

Aesthetic Symbolic and Communicative Functions of English Signs in Urban Spaces of Jordan: Typography, Multimodality, and Ideological Values¹

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Abstract

This study examines the visual aesthetic function of English signs in line with ethnographic approaches as a means of achieving various symbolic and communicative implications in the linguistic landscape (LL) of Jordan. Having coded the data in 6 urban streets of the major Jordanian cities, the social semiotic analysis centers on the visual layout of signs based on the typographical features of English texts and the multimodal interrelationships amongst the typographical characteristics wherein images and drawings are often supplemented to the English letter-forms in decorative manners. These aesthetic resources utilized in the construction of the English signs encourage symbolic ideological meanings of practices and customs related to young femininity, amusement and entertainment values, and shared cultural concepts. After all, this study establishes the aesthetic and ornamental aspect of visual English as a new approach in communicating the symbolic commercial messages in the Jordanian public space for both Arabic- and English-speaking audiences.

Keywords: Social Semiotics; Visual Typography; Multimodality; Urban Areas; Symbolic Ideologies; Jordan

1. Introduction

The study of language on signs in the urban spaces has been a place of interest to many scholars worldwide, and it has increased drastically since 1997 as a particular area of LL studies in numerous regions. Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 25)

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were the first scholars who used the term *linguistic landscape* (LL, henceforth) and defined it as “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs.” Even though this definition has been of great importance in the field due to its massive expansion in many ensuing studies, other researchers refer to LL as *linguistic cityscape* because most studies focus on signs in urban spaces or the city centers which are more susceptible to miscellaneous economic, social, and political influences from outside world (Backhaus, 2007; Gorter, 2013; Spolsky, 2009; Wang, 2015). Within most urban spaces in Jordan, such influences are remarkably demonstrated in the display of English that turns out to be the most notable language amongst other foreign languages. When walking through certain metropolitan parts in Jordan, one may view various signs on shop fronts, billboards, advertisements, and so forth, written in several languages, the majority of which are in English.

Given that English is both the major linguistic means for the standardization of advertising discourse (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2006) and the dominant advertising language used in non-English-speaking countries (Piller, 2003), mixing English with local languages in LL has recently engaged in issues of linguistic globalization, economic marketing, modernity, and progress (Blommaert, 2010; Heller, 2010). The increasing display of English in world urban spaces has extensively acquired a great area of study, where many scholars in anthropology, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies have offered advantageous scholarships on LL major principles (Bolton, 2012). Therefore, the investigation of LL may help in understanding “the rapidly changing urban landscapes, and the increasingly multilingual worlds, in which we live, or we experience through travel” (Bolton, 2012, p. 32). With the analysis of LL signs within their symbolic and informative functions (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), particularly English aesthetic and decorative reflections through visual semiotic resources and features, the present study is likely to establish new insight in the investigation of the display of English in the Jordanian urban spaces.

1.1. Aesthetic Function of English Signs in LL Studies

LL studies have focused on two major functions of languages: informative and symbolic (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). The informative function concerns the existence of communities displayed in light of their language uses on signs. This function, as stated by Landry and Bourhis (1997), pertains to the pervasiveness of a certain language in the community and its real use in public and private spaces. Cenoz and Gorter (2008), too, argue that the community language practices of the official and the second language can significantly be reflected from information on the LL signs. Barni and Bagna (2010) do not identify the display of immigrant languages in LL in identical ways to the local languages; rather, they reinforce the solid interconnection between the frequent visibility of languages and their vitality in the

community. Instead of the informative function, Scollon and Scollon (2003) use the term “*indexicality*” (p. 118), explaining that the codes visible on LL signs are aimed to index certain communities. This embraces a Chinese- or an English-speaking community, in which the Chinese letters are used inside a shop for indexing the Chinese community. Accordingly, Scollon and Scollon (2003) believe that the more the languages are used on signs, the more their practice in the community is.

The preference of one language to another in LL refers to the symbolic function. This has been essentially addressed by Landry and Bourhis (1997) who identify the symbolic function of LL in social circumstances in which the absence or presence of someone’s language establishes some attitudinal effect on their feelings regarding the values and status of their languages in a certain territory. Scollon and Scollon (2003) use the term “*symbolism*” (p. 119), viewing the signs in LL as donating things that do not exist in the world of people. For Scollon and Scollon (2003), there should be evidence in the formation of signs, indicating whether the languages encompass symbolic or informative functions. For instance, the appearance of English in the LL of a Chinese-speaking country refers to foreign tastes and manners more than indexing an English-speaking community.

With the review of the premises of LL functions, one can note that there are no clear-cut lines between the informative and symbolic functions; still, their identification above brings the discussion closer to an unprecedented related concept in the urban spaces, that is, the aesthetic function of English. On the one hand, the use of English on local signs is informative for foreign viewers; on the other hand, its dominant use has great symbolic meanings for local viewers (Piller, 2001, 2003). In many LL studies, English has been testified to achieve substantial symbolic functions within which its aesthetic or decorative aspect is well-regarded in advertising products in public spaces. In essence, these studies view English as the language of Westernization, cosmopolitanism, progress, and attractiveness (Curtin, 2014; Gorter & Cenoz, 2008; Guihang & Bingjie, 2017; Kelly-Holmes, 2005; Lanza & Woldemariam, 2014; Manan, David, & Dumanig, 2014; Nikolaou, 2016; Shang & Guo, 2017). These studies, amongst others, intend to investigate English as a symbolic device in a social context where English is used as a nonofficial language. This has been significantly studied in Congo, where Kasanga (2012) argues that English is not used for informational purposes; rather, it is largely used for “aesthetic, symbolic, and promotional purposes, given English positive ethnolinguistic values, global symbolic power, and ornamental effects” (p. 66). This implies the significance of the aesthetic aspect of English as an essential part of its excessive occurrence in local public spaces.

Given the theoretical backdrop underpinning the present study, it merely analyzes the English signs based on the salience of English characters in relation to

both functions, but in differing directions from the abovementioned research. The study does not identify the cultural connotations of the English signs in comparison with the Arabic ones representing the official spoken language in Jordan; rather, it investigates the signs noticeable decorative part wherein their extralinguistic and semiotic compositions—as discussed below—are serving as significant resources resulting in some other ideologies, irrespective of the Jordanian context. The accessibility and intelligibility of English to a majority of people could lead to the potential of using this language in global provinces. This fact inspires people in commerce and business sectors to exploit English within international advertising, in which it is now widely used in both communicative and symbolic functions. It is this sense of the ornamental part of English based on its visuals that helps communicate both informative and symbolic meanings.

As the large body of the existing research goes for the symbolic aspect of English signs, the point of the current study contributes to the intermingling relations between the two functions in LL, whereby there is a wide range of signs embodying the issue that the visual aesthetic element used in producing English signs directs the viewers to detect them within the symbolic and informative backgrounds. In the light of the observations made in the LL of urban Jordan, it indeed contains diverse English signs aimed to target the local people with no consideration to their full understanding of the advertised language. Analysis of a corpus of commercial signs leads the study to set out a pivotal investigation of how English is used in LL. The resulting analysis not only functions as an attention-getter, but also involves rather sophisticated linguistic and visual devices that are at play to achieve symbolic and communicative goals of different businesses.

1.2. Semiotic Background Studies

The semiotic approach is an analytic tool to conduct a discursive investigation of how individuals communicate meanings in signs, rather than their purposes of communication processes. The social semiotics theory, namely Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design (1996), is the focal area under which the images induced in visual aesthetic English are investigated. Visual images, as articulated by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), allow the language to interplay with three compositional resources that serve the arrangement of text elements and images in a delineated visual mode: The first resource includes *salience* that can be viewed through color divergence, foregrounding, size, and the use of upper and lower case letters and font types in written texts. The second one is *framing* that displays how closer or farther the elements in the signs are from each other and that denotes more salience to some visual elements than others. The third resource is the *informational value* of the visual signs that result in three visual placements of the elements: left-right, upper-lower, and center-position.

A further powerful area of Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) standpoints is their profound awareness of how "visual language is not transparent and universally understood, but culturally specific" (p. 3). They view signs as "dynamic process" (p. 22) along with human individuals as producers or creators of signs who are, in turn, determined and affected by the cultural forces of the society they live in and so the meanings made from the signs in that society are primarily taken as their responsibility. In this context, the emphasis is on the idea that signs cannot be approached and analyzed without taking them as carriers of ideological meanings that initiate questions of how cultural specificity in visual images discloses many valuable social and ideological practices of a given culture. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), further, emphasize the significance of conducting more universal visual analysis to images in non-Western countries, where their research could "provide some ideas and concepts for the study of visual communication" (p. 85).

In response to Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) theoretical framework, various studies in other non-Western countries adopt the rules of social semiotics with different potential objectives. For example, Jha, Raj, and Gangwar (2017) discuss how gender roles are depicted through their semiotic visual stereotypes in Indian magazine advertisements. With the use of visual semiotic principles, Jolayemi and Olayemi (2017) studied the communicative impact of the road signs in Nigeria, where Akure metropolis was used as a case study. Also, Adebileje (2017) identifies the textual elements representing Africanism in the Nigerian LL from the semiotic perspective. In China, Liu (2013) focuses on the use of visual semiotics in interpreting multimodal texts. In Tehran, Najafian, and Ketabi (2011) analyze the advertising discourse of two sample advertisements chosen from *Time Magazine* with the use of semiotic principles. Central to their arguments in terms of cultural ideological concepts is the studies identification of two visual resources: visual images and the language. The combination of these two resources is known as "multimodality" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 81), in which the meaning-making process is a result of collaboration amongst the visual, verbal, and written elements in the signs. Multimodal analysis would have little impact with no focus on the language, given that the social semiotic frame demands a profound examination of the language by looking at how it is "nestled and embedded within a wider semiotic frame . . . and its place in a multimodal communicational landscape" (Jewitt, 2009, p. 2). As crucial autonomous semiotic resources of multimodality, other scholars consider either the visual role of color (Kabuto, 2009, Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002) or typography (Serafini & Clasen, 2012) that work as noteworthy elements with their symbolic meanings potential in visual images.

Despite the fact that there is an intensive research conducted on the semiotic practices of language signs for divulging various cultural associations in the LL field,

there is scarce research conducted on the semiotic visual insights of English signs, in particular, in the urban spaces of Jordan where English is used as a second language. The majority of the studies above revolves around the fact that the social meaning and the effect of the signs are uncovered through applying some related semiotic tenets. Equally, the existing study values and unpacks the semiotic resources emerged from the analysis of the aesthetic aspects of English in the urban Jordanian signs, whether to consider the visual elements independently (e.g., color or typography) or to focus on multimodality, that is, the interrelationships amongst diverse semiotic resources. The present study is different from the semiotic research above in that it intends to contribute to the symbolic and informative functions of languages in identifying ways where several semiotic sources are at work to symbolize broader sociocultural and ideological values. They are, in many ways, allied with the display of English in the local context of Jordan and worldwide. Semiotic values are, accordingly, of central significance in developing a variety of covert sociocultural meanings in the visible English signs of the Jordanian urban spaces. Hence, the following primary objectives shall anchor this study:

1. To investigate the aesthetic and ornamental visual features of the English signs through making reference to semiotic guidelines in the Jordanian urban spaces.
2. To identify the ways in which the aesthetic aspects of English foreground diverse symbolic cultural meanings in the Jordanian context.

2. Methodology

For the purposes of analyzing how the LL English signs figure in the local context, the study corpus concentrates on the urban parts of Jordan for reasons of modernity, commercialism, and tourism. More traditional methodologies to LL research have been built upon quantitative approaches, where the signs in a specified area are photographed to develop themes and findings of the study in hand (Backhaus, 2007; Comajoan & Long, 2012; Edelman, 2009; Tufi & Blackwood, 2010). This methodology has been pursued in the survey of the English signs in the Jordanian urban streets to obtain some pertinent trends and perspectives from the general understanding of quantitative data. As such, this study—as discussed below—sets up a quantitative typology while gathering and analyzing the signs in the intended areas to encourage a sound qualitative analysis of the aesthetic suggestions of the English signs.

Prior to the process of picture-taking, some ethnographic interviewing was conducted with passers-by in the intended streets. LL studies have recently benefited from the ethnographic methodologies that inform an in-depth overview of a variety of issues in local contexts (Alomoush & Al-Naimat, 2018; Garvin, 2010; Lanza &

Woldemariam, 2014). The analysis of the English signs necessitated planning many visits to the intended areas over the past 6 months and, therefore, making many notes regarding the signs visible languages and their visual components. That ethnographic approach requested making interviews with four passers-by in each street chosen concerning whether they could reach a full understanding of the English signs in their mere English-designed layout, that is, with the absence of any Arabic subtext in the signs.

The participants were of different ages and educational levels, who all did not show any variations on their answers. Nearly, all the interviewees, whether educated or uneducated, young or old, reported that they could understand the purposes of the signs, even though they were fully displayed in English. This preliminary outcome of the ethnographic field was the point of significance that inspired the study to delineate the urban areas chosen in terms of the streets characteristics and the unit of analysis. These methodological LL procedures were carried out for the purpose of exploring a substantial analysis of the aesthetic components of the English signs that chiefly assisted the passers-by to realize the commercial purposes of the English texts on the signs.

This being so, the Jordanian urban spaces chosen for the present study were rested on the selection of the most commercial and tourist streets in the Jordanian cities, including Amman, Zarqa, Irbid, Kerak, Ma'an, and Aqaba. Each city, it is believed, contains, at the minimum possible, a street that is commercially condensed for prospective reasons related to the residence of university students, tourist zones, or even locals' great level of economic and trade activities. Gorter and Cenoz (2008, p. 8) point out that one great criterion in selecting areas or streets is "to share the same characteristics" and "to analyze all the signs" displayed in the cities. Drawing on this argument, it was found that, for example, Ma'an and Irbid cities share the quality of the existence of university streets in the intended areas where the students reside heavily, requesting the business owners to establish many commercial centers and shops to meet the students' requirements. Kurneesh and Sweifyah Streets are also believed to be the most tourist and commercial zones in Aqaba and Amman, respectively. These social and economic marketing circumstances have accompanied the obvious occurrence of many signs of restaurants, Internet and coffee shops, grocery shops, pharmacies, bakeries, and other makeup and clothing shops that all represent a great occurrence of the signs displayed in English in such modern vicinities.

However, the distances of the survey areas have been delimited in different LL studies according to the purpose of collecting the signs in a specific territory. Tufi and Blackwood (2010) coded all the signs displayed within 50 meters in the urban neighborhoods in France and Italy. Comajoan and Long (2012) widened the survey

areas distance to embrace a 400-meter distance in Barcelona. Other scholars like Backhaus (2007) considered the parts of streets located between the traffic lights the survey areas for his study in Japan, regardless of how long the distance was. For this study, the survey areas were founded on a 400-meter stretch in the survey streets selected, in which the signs were captured with the help of a digital camera. The unit of analysis was limited to the visual signs in the street distances, where they are displayed in public spaces and in different languages. The data were collected within the general guidelines of Landry and Bourhis's (1997) framework who point out that "linguistic landscape is concerned with the issue of language in the written form in the public sphere" (p. 25). As shown in Table 1, the primary typology of all the visual signs in the streets find 474 signs in three language displays: English, Arabic, and other foreign languages:

Table 1. *Language Signs in Jordan Urban Areas*

City	Survey Areas	Arabic Signs	English Signs	Foreign Signs
Amman	Sweifyah Street	22	68	16
Zarqa	Al-Sa'adah Street	17	55	10
Irbid	University Street	19	49	10
Kerak	University Street	20	44	8
Ma'an	University Street	19	36	4
Aqaba	Kurneesh Street	10	52	15

Table 1 shows that English is the dominant language in all modern localities, as it is probably perceived as the language of commerce and marketing because of the language susceptibility of drawing attention by virtue of its connotations of modernity, progress, and success (Piller, 2003). The current study focuses on the visual aesthetic aspect of the English signs to seek their symbolic and informative functions—which have been already understood by the viewers—by the related social semiotics principles. This has been carried out in light of the potential of guiding the study to some illustrative important social meanings in urban Jordan. From a qualitative viewpoint, the analysis of such meanings comprises observations culled from the occurring collected data, in particular, the visual features of existing English layouts establishing links between English and the semiotic resources displayed, on the one hand, and themes and trends, on the other hand.

3. Results of Semiotic Resources in Aesthetic English

The study corpus contains different unique semiotic resources for the construction of the visual signs, which are made by the business owners for reflecting the aesthetic function of English. The peculiar arrangement of the signs in terms of visual graphic, textual, or nontextual components necessarily demanded employing

the visual semiotic rules. This contributes to the recognition of the meanings related to the sociocultural connotations of using English in the Jordanian commercial discourses.

3.1. Visual Typography

The tendency for the aesthetic letter characters to add visual subtexts to signs content makes typography a significant semiotic source of analysis. Bringhurst (2004) states that “typography exists to honor content” (p. 19). Like other elements of language in visible signs, typography facilitates understanding of the visual patterns of meanings (Kostelnick & Hassett, 2003). This suggests that typography involves the ways of arranging letters and characters through particular fonts, typefaces, or scripts to make the written language have a visual symbolic sense of communication (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The typographical features in the English signs in the urban parts of Jordan are judged on the basis of their compliant semiotic abilities to convey a variety of symbolic ornamental and aesthetic meanings related to content. This is essentially demonstrated in *Canon* sign whose visual typography greatly represents the symbolic aesthetic function of English (see Figure 1):



Figure 1. A Brand Name Sign Displaying Typography

The *Canon* sign contains a global layout in terms of font and script. Accordingly, the sign producer seems to use and comply with the permanent worldwide design of writing of the brand product (i.e., *Canon*) by adopting the standard visual characteristics of the sign. These charming semiotic resources impinge for diminishing the communicative distance between the viewers and the commercial message of the business. This global typography is likely to add to the impact of the business name on Jordanians’ social life styles and to further generate a great deal of readership to the language of the sign. The visual English of *Canon* has made itself readable and understandable for Jordanians in the urban areas, despite the fact that not all of them are literate in English.

Closely related to the typographical features is the visual strength of English in sharing the symbolic content of *Canon*. The visual design of language through the choice of the type font, size, and color brings more meanings of globalization, sophistication, and modernity to the language of the business. Equally important, the

sole use of English letter-forms in the sign embodies a duplication to Jordanians' appreciation and respect of the global brand products, thus acquiring wider acceptability and usage of its communicative purpose.

The semiotic elements ratifying the aesthetic connotations of the English signs find some metalinguistic symbols within the lettering format of the English words. The viewer of the sign *STRONG* (see Figure 2) does not consider the visual capital block letters as an area of attention-getter. More importantly, the nonlinguistic symbols attached to the letters including [R], [O], [N], and [G] would hint many symbolic positive connotations about the word itself, though the viewers may not get its literal meaning. The English word *STRONG* is displayed only for purely ornamental purposes with the assistance of the visual red mid-symbol for probably allowing the viewers to approach its associations and meanings. In this figure, the overall semiotic layout reveals diverse symbolic artistic and aesthetic values in order to communicate the sign's visual meanings via the symbols merged within such words:



Figure 2. An English Sign Representing Aesthetic Associations



Figure 3. An English Sign Displaying Figurative and Informative Symbols

As displayed in Figure 3, the symbols can, further, accomplish identical semiotic functions in *Levi's* where the [√] symbol sounds positive to the passers-by and, undeniably, permit them to establish an encouraging recognition of the word's associations. The visual typography of the English signs seems to have requested the business owners to replace some letters inside the font writings with symbols that could trigger the viewers' attention to realize the purpose of the business. This has been significantly demonstrated in the shop name *SAMSUNG mobile* (see Figure 4), where the sign producer replaces lower case-letter [i] with the exclamation mark [!] probably on the basis of their potential similar visual. Exclamation marks are typically used at the end of sentences to mark strong feelings or high volumes, and in the current sign, it could emphasize the semiotic and aesthetic goal of the English language as it should show a decorative and communicative message demonstrating some symbolic meanings of admiration and excitement for the viewers. Similarly, the inspection of the upper-case letter [A] in Figure 4 would find that it is not typed

properly for possibly enhancing the aesthetic function of English that assumes the viewers' recognition of the business aim:



Figure 4. An English Sign Reflecting Some Messages by Nonlinguistic Letter-Forms

With the examination of the visual features of all the signs above, one can note that the visible design makes good use of the color with the red-letter style in *Canon* and *STRONG*, establishing a more ornamental and attractive room for the viewers. The most illustrative and important point about the colored typography is the amalgamation of the sign typeface and color symbolism. As shown in Figure 5, the golden type of *TIATRO* establishes a symbolic connection between the visual color itself and the content of the shop; therefore, the overall design reflects the shop aim, which is clearly for selling jewelry. The sign similarly shows a great influence of the typographical design that appears sizeable bold letter-forms constructing some sort of decoration and ornamentation. The colorization of typeface in the text is to perform some symbolism and decoration functions, demonstrating no change to the sign meaning. However, even though the visual features of *TIATRO* sign convey some ornamental ideas to draw attention of the viewers, this contributes to their understanding of the symbolic and communicative aspects in the public space:



Figure 5. An English Business Name Sign Representing a Typographic Color



Figure 6. An English Business Brand Name Sign Containing Multitypographic Colors

Also, sign typeface has a symbolic aim, where it displays diverse colors to reflect its main content. For example, *Google* in Figure 6 is typed in seven colors for

symbolic meanings related to the entertainment or amusement themes—a section discussed below. The sign producer here assumes that the viewers' infinite knowledge of such a widely used Internet engine would enable them to recognize its symbolic meaning; in particular, each type in the sign is provided according to the universal visual layout in real attempt to help the viewers recognize such word and to add some aesthetic and decorative values to the text. Moreover, the communicative characteristics of typography are sharpened through the symbolic preference of color typeface in opposing direction to the background color founding an area of readability and attention.

3.2. Multimodality

The visual elements of typography in combination with the symbolic images, drawings, or illustrations could make the content of the English texts more understandable and communicative in the urban areas of Jordan. The business owners' material endeavors in making their linguistic layout more visual seem to draw on multiple symbolic modes and resources aimed to permit the English signs communicate their commercial messages. For instance, the English text of the symbolic *Kangaroo* in Figure 7 is assumed to be evidently understandable by the viewers, even though the Arabic codes have less prevalence according to their sizes and position in the visual design. The colorful and large font of the word *Kangaroo* in the center of the sign along with the symbolic drawing of such an animal on the right establish an important visual message associated with the speed suggestions of the Internet shop (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Any viewer inspecting this sign would reach the main purpose of the shop, though the whole dominant text is given in English. The producer of the *Kangaroo* sign has not only used the English text and image, but also has relied on typography and layout as symbolic modes of representation:



Figure 7. A Prime Example of a Multimodal English Sign



Figure 8. A Multimodal English Sign of a Clothing Store

The same visual could, further, be set up in *Delfino* sign in Figure 8, where the English language of the clothing store sign—with its odd orthographical error

seen in the insertion of sound /f/ instead of the pronunciation of the consonants [ph]—demonstrates a discrete and exotic way of producing the typeface of the word. At the same time, the use of English seeks an artistic way of attaching the drawing of *Delfino* to the word itself, urging the viewers to realize the sign from its entire semiotic design.

In Figure 9, however, the sign content is noticeably achieved through the two chili peppers displayed in a symbolic, funny, and attentive manner. It is the very process that enables people to identify the sign beyond the boundaries of the language. Though they take the place of two letters in the figure, the insertion of the two chilies objects functions as an attention-seeking device and manifests consistency with the linguistic and visual layout of the sign. This, further, adds a new ornamental property to the word and suggests shared knowledge between the sign maker and the viewers:



Figure 9. A Multimodal Sign Exhibiting Nonlinguistic Components

To this end, the examples above propose that the symbolic commercial messages are transposed to the Jordanian contexts through the multimodal nature of the signs in that they rely on multiple semiotic modes by the use of English as a linguistic element and the insertion of images or drawings as paralinguistic elements. The prominence of the English texts in combination with the images has established the people's skillful realization of the signs' content whose overall visual not only complements the text meanings, but also reveals many hints and associations left untold in the words.

4. Ideological Meanings of Aesthetic English

The aesthetic values of English signs carry symbolic messages for viewers through the visual multimodal and typographic features. The related social semiotic facets are used to explore the ways in which visual English is restructured as the best carriers of cultural ideologies and values.

4.1. Young Femininity

A considerable mass of signs evokes symbolic connotations of young femininity entrenched in the presence of several images or drawings of girls along

with the symbolism of English as an attribute of beauty and decoration. From the visual of the business name called *Girly* as shown in Figure 10, one can notice a number of semiotic resources at play to manifest the symbolic femininity in the sign. The display of the word *Girly* is presumed to be simply recognized and used amongst the Jordanian young females and so the realization of other words in English or in Arabic would not make much influence on understandability of the commercial content, that is, English is inserted here for purely decorative purposes. In this figure, the sign maker seems to target the young girls as a specific group of Jordanians on the visual symbolic drawing of a girl in the place of the letter [L], who is depicted to carry her bag which is itself represented as a part of the letter [i]. These linguistic letterings and visual drawings are strengthened with the images of butterflies on both sides, which could signal tenderness and femininity values, too:



Figure 10. An English Business Name Sign Displaying Visual Young Femininity



Figure 11. A Prime Example Showing Beauty Associations of Visual English

For the viewers, the symbolic suggestions of *Girly* could take over the main message of the business and replace other English and Arabic slogans. Taken together, the use of an English word along with the girl's symbolic drawing suggest a correlation between the English language connotations, on the one hand, and the Jordanian girls' needs of showing elegance, beauty, and attraction, on the other hand. Hence, the visual *Girly* is designed similarly to draw attention of the Jordanian girls. Also, the overall visual structure of the red bold text reveals a number of thoughts and associations related to the business owner's attempts to draw attention of the girls. With the advertising of the girl drawing, the text goes on to portray a positive and a strong young female image, where its affixation to the English language has intensified its symbolic relevance with modernity and progress meanings that are, in turn, linked to powerful and young attributes.

Figure 11 shows a semiotic structure that visually matches the earlier discussed sign. As illustrated in Figure 11, the use of English is linked to femininity portrayed in the *PARTY TIME* phrase—albeit the female image does not visibly manifest itself, the English words could have beauty and decoration associations by virtue of the words *accessories*, *make up*, and *perfums*, all of which can be

symbolically and informatively accessible for the viewers. From the visual semiotics perspective, bold design and odd ways of writing make its typography surpass the formal purpose of the sign content; in particular, the demonstrative message can be made clear by examining the decorated-typed characters displayed below. This interactional mode between the concept of young femininity representing a specific segment in the urban Jordan and their semiotic layout presence on the English signs is rarely, if ever, made in the men's advertisements implications, suggesting that beauty and elegance are the main concerns of females in Jordan, in particular, and worldwide, in general.

4.2. Amusement and Entertainment

Another crucial dimension in the visual format of the English signs concerns the amusement and entertainment symbolic values. This is an essential part of Jordanians' social practices, particularly in the urban areas that offer funny services and utilities of spending their times by going shopping, visiting some tourist sites, or even having coffee or ice-cream in luxurious cafés. These diverse social practices and activities lend themselves to the visual signs of the English texts that promote flower shops, baby centers, gift shops, coffee shops, and restaurants, amongst others. For instance, the symbolic clues of the coffee shop *Aroma* in Figure 12 can be obviously communicated with the business owner's personal semiotic layout. In particular, the figure displays some funny rotating endings to be more likely perceived exactly like the way the ice-cream often looks. By doing so, the business owner seems to succeed in adding a new symbolic way of advertising his or her products and in allowing the viewers to understand the message with the enclosure of some aesthetic elements to an original English word:



Figure 12. An English Sign Displaying Visual Amusement and Entertainment in Aroma



Figure 13. A Multimodal Sign Aspiring Amusement and Entertainment Values in a Café and Restaurant

A similar symbolic message occurs in Figure 13 whose symbolic effect is enhanced via the business owner's reliance on the visual drawing of the cup of coffee at the top as a part of the rectangular shape in which the business name *Prestige* is

provided in English. The writing of *Prestige*, further, appears attractive in a way that the visual extensions of the first and final letters make the word a persuasive spot of attention and decoration. After all, the pictorial layout of such signs spells out quite clearly how some social stereotypes relate to the use of English such as modernity, progress, and success (Kelly-Holmes, 2005).

Illustrative entertainment and amusement values in visual English are understood as a part of a *fun orientation* (Piller, 2001), stirring English to be used to add some special decorative effects more than communicating information, which, in the current cases, can be attained only through reference to the drawings or images along with the English words. Putting it differently, the sign makers employ the visual multimodality in amazing and ornamental ways with less focus on reading and understanding the English texts. This semiotic principle has been also embodied in another illustrative stance: *Mayar* (see Figure 14):



Figure 14. A Sign Representing Decorative Aim of Visual English

In Figure 14, the business owner seems to exploit the decorative sight of the flower and to link it to the letter [Y] in the word *Mayar*, which itself appears to look like a plant of a flower on the green color. Therefore, the overall semiotic design of the text would help the viewers to identify the symbolic hint of the English words provided below the word *Mayar*, that is, *Flower Shop*.

4.3. Shared Cultural Concepts

Also, the data find some signs displayed in English, but their recognition and understanding may well depend on the fundamental correlation between their visual looks and the intended associations shared and known to the targeted readers in the LL. It is this sense that has requested the viewers to employ sensible knowledge on their background information as an aid helping them understand the symbolic commercial message of the signs. This has been significantly represented in the signs visible features, which enable the audience to understand their English associations based on the symbolic display of a visual element socially and culturally identified.

For instance, in Figure 15, the sign maker has exceeded the stage of including any Arabic word and made good use of the visual of different multimodal semiotic resources. These include the salient red bold font of the word *Grilly's*, the shadow of the symbolic letters denoting fire flames as a striking reference to the

content, and the English slogan given below: *Enjoy the taste!* In this sign, the English linguistic form of the word *Grilly's* seems to be displayed not for communicating the message of the restaurant business. More importantly, the overall semiotic scene of the word itself, according to its visually molded design compatible with the shape and color of the fire flames, reflects a great deal of decorative and informative ideas about the aim of the business:



Figure 15. An English Sign Identifying the Business Aim via Multisemiotic Resources for Fire Concept



Figure 16. An English Sign Displaying Semiotic Features for Embodying the Concept of Danger

A slightly similar visual layout is viewed in Figure 16, which reads *SAMiX*. In this figure, the electricity aim of the shop is likely to be recognized by inserting the letter [i] in a red odd font, just like an individual exposed to an electrical energy, that is, the concept of danger resulting from approaching any electricity source is semiotically illustrated. This metalinguistic symbol serves a partial multimodal source, guiding the viewers to the shop commercial message easily with less importance to the English letter-forms of the word.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The semiotic resources embedded within visual English have indicative evidence of how English functions symbolically to express what the business implies, whereas, at the same time, it can function communicatively and decoratively to convey what a business is. The essential mission of visual resources is to exhibit diverse effective aspects of sharing symbolic commercial messages. For instance, the typography is used in a symbolic and decorative manner of communication whose design, arrangement, and use in the layout of the signs has great importance in drawing attention. Therefore, the typography has a great successfulness in conveying the implicit messages of the English signs for the viewers with different levels of English proficiency because it is both their visual and practical demonstration. Though adding color to the text is decorative, it empowers the task of facilitating perception of the major purpose of the business, especially in cases the sign color symbolizes the type of product and item intended to be advertised.

English has been, in accordance with the visual semiotic practices, approached from symbolic, communicative, and decorative values' viewpoints in the urban spaces of Jordan. Visual English displayed on signs has a much operational function in which intelligibility is frequently accessible by the use of common English words (e.g., *Girly & Canon*) that have been presented symbolically in the LL to index language practices of such English words in the Jordanian Arabic discourse.

The insertion of paralinguistic symbols in harmony with the business names, as well as the semiotic resources of drawing signs in terms of striking print and colored fonts all contribute to the symbolic, communicative, and decorative role of visual English. Such advertising tools manipulate some aspects of the language inasmuch as they expose the richness, distinctiveness, and expressivity of local products. As the examples have attested, the new orthographical language forms such as *Delfino* instead of *delphino*, the diverse metalinguistic letter-forms of [i] in the *SAMSUNG mobile* and *SAMiX* signs, and the incorporation of some odd symbols within the words *STRONG* and *Levi's* all appear to be revealed intentionally by the business owners to work as a cute cover to the shops. Also, they are coupled with seemingly senseless word-forms that have still sophisticatedly decorated the English signs. The semiotic framework has identified how the frequent uses of English characters are shown to enrich the businesses' outward appearance. Curtin (2014) calls this aesthetic taste and visual excellence of language practices "distinctive cosmopolitanism" (p. 169) in which the features of script, style, and materiality amplify the visual display of a language. The visual arrangements of English are decorative and provide the urban areas of Jordan with a unique scenery due to their overall social image of modernity, style, and cosmopolitanism.

English has received significant semiotic characteristics, which inevitably leads to a fact that its visual representations accomplish a greater symbolic and communicative function. The personal symbolic design of English in the present study reinforces the communication process via the positive associations it has been claimed to evoke. Despite the fact that English along with the local language has been investigated in different contexts to suggest the positive values of English such as fun, sophistication, and success (Al-Naimat, 2015; Kelly-Holmes, 2005; Lanza & Woldemariam; 2014; Manan et al., 2014; Piller, 2001, 2003), it seems that the business owners in this study have preferred the usage of visual English to be a tool of incorporating both symbolic and communicative goals in order to gain local and universal readership.

Whilst this study aimed to investigate the communicative dimensions of symbolism in the visual aesthetic English signs of the Jordanian urban contexts, it argues how the signs extend their scopes to capsule local and transnational backgrounds. For instance, like the young girl worldwide, the Jordanian girls stand

out for their elegance, beauty, dress fashion, and beauty, in particular, in the urban Jordanian areas where people with prestige could live high fashion and cosmopolitan lifestyles. Whilst less relevant to the overall Jordanian context, the display of English is semiotically limited to a particular stratum of the Jordanian women, especially during this time of young female generations' change and appeal in aspiring and going toward the fashionable and stylish attributes. Therefore, feminist prospects, which are symbolically and charmingly advertised via signs of *Girly* and PARTY TIME amongst others, are destined to address a specific segment of young females' interest in elegance and beauty worldwide. Also, the communicative and symbolic aspects of fun and entertainment depicted in English are a place of sharing common activities between the locals and the foreign visitors, where the latter are more capable of identifying the entertainment centers in such Jordanian modern localities, with no reference to the Arabic language in the signs. At the same time, the use of English could be of much help to Jordanians, as the message is fully set from the images and the designs of the writing. In addition, the signs illustrating shared cultural concepts were analyzed in light of the manners of how they set up a linguistic commonality between the local businesses, on the one hand, and the residents and worldwide passers-by, on the other hand. The English language used within images and drawings of some common natural phenomena increases the process of communicating the advertised items.

In this study, the communicative approach of the visual symbolic English primarily relies on several simple words, but some more innovative patterns can be explored with the viewers' recognition of more complex phrases and expressions, taken into account the whole visual arrangement of the elements in the signs. Therefore, the very strong presence of visual English adds to the existing literature of LL functions, moving away from solely analyzing the English signs as acquiring a purely Western image to a powerful visual symbolic layout as a new definable communicative frame. After all, we can argue that the concomitant semiotic resources of the English signs in the urban areas of Jordan suggest the significance of ornamental and aesthetic function of English as an insightful symbolic approach of communicating commercial messages in the absence of any Arabic expressions.

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