



Arabic Linguistic Landscape in Australia: A Multilingual Study of Commercial Signage on Haldon Street, Lakemba

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Abstract:

This study explores the presence and function of Arabic language within the linguistic landscape of Haldon Street, Lakemba, a multicultural suburb in Sydney, Australia. Using Backhaus's (2007) framework, the research analyzes twenty commercial and institutional signs to examine the distribution of Arabic alongside English and other languages. The findings demonstrate that Arabic appears in both standard and transliterated forms, functioning in diverse bottom-up contexts such as shops, restaurants, and service agencies. The study reveals varying degrees of language dominance, from bilingual balance to the predominance of English or Arabic, reflecting identity negotiation among migrant communities. Beyond its communicative role, Arabic in the public space serves as a marker of Islamic cultural identity, fostering both community cohesion and visibility in a multilingual society. This research contributes to broader discussions on language identity, multilingual practices, and the role of Arabic as both a heritage and diasporic language in contemporary global contexts.

Keywords: *Linguistic landscape, Arabic language, multilingualism, identity, diaspora*

Abstract

مستخلص

البحث

Keywords

كلمات

أساسية

INTRODUCTION (مقدمة)

Human mobility in modern life is inseparable from the presence of language in public spaces. Various forms of visual texts such as street signs, advertisements, shop boards, restaurants, and public service markers demonstrate that language functions as a non-verbal means of communication carrying social meaning. The phenomenon of globalization and cross-border migration has accelerated the emergence of multilingual spaces in major cities around the world.¹ International migration and the formation of diasporic communities have contributed to linguistic diversity that is represented within the linguistic landscape.² Through the linguistic landscape, language serves not only as a medium of information but also as a marker of identity, cultural legitimacy, and the symbolic presence of a community in public space.

Arabic is one of the six official languages of the United Nations and is used by more than 25 countries across the Middle East and North Africa.³ Beyond its role as a language of communication, Arabic holds a distinguished status as the liturgical language of Muslims worldwide. Historically, the spread of the Arabic language developed alongside the expansion of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula to Asia, Africa, and Europe.⁴ In the context of the modern diaspora, Muslim communities across continents continue to use Arabic in religious practice, education, and symbolic expressions of identity. It is estimated that nearly half of the world's Muslim population lives outside the Middle East, making Arabic visible in public spaces across different countries as part of cultural and spiritual identity.⁵

Australia is widely known for its established multiculturalism policies and highly diverse immigrant population. More than a quarter of its residents were born overseas, and multi-ethnic communities are spread across major cities such as Sydney,

¹ Nanang Sutrisno, "Multilingualitas sebagai Media Negosiasi Budaya Komunitas Diaspora Bali dalam Masyarakat Multikultural di Kabupaten Banyuwangi," 2 (2023), hal. 238–49.

² Sahril Sahril, Syahifuddin Zuhri Harahap, dan Agus Bambang Hermanto, "Lanskap Linguistik Kota Medan: Kajian Onomastika, Semiotika, Dan Spasial," *MEDAN MAKNA: Jurnal Ilmu Kebahasaan dan Kesastraan*, 17.2 (2019), hal. 195, doi:10.26499/mm.v17i2.2141.

³ Daud Lintang, "Bahasa Arab Sebagai Identitas Budaya Islam dan Pemersatu Keberagaman Suku," *Ta'limi | Journal of Arabic Education and Arabic Studies*, 2.1 (2023), hal. 73–86.

⁴ Layla Hasibuan dan Tasya Hasibuan, "Sejarah Pertumbuhan Dan Perkembangan Bahasa Arab," *Jurnal Sathar*, 1.2 (2023), hal. 1–12, doi:10.59548/js.v1i2.68.

⁵ Hackett et al., *How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020*, 2025, doi:10.58094/fj71-ny11.

Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Perth.⁶ This diversity encompasses not only ethnic backgrounds but also religious beliefs, cultural practices, and language use in social spaces. The presence of diasporic communities plays a significant role in shaping identity representation through language, both in daily interactions and in the visual landscape of cities. Among these communities, Arab–Muslim groups are one of the most culturally and linguistically visible in public spaces.

Lakemba, located in southwestern Sydney, New South Wales, is widely recognized as a central hub of the Arab–Muslim community in Australia. Since the 1970s, Lakemba has become a primary settlement area for Lebanese-Australian immigrants and has subsequently developed with the arrival of other Arab–Muslim communities.⁷ The cultural and religious identity of Arab residents is clearly reflected in the economic and social activities of the area. This is most evident along the commercial center of Haldon Street, which is lined with shops, restaurants, and service providers owned by diaspora communities. The commercial signboards in Arabic along this street function not only as informational media but also as symbolic representations of the collective identity of Arab–Muslim communities in the public sphere.⁸

The study conducted by Yusuf, Syaie, A’la, and Alomoush (2022) is grounded in the background of religious identity representation among the Arab diaspora community in the public spaces of Sydney, particularly through shop signs and commercial service boards along Haldon Street, Lakemba.⁹ The primary aim of the study is to examine how Arabic is visually employed as a symbol of religious identity within the local linguistic landscape. Using a qualitative descriptive method based on signage documentation and interpretive analysis, the research demonstrates that Arabic functions not only as an informational medium but also holds a strong symbolic role in constructing the Islamic image of the community. The findings reveal that most bilingual signage visually

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistic, *Australia’s Population by Country of Birth, 2021, 2022* <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/australias-population-country-birth/2021>> [diakses 21 Oktober 2025].

⁷ Val Colic-Peisker dan Rachel Sharples, *A review of programs targeting social cohesion and socio-economic disadvantage in select migrant concentration localities in Sydney and Melbourne*, 2020.

⁸ Kamal Yusuf et al., “Religious Identity Representation of Arab Diaspora in the Linguistic Landscape of Shop Signs in Sydney, Australia,” *Issues in Language Studies*, 11.1 (2022), hal. 91–108, doi:10.33736/ils.4338.2022.

⁹ Yusuf et al., “Religious Identity Representation of Arab Diaspora in the Linguistic Landscape of Shop Signs in Sydney, Australia.”

foregrounds English, while Arabic appears as a marker of cultural and spiritual identity. The significance of this study lies in its reading of Arabic as a means of expressing minority identity within a predominantly non-Muslim society. Its relevance to the present research is substantial, as the object, location, and focus on the use of Arabic in Lakemba's public space share close similarities. However, the present study contributes further by strengthening the analysis of language hierarchy, script typology, and symbolic-informational functions through a more systematic application of Backhaus's (2007) framework compared to previous works.

The research by Al Afnan (2021) stems from the phenomenon of diglossia and the varying use of Arabic among diaspora communities in Australia, influenced by factors such as age, educational level, and social status.¹⁰ The main objective of the study is to analyze how Arab speakers in Sydney select linguistic forms whether Standard Arabic, dialectal Arabic, or English in everyday interactions occurring in social spaces and public services. Through a qualitative method using recorded verbal interactions and interviews, the study finds that Arabic within the diaspora undergoes a functional shift: Standard Arabic is primarily used in religious and formal contexts, whereas dialectal varieties and English dominate practical and economic communication. These findings highlight the presence of sociolinguistic stratification that shapes the vitality of Arabic outside its homeland. The significance of this research lies in its exposition of the relationship between language variation and the dynamic identity of diaspora communities. This aligns with the present study in terms of understanding how variations of Arabic influence its selection and representation within commercial landscapes.

The study by Gu and Coluzzi (2024) originates from the increasing visibility of Arabic in the linguistic landscape of multilingual cities outside the Middle East, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, as part of religious identity, global mobility, and cultural commodification.¹¹ The aim of the research is to examine the functions of Arabic in public spaces dominated by national and global languages, such as Malay and

¹⁰ Mohammad Awad AlAfnan, "Diglossic features of the Arabic-speaking community in Australia: The influences of age, education, and prestige," *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17.1 (2021), hal. 462–70, doi:10.52462/jlls.29.

¹¹ Gu, C., & Coluzzi, "Presence of 'ARABIC' in Kuala Lumpur's multilingual linguistic landscape: heritage, religion, identity, business and mobility."

English. Using visual observation and textual analysis of commercial and religious signage, the study identifies three primary functions of Arabic: symbolic (Islamic identity and heritage), commercial (branding of restaurants, stores, and halal products), and mobility-related (transnational connections and religious tourism). The significance of the findings lies in showing that Arabic serves as an identity marker not only for Arab communities but is also utilized by non-Arab groups for cultural and economic legitimacy. Its relevance to the present study lies in the shared symbolic and commercial functions of Arabic within multicultural public spaces. However, the present research offers a more specific context than that of the Arab-Muslim diaspora in Australia and incorporates an analysis of visual hierarchy and script types using Backhaus's (2007) framework, which is not addressed in the Kuala Lumpur study.

The study conducted by Yusuf, Rohmah, and Alomoush (2022) is grounded in the growing use of Arabic in commercial landscapes across European cities, particularly in Leipzig, Germany, where such signage reflects not only ethnic identity but also economic strategy and cultural commodification.¹² The aim of this study is to examine how Arabic is employed as an element of branding, product legitimacy, and exotic symbolism in business signage operated by immigrant communities and local entrepreneurs. Through direct observation and visual documentation, the research finds that Arabic is strategically positioned through transliteration, calligraphy, or religious phrases to attract consumers and reinforce an authentic image. The significance of this study lies in understanding Arabic as a culturally negotiated commodity within non-Arabic public spaces. Its relevance to the present research appears in the shared focus on commercial signage within diaspora communities. However, the context of Lakemba demonstrates a stronger role for Arabic in relation to religious identity and community solidarity, rather than exoticized market appeal. Additionally, the present study refines this perspective by analyzing visual hierarchy, script types, and the positioning of Arabic through Backhaus's (2007) framework, an aspect not emphasized in the Leipzig study.

¹² Kamal Yusuf, Zuliati Rohmah, dan Omar Ibrahim Alomoush, "The Commodification of Arabic in the Commercial Linguistic Landscape of Leipzig," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 30.4 (2022), hal. 1703–22, doi:10.47836/pjssh.30.4.13.

This study aims to analyze how Arabic is represented within the linguistic landscape of commercial signboards along Haldon Street, Lakemba. The primary focus of this research includes identifying the forms of Arabic usage in signage, examining its patterns of coexistence with other languages particularly English and exploring how Arabic is visually positioned within the linguistic hierarchy of public space. Through observing and classifying the texts on shop signs, restaurants, and community services, this study seeks to understand the status of Arabic not merely as a communication tool but also as a symbol of identity and a marker of diasporic presence. With this approach, the study aims to reveal the linguistic strategies employed by Arab-Muslim communities in navigating the multilingual and multicultural environment of Australia.

Academically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of linguistic landscape studies, particularly regarding the use of Arabic in the public spaces of multicultural nations. The findings of this study not only enrich the literature on diasporic linguistic identity but also open discussions on how minority languages are negotiated, maintained, or commodified within commercial settings. In addition, this research holds significant social relevance, as it shows how Arabic functions in fostering community cohesion, reinforcing religious symbolism, and representing the presence of Muslims in Australia. More broadly, this study may serve as a reference for scholarship on identity, global mobility, and multilingual dynamics in contemporary societies.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK (نظريات)

Studies on the linguistic landscape focus on the relationship between language and the ways in which society is reflected in public spaces. This field was first popularized by Landry and Bourhis (1997), who argued that the presence of language on signboards, advertisements, and street signs functions not only as an informational tool but also as a marker of the collective identity of a social group.¹³ Subsequent developments in linguistic landscape research began to view public space as an arena of ideological representation, power relations, and identity negotiation a framework advanced by

¹³ Rodrigue Landry dan Richard Y. Bourhis, "Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality: An Empirical Study," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16.1 (1997), hal. 23–49, doi:10.1177/0261927X970161002.

Backhaus (2007).¹⁴ He distinguishes signage based on its source of production: top-down, issued by official institutions, and bottom-up, created by community members or business owners. In addition, Backhaus emphasizes the importance of examining language hierarchy, visual positioning, and the use of scripts to determine linguistic dominance.

Through this framework, signage is understood not merely as text but also as an indicator of the presence, dominance, or marginalization of a language community within a particular social context. Thus, the linguistic landscape is not only seen as a visual object but also as a social text that reflects the relationship between language, space, and identity. This model is highly relevant for analyzing the Lakemba area, as most commercial signs in this region are produced by diaspora communities and local business owners, enabling researchers to uncover the power relations, identity construction, and linguistic strategies negotiated within a multicultural public space such as Lakemba.

To date, linguistic landscape studies in various countries have generally focused on majority languages or immigrant groups with strong economic or demographic dominance, such as English, Mandarin, French, or Spanish. Research on the representation of Arabic in diaspora contexts particularly in Western countries like Australia remains relatively limited and has not been extensively explored empirically.¹⁵ Yet Arabic occupies a unique position, functioning not only as an ethnic language of communication but also as one intertwined with religious practices, collective identity symbols, and the cultural memory of Muslim communities. The scarcity of academic documentation on the presence of Arabic in Australia's public spaces including commercial and religious signage indicates a significant research gap that needs to be addressed. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the expansion of linguistic landscape scholarship, particularly regarding Arabic within the diasporic context of a multicultural nation.

¹⁴ Peter Backhaus, *Linguistic Landscapes: A Comparative Study of Urban Multilingualism in Tokyo* (Multilingual Matters, 2007), doi:10.21832/9781853599484.

¹⁵ Yusuf et al., "Religious Identity Representation of Arab Diaspora in the Linguistic Landscape of Shop Signs in Sydney, Australia."

Linguistic landscape research that highlights the presence of Arabic in public spaces is not only relevant for advancing linguistic theory but also for understanding social dynamics, religious identity, and cultural representation within diaspora communities. In multicultural societies such as Australia, Arabic often functions as a symbol of religious affiliation, a means of identity resistance, and a marker of community presence within broader social spaces.¹⁶ Research in this area also contributes to discourses on multiculturalism, social integration, and linguistic diversity as reflected in public policy debates. Furthermore, the study of visual texts such as commercial signboards, billboards, or religious markers provides insight into how diaspora communities maintain their identities amid the dominance of majority languages.¹⁷ Therefore, analyzing the Arabic linguistic landscape in Lakemba is significant not only from a linguistic perspective but also as part of broader studies on diaspora communities and contemporary Muslim identity representation.

METHOD (طريقة \ منهج البحث)

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, as its primary focus is to provide an in-depth depiction of the forms, functions, and representations of Arabic within the linguistic landscape of Haldon Street, Lakemba. This approach was selected to enable the researcher to analyze linguistic phenomena contextually based on the visual realities observed in public spaces. The descriptive method is used to document and interpret the diversity of signage containing Arabic without manipulating the research objects. In the context of linguistic landscape studies, this method is considered relevant because it can reveal the symbolic, informational, and sociocultural dimensions embedded in visual texts appearing in multilingual public spaces.

The research data consist of twenty commercial signboards located along Haldon Street, Lakemba. The site was selected purposively because the area is known as a central hub of the Arab–Muslim community in Sydney. Data were collected through

¹⁶ P. Gu, C., & Coluzzi, “Presence of ‘ARABIC’ in Kuala Lumpur’s multilingual linguistic landscape: heritage, religion, identity, business and mobility,” *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 2024, hal. 1–31.

¹⁷ Gu, C., & Coluzzi, “Presence of ‘ARABIC’ in Kuala Lumpur’s multilingual linguistic landscape: heritage, religion, identity, business and mobility.”

field documentation in the form of photographs of signage and the recording of linguistic texts displayed on the signboards. During the data collection process, the researcher classified the languages used (monolingual, bilingual, multilingual) as well as the types of Arabic script present (standard, dialectal, transliteration). This technique allows the resulting data to reflect the variations in Arabic representation within a multilingual context.

Data analysis was conducted using Backhaus's (2007) framework, which emphasizes top-down and bottom-up distinctions, language hierarchy, and script variation.¹⁸ Each signboard was categorized according to language dominance (Arabic, English, or balanced) and positioned within the context of linguistic hierarchy. Subsequently, the classification results were interpreted to understand how Arabic functions both as a medium of communication and as a symbol of identity. This analytical process positions Arabic not merely as a visual text but also as a representation of power, ideology, and diasporic community solidarity.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION (بحث ومناقشة)

This study successfully documented twenty commercial and institutional signboards located along Haldon Street, Lakemba. These signboards originate from various types of establishments, including halal butcher shops, restaurants, financial service agencies, and social institutions. Most of the signboards are bilingual (Arabic–English), while others display multilingual combinations including Urdu and Bengali. The presence of Arabic on the signage appears in both standard forms and transliterations. Overall, these data indicate that Lakemba's linguistic landscape reflects the dynamics of a heterogeneous Muslim diasporic community. The following are the findings presented alongside the collected data:

No	Location	Text	Bahasa Yang Digunakan	Language Hierarchy	Top-Down / Bottom-Up	Position of Arabic	Arabic Type of Arabic Script (Standard/ Dialect/Latin-Arabic)
1.	Shop	AL YASEEN	Bilingual	Balanced	Bottom	Parallel	Arabic

¹⁸ Backhaus, *Linguistic Landscapes: A Comparative Study of Urban Multilingualism in Tokyo*.

		Halal Butchery Alyaseen halal butchery <i>Malhalah Al- Yaseen Al- lahmal halaal</i>			-Up		transliterati on and standard
2.	Shop	King Of Sweets <i>Malikul Al- halwiyaat</i>	Bilingual	English- dominant	Bottom -Up	Lower	Standard
3.	Service Agency	Australian Exchange <i>Al-istiraaliyah lisharaafah</i>	Bilingual	English- dominant	Bottom -Up	Parallel	Standard
4.	Shop	<i>Malhalah As- sulthaan</i>	Monoling ual	Arabic- dominant	Bottom -Up	Upper	Standard
5.	Restauran t	Lahoree Sweets & Resturant Lahuur Sawiit aind Risturant	Bilingual	Balanced	Bottom -Up	Parallel	Arabic transliterati on
6.	Shop	<i>Suparamarketa Supermarket Suparmaarikit</i>	Multiling ual (Bengali- Inggris- Arab)	Balanced	Bottom -Up	Parallel	Standard
7.	Service Agency	Islamic Welfare Centre Manager Syeikh Khalil Chami <i>Al-maktub Al- islamiy Lilkhudamaat Al-Ijtima'iyah badar syaikh Khalil syami</i>	Bilingual	Balanced	Bottom -Up	Lower	Standard
8.	Service Agency	<i>Ma'dzun syar'I waqoonuuni</i> Marriage Celebrant	Bilingual	Arabic- dominant	Bottom -Up	Upper	Standard
9.	Service Agency	United Exchange Fast & Reliable <i>Sarafat Watahwilaat maaliyat</i>	Bilingual	English- dominant	Bottom -Up	Lower	Standard
10.	Restauran t	Shaahi Lounge <i>Maziid Urdisii Kahanuun Kamarkaz</i> Traditional Pakistani Cuisine	Multiling ual (Urdu- Inggris- Arab)	English- dominant	Bottom -UP	Lower	Standard
11.	Shop	Maywand Carpets & Kitchenware	Bilingual	Balanced	Bottom -Up	Parallel	Standard

		<i>Syarkat farash wa dhorof Furusyi Maywand</i>					
12.	Service Agency	W Solution Group Money Transfer & Exchange <i>Shayrafatu waqaash</i>	Bilingual	Arabic-dominant	Bottom-Up	Parallel	Standard
13.	Service Agency	<i>Syarkah Yuunaitid littahwiilaat Al-maaliyah</i> Money Transfer Currency Exchange	Bilingual	Arabic-dominant	Bottom-Up	Upper	Standard
14.	Gas Station	Al Mustafa Petroleum	Bilingual	Balanced	Bottom-Up	Upper	Arabic transliteration
15.	Restaurant	Mataam Al Mandi Authentic Arabian Food	Bilingual	Arabic-dominant	Bottom-Up	Upper	Arabic transliteration
16.	Service Agency	Insaaf Saving People From Riba Looking for Halal Finance?	Bilingual	English-dominant	Bottom-Up	Lower	Arabic transliteration
17.	Service Agency	Travel <i>Safariyaat Amru Yaasin</i>	Bilingual	Balanced	Bottom-Up	Lower	Standard
18.	Shop	Darwich Butchery <i>Malhalah Darwisy Ikhwan</i>	Bilingual	Balanced	Bottom-Up	Parallel	Standard
19.	Shop	Afghan Sufra Restaurant and Bakery <i>Afghoon Sufroo</i>	Bilingual	English-dominant	Bottom-Up	Parallel	Arabic transliteration
20.	Shop	Hamze Bros Fruit Market <i>Jamii' Anwaau' Al-khadhooru walfawaakih</i>	Bilingual	English-dominant	Bottom-Up	Lower	Standard

1. Signboard Categories (Top-Down/Bottom-Up)

On the *Al-Yaseen Halal Butchery* shop sign, following Backhaus's (2007) framework, this signage falls into the category of bottom-up signage, as it is independently produced by the business owner without the involvement of any official institution. The use of the Arabic word “الحلال” (halal) serves as a symbolic element

indicating religious values and the authenticity of the products offered to Muslim consumers. Meanwhile, the name “Al-Yaseen” written in Latin transliteration reinforces Arab identity while remaining accessible to non-Arab readers. This combination demonstrates a dual linguistic strategy: an informational function aimed at reaching a broader market and a symbolic function intended to strengthen Islamic legitimacy. Visually, English still dominates the layout of the signboard, yet the presence of Arabic script provides a sense of identity and pride for the diaspora community rooted in religious values.



Similarly, the signboard of the *Money Transfer* service agency is also classified as bottom-up signage, despite containing global business elements such as Western Union. Arabic appears as a complementary language used to communicate financial services catering to Middle Eastern immigrant communities. The placement of Arabic alongside English demonstrates a dual orientation: reaching the general public while simultaneously reinforcing a linguistically safe space for Arab–Muslim customers. Here, the use of Arabic is instrumental, yet it retains symbolic dimensions as it reflects



the community's acceptance and visibility within the local economic sphere.

Based on the overall field findings, all signage documented along Haldon Street, Lakemba, falls under the bottom-up signage category according to Backhaus's (2007) classification. This is because all of the analyzed signs were produced as initiatives of individuals or local business owners, rather than as outcomes of governmental policies or institutional regulations. The dominance of bottom-up signage reflects the strong participation of the Arab-Muslim community in producing their own linguistic representations within the public space.

2. Language Varieties

In terms of language variety, several signages use Arabic monolingually, such as "*Malhalah As-Sulthaan*." This sign displays standard Arabic text without an English translation, indicating the full dominance of Arabic. Such a choice may be interpreted as a strong expression of community identity as well as a statement of exclusivity. For readers who do not understand Arabic, the sign may be less accessible communicatively, yet it simultaneously reinforces internal solidarity. This phenomenon illustrates how Arabic is positioned as a symbol of authority and authenticity within the



public space.

Some signages use both Arabic and English, such as "*King Of Sweets*." In this case, Arabic and English texts occupy equally important positions in the sign's design. This balance demonstrates an inclusive strategy aimed at reaching two audiences simultaneously: the Arab-Muslim community and the general public in Lakemba. By positioning both languages on equal footing, business owners signal openness of

identity without losing their religious distinctiveness. Such signage indicates that Arabic can coexist harmoniously with English in a multicultural public space.



A number of signages display the use of more than two languages, such as a “*Supermarket*” sign that features Bengali, English, and Arabic. In this example, the multilingual elements are presented in parallel, with Bengali asserting ethnic identity while Arabic functions as a symbol of halal assurance and Islamic legitimacy. This multilingual pattern reflects interactions among Muslim communities of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Arabic may not always serve as the primary language, yet it occupies a strategic space as a religious symbol that unifies various groups. This phenomenon underscores the role of Arabic in fostering cohesion across different Muslim diaspora



communities.

3. Interlingual Relations

In the analysis of interlingual relations, there are signages that present Arabic as a direct translation of English, such as the “*Islamic Welfare Centre*” sign. The use of Arabic here functions to supplement the main message conveyed in English, representing a form of functional translation aimed at ensuring informational clarity for the Arab–Muslim community. However, visually, the English text still occupies the

dominant position, while Arabic serves to reinforce religious identity and community connectedness. This reflects a hierarchical relationship between majority and minority languages, where translation is not solely linguistic but also ideological.



The Arab–Muslim community in Lakemba employs linguistic strategies to mitigate potential prejudice. One such strategy is the use of Arabic transliterated into Latin script, as seen on the “*Lahore Sweets and Restaurant*” signage, which maintains an Arabic cultural nuance while remaining accessible to non-Arab readers. Another strategy is the use of balanced bilingualism, which conveys openness through English without erasing Arab identity. These approaches demonstrate that diaspora communities aim to achieve universal readability while preserving religious symbolism. Thus,



signage becomes a medium of negotiation between inclusivity and identity.

Variations in Arabic–Latin transliteration can also be associated with generational dimensions. Younger generations of the diaspora, who are more accustomed to the Latin alphabet, tend to access transliterated forms more easily than standard Arabic script. Signage containing transliteration therefore serves as a bridge between Arab–Muslim identity and the linguistic reality of second- and third-generation members. This strategy also challenges internal prejudice that younger generations lack the ability to read

Arabic. Consequently, transliteration illustrates how language hierarchies intersect with intergenerational dynamics.

4. Language Hierarchy

Within Backhaus's (2007) framework, the concept of language hierarchy in macro-level analysis emphasizes that languages in the linguistic landscape do not appear in equal positions. Some languages dominate due to larger font size, more strategic placement, or more complete information, while others are positioned subordinately. This hierarchy reflects power relations in multilingual societies, where majority languages often appear more prominent. In the context of Lakemba, this concept is relevant for examining the positions of English, Arabic, Urdu, and Bengali. Thus, signboards can be understood not only as communication tools but also as representations of linguistic inequality.

English is almost always present in the signage on Haldon Street, whether in business, service, or social institution contexts. In many cases, English serves as the primary language because it is the lingua franca in Australia. This dominance demonstrates English's power as the language of economy, administration, and universal communication. Its presence allows signage to reach consumers beyond the Arab or Muslim community. Therefore, English occupies the highest position in Lakemba's linguistic hierarchy, even when Arabic is also displayed.

A concrete example of English dominance is seen in the "United Exchange Fast & Reliable" signage. In this signboard, the English text is printed in large font and placed in the most prominent position, while the Arabic text appears smaller beneath it. This visual pattern shows that the primary target audience of the business owner is the general public, while Arabic serves as an additional identity marker. This hierarchy illustrates majority–minority relations, where English controls the economic domain and Arabic is positioned subordinately. This phenomenon reinforces Backhaus's view that



language hierarchy indicates the distribution of social power.

Although less frequent than English, there are signboards that show the dominance of Arabic, particularly in religious and Sharia-related domains. In such cases, Arabic not only appears but occupies the principal position as the authoritative language. Its main function is to provide religious legitimacy and authenticity something English cannot replace. By placing Arabic as dominant, business owners demonstrate that community values take precedence over universal readability. This



phenomenon indicates a shift in symbolic power within Lakemba's public space.

The “*Ma'dzun Syar'i wa Qonuni*” signage exemplifies the dominance of Arabic. Almost the entire text is written in standard Arabic script, with minimal English translation. This shows that the primary target audience is the Arab-Muslim community, while non-Arab audiences are not the main concern. Through this strategy, Arabic gains the status of guaranteeing the authenticity of Sharia-based services. The language hierarchy on this signboard affirms Arabic as both a symbol of religious authority and an instrument of moral legitimacy.

Language hierarchy also has a gender dimension, as seen in this signage. The use of Arabic in this context not only provides religious legitimacy but also symbolizes moral authority related to gender roles in the Muslim community. The “*Ma'dzun Syar'i*” sign affirms the validity of marriage services in accordance with Sharia, which are closely linked to gender norms. Here, Arabic functions as a language of power that

regulates social and moral legitimacy. Thus, language hierarchy also reflects gender structures within the diaspora community.

Beyond patterns of dominance, there are signboards that display balance between Arabic and English. In such signage, both languages are placed equally in terms of size, position, and informational content. This strategy illustrates the business owner's effort to negotiate community identity while remaining open to the broader public. Such balance also reflects functional and symbolic bilingualism. Hence, the signboard serves a dual purpose: fostering internal cohesion while reaching external consumers.

Bilingual signage also reveals a negotiation of power between English and Arabic. English ensures readability for the broader consumer base, whereas Arabic provides community identity and religious legitimacy. In this context, the two languages do not fully compete but instead complement each other according to their respective functions. This negotiation is evident in the "*Maywand Carpets & Kitchenware*" signage, where Arabic and English are positioned equally. Thus, bilingualism becomes a means of power compromise that benefits both sides.



Lakemba also contains signage that uses more than two languages, especially in restaurants or shops operated by South Asian communities. In these contexts, English remains dominant, while Urdu or Bengali is used to mark ethnic identity. Arabic typically appears symbolically, relating to halal assurance or Islamic values. This multilingual pattern reflects the internal diversity of the Muslim diaspora community, which is not monolithic. The resulting hierarchy is more complex because it involves negotiating power between majority language, religious symbols, and ethnic identities.

The “*Shaahi Lounge*” signage demonstrates the use of three languages: English, Urdu, and Arabic. English appears as the primary language with large lettering and the description “*Traditional Pakistani Cuisine.*” Urdu signifies South Asian ethnic roots,



while Arabic provides halal legitimacy and Islamic nuance. This pattern illustrates a layered hierarchy in which English dominates, Urdu serves as the ethnic marker, and Arabic functions as the universal religious symbol. Thus, Arabic remains strategically important even when it is not the main language.

In this signage, an imbalance of power between languages is evident. English typically remains dominant, Arabic appears as a religious symbol, and Urdu or Bengali tends to be subordinate. This reflects internal hierarchies within the Muslim diaspora, where ethnic identity is positioned beneath religious identity and universal communication needs. For instance, in the “*Shaahi Lounge*” signage, English occupies the main position, Arabic signifies halal status, and Urdu serves only as an ethnic complement. Therefore, multilingual signage reveals complex layers of power that reflect social stratification.

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the dominance of English in Lakemba’s signage reflects the power of the majority language in economic and social contexts. English functions not only as a universal communication medium but also as the language of state authority and the marketplace. This power is evident in business signboards that place English as the primary language with complete information. The presence of Arabic and other languages does not eliminate this dominance but merely adds layers of identity. Thus, English continues to control accessibility and readability in Lakemba’s public space.

Although not dominant in quantity, Arabic possesses significant symbolic power. Its presence in signage signifies Islamic identity, halal authenticity, and Sharia legitimacy. Arabic functions as a marker of community solidarity, even when its size is small or placed subordinately. This shows that symbolic power is not always proportional to practical power. Thus, Arabic emerges as a minority language that plays a major role in constructing the collective identity of the Muslim diaspora.

In Western contexts, Arabic is often associated with negative stereotypes such as terrorism, violence, or “otherness.” These prejudices shape additional meanings when Arabic appears in public spaces, including signage in Lakemba. For some non-Muslims, Arabic script may evoke distance or discomfort. However, for Muslim communities, its presence reinforces resistance and identity affirmation. Thus, Arabic-language signage is not merely commercial text but also an ideological arena rich in social meaning.

The study by Yusuf et al. (2022) on signboards in Sydney emphasizes the representation of religious identity within the linguistic landscape. Their findings show that Arabic appears primarily on signage associated with religious domains, whereas English remains dominant in commercial spaces. This study differs from the research in Lakemba, which highlights a broader language hierarchy, including power relations between English, Arabic, and other ethnic languages. Thus, the present study enriches the discussion by demonstrating that Arabic is not merely a religious symbol but also part of power negotiations within a multicultural public sphere.

The study by Gu and Coluzzi (2024) in Kuala Lumpur demonstrates that Arabic functions as a symbol of heritage, religion, and commercial strategy. This differs from the situation in Lakemba, where Arabic functions more as a minority identity marker. In Kuala Lumpur, Arabic holds stronger legitimacy due to Malaysia’s Muslim-majority context. This contrast illustrates differences in the power position of Arabic: dominant in a Muslim-majority society but symbolic in a minority diaspora context. Such a comparison expands our understanding of the flexibility of Arabic’s functions in multilingual public spaces. Therefore, the position of Arabic must be viewed contextually in accordance with the local demographic structure.

The research by Yusuf et al. (2022) in Leipzig highlights the phenomenon of the commodification of Arabic, in which the language is used as a market attraction and

exotic attribute. In Lakemba, Arabic is also used in branding, but its meaning is more closely tied to religious symbolism and community identity. This indicates that although the patterns of Arabic usage are similar, their ideological functions differ significantly. In Leipzig, Arabic is a cultural commodity; in Lakemba, Arabic is a symbol of religious authority and diasporic solidarity. Hence, this comparative analysis demonstrates the plurality of meanings associated with Arabic in global contexts.

This comparative discussion shows that the analysis of language hierarchy in a multicultural linguistic landscape is not merely a technical matter of font size or visual placement, but is also closely tied to power relations and prejudice. English asserts practical power as a lingua franca, Arabic displays symbolic power as a religious identity marker, and other ethnic languages affirm community roles. These findings reinforce Backhaus's framework while expanding it with sociological and ideological dimensions. This study also fills a research gap by situating Arabic within diaspora communities from the perspective of power hierarchy rather than solely religious identity representation. Thus, this research provides an important contribution to linguistic landscape studies, diaspora sociolinguistics, and contemporary Muslim identity scholarship.

This study finds that the use of Arabic in the linguistic landscape of Haldon Street, Lakemba, appears in monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual variations, forming layered hierarchical patterns. English occupies a dominant position as the lingua franca and the language of economic activity, while Arabic functions as a form of symbolic power that affirms Muslim identity and religious legitimacy. Other ethnic languages such as Urdu and Bengali appear in subordinate positions, reflecting the internal stratification of the Muslim diasporic community. These findings demonstrate that the role of Arabic extends beyond communicative functions, serving also as a medium for commercial branding, community solidarity, and resistance against prejudice. Consequently, this research enriches the study of linguistic landscapes and Arab diaspora scholarship, while also opening pathways for future investigations whether by comparing similar dynamics in other Arab communities across Australia or by further exploring the role of Arabic–Latin transliteration among younger generations of the diaspora.

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