

Linguistic Identities in the Arab Gulf States

Waves of Change

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Sarah Hopkyns and Melanie van den Hoven

The coronavirus pandemic has cast a spotlight on inequalities across many sectors of society around the globe. Clear communication in a crisis is vital, and such a task can be made more challenging in multilingual contexts. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is characterized by both cultural and linguistic diversity, with almost 90% of the population being transnational workers who collectively speak over 100 languages (UAE Fact Sheet, 2019). Labour migration in the UAE follows a ‘dual employment structure’ (Malecki & Ewers, 2007) of unskilled/low skilled labourers juxtaposed with ‘professional transients’ (Castells, 2000). The former group is much larger in number and tends to include workers from South and Southeast Asia, resulting in the four largest foreign communities in the UAE being Indians (2,600,000), Pakistanis (1,200,000), Bangladeshis (700,000), and Filipinos (525,530) (The Media Lab, 2019). The latter group, in contrast, tend to originate mainly from neighbouring Arab countries, Asia, Europe, and North America. The number of expatriates from inner-circle English-speaking countries (Kachru, 1992) is comparatively high globally, with 28,760 from the UK and 15,390 from the US (UAE Population & Demographics, 2020). In addition, a wave of approximately 13,000 Koreans recently relocated to the UAE (Amed, 2019), due in part to growing business connections. Due to such diversity, commonly spoken languages in the UAE, in addition to Arabic and English, include Hindi, Farsi, Urdu, Malayalam, Bengali, Tamil, Tagalog, and Korean, amongst many others.

Despite the UAE’s multilingual population, not all languages are ‘textually present’ (Ahmed, 2021) in the linguistic landscape. Textual visibility is heavily skewed in favour of the official language, Arabic, and the nation’s de facto lingua franca, English. This is particularly apparent on public signage, where it is rare to see third languages (Ahmed, 2021; Hopkyns & van den Hoven, 2021). As a result, minority languages and dialects remain ‘linguistic outsiders’ (Smakman & Heinrich, 2018, p. 44) in public spaces. An exception to the monopoly of Arabic and English on signage can be found in strategic settings where particular speech communities are predominant, warranting the display of a third language. For example, Piller (2018) found that South Asian languages were prominent on signage in Dubai money exchange booths, where many migrant workers gather to send remittances back home to their

families. Ahmed (2021) found that third languages such as Malayalam and Sinhala were present on signage at Dubai metro stations, where workers travel to and from their workplaces. Similarly, in our previous study of signage on an Abu Dhabi industrial site, Korean featured as a third language, as many Koreans lived and worked there (Hopkyns & van den Hoven, 2021). As Ahmed (2021) summarizes, ‘signs that include other languages besides Arabic and English are rarely found, and when they are, they are restricted to particular places and locations where a high density of expatriate communities, speaking those languages, are present’ (p. 193).

In the past decade, a growing interest in language and semiotic resources on signage in Gulf contexts has emerged. Previous studies have looked at signage in various cityscapes and public spaces in the UAE (Ahmed, 2021; Hopkyns, 2020a, 2021; Hopkyns & van den Hoven, 2021; Karolak, 2020a), Oman (Buckingham, 2015; Buckingham & Al-Athwary, 2017), Saudi Arabia (Blum, 2014), Bahrain (Gomaa, 2007), Kuwait (Brdarević Čeljo & Zolota, 2019), and Yemen (Al-Athwary, 2012). Linguistic landscaping (LL) research tends to fall into two broad categories: general and specific. The former category of study gives a descriptive overview of signage in a city or country with select examples to demonstrate trends, as seen in Ahmed’s (2021) LL research in Dubai and Hopkyns’ (2021) analysis of UAE signage. The latter type of LL study looks at a small area in greater detail as seen in Karolak’s (2020a) study of the Souk Naif area of Dubai, and our previous ethnographic study of coronavirus signage in an Abu Dhabi beachside community and industrial zone (Hopkyns & van den Hoven, 2021).

To the best of our knowledge, only two previous studies have explored coronavirus communication in the Gulf context. These studies either focused on signage in specific geographical zones (Hopkyns & van den Hoven, 2021) or looked more broadly at a range of communication forms apart from signage (Ahmad & Hillman, 2020). Hence, a holistic exploration of languages used for coronavirus health warnings on signage in transactional zones, where residents meet and interact in a Gulf context, is notably missing from the current literature. This chapter aims to help close this gap by providing an ethnographic analysis of languages appearing on coronavirus signage in multiple Abu Dhabi transactional spaces across a wide geographical area in the Abu Dhabi Emirate. Such a holistic analysis is valuable in providing insights into linguistic inclusivity across spaces and domains.

Communication during crises

While linguistic inclusion and exclusion affect access to information and a sense of belonging in ordinary times, such effects are amplified in times of crisis. Often, in a crisis, immediate decisions need to be made when creating health warning signs (Hopkyns, 2020a). This leads to many handmade make-shift signs (bottom up) suddenly appearing alongside official government-produced ones (top down). Previous studies have found that crisis communication

tends to be dominated by a nation's official language as well as English as a global language. For example, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, English-only storm warnings disadvantaged the relatively large Spanish-speaking population, many of whom did not evacuate in time (Petri, 2009). Similarly, after the 2011 earthquakes in Canterbury, New Zealand, and Miyagi, Japan, information in languages other than English and Japanese, respectively, was limited (Uekusa, 2019). Such studies point to what Uekusa (2019) calls 'disaster linguicism', where crisis communication favours only dominant languages, and the exclusion of linguistic minorities is a by-product.

Phyak (2020) points out that, during the coronavirus pandemic, a parallel linguistic pandemic or 'linguademic' exists, whereby certain speech communities are unable to access health warnings and guidance in their L1. Contexts in which monolingual or bilingual coronavirus information has been found to conflict with the needs of multilingual societies include Taiwan (Chen, 2020), Nepal (Phyak, 2020), the UK (Zhu, 2020), and Australia (Grey, 2020). In the Gulf context, governments have made laudable efforts to include minority languages in online communication and through radio broadcasts and community leaders (Ahmad & Hillman, 2020). For example, Hindi is a language choice on the Al Hosn coronavirus tracing app. However, as we observed in our earlier study of coronavirus signage in two Abu Dhabi live/work zones, coronavirus public signage rarely includes 'peripheral languages' (van den Hoven & Carroll, 2017) and is instead dominated by English and Arabic (Hopkyns, 2020a; Hopkyns & van den Hoven, 2021).

It could be argued that signage is just one of many ways to access coronavirus safety warnings (Ahmad & Hillman, 2020; Chen, 2020; Phyak, 2020). For example, information can be gained through official government announcements on websites and social media, such as Facebook, Instagram or WhatsApp. Community centres or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also play a part in spreading information in less textually visible languages. However, while 'informal networks of care' (Kathiravelu, 2012, p. 103) through community leaders, NGOs, and social media groups are important for supporting linguistic minorities during the crisis, Jang and Choi (2020) argue that, for such means to be effective, adequate resources and levels of infrastructure need to be in place. In the context of the UAE, we have questioned the adequacy of social media for reaching low skilled migrants, who may have long working hours and reduced access to the mobile phone data needed (Hopkyns & van den Hoven, 2021). Lack of social capital amongst some linguistic minority groups highlights the importance of linguistic inclusivity on public signage so that context-specific messages are effective by being immediate, trustworthy, and visually reinforced.

Linguistic landscaping and identities

Linguistic landscaping (LL), which is a rapidly expanding branch of sociolinguistics (Blommaert, 2013), can be defined as 'the visibility and

salience of languages on public signs within a territory' (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 23). Signs are important features for the development and construction of public spaces with the purpose of disseminating information and directing behaviours. Signs reveal information not only about the geographical space but also the sign maker. In this sense, a sign in a given space can be interpreted as 'a symbolic marker communicating the relative power and status of linguistic communities in a given territory' (Mooney & Evans, 2015, p. 8). Bassiouney (2020) points out that signage is closely connected with the society and culture of a place. Rather than signage only being top-down or government-produced, society members such as shopkeepers, hotel managers, and school leaders also make decisions regarding bottom-up signage and the intentional or unintentional inclusion/exclusion of certain languages and speech communities.

Scollon and Scollon (2003) stress the importance of 'geosemiotics', which is 'the study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs in the world' (p. 1). Here, the languages and symbols chosen for signs in a particular space can indicate the social dynamics of an area, power relations, and linguistic priorities. In many multilingual spaces, 'minority languages and minority language speakers are, more often than not, less valued compared to languages and speakers who enjoy more powerful and prestigious positions' (Blackwood et al., 2016, p. xviii). Language, culture, and identity are interwoven into the LL of a given space, making linguistic and semiotic landscapes active sites of identity construction and representation (Rubdy & Said, 2015). In this sense, one's identity and sense of belonging can be strengthened or weakened by the presence or absence of information in one's L1. The concept of 'belonging' is an under-theorized term, which is often used interchangeably with home, identity, or citizenship (Walsh, 2014). As recognized by post-structural approaches to identity (Norton, 2013), the concept of belonging is 'always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only a naturalized construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations' (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). In this way, a sense of belonging can vary according to social context, social interaction patterns, and power relations within a given space. The 'politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197) are, therefore, complex, multifaceted, and socially constructed. The concept of belonging is increasingly being theorized as spatialized phenomena where places, sites, spaces, territories, and landscapes are viewed in conjunction with belonging, rendering belonging an inherently geographical concept for connecting physical objects to place through various practices of boundary making and inhabitation (Mee & Wright, 2009, p. 772). Such sites of belonging can be viewed as an emotional, contested, and politicized way of relating to place and space (Antonsich, 2010).

The concept of belonging is salient for UAE residents, who, distinguished from citizens, are a broad group constituting a dominant majority of the nation (Hopkyns, 2020b). Although many UAE residents with L1s other than English and Arabic have high levels of English proficiency, and therefore

are able to access monolingual (English) or bilingual (Arabic and English) information, others may lack proficiency in either of the UAE's dominant languages. For example, it is common for families to move to the UAE primarily for work opportunities. In such cases, one parent may have the required English level needed for working in the UAE, but a 'trailing spouse' (Walsh, 2014) and children may only have basic English (Amed, 2019). Equally, as Karolak (2020a) points out, often low-skilled workers from the global south do not arrive in the UAE literate in English or Arabic and therefore may not easily access monolingual (English) or bilingual (English and Arabic) signage. Lack of peripheral languages on signage may have unwanted effects not only in terms of access to information but also for compliance with government regulations, particularly for residents without full or partial proficiency in English and/or Arabic. As Piller (2018) argues, being a linguistic outsider leads to a tacit acceptance that one's own language is not only undervalued in social spaces but also undervalued in general. In this sense, Yuming (2020) argues that linguistic inclusion is important for emotional wellbeing when describing the 'linguistic comforting' which occurs when seeing messages in a familiar or home language, especially in a crisis context.

The study

The study investigates linguistic inclusion and exclusion on coronavirus signage in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and the resultant effects on Gulf linguistic identities. We address three main research questions:

- RQ1) Which languages appear on coronavirus signage in transactional spaces in the public domain of Abu Dhabi?
- RQ2) In what ways do the languages and semiotic resources on signage support residents' identities and sense of belonging?
- RQ3) What evidence is there to support linguistic inclusion among speakers of peripheral languages?

We employed linguistic ethnography as an approach to linguistic landscaping. Linguistic ethnography recognizes that 'language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity' (Rampton et al., 2004, p. 2). Here, an emphasis on the close connection between language and social context is stressed. Rather than language standing alone, social and political issues such as power and identity are a primary concern for linguistic ethnographers. In this sense, linguistic ethnography can be characterized as a 'site of encounter' (Rampton, 2007, p. 585), whereby various research perspectives can come together (Edwards, 2009, p. 17).

During the coronavirus period, border closures and travel restrictions forced us to pay greater attention to our immediate surroundings. In our earlier study,

which was conducted during the spring 2020 lockdown (Hopkins & van den Hoven, 2021), our movement was restricted to small live/work areas. The current study, which is part of a larger research project, took place in the autumn of 2020 when the national lockdown had ended. Abu Dhabi was starting to cautiously open up again with face-to-face education resuming in most schools, and with shops, restaurants, galleries, and hotels reopening with capacity limits and coronavirus safety measures in place. With travel restrictions easing, we were able to document signage in multiple locations within Abu Dhabi as we conducted our daily lives. As researchers who are also community members and residents of Abu Dhabi, we adopted the roles of participant observers (Spradley, 1980). In September 2020, we photographed coronavirus signage in a range of settings including our places of work (university and industrial site), schools, health clinics, malls, petrol stations, hotels, beaches, parks, and



Figure 8.1 Geographical area explored.

Source: Map data @2022 Google

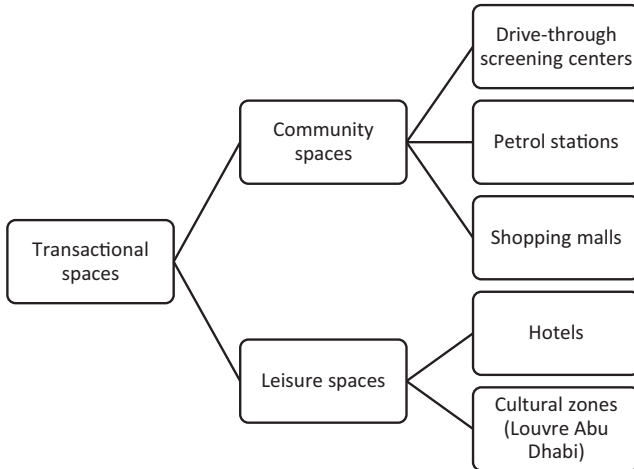


Figure 8.2 Coronavirus signage spaces explored in the study.

galleries. Figure 8.1 shows the geographical area in which we collected data, which includes both Abu Dhabi's 'on-island' (city centre) and 'off-island' suburban locations as well as the highway leading to the Western Region, which is an industrialized area of the Abu Dhabi Emirate.

A joint corpus of over 800 signs was documented over this period. For the purpose of this chapter, we narrowed the focus down to two transactional zones: Community spaces and leisure spaces. Within each transactional space, five specific zones were identified for being high-contact sites for diverse residents. These zones included drive-through screening centres, petrol stations, shopping malls, hotels, and cultural zones such as galleries (Figure 8.2).

When analysing our combined corpus, we employed thematic data analysis to organize signs according to the type of transactional space. We then generated classifications of signage into four broad linguistic categories:

- Monolingual (usually English only)
- Bilingual (English and Arabic)
- Trilingual (English, Arabic, and one other language)
- Multilingual (more than three languages)

In addition to analysing language choice, we noted the size, spacing, order, and symbols used. We also analysed the social context surrounding the signs for evidence of the kind of sign maker (top down or bottom up) and the intended and actual audience. Such analysis allowed us to gain valuable insights into power dynamics, issues of inclusion/exclusion, 'belonging', and the identities of speech communities in the areas under study.

Findings

Signs in community spaces

An important space to investigate in relation to coronavirus signage is ‘the community’. The concept of ‘community’ has multiple definitions which vary according to individual and civic orientations. However, our perspective of community space is a geographical area where people, often from diverse backgrounds, interact socially and conduct everyday transactions. We classified shopping malls, petrol stations, medical clinics, drive-through testing centres, and pharmacies as contact zones for all sectors of the UAE’s diverse population. We hypothesized that such sites would generate the greatest range of multilingual signs. However, when visiting these various routine places, coronavirus signage was mainly bilingual (Arabic and English) if top down or monolingual (English) if bottom up, with some variance in the form of a third language or additional languages, as is reported in the following sections.

Drive-through screening centres

Drive-through screening centres are a type of community access initiative that received national attention shortly after lockdown ended in spring 2020. Over 20 drive-through screening centres were set up in Abu Dhabi for the rapid coordination of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests. While it is customary for hospitals and clinics to provide PCR tests, Abu Dhabi was one of the first cities to launch these makeshift testing centres. According to a national newspaper, in January 2021, 6.2 million of all 20.5 million PCR tests were taken via screening centres (Goodier, 2021), meaning that community members from all sectors of society would frequent these facilities. These centres were designed to be fast and convenient, allowing tests to be administered with minimal human contact. Signage at these makeshift screening centres was often visible from the roadside. Located in non-descript neighbourhoods (without tourist attractions or other notable architecture), signage and branding were important for helping residents locate the facility, its authority, and, once in situ, knowing what to do. As shown in Figure 8.3, a white marquee demarcated the entrance to the facility in Al Shamkha, a large residential neighbourhood on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi. Here, a placard with Arabic at the top and English below identified the screening centre and its sponsorship.

In Figure 8.3, screening centre signage functions as both road signage and facility branding for the public health care services on offer. The choice of English and Arabic align with bilingual road signs prevalent in the UAE. While apps such as Google Maps and Waze enable drivers to identify their route and hours of operation, these signs identify the structure by name as well as the institutional logos, further communicating the legitimacy of services on offer. While such drive-through centres make assumptions about the socioeconomic profile of test takers, whereby users have access to a private



Figure 8.3 Bilingual sign at a COVID-19 drive-through screening centre.

vehicle, signage in Arabic and English carries important assumptions about the adequacy of these two languages for the community of test takers.

A further dimension of linguistic inclusion to consider more closely is the available digital communication and the related social connectivity of test takers. According to Al-Suwaidi (2014), UAE residents are among the most socially networked in the Arab world. However, as Kathiravelu (2012) points out, migrant workers often have restricted access to digital resources and mobility. Screening centres require access to online resources for effective use of these community services. In Figure 8.3, there is no attention to the online resources which permit access to the facilities for a special date and time. Before the pandemic, these public areas were small parks or hospital parking areas, open fully for a range of community services. However, during most of 2020–2021, they have been temporarily restricted. Permission to access these community spaces was dependent on advanced booking on associated online resources. For instance, an appointment displayed on a health services app is needed to get past the entry gate. In addition, a specially designed national tracing app (Al Hosn) serves as the main channel for tracing interaction with others and documenting the validity of the PCR test. The app will reliably communicate the date and result of each PCR test within two days of the test without the need for human contact. As mentioned earlier, the settings on this app allow displays in three languages: English, Arabic, and Hindi. However, the screening centres themselves use only two languages: Arabic and English. While UAE test takers using English and Arabic with access to vehicles and the internet via mobile phones were well supported with up-to-date information on coronavirus communication, speakers of minority languages, such as migrant workers, received less support.

Petrol stations

Another community zone we explored was petrol stations. Figure 8.4 shows a sign posted on a petrol station window on a long stretch of off-island highway



Figure 8.4 Trilingual coronavirus sign at a petrol station in the Abu Dhabi Emirate.

from Abu Dhabi to the Al Dhafra region. This effective but rare trilingual coronavirus sign, made on an A4-size sheet of paper, has been displayed for customers at the entry way to the associated shop. Taped in front of a Red Crescent donation box, it shows an image of a typical customer: a young male with brown hair and a light blue mask. A year earlier, a masked man would have connotations of a burglar, but now the man, dressed in a blue similar to that of the coveralls commonly worn by workers in the surrounding male-dominated industries (oil, gas, nuclear energy, mining, and construction) reflects the appropriate and generic look of socially responsible shop-goers.

The image of a masked man is qualified by the text below it, which states that entrance is forbidden without a mask. The message is written in three languages: Arabic, English, and Urdu. Arabic is at the top, English in the middle, and Urdu at the bottom. The spelling mistake in the word 'Entrance' indicates that the sign maker did not have English as an L1 but was familiar with the end users. Note that the misspelling allows the root word, 'enter', to effectively reinforce the main meaning and could be an example of the way

English is modified by end users to ensure comprehensibility (van den Hoven & Carroll, 2021). The petrol station is an important transactional zone, where multilingual customers, including local Emiratis, converge. From observation, the choice of languages and images is an accurate representation of the gender and language profile of the patrons visiting this space.

Shopping malls

Shopping malls in Abu Dhabi serve as community hubs due to the extreme heat for much of the year. While most shop signs are bilingual (Arabic and English), some appear only in English. The same pattern can be observed with coronavirus signage in malls, which tends to be bilingual if top down and English-only if bottom up. Coronavirus safety signs in malls mostly appeared as ‘floor stickers’, with some being bilingual (Arabic and English) as seen in Figure 8.5 and others being monolingual (English) as seen in Figure 8.6, which uses the image of a cactus to dissuade mall visitors from hugging or having any physical contact.

There were a few exceptions to the dominance of bilingual (Arabic and English) and monolingual (English) signs in malls. For example, Figure 8.7 shows a multilingual sign in a pharmacy window. The word ‘Pharmacy’ appears in five languages: Arabic, English, Russian, Chinese, and Hindi. This sign could be seen as an attempt to include and respect Abu Dhabi’s linguistically diverse population, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. However, as Piller (2017) points out, often token multilingual signs such as



Figure 8.5 Bilingual coronavirus floor sign in an Abu Dhabi mall.



Figure 8.6 Monolingual coronavirus floor sign in an Abu Dhabi mall.



Figure 8.7 Multilingual pharmacy sign in an Abu Dhabi mall.

popular ‘welcome’ signs written in many languages, which are present in many global locations, represent ‘banal cosmopolitanism’. Banal cosmopolitanism refers to multilingualism being used to create a ‘realm of the global’ (Piller, 2017, para. 7) without being particularly useful or inclusive. Similarly, for the sign in Figure 8.7, it could be argued that anyone walking by it would be able to see from the store window what type of store it is.

We argue that a more effective use of multilingual text would be to identify available stock of protective equipment such as masks, hand sanitizers, and gloves, which would offer more relevant information for linguistic minorities to read and access during the pandemic.

Signs in leisure spaces

A second transactional space explored in this study was leisure spaces. In the UAE, leisure time is a serious business for tourists and residents alike. It is not uncommon to hear mid- to high-income expatriates speak about a ‘work hard, play hard’ lifestyle. The UAE can no longer solely rely on oil money, hence the tourist industry has exploded in the last decade. As Karolak (2020b) states, the UAE and particularly Dubai ‘has turned tourism into an important driver of the economy’ (p. 139). In 2016, tourism accounted for 8.7% of the nation’s GDP, and, in Dubai, tourism accounted for 31% of the UAE’s GDP (WTTC 2017). In ordinary times, hotels and museums cater primarily to international tourists from the Middle East (33.5%), Europe (30%), and Asia-Pacific (26%) (Karolak, 2020b), as well as locals and residents. During the coronavirus period, however, the closing of external and internal borders meant that such facilities were reserved only for local citizens and residents. With the exception of repatriation flights, residents were strongly recommended to stay in the Emirates for the whole of 2020.

Hotel spaces

While staycations and hotel day passes are popular year-round with Abu Dhabi residents, after hotels opened again following the spring 2020 lockdown, a more pronounced ‘culture of staycations’ developed as hotels lowered prices and offered special ‘staycation resident deals’. Hotels were monitored for compliance with top-down directives about appropriate safety measures. Hotels then became sites that hosted a proliferation of top-down and bottom-up coronavirus signage. It was apparent, however, that, despite the multilingual composition of the UAE’s population, coronavirus signs in Abu Dhabi’s many four- and five-star hotels were mainly monolingual (English) or bilingual (Arabic and English). Figure 8.8 shows an English-only coronavirus health warning located near a hotel pool, and Figure 8.9 shows an English list of coronavirus guidelines when approaching a hotel beach. The signs in Figure 8.8 and Figure 8.9 use full sentences with passive construction and no

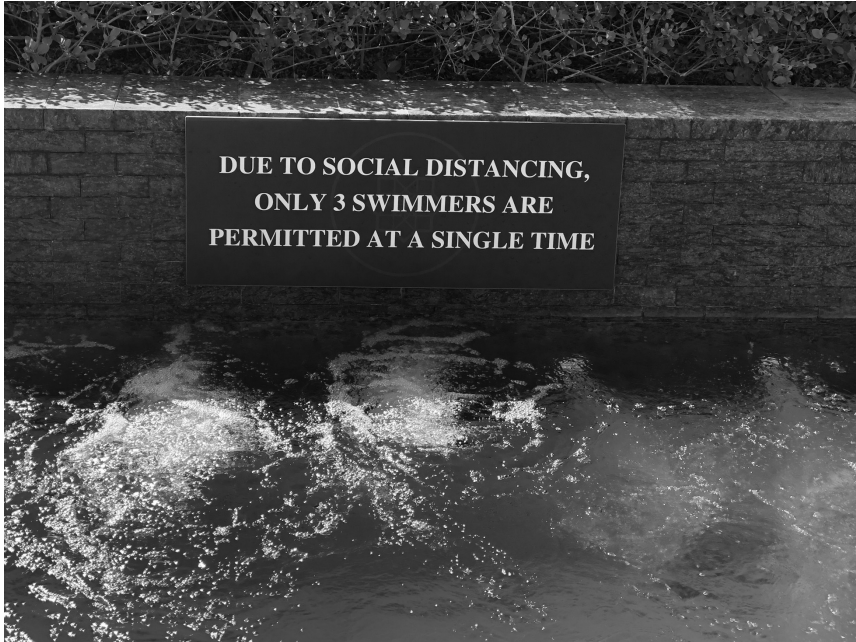


Figure 8.8 A monolingual coronavirus health warning at an Abu Dhabi hotel pool.

symbols or other languages, making the signs accessible only to those proficient in English.

Other hotel signs, such as the one seen in Figure 8.10, were more accessible due to the use of symbols and short phrases in both Arabic and English. Nevertheless, third languages are missing in this public space. Although hotels could be described as ‘spaces of expatriate sociality’ (Norum, 2013, p. 31), with guests primarily being mid- to high-income cosmopolitan residents, not all guests necessarily have a high level of English proficiency.

The choice of mainly monolingual signage in hotels sends out a message that English-speaking residents ‘belong’ in these spaces, whereas speakers of periphery languages may feel a reduced sense of belonging.

Cultural spaces

Another leisure space which has grown tremendously in the Gulf context in the last decade is cultural entertainment venues, such as museums, art galleries, theatres, opera houses, and heritage villages. As with hotels, cultural attractions were forced to reduce their visitor numbers after reopening post-lockdown and to create safety signage. An increased number of resident deals and free entry passes also appeared due to the loss of international

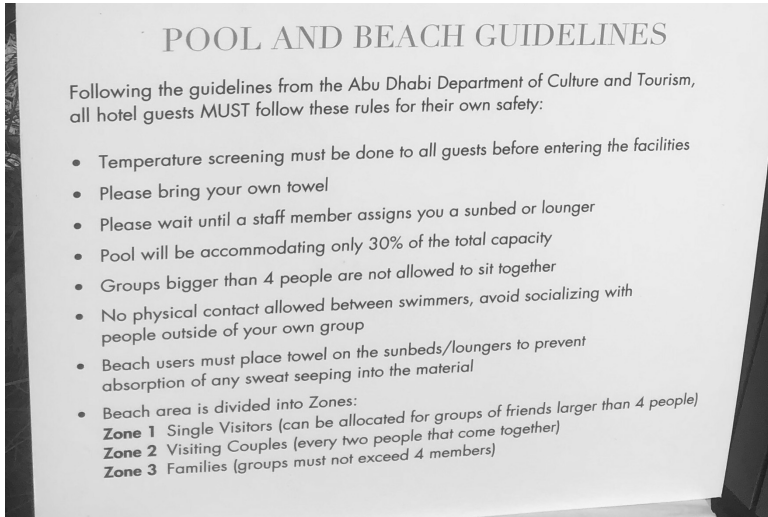


Figure 8.9 Monolingual guidelines at an Abu Dhabi hotel beach.



Figure 8.10 Bilingual coronavirus hotel signs.



Figure 8.11 Trilingual coronavirus sign (English, Arabic, and French) at the Louvre, Abu Dhabi.

tourism. For example, the sister branch of the Paris Louvre, which opened in Abu Dhabi in 2017, offered free entry to teachers in September 2020. In the Louvre, a trilingual policy of English, Arabic, and French features on a wide range of signs including labels and placards throughout the museum (Figure 8.11).

The cultural legacy of the Louvre in Paris explains the obvious choice of French as the third language. Despite a dramatic fall in tourists from France and elsewhere internationally, French maintained a high visibility, showing a commitment to upholding the prestige of the French brand rather than ensuring compliance amongst museum goers. A more appropriate third language would be one more commonly spoken by UAE residents, such as Urdu, Hindi, Farsi, or even Korean.

Discussion: Crisis sociolinguistics as an impetus for change

The findings of the study revealed a prevalence of monolingual and bilingual coronavirus signage. Our study drew attention to the rare instances of context-specific trilingual and multilingual signage. Such minimal textual visibility of languages other than English and Arabic juxtaposes the UAE's linguistically diverse population. The findings support our previous study in two Abu Dhabi live/work zones during lockdown, where few third languages were found on coronavirus signage (Hopkins & van den Hoven, 2021).

Although third languages were textually present on signage in community and leisure spaces, they were limited to certain speech communities. The presence of Urdu on coronavirus signs at petrol stations was a good example of a trilingual sign that reflects the linguistic profile of this site. This petrol station hosts a wide range of travellers, including a large number of Pakistani truck drivers transporting goods to and from Saudi Arabia, and skilled labour working in local industries who need to frequently refuel vehicles in such locations. The presence of Urdu in other locations such as malls, however, was notably missing. In other cases, third languages were used only

symbolically on safety signs, such as French in the Louvre gallery, rather than sign makers addressing the needs of the most common speech communities in the local area. A symbolic use of peripheral languages could also be seen in community hubs such as malls, as was demonstrated in the multilingual pharmacy sign. The languages chosen and the text translated on such signs need to be (re)examined for their effectiveness during a crisis. While the presence of one's first language on signage and in messages is primarily important for accessing information, especially during a crisis, seeing one's first language on signage is also important for emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging. In a crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic, 'linguistic comforting' (Yuming, 2020) and emotional support in one's L1 strengthens identities and feelings of self-worth.

A challenge the UAE faces is the highly transient nature of large parts of the expatriate population, which, as Ahmed (2021) recognizes, 'may work against or at least slow down the process of localization' (p. 193). In this sense, as UAE residents are temporary members of the nation's society, it is understandable that there is often a lack of investment in changing signage in public spaces to reinforce existing messages of tolerance and inclusion. While sensitive to such limitations, two concrete ways to increase the visibility of minority languages on coronavirus signage include raising awareness and the context-specific translation of bilingual and monolingual signage.

First, greater public awareness should be raised as to the importance of linguistic inclusion for long-term change. While messages supporting linguistic awareness are promoted in the media with the aim of greater inclusivity and greater social justice (May, cited in McVeigh, 2020), this can be enhanced at a grassroots level by introducing LL studies into schools and universities. Task-based projects involving the documentation of languages visible in public domains can lead to important discussions on social diversity, including issues of linguistic inclusion and exclusion. Second, students and community members could be encouraged to take greater social responsibility by becoming involved in translation drives aimed at producing multilingual coronavirus signage. An inclusive model would not involve the blanket translation of all signage into multiple peripheral languages. Rather, an ethnographic analysis of contexts would inform policymakers of the linguistic needs found in transactional spaces. Greater attention should also be given to the strategic use of pictograms and other internationally recognized symbols by taking cues from bodies concerned with managing risks and promoting industrial safety. Two examples are the Codes of Practice issued by the Abu Dhabi Occupational Safety and Health Center (OSHAD) and the Globally Harmonized System that both provide guidance on the design of safety signage. Greater official engagement of speakers of minority languages for the making of bottom-up coronavirus safety signage is also necessary in order for messaging to be aligned across various iterations. Such signage would include both basic safety protocols such as handwashing and maintaining social distance and signs relating to emotional wellbeing and

comfort. Such action would increase access to health communication at the street level while validating the linguistic identities of the UAE's multilingual population.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored linguistic inclusion and exclusion on public signage in two interactional spaces: community spaces and leisure spaces. While our findings revealed examples of effective trilingual signage in these spaces, such signs were the exception rather than the norm. Our findings show that signage caters mainly to English- and Arabic-speaking residents, whereas the linguistic identities of minority language speakers are rarely visible in transactional spaces where members of diverse speech communities meet and gather. The chapter suggested a move towards greater inclusion of third languages on public signage in multilingual contexts such as Abu Dhabi. It was argued that greater linguistic inclusion in the coronavirus period and beyond could be achieved by raising public awareness, introducing LL projects into schools and universities that document and critique language use on signage, and encouraging translation drives with an emphasis on the use of strategic languages and symbols on signage. Such strategies are not only relevant for the Abu Dhabi context but for other multilingual contexts where power disparities exist between the languages selected for communicating health warnings on public signage.

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