

A City in Shame: The Cairene Linguistic Landscape and Cultural Distinction

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Abstract

Authoritarian placeless projects after 2017 introduced a significant shift in Cairo's linguistic landscape; giant streets and electronic billboards, banners, and signs co-shaped the city's global image. Promoting English and bilingualism (English-Arabic) created the study question. Why do advertisements address the Arabic-speaking population in English? This study aims at investigating the Cairene linguistic policy and its cultural meanings. The field study occurred between 2020 and 2022 in around twenty sites in Cairo, among which authoritarian placeless projects were significant. Exploring Cairene linguistic landscape in Cairo is based on former literature and observations while moving around in public spaces on foot and by car. Around 20 locations were visited, 120 photos were taken, and spontaneous interviews were conducted. The collected data were produced during two years (2020-2022) of fieldwork in Cairo. Describing and categorising the Cairene linguistic landscape identified its cultural values. Moreover, exploring historical changes in the 19th and 20th centuries explained the linguistic socio-cultural roots. The culture of shame bridges shifting from pride to profit in Cairo's linguistic landscape, presenting countless symbolic meanings, among which cultural distinction, linguistic centrality and marginality are significant.

Keywords

Urban Studies, Urban Design, Linguistic Landscape, Placemaking, Culture, Cairo

1. Introduction

Landry and Bourhis (1997: p. 25) define the linguistic landscape as the language of road signs, billboards, and place and street names. Furthermore, commercial shop signs and names indicating governmental structure contribute to the city's

linguistic landscape (Rosendal & Amini Ngabonziza, 2023: p. 3). After 2017 Cairo became overwhelmed with English typography. Signs, commercial brands, place names, street billboards and authoritarian building names co-define the city's image (Figure 1).

Cairo's linguistic policy can be identified in its bilingual traffic signs, giant street billboards, and English typography in high-income gated communities scattered throughout the city. Local shop signages, restaurant menus, and individual T-shirts promoted English or bilingual typography. English is imposed in various aspects of Egyptian life; in schools, it is promoted as a sign of excellent education, in universities as a sign of global acceptance and in commercial products as a sign of quality. Adapting bilingual and English policies should present no surprise as it started decades ago in Cairo and shifted from various discourses; moreover, its symbolic meanings, production and role in the Egyptian collective memory need to be addressed.

Bilingualism (or using two languages in the same sign) might be accepted in traffic and urban information signs as a guiding tool for non-Arabic speakers. However, producing advertisements and branding products in English for local consumers must be questionable. Why do advertisements address the Arabic-speaking population in English?

The author argues that Cairo's linguistic landscape's policy and production reflect the community's inherited and subconscious culture of shame, amplified or reinforced by authoritarian placeless projects in a closed network of elites' socio-cultural viewing (for more about the Cairene placeless projects, see Saad, 2020b). This article focuses on the street billboards' and signs' production and consumption as cultural symbols.

The case studies presented in this article are developed based on data collected



Figure 1. Cairene Linguistic landscape; street billboards, 2022; the author.

under limited accessibility for security conditions. Each chosen study case presents significant socio-cultural and economic characteristics in Cairo; around 20 locations were visited, 120 photos were taken, and spontaneous interviews were conducted. The collected data were produced during two years (2020-2022) of fieldwork in Cairene's significant roads and authoritarian placeless projects. Furthermore, the study's primary data is obtained from observations, field notes, and photos. It must be pointed out that interviews were marginally used due to their limited population size.

Judging linguistic elements' and the linguistic landscape's illustrative meaning in Cairo is based on former literature and observations while moving around in public spaces on foot and by car. Describing and categorising the Cairene linguistic landscape within 2020-2022 can identify its character and relationship to its context and cultural values. Exploring historical, cultural, socio-economic and political changes in the 19th and 20th centuries should explain the linguistic socio-cultural roots. The author used the term "linguistic elements" to refer to the various types of street billboards, banners and signs.

Moreover, as the most significant part of the data is culturally oriented, the author acknowledges the study's limitation in answering socio-economic and political questions related to the topic.

2. The Study Results

By the second decade of the 21st century, Cairo's urbanism experienced a significant change; the authority's urban interventions aggressively reshaped Cairo's global identity (for more on this subject, see Saad, 2020b). Authoritarian interventions presented a playground for the city's linguistic landscape, creating a new perspective of the urban ensemble. After 2017, linguistic elements mushroomed in 95% of the authoritarian projects. English typography and westernised graphic found a place on authoritarian structures and vehicles, public facilities, private shops and temporary banners, (Figure 2). It became customary to see street advertisements in only English on most significant city roads.

The Cairene linguistic landscape's investigation presented the following significant results:

1) Linguistic elements in arterial roads were defined and categorised into three groups; commercial billboards and business signage (78%), political propaganda accounted for 16%, and urban information (street and traffic signs) accounted for 6%. However, it should be noted that during the fieldwork, political banners kept changing in favour of the commercial. Political banners overwhelmed the area's linguistic landscape as authoritarian placeless projects were executed. Nevertheless, they shifted to commercial advertisements a few months later,

2) Linguistic elements came in around eight designs varieties; street signs (two forms), advertising banners and boards (two forms), giant street and electronic



Figure 2. A new shopping area, English temporary banners, 2022; the author.

billboards (three significant forms) and traffic signs (standard form and variable sizes and mountings structure),

3) While giant street billboards are mounted on steel structures and projected over the road, **Figure 3**, advertising banners and boards are mounted on lighting columns on the roadsides and its middle, **Figure 4**,

4) Giant street billboards came in two main designs, curved and straight, presenting similarities in their mounting structure,

5) Giant street billboards follow few rules, among which order is considered insignificant; their distribution seems to be related to commercial profit, physical availability, traffic and road form and adverting agent's power position; as such, in various cases, they blocked each other's view, **Figure 5**,

6) While giant street billboards came in similar forms, they introduced unlimited graphic designs,

7) Electronic billboards are mostly mounted on flyovers and present form similarities, **Figure 6**,

8) Street name signage came in awful condition, primarily unchanged from the end of the 19th and the middle of the 20th centuries (**Figure 7**). The few remaining street signs from the end of the 20th were identified in middle and high-income housing, such as Heliopolis, **Figure 8**,

9) Authoritarian structures and vehicles collaborated in the Cairene linguistic landscape (for security reasons, photography was not allowed). English was widely promoted on authoritarian vehicles reading "the Egyptian Police", or just "Police" in English,

10) Individuals' linguistic elements came in a significant variety of shop signs, business names and brands, poler advertisements and banners, **Figure 9**,

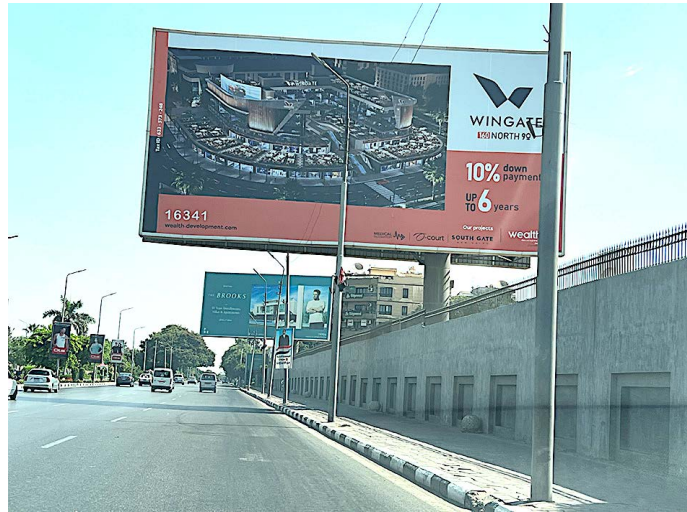


Figure 3. Street billboards projecting over the street, 2022; the author.



Figure 4. English street advertisement on lighting column, 2021; the author.



Figure 5. Street billboards blocking the view; a major flyover in Cairo, 2020; the author.



Figure 6. An electronic billboard mounted on a flyover, 2021; the author.



Figure 7. Street signs from various areas before 1980. Top-left; Arabic and Arabic in Latin typography. Right side: Arabic only. Down-left: Arabic-English, 2021; the author.



Figure 8. Bilingual street signs from the end of the 20th century, Arabic-English, 2022; the author.

11) While street billboards, for example, were unlimited by physical conditions, business signs are limited by the physical availability, collective deliberation, traffic nature and advertisements' design fundamentals (interviewing business people),

12) Temporary fences were used for advertising under-construction projects in various linguistic policies, among which English was weighty, **Figure 10**,

13) Traffic signs adopted a bilingual policy (Arabic-English), **Figure 11**.



Figure 9. Cairene business naming, 2022; the author.



Figure 10. English typography on a fence surrounding a housing project under construction, English, 2022; the author.



Figure 11. Bilingual traffic sign; Arabic-English, 2020; the author.

3. The Historic Shifts in Cairo's Linguistic Landscape

To better comprehend the symbolic meanings of introducing English in the Cairene linguistic landscape, investigating Cairo's history regarding cultural conflicts of 19th-century colonialism and orientalism should be helpful. Cairo's linguistic landscape shifted in nature, form and language along with its history. Arabic geographers such as el-Maqrizy (1364-1442) and el-Jabarty (1753-1822) introduced no description of a linguistic landscape in Cairo. It is unlikely that the city witnessed significant cultural conflicts, even though Cairo before 1800 was a multi-cultural urban arena (Saad, 2019a). Furthermore, relying on various sources such as orientalist's drawings presents no evidence of linguistic traces in the city before the middle of the 19th century. It was only after the end of the 19th century that inventing the camera and its use on a broad scale, photographs documenting linguistic landscapes from various places in Cairo and other significant towns in Egypt became available.

Historic Cairene Street and Place Naming

Cairo's place naming presented a dynamic nature before the beginning of the 19th century. Places, buildings, nodes and open spaces were named after urban functions, owners, and ethnic groups. As the building owners changed, urban functions transformed and open areas were built; names kept changing (Al-Maqrizi, 1441). Individuals had to depend on personal inquiries and communication while navigating the city (Mubarak (d. 1893), 1989).

Cairo's first accurate cartographic material was produced by French engineers (The French Government, 1809, 1818) during Napoleon's occupation of Egypt

(1798-1801). Places, structures, spatial nodes, and open areas were named and located geographically. The French urban and administrative systems allowed Mohammed Ali (1805-the 1840s) to eliminate the traditional system and adopt the French as a “means of modernity” (Raymond, 2001).

By the second half of the 19th century, Ismail Pasha (Mohammed Ali Pasha’s grandson) proudly demonstrated his French way of life during his visit to Paris International Exposition (e.g. *Exposition Universelle*, June 1867). Ismail Pasha’s and his entourage’s significant activities were presenting themselves in French celebrative uniforms, visiting art galleries and attending opera and concerts. Fascinated and overwhelmed by Paris Hausmannisation, Ismail Pasha appointed a French road engineer to “transform Egypt to be part of Europe” in 1867-1868 (Ali, 1998; Mubarak (d 1893), 1970). Ismail Pasha’s newly developed *Ismailia* area (or Khedivial Cairo) adopted Western architectural styles. He imitated Buckingham palace on a smaller scale as his new ruling palace in *Abedin*, Eastern Cairo (Saad, 2019b, 2020a).

By the end of the 19th century, street signs invaded the city; to ease its navigation, as the city authority argued (Mubarak d. 1893, 1989). The first appearance of Cairo’s linguistic landscape presented itself; places, streets and nodes were labelled after Mohammed Ali Pasha’s family and ruling class. The Khedivial Cairo presented a bilingual landscape of French and Arabic for around a century (Abu-Lughod, 1965, 1971; Ali, 1990, 1998; Al-Sayyad, 1981; Mubarak (d 1893), 1970).

By the beginning of the 20th century, Khedival Cairo became overwhelmed with French business and shop names; even an American-style restaurant was branded in French, *L’American*. However, studying orientalist’s drawings and photographs presented the old city’s shops’ non-linguistic character for decades. French was part of the Egyptian cultural discourse until the middle of the 20th century, despite the British colonisation. The Egyptian Ministry for Foreign Affairs was the final authority to shift its travel document from the bilingual French-Arabic to English-Arabic (in the late 20th century).

In 1952 the “Free Officers” came to power, ending Mohammed Ali’s monarchy, and Nasser (1956-1970) promoted the concept of Arabism. The concept of Arabism and Nasser’s attitude against Mohammed Ali’s monarchy redefined Cairo’s linguistic landscape. Streets were renamed after “revolutionary” events, members of the Free Officers, Arabic cities and intellectual celebrities. For example, Solaiman Pasha Street became the 26th of Juley Street, *Midan el-Ismailia* became *Midan el-Tahrir* (Tahrir Square), the *el-Ismailia* district became *Waust el-Balad* (downtown), and Heliopolis became *Misr el-Jadida* (New Cairo). Meanwhile, specific housing areas such as *Abedien*, *Abasseia*, and *Helmeia* sustained their founder names, Abas Helmy Pasha (a royal member of Mohammed Ali’s family) (Saad, 2020a, 2020b). The bilingual policy was prominent in the Cairene linguistic landscape; English replaced French. The 19th and 20th centuries cultural shifts in Cairo laid the foundation of an urban linguistic image. This urban im-

age communicates with the receptor in a dynamic manner and powerful linguistic signs.

4. The Cairene Linguistic Image and Power

The public space is never neutral; it is always somebody's space, imbued with power exercised by somebody. As much as the private, public and authority share being part of the place, they might have entered the urban arena with different perspectives (Abaza, 2007; Abu-Lughod, 1971; Agamben & Wakefield, 2013; Agrawal (edit), 2022; Panerai et al., 2005). By being part of the space, the private, public, and authorities leave traces indicating power practices such as; dominancy, control and ownership. Moreover, the power trace is related to space and experienced as an image. Reading the urban power traces relies heavily on the visual presentation, observation and interpretation of the image's symbolic meaning (Saad, 1994). Since the linguistic and graphic units are signs that appear to be given by their cultural meanings and some natural "intrinsic sensuous qualities" (Gori, 2017: p. 41), they produce iconological values.

What makes the image significant in contemporary life is its connection to our visual experience, as Robert Hassan (2019) argued. Citizens experience the city by employing visual communication. Visual communication is a capacity provider in facilitating the citizens' understanding of branded products, urban and commodities (Järlehed & Fanni, 2022: p. 4).

To create action, the viewer must communicate with the linguistic landscape. Visual communication makes the viewer interpret the image to understand its graphic ideology. On the one hand, as graphic justify order and use (Spitzmüller, 2012: p. 257), it is used to create the place-linguistic image. On the other hand, interpreting the linguistic landscape enables reading and comprehending the countless meanings related to place typography (Järlehed & Fanni, 2022: p. 2).

The Linguistic Image Production in Cairo

The linguistic landscape in Cairo presents a powerful image due to its elements' size, density and distribution along significant roads. Cairo's significant roads became defined by continuous rows of linguistic elements taking advantage of project leftovers. The Cairene linguistic landscape produces its visual image through a multidimensional mechanism. This mechanism is effective due to its graphic ideology and visual communication. Furthermore, the graphic ideology is produced due to the language policy, graphic design and objectives. On the other hand, graphic design identifies the spreading of visual registers, as Adam Jaworski (2015) argues.

Identifying the image's meaning requires interpreting the graphic ideology and communicating with the context. Seeing the overall image suggests two interrelated actions; seeing the image and its background. The image background assumes various roles; it illustrates the relationship between the image (Stubblefield, 2017: p. 197) or the billboard and its context. Similarly, seeing each image

implies a double action simultaneously, seeing the canvas and graphic design presented on the canvas. Hence, the production mechanism is constructed from self and external aspects. The internal aspects are the graphic ideology and design, linguistic typography and policy, and the produced visual registers. Communicating with the overall image or each image, its canvas and what is on the canvas, and the context or foreground are external aspects.

Nevertheless, the Cairene linguistic image creates a distinctive impact, as the background is minimal. Linguistic elements along the road's sides and middle significantly reduce or eliminate the overall background's or context's role. They introduce an overwhelming image as the viewer's perception is focused on the crowded image and then the road quality as a foreground. Focusing on the image minimises the background's significant meaning and empowers the billboard's marketing and advertising objectives. Nevertheless, eliminating or minimising the background is a double face coin.

The impact of eliminating the context can be comprehended within place branding (Bassem, 2018). Branding places, like branding products, aim to create a public image and identity (Woolard, 2016: p. 36); if a product branding becomes isolated from its context, its branding fails (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Similarly, isolating an image from its context presents an overwhelming image and fails in branding the space. The emplacement and genre play a crucial role in Cairo's linguistic landscape. Scollon and Scollon (2003) argued that "emplacement" is the situating of signs and language in the physical space, and emplacement constructs the signage-context relationship. The genre is a text or sign and a normative system that establishes relationships between semiotic resources and space users (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Giant billboards' chaotic distribution and genre introduce numerous meanings, among which place identity is insignificant. The Cairene multidimensional mechanism becomes more interesting by adding another aspect; the viewer interpretation process. During the perception process, the image comes first, then the canvas or background (Gori, 2017: p. 52). Since the background comes last and is minimised, the linguistic elements introduce substantial ideological impact as a commercial space than producing an urban experience; it strengthens the road's placelessness, **Figure 12**.

5. The Symbolic Meaning of the Cairene Linguistic Landscape

The Cairene linguistic landscape does not act straightforwardly in promoting its graphic ideology toward aspiring specific actions, **Figure 13**. Its production and symbolic meanings (in creating centrality versus marginality) reflect other values.

People ascribe meanings to images based on their prior experience negotiating the place (Johannessen & Van Leeuwen, 2018), as meanings facilitate their place relationship and acceptance of signs and names. The meanings of the Cairene linguistic landscape are related to various aspects, such as human perception and



Figure 12. Billboards defining the road, 2021; the author.



Figure 13. Street billboards calling to actions, 2021; the author.

interpretation. The Cairene linguistic landscape's meaning is produced by promoting those aspects within the multidimensional mechanism.

Emplacing signs and producing genre construct (or reflects) language narratives policy (Rosendal & Amini Ngabonziza, 2023: p. 2) and do not act straightforwardly in Cairo. They lean on the community's collective cultural consciousness and subconsciousness. Promoting English as a central linguistic policy and bilingual

(English-Arabic) or Arabic as a marginalised policy draws on the community's socio-cultural memory—a constructed memory for more than a century of bilingualism. However, semiotics is significant for comprehending how centrality and marginality produce meanings.

As semiotics refers to the actions of communication to produce meaning (Van Leeuwen, 2005), the Cairene linguistic landscape is an image understood by its semiotic reference. Semiotics allow the viewer to construct meanings such as modernity, luxury, a wealthy or healthy lifestyle, centrality and marginality.

English was widely used in Cairo's linguistic landscape, accounting for more than 91% of public and private signs and street billboards. Adopting Western graphics and English should remind consumers of the American way of life, as seen in Hollywood movies. However, bilingualism (English-Arabic) must be considered, as it cannot always be due to the particular language usage but instead results from a series of factors (Savski, 2021: pp. 8-9). Factors such as personal behaviour and the need for global recognition might have played various roles, as Balirano et al. (2018) and Durante (2021) argued.

The authoritarian placeless projects in Cairo (after 2017) contain tension between imprinting the space with authoritarian power, balancing the local image and imposing decision-makers' synoptic policy (for more about the Synoptic Policy and Viewing, see Coleman, 2019). Such tension can be identified between the image's various components. The Cairene linguistic landscape introduces a struggle over whose reality is represented and visible in the city and is dominated by English policy.

Shohamy (2006), in his book; *Language Policy: Hidden Agendas and New Approaches*, argued that the linguistic landscape could be considered a tool for achieving policy influence. Moreover, Rubdy and Ben Said (2015), in their book entitled: *Conflict, Exclusion, and Dissent in the Linguistic Landscape*, presented the linguistic landscape's elements as signs for expressing official policy. If one accepts that the linguistic landscape in Cairo is a sign of elites policy influence and expressing official policy, one must identify the linguistic elements as such. The most significant traces expected for official expression are the naming, linguistic elements' emplacement, graphic ideology and language policy. Nevertheless, controlling a public space might start by naming it, as naming has a performative, stabilising and ordering character, as Hendry (2006: p. 25) argued and considered "the power to control symbolic systems" mirrors semiotic values and legitimate conceptions.

Since Cairo's history teaches us that attempting to change the names of existing spaces is complex, the authoritarian placeless projects presented significant possibilities for imposing the new naming agenda. The Egyptian Pretorian state (after 2017) might have found that maintaining the existing urbanism would not help its naming agenda. Moreover, naming should be recognisable within the state's new mega project. Naming flyovers, nodes, and new roads, after army generals and prominent, have semiotic references to official expressions. Such an

act is similar to Ismail Pasha's mega projects, as naming them found strongholds in the Khedivial Cairo.

The struggle over whose reality is represented and visible in Cairo is divided between the Pretorian state and the cultural elites. Naming spaces, flyovers and traffic nodes are official policies in producing traces of power. Meanwhile, the cultural elites seem to gain the upper hand in the Cairene linguistic policy. The Egyptian Defence Ministry controls the linguistic elements mushrooming from military facilities and sites. One can confidently argue that the Ministry of Defence does not control its graphic ideology and linguistic policy, as renting the element is the primary concern, **Figure 14**.

However, who controls their spreading over roads, along public spaces, and pavements need to be present. The authorities must have accepted or turned a blind eye to billboard density and emplacement; an influential party or parties might produce them. Furthermore, presenting English on authoritarian structures and vehicles is meaningful. Nevertheless, such a presentation might result from a prevailing cultural attitude. The aggressive promotion of an English policy at the beginning of the 21st century cannot easily be considered official; instead, it can be an advertising policy targeting specific consumers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

5.1. Modernism, Colonialism and Globalism

Remarkably, English was not part of the Egyptian cultural repertoire before the end of the 19th century; French was promoted from the 1840s to the 1930s. Within the 20th century, English emerged in the cityscape and dominated in the 21st century. "Modernity" and "progress" were attached in the 19th century to French and in the second half of the 20th century to English. Nevertheless, some street signs maintained their bilingual French-Arabic, **Figure 15**. It is argued



Figure 14. A street billboard constructed in a military site, 2021; the author.



Figure 15. Bilingual street signs from the 1960s, Arabic-French, 2021; the author.

that the cultural shifts, from Arabic to French to English, in Egypt are motivated by “development” as an inevitable means for solving the community’s problems. Such an argument dominated the intellectual discourse in Cairo in the 20th century (Bianca, 2000, 2006; Samy, 1917; Al-Sayyid Marsot, 1984). Furthermore, it was argued that the language and education (Samy, 1917) and political and economic (Rothstein, 2018) policies imposed by British colonialism have contributed to the Egyptian policy shift (Mitchell, 2002). Nevertheless, both arguments are influential in explaining a cultural attitude but must be more in explaining the linguistic shift.

It cannot be just a coincidence that English substituted French in Cairo’s linguistic landscape. Testing such a phenomenon within a global context should explain its cultural merit. The city obtains its cultural and economic position from its global influence. The political position within the global power network plays a significant role in the local cultural and economic forces (Allen, 2010). For example, imposed exogenous languages in Africa by colonial powers were maintained by post-independence regimes for global recognition (Makalela, 2016). The Cairene bilingual policy shifted from French-Arabic to English-Arabic when the global power position shifted from France to Britain to the USA. Blaming Egypt’s cultural shifts on colonisation and globalism is inaccurate; local elites must have contributed to such a shift.

The independent national movements cornered the community elites in finding solutions for local problems. Driven by their cultural values, the Egyptian elites searched for solutions in a superior cultural system producing what Badie considered an “Imported State”. The imported state production can reflect the global boss-state-client relationship maintained for global recognition (Badie, 2000). Batibo (2020) argues that post-independence nations have formed language policies to accommodate the inherited British colonial legacies of divide

and rule. The British colonial superiority inspired the Egyptian ruling and elite classes' reliance on westernised political and economic models at the expense of local and regional ones (Abdullah, 2017). Despite that not all successful, wealthy developed countries have downgraded and replaced their national languages with English (Rosendal & Amini Ngabonziza, 2023: p. 16), English and bilingualism in Egypt became the norm, and it became challenging to assign functions to Arabic.

5.2. The Culture of Shame

Nevertheless, the foundation of inferiority must have been constructed before the cultural shift. The French colonisation of Egypt (1798-1801) presented a crucial impact on national political pride and cultural certainty; it triggered an inferior perspective of a defeated nation (Fahmy, 2010). Adopting French policies for decades has strengthened the elites' inferiority and reliance on the West.

The overwhelming mockery that Ismail Pasha and his entourage faced from French intellectuals and journalists during their visit to Paris (1867) is considered by Çelik and Mitchell to be a vital sign for spreading the silent culture of shame (Çelik, 1992; Mitchell, 1991). By the end of the 19th century, the silent culture of shame became an overwhelming attitude. It implied that the local culture and Arabic represent backwardness and a reminder of messy urban life (Hakim, 2001: p. 88). Countless events can present evidence of the culture of shame, including Ismail Pasha's meeting with European ambassadors. Satisfied with Cairo's urban "development" in 1870, Ismail Pasha told European ambassadors: "for thirty years, the European influence has transformed Egypt, now [...] we are civilized" (Çelik, 1992: p. 13).

The culture of shame and the need for global recognition has started a Westernisation process. French was used for presenting ideas and beliefs; promoting specific cultural values. The culture of shame explains why the Egyptian elites marginalised the local culture in favour of an exogenous one during the first cultural shift (from Arabic to French). Relating the global powers to the intellectual class interests contributes to explaining the second shift.

5.3. The Intellectual Classes and Individual Interests in Cairo

The linguistic landscape's production is directly related to socio-cultural forces since conceptualising typography as a social practice is a semiotic issue closely linked to ideology (Järlehed & Fanni, 2022: p. 4, 2). If producing local linguistic policy is crucial for national pride, shifting Arabic from the centre to the marginal position echoes a shift from pride to shame or profit (Dlaske, 2014). The shift from pride to shame was initiated in the 19th century. Nevertheless, shifting to interests and profit in the 20th century makes one question the meaning.

Profiting from the colonial habitus and cultural reproduction, post-independent, intellectual and ruling classes took advantage of their knowledge to occupy a pivotal position (Badie, 2000). The linguistic policy reinforced the cultural inequalities,

“and, in doing so, the ruling and cultural classes empowered themselves” (Rasool, 2007: p. 2). Climbing the socio-economic ladder in the 19th century was based on a boss-state-client relationship. French was significant for cultural empowerment when it matched the monarch’s linguistic policy (El-Beshry, 2018). Nevertheless, as the power balance favoured Britain and the USA, profiting from the new global boss-state-client relationship required shifting to English.

The boss-state-client relationship shifted during the Pretorian eras (from 1952-present) from adopting the monarch-state as a boss-state to the Pretorian state (Haykal, 1961; Maksoud, 1960). When Nasser came to power (1954), his idea of Arabism successfully promoted an “Arabic” linguistic policy for a short period. Contrary to countries such as Indonesia and Thailand (Savski, 2021), no effective law was imposed against using English in public life. Meanwhile, Arabic was seen as primitive, and its use presented poverty or backwardness (Mignolo, 2003: p. 282); the Egyptian cultural elite distanced themselves from it, and Nasser Arabism faced significant hidden resistance (Moor, 1994; Sadek, 2006), (see Figure 15). Decades later, Egypt took a new turn toward Americanization (Saad, 2020b). It is not apparent that the Egyptian authorities, after Nasser’s death in 1970, encouraged an English policy; it is probably encouraged by the cultural elites’ need to maintain a pivotal position by advocating for “modernism” and “development”.

The language policy seems closely related to the cultural elites promoting their cultural values on two levels; consciously and subconsciously. The elites’ cultural hidden resistance to Nasser’s Arabism succeeded in shifting the linguistic policy to English. Such a shift mirrors the cultural elites’ need for global recognition under the new American order. As the English took over French, Egyptian intellectuals imposed their synoptic policy on the community to protect their interests and maintain a pivotal position. The local boss-state-client relationship inspired the Egyptian cultural elites to promote the American solution for gaining a favoured position within the Pretorian state while shifting from shame to profit.

5.4. Cultural Distinction

Promoting English and Westernised graphics for an Arabic-speaking community establishes a specific relationship between the linguistic landscape and viewers. Furthermore, the marginality of Arabic versus the centrality of English transmits symbolic meanings of language policy generated by “somebody” and addresses specific groups. Since the linguistic policy and graphic ideology in Cairo are promoted in luxury products, the communication adopted as a semi-otic reference emphasised English as a sign of the elite groups and segregated the viewers into central and marginal groups.

Presenting and repeating specific ideas in English emphasise its centrality and affect the viewer’s cultural values (Durante, 2021). In Egypt, real estate and

marketing companies sell the dream of a luxurious living by promoting linguistic policy and graphic ideology drawn from the American way of life, **Figure 16** and **Figure 17**. It explains why 80% of luxury housing advertisements are English, and 17% are bilingual. Distinctive presentation of linguistic policies means distinguishing between English-mastering “elites” and the Arabic-speaking “masses”. It is a distinction between those who adopt English from the “others” by creating a feeling of superiority. Such a distinction is not a neutral reflection of reality but rather a reflection of the dominant ideology that serves the interests of those in positions of power (Toolis, 2021). Adopting English in Cairene’s linguistic landscape reflects the socio-cultural distinction inherited from the colonial divide and rule concept.



Figure 16. A group of street billboards; the American way of life, 2022; the author.



Figure 17. American living; billboards and banners. Bilingual traffic signs and Arabic political propaganda 2022; the author.

By neglecting local culture, turning a blind eye to the culture of shame's impact and looking for global recognition, the socio-cultural distinction is deeply rooted in the community memory. English became Egypt's language of power (Janks et al., 2014). The embedded culture of shame, official practice, individual and class interests and the elite's synoptic policy are among the significant symbolic meanings of Cairo's linguistic landscape.

6. Conclusion

The Cairene linguistic policy presented three significant cultural stages. The first stage presented no linguistic landscape, and the second laid the foundations of a bilingual policy; French-Arabic. Moreover, it took the linguistic policy to a discourse of "pride" and "shame". The third stage (English-Arabic) took the linguistic policy and landscape to a neoliberal discourse of socio-cultural "profit".

The Cairene linguistic landscape reflects the influential classes' cultural objectives by transmitting direct and indirect messages. Motivated by the globalist corporate, the Egyptian elite have contributed to the authorities' placelessness.

Imposing English typography and Westernised graphic ideology in the Cairene linguistic landscape leaves little room for uncertainty. Countless factors have collaborated in creating the Cairene linguistic landscape in a multidimensional mechanism, such as the inherited subconscious culture of shame, globalisation, class interests, or the elite cultural synoptic viewing.

Seeing the linguistic landscape as an overall image related to authoritarian placeless projects suggests a constructive value between road engineering and the dream of Westernised urban quality. Furthermore, the linguistic elements' emplacement and chaotic distribution emphasise the road's placelessness.

While naming roads, flyovers and traffic nodes aimed at achieving official policy, the Cairene graphic ideology and linguistic policy aimed at producing cultural influence.

The centrality of English and the marginality of Arabic in Cairo's linguistic landscape are not coincident, as they reflect a cultural distinction between the elites and the masses.

Determining the most significant meaning and generating forces of Westernised graphic ideology and English policy is tricky. The conflict between culture and other forces in the Cairene linguistic landscape still needs to be clarified. Examining the wordplay of political and socio-economic influential groups should introduce deeper comprehension. This article suggested a relationship between Cairo's linguistic landscape and the community's socio-economic forces. However, the author admits the study's limitation in tackling such a suggestion.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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