which is discussed below.

Focusing on the bilingual bottom-up signs, the 90 bilingual signs are analyzed in Table 3 according to the taxonomy of types of multilingual information arrangement provided by (Reh, 2004), namely: duplicating, fragmentary, overlapping, or complementary. The results of the analysis are as follows:

Table 3 bottom-up taxonomy of multilingual information arrangement in the street

Commercial Bilingual Bottom-up Signs	Count	Percentage
Duplicating	63	70.0%
Fragmentary	17	18.88%
Overlapping	6	6.66%
Complementary	4	4.44%
Total	90	100%

This analysis reveals that 70% of the signage is categorized as duplicated information. The next representative chunk (18.88% of the total) shows the bilingual fragmentary signs with a preference of English for presenting more information in it as shown in figure 3 below of different shop fronts.

**Figure 3 Arabic/English Bilingual Banners**

Overlapping and complementary categorized signage equal 11% of the total bilingual signs, with 6.66% and 4.44% for each respectively.

3.3 Top-down signage

For the top-down category, there are 40 signs divided according to 1) verbal vs. non-verbal signs, 2) language, and 3) the taxonomy of types of multilingual information arrangement provided by Reh (2004).

The first categorization for top-down signs is whether they are verbal or non-verbal or both (bilateral). Many studies do not provide the third categorization i.e. verbal and non-verbal signs at the same time. By raising this issue in this study, the

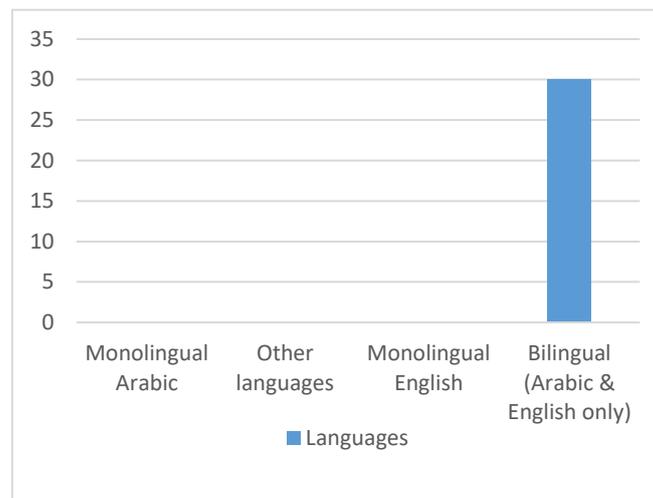
researchers aim to shed some light on the indefinite stratification of signs for each category. Table 4 elaborates on this matter as follows:

Table 4 distribution of signs according to the type of information

Verbal vs. Non-verbal Top-down Signs	Count	Percentage
Verbal	20	50%
Non-verbal	10	25%
Dual (Bilateral)	10	25%
Total	40	100%

According to the table, one-quarter of the total top-down signs includes both verbal information and non-verbal elements such as symbols, icons or indexes to complement the meaning for the sign as a single framed unit of information and to exercise the authoritative power for these signs' providers. The percentage of 25% in this categorization is deemed insufficient in comparison with the exclusively verbal signs, which count up to half of this categorization. Finally, the exclusively non-verbal signs are present with 25%. As the results show, the number of dually communicative (verbal vs non-verbal) signs equals the non-verbal signs. This finding might support the previously formulated supposition that this duality in the signs was not sufficiently displayed for the purpose of fully expressing the message of the signs along the street.

Accordingly, a total of 75% of the signs in this categorization are bilingual. Therefore, the dual and verbal top-down signs were analyzed as shown in Graph 3.



Graph 3. Languages in Top-down Signs

It is obvious that all the top-down signs that contain verbal forms are Arabic/English bilingual at a rate of 100% of the overall results of this category.

This may have resulted on account of the literacy rate in Palestine, which reached 96.3% in 2017 as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, there are no additional multilingual signs in this categorization, and the only displayed languages are Arabic and English. The Arabic language display, however, abides the Advertisement Law in Palestine, (2015) and Act IV concerning the usage of other languages in advertising besides the national language. On these signs, the Arabic version is displayed first and in a bold font followed by its English counterpart with more attention and emphasis to Arabic in terms of fonts size, colour and spatial positioning at the top. The next section tackles the types of information provided in top-down signs.



Figure 4. Top-down Bilingual Signs

The last analysis of the top-down category is within the bounds of Reh (2004) taxonomy of types of multilingual information.

Table 5 Content of Top-down Bilinguals Signs

Top-down Bilinguals Signs	Count	Percentage
Duplicating	30	100%
Fragmentary	0	0.0%
Overlapping	0	0.0%
Complementary	0	0.0%
Total	0	100%

Highlighting the importance of this category in aligning and defining the interaction order in the social area with visual and verbal semiosis, the remarkable notice here is that all the top-down bilingual signs fall in the duplicating section. The emphasis is, of course, on Arabic - as the official language - while English is the second in order, without any display of other languages such as Hebrew or Aramaic, despite the fact that they are the mother tongues for some minorities in Palestine.

4. Results and conclusion

The analysis of the data that documented the representation of the different LL items, both top-down and bottom-up in the private and the public signs, reveals the existence of differential LL patterns in each of these areas that reflect a signature landmark for the city but not for the Palestinian Arabic society in general. These results, as displayed in the tables and graphs above, show how heterogeneous the street is in general.

There are various systematic differences between the bottom-up and the top-down signage of the street, though the top-down signs are more rectangular or portrait shaped in the form of a poster than the bottom-up, which are only in landscape orientation. The quantity and the quality of the signage in the bottom-up category overpower the top-down in number and designs.

Most of the signage in Rukab Street are bottom-up (475/519) with 91.52% and top-down signage count (44/519) with 8.48 %. Despite the fact that the official language is Arabic, English is more represented in the street especially with bottom-up signage. My endeavour was to find out which language has more dominance and why in the named street. As a matter of fact, top-down signs are also exclusively Arabic/English bilinguals with no dominance of Arabic over English on account of numbers. Despite the fact that the Palestinian Advertising Law clearly states the importance of uplifting and highlighting Arabic whenever there are any other languages present, the majority of bottom-up signs are exclusively English monolingual. Moreover, the Arabic/English bilingual signs show bias towards English and provide more information in it. Therefore, it can be stated that the street is neither qualitatively nor quantitatively representative of the state language and does not abide the advertising law which can affect and smear the street's landscape and the city's overall identity.

In specific terms with regard to each of the two languages, contrary to the hypothesis, English emerges as the language with the highest visibility. The presence of Arabic in bottom-up signs is less represented in all the signs. In top-down signs, both Arabic and English are visualized equally in the duplicated type

where all information is translated in all signs with no mention or visibility of any other minority language.

The dominance of English in the street can be interpreted in light of the high literacy rate among the Palestinians, who understand both Arabic and English as well as the prestigious dimension related to the language as a Lingua Franca for the whole world. Another possible reason is that many of this city's inhabitants spend their time in the USA and only come to Palestine during the summer vacation. It is advised that language policy and preserving the national language, as well as minority languages, be held more firmly to maintain the social and homogeneous fabrics of these languages.

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