

The role of English in shaping the linguistic landscape of Qazvin

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Abstract: This paper examines the linguistic landscape of Qazvin. The subject of the analysis is the impact of the English language as an international communication agent on the linguistic landscape of this city. Iran has its language policy aims to preserve the national language, i.e., Farsi, however, the process of globalization has its impact on each country and the role of English in the linguistic landscape is becoming increasingly important. This paper studies the role of English on commercial storefronts of Qazvin and discusses the way people use English based on their preferences of the language policy.

Keywords: Linguistic landscape, language policy, Qazvin.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The urban space around the world is abundant in multilingual signage. Languages are omnipresent and are integral part of modern human settlements around the globe. We name our products in the market, we use language in shop signs, our building's name, in the airport, shopping malls and notice boards and we use it in advertising and hoardings. By studying the signs in our environment we can determine a great deal of information about the people who live in the area, the language ideology that are in practice there, the status of languages which are marginalized or less privileged and those enjoying the power and prestige (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008; Dagenais, Moore, Sabatier, Lamarre, & Armand, 2009; Leeman & Modan, 2009; Papen, 2012; Yaguas, 2009).

In the division of language use, we further see the two distinct divisions' of top-down and bottom-up. Top-down is the public sign which has created by the state and local government bodies, and bottom-up is created by shop owners, private businesses, etc. Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, and Trumper-Hecht (2006) summarized the division and the types of items under each category as follow:

Top-down:

- 1) Public institutions: religious, governmental, municipal-cultural and educational, medical.
- 2) Public signs of general interest.
- 3) Public Announcements.
- 4) Signs of street names.

Bottom-up:

- 1) Shop signs: e.g., clothing, food, jewelry.
- 2) Private business signs: offices, factories, agencies.
- 3) Private announcements: 'wanted' ads, sale or rentals of flats, or cars.

This paper, with the help of the data collected, studies the bottom-up signs in Qazvin city, Iran and draws some conclusions related to the role that English plays in the linguistic landscape of the city. Each bilingual sign was carefully examined and further analyzed following the model proposed by Reh (2004). She categorized the data into four types:

- 1) Duplicate - Information in different languages carries the same value and is identical.
- 2) Fragmentary - The entire information is given in one language, and only some parts are translated into the other language.
- 3) Overlapping - Text as the whole is presented in one language and some parts of it are repeated into another language.
- 4) Complementary - A multilingual sign may contain multiple languages, and all the languages must be known to a viewer for the sign to be fully understood.

Since number two and three of this categorization (Fragmentary and overlapping) share similarities, Spolsky (2009) and Huebner (2009) suggested using only one of them.

The study emphasizes the role of the English language and the effects it has on the Iranian society, the attitude of the government towards its implementation and its popularity in public signage. The study intends to evaluate the role of English language in public signage and its increasing demand as an international language in Iran, along with its presence, importance, and representation of Iran's linguistic landscape.

This research observes the use of English with regards to the rules, regulations and the language policy of the country to analyze the effect of English on signs, according to the rulebook on bottom-up sectors in the city of Qazvin.

Language policy and the linguistic landscape

Provision 15 and 16 of the country's constitution is concerned with official languages and script.

Article 15: "Persian is the official and common language and script of the people of Iran. The documents, correspondence, official texts, and schoolbooks must all be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and ethnic languages in the press, the mass media, and the teaching of their literature at schools, alongside the Persian language, is freely permitted".

Article 16: "Since the language of Qur'an and Islamic texts and teachings is Arabic, and since this language thoroughly permeated Persian literature, it must be taught after elementary level, in all classes of secondary schools and all areas of study."

Arabic has a prolonged influence on Iran's literature and grammar; it is also one of the spoken languages in Iran. Farsi script is written from left to right, and the Persian alphabet is a modified variant of the Arabic script, which itself evolved from the Aramaic alphabet. As the official language planning of the country after revolution shows, it appears natural to see Farsi on all signboards throughout the country since it is the national language of Iran and the rate of Persian literacy in almost 98%.

Though the status of English is not well defined in Iran, the growing number of private institutions teaching English language and using English as a medium of instruction is a vital testimony of its popularity and dependency in modern Iran. Shortly after the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979 English was demarcated as a foreign language chopped off some of its application due to the political view of the nation. Though in the initial years of post-revolution the approach towards English was somehow perceived more conservatively, that has gone through many changes over the years. Currently, English has its prominent footsteps in both public and private education sectors fueled by tourism, penetration of western cinema and social media. A sign of social acceptance can be seen which renders it as a social achievement in public too.

The rules governing linguistic landscape involving a foreign language which will be the point of discussion in the present study are as follow:

A) *The executive instruction for urban advertising and Articles 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 of the Regulation of institutions and monitoring the activity of advertising centers*

Approved by the extraordinary meeting of the Central Committee of Advertising Organizations of the country:

15- Promotion of foreign language, misspellings and misleading are not permitted in advertisements.

16. In case an alien language is needed to be used in advertising, the font size of the Persian language must be larger than the foreign language.

B) *'The approval of the 33rd session with regards to the ratio of non-Persian text where the advertising need to use a foreign language'*

'... As per the prior announcement of the General Directorate of Advertising of the proportionality of 70% Persian and 30% non-Persian languages in the advertisement that requires the use of foreign text, there is an immediate requirement for regulation for the prohibition of the usage of foreign names, titles, and terms....'

Background study

II. QAZVIN

Qazvin city is the capital of the Qazvin Province and its largest city which is also known as the calligraphic capital of Iran due to many renowned calligraphists that were born here throughout its history. Qazvin has an important status due to its proximity to Tehran and being a vital connecting bridge between the northern and eastern provinces. The city is also famous for having several industrial zones and many renowned universities, including The Imam Khomeini International University which admits international students, mainly into its Center for Teaching Persian.

People from Qazvin are mainly Farsi speakers; the mother tongue of the majority of the people is Farsi fused with the Qazvini accent. Other prominent ethnic groups in the city are Tats, Gilaks, Azaris, etc., which comprises the largest ethnic groups of Qazvin migrated from various other parts of the country.

Data collection

The location chosen for data collection was Khayyam Street. It is considered to be one of most densely populated and crowded shopping streets in Qazvin with many shopping complexes in the vicinity; some of the most notable ones are; Setare, Morvarid, Pardis and Maadar.

The data collection took place in North-Khayyam Street. All signs were photographed using a digital camera. Any signboard containing text was photographed. However, for the bottom-up study, only the signs from storefronts were selected for analysis, to study the impact and the use of English language and how the private sector (bottom-up) use these texts and languages to attract their customers, keeping in mind the language policy of the country. Based on the definition presented by Shohamy and Ben Rafael; the bottom-up category includes: 1) Shop signs: e.g., Clothing, food, jewelry 2) Private business signs: Offices, factories, agencies 3) Private announcements: 'Wanted' ads, sale or rentals of flats, or cars.

For this study, the third part, i.e., the private announcements have been excluded and only the permanent texts on display for each shop were analyzed.

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A total number of 131 pictures were analyzed for this study which was clicked from North-Khayyam Street in Qazvin. Once the quantitative dimension of the data was examined, the monolingual signs in Farsi counted for 69, English 7 and 55 bilingual signs were counted. It is worth mentioning here that all the bilingual signs are in Farsi-English and no instance of Arabic or other ethnic or international languages are observed.

The analysis shows in Fig.1:

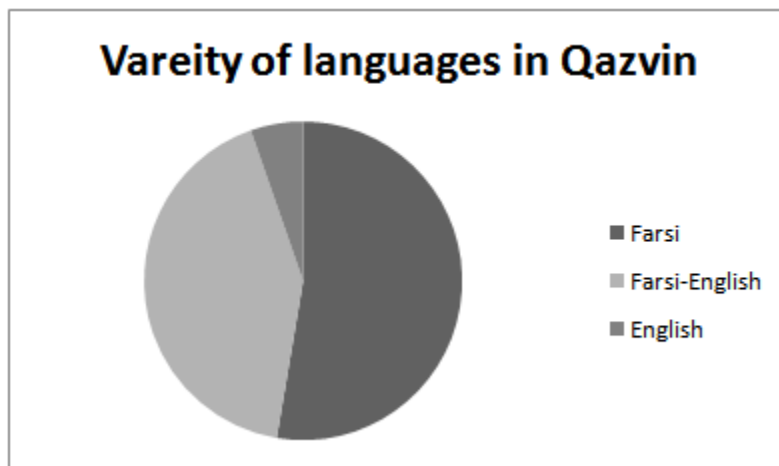


Figure 1. Variety of languages displayed in Qazvin

The percentages shown for each of these languages are:

<u>Farsi</u>	<u>Farsi-English</u>	<u>English</u>
52.6%	41.9%	5.3%

The results show the clear dominance of the official language of Iran in Qazvin. Farsi is seen in almost 94.5% of the signs. As the language policy of the country homogenously reflects on the signs, we can also observe the presence of English in 47.2% of all signs and in 5.3% of the times it appears individually which is prohibited by the language policy.

For the second analysis, all the bilingual signs were segregated and the types of signs were analyzed. As mentioned earlier, based on Reh's (2006) model there are three language types in this section: a) Duplicate b) Complementary and c) Fragmentary. Below we see an example for each type:



Figure 2 Duplicate (left), Complementary (center), Fragmentary (right).

Upon the analysis based on language type on multilingual signs, the following results recorded:

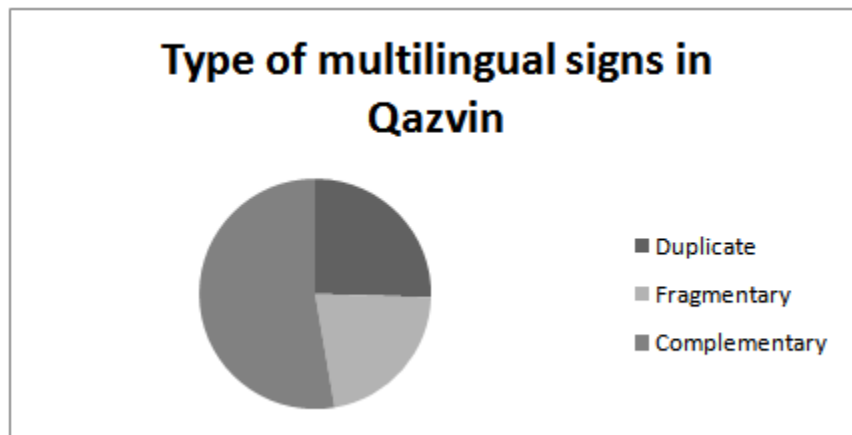


Figure 3. Type of multilingual signs

As it can be seen in Fig. 3, the complementary signs occupy the majority of the multilingual signs and show to be the choice when designing storefronts. It follows closely by duplicate and fragmentary signs. This finding may suggest the language proficiency of people as based on the complementary sign's definition a reader must have command over all languages to understand the sign. The number of signs recorded in the duplicating section superseding the fragmentary signs is another surprising finding to show the popularity of English and how the shop owner utilize it.

The percentage for each type is as follow:

Duplicate	Fragmentary	Complementary
25.4%	21.8%	52.7%

Observing the duplicate signs also guided the study to another fact. As the ratio in these type of signs is equal, the signs were not represented equally. Therefore, for the next level of analysis, the ratio of Farsi to English was looked at to study whether it goes according to the instructions proposed by the language policy on the linguistic landscape of Iran or not. The intention was to see any possible deviation of the bottom-up section from the existing rules of the country and how the inclusion of English on their signs reflects globalization and modernization.

This section of study gives the ratio of Farsi to English in all bilingual signs; the method of counting letters posed an issue since English uses Roman script and Farsi uses abjad. Abjad includes only consonants and vowels are not written and even if they are written it is in the form of diacritics.

Each sign in this part of the analysis was roughly analyzed by balancing the word and its translated equivalent, the approximate estimation average of 57.6% in Farsi and 43. 2% in English was showed. It was observed that the rule proposed by the Central Committee of Advertising Organizations of the country' stating that 'the 70 to 30% ratio between Farsi and any other foreign language should be maintained' is not met in all the cases. Although, this might seem like a close percentage between the two languages, the representation of them was not equal as it was mentioned earlier.

Turning into the second provision of the rule regarding the language representation on signs which states: 'In case of need to use an alien language in advertising, the font size of Persian language must be larger than the foreign language.'

To study whether this point has met or not each bilingual sign was analyzed and the dominating language was observed. Of all the 55 bilingual signs five were showing English dominance and 50 were favoring Farsi. There was one picture which was not counted in this section of analysis as no biasing to any language was observed.

<u>Farsi</u>	<u>English</u>
90.9%	9.09%

Another set of categories are made to see the manner and trend in which the private sector commercial spaces of Qazvin display the bilingual signs. Farsi dominance can be inferred: a) by positioning, b) by font size and c)by font and positioning.

Results suggested the following:

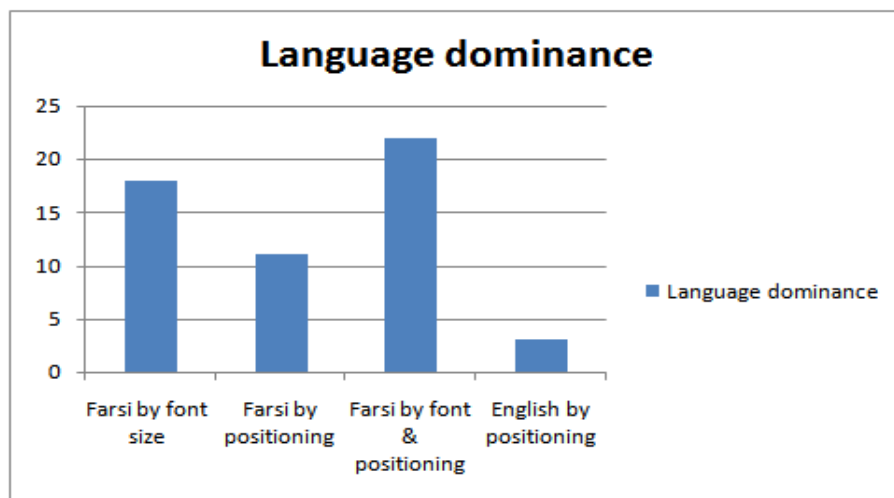


Figure 4 Language dominance

It can be observed in the above datathat the bottom-up section prefers to follow the language policy by using the positioning and font size instead of the percentage share. As it was mentioned earlier, the percentage of English used on signs in the majority of multilingual signs exceeds the limit of 30% permitted allowance of a foreign text. Although the threshold is reached, the shopkeepers enlarge the font size and position the Farsi name on the top or in the center even in case of duplicating signs. The table below is showing the results in number:

	Language dominant
Farsi by font size	18
Farsi by positioning	11
Farsi by font & positioning	22
English by positioning	3

IV. CONCLUSION

The study conducted in Qazvin demonstrated the interest of the shop owners in using English as a tool to conform modernization. Despite the conservative approach by the authorities, English appears to have achieved its constant status of popularity in Iran. Ability to understand and speaking English is marked as a social achievement and educational superiority. Many English words now became an integrated part of Persian language speakers and learning English is now considered as a valuable asset for Iranians. When it comes to the use of English on signs, as we saw, the utilization of English has become quite popular but in order to be compliant with the law, the people positioned Farsi in a way to show its superiority and importance are given, by enlarging the Farsi fonts in majority of the multilingual signs.

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