

## MULTIMODAL DISCOURSES IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT: ANALYZING IMAGES AND LANGUAGE ON BILLBOARDS IN SIALKOT THROUGH THE LENS OF WORLD ENGLISHES

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### **Abstract:**

*The paper examines the commercial billboard multimodal in Sialkot, Pakistan, and how English and Urdu may relate with graphics to compose the meaning of regional advertisements. Located in the framework of the World Englishes (WE) paradigm and operating within the framework of the three concentric circles model proposed by Kachru, the current study will fill a serious gap in the literature about the manifestation of the English varieties in multimodal communicative practices. Through the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), the analysis will point to unique tendencies of linguistic adaptation, such as transliteration, phonological transfer, and strategic code-switching strategies that work in harmony with the visual semiotic means. The results prove that the English language situation of the Sialkot business environment is subject to systematic localization processes, creating hybrid forms of communication that disclose the global linguistic capital and the local cultural authenticity that can be referred to as the process of local identity construction. The study disputes prescriptive theories of English language norms, recording how Pakistani English, as a variety specified in billboard advertising, displays regulated structural changes and not failed deviations of Inner Circle forms. Based on theoretical discussions on the legitimacy and standardization of languages, the study provides an account of the dynamic processes of negotiation between standardization and local innovativeness in the cases of the Outer Circle. The findings have significant implications for the study of World Englishes in the way they widen theoretical perspectives of monomodal analysis to include multimodal communicative practices, through empirical records to sociolinguistic theory of language contact and language hybridization, and to applied linguistic pedagogy in offering evidence based on the means of recognizing and legitimizing non-native varieties in an education setting.*

**Keywords:** World Englishes, multimodal discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, Pakistani English, Sialkot, billboard advertising, code-switching, globalization, linguistic hybridization, visual semiotics

### **Introduction**

The global spread of English has given rise to diverse local varieties, challenging the notion of a single, monolithic standard (Kachru, 1990). Pakistan, situated in the Expanding Circle of World Englishes, is a crucial site for examining this linguistic evolution, where English interacts dynamically with indigenous languages like Urdu and Punjabi. This interaction is nowhere more visible than in the Semiotic Landscape, which encompasses all visual public displays, including billboards, signage, and wall writing that blend language and imagery to communicate political, commercial, and ideological messages (Jewitt et al., 2016).

Within the paradigm of World Englishes, Pakistan represents an outer-circle context where English has developed localized linguistic features influenced by cultural and historical factors, including British colonial education systems and bilingual social practices. Studies show that

Pakistani English used on public signage frequently exhibits syntactic, phonological, and lexical deviations from standard varieties, often appearing in Urdu script or mixed forms through code-switching and transliteration (Shah et al., 2024). These hybrid language practices are particularly visible on billboards, where English words written in Urdu font-style, localized pronunciations, and bilingual phrasing have become common advertising strategies. By analyzing the interplay between text (language variation, code-switching, localized spellings) and image (visual rhetoric, ideological representations), this research seeks to:

### **Research Questions:**

1. How do billboards in Sialkot linguistically represent Pakistani English within the framework of World Englishes?
2. What multimodal strategies (textual and visual) are used on Sialkot billboards to construct meaning for local audiences?
3. How does code-switching between Urdu and English function on these billboards, and what socio-cultural purposes does it serve?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the linguistic features of Pakistani English on Sialkot billboards through the lens of World Englishes.
2. To examine how visual and textual modes interact in billboard advertising using Multimodal Discourse Analysis.
3. To explore the patterns and functions of Urdu–English code-switching in the regional advertising context of Sialkot.

### **Literature Review**

Mehvish Riaz (2019) examines the phenomenon of code-mixing and code-switching in Pakistani TV commercials. Her study, based on seventy randomly selected advertisements aired between 2011–2015, demonstrates how English heavily influences Urdu in advertising, reflecting sociolinguistic variation driven by fashion, technology, and prestige. Similarly, Habib, Khokhar, and Mustafa (2025) provide a detailed linguistic analysis of code-switching on billboard advertisements specifically. In their study of 41 billboards, they find that nearly half employ some form of switch between English and Urdu, with English often embedded into the Urdu-dominant slogans to make them more appealing and modern.

Muhammad Haris (2024) analyzes English magazine advertisements in Pakistani periodicals such as *SHE* and *Friday Times*. Using multimodal discourse analysis, he examines how language, image, and layout converge to construct gendered identities. His analysis finds a contrast: ads for women often emphasize beauty, domesticity, and care, and use softer visual frames, while male-targeted ads emphasize strength, professional success, and power. Previous scholarly work has established that the Pakistani public sphere is characterized by significant linguistic hybridity, code-switching, and local adaptation, often referred to as the "globalization of English" (Manan et al., 2017).

Studies focusing on national trends in Pakistani billboards and wall posters have highlighted syntactic, lexical, and phonological deviations that mark Pakistani English as a distinct variety (Shah et al., 2024). These analyses reveal the prevalent use of Romanized script for Urdu alongside English, creating a complex, multimodal discourse that reflects colonial heritage and contemporary socio-economic realities. The analysis confirms that Pakistani wall posters exhibit a hybridized language form through the frequent use of code-switching between

English (written in Roman script) and Urdu, which is employed as a strategic bilingual advertising technique (Shakoor et al., 2025).

Though a significant geographical and regional gap persists in the literature. While national patterns are documented, the specific ways in which these global and national linguistic trends are realized in secondary industrial hubs remain underexplored. This paper addresses that gap by undertaking a focused investigation into the city of Sialkot. As a major industrial and exporting center, Sialkot's distinct commercial environment provides a rich, concentrated corpus of public communication that may feature unique local vernaculars and advertising strategies not fully captured in broader Lahore or Karachi-centric studies. The primary aim of this article is to conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) of the linguistic and visual elements present on Sialkot's public signage.

### **Method and Theoretical Framework**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), informed by Fairclough's (2013) model, and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2019) visual grammar, form the theoretical framework for this study. These approaches are employed to examine how linguistic and visual modes interact in constructing meaning on billboards in Sialkot. The qualitative data were collected from major commercial locations in Sialkot using purposive sampling, focusing specifically on billboards containing both Urdu and English. This framework allows the researcher to analyze how linguistic choices, such as the use of specific adjectives, nouns, verbs, and hybrid Urdu-English forms, shape the communicative intent of advertisers.

Attention is also given to the frequency of English words written in Urdu font style, as well as the phonological and syntactic patterns that illustrate localized features of Pakistani English within the World Englishes paradigm. Pragmatic elements, including cultural and religious keywords, are also examined to understand how power, identity, and persuasion are embedded in local advertising discourse (Fairclough, 2013). Alongside linguistic elements, the framework incorporates analysis of visual semiotic choices, such as images, colours, layout, and symbols, to understand how multimodal resources together influence audience perception and establish connections between consumers and the advertised products.

#### **a) Textual Analysis**

- i. Examination of parts of speech and their strategic use in the billboard texts.
- ii. Analysis of phonological, lexical, and hybrid Urdu-English patterns.
- iii. Identification of localized features of Pakistani English and variation from standard varieties within the World Englishes framework.
- iv. Investigation of power relations and persuasive intent through specific linguistic choices.

### **Results**

The analysis of the data shows that when the advertisers prefer to use Urdu and English on the billboards, they use a huge quantity of English words in the Urdu font style. Writing English words in Urdu font style creates ambiguity in pronunciation, which has been explained in the analysis of the following billboards. Moreover, specific sentence and phrase structures have been followed that do not satisfy the standard rules of sentence making. In terms of phonological patterns, the American variety seems dominant in the Pakistani context.

The image analysis has not been presented under each billboard, but the general findings are: the images of multiple products have been abruptly placed on some billboards, while others contain the text only, with specific backgrounds having different colors. For instance, the Internet Service banner (Image 5) places small icons/images of WiFi routers and mobile phones near the

text. The Mobile Academy banner (Image 6) lists English terms like HARDWARE and SOFTWARE alongside icons representing equipment. Famous brands commonly use iconic figures of famous personalities to psychologically attract their audience. For instance, the celebrities, such as sports persons or from the media industry, may be shown in the ads to convince the audience to buy the product, but the selected data does not contain such a strategy. The purpose of using such images on billboards may be to facilitate customers' understanding of the services being provided, but usually the original products are placed on the front for this purpose.

The following chart contains some commonly used words that show a deviation of Pakistani English variety from the standard Englishes, i.e., British or American. The chart shows that most of the words follow American variety in phonological patterns, while a greater number of nouns are originally English words, but often written in the Urdu font style. The individual analysis of each billboard will open up the discussion in more detail.

Table 1

*List of the most common words used in the text of billboards*

English Word	Urdu-Font Version (As Seen on Billboard)	British IPA	English IPA	American IPA	English IPA
Delight	ڈیلائٹ	/dɪ'laɪt/		/dɪ'laɪt/	
Tailor	ٹیلر	/'teɪ.lə/		/'teɪ.lə/	
And	اینڈ	/ænd/		/ænd/	
Café	کفے	/kæ'feɪ/		/kæ'feɪ/	
Store	سٹور	/stɔ:/		/stɔ:r/	
Bakery	بیکری	/'beɪ.kə.rɪ/		/'beɪ.kə.i/	
Brand	برینڈ	/brænd/		/brænd/	
Mobile	موبائل	/'məʊ.baɪl/		/'moʊ.baɪl/	
Academy	اکیڈمی	/ə'kæd.ə.mi/		/ə'kæd.ə.mi/	
Discount	ڈسکاؤنٹ	/'dɪs.kaʊnt/		/'dɪs.kaʊnt/	
Internet	انٹرنیٹ	/'ɪn.tə.net/		/'ɪn.tə.net/	
Service	سروس	/'sɜ:.vɪs/		/'sɜ:.vɪs/	
Complete	کمپلیٹ	/kəm'pli:t/		/kəm'pli:t/	
Solution	سلوشن	/sə'lu:.ʃən/		/sə'lu:.ʃən/	
Turbo	ٹربو	/'tɜ:.bəʊ/		/'tɜ:.bəʊ/	
Unlimited	ان لیمیٹڈ	/ʌn'lim.i.tɪd/		/ʌn'lim.ə.tɪd/	
YouTube	یوٹیوب	/'ju:.tju:b/		/'ju:.tu:b/	
Facebook	فیس بک	/'feɪs.bʊk/		/'feɪs.bʊk/	
WhatsApp	واٹس ایپ	/'wɒts.æp/		/'wɑ:ts.æp/	



Instagram	انسٹاگرام	/ˈ in.stə.græm/	/ˈ in.stə.græm/
Wi-Fi	وائی فائی	/ˈ wai.fai/	/ˈ wai.fai/
Fiber	فائبر	/ˈ fai.bər/	/ˈ fai.bə/
Home	ہوم	/həʊm/	/hoʊm/
Office	آفس	/ˈ ɒf.ɪs/	/ˈ a:.fi.s/
School	سکول	/sku:l/	/sku:l/
Public	پبلک	/ˈ pʌb.lɪk/	/ˈ pʌb.lɪk/
Panel	پینل	/ˈ pæn.əl/	/ˈ pæn.əl/
Islamic	اسلامک	/ɪzˈ læm.ɪk/	/ɪzˈ læm.ɪk/
Education	ایجوکیشن	/ˌ edʒ.uˈ keɪ.ʃən/	/ˌ edʒ.əˈ keɪ.ʃən/
Admission	ایڈمیشن	/ədˈ mɪʃ.ən/	/ədˈ mɪʃ.ən/
Model	ماڈل	/ˈ mɒd.əl/	/ˈ ma:.dəl/
Future	فیوچر	/ˈ fju:.tʃər/	/ˈ fju:.tʃə/

## b) Multimodal Image Analysis

Figure 1

The billboard for Delight Pizza and Café contains three English-origin words i.e. Delight, Pizza, and Café, written entirely in Urdu script, which reflects a common advertising practice in



Pakistan where English lexical items are visually localized for easier public readability. Although these words belong to English, they have become fully integrated into colloquial Urdu, which indicates their nativization in Pakistani English (PakE). The word *Delight* appears as ڈیلائٹ, preserving the diphthongal sound but ending with a retroflex ٹ, showing a clear phonological adaptation influenced by Urdu. Similarly, *Café* appears as کافی, where the diphthong /ei/ is flattened, and *Pizza* is rendered as پیزا without marking stress or vowel length. These hybrid spellings illustrate how English words written in Urdu font often diverge from Standard English phonology, creating a localized pronunciation pattern recognizable by Pakistani consumers. The billboard also contains smaller English nouns such as phone, address, and food items, though these are visually minimized compared to the headline. Code-switching is present through the use of the Urdu-script connective اینڈ for “and,” which links two English-origin nouns. This mixing of English nouns with Urdu syntactic structure demonstrates a typical Pakistani discourse pattern in which Urdu sentence construction hosts English lexical insertions. Pragmatically, using English-

origin food terms signals modernity and global appeal, while writing them in Urdu script ensures accessibility for non-English readers.

Visually, the billboard employs appetizing imagery of pizza to enhance persuasive appeal. The product image functions iconically: consumers immediately associate the sign with food services. The colour palette, often involving reds and yellows, is meant to stimulate appetite and convey energy. The headline is placed at the top in bold, large Urdu-script lettering to create salience and visual dominance, while the images of pizza provide an immediate sensory anchor. The absence of celebrity endorsers suggests that the advertiser relies on visual realism and product appeal rather than aspirational identity. The multimodal arrangement combines localized English lexicon, Urdu typography, and appetitive imagery to construct a local identity: modern enough to attract urban customers yet locally intelligible for broader audiences.

Figure 2

The billboard for Luqman Cheema Super Store and Book Depot features several English-origin nouns, *super store*, and *book depot*, all written in Urdu script. Although these words belong to English, their Urdu-font representation shows how English vocabulary has become naturalized



in local discourse. Words such as *سپر اسٹور* and *بک ڈپو* follow Urdu phonological patterns, often flattening diphthongs and altering stress positions, demonstrating a typical feature of Pakistani English when English words shift into Urdu orthography. The text reflects code-switching in which Urdu grammar frames English lexical items, allowing English to function as vocabulary while Urdu provides the syntactic structure. This bilingual blending signals modernity and commercial variety, aligning with Fairclough's idea that language choices in advertisements index social identity and power.

Visually, the billboard uses product images, such as toys, stationery items, and cosmetics to reinforce the text and provide immediate recognition of the store's offerings. These images work iconically and help bridge gaps caused by transliterated English spellings. The design uses bright colours and a crowded layout, emphasizing abundance and variety, typical of local superstore advertising. The main headline is placed at the top in bold Urdu typography to establish salience, while secondary text and images create a visual hierarchy that guides the viewer's attention. Overall, the multimodal combination of Urdu-script English words, colourful imagery, and dense layout creates a locally anchored yet modern commercial identity, making the billboard accessible and persuasive for a diverse Sialkot audience.



Figure 3

The Punjab mobile academy Sambrial displays a mixture of English technical vocabulary such as *Hardware*, *Modern tools*, *Qualified Teachers*, and *Hardware*. Alongside Urdu-script renderings of English words such as *mobile* (موبائل), *academy* (اکیڈمی), and *discount* (ڈسکاؤنٹ). This combination of scripts reflects the dual communicative goals of projecting technical credibility while ensuring local accessibility. Technical terms like *HARDWARE* and *SOFTWARE* are kept in Latin script to signal authenticity and modernity, as English holds high prestige in ICT-related domains. Meanwhile, consumer-oriented terms are transliterated into Urdu to ensure comprehension across literacy levels. Phonologically, many terms show Pak tendencies: *Internet* is commonly realized as /انٹرنیٹ/, *Railway* as ریلوے, and *Complete* as کمپلیٹ with a shifted stress pattern. Syntactically, most phrases are noun-heavy and function as informational labels rather than complete sentences, reflecting the genre's need for brevity. The billboard also displays code-mixed expressions where Urdu connectors and determiners combine with English technical terms, showing how Urdu grammar frames English lexicon within local syntactic boundaries. This pattern reflects how Pakistan navigates between global ICT terminology and locally grounded communicative norms.

Figure 4





Visually, the billboard uses familiar technological icons such as Wi-Fi signals, cables, routers, and digital symbols that function as immediate communicative cues. These icons carry a universal semiotic meaning and help viewers quickly identify the nature of services being advertised. The colour scheme typically includes blues or greens, colours associated with reliability, technology, and connectivity. The bilingual text arrangement creates a layered visual hierarchy: Latin-script English appears authoritative and technical, while Urdu-script English communicates friendliness and approachability. The layout divides the billboard into distinct visual zones, technical features, services, and contact information, allowing rapid scanning by viewers in motion. This multimodal configuration positions the business as both technologically competent and locally grounded, blending global technical discourse with regional linguistic practices. Through its hybrid script usage, image placement, and multilingual layering, the billboard enacts a localized form of modernity where technological advancement is presented through culturally familiar semiotic resources.



Figure 5.

This image shows a hand-painted advertisement for “Kazmi Electric Service” on a weathered wall, where the physical environment itself becomes part of the meaning-making process. The cracked plaster, uneven paint, and narrow street index a low-budget, small-scale business that relies on traditional wall-writing practices. Linguistically, the ad is predominantly in Urdu, with a small alphanumeric English code switched into the text for locational precision, demonstrating the functional blending of Urdu and English common in Pakistan. The typography is informal, with stretched and uneven Urdu letters that reflect manual brushwork and the aesthetic flexibility typical of street advertisements, though this style may compromise readability. The linguistic mode is dominated by Urdu, with a small English alphanumeric code inserted for locational clarity, demonstrating functional code-switching common in Pakistani public writing.

The typography is informal and manually produced, with thick, stretched strokes in the main headline and thinner, uneven lines in the descriptive text, reflecting the traditional practice of wall-writing in low-budget advertising contexts. The absence of imagery and reliance solely on handwritten text signals a utilitarian intent, prioritizing information over aesthetic sophistication. Spatially, the layout follows a top-down structure, with the bold business name capturing initial attention and supplementary service details arranged below, while the prominently placed phone



number ensures accessibility. Altogether, the ad indexes locality, affordability, and grassroots marketing practices rooted in manual craftsmanship.

This image contrasts sharply with the first, featuring a digitally printed banner for “Blue Tec Internet Service” that uses color, images, and hybrid textual practices to create a modern commercial appeal. The linguistic mode integrates Urdu and English extensively, with many English terms, such as “Unlimited,” “Turbo,” and “EPON,” appearing in Urdu script and therefore likely pronounced according to Urdu phonological patterns, marking a clear deviation from standard English varieties. This blend reflects the pervasive bilingualism of Pakistani urban communication, especially in advertisements related to technology. The visual mode is highly prominent, incorporating icons of YouTube, WhatsApp, routers, and network signals, providing intertextual cues that help even semi-literate viewers understand the advertised services. Bright colors, gradients, and a compartmentalized layout attempt to create a professional appearance, though the density of text and imagery reveals a local tendency to overload information for persuasive impact.

Compared to the minimalistic, hand-drawn nature of the first image, this banner demonstrates a more modern and commercially polished approach, using multimodality to signal reliability, digital competence, and technological advancement. Information is distributed in blocks. The service name at the top works as the primary headline. Prices, features, and contact numbers appear in separate compartments, each visually marked, reflecting an attempt at hierarchy. However, the excessive text and imagery may overwhelm the viewer, indicating the tension between professional design aspirations and practical constraints. English appears both as script and as digital logos (e.g., “Zong 4G”). This layering of linguistic and visual English strengthens the technological identity of the ad. It also reflects Pakistani urban multilingualism, where English is associated with modern services, Urdu with accessibility, and visual icons with universal comprehension.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of the selected billboards from Sialkot demonstrates that the linguistic and visual choices used in public advertisements reflect the broader dynamics of Pakistani English within the framework of World Englishes. The presence of English words written in Urdu script, localized pronunciations, and hybrid spellings shows that English has undergone contextual adaptation influenced by Urdu phonology and everyday communicative practices. Similarly, the strategic use of code-switching between Urdu and English serves both functional and symbolic purposes: Urdu ensures wider accessibility, while English indexes modernity, technological advancement, and social prestige. In multimodal terms, the visual elements icons, colors, typography, and layout, work together with language to persuade, attract attention, and communicate meaning to local audiences. Hand-painted advertisements rely heavily on Urdu and minimal visual design, indexing local craftsmanship and economic constraints, while digitally printed banners blend global imagery and English terminology to create a more modern commercial identity. Collectively, these findings reinforce that Sialkot’s semiotic landscape represents a hybrid linguistic environment where local and global modes of communication coexist, shaping a distinct regional variety of Pakistani English.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

Despite offering valuable insights into the multimodal practices of Sialkot’s advertising landscape, the current study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a small set of

images, which restricts the generalizability of the findings across the diverse billboard contexts in the region. A larger dataset, collected from multiple commercial zones and rural-urban intersections, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic trends. Second, this study focuses primarily on linguistic and visual features and does not include interviews with advertisers, designers, or viewers, which could offer deeper socio-cultural interpretations of code-switching and design choices. Third, the study did not consider variations across product categories, such as beauty products, politics, health services, or education, each of which may employ language and imagery differently. Finally, the analysis centers only on Urdu–English interactions and does not account for regional languages like Punjabi, which also play an important role in the semiotic landscape of Sialkot.

Future studies may benefit from expanding the dataset to include a wider range of billboards, wall writings, banners, and digital screens across different neighborhoods of Sialkot. Incorporating interviews or ethnographic observations could help uncover the motivations behind particular language choices, design conventions, and code-switching practices. Comparative studies between Sialkot and other Pakistani cities, such as Lahore, Karachi, or Peshawar would also provide insight into how regional contexts influence the emergence of Pakistani English in public signage. Additionally, further research could explore multimodal features more deeply, such as gesture, color psychology, typography, and spatial design, using frameworks from visual semiotics. Finally, extending the analysis to include Punjabi-English and Urdu-Punjabi-English mixed signage would enrich the understanding of multilingualism in Pakistan’s evolving semiotic landscape.

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