

LANGUAGE VARIATIONS ON PAKISTANI WALL POSTERS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS THROUGH THE LENS OF WORLD ENGLISHES

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ABSTRACT

The linguistic variations observed in Pakistani wall posters reveal syntactic, phonological, and lexical deviations that distinguish Pakistani English as a unique variety. This study investigates these variations using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theoretical framework and the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2019). The analysis focuses first on the language employed in the selected wall posters and then on the associated visual elements. The findings reveal that Pakistani wall posters frequently feature English words written in Roman script alongside Urdu, presenting a hybridized language form. Code-switching is prevalent, reflecting a bilingual advertising strategy. Phonological patterns align more closely with Pakistani English norms, diverging from standard British or American English. Additionally, posters often incorporate culturally significant religious or local imagery to emotionally connect with the target audience. This study demonstrates how advertisers strategically use language and visuals to convey socio-political messages and establish a localized identity. The findings contribute to understanding Pakistani English as an evolving language variety and offer a model for further research in Critical Discourse Studies.

Keywords: CDA of wall posters, language variety in Pakistani posters, analysis of Pakistani English variety, code-switching in wall posters, Pakistani signboards, and English variety

INTRODUCTION

As a public communication mode in Pakistan, wall posters offer a dynamic linguistic and visual discourse analysis space. These posters often blend English and indigenous languages like Urdu and Punjabi, carrying socio-political messages targeted at diverse audiences. This study examines these linguistic practices using two theoretical frameworks: the World Englishes paradigm, which views English as a plural and adaptable language (Kachru, 2020), and Critical Discourse Analysis

(CDA), which explores discourse about power dynamics.

As English has established itself as the dominant global language of media and advertising, its influence in South Asia, including Pakistan, is evident (David, 2018). This phenomenon is the result of centuries of trade, cultural exchange, and colonial history. In Pakistan, where Urdu serves as the national language, the impact of international media and advertising is particularly visible in the

frequent use of bilingual advertisements. Wall posters in urban settings, such as Lahore, showcase three distinct linguistic categories: i) posters entirely in Urdu, ii) posters fully in English, and iii) posters employing a bilingual approach. This research focuses on the third category, where the bilingual nature of these advertisements serves as a strategic means to engage a broader audience. The use of English as a promotional tool in Pakistan can be analyzed through Kachru's concentric circles model. Pakistan falls within the outer circle, where English is influenced by historical and cultural factors, particularly British colonialism (Mahboob, 2002). The Macaulay education system introduced during colonial rule significantly transformed language practices in the region, making English synonymous with power and prestige (Haq & Sajjad, 2022). This historical evolution is evident in contemporary Pakistan, where English often dominates formal and official domains, coexisting with Urdu.

The coexistence of English and Urdu has led to widespread code-switching, particularly in media and advertising. This blending of languages represents a unique variety of Pakistani English, characterized by localized adaptations and deviations from standard British English norms (Nawaz, Yali, & Hameed, 2023). Wall posters exemplify this phenomenon by incorporating cultural and localized elements, strategically connecting with diverse audiences. The present research attempts to answer the question of how this interplay of language, culture, and politics can be realized in these posters by answering the following questions:

R1. How do Pakistani wall posters manifest their linguistic varieties in English?

R2. What socio-political messages are represented through these variations?

R3. How does the use of English in these posters relate to the concept of glocalization in world-englishes?

Literature Review:

Waseem, Shah, and Hussain (2020) observe that Urdu advertisements frequently incorporate English lexical items due to the dominance of English in Pakistani society, leading to linguistic borrowing. Advertisers strategically use culturally

relevant language and speech acts to influence the public (Ayoub, Shamim Khan, & Tariq, 2023). Multimodal Analysis (MDA) is utilized to examine these advertisements, as they encompass not only text but also visual elements such as images, colours, and typography, all contributing to contextual meanings (Jewitt, 2016). Hussain and Farid (2023) further emphasize the use of eye-catching visuals and concise language to engage audiences effectively.

Schiffrin and Tannen (2015) define discourse as extending beyond mere sentences, while Fairclough and Wodak (2013) frame language as a tool of power and ideology through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Coluzzi (2020) explores the connection between script and religion in Malaysia, noting the prevalence of Islamic terminology.

In the context of World Englishes, Saeed (2020) discusses plurilingualism, where multiple languages coexist and speakers switch languages as needed. In Pakistan, where English is used alongside local languages (Ashraf, Turner, & Laar, 2021), advertisements often blend Urdu and English, a phenomenon termed transliteration (Zepedda, 2020).

Public signs, as forms of verbal and nonverbal communication, play a significant role in shaping language and community understanding (Spolsky, 2009). Shohamy and Gorter (2009) highlight various linguistic types in public signs, including translation and multilingualism. Spolsky (2020) emphasizes the significance of the creators of these signs and their social contexts. Additionally, Bernardo-Hinesley (2020) calls for further research on language use in educational settings and its impact on bilingual education.

Shah et al. (2024) analyzes linguistic variations in Pakistani English on billboards, focusing on syntactic, phonological, and lexical deviations from standard English. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), they find that English words are often written in Urdu script, reflecting a unique language blend. Code-switching is prevalent, and American English phonological patterns dominate. Religious words frequently appear as brand names, appealing emotionally to the public. The strategic use of imagery strengthens the link

between text and product, highlighting the interplay between language and visuals in advertising. This study adds to Critical Discourse Studies, providing a framework for future research on language in public discourse.

The existing research on language in advertisements in Pakistan has largely overlooked the specific variations found in wall posters. While previous studies have addressed advertising strategies and the blending of Urdu and English, they have not focused on the detailed linguistic practices in this common urban medium. Additionally, many analyses separate text and visuals, missing the interaction between them. This study will utilize Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to address these gaps and explore how imagery and language work together to create meaning on wall posters.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), complemented by a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach by Kress and van Leeuwen (2019), to analyze linguistic and visual variations in Pakistani wall posters. The qualitative data was collected from a densely populated area. Using a purposive sampling technique, posters containing both Urdu and English were selected to explore how bilingualism is strategically employed in urban advertising. The analysis of linguistic choices focuses on how advertisements create a connection between the reader and the product, influencing consumer preferences. Additionally, the selection of images in these advertisements is briefly analyzed to understand their contribution to the overall message. The analysis is conducted at the following levels:

a) Textual Analysis:

i) Examination of parts of speech and their specific use in advertisements

ii) Identification of phonological and lexical patterns in the selected words.

iii) Exploration of variations in Pakistani English compared to Standard Englishes.

English Word	Urdu Script	British English Transcription	American English Transcription	Pakistani English Transcription
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iv) Analysis of power dynamics conveyed through particular word choices.

b) Visual Analysis:

Evaluation of the imagery used in the advertisements, focusing on its cultural relevance and role in reinforcing the intended message.

Results

The analysis of the data shows that when wall posters in Pakistan combine Urdu and English, they often feature English words in Roman script alongside traditional Urdu text. This blending creates a hybrid linguistic identity and serves specific communicative purposes. Writing English terms in their original script alongside Urdu can create ambiguity for some readers while emphasizing modernity and professionalism. Moreover, the sentence structures used in the poster do not strictly follow standard English or Urdu grammatical rules, reflecting a localized style of language use. Phonological patterns of English terms suggest alignment with Pakistani English pronunciation norms, which are distinct from standard British or American English.

In terms of visual design, religious and cultural imagery is prominently used. The central image of the Kaaba emphasizes the religious context of Hajj, targeting an audience with strong cultural and religious affiliations. The inclusion of professional branding and corporate slogans highlights the integration of Islamic values with modern financial practices.

The following chart contains some commonly observed words from the poster, showing deviations of Pakistani English variety from standard British or American English:

Bank	بنک	/bæŋk/	/bæŋk/	/bæŋk/
Punjab	پنجاب	/pʌn'dʒɑ:b/	/pʌn'dʒɑ:b/	/pən'dʒɑ:b/
Taqwa	تقوی	/'tæk.wə/	/'tɑ:k.wə/	/'tɑ:kwə/
Rate	ریٹ	/reit/	/reit/	/reit/
Islamic	اسلامی	/ɪz'læmɪk/	/ɪz'læmɪk/	/ɪz'læmɪk/
Hajj	حج	/hædʒ/	/hɑ:dʒ/	/hʌdʒ/
The	دی	/ðə/	/ði:/	/ðə/
Of	آف	/ɒv/	/ʌv/	/əv/
Scheme	سکیم	/ski:m/	/ski:m/	/ski:m/
Class	کلاس	/kla:s/	/klæs/	/klæs/
Academy	اکیڈمی	/'ækæd.ə.mi/	/'əkæd.ə.mi/	/'əkæd.mi/
Principal	پرنسپل	/'prɪn.sɪ.pəl/	/'prɪn.sɪ.pəl/	/'prɪn.sə.pəl/
Technical	ٹیکنیکل	/'tek.nɪ.kəl/	/'tek.nɪ.kəl/	/'tek.nɪ.kəl/
Institute	انسٹیٹیوٹ	/'ɪn.stɪ.tju:t/	/'ɪn.stɪ.tju:t/	/'ɪn.stɪ.tju:t/
Ittihad	اتحاد	/'ɪt.tɪ.'hɑ:d/	/'ɪt.tɪ.'hɑ:d/	/'ɪthɑ:d/

Figure 1



Analysis

The headline "دی بینک آف پنجاب" uses English words transliterated into Urdu, showing the influence of English on Urdu. Terms like "Bank" and "Punjab" are common in daily use, reflecting bilingualism. The word "دی" (Di) imitates the English article "The" but aligns with Urdu phonology, the smaller text, phrases like "حکومت پاکستان کی حج اسکیم کے تحت درخواستیں" follow Urdu grammar rules but integrate English branding, such as "BOP" and "111-267-200" for clarity and recognition. The abbreviation "BOP" stands for "Bank of Punjab," which is a proper noun and retains its English form even in Urdu advertisements. Words like

"Taqwa" are presented in Roman script, demonstrating code-switching. The Ad also displays Arabic-style Islamic calligraphy and imagery (e.g., the Kaaba illustration), indicating cultural and religious targeting, particularly appealing to an Islamic audience for Hajj Scheme promotions. This use of imagery aims to emotionally connect with the audience by invoking religious values. The advertiser has avoided overloading the banner with English terms to maintain clarity for Urdu-speaking audiences. For instance, the use of "درخواستیں"

(applications) instead of "Applications" ensures comprehensibility.

The sentence structure combines Urdu and English, ensuring comprehensibility for a broad

audience. Islamic and cultural elements dominate the advertisement, but the inclusion of English maintains a formal and professional tone.

Figure 2.



Analysis

The banner prominently displays "Akbar Technical Institute" in English, reflecting the influence of English in educational and professional sectors in Pakistan. The phrase "(Under Supervision) Ittihad Welfare Organization" mixes English and Romanized Urdu, demonstrating code-switching to appeal to a bilingual audience. The word "Beautician" is used as a headline in English to highlight the course's subject, while a smaller Urdu script provides details, ensuring accessibility for diverse readers. Terms like "Free Course" and "Centre No." cater to English-literate audiences, emphasizing professionalism. Contact information (Phone No: 0305-1972949) and the address are written in Roman Urdu, ensuring clarity and accessibility. This mixture of languages caters to both Urdu and English-speaking populations, reflecting bilingualism in advertisements targeting vocational training audiences. The ad balances Urdu and English text effectively to ensure inclusive while maintaining a professional tone. The phrase "Under Supervision

of Ittihad Welfare Organization" indicates a focus on trustworthiness and affiliation with welfare, which appeals to local cultural values emphasizing community and support.

The address is provided in Roman Urdu (e.g., "Mohallah Qadir Abad Street Pishawari Hotel Layyah"), which is a practical choice in a multilingual context where formal Urdu or English alone may not suffice. Romanized Urdu ensures that even those with basic literacy in Urdu can understand the details. The inclusion of phrases like "Under Supervision" and "(Reg.)" signals legitimacy and reliability. This is especially important in vocational training advertisements, where trust in the institution is crucial for attracting students. By combining bilingualism, trust-building elements, and cultural relevance, the advertisement effectively communicates its message while appealing to a broad audience.

Figure 3.



Analysis:

The headline features English words ("ٹوپس" for tops, "پبلک" for public, and "اسکول" for school) written in Urdu script, demonstrating the influence of English on Urdu in advertisements. This is a clear example of Pakistani English (PakE), where English words are integrated into the Urdu language. The word "اسکول" (school) follows English phonology, preserving the /sk/ sound, while "پبلک" (public) is pronounced similarly to its English counterpart. These words have become commonly used in everyday Urdu, showing how English words are absorbed into local speech. The rest of the text, such as "مفت داخلہ" (free admission),

follows Urdu grammatical structure, with English words like "اسکول" and "پبلک" inserted into the sentence. This reflects code-switching, where English and Urdu blend at the word level while maintaining Urdu syntax.

However, the lack of diacritical marks on the English-origin words could cause pronunciation confusion for some readers, such as misreading "اسکول" as /skoo-l/ instead of /skool/. The absence of these marks may lead to difficulties for those unfamiliar with both Urdu and English phonology. The use of English words in Urdu script appeals to a bilingual audience, adding a modern, prestigious touch to the advertisement, especially in an educational context.

Figure 4.



Analysis

The main headline "کمرشل پلاٹ فروخت" blends both English and Urdu elements. The word "کمرشل," borrowed from English ("commercial"), is written in Urdu script, while "پلاٹ" (plot) and "فروخت" (for sale) are native Urdu terms. This mix reflects the growing dominance of English in advertising, particularly in the real estate sector in Pakistan. The use of the word "کمرشل" highlights the perception of English as a language associated with professionalism and modernity, which is common in business contexts. The word "کمرشل" is adapted phonetically to suit Urdu speakers, following the English pronunciation with a slight modification, making it easier for native Urdu speakers to pronounce. In contrast, "پلاٹ" is a term borrowed from English but now fully integrated into Urdu, especially in real estate discourse, where it is no longer seen as foreign. The sentence structure follows standard Urdu grammar, with the verb "فروخت" (for sale) placed after the noun phrase "کمرشل پلاٹ," adhering to the Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) format typical of Urdu. This sentence is an example of code-switching, as it incorporates English-origin words while maintaining Urdu's grammatical structure.

The combination of English and Urdu in this advertisement is a strategic use of bilingualism, as it allows the message to resonate with a broad audience familiar with both languages. The use of "کمرشل" in place of a more traditional Urdu term like "تجارتی" (commercial) reflects a preference for modern, international connotations that align with the professional image sought in real estate marketing. Additionally, the absence of diacritical marks in the Urdu script could create potential mispronunciations of the word "کمرشل" for those unfamiliar with English phonology, though this is a common feature in advertisements. The inclusion of Arabic numerals for the contact number ensures the advertisement is accessible to all, regardless of linguistic background. Overall, this advertisement illustrates how English words, especially in their transliterated form, are becoming deeply embedded in Urdu, particularly in sectors where English is seen as a symbol of status and modernity, thus reflecting the evolving linguistic landscape of Pakistan.

Figure 5.



Analysis

The wall advertisement, titled "عامل شہباز رنگی," blends Urdu and Arabic with a clear cultural and spiritual focus. The term "عامل" (Aamil), which refers to a spiritual healer, is of Arabic origin but is commonly used in Urdu to denote someone who practices spiritual or religious healing. The name "شہباز رنگی" (Shehbaz Rangi), stylized in bold script, appears to be the healer's name, combining "شہباز" (falcon), a symbol of power and freedom, with "رنگی" (colored or vibrant), possibly suggesting vitality, mysticism, or spiritual energy. The name's stylistic treatment in bold font emphasizes the healer's authority and expertise. The use of Arabic-origin words like "عامل" contrasts with previous advertisements that incorporate English words. This reflects the spiritual and religious domain of the advertisement, where Arabic holds cultural and religious significance, making it suitable for the context of spiritual healing. The overall structure of the advertisement follows Urdu grammar, with phrases like "مسئلہ کا حل ہر وقت دستیاب" (solutions for problems available at all times), which are easily understood by a broad audience. The sentence adheres to standard Urdu syntax, reinforcing its accessibility to local readers.

The script style also plays a significant role in conveying the importance of the healer. The bold, decorative font for "عامل" and "شہباز رنگی" makes the main message stand out, signaling the

professional identity of the healer, while the smaller font for additional details ensures that the message remains clear and legible. The use of yellow and black highlights further emphasizes the healer's name and profession. Contact numbers written in Arabic numerals ensure that the information is universally accessible, regardless of literacy in English or Urdu. The absence of English words in this advertisement highlights its cultural and spiritual appeal, aiming to reach an audience that values traditional, religious practice. This approach underscores the significance of Arabic in the context of spirituality, contrasting with the more secular and modern use of English in commercial advertisements. The advertisement successfully integrates linguistic elements with cultural relevance, enhancing its impact within the specific domain of spiritual healing in Pakistan.

Discussion

The study reveals the extensive use of both Urdu and English on Pakistani wall posters, reflecting the country's bilingual nature. For instance, in the advertisement for "دی بینک آف پنجاب" (The Bank of Punjab), English words like "Bank" and "Punjab" are written in Urdu script, demonstrating the fusion of both languages. The word "BOP" (Bank of Punjab) remains in its English form even within the Urdu context, indicating the prevalence of English as a dominant language in advertising.

This aligns with findings that Pakistani advertisements often integrate English to convey professionalism, while still ensuring comprehensibility for a broader audience through Urdu grammar.

In the "Akbar Technical Institute" ad, English words like "Beautician" and "Free Course" are strategically used to appeal to an educated, bilingual audience. This code-switching reflects the common practice of mixing English and Urdu to maximize reach. Similarly, the "کمرشل پلاٹ" (Commercial Plot for Sale) ad uses the English-derived word "کمرشل" (commercial) alongside Urdu words like "پلاٹ" (plot) and "فروخت" (for sale), demonstrating the growing dominance of English, especially in real estate advertising.

Moreover, the use of Arabic-origin words like "عامل" (Aamil) in the "عامل شہباز رنگی" (Aamil Shehbaz Rangi) ad highlights the cultural and spiritual appeal of certain sectors in Pakistan, where English is less common, but Urdu and Arabic play a significant role in connecting with the audience emotionally and culturally.

Conclusion

Pakistani advertisements reflect a linguistic blend that caters to a diverse audience. The use of English, especially in its transliterated form, signals modernity and professionalism, as seen in the ads for "دی بینک آف پنجاب" and "Akbar Technical Institute." At the same time, Urdu and Arabic terms remain essential for cultural and emotional appeal, as seen in the "عامل شہباز رنگی" ad. The strategic use of both languages demonstrates how advertisers in Pakistan leverage bilingualism to maximize reach and impact. However, the incorporation of English and its transliteration into Urdu can sometimes cause pronunciation challenges, particularly for those less familiar with English, as observed in the "کمرشل پلاٹ فروخت" ad. The findings underscore the need for a more systematic approach to code-switching in advertising to ensure clarity and engagement for all linguistic groups.

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