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**Multilingual Practices in the Linguistic Landscape:
Insights into Linguistic Repertoires and Language
Policy**

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Multilingual Practices in the Linguistic Landscape: Insights into Linguistic Repertoires and Language Policy

ABSTRACT

Globalization has expanded cross linguistic communication, influencing Algeria's linguistic landscape, especially its public signage. The linguistic landscape (LL) -introduced by Robert B. Landry and Richard Y. Bourhis, (1997)- encompasses the languages found in public signage, outdoor advertisements, street nameplates, storefront signage, and official signage, collectively shaping the linguistic environment of a specific area. This study investigates how Tiaret's linguistic landscape reflects its multilingual character and language practices. The objective is to demonstrate how LL can offer valuable insights into the linguistic repertoire of Tiaret, including patterns of language use, official language policies, prevailing language attitudes, and the long-term impact of multilingual encounters. This research adopts a qualitative approach to analyze the representation of languages in public signage. Data were collected through an interview and an observation of street signs, advertisements, building names, warnings, billboards, store signs, and official signs. The findings revealed a complex relationship between the official language policies, societal attitudes, and multilingual representation in public signage. Future research is required to investigate the impact of foreign language mastery on public signs in the country.

Keywords: *Language contact, Language planning, Shop signs, Public signage, Multilingualism*

Introduction

In recent years, the city of Tiaret has experienced a notable shift in public signage, particularly in the realm of the sales outlet signs, which have transitioned from being predominantly monolingual to multilingual. This change is quite significant and reflects a new trend influenced by language contact. Business owners have increasingly adopted multiple languages in their signage to attract a broader clientele, especially targeting younger generations. This study, based on the researchers observations, explores the motivations behind this shift, and examines how language contact has transformed the linguistic landscape in Tiaret. This phenomenon not only highlights the growing influence of globalization but also exhibit the evolving linguistic preferences of the local populations. The growing presence of foreign language in the country, particularly English and French, alongside Arabic, suggest a shift toward a cosmopolitan identity. Furthermore, this change reflects broader socio-economic and cultural dynamics and its adaptation to contemporary linguistic and cultural influences.

In order to guide this endeavor, the following research questions are raised:

1. What are the key linguistic changes observed in the public signage of Tiaret?
2. What socio-cultural and economic factors motivate business owners to use multilingual signage?
3. How do people in Tiaret view the use of foreign languages in store signs?

Literature Review

Linguistic Landscape: Language, Signs, and Space

The linguistic landscape is a reflection of the territorial presence and/or administrative control of a given language group, and the study of linguistic landscapes reveals the extent of language visibility and salience in a given territory.

— Landry & Bourhis, 1997, 23-24

Since the 1990s, the study of public signage has garnered significant attention, leading to a growing interest in this area of research. Linguistic Landscape (LL) has gained popularity across various disciplines, including linguistics, semiotics, sociology, politics, economics, communication, and urban planning. LL focuses on the examination of written displays in public spaces, particularly those involving minority languages (Shohamy and Gorter, 2009). The term "linguistic landscape" was initially introduced in sociolinguistics by Landry and Bourhis (1997, 25), who defined it as: *"the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration."* This definition indicates that LL encompasses both administrative signs (from regional, national, or municipal levels) and private signs (such as those found on stores, banks, and billboards) as well as spontaneous signs (like graffiti and café menu boards), all of which reflect the multilingual character of a territory. Shohamy and Gorter (2008) later expanded this definition to include:

"...language in the environment, words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces, that is the center of attention in this rapidly growing area referred to as Linguistic Landscape (LL)."

According to Gorter, the concept of LL could be used to account for the linguistic situation in a given country, or for the presence of certain languages in a larger geographical location (2006, 1). For him, LL is simply concerned with *'the usage of language in its written form in public spheres'* (Gorter, 2006, 1). In fact, Gorter's account broadens the scope of LL to such a degree that it comprises all the textual items, which are publicly displayed. LL, whatever ways it is defined, lies upon two basic elements, namely *the linguistic sign* and *public space* (Boukhaloua and Belkhir, 2020).

Other researchers focused their studies on a particular sign, such as billboards (Tulp, 1978), shop signs (Dimova, 2007; McGregor, 2003; Sadikhova & Marjan, 2000; Schlick, 2002, 2003), road signs (Puzey, 2007), or proper and brand names (Edelman, 2009; Tufi & Blackwood, 2010). However, some of them included visible or displayed texts (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Dagenais, Moore, Sabatier, Lamarre, & Armand, 2009; Spolsky & Cooper, 1991, Litvinskaya, 2010, 11).

Research in the linguistic landscape explores various directions within the field of linguistics. Some studies focus on the comparative aspect between different geographical regions (e.g. Coluzzi 2012), while some others focus on situations of minority languages (e.g. Cenoz, J. and D. Gorter 2006), multilingualism (e.g. Backhaus 2007, Shohamy et al. 2010), or practical application of LL in the second language acquisition (e.g. Cenoz and Gorter 2008). Still, the underlying interest of all LL studies remains similar: “(1) they use written language in the landscape as a primary source of data; (2) that they analyze the data concerning the presence, status or functions of minority languages” (Gorter et al. 2012, 3). This wide range of applications has significantly contributed to the popularity of the linguistic landscape across various research fields (Boukhaloua and Belkhir, 2020).

Linguistic Landscape Signage: Origins and Classifications

Ben-Raphael et al. (2006), Shohamy, E; Ben-Rafael; Bami, M. (2010), as cited in Boukhaloua and Belkhir (2020), distinguish between the top-down and bottom-up signage. *Top-down* (public signs, created by the state and local government bodies such as public sites, public announcements and street names) and *bottom-up* language use (created by vendors, private businesses including names of shops, business, signs and personal announcements.), as it is summarized in the table below:

Category	Type of Linguistic Landscape Sign
Top-down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Public institutions (religious, municipal-cultural and educational) b) Public signs of general interest c) Public announcements d) Signs of street names
Bottom-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Store signs (e.g. clothing & jewelry) b) Private business signs (factories, agencies) c) Private announcements

Table 1: Types of Linguistic Landscape Signs: Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara and Trumper-Hecht, 2006).

The Multi-functional role of the Linguistic Landscape

The Linguistic Landscape (LL) has multiple functions within a given community namely: informative, symbolic, cultural, historical, educational, social etc. Each contributes to how language is experienced

and understood in public spaces.

The Informative Function

It is viewed as providing information on the linguistic diversity of a specified area and the level of the area's involvement in globalization processes. Thus, English plays a significant role in the names of cafes, restaurants, etc. When international events are held, English becomes an official language in signage, catering spheres, etc. Secondly, signs in minority languages define the geographical and administrative borders of minority language areas.

The Symbolic Function

It is connected with the status of the language, the demographic and institutional power of the ethnic group. This function has to do primarily with signs on administrative buildings.

The Social Function

It is linked to the local and national identities and it reveals the attitude of social groups to the problem of signage. The choice of the language indicates social problems and interethnic relations in society.

The Psychological Function

It is described through the attitude the subjects of LL experience at the vision of elements of LL and describe them as (un)pleasant, beautiful, ugly, (in) correct, etc.

The Mythological function

In 2002, Hicks analyzed the Gaelic revitalization in Scotland and added the mythological or the folkloric function. It focuses on places named in association with traditional stories, myths, and folklore. Furthermore; these signs reflect the traditional culture of a specific group and may serve as a transmitter or a link between the past and the present generations, which symbolizes one of the design features of language “*Cultural transmission*”. Thus, adding a sense of belonging to the in-group. Therefore, this function has to do with the phatic function of language to establish a relationship between past and present generations.

The Commercial function

Hornsby (2008) coined the commercial function. It is fulfilled when a language is used to promote a certain product or a place for tourists. It is, therefore, used for commercial purposes. This function is associated with conative function because it calls for persuasion and affecting consumers' behaviors.

Methodology and Data Collection Procedures

This endeavor adopts a qualitative research design typically grounded in the linguistic landscape of the selected speech community; it combines a non-participant observation and a semi-structured interview. The approach adopted helps us gain visual and interpretive insights into how multilingualism is usually expressed in public signs and how the linguistic choices reflect the language ideologies and attitudes in the speech community.

Analysis of Store Owners' Interview

Age and gender, regarded as demographic variables with no influence on the study's outcomes, were not taken into account in the analysis, four vendors and an owner of a private educational institution, were asked to explain the motive behind labeling their sales outlet.

Question 1: Business Type and Vendor's Level of English Proficiency

Respondent ID	Type of Business	English Proficiency Level
1	Private school	Advanced
2	Bakery	Intermediate
3	Pastry Market	Intermediate
4	Fast-food Restaurant	Intermediate
5	Clothing Store	Beginner

Table 2: Services Provided and English Proficiency Levels

The three respondents claim that they have an intermediate level of the language saying that they can understand a few words in English but cannot speak fluently. The respondent with an advanced level claimed that he can speak English fluently, which is why he decided to open a private educational school of foreign languages to give the chance to other people improve their skills in languages, especially English. The interviews with the store proprietors indicate that most Algerian non-English speakers value English. The last one claimed that he has a beginner level of English proficiency, but still wish to learn and improve his skills in English.

Question 2: Why did you choose to name your store in English?

Two business owners emphasized the international status of the English language, claiming that the mastery and use of English help to attract customers, and not just any customers, but those who are socio-economically privileged. The other decided to simply name their store with the brand label of

the company they collaborate with. The other respondent described English as a prestigious language that gives a modern appeal.

Question 3: Who do you think is able to read or understand your business sign?

The responses to this question varied among the business owners. Two of them stated that they chose words commonly heard by the public, like 'Pizza' and 'Fashion', which means they are already exposed to them in media, social media, or other contexts. This suggests that people may form judgments based on the perceived familiarity or prestige of the English language, even without full comprehension. Most store managers thought their signs were clear to most clients, regardless of their language proficiency. A few respondents specifically mentioned that their target audience includes youngsters already skilled in English.

Question 4: To what extent do you think an English store name influences customer visits?

The interviewees confirmed that labeling a shop in English plays a major role in attracting clients. However, they emphasized that factors such as reputation, quality of the service, hygiene, and so forth also complement the English label.

For example, the drawing of a cupcake or ice cream cone with its attractive colors makes the store sign readable and beautifully appealing to everyone. That is to say, the overall view of the store sign can be affected by other factors, such as the colors used, the drawing, and the shape of the sign than the text inserted. The conventional information people gain from observing this sign allows for more than just reading it; they also appreciate it and feel attracted to it.

Question 5: Have you received any feedback about your use of English in your store's name?

All respondents confirmed that they receive feedback and comments regarding the use of the English language. While the feedback varies, it is generally positive, with many appreciating the modern and international appeal that English conveys. Some also noted the novelty of using English in a local setting. Moreover, the sales outlet owners reported that their clients tend to be better informed about the quality of their products and services through the English signage. Consequently, the English outlet name reflects that their business aligns well with the international market standards.

Question 6: Do you believe English should be more widely used on commercial establishment and street signs in Algeria?

All respondents expressed a preference for increased use of English on public signs and in the streets, citing the global and powerful status of the language. They strongly believe that promoting English could contribute to the region's development as a commercial hub and potentially as a tourist destination.

Interpreting Sign Designers Perspectives

The creation of store signs takes place at the graphic design store. Graphic designers are key figures responsible for crafting graphics used in advertising and signage. Two graphic designers from the town center were interviewed about their clients' language preferences and demands. Their responses supplement the findings from the interviews with the sales outlet owners.

Question 1: Which languages do your clients most commonly request for signage?

One graphic designer affirmed "*there is no fixed answer to this question.*" Most advertisement signage includes up to three languages. In his opinion Arabic, French, and English are used equally. The other one claims that French and Arabic hold a position of dominance around the area. When asked about English, he confirmed he had also designed signs in English, though less frequently.

Question 2: Which language is currently most dominant in signage and advertising in Tiaret?

The two designers asserted that English is now holding a new spot. They confirm that people tend to use more English, especially when it comes to private businesses; French and Arabic are not in demand compared to how they used to be in the past. In their words, there is no single predominant language, but there are three which co-exist simultaneously instead.

Question 3: Which language do you believe made your most successful design?

The first graphic designer claimed that the one in Arabic, since it is the mother tongue of Algerian, while the other one assumed that the one written in foreign languages, i.e., French or English since they attract more attention.

Question 4: In your opinion, does using English in public signs help attract more customers?

The two graphic designers who responded to Question-item 2 agree that English signs would be more attractive, especially for younger generations, as they are more interested in English and use it more frequently.

The interviews conducted have revealed the importance of the English language, which is in constant progress in Algeria due to its international and modern status. Though French was taking a recognizable position at all levels, now with the huge spread of trade and market in English, this language is learned at schools, universities, and even private schools. Besides the positive attitudes of Algerian citizens towards the language, it would be the prioritized language for public signage.

Research results

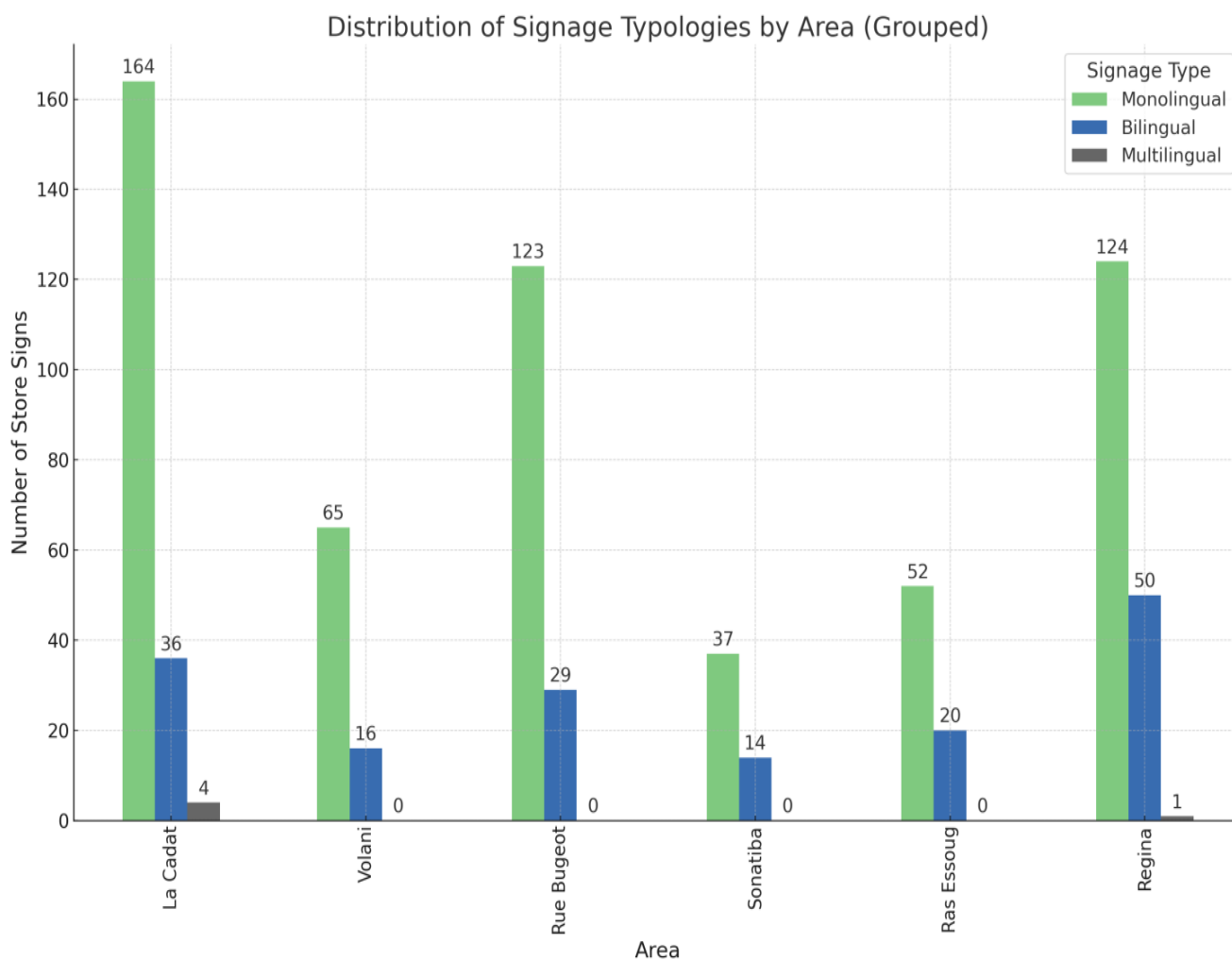
Patterns of Language Use in Public Signage

The occurrences of language varieties on shop signs contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic landscape of the selected community. A substantial number of store signs photographs were collected and analyzed. Moreover, the Algerian linguistic repertoire is rich and it is likely characterized by language diversity, an aspect clearly reflected the languages used on the store signs.

During the data collection process, researchers observed signs featuring one single register; others incorporate two or even three language varieties. Therefore, the analysis of data collected reveals different typologies of sales outlet signs i.e., monolingual, bilingual and multilingual typology.

Figure 1 below exhibit that there is a noticeable dominance of monolingual shop signs (76.9%) across all studies locations, indicating limited linguistic diversity in public commercial spaces. Bilingual signs account for 22.4% of the total, while multilingual signs are limited to only 0.7%, reflecting minimal instances of complex language hybridity. Among the sampled locations, Regina and Rue Bugeot stand out with the highest numbers of bilingual signs (50 and 29, respectively), this suggests a greater degree of linguistic variation likely due to socio-economic or demographic factors. Nonetheless, areas like Volani, Sonatiba, and Ras Essoug show minimal to no multilingual signage. Thus, the overwhelming presence of monolingual signs may suggest a preference for national languages or a limited demand for multilingual communication in these contexts.

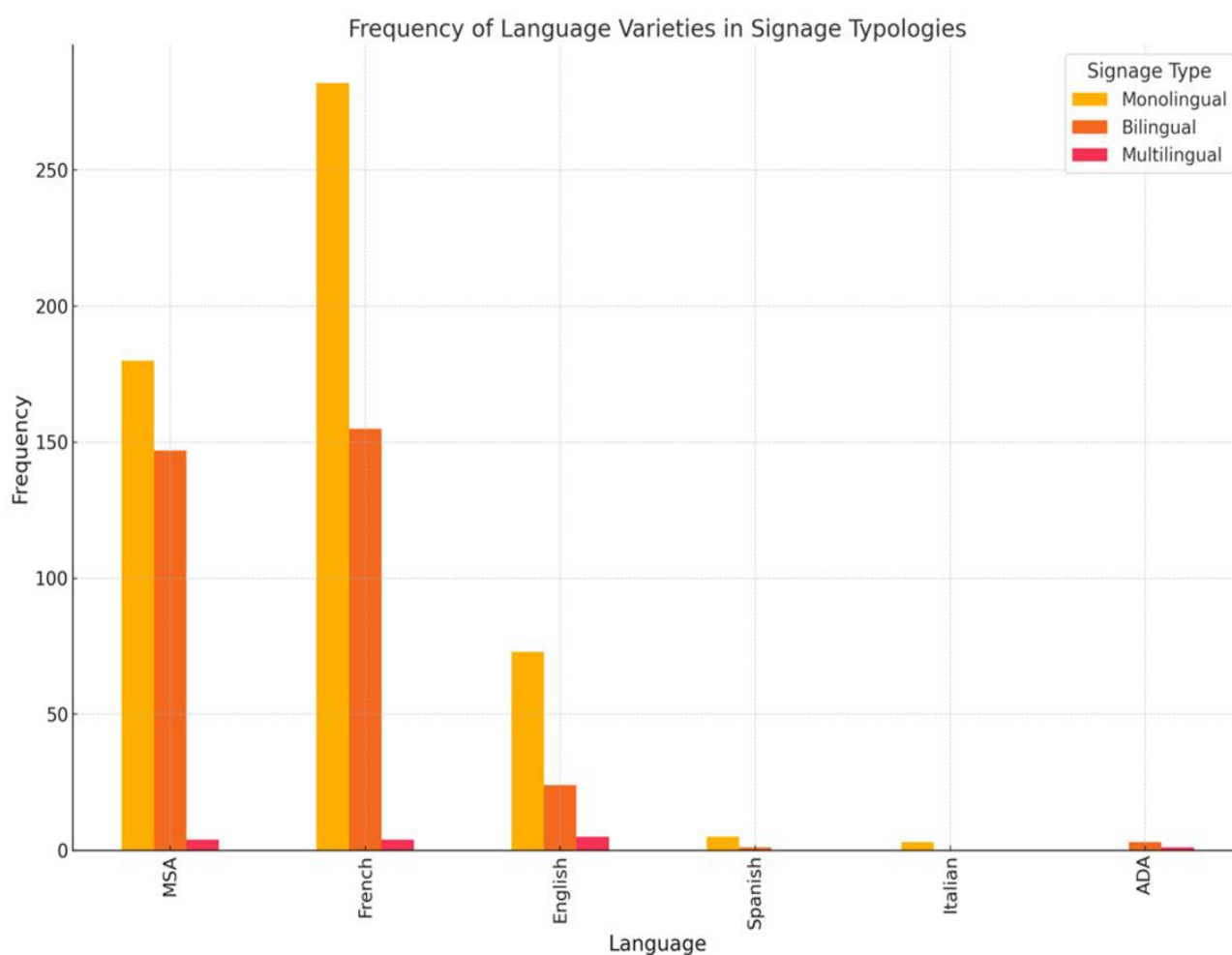
Figure 1: Distribution of Signage Typologies



Similarly, the data in figure 2 below reveal that monolingual signs include the most frequent

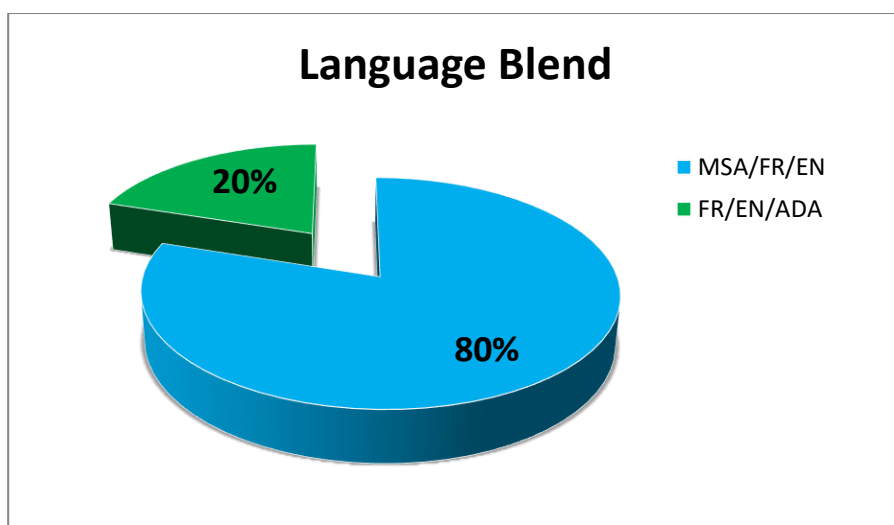
language varieties of the sample i.e. MSA (180), French (282) and English (73). Even less common languages, such as Spanish and Italian appear more frequently in monolingual signs. However, ADA is absent in monolingual signs. Moreover, bilingual combinations consist of MSA and French, as their occurrence is very high, with 147 signs in MSA and 155 in French. Also, the occurrences of English are about half of its appearance in monolingual signs. Interestingly, although ADA does not appear in monolingual signs, it is present in a small number of bilingual and multilingual combinations.

Figure 2: Frequency of Language Varieties in Signage Typologies



The dominance of MSA and French as observed regarding bilingual combinations, applies also to multilingual patterns. As shown in figure 3, there are only five multilingual signs out of hundreds of stores in Tiaret community. 80% of the multilingual patterns include MSA, and French alongside English. It is notable that there is only one trilingual pattern in which French, English and ADA are included. This rare combination asserts that ADA occurs in three bilingual patterns and suggests strong evidence that it exists alongside official and foreign languages, even at low frequencies. The figure below displays the percentage of language blend in public signs.

Figure 3: Language Combinations in Multilingual Signs



Our findings exhibit that the most prominent commercial sectors in terms of language signage are the food sector, clothing and fashion, and automobile accessories. The food sector has the highest number, with French appearing on approximately 54.8%, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) on 54%, and English on 14.3% of the signs. Spanish, Italian, and ADA are present in less than 1.2% each. These percentages may not sum to 100% because many signs are multilingual and counted under more than one language. The clothing and fashion sector follows with 217 signs, where French appears on 54.4%, MSA on 26.7%, and English on 17.5% of the signs. The automobile accessories sector, though smaller with 44 signs, shows a strong presence of French (77.3%) and MSA (50%), with no English or other languages used. In this regard, French and Modern Standard Arabic are considered the dominant languages in the most active sectors, while English plays a secondary role. Minor languages like Spanish, Italian, and ADA are rarely used, and this indicates limited linguistic diversity in the aforementioned languages.

Discussion of the Findings

As mentioned earlier, Landry and Bourhis (1997) distinguished between the informational and symbolic functions of language signs. The data collected shows that a specific language (English) or languages (MSA and French) are available for communication, e.g., to sell products. On the other hand, the symbolic function refers to the value and status of languages as perceived by members of a language group in comparison to other languages. For example, Modern Standard Arabic is highly respected by Algerian speakers, yet it is seldom used in daily interactions.

Landry and Bourhis view that LL can be an important factor in language policy and in economic

processes, which does not seem to be the case for Algeria, since our study of Tiaret Linguistic landscape reflects Algeria's linguistic diversity that is still neglected by decision makers.

The findings revealed that using French and MSA effectively attracted customers, as most Algerians understand these languages. It is worth mentioning that some signs have German too; this could reflect the migration tendency of most Tiaretian youngsters. The presence of English in the linguistic repertoire and public signage of a community is one of the most prominent indicators and positive outcomes of globalization. In Algeria, people started using English and prioritizing its reform and policy in primary schools. This is a strong sign of the positive attitudes of the society as a whole in favor of English over the French language, which is receiving less interest in the economy and education.

Conclusion

This study of the linguistic landscape of Tiaret has revealed that the city is shifting toward multilingualism, incorporating English, French, Spanish Italian, and German, driven by language contact, economic factors, and globalization. The most remarkable linguistic change is English signage, especially among younger business owners aiming to attract a broader and modern clientele. Participants viewed English signage positively; they associated its use with professionalism, modernity, and prestige. Nonetheless, French remains dominant due to its colonial legacy and its institutional presence. By contrast, the visible presence of Algerian Dialectal Arabic in signage reflects the community's cultural attachment to their mother tongue. In this regard, further research in other Algerian cities is needed to investigate whether similar multilingual patterns emerge.

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