

Visible Languages, Invisible Borders:
Exploring Linguistic Landscapes and Class Segregation in Dhaka, Bangladesh

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor in Arts
in English

Department of English and Humanities

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing a degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Ethical Statement

All sources used in this research have been properly paraphrased or quoted with accurate citation. All other contents consist solely of my own words, and no idea or information from other sources has been included without appropriate reference. All cited materials used in this research have been obtained from credible primary and secondary sources. I fully acknowledge that failure to comply with these principles may result in disciplinary action, which I agree to accept without objection. I also understand that academic misconduct may result in suspension or expulsion from BRAC University.

Abstract

This research explores how linguistic landscapes both reflect and shape socioeconomic inequality in Dhaka's urban space through a systematic comparison of signage in developed and underdeveloped areas of the city. The study uses qualitative thematic analysis of 32 photographs across eight categories of signs collected from neighbourhoods selected based on Islam's (1996) spatial inequality framework. Employing an inductive analytic process by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, five major themes have been identified: Language Hierarchies and Spatial Class Differences, Material Quality as an Indicator of Social Class, Authority Structures and Religious Geography, Commercial Branding and Target Audiences, and Visual Hierarchies in Multilingual Signage. The findings show that English-dominant signs are concentrated in low-density elite areas and are produced with high quality materials that signal cosmopolitan identity. On the contrary, Bengali-dominant signs are concentrated in high-density working-class areas and are typically hand-painted, emphasizing local identity and cultural belonging. Overall, this study shows how linguistic landscapes actively reproduce inequality by presenting class hierarchies as differences in language use, and creating forms of "sociolinguistic apartheid" even within multilingual signage (Sultana, 2014). Methodologically, it demonstrates the significance of combining rigorous urban classification with linguistic landscape analysis to reveal micro-level segregation invisible in official spatial categories. Eventually, these findings highlight the role of linguistic landscapes as hidden mechanisms to reinforce spatial inequality, with important implications for language policy and urban planning in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscape; Socioeconomic Inequality; Symbolic Capital; Spatial Segregation; Urban Multilingualism

Dedication

For my parents, whose support and guidance gave meaning to this endeavour.

Acknowledgment

All praise belongs to Allah (SWT), whose mercy sustained me through this journey. My deepest gratitude to my father, who walked through Dhaka's streets with me to capture signs, and to my mother, whose unwavering presence, nourishment, and encouragement wiped away tears when hope faltered. I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Md. Al Amin, whose patient guidance and insightful feedback continually refined my approach and shaped this research into its final form. To one of my closest friends, Seetun Mahyan, who saw light in me when I saw only darkness and refused to let me surrender. Finally, to those who sought to dim my path: your doubt became my fuel, and your humiliation became my courage, teaching me that stars shine brightest against the darkest skies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

A city uses many languages; but not all of them gain equal attention. When one moves from the wide streets of Gulshan to the narrow lanes of Nadda, a distinct linguistic division becomes visible. In developed areas, glass buildings display English prominently through polished materials, bright lighting, and durable signs. Conversely, in underdeveloped areas, Bengali appears mainly in hand-painted signs on worn walls, where messages look temporary and visually less dominant. A symbolic invisible boundary exists between these spaces. Certain languages gain visibility through expensive materials and central placement, while other languages gradually disappear into the background. In this case, power is expressed through metal, glass, colour, and design, marking territories without maps or official borders. Therefore, Dhaka's streets contain clear evidence of inequality which is visible, yet often left unnoticed. These street signs are basically layered urban texts where social division is written through language, visual design, and material form that residents may encounter every day, usually without having conscious awareness.

This clear contrast in Dhaka's linguistic landscape poses important questions regarding the relationship between language, space, and power in postcolonial cities. Landry and Bourhis (1997) explain that linguistic landscapes not only provide information, but also they serve strong symbolic functions and act as “a marker of the relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting the territory” (p. 23). Since some neighbourhoods consistently display

English-dominant signage while others display Bengali-dominant signs, the underlying power dynamics become visible. Similarly, when signs in some areas use polished and professional materials, while signs in other areas appear faded on deteriorating walls, these visual differences contribute to constructing and normalising the social hierarchies through everyday urban spaces.

Dhaka provides a strong context to examine these questions. Being the capital city of Bangladesh and the country's main economic center, Dhaka brings together national wealth, major educational institutions, and international connections. At the same time, Dhaka remains as an “unfairly structured city”, according to Islam's (1996) description (p. 87). It is also marked by severe spatial inequality. Planned residential areas having large plots and full infrastructure exist alongside densely populated settlements lacking basic services. This contrast raises several important questions: do these spatial inequalities also appear in language use? Does this unequal structure of physical space mirror an unequal structure of linguistic visibility in the city?

Existing research in this field offers suggestive but incomplete insights. Previous studies have observed the dominance of English in particular areas and shown how English operates as a symbolic capital within the Bangladeshi education system, creating systematic exclusion based on access to English. However, no such studies have systematically examined whether this educational and sociolinguistic stratification is visibly reflected in Dhaka's urban spaces or not. In particular, the question remains whether socioeconomic spatial segregation is matched with a corresponding segregation in linguistic signage across different areas of the city.

This gap has importance since linguistic landscapes do not merely reflect existing inequality; they actively help in creating it. According to Blommaert (2013), signs are basically the “outcomes of specific socioeconomic conditions that enable certain forms of signage while making others impossible” (p. 28). Differences between professionally designed signs and hand-painted signs point to unequal access to economic resources and technology. More importantly, language choices on signs function as a tool of symbolic violence by presenting certain languages as symbols of modernity and progress, while portraying other languages as traditional or less valued. Being exposed to these signs on a regular basis, children and residents learn which languages, and which social groups, are associated with status and importance.

1.2. Research Objectives

This study explores linguistic landscape patterns in socioeconomically stratified areas of Dhaka in order for understanding how language use both reflects and produces spatial inequality. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Document and analyse linguistic landscape patterns across areas with different socioeconomic conditions in Dhaka, putting emphasis on linguistic choice, visual hierarchy, material quality, and content strategies.
2. Locate key themes that reveal how signs construct social class distinctions through linguistic, visual, and symbolic features.
3. Explain these patterns using relevant theories to interpret how linguistic landscapes operate as tools of boundary-making and exclusion in postcolonial urban settings.

1.3. Research Questions

Two research questions guide this research:

RQ1: What linguistic landscape patterns do emerge from Dhaka's socioeconomically contrasting areas?

RQ2: How do these linguistic landscape patterns reflect and create socioeconomic inequality?

1.4. Significance of the Study

In several ways, this research contributes to academic scholarship and practical discussions. At a theoretical level, this study moves linguistic landscape studies beyond simply explaining linguistic diversity to examining how multilingualism can reproduce social inequality. By incorporating a number of theoretical frameworks, this research shows how different analytical perspectives help in interpreting various aspects of linguistic inequality in urban environments.

At a methodological level, this study strengthens qualitative approaches in the linguistic landscape research. Whereas quantitative studies only count languages, qualitative analysis helps explain why particular patterns emerge and what social and symbolic meanings they convey. This research exemplifies how inductive methods can uncover patterns without depending on predetermined theoretical categories and the use theory to interpret and explain those patterns.

Empirically, this study addresses a significant gap in research on linguistic landscapes in Bangladesh. Previous studies have not systematically compared signs across socioeconomically different neighbourhoods in Dhaka. By employing a rigorous framework for classifying urban

areas, this research offers the first systematic comparative analysis of how linguistic inequality mirrors spatial inequality in Bangladesh's capital city.

Practically, the findings have real implications for language policy and urban planning. If linguistic landscapes actively produce inequality by making certain neighbourhoods symbolically inaccessible to speakers of particular languages, policymakers require clear evidence to address such forms of exclusion. Acknowledging how signs operate as territorial claims helps planners to comprehend that linguistic landscapes are not some neutral design choices, but meaning political decisions that influence who feels welcome or excluded in different urban areas.

This research is important for social justice going beyond its academic and policy relevance. Bangladesh witnessed a historic language movement in 1952, during which lives were lost in order to protect the dignity and status of Bangla. However, many decades later, English has emerged as a new form of exclusion. This exclusion does not take place by means of official linguistic policy, but through everyday signage that creates symbolic boundaries between cosmopolitan elite areas and local working-class neighbourhoods. Making these patterns visible through research is the first step towards addressing this form of inequality.

1.5. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research problem, objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that construct the conceptual foundation. Chapter 3

describes the research methodology and the process of data collection as well as analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the findings, organized around different key themes. Chapter 5 discusses these findings using theories to explain how linguistic patterns construct inequality in Dhaka's urban spaces. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarizing the study, outlining its implications, limitations and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews different key theories and previous studies to make the foundation for this research on Dhaka's Linguistic Landscape. Afterwards, this chapter discusses multiple frameworks which are usually used to understand how signs communicate meaning, which also include metrolingualism, Dell Hyme's SPEAKING model, and multimodal theories. It also delves into the intertwined relationship between language and social class, emphasizing on the role of English as symbolic capital in Asian cities. Then, this chapter explores Dhaka's urban classification studies and earlier linguistic landscape research based on different regions in Bangladesh. Finally, it explains how thematic analysis serves as the best fit for this research's methodology. Overall, the sections of this chapter creates the theoretical base of this study, showing how the research gap will be addressed by this research endeavour.

2.2. Theory of Linguistic Landscape

2.2.1. Primary Analysis: Landry and Bourhis (1997)

Landry and Bourhis's seminal work on linguistic landscape is the theoretical foundation of this subfield of applied linguistic studies. According to them, the linguistic landscape defines "the visibility and salience of different languages on public and commercial signs in any given territory or region" (p. 23). It also "encompasses the language of advertisements, billboards, public road signs, street names, place names, commercial shops' signs, and public signs on different government buildings" (p. 25). Their definitions shed light on the fact that these signs

not only convey information, but also work as symbolic representations, reflecting power dynamics and identities of the communities.

According to Landry and Bourhis's arguments, the linguistic landscape functions in two critical ways in multilingual societies. The informational function reveals which language can be used to obtain services in a particular area, "acting as an articulated marker of a particular language community living in a particular geographical space" (p.25). The symbolic function works in an intricate manner. Landry and Bourhis (1997) state that the linguistic landscape can equally "perform both symbolic and informational functions through interpreting the power and social status of the language communities that inhabit themselves in a particular area" (p.23). They put emphasis on the fact that "when a community's own language gets enshrined on most government and private signs, it helps in creating a feeling amongst the community that the in-group language has certain status and value" (p.27). On the other hand, absence of a particular in-group language provides the communities with a symbolic message: "this type of exclusion underscores the fact that in-group language will be of very little use to conduct public discussion, reinforcing a diglossic situation by favouring the dominant language" (p.28).

Landry and Bourhis (1997) differentiate between private signs (commercial signs on storefronts) and government signs (public signs presented by municipal authorities), a comparative analysis deemed fundamental in linguistic landscape studies. This study identifies the fact that the linguistic landscape has been a powerful predictor regarding how people perceive whether a language is vital or not. It also explains a carryover effect where the visibility of a particular language on signs encourages its excessive use in everyday communications.

2.2.2. Agent-Centered Approach by Spolsky (2009)

While Landry and Bourhis (1997) introduce the definition of the linguistic landscape, Spolsky (2009) emphasizes the significance of comprehending who creates signs and what is the reason behind the creation of signs. Criticising the studies based only on finished signs, he argues, “We predominantly base our work on observation, photographing, and counting actual finished signs; but we rarely delve into the process of production of each sign” (p.31). Spolsky suggests an agent-centered approach, meaning that “a sign should be considered as the product of a process that includes different participants: the owner or the initiator of the sign, the people who make the sign, and the people who read the signs” (p. 31).

Spolsky points out three interrelated factors that influence language choice while creating signs: using a language that is known to the maker, choosing languages that the target readers can understand, and selecting the maker’s own language or the language s/he wants to be associated with (p.33). These factors, linguistic knowledge, comprehension of the readers, and expression of identity, function in a complex way when signs are produced.

2.2.3. Ben-Rafael’s (2009) Sociological Perspective

A sociological framework is proposed by Ben Rafael (2009), viewing the linguistic landscape as a symbolic construction of public space. He explains this framework noting that “the languages that are displayed and the symbols that are used function as the landmarks of a particular space” (p. 41). An important element of his framework is the difference he shows between bottom-up signs (produced by individuals showing grassroots practices) and top-down signs (produced by public authorities based on official policies). This difference signifies power

dynamics, reflecting on who is the controller of a public space and which languages will gain visibility.

2.2.4. Linguistic Landscape being intertwined with Social Inequality

According to Blommaert (2013), linguistic landscapes are not actually a neutral representation of diversified communities, but they are “highly structured phenomena”, revealing hierarchical patterns in power and deep-rooted social inequalities (p. 2). He critiques the traditional studies for their inability to “delve into the power structures behind the visible linguistic patterns” (p.2). These studies only record which languages appear in which areas, but overlook the key issue of social inequality as they do not explain why some languages gain visibility, and why the other languages are marginalized.

A concept called ‘scope’ introduced by Blommaert is particularly useful to analyse class-based distinctions in linguistic landscapes. Scope implies “the social reach of a particular sign, including the people who address it and the people who exclude it” (p. 42). Signs which are dominated by the English embrace a narrow scope, reaching only English-educated elites; conversely, signs in various local languages embrace a broad scope, conveying information to all residents irrespective of their educational backgrounds. This difference makes linguistic landscapes as tools of spatial exclusion disguised as mere public signs.

A significant element of Blommaert’s (2013) argument is that these signs play active roles in creating social realities, instead of reflecting them in a passive manner. He goes on to explain stating, “the signs we come across in an urban arena are not just ‘there’; they are the

results of certain socioeconomic factors that allow particular forms of signage to be visible, while making other forms impossible to see” (p. 28). Material differences, for instance, premium LED lights used in elite areas versus hand-made tin signs in working-class neighbourhoods, reveal the inequality in accessing capital, printing technology, and permanent sort of spaces. The hidden elements of economic inequality are revealed through these differences in materials.

2.2.5. Metrolingualism: A mingled version of Language, Space and Urban Practices

Based on the framework of superdiversity by Blommaert (2013), Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) introduce “metrolingualism” to examine language use in the cities worldwide (p. 6). Instead of simply counting languages (e.g., 30% English, 20% Bengali) that many traditional linguistic landscapes studies do, metrolingualism explores how languages “derive from the activities people involve themselves in”, for example, commercial transactions, walking through public spaces or while doing religious practices (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015, p. 6). This concept makes the attention-shift happen from only counting languages to analysing the multi-layered and contextual language practices of urban areas.

One of the main ideas of their framework is “multilingualism from below” that explains language use in everyday life emerging without being dependent on official policies (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2013, p. 12). They interpret that this concept delves into the process of “how people manage to use these languages in daily life and fathom these practices from their perspectives; it does not merely explain whether local language policies are synonymous with top-down ideas or not” (p. 12). For instance, in the commercial zones of Sydney, Lebanese-Arabic mix naturally with English, as vendors adjust prices with customers and handle inventories, despite Australia

incorporating English-only policies. In the same way, in Bangladeshi context, the constitutional mandate for Bengali coexists with the use of English in grassroots commerce, indicating the tension between policy-driven ‘multilingualism from below’ and practice-driven ‘multilingualism from below’.

According to Pennycook and Otsuji (2015), urban spaces are equally “convivial and contested” (p. 93). Conviviality implies the realistic coexistence of diversified communities, interacting and transacting with one another despite having differences. Contestation, on the other hand, explains that “languages used in public spaces are not just markers of diversity; they are the instruments of contesting, negotiating, and claiming an urban space” (p. 100). For example, English signs in elite areas highlight cosmopolitan identity, while local languages used in signs in working-class neighbourhoods indicate a sort of territorial belonging. This duality, where conviviality supports interaction between different linguistic groups and contestation creates boundaries between them, exemplifies the intricate social functions of linguistic landscapes.

In line with that, cities have “different rhythms that have impacts on language use” (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015, p. 50). Different groups visit different spaces at different times; for instance, Friday mosque attendees versus people who go shopping on Sunday, or people who commute in the morning versus night-shift workers. Traditional linguistic landscape studies may analyse only a single moment in this ‘breathing’ urban life. Basically, this temporal perspective functions similarly as Blommaert’s idea of historical layering, where signs are accumulated over

time, designing palimpsests in which new signs overshadow old ones, showing changes in power structures.

2.2.6. Multimodality in the Era of Globalization

Cenoz and Gorter (2009) show an economic perspective, noticing that signs require costs and provide monetary benefits; so choosing the language depends on an economic calculation. They observe the fact that “the omnipresent visibility of English in LLs is one of the most common markers of globalization” (p. 57). It places linguistic landscapes on a debate between linguistic dominance and linguistic justice in the Global South.

2.3. SPEAKING Model by Dell Hymes

2.3.1. Explanation of the Framework

Dell Hymes (1974) develops the theory called ‘ethnography of communication’ to examine language use in real world contexts. He argues that comprehending language use requires studying “directly the use of language in social contexts or situations in order to identify patterns in speech activities” (p. 4). According to Hymes (1974), a speech community refers to “a community that has shared knowledge about the rules for the conduct and the interpretation of speech” (p. 51). Saville-Troike (2003) further adds to the approach that Hymes’s concept “not only deals with language code; it also illustrates what to say to whom, and how to say it properly in any given situation” (p. 18). She basically emphasizes the importance of social norms and contexts over abstract linguistic rules.

The SPEAKING model consists of eight interrelated components: Setting and Scene (physical and psychological context), Participants (producer/speaker, addressee, audience), Ends (purposes and intended outcomes), Act Sequence (content and message form), Key (tone and manner), Instrumentalities (codes and channels), Norms (rules of interaction and interpretation) and Genre (event/sign type). According to Hymes's observation, "the same linguistic means may be made to serve different ends; while the same communicative ends may be served different means from a linguistic point of view" (p. 5). It signifies the need of analysing how languages interact with each other within their own contexts, rather than examining a mechanical implication of them.

2.3.2. Applying the SPEAKING Model in Linguistic Landscape Studies

For the studies of linguistic landscapes, the SPEAKING model provides a comprehensive framework to delve into why certain language choices are made, instead of just counting languages like traditional studies conducted in this field. Saville-Troike (2003) emphasizes that, "it is significant to inquire how each component is related to all of the others" (p. 124). She highlights the fact that SPEAKING analyses dynamic interactions instead of isolated factors. The Setting and Scene have significant influence in the comparative discussion of areas having different socioeconomic conditions, emphasizing the fact that physical spaces (developed and underdeveloped areas) impact language use. The effectiveness of a language in communication is described through Participants (sign-makers and intended audience). Ends examine the purpose of making a sign; some signs target customers who are of upscale to convey prestige; while others prioritize accessibility. The Key, along with describing whether a sign is linguistically

direct or indirect, is conveyed through designing elements like fonts and material quality, signalling whether a place is formal or informal, and affordable or expensive.

However, aligning with Saville-Troike's (2003) ethnographic principles of determining how communities structure communicative situations instead of imposing external categories, this research employs the SPEAKING Model as a lens of interpreting data in the Discussion chapter, rather than considering it as a predetermined coding tool. In this manner, themes will emerge in an inductive manner from the data which will be supported by a detailed theoretical analysis of the noticed patterns.

2.4. Multimodal Analysis and Visual Communication

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), signs are visual compositions which “relate with representational and interactive meaning of the image in three correlated ways: Information Value, Salience, and Framing” (p. 177). Information Value implies the placement of different elements in an image; it defines how “placing the elements differently provides them with specific information value that is associated with specific ‘zones’ of the image; for example, left and right, centre and margin, top and bottom” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 177). Elements that are placed on the left fall under ‘Given’ or familiar information, while elements shown on the right side function as ‘New’ information that requires attention. All the elements presented at the top are ‘Ideal’ or aspirational; on the other hand, elements placed at the bottom are ‘Real’ or practical.

Salience implies the order of importance through visual details, such as size, colour-contrast, saturation, highlighting which elements grab attention first (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). By analysing frame lines, empty spaces in an image, or colour breaks, framing interprets the connection or separation between different elements in a multimodal composition. The SPEAKING Model and multimodal analysis complement each other by decoding how visual elements aid or throw challenges at social meanings expressed by different language choices. Basically, these theories explain how linguistic landscapes both actively structure and reflect social class distinctions in urban environments.

2.5. Language Use and Social Class

2.5.1. Linguistic Capital by Pierre Bourdieu

In order to understand how language functions in a socially stratified society, Pierre Bourdieu's (1989) linguistic capital is important to discuss for a strong theoretical understanding. According to Bourdieu (1989), "fundamental powers" can be identified as "economic capital (in its various forms), social capital, cultural and symbolic capital" (p. 17). He explains that symbolic power functions as "world making... in reuniting and separating, frequently in the same operation" (p. 22). It is important that "the representations of different agents vary with their positions (and at the same time with the interests associated with it) and with their habitus" (p. 19). It signifies the fact that language is not a mere tool of communication; rather it performs as a capital by influencing social position and access to resources.

2.5.2. English: A Symbolic Capital in Asian Contexts

English has become significantly important as a form of symbolic capital in the present urban Asian contexts. According to Byean's (2015) study of examining South Korea's Linguistic Landscape, "English receives its indexical prestige as a part of symbolic capital rather than merely a form of linguistic capital" (p. 875). Byean's (2015) findings include that "in the neoliberal education market, unequal access to learning English across the class spectrum destroys the prospects of disadvantaged students" (p. 870). This information points to the fact that in the postcolonial Asian context, the visibility of English on public signs may act as a marker of social class. Areas that are inhabited by privileged groups of the society may display more use of English on the signs as it implies symbolic capital, such as wealth, education, and cosmopolitanism instead of merely serving the communicative purposes.

2.5.3. English functioning as Symbolic Capital in Bangladesh

A study on Bangladeshi University students by Sultana (2014) using mixed-methods reveals how English acts as a symbolic capital with real material consequences. Conducting a survey on 115 Bangla-medium school (BMSC) students and interviewing them across six Bangla-medium schools, Sultana (2014) locates different patterns of systematic exclusion. BMSC students showed much greater difficulty to continue conversation in English than the students belonging to English-medium backgrounds. Critically, students living in rural or semi-urban areas experience even more difficulties than students living in urban areas.

These consequences go beyond academic performances. Sultana (2014) identifies that 63.2% of BMSC students believe that a strong grip in English language would help them be noticeable to the teachers, while 42.1% of them believe that it would help them make more

friends in the school. It emphasizes the importance of English as social currency, rather than being a mere means of communication. The interviews show strong psychological impacts. One student exemplifies the situation stating “Even during the class, we sit as two groups.. on one side who are good [at English]... on the other side... we... who are not so good at English” (Koyel, cited in Sultana, 2014, p. 31). Students’ repetitive uses of ‘we’ (Bangla-medium) and ‘they’ (English medium) point out the linguistic hierarchies that they have internalised.

Sultana (2014) makes her argument that such situation creates what Bhatt (2005) called “sociolinguistic apartheid”, a form of unequal social state that is both “pervasive and unchangeable”, and it creates class distinctions in Bangladeshi society based on having access to English (cited in Sultana, 2014, p. 13). Sultana (2014) observes that this sociolinguistic distinction has a clear geographical distinction as well, since 88.7% of Bangladeshi students study at Bangla-medium schools, while merely 10% students study at elite English-medium schools situated predominantly in affluent urban areas. These schools are basically situated in the developed areas of Dhaka, for instance, Gulshan, Banani, and Dhanmondi, appearing as a form of spatial and linguistic inequality in which social stratification becomes visible both in educational settings and urban spaces.

2.6. Classification of Urban Areas in Dhaka

According to Islam’s (1996) analytical observation, Dhaka is an “unfairly structured city”; although different cities unequally distribute services and resources, this city shows its inequality in the patterns of its residential areas (p. 87). This discrimination appears more clearly in land distribution. “Almost 70% of the city’s entire population are forced to live in 20% of

residential land; whereas 30% of the population inhabits more than 80% of residential land” (Islam, 1996, p. 105).

Islam (1996) classifies Dhaka’s residential areas through two defining empirical criteria (Table 2.1). The people belonging to the upper-income group, occupy “15% of the city’s land, constituting only 2% of the population, with a very low housing densities ranging from 20 to 100 persons per acre” (p. 100). On the contrary, lower-income groups, constituting 70% of the city’s population, reside only in 20% of the land. Islam (1996) provides description of *bustees* as settlements that “are physically characterised by *kutcha* (temporary) or *semi-pucca* (semi-permanent) single-storey residents. These areas have high housing densities ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 persons per acre (p. 104).

Table 2.1: Dhaka Area Classification Framework (Islam, 1996)

Criteria	Developed Areas	Underdeveloped Areas
Population Distribution	30% of entire population controls 80% of the land	70% of population live on 20% of the land
Density of Population	20-100 persons per acre	1,000-2,500 persons per acre
Infrastructure	Fully serviced (paved roads, clean water, sanitation, drainage system)	Absent or limited services
Type of Housing	<i>Pucca</i> (permanent multi-storied buildings)	<i>Kutcha</i> (temporary single-storey residents)
Tenure of the Land	Legal ownership	Illegal squatting or insecure rental
Level of Income	Upper or middle income	Lower income
Examples	Gulshan, Dhanmondi, Banani, Bailey Road	Hazaribag, Rayerbazar, Kamrangirchar

Source: Islam (1996, p. 87-105)

This classification provides empirical data to distinguish between developed and underdeveloped areas based on the density of population, infrastructural quality, permanence of housing, ownership of land, and different levels of income. In order to do a comparative analysis of Dhaka's linguistic landscapes, the current study uses these classifications for selecting contrasting areas.

2.7. Linguistic Landscape Studies in Bangladeshi Context

The first comprehensive study of Dhaka's linguistic landscape has been conducted by Ferdouse (2023), using 560 signs' photographic documentation across Gulshan and Motijheel. The findings show that 54.29% of the signs are bilingual (mixture of Bangla and English), 24.11% are English-only, and 18.21% are Bangla-only. In 28.29% of the bilingual signs, English has been given visual prominence, while 13.49% of them have prioritised Bangla. According to Ferdouse's (2023) argument, "English has been given priority clearly due to its association with globalization, modernisation, and prestige" (p. 247). However, this particular study focuses only on two selected areas without giving any comparative analysis based on different socioeconomic conditions, leaving the question unanswered whether linguistic patterns are related to spatial inequality or not.

In Ahmed et al's (2023) research, the linguistic landscape of eight government primary schools in the Khagrachari district has been examined. Despite the student population being multilingual and including speakers of indigenous languages, Ahmed et al (2023) finds strong

dominance of Bangla and English in school signs. Through practical reasoning, teachers have explained such patterns. As Ahmed et al (2023) states, “indigenous teachers’ unquestionable acceptance of the pattern, the implementation of the national language, Bangla, and the Lingua Franca English in the LLs of these primary schools are connected to the axiom of ‘survival of the fittest’” (p. 229). This study reveals the continued dominance of Bangla-English through institutional power even in a multilingual setting.

For a comparative linguistic landscape analysis, Backhaus’s (2006) study of Tokyo provides a methodological foundation. A paradox has been identified by his research: “Tokyo, a monolingual environment, prioritizes multilingual signs; whereas Quebec, a much more linguistically heterogeneous environment, is anxious to enforce multilingualism and attempts to preserve monolingual landscape” (p. 167). Backhaus (2006) argues that “formatting an area’s linguistic landscape is not a natural process; rather it is a consciously designed process reflecting official rules and regulations” (p. 170). It reinforces the fact that linguistic landscapes are results of deliberate linguistic choices related to power dynamics, rather than natural consequences of linguistic diversity.

2.8. Applying Thematic Analysis to Linguistic Landscape Studies

Early studies in the field of linguistic landscape studies employed quantitative methods of counting the numbers of visible languages (Backhaus, 2006; Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Recent research, on the other hand, increasingly adapts qualitative thematic approaches to interpret why such patterns appear. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is “a methodological technique to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within data”, that

along with organizing the data in a descriptive way, “explains several aspects of the research topic” (p. 6). Being inductive in nature, thematic analysis derives themes from data itself, instead of applying predetermined frameworks as followed in deductive approach. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that in the inductive approach, “the themes that are identified have strong connections to the data itself” rather than to preassumed theoretical understandings (p. 12). At the same time, they stress on the fact that “researchers cannot outgrow their theoretical and epistemological commitments”, implying that the theories guide the discussion instead of shaping them directly (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12).

A clear example of thematic linguistic landscape research is Papen’s (2012) analysis of gentrification in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. Instead of focusing on counting language frequencies, he observes that “new shops having fancy names not only indicate a change in the population structure, it also implies private investment... that this is now an up-and-coming trendy area” (p. 57). By incorporating close analysis of the visual and linguistic elements of the signs, she finds different themes, such as “commercial aestheticization” and “contested spaces” (Papen, 2012, p. 57). In her study, Papen (2012) combines sign analysis with qualitative semi-structured interviews with shop owners, delving into the decision making processes of different linguistic choices. This methodological approach goes beyond superficial description and provides rooms for in-depth analysis.

Papen’s (2012) observation of “citizens using public places to spread their views” through protest banners and graffiti emphasizes the contested nature of linguistic landscapes (p. 73). Signs are not merely the passive reflections of social reality; it functions as the productive

force “affecting the people who would visit, work or reside in a given neighbourhood” (Leeman & Moran, 2009, cited in Papen, 2012, p. 57). This productive role played by linguistic landscapes makes it best suited to qualitative research. It signifies the importance of incorporating qualitative research to see how signs actively create class distinctions, rather than to only measure statistical data.

Guest et al. (2012) introduces Applied Thematic Analysis (ATA) as a form of “rigorous, yet inductive, set of processes designed to locate and examine themes from textual data in a transparent and credible manner” (p. 15). They go on to explain ATA as a method that amalgamates positivism, grounded theory, interpretivism, and phenomenology in one single framework (Guest et al., 2012, p. 16). This flexible approach makes it easier for the researchers to follow a systematic approach, while including theoretical understanding in it. According to Guest et al. (2012), “ATA can employ multiple analytic techniques, combining thematic coding with the identification of multiple patterns across different contexts” (p. 3). This approach is broad in nature which aids in detailed thematic descriptions and systematic comparisons.

The current study employs thematic analysis in order to delve into the intricacies of Dhaka’s socioeconomic complexity which requires depth in interpretation going beyond what quantitative analysis can do alone. Despite SPEAKING, multimodal analysis, and Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital structuring the Discussion chapter, they are not used to identify patterns in the analysis statute (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012). This methodological approach allows the results to emerge from the observed data rather than being based on

predetermined assumptions, answering the question of ‘what patterns exist’ before incorporating theory to describe ‘what those patterns imply’.

2.9. Research Gap

No existing research has compared linguistic landscapes in a systematic manner across Dhaka’s socioeconomically contrasting areas. Although Islam (1996) documents Dhaka’s spatial inequality by labeling it as ‘unfairly structured’, and Ferdouse (2023) examines dominance of English in two selected areas, no research has focused on whether linguistic inequality mirrors spatial inequality or not. Additionally, very few linguistic landscape studies have employed thematic analysis in a systematic approach to examine how language choices create social stratifications in postcolonial urban settings. Addressing these gaps, this study makes a comparative analysis of Dhaka’s developed and underdeveloped areas. It employs thematic analysis to locate the patterns and then falls them under theoretical frameworks, for example, SPEAKING, multimodal analysis, Bourdieu’s symbolic capital theory, Pennycook and Otsuji’s metrolingualism, and Blommaert’s concept of ‘scope’, to define how linguistic landscapes both actively organize and reflect socioeconomic class divisions in Bangladesh’s capital city.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research approach integrated with an exploratory design to delve into the linguistic landscape patterns in socioeconomically different areas of Dhaka. A qualitative method is appropriate to understand how linguistic choices and visual design reflect and shape social meanings in urban spaces (Backhaus, 2006). The exploratory design allows systematic documentation and interpretation of linguistic landscape patterns that have not been explored through socioeconomic comparison in Dhaka. Following Backhaus's (2006) technique of systematic photographic documentation in Tokyo, this research treats signs as texts located in specific contexts and decodes both their linguistic content and visual features.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

The study amalgamates three complementary theoretical frameworks to present a comprehensive analysis of Dhaka's linguistic landscape. Firstly, Linguistic Landscape Theory by Landry and Bourhis (1997) provides the foundational framework by revealing that linguistic landscapes have both informational functions, suggesting which languages are available for communication and services, and symbolic functions, reflecting language status and power dynamics. Their distinction between top-down signs (created by official or government bodies) and bottom-up signs (produced by individuals or commercial organisations) is applied to classify various types of signs.

Secondly, Dell Hyme's SPEAKING model is incorporated into the analysis in order to examine the social context of communication through eight different elements: 'Setting and Scene' (the physical and cultural environment), 'Participants' (the makers of the signs and their target audiences), 'Ends' (the purposes of the signs, such as attracting affluent customers or merely providing accessible information for everyone), 'Act Sequence' (the content and the organisation of the message within a sign), 'Key' (the tone and manner expressed through design choices), 'Instrumentalities' (the language or the codes used), 'Norms' (expectations regarding appropriate languages use on signs), and 'Genre' (types of signs, such as of restaurants, schools, or religious institutions). Within 'Act Sequence', this research includes Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal framework to analyse visual design. The components of this framework include 'Information Value' (the spatial placement of languages on the sign), 'Salience' (which language stands out through size, colour or contrast), and 'Framing' (whether different languages are visually connected or separated).

Thirdly, along with Bourdieu's (1989) concept of symbolic capital, Blommaert's (2013) concept of 'scope' and Pennycook and Otsuji's (2015) concept of metrolingualism, allows this research to interpret how English functions as a marker of social class in postcolonial urban settings. Importantly, these frameworks are applied in the Discussion chapter to further explain the findings, but they are not used as coding frameworks during the analysis process. This methodological decision allows themes to emerge inductively from the data, aligning with the principle of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012).

3.3. Study Area and Classification

The study has selected research areas based on Islam's (1996) empirical findings of Dhaka's residential structure. Islam labels Dhaka as an "unfairly structured city", where 70% of its population reside only in 20% of the residential land, while 30% of the population controls 80% of it (p. 105). His comprehensive study offers clear criteria to distinguish between developed and underdeveloped areas.

Developed areas are characterized by low population density (20 to 100 persons per acre), water supply and sanitation, fully developed infrastructure such as paved road, proper drainage system, electricity, 'pucca' (permanent) multi-storey buildings, secure legal land ownership, and primarily upper and upper-middle class residents (Islam, 1996). The developed areas selected for this research include Gulshan, Dhanmondi, Banani, Bailey Road, which are basically planned residential territories defined by large plots, wide roads, and comprehensive urban services.

On the other hand, underdeveloped areas are characterised by high population density (1,000-2,500 persons per acre), limited or absent infrastructural resources, 'kutcha' (temporary) single-storey housing, illegal occupation or insecure rental arrangements, and predominantly lower-income populations (Islam, 1996). The underdeveloped areas selected for this research include Hajaribag, Rayerbazar, Moghbazar, Mirbag, Gonokatuli, Kalachandpur etc. In most of these areas, a large number of people live in 'bustees' (slums) and squatter settlements, where residents frequently face threats of eviction and insufficient access to basic resources. Selecting these areas produces a strong socioeconomic contrast, allowing the research to make a systematic

comparison regarding how linguistic landscapes differ across Dhaka's class-stratified urban spaces.

3.4. Data Collection

3.4.1. Sign Categories

This study has collected photographs of signs from eight functional categories: (1) Educational Institutions, including schools, madrasas, and coaching centres that display institutional identity; (2) House names, that express house owners' linguistic and aesthetic preferences; (3) Beauty parlours, that represent service businesses associated with beauty targeting specific client groups; (4) Advertisements, that consist of commercial promotional elements; (5) Religious Institutions, such as mosques that mark community presence; (6) Shopping complexes and markets, reflecting commercial language practices; (7) Cautionary posts, including warning signs that suggest authority; and (8) Restaurants, signaling types of cuisine, price level, and intended customers.

These eight categories have been chosen as they include both top-down signs (educational institutions and cautionary posts), and bottom-up signs (house names, beauty parlors, and restaurants). Moreover, they represent a wide range of functional domains, including educational, commercial, residential, religious and regulatory contexts. Also, these signs can be observed in all socioeconomic areas of the city, which helps make a systematic comparison across different locations (Backhaus, 2006).

3.4.2. Sampling and Distribution

The study has collected 70 photos in total. Amongst them, a total of 32 photographs: 16 from developed areas (Gulshan, Dhanmondi, Bailey Road etc), 16 from underdeveloped areas (Hajaribag, Nadda, Rayerbazar etc) have been chosen based on being the best suited for each category. Each of the eight sign categories integrates two examples from developed areas and two from underdeveloped areas. This balance approach ensures equal representation across area types and sign categories, supporting systematic comparative analysis.

The photographs were collected between September and November in 2025 to capture current linguistic landscape patterns. The researcher systematically walked through the selected areas and captured photos of signs from each category. Images were captured using a mobile phone camera and included the full text of the signs, visual design features, material quality, placement, and the surrounding environment. Aligning with Saville-Troike's (2003) principle of "descriptive adequacy" which attempts to help outsiders "understand how to communicate appropriately in a particular context", each photograph also included relevant architectural and environmental information (p. 88). Visual details about building condition, materials, location indicators, and spatial positioning fell under these details.

3.4.3. Ethical Considerations

As this study examines public signs available in open spaces, informed consent from sign owners or viewers was not required. However, this study acknowledges Spolsky's (2009) methodological concern that analyzing "actual finished signs" without accessing the production process can limit understanding of the decisions behind linguistic choices (p. 31). In order to address this limitation, the SPEAKING model has been applied to systematically analyse

noticeable contextual features of the signs, helping infer likely motivations and communicative intentions.

3.5. Data Analysis: Process of Thematic Coding

The study uses thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as “a method for identifying, analysing, reporting patterns (themes) within data” that both structures data descriptively and “interpret several aspects of the research topic” (p. 6). Thematic analysis has been incorporated due to its theoretical flexibility. Unlike approaches restricted to a single epistemological position, it can be applied in different research paradigms while still maintaining analytic rigor (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following Guest et al.’s (2012) Applied Thematic Analysis (ATA) framework, this research integrates elements of grounded theory, positivism, interpretivism, and phenomenology into a single methodological approach (p. 16). This allows the analysis to be systematic as well as a theoretically informed interpretation.

Inductive Approach

Aligning with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) inductive approach, the themes identified “are strongly connected to the data themselves”, rather than to preconceived theoretical frameworks (p. 12). This is why the SPEAKING model and the multimodal analysis have not been used as coding schemes during analysis. Despite Braun and Clarke (2006) stating that “researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments”, this inductive approach makes it easier for the patterns to emerge directly from observable features of Dhaka’s linguistic landscape, for instance, language choice, visual hierarchy, material quality, and spatial placement, rather than being imposed by prior theoretical models (p. 12).

Six-Phase Analytic Process

This study follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework (p. 25).

Phase 1: Familiarization with the Data

All 32 photographs have been reviewed multiple times. Initial observations have put emphasis on the languages used, visual design features, material conditions, and contextual details. At this stage, no formal coding has been applied.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Signs have been coded based on noticed features, including language choice (Bengali, English, or mixed), visual hierarchy (size, placement, colour), material quality (LED, printed, hand-painted), type of establishment, and socioeconomic factors (developed or underdeveloped area). Coding remains descriptive and focuses on locating basic features that can be examined independently.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Initial codes have been grouped into potential themes. For instance, codes such as 'English dominance', 'high-quality materials', and 'top-center placement' have been grouped under a possible theme connected to prestige signaling in elite areas. Aligning with Guest et al.'s (2012) view that Applied Thematic Analysis "can involve multiple analytic techniques", this phase includes creating thematic maps with a view to exploring relationships between codes (p. 3).

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

Identified themes have been reviewed to maintain entire internal consistency, implying that all data within a theme fit together, and external and distinction, meaning that themes are clearly different from one another (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this stage, some themes have been merged, while others have been divided.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Final themes have been clearly defined and named. Each theme has been refined to keep its central meaning or “essence” intact, ensuring that it describes a specific aspect of Dhaka’s linguistic landscape in a coherent manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 22).

Phase 6: Producing the Report

The themes have been organized and present in the Findings section, supported by sample photographs. This is how the analysis moves beyond surface level description to interpret broader social meanings of the patterns observed (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 24).

Relationship to Theoretical Frameworks

The important fact is that the SPEAKING model by Hymes (1974), multimodal analysis of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), and Bourdieu’s (1989) concept of symbolic capital have been applied in the Discussion chapter to interpret the findings. They have not been applied during the analysis period as coding frameworks. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), an inductive thematic approach extracts themes from patterns in the data, rather than shaping them by predetermined theoretical models. This approach helps the study address research question 1

(what patterns exist?) through data-driven themes presented in Findings chapter, then address research question 2 (what do these patterns mean?) through theoretical explanation in the Discussion chapter. As per Guest et al. 's (2012) principle of interpretations being mandatorily “grounded in the data”, all theoretical interpretations are directly linked to specific photographic evidence from the 32-sign dataset (p. 12).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter is a presentation of the findings from the thematic analysis of 32 photographs of signs collected based on eight categories in developed and underdeveloped areas of Dhaka. The analysis locates five major themes: (1) language hierarchies and spatial class differences, (2) material quality: a marker of determining social class, (3) authority structures and religious geography, (4) strategies of branding and target audiences, and (5) visual hierarchies in multilingual signs. Each theme is discussed through using photographic evidence and descriptive observations.

4.1. Language Hierarchies and Spatial Class Differences

A clear spatial pattern is revealed while analysing the signs across all eight categories. Developed areas, for example, Gulshan, Dhanmondi, and Banani have mainly displayed English-dominant signs, while underdeveloped areas such as Rayerbazar, Nilkhet, Nadda, and Hajaribag predominantly display Bangla-dominant signs. This pattern has appeared across house names, educational institutions, commercial establishments, and public signs, pointing out the systematic linguistic division that is created on the basis of socioeconomic geography.

Amongst educational institutions, elite private schools in developed areas have used English prominently. ‘Tahfiz International School’ in Sir Syed Road has displayed English dominance in its sign, referring to the ‘EYFS Curriculum’ and ‘Cambridge International

Education’ shown in a clear manner, while Bengali and Arabic have been presented only symbolically with small logos (Fig 4.1). ‘Green Gems International School’ in Dhanmondi 9/A has used only English to convey necessary information and includes marketing-friendly language, for instance, ‘Providing the best start in life for your child since 1991’, along with Facebook and Website links (Fig 4.2). On the contrary, schools in underdeveloped areas have displayed dominance of Bengali in signage. ‘নীলক্ষেত সরকারি প্রাথমিক বিদ্যালয়’ (Nilkhet Government Primary School) in Ramna only has used Bengali text, painted by hands on corrugated metal, while prominently displaying ‘স্থাপিত: ১৯৬৮’ (Established in 1968) (Fig 4.3). A notable thing is that even within the elite area of Gulshan, ‘কালচাঁদপুর দাখিল মাদ্রাসা ও এতিমখানা’ (Kalachandpur Dakhil Madrasah & Orphanage), located in a working-class neighbourhood named Kalachandpur, has used Bengali dominant and hand-painted signage. It indicates the presence of micro-segregation within officially developed areas.



Fig 4.1. *Tahfiz International School*
(English dominance with small Arabic logos)



Fig 4.2. *Green Gems International School*
(100% English)



Fig 4.3. Nilkhet Government Primary School
(Bengali-only, hand-painted)



Fig 4.4. Kalachandpur Dakhil Madrasah
(Bengali dominance in Gulshan enclave)

House names have shown clear contrasts between areas. Residences situated in developed areas have displayed English-only names using creative language, signalling a cosmopolitan identity. ‘Regency Radiance’ (Gulshan, Road 36) is an example of elite naming patterns of residences. Incorporating an alliterative English branding, the naming pattern of this house has used repeated ‘R’ sounds that create a particular sense of phonetic elegance. These words themselves suggest something luxurious. ‘Regency’ implies the Royal Heritage of the UK, and ‘Radiance’ means brightness and beauty. Through a professional production process, this sign has been designed using metal engraving with raised three-dimensional black lettering on a silver-grey metallic background, creating both visual depth and a sense of permanence. The letter ‘R’ in ‘Regency’ has been written in stylized cursive form that adds decorative sophistication going beyond basic readability. Address details have been presented in the standardized international format, written in formal capital letters ‘HOUSE- 01/ Road- 36/ Gulshan’, rather than local land-mark based descriptions usually found in underdeveloped areas. This sign is mounted on clean white walls having visible professional fixtures, pointing to the financial

investment in residential identity. No Bengali translation has been included, making the sign only readable to English-literate people.



Fig 4.5. *'Regency Radiance' - Residential Name in Gulshan (English-only alliterative branding, professional metal engraving, 3D raised lettering)*

Other houses' names in elite areas have shown similar kinds of patterns. 'Ventura Artista' in Dhanmondi (Road no. 4) has incorporated Italian or Spanish words ('Ventura' means adventure, and 'Artista' means artist), suggesting European cosmopolitanism and artistic sophistication (Fig 4.6). It has also followed the international format of conveying addresses ('House 21A/Road 04/Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1205'). These abstract and global oriented naming patterns strongly contrast with working-class residential signs, which are basically based on personal names, religious expressions, or simple functional details.



Fig 4.6. 'Ventura Artista' - House name in Dhanmondi (Italian/Spanish Cosmopolitan Branding)

In underdeveloped areas, house names are written mainly in Bengali, often including the Arabic *Bismillah*. 'হরবানু মঞ্জিল' (Horobanu Manjil) in Ganakatuli has used nameplate which is based on an individual's name, being hand-painted on worn walls and decorated with traditional borders (Fig 4.7). Visible environmental damage in the photograph, for example, peeling point, water stains, cracked walls, torn posters, contrasts strongly with the polished and clean materials seen in elite areas. The only English commonly observed in the working-class residential signs is 'TO-LET' on rental notices, shedding light on the fact that English is used in such areas for practical purposes rather than to signal prestige. Another example of residential names in underdeveloped areas is 'জোবেদা কুঞ্জ' (Jobeda Kunja) in Mirbag, displaying hand-painted Bengali text with the Arabic *Bismillah* at the top. The sign has been painted on a weathered white plaque mounted on green-painted walls (Fig 4.8). It has incorporated assumably the house owner's name as the house identifier and presented the address in Bengali: '২নং মীরবাগ,

মগবাজার, ঢাকা-১২১৭' (2 No. Mirbag, Mogbazar, Dhaka-1217), along with the year of establishment 'স্থাপিত: ১৯৯৩ইং' (Established: 1993). In order to add traditional aesthetic features usually found in underdeveloped areas' residential signage, this sign has added decorative borders in the corners. Overall, instead of being written using abstract and cosmopolitan vocabulary, this sign has anchored identity in Islamic religious expression and personal or family naming.

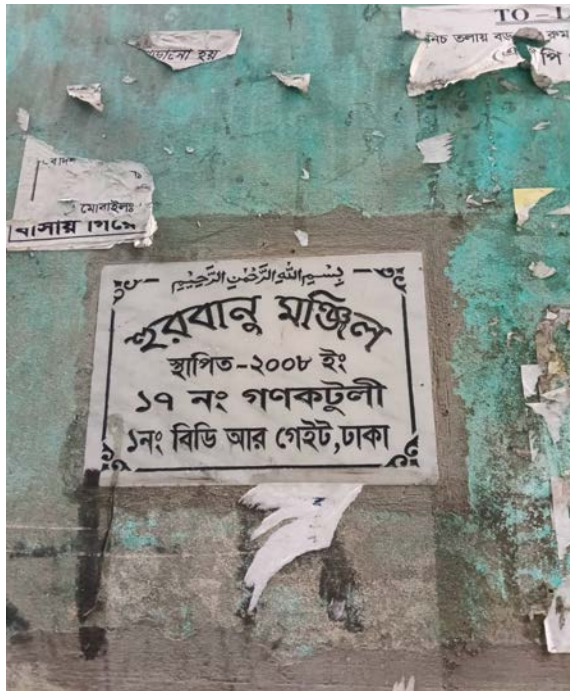


Fig 4.7. 'হরবানু মঞ্জিল' (Horobanu Manjil)
- House Name in Gonokatuli (Bengali with Bismillah, hand-painted on deteriorating wall)



Fig 4.8. 'জোবেদা কুঞ্জ' (Jobeda Kunja)
-House Name in Mirbag (Personal name with Bismillah, hand-painted, traditional borders)

In case of beauty parlours, similar patterns have been noticed. ‘AURA BEAUTY LOUNGE’ in Bailey Road has used only English on its nameplate, with an abstract and mystical expression incorporating an upscale term ‘Lounge’ instead of ‘Parlor’. This sign is designed using three-dimensional lettering to reinforce the idea of elitism (Fig 4.9). ‘Dream’s Hair & Beauty Corner’ in Dhanmondi (Road no. 1) has combined beauty services with fitness training, displaying English-only signage patterns along with Western-style fitness images (Fig 4.10). Conversely, beauty parlours in underdeveloped areas have shown a different kind of pattern. ‘মৌসুমি বিউটি পার্লার’ (Mousumi Beauty Parlor) in Rayer Bazar has named the parlour using a personal name, displaying the sign on deteriorating infrastructure, including exposed writings and stained walls, with an emphasis on bridal services (Fig 4.11). However, ‘লাবণ্য বিউটি পার্লার’ in Tally Office Road (Lavanya Beauty Parlor) has demonstrated a nuanced kind of strategy. It has used vocabulary like ‘লাবণ্য’, implying grace or charm, which is a high-register literary Bengali vocabulary. It contrasts with a common personal name as ‘মৌসুমি’. The sign has also highlighted material investment by prominent advertisements like ‘শীতাতপ নিয়ন্ত্রিত’ (air-conditioned), presenting itself as a training center, and articulately stating ‘শুধুমাত্র মহিলাদের জন্য’ (Only for women) to indicate gender segregation (Fig 4.12). This sign reveals an alternative form of branding using elevated Bengali language and material facilities rather than using branding strategies in English.

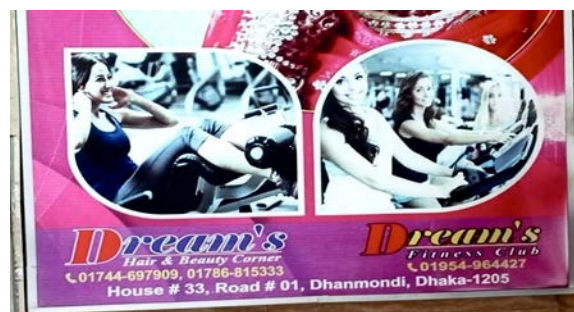


Fig 4.9. *AURA Beauty Lounge in Bailey Road*
(100% English, abstract name)

Fig 4.10. *Dream's Hair & Beauty Corner*
in Dhanmondi (English-only with fitness
imagery)



Fig 4.11. মৌসুমি বিউটি পার্লার (*Mousumi Beauty Parlor in Rayrebazar, Deteriorating Wall*)



Fig 4.12. 'লাবণ্য বিউটি পার্লার'
(*Lavanya Beauty Parlor in Tally Office Road, AC advertised, gender segregation*)

Signs of Restaurants have also shown clear differences. 'Gloria Jean's Coffee' in Gulshan has displayed a Bengali transliteration of the name on the main sign (গ্লোরিয়া জিন্স); however, its promotional materials are dominated by English slogans such as 'AWAKEN YOUR SENSE WITH EVERY SIP' and 'AMP UP YOUR PRODUCTIVITY'. These marketing strategies reflect lifestyle and productivity branding targeting the cosmopolitan customers (Fig 4.13). 'Chilis' in Dhanmondi (Road no. 27) has incorporated a bilingual pattern of making signs, while

visual emphasis favouring English through large LED letters. The Bengali text ‘চিলিস’ has appeared in smaller light-blue LED lettering (Fig 4.14). On the contrary, ‘মায়ের দোয়া বিরিয়ানী হাউজ’ (Mayer Dowa Biryani House, meaning ‘Mother’s Blessing’) in Hazaribagh has branded itself using emotional and religious linguistic expressions. This sign provides comprehensive practical information, including specific dishes ‘শাহী মোরগ পোলাও, খাসীর কাচ্চি, বিরিয়ানী, গরু কাচ্চি, বোরহানী, তেহারী’ (Morog Polao, Mutton Kacchi, Beef Kacchi, Borhani, Tehari), the chef’s name ‘বাবুচী মোরশেদ মিয়া’, claims of heritage stating ‘পুরাতন ঢাকার ঐতিহ্যবাহী’ (traditional Old Dhaka), 24/7 delivery service availability, and visible menu prices (such as chicken kacchi for 80 BDT) hanging under the sign. The sign also adds images of a cow and a chicken in order to indicate halal meat (Fig 4.15). ‘অর্জিনাল লালবাগ বিরিয়ানী হাউজ’ (Original Laibach Original House) has revealed a similar pattern, having Bengali-dominance on weathered hand-painted banners, providing information regarding 24-hour catering services in the Hajaribag tannery area (Fig 4.16).



Fig 4.13. ‘Gloria Jean’s Coffee’ in Gulshan (English Lifestyle Branding)



Fig 4.15. ‘মায়ের দোয়া বিরিয়ানী হাউজ’ (Mayer Dowa Biryani House in Hajaribag, Emotional Branding. Detailed Information, prices)

Fig 4.14. ‘Chilis’ in Dhanmondi -Visual Hierarchy, Favouring English)



Fig 4.16. ‘অর্জুনাল লালবাগ বিরিয়ানী হাউজ’ (Original Lalbag Biryani House in Hajaribag Tannery Block, hand-painted & functional messaging)

These findings prove the fact that language choice in Dhaka’s signage system is not random, rather it follows a clear class-based pattern. English-dominant signs in developed areas indicate connection to global and cosmopolitan networks and may exclude people who do not have literacy in mEnglish. On the other hand, Bengali-dominant signs in underdeveloped areas put emphasis on local accessibility and community belonging. The consistent link between location and language choice signals that linguistic landscapes actively create invisible boundaries within a city’s territorial border. These boundaries have divided Dhaka into two

different symbolic zones; one of which is oriented towards international connection while the other one is grounded in local traditions. As a consequence, residents move not only through physically different neighborhoods but also socially and symbolically stratified environments, where language plays a significant role in shaping who belongs and who is treated as an outsider within the city.

4.2. Material Quality: An Indicator of Social Class

The quality of materials and methods of production have clearly distinguished elite signs from working-class signs going beyond language choice. In developed areas, signs have used high-quality materials, for instance, LED or neon lighting, professional vinyl printing, metal engraving, and facades made of glass. On the contrary, signs in underdeveloped areas are often hand-painted on paper posters, corrugated metal, or damaged walls. This difference in material quality shows inequality in accessing economic resources, printing technology or long-term spatial stability.

The ‘Regency Radiance’ house name in Gulshan clearly exemplifies the elite investment in material quality. The sign is made incorporating metal engraving with raised three-dimensional lettering, adding physical depth which is not possible with hand-painted signs (Fig 4.5). It allows the sign to remain visible from a distance by using a silver-grey metallic background that reflects light. Professional mounting fixtures along the edges prove that careful attention has been paid to durability and visual integration with the building. The clean and freshly painted white wall behind the sign with no damage or weathering indicates continuous maintenance and considerable investment in visual order. Altogether, these features imply

permanence, reflecting that the residents intend to remain, have resources for upkeep, and value aesthetically pleasing presentation.

Shopping complexes' signs have also been designed in similar patterns. 'Rapa Plaza' in Dhanmondi (Road no. 27) has featured high-quality red and yellow LED neon signage on a multi-storey glass facade illuminated at night (Fig 4.17). 'ইনফিনিটি মেগামল' (Infinity Megamall, Bailey Road) has also been produced using dual-colour LED signage integrated into glass architecture (Fig 4.18). Conversely, 'গাউছিয়া মার্কেট' (Gausiya Market, New Market Area) has displayed itself through three-dimensional lettering, mounted on exposed brick walls and surrounded by blue tarpaulins, vendor stalls and other open-air commercial activities at street level (Fig 4.19). 'মক্কা শপিং মল' (Mokka Shopping Mall, New Market Area) has presented its sign showing simple painted signage above a crowded street market with different colourful umbrellas and temporary stalls, exemplifying a two-tier spatial economy in which formal buildings and informal commerce coexist (Fig 4.20). Also, the house name 'জোবেদা কুঞ্জ' (Jobeda Kunja) in Moghbazar illustrates usual material constraints found in working-class areas. The sign consists of hand-painted black letters on a simple white plaque, placed on green-printed brick walls showing signs of wear (Fig 4.8). Being in a stark contrast with elite metal-engraved signs, the hand-painted style showed uneven letter thickness and small imperfections, revealing limited access to professional printing services. Although the decorative borders in the corners have added visual appeal, they have also been drawn by hand, not produced mechanically. It indicates that residents in underdeveloped areas often invest personal labor, rather than financial capital, in order to create markets of residential identity.



Fig 4.17. 'Rapa Plaza' in Dhanmondi (Premium LED neon on glass facade)



Fig 4.18. 'ইনফিনিটি মেগামল' (Infinity Megamall in Bailey Road, Dual-color LED, Bengali script & English words)



Fig 4.19. 'গাউছিয়া মার্কেট' (Gausiya Market In New Market Area, 3D Letters on Brick



Fig 4.20. 'মক্কা শপিং মল' (Mokka Shopping Mall in New Market Area,

Informal vendors below)

functional signage above street market)

However, patterns in using materials have also revealed complexity. ‘মোহাম্মদিয়া জামে মসজিদ’ (Mohammadiya Jame Masjid) in West Rampura has used LED and neon lighting, with red letters and a green border, although the sign is placed on a structurally deteriorating building with peeling yellow and green paint and broken windows (Fig. 4 21). This contrast between a modern costly signage system and a poor building condition shows that the community prioritizes visual public identity over structural maintenance. A similar kind of pattern has appeared in ‘লাবণ্য বিউটি পার্লার’ (Lavanya Beauty Parlour, Tally Office Road), which has prominently advertised ‘শীতাতপ নিয়ন্ত্রিত’ (air-conditioned), a luxury element suggesting material investment, despite the sign using only Bengali and being located in a working-class neighbourhood (Fig 4.12). These examples reveal alternative ways to construct prestige. While elite establishments solely depend on symbolic capital using English branding, the marketing strategies of working-class’ signs emphasize material capital, such as air-conditioning, integrated with using high-register Bengali vocabulary.



Fig 4.21. ‘মোহাম্মদিয়া জামে মসজিদ’ (*Mohammadiya Jame Masjid in West Rampura, LED Signage on deteriorating building*)

Differences in the material quality of signage suggest deeper inequalities in accessing resources and technology. High-quality materials such LED lighting metal engraving demand significant financial investment and are therefore used primarily by elite establishments; while businesses in underdeveloped areas depend more on affordable and hand-painted signs. At the same time, an important paradox is highlighted through the presence of costly LED signage on structurally deteriorating mosque buildings. It describes the situation of working-class communities placing greater importance on public symbolic identity, leaving the basic infrastructure in poor condition. It proves the fact that visible signs hold powerful social value in expressing community pride and identity, at times being valued more highly than the buildings themselves. Overall, material differences of signage between developed and underdeveloped areas contribute to making social inequality visible in the urban space, not only through the messages displayed, but also through the ways of sign production.

4.3. Authority Structures and Religious Geography

Signs have revealed different sources of authority across social classes. In developed areas, signs have basically referred to international standards, corporate brands, and state institutions. On the other hand, in underdeveloped areas, signs have been observed drawing authority from community organization, religious institutions, and personal reputation. This distinction has specifically been noticed in cautionary signs and religious spaces.

Cautionary signs have clearly shown differences in sources of authority. In developed areas, an ‘UNDER CONSTRUCTION SITE/ KEEP SAFE DISTANCE’ sign in Dhanmondi (Road no. 4) appears entirely in English, being placed on a modern composite wall and using international safety symbols, such as yellow and black diagonal stripes. Although it is supposed to serve the purpose of public safety, it has not included any Bengali translation (Fig 4.22).

Despite showing bilingual text, a ‘NO PARKING’ sign in Gulshan has given visual priority to English. It also displays the emblem of Dhaka Metropolitan Police and includes a commercial advertisement (‘Orix Crystal Wash’) on the same sign, indicating the commercial use of a public sign (Fig 4.23). In contrast, cautionary signs in underdeveloped areas are seen depending on community-based authorities. A ‘হর্ণ বাজানো নিষেধ’ (No horn blowing) sign in Mirbag cites ‘অনুরোধক্রমে: মীরবাগ সোসাইটি’ (requested by Mirbag Society) instead of a governmental institution (Fig 4.24). Most importantly, a ‘ধীরে চলুন’ (Go slowly) sign in Moghbazar states ‘ধীরে চলুন সামনে মসজিদ ও মাদ্রাসা’ (Go slowly, mosque and madrasa are ahead), including the message ‘মুসল্লীদের রাস্তা পারাপারে সহযোগীতা করুন’ (Help worshippers cross the road). This sign reveals the fact that religious institutions provide traffic guidance based on community care and moral responsibility, rather than only relying on formal regulation (Fig 4.25).



Fig 4.22. *Under Construction Sign in Dhanmondi (English-only, International symbols)*



Fig 4.24. 'হর্ন বাজানো নিষেধ' (*No horn Mirbag society authority*)

Fig 4.23. *No Parking Sign in Gulshan (Police Emblem & Orix Detergent Ad)*



Fig 4.25. 'ধীরে চলুন সামনে মসজিদ ও মাদ্রাসা' (*Go slowly, mosque and madrasa are Ahead in Moghbazar , community care Message by Mosque/Madrasah authority*)

Complex and varied patterns have been shown by religious institutions. 'Gulshan Society Jame Masjid', located in a developed area, has only used English on its signs, featuring minimalist modern architecture of glass facades and marble. It hints at a form of cosmopolitan Islam (Fig 4.26). On the contrary, other mosques in developed areas, 'বায়তুল করিম জামে মসজিদ' (Baitul Karim Jame Masjid) in Azimpur has designed its sign using Bengali printed on professional vinyl. This particular choice puts emphasis on religious authenticity expressed

through Bengali despite being located in an elite area (Fig 4.27). In underdeveloped areas, mosques use Bengali-only signs. A mosque named ‘কুড়িল বড়বাড়ী জামে মসজিদ’ (Kuril Borobari Jame Masjid) in a working-class neighbourhood named Vatara has displayed traditional Islamic visual coding; the sign has used Bengali-only text in white letters on green background (Islamic symbolic colours), with a mosque dome iconography, designed on metal rather than on modern LED materials (Fig 4.28). Additionally, shopping complexes in underdeveloped areas often name themselves after Islamic places’ names. For example, ‘মক্কা শপিং মল’ (Mokka or Mecca Shopping Mall) and ‘গাউছিয়া মার্কেট’ (Gausiya Market, named after a religious saint) (Fig 4.29 & 4.30). On the contrary, commercial establishments in developed areas tend to avoid religious expressions, instead prioritising secular and cosmopolitan brand names, for instance, ‘Rapa’, ‘Infinity’ and ‘AURA’.



Fig 4.26. ‘Gulshan Society Jame Masjid’
(100% English, modern architecture)



Fig 4.27. ‘বায়তুল করিম জামে মসজিদ’
in Azimpur (Bengali-dominant vinyl
banner)



Fig 4.28. 'কুড়িল বড়বাড়ী জামে মসজিদ' (Kuril Borobari Jame Masjid in Vatara, Bengali-only)



Fig 4.29. 'গাউছিয়া মার্কেট' (Gausiya- name of a saint)



Fig 4.30. 'মক্কা শপিং মল' (Mokka Shopping Mall, Islamic Holy City's name)

Differences in sources of authority shown on signs indicate the fundamentally different forms of social organization across class divisions. In developed areas, signs are designed

maintaining international standards, following the rules of state institutions, and integrating corporate brands. These sources imply universal legitimacy requiring no local explanation. In contrast, signs in underdeveloped areas depend on immediate and personal authorities, including mosques, community organisations, and individual reputations, whose legitimacy derives from local relationships and shared values. This contrast suggests a deeper social reality. Residents of elite areas are more connected to formal state structures and international systems, while residents of underdeveloped areas rely on informal community networks. The religious and neighbourhood institutions play a significant governing role in it, filling the gaps created by limited state presence. As a result, the linguistic landscape locates not only linguistic differences, but also reveals political geographies; wherein one has an orientation towards distant formal power and the other has an orientation towards community authority.

4.4. Commercial Branding and Target Audiences

Different branding strategies are followed by restaurants, house names, and advertisements, reflecting class differences. Establishments in elite areas have used cosmopolitan branding, lifestyle-oriented messages, and corporate or franchise identities. Conversely, business establishments in working-class areas have relied especially on emotional appeal, personal names, references to traditional heritage, and clear price descriptions.

Names of the residents reveal these differences in the most clear manner. ‘Regency Radiance’ has expressed itself through abstract vocabulary with royal and luxury associations (Fig 4.5). The word ‘Regency’ means the British Regency period which is related to architectural elegance, refined taste, and aristocratic culture. In order to understand this reference, one

requires a certain level of knowledge. ‘Radiance’ suggests brightness, beauty, and a sense of positivity, relying mainly on abstract aesthetic meaning instead of concrete description. The alliterative pattern of the two words creates a sense of linguistic creativity and sophistication.

On the other hand, a resident in Moghbazar named ‘জোবেদা কুঞ্জ’ (Jobeda Kunja) has used a personal name for the readers to identify the household, creating a sense of personal identity and connection (Fig 4.8). The inclusion of the Arabic *Bismillah* indicates to Islamic religious practices of the residents, while the year of establishment (‘স্থাপিত: ১৯৯৩’) highlights longevity and legitimacy. This technique differs fundamentally from elite abstract names like ‘Regency Radiance’ which exclude personal identity in order to favor aesthetic branding. Working-class signage communicates personal identity, while elite residential signs present the residence as an example of luxurious and refined space. This difference suggests class-based values: working-class identity embraces personal reputation and religious belonging, while identity of the elite residents is shaped by cosmopolitan cultural references and aesthetic abstractions.

The use of Italian or Spanish linguistic expressions in ‘Ventura Artista’ further exemplifies cosmopolitan branding. Here, the word ‘Ventura’ means ‘fortune’ or ‘adventure’, while the word ‘Artista’ means ‘artist’. It hints at the sign being associated with European cultural associations and artistic sophistication. These foreign language choices suggest what Bourdieu describes as ‘distinction’, since they show elite taste by referring to European high culture. On the other hand, working-class signs seldom have foreign names in them, except for practical English terms like ‘TO-LET’ or transliteration of commercial terms like ‘Shopping Mall’.

Advertisements reveal clear differences in the process of describing space and location. Advertisement in a developed area like Dhanmondi has used international measurement standards, for instance, ‘4 Bed-3660 sft’, including brand names like ‘SOUTH BREEZE’ (Fig 4.31). Detailed floor and size information are provided in commercial space rental signs. For example, ‘11 Floor/ Ground Floor/ 4,879 SFT/ 3,666 SFT’ in Bailey Road is presented in professionally printed yellow and black vinyl (Fig 4.32). On the contrary, rental signs in working-class areas do not follow standardized measurements. Instead of it, they have relied on functional descriptions and local landmarks, for instance, ‘দোকান/অফিস/গোড়াউন ভাড়া হবে’ (Shop/Office/Godown for rent), located in Nadda Morol Bazar (Fig 4.33). Seat-rental ‘সীট ভাড়া হবে’ advertisement in Central Road targets job-holder/students (‘চাকুরিজীবী/ছাত্র’), emphasizing living conditions such as ‘সুন্দর ও মনোরম পরিবেশ’ (beautiful and pleasant environment), while identifying locations through nearby educational institutions, such as ‘আইডিয়াল কলেজ সংলগ্ন’ (adjacent to Ideal College) (Fig 4.34). These differences between terms like ‘apartment’, ‘floor numbers’ and ‘square feet’ on one hand, and ‘seat’, local landmarks, and environmental details on the other hand, suggests sharp economic inequality. Elite advertisements promote large private apartments with multiple bedrooms, while working-class advertisements refer to shared living spaces and culture of renting beds within crowded accommodations.



Fig 4.31. Apartment Sale in Dhanmondi
(International Measurement, Corporate Branding)



Fig 4.32. Commercial Space Rental
(Floor Numbers, SFT measurements)



Fig 4.33. Shop/Office/Godown Rental

In Nadda (Landmark-based address, no measurements)

Fig 4.34. Seat Rental in Central Road

(Target audience explicit, environment emphasized)

Strategies of branding show that elite and working-class businesses target very different audiences with different expectations. Elite branding attempts to address educated customers who value abstract aesthetic references, comprehend foreign vocabulary, and have the required knowledge to interpret sophisticated meanings. In contrast, branding in underdeveloped areas targets practical customers who require clear and useful information, such as available dishes, prices, the owner's reputation, and detailed descriptions of locations through familiar landmarks. The distinction between 'Regency Radiance' and 'মায়ের দোয়া বিরিয়ানী হাউজ' is therefore not merely linguistic but also conceptual. Elite branding incorporates cultural sophistication in order to grab the attention of status-oriented customers, while working-class branding builds credibility through personal connection and transparency for everyday customers. These differing styles demonstrate how social inequality decides not only what businesses will communicate, but also how they will understand and relate to their audiences.

4.5. Visual Hierarchies in Multilingual Signage

Where multilingual signs are present, visual designs have consistently given priority to certain languages through placement, size, colour intensity, and the amount of information provided. The analysis sheds light on clear and repeated hierarchies, even when more than one language appears on the same sign.

The ‘Chilis’ restaurant sign in Dhanmondi shows a clear visual hierarchy. The word ‘Chilis’ has been displayed in bright red LED letters placed at the top and centre of the sign, while the Bengali transliteration ‘চিলিস’ appears above it in smaller, light blue LED letters (Fig 4.35). English has been given significant importance through larger size, stronger colour intensity, and central placement, while Bengali has been placed in a secondary position, although both languages are included in the sign. A similar pattern of visual hierarchy appears in a bilingual ‘NO PARKING’ sign in Gulshan. The command ‘NO PARKING’ in English has been displayed prominently in large red letters, while Bengali appears in the below in smaller text, indicating the issuing authority as ‘ট্রাফিক শুল্লান বিভাগ/ ঢাকা মেট্রোপলিটন পুলিশ, ঢাকা’ (Traffic Control Division, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Dhaka). This hierarchy where English has been used for instructions that the public must follow and Bengali has been used for bureaucratic purposes is a common factor across official signage (Fig 4.36).



Fig 4.35. ‘চিলিস’ (*Chilis*, English large red LED, Bengali smaller blue LED)



Fig 4.36. No Parking (*English Directive prominent, Bengali subtitle*)

Shopping complexes have revealed a clear three-tier linguistic hierarchy. In elite areas like Dhanmondi, English words appear in English script, as observed in ‘Rapa Plaza’, which has designed the sign using premium LED neon lights (Fig 4.17). In upper-middle class areas like Bailey Road, English words have been written in Bengali script, as in ‘ইনফিনিটি মেগামল’ (Infinity Megamall), where linguistic expressions in English are transliterated into Bengali letters (Fig 4.18). In working-class areas like New Market, signs have included Bengali or Islamic names combined with limited borrowed retail terms. For example, ‘মক্কা শপিং মল’ (Mokka Shopping Mall) combines the name of a holy city with the borrowed retail term ‘শপিং মল’ (shopping mall) (Fig 4.28). ‘গাউছিয়া মার্কেট’ also integrates the traditional term ‘মার্কেট’ (market) (Fig 4.29). Through these observations, it is clear that elite establishments incorporate English in English scripts in order for signalling full cosmopolitan identity, while upper-middle class establishments use English vocabulary in Bengali script to convey aspiration, and working-class establishments depend mainly on Bengali or Islamic vocabulary with selective borrowing.

Visual hierarchies in multilingual signs reveal that apparent inclusion can still involve exclusion. Token inclusion is practiced when signs include both English and Bengali but display English in larger, brighter, and more central positions while placing Bengali in smaller and less visible areas. Although Bengali is formally present, English is clearly prioritised. This visual organization of these linguistic features provides subtle yet powerful messages regarding which language and which speakers are considered important. Economic aspiration is revealed through script choices while analysing the three-level pattern in shopping complexes’ signs. Elite establishments are seen confidently using English in English script, middle-class establishments indicate aspiration through using English words in Bengali script, while working-class business

establishments maintain Bengali or Islamic identities with an amalgamation of selectively borrowed commercial terms. These patterns prove that multilingualism itself is socially stratified. Not all bilingual signs prioritize the languages equally; rather visual design determines which languages will receive real recognition and which ones will only get symbolic acknowledgment.

4.6. Additional Observations Across Sign Categories

Along with the five main themes, additional patterns have appeared across different sign categories. Firstly, retail terms present a clear hierarchy. Business establishments in elite areas use the term ‘Plaza’, reflecting international influence. In order to indicate regional aspirations, upper-middle class establishments use ‘মেগামল’ (Megamall). Commercial establishments in working-class areas use ‘শপিং মল’ (Shopping Mall) and ‘মার্কেট’ (Market) to borrow prestige and to emphasize traditional and functional purposes. Secondly, signs in underdeveloped areas have shown temporal and material layering. In these urban spaces, newer signs identifying religious authority, for instance ‘ধীরে চলুন’ (Go Slowly) sign in Moghbazar issued by mosques, are placed over older advertisements for English coaching centres, such as ‘SPOKEN ENGLISH/ The Smart Way’. This technique of overlapping suggests changes in linguistic and economic priorities over time (Fig. 4.37).



Fig 4.37. Layered Sign (Religious authority over English coaching ads)

Measurement systems have also reflected social class differences. Elite signs have used international standards, such as SFT (square feet), while working-class advertisements have provided only functional descriptions without standardized measurements. Patterns of providing contact details have also differed. Elite signs usually display corporate branding and a professional contact number, whereas working-class advertisements have often listed multiple phone numbers, suggesting individual ownership. Differences in target audience representation have also been evident. Elite signs, assuming English literacy, do not provide explanations, while signs in underdeveloped areas clearly identify their intended audience, for instance ‘চাকুরিজীবী’ (job-holders), ‘ছাত্র’ (students), ‘মুসল্লী’ (worshipper), and emphasize qualities like ‘সুন্দর ও মনোরম পরিবেশ’ (pleasant environment) or ‘ঐতিহ্যবাহী’ (traditional).

Micro-level segregation within developed areas has been identified as an important finding. The Bengali-dominant, hand-painted sign of ‘কালচাঁদপুর দাখিল মাদ্রাসা ও এতিমখানা’ (Kalachandpur Dakhil Madrasah & Orphanage) reveals the presence of working-class enclaves that are not present in the official documentation, but becomes clear through linguistic landscape analysis (Fig 4.4). It implies that examining linguistic landscapes can identify patterns of spatial inequality at a finer level than formal administrative categories.

The cross-cutting observations describe how linguistic inequality functions through several connected systems; not only through language choice but also through retail terms, measurement patterns, contact details, and explicit audience targeting. The shift from labels such as ‘Plaza’ to ‘Market’ shows broader differences in how commerce and identity are defined. The layering of signs, where religious authority messages are placed over older English coaching advertisements, show changing power relations, where community institutions reclaim spaces once shaped by English-oriented aspirations. The identification of micro-level segregation within officially developed areas further demonstrates that linguistic landscape analysis can shed light on forms of inequality that are not visible in standard official classifications. On the whole, these patterns prove that signs operate as complex social texts. They communicate not only linguistic choices, but also layers of class distinction, spatial organization, and power dynamics that shape everyday urban life, often in ways that residents experience without consciously observing.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The chapter explains the five thematic findings incorporating the theoretical frameworks discussed in the Literature Review. This interpretation applies Dell Hymes's SPEAKING model to examine signs as situated communicative events, Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal framework to analyse visual hierarchies, and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital to comprehend language as a marker of social class. Along with these theories, it draws on Blommaert's theory of scope and Pennycook and Otsuji's concept of metrolingualism to explain spatial and linguistic inequality. This discussion addresses research question 2: how linguistic landscape patterns both reflect and construct socioeconomic inequality in Dhaka's urban space.

5.1. Language Choice and the Construction of Spatial Boundaries

The clear pattern of English dominance in developed areas and Bengali dominance in underdeveloped areas points towards Bourdieu's (1989) description of linguistic capital that reproduces social class boundaries. Bourdieu explains legitimate language's role as 'symbolic capital' which provides social status and access to power. The people who possess valued linguistic forms gain advantages, while those who do not possess it fall under structurally disadvantaged groups. In Dhaka's linguistic landscape, English functions in the same way as symbolic capital, marking elite places and restricting access to those who have English literacy.

House names most perfectly show how language choice creates symbolic boundaries that express social class. 'Regency Radiance', an English-only house name observed in Gulshan, with

professional metal engraving, exemplifies what Bourdieu describes as the conversion of economic capital to symbolic capital. Financial resources make high-quality materials affordable, while English branding produces a cosmopolitan identity. The words themselves convey elitism where ‘Regency’ suggests British Royal elegance, and ‘Radiance’ indicates refinement and beauty. The use of language in this sign is not driven by the needs of practical communication, since house names do not need to be written in English in a Bengali-speaking context. Instead, the linguistic choice serves a symbolic function by highlighting the connection to global elite cultures rather than to local community life. In the same way, ‘Ventura Artista’ in Dhanmondi incorporates Italian or Spanish vocabulary to imply European cosmopolitanism. It reflects what Bourdieu defines as ‘distinction’, where wire identity is shaped through references to foreign and high-status cultural forms.

Applying Hymes’s (1974) SPEAKING model makes it easier to explain how ‘Regency Radiance’ acts as a communicative event that expresses social class. The ‘Setting’, an elite residential area in Gulshan, connects with the ‘Participants’, where wealthy homeowners act as sign producers and cosmopolitan visitors are the intended readers. Within this context, English-only naming may appear appropriate for elite social circles, while excluding Bengali-speaking working-class visitors, such as domestic workers or delivery personnel, who must navigate addresses written in a language they are not proficient in. The ‘Ends’ of the sign go beyond simple identification. The English naming pattern performs cosmopolitan distinction, pointing to the fact that the residents see themselves as part of global culture. The ‘Key’, expressed through stylized cursive letters and raised three dimensional metal design, conveys the message of aesthetic refinement being valued more than practical clarity. The ‘Instrumentalities’

include the exclusive use of English and standardized formats of mentioning addresses such as ‘HOUSE-01, Road 36, Gulshan’. It further marks the residence as a part of the elite social network where English proficiency is assumed prerequisite. Finally, the ‘Norms’ of interpretation differ across different groups; elite residents may identify the sign as elegant and refined, while working-class Bengali speakers may experience it as a form of exclusionary signaling.

Educational institutions also demonstrate how symbolic capital operates through language. ‘Green Gems International School’ in Dhanmondi, with its English-only tagline ‘Providing the best start in life for your child since 1991’, performs what Bourdieu labels as ‘symbolic violence’. It presents English-medium education as naturally superior, hiding the economic barriers that limit access to this sort of education. This interpretation can be backed by Sultana’s (2014) findings. She finds that only 10% of Bangladeshi students study at English-medium schools, while more than 88.7% receive education in Bengali-medium schools. Her findings observe that these elite English-medium schools are primarily located in Gulshan, Banani and Dhanmondi. These are the same areas where this study has identified signage with English dominance. This spatial concentration gives birth to linguistic territories wherein English claims elite neighbourhoods as cosmopolitan spaces. In this process, Bengali marks working-class areas as locally rooted communities that are largely excluded from those cosmopolitan networks.

In contrast, Bengali-dominant signs in underdeveloped areas suggest exclusion from English-medium networks and the symbolic capital associated with them. Differences are

observed in material quality, such as hand-painted signs on corrugated metal in comparison to professionally engraved metal signs, adding material disadvantage to symbolic exclusion. It reflects what Blommaert (2013) defines as the ‘material dimension’ of sociolinguistic inequality. How English becomes normalised as a marker of cosmopolitan sophistication is an evidence of Bourdieu’s idea of ‘world-making’ power. This process aligns well with Pennycook and Otsuji’s (2015) way of viewing cities as “contested” spaces, where language operates as “instruments of claiming, contesting, and negotiating urban space” (p. 100). These spatial and linguistic boundaries are often more effective than formal segregation as they seem to be natural aesthetic choices rather than to be imposed forms of inequality.

5.2. Multimodal Hierarchies and Visual Construction of Inequality

When multilingual signs are used, visual designs have consistently prioritised English, reflecting what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) describe as ‘Information Value’, ‘Salience’ and ‘Framing’. The ‘চিলিস’ (Chilis) restaurant’s sign has placed English in large, bright red LED letters at the top and center, while positioning Bengali transliteration in smaller, light blue LED letters. It illustrates the hierarchy presented through Information Value (placement of the elements in a multifaceted composition). Elements that have been placed at the top and center carry greater importance. The use of bright red for English and pale blue for Bengali also produces differences in Salience, since stronger colours attract more attention, although both languages are present on the sign.

This process of visual subordination reflects what Blommaert (2013) explains as the difference between formal multilingualism, where multiple languages are visible, and real

accessibility, where some languages carry more meaning and reach than the others do.

Blommaert's concept of scope, described as "the social reach of a sign implying who is included and who is excluded", helps interpret how visual hierarchies create different target audiences. In the 'চিলিস' (Chilis) sign in Dhanmondi, English has a wider scope, having the power to address cosmopolitan consumers, while Bengali has a limited scope, mainly serving people from local communities who require transliteration.

The three-level pattern observed in shopping complexes' signs- English in English script ('Rapa Plaza'), English words written in Bengali script ('ইনফিনিটি মেগামল'/Infinity Megamall) and Bengali or Islamic words combined with borrowed commercial terms (মক্কা শপিং মল/Mokka Shopping Mall), exemplifies what Blommaert (2013) describes as 'truncated repertoires' in socially stratified multilingual settings. Commercial establishments in developed areas have access to full English repertoires, middle-class establishments display partial English repertoires that require Bengali script, and the commercial establishments in underdeveloped urban spaces mainly use Bengali or Islamic linguistic resources with limited borrowing. This pattern closely suggests differences in educational access. English-medium education enables full English repertoires, while Bengali-medium education results in limited repertoires restricted to some common borrowed linguistic expressions. At this point, Byean's (2015) description of English carrying "indexical prestige as symbolic capital" becomes relevant to Dhaka's context (p. 875). English indicates social class position irrespective of communicative need and functions, acting mainly as a symbolic marker rather than a practical language choice.

5.3. Authority, Authenticity, and Religious Geography

The different sources of authority have been observed in cautionary signs. International standards and state institutions in developed areas, and community groups and religious authorities in underdeveloped areas, reveal competing forms of spatial regulation in contested urban spaces. The ‘UNDER CONSTRUCTION SITE/ KEEP SAFE DISTANCE’ sign, entirely written in English using international safety symbols, shows what Backhaus (2007) describes as linguistic landscapes being “consciously shaped and controlled by” institutional structures (p. 170). The absence of Bengali translation, despite the sign serving public safety purposes, exemplifies what Blommaert (2013) calls a narrowing of ‘scope’. The sign basically targets cosmopolitan professionals having readability in English rather than people who only have literacy in Bengali, thereby reproducing potential risk through linguistic exclusion from essential safety information.

On the other hand, the sign ‘ধীরে চলুন সামনে মসজিদ ও মাদ্রাসা’ in Moghbazar (Go slowly, mosque and madrasa are ahead), evoking religious authority, illustrates Pennycook and Otsuji’s concept of language as a spatial resource. The use of Bengali along with references to Islamic religious institutions marks the street as a space regulated by the local religious community. The message ‘মুসল্লীদের রাস্তা পারাপারে সহযোগিতা করুন’ (Help worshippers cross the road) shows what Hymes (1974) defines as shared norms of interpretation, where readers comprehend that mosques are sacred places requiring care and protection, and where communal responsibilities are valued. This approach strongly differs from the communal norms found in the developed areas, which mainly depend on impersonal state authority or international standards rather than community-based regulation.

Various language choices made by religious institutions reveal competing ideas of authenticity in Islamic practice in Bangladesh. The use of English-only signs at ‘Gulshan Society Jame Masjid’ contrasts with Bengali-dominant sign of ‘বায়তুল করিম জামে মসজিদ’ (Baitul Karim Jame Masjid) in Azimpur, although both are located in areas that fall under developed urban spaces according to official documentation. Signs consisting of English-only linguistic expressions indicate a form of cosmopolitan Islam that aligns with global professional identities, while Bengali-dominant signage focuses on traditional religious authenticity. A similar type of contrast has been observed in commercial spaces. Working-class shopping complexes often use Islamic names, for instance ‘মক্কা শপিং মল’ (Mokka Shopping Mall) or ‘গাউছিয়া মার্কেট’ (Gausiya Market), while developed areas prioritize secular brand names such as ‘Rapa’, ‘Infinity’, and ‘AURA’. This pattern shows spatial and religious geography in which Islamic naming conventions challenge erotic commercial identities by placing economic activity within moral and religious frameworks. On the whole, the linguistic landscape represents contrasting visions of urban modern life: religious versus secular, and community-driven versus individualistic.

5.4. Strategies of Branding and the Semiotics of Class Distinction

House names, signs of restaurants, and beauty parlours’ branding reflect what Bourdieu (1989) labels as ‘habitus’, implying the shared taste and dispositions that distinguish social classes. Establishments in developed areas incorporate abstract and cosmopolitan names such as ‘Regency Radiance’, ‘Ventura Artista’ and ‘AURA’. On the contrary, working-class commercial establishments often use emotional linguistic expressions, such as ‘মায়ের দোয়া’ (mother’s blessing), or personal names like ‘মৌসুমি’ (mousumi). This difference exemplifies Bourdieu’s concept of distinction. Branding in elite areas emphasizes impersonal aesthetic styles that

indicate cultural sophistication, while working-class branding strategies include personal and emotional connections that highlight community belonging.

‘Regency Radiance’ shows elite ‘habitus’ through its use of alliteration, creating phonetic elegance through vocabulary that requires cultural knowledge to understand. The term ‘Regency’ refers to a British period associated with refinement, while ‘Radiance’ means beauty integrated with brilliance. It reveals how symbolic capital functions, as its value relies on being recombined by people who already possess the cultural capital. ‘Ventura Artista’, in the same way, reflects European cultural sophistication by using Italian or Spanish words. In commercial branding, a comparable pattern has been noticed. ‘Gloria Jean’s Coffee’ uses promotional phrases like ‘AWAKEN YOUR SENSES’ and ‘AMP UP YOUR PRODUCTIVITY’, that indicate lifestyle marketing aimed at cosmopolitan professionals. On the contrary, ‘মায়ের দোয়া বিরিয়ানী হাউজ’ (Mayer Dowa Biryani House) emphasize on practical and concrete information, including specific dishes, the owner’s name, claims of traditional food heritage, clearly displayed prices. Applying Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) concept of ‘Information Value’, it is observed that working-class signs place essential information, such as food items, prices, and halal status, at the center, while restaurants’ signs in elite areas prioritize abstract lifestyle messages over practical details.

The example of ‘লাবণ্য বিউটি পার্লর’ (Lavanya Beauty Parlor), which prominently advertises air-conditioning system despite using Bengali-only signage pattern, challenges the one directional idea that English alone signals prestige. While English operates as symbolic capital in developed areas, working-class businesses create others forms of signaling prestige through

material facilities, such as ‘শীতাতপ নিয়ন্ত্রিত’ (air-conditioned), and through the use of high-register Bengali words, for instance, ‘লাবণ্য’ (Lavanya), a quite literary and poetic term. It reflects Blommaert’s (2013) concept of ‘multiple centres’, where different linguistic and material resources carry prestige in varied social settings. Although English functions as a prestige code in elite urban spaces, in working-class contexts, refined use of Bengali language combined with material amenities creates local hierarchies. The ways of treating genders also highlight these differences. Explicit gender segregation, such as signs using ‘শুধুমাত্র মহিলাদের জন্য’ (Only for women), are observed mainly in working-class neighbourhoods, where social norms are strictly followed. Conversely, elite establishments seldom show gender exclusivity, presenting unmarked spaces that perform a cosmopolitan and liberal identity. These distinctions reveal how class shapes not only language and material choices, but also social values presented through signage.

5.5. Linguistic Landscapes as Indicators of Spatial Inequality

The most significant theoretical finding of this study is the evident link between Islam’s (1996) mapping of spatial inequality and the thematic patterns found while analysing the linguistic landscape. Islam presents Dhaka as an “unfairly structured city”, where 70% of the entire population live on 20% of the land, while 30% of the population are in control of 80% of the land (p. 105). He also sheds light on the strong density differences, with elite areas having 20 to 100 persons per acre and bustees (temporary settlements) having 1,000 to 2,500 persons per acre.

In this study, it is found that linguistic inequality mirrors spatial inequality. Signs with English dominance are concentrated in low-density elite areas, while signs having Bengali dominance are concentrated in high-density underdeveloped areas. This comparative finding suggests that

linguistic landscape analysis can be of great benefit to identify power dynamics behind urban multilingualism. In this way, this study addresses Blommaert's argument that research often fails to delve deeper into the power relations that produce linguistic diversity (p. 2). By placing language use onto spatial inequality, linguistic landscape analysis shows how power relations shape language distribution in the city.

The finding of micro-level segregation, shown through ‘কালচাঁদপুর দাখিল মাদ্রাসা ও প্রতিমখানা’ (Kalachandpur Dakhil Madrasah & Orphanage), using hand-painted and Bengali-dominant signs within the elite territory of Gulshan, puts emphasis on the value of linguistic landscape analysis as a diagnostic tool to locate inequality at a finer scale than official area classifications. Islam's (1996) categories indicate inequality at the neighbourhood level, but linguistic landscapes show smaller sub-neighbourhood enclaves which are not visible in accumulated spatial data. It reflects Pennycook and Otsuji's (2015) argument for analysing ‘multilingualism from below’, where everyday language interactions reveal social distinctions that top-down classifications often overlook. By using Hymes's ‘Norms’ component from the SPEAKING model, it is understood how linguistic landscapes create territorial expectations. The elite areas focus on English literacy, the use of international measurement systems such as SFT, and familiarity with corporate branding techniques. On the other side, working-class areas prefer Bengali literacy, navigation through local landmarks, reliance on personal reputation, and explicit statements in order to emphasize quality and establish credibility. According to Saville-Troike (2003), these different norms create separate “speech communities” (p. 15). Despite elite and working-class residents sharing the same urban space, they engage in distinct sociolinguistic communities that have different communicative expectations.

Pennycook and Otsuji's (2015) concept of considering languages as "instruments of claiming, contesting, and negotiating urban spaces" provides a useful framework to comprehend these patterns. English dominant signs claim developed neighbourhoods as cosmopolitan spaces related to global networks. Names such as 'Regency Radiance' and 'Ventura Artista' can easily appear in cities like London or Dubai, making areas like Gulshan as a part of that global elite landscape rather than a locally grounded Bangladeshi urban space. Conversely, signs having Bengali dominance claim working-class areas as locally rooted community spaces. Signs, for example, 'মায়ের দোয়া বিরিয়ানী হাউজ' (implying mother's blessing) and 'মক্কা শপিং মল' (Mokka/Mecca shopping mall) position commercial activity in Bengali language and Islamic cultural geography. This contestation occurs through visual presence in public spaces. English signs in developed areas can create symbolic exclusion by restricting access for Bengali-only readers, while signs with Bengali dominance in underdeveloped areas can be regarded as a form of symbolic resistance that rejects English-focused cosmopolitan identity.

5.6. Integration of Theories and Implications

This analysis sheds light on the fact that linguistic landscape patterns do not merely reflect existing social inequality; it also actively helps in creating and maintaining what Bourdieu (1989) calls 'symbolic power', the ability to structure how social reality is perceived. By filling developed areas with English signs and underdeveloped areas with Bengali signs, Dhaka's linguistic landscape reveals class hierarchy as a difference in language use. In this process, structural inequality presents itself as cultural variation rather than as political and economic domination. Hymes's (1974) SPEAKING model backs the explanation of signs operating as full

communicative events that express class-based norms. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal research explains how visual design produces hierarchies, marginalising Bengali even when signs appear bilingual. Blommaert's (2013) concept of scope interprets how languages differ in social reach throughout spaces, connecting language use directly to spatial inequality. Pennycook and Otsuji's (2015) concept of contested city further demonstrates linguistic landscapes as sites where urban spaces and identity, being intertwined with each other, are constantly negotiated. Altogether, these frameworks help build a systematic understanding of how Dhaka's linguistic landscape both suggests and reinforces the 'unfairly structured city', as described by Islam (1996). In reality, spatial inequality, linguistic inequality, and socioeconomic inequality are closely connected with one another, reproducing class divisions in the city.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1. Summary of Findings

This study has explored how linguistic landscape patterns in socioeconomically distinct areas of Dhaka both reflect and actively shape urban inequality. Using thematic analysis of signs from developed areas (Gulshan, Dhamondi, Bailey Road) and underdeveloped areas (Hajaribag, Rayerbazar, Nadda), this research finds clear patterns of linguistic stratification that closely match with spatial inequality. The analysis has located five themes: language hierarchy across spatial class divisions, material quality as a marker of social class, sources of authority and religious geography, breeding strategies and target audience, and visual hierarchies in multilingual signs.

The findings reveal that Dhaka's linguistic landscape operates as what Bourdieu (1989) defines as symbolic violence, by making class hierarchies seem natural through everyday features of the urban environment that residents often come across without conscious awareness. English-dominant signage appears in low-density elite areas (20 to 100 persons per acre) and is characterized by high-quality materials such as LED or neon lighting, professional printing, and metal engraving, alongside cosmopolitan branding and maintaining international standards. Conversely, Bengali-dominant signage appears in high-density working-class areas (1,000-2,500 people per acre) and are typically displayed as hand-painted signs on corrugated metal or deteriorating walls, with personal or emotional branding and references to community organizations and religious institutions. This important alignment between Islam's (1996) mapping of spatial inequality and these linguistic patterns imply that linguistic exclusion reinforces material exclusion. As a result, residents living in underdeveloped areas experience

layered disadvantages, facing not only economic hardship but also symbolic marginalization through language in public spaces.

Critically, the study finds that even when signs are multilingual or bilingual, visual design consistently prioritizes English. English appears in larger fonts, brighter colors, central positions, and with proper information, while Bengali is placed in secondary positions and often carries limited content. This pattern suggests what Blommaert (2013) explains as the difference between formal multilingualism, where multiple languages are present, and real accessibility, where some languages assume greater communicative value than others. In this way, Dhaka's linguistic landscape creates what Sultana (2014) identifies in education as a form of "sociolinguistic apartheid", in which access to English is a determining factor of spatial belonging and symbolic inclusion in the city.

6.2. Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to linguistic landscape studies by shedding light on how different theoretical frameworks help explain several aspects of spatial and linguistic inequality. Hymes's (1974) SPEAKING model has been applied to show how signs operate as complete communicative events. In this context, 'Setting' refers to developed and underdeveloped neighbourhoods, 'Participants' imply elite and working-class sign makers and audiences, and 'Ends' differs between signaling prestige and serving practical communicative purposes. The 'Key' reflects either a direct cosmopolitan or traditional tone, 'Instrumentalities' include the use of English or Bengali, 'Norms' are shaped by either international standards or local community authority, and 'Genre' defines the type of the sign (commercial, institutional or residential).

Applying the SPEAKING model in this way extends this study's contribution beyond spoken interaction to visual and spatial contexts. This application strategy demonstrates its value for analysing how physical environments communicate social class differences and reproduce social hierarchies.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of multimodality explains how 'Information Value' (spatial placement), 'Salience' (visual emphasis through size and colour), and Framing (the visual connection or separation of elements) create clear hierarchies, despite signs appearing multilingual. The analysis of the current study reveals that English is generally placed at the top or central positions, displayed in bright and saturated colours, providing complete information. On the contrary, Bengali is often positioned at the margins, shown in lighter colours, and given limited amounts of content. These findings prove that visual design choices are not neutral or entirely aesthetic. Instead, they function carrying meaning social actions that determine which languages and which communities will receive actual visibility and recognition, and which are included only in a symbolic manner.

Bourdieu's (1989) concept of symbolic capital is important to understand why English dominates elite spaces despite Bangladesh's constitutional status of Bengali as the only state language. In these contexts, English acts less as a partial means of communication and more as a symbolic capital that indicates distinction and access to cosmopolitan networks. Elite establishments invest significantly in producing English signage to align with global and international spheres. Conversely, working-class establishments often have limited access to this kind of symbolic capital or intentionally prefer alternative ways to signal status by using

high-register Bengali vocabulary, highlighting material features like air-conditioning, or employing Islamic names to put emphasis on religious authenticity over secular cosmopolitan identity.

Blommaert's (2013) concept of 'scope', combined with Pennycook and Otsuji's (2015) framework of metrolingualism, helps interpret how linguistic landscapes function as territorial claims in contested urban spaces. The English-dominant signage pattern limits its scope to English-educated elites and shows elite neighbourhoods as cosmopolitan areas connected to global networks. In contrast, Bengali-dominant signage patterns assume a wider scope, addressing residents regardless of educational background and marking working-class neighbourhoods as locally grounded community spaces. Because of these contrast practices, linguistic choice becomes more than a mere means of communication. It turns into a political statement regarding belonging and exclusion, exemplifying how Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) define languages as "instruments of claiming, contesting and negotiating urban space" (p. 100).

By combining all these theories, the study proves that no single approach can fully explain inequality in the linguistic landscape. The SPEAKING model describes how signs function as communicative events, multimodal analysis shows visual hierarchies, Bourdieu's theory sheds light on the role of symbolic capital, and Blommaert's/ Pennycook and Otsuji's ideas address spatial contestation. Together, these frameworks show that Dhaka's linguistic landscape both reflect existing inequality, since elite areas have greater resources to produce high-quality signs, and actively creates a new form of inequality, as English-dominant signs restrict access for Bengali-only speakers and affect feelings of belonging. This dual role of

reflection and construction defines linguistic landscapes as significant sites to comprehend how social inequality is reproduced through everyday linguistic features of the urban environment.

6.3. Methodological Contributions

Methodologically, this research contributes to qualitative analysis in linguistic landscape studies by applying Braun and Clarke's (2006) inductive thematic analytical approach, in which themes emerge from the data instead of being shaped by predefined coding categories. This approach reveals how patterns that may remain unnoticed in quantitative frequency counts can be identified through close and interpretive analysis. For instance, the observation that some working-class establishments invest considerable amounts in LED signage on structurally deteriorating buildings, prioritising public identity over infrastructural maintenance, have emerged inductively from the data. Such cultural nuances are difficult to capture through quantitative analysis alone.

This study's combination in using Islam's (1996) systemic urban classification with linguistic landscape analysis provides a useful model for future research. Instead of selecting areas prioritising convenience or impression, this study applies clear criteria, such as population density, infrastructural quality, housing permanence, and land tenure, to aid reliable comparison across socioeconomic contexts. This approach strengthens claims regarding how linguistic patterns connect to class-based spatial inequality. The identification of micro-level segregation within officially developed areas, revealed by Bengali-dominant signage in working-class enclaves inside elite Gulshan, further demonstrates the significance of linguistic landscape analysis. These patterns are not present in the official area classifications; but they become clear

through close analysis of public signs. It suggests that linguistic landscape research can operate as a diagnostic tool to identify fine-grained urban inequality, with potential relevance for urban planning policy-making.

However, this study also locates methodological limitations that point to directions for future research. Depending only photographic evidence implies that the decision making processes behind linguistic choices remain unclear. For example, it is not explored why some mosques in elite areas use only English signs while others prefer Bengali-dominant signs. It is also uncertain whether sign makers consciously choose languages to reflect social status, or whether these choices signal unconscious habits. In the same way, it remains unspecified whether working-class businesses intentionally avoid English or they simply lack access to it. Addressing these questions would demand an ethnographic approach that combines visual analysis with interviews of sign producers, following Papen's (2012) method of integrating sign photography with stakeholder perspectives.

6.4. Practical Implications

The findings have important implications for designing language policy and urban planning in Bangladesh and other postcolonial settings. Firstly, policymakers need to acknowledge that constitutional language policies alone cannot achieve linguistic justice when everyday practices create separate linguistic spaces. Despite Bengali being the only state language in the constitution, English-dominant elite areas exist in practice, creating a form of linguistic distinction that can be more influential than official policies. Dealing with such

situations requires moving beyond symbolic constitutional statements towards practical measures that ensure public signage is accessible to all language users.

Secondly, urban planners should consider linguistic landscapes as an important part of infrastructure that affects spatial equality. Just as the absence of paved roads or electricity limits access to urban resources in working-class neighbourhoods, English-only signs can exclude Bengali-speaking residents from accessing services, navigating public spaces, and feeling a sense of belonging. Planning regulations could therefore require multilingual signs in places serving the public, especially for safety-related details which are currently displayed only in English despite being intended for Bengali-speaking workers.

Thirdly, education policymakers need to address how linguistic inequality across urban areas contributes to reinforcing educational inequality. When elite neighbourhoods are filled with English signs and underdeveloped neighbourhoods display predominantly Bengali signs, children experience quite different levels of linguistic exposure outside schools. Children growing up in areas like Gulshan come across English regularly in their everyday environment, while children in areas like Hajaribag do not. The difference in environmental exposure establishes English as a natural part of elite life even before children enter schools, which are already divided by medium of instruction.

Finally, the finding that establishments in underdeveloped areas create alternative forms of signaling prestige through high-register Bengali, material investment, or Islamic authenticity suggests possibilities for resistance. Rather than fully accepting English dominance, communities

draw value from Bengali literary language, highlight material facilities, or place commercial activity with moral and religious frameworks. Cultural policies that recognise and support these alternative forms of expressing prestige can help in challenging the exclusive association of symbolic capital with English.

6.5. Limitations

Several limitations should be considered while interpreting the findings of this study. The relatively small sample size of 32 photographs across eight categories puts emphasis on the depth of analysis rather than breadth, allowing detailed interpretation but limiting statistical generalisation. The study mainly focuses on Bangla/English bilingualism and does not examine other languages that may appear in Dhaka's linguistic landscape, such as Arabic, Japanese, Korean, or other indigenous languages, meaning that some aspects of linguistic diversity are not captured. Additionally, the data represent a single time period (September-November, 2025), providing a snapshot of current patterns without explaining how linguistic landscapes change over time. Finally, the focus on Dhaka limits the extent to which the findings can be applied to other urban spaces in Bangladesh or to postcolonial urban contexts shaped by varied social and economic conditions.

Most importantly, relying only on photographic documentation means that the intentions of sign makers and the interpretations of readers are not actually examined. It remains unclear whether Bengali-speaking residents feel excluded by English-dominant signs or whether they navigate the multilingual environments in practical ways. It has also not been explored whether the elites having proficiency in English consciously use language or whether these choices

reflect unconscious habits. Answering these questions would require additional methods beyond those used in this study.

6.6. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research can address these limitations in multiple ways. Firstly, large-scale quantitative studies can examine whether the patterns identified in this study can be observed across a wider range of sites in Dhaka or in other cities in Bangladesh. Secondly, historical and comparative research can explore how linguistic landscapes have changed over time, specifically in relation to economic liberalization, to determine whether English dominance has increased alongside neoliberal globalization or not. Thirdly, ethnographic research involving interviews with sign producers, for example, business owners, government officials, and designers, as well as with readers who move through these places in everyday life, can provide insights into linguistic choices and audience experiences that are not visible through visual analysis alone.

Fourth, comparative studies of linguistic landscapes in other postcolonial South Asian cities, such as Kolkata, Karachi, and Colombo can help in determining whether the patterns observed in Dhaka are unique or parts of wider regional trends. Fifth, experimental research can test whether interventions in linguistic landscapes, such as requiring multilingual signage or promoting the prestige of Bengali, have influence in public perceptions and everyday language practices or not. Sixth, intersectional research can explain how linguistic landscapes interact with factors like gender, religion, and indigeneity. For instance, future studies can delve into whether women and men experience linguistic exclusion differently, or how religious minorities navigate Bengali-Islamic naming practices in working-class commercial spaces.

6.7. Final Reflections

This research started its journey with a simple observation: different neighbourhoods in Dhaka display different languages. It concludes with a more concerning insight: these linguistic differences are not merely some neutral expressions of diversity, but forms of systematic inequality. This inequality cannot be described by material deprivation alone. Rather, it requires attention to symbolic power functioning through everyday signs that most residents encounter in a routine manner, often without conscious awareness.

Bangladesh lost many lives in 1952 in order to defend the dignity of Bangla against the forced imposition of Urdu. Yet, after seventy years, English appears to operate as a new form of linguistic domination. This dominance does not function through state policies; instead, it operates through capitalist processes that prioritize cosmopolitan symbolic capital over national linguistic belonging. The irony is that a constitutional achievement, Bangla as the only official language, exists alongside a social reality where English is considered as a prestige language that shapes spatial access and opportunities for social mobility.

This research contributes to making visible what often remains unnoticed: how public signs build territories, normalize social hierarchies, and enact symbolic violence. Whether these insights will lead to actions that challenge linguistic inequality actually depends on political will which is beyond the scope of this study; but this research attempts to inform such efforts. Children who walk past English signs in Gulshan and Bengali signs in Nadda, deserve urban spaces where language expands opportunities rather than limiting them, where signs express

inclusion rather than signal exclusion, and where symbolic capital supports communication instead of being a means to dominate. Comprehending how linguistic landscapes create inequality is a necessary first step, however modest, towards achieving linguistic justice.

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