**The Framing of the Linguistic Landscapes of Persian[[1]](#footnote-1) Shop Signs in Sydney**

***Abstract***

This study provides an interpretive perspective on the linguistic landscape (LL) of ethnic Persian shops in the city of Sydney, Australia. Photographic data and ethnographic observations demonstrate how linguistic and cultural displays on ethnic Persian shops are organized in different frames which are driven by local symbolic markets. These frames are investigated through an analysis of linguistic and semiotic resources drawn on these ethnic premises. The study also illustrates that the trajectory of the Persian language and its semiotic resources as mediational tools frame the collective identity of the sign producers (social actors) and symbolic and cultural means that are activated in the LL of such ethnic shops. These framing devices promote minority languages, Persian in specific, as valuable resources and commodities in the multicultural context of Sydney, and point to the possible impact of those resources on the local political economy of language. In addition, the findings reinforce the view that patterns of multilingualism are not static and are influenced by a number of factors such as cultural, economic and linguistic resources which individuals and officials use in the public space.

**Keywords:** *Ethnic shops, framing, linguistic landscape, multilingualism, Persianness.*

**Introduction**

This paper reports on a study of the linguistic landscape (LL) of a range of shops from the private sector in eight different neighborhoods in the city of Sydney, Australia. More specifically, the study focuses on the neighborhoods of Sydney where Persian immigrant communities have settled. These places differ among themselves by virtue of various factors including linguistic space as well as geographical position. In order to understand the relationship between an area’s LL, its social space, we take a qualitative and frame-analytic perspective (sociological studies and geosemiotics ([Scollon & Scollon, 2003](#_ENREF_36))) to the analysis of Persian shop signs in Sydney. The study pays attention to both visual images (e.g., the Faravahar, one of the most common symbols in the Zoroastrian religion) as a mediational means (cultural tools) ([Scollon, 2001](#_ENREF_34)) and written texts, hence contributing to the recently developed concept of “semiotic” rather than “linguistic” landscape ([Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010](#_ENREF_20)), where “semiotically we just have to replace ‘language’ by ‘signs’” ([Blommaert & Huang, 2010, p. 4](#_ENREF_8)). The significance of this study is that it offers evidence that public signs are driven by a mixture of motivations that give rise to language choice and use as well as the maintenance of a language in a multilingual context.

The LL of these destinations reflects not only the status and roles of various languages displayed on the shop signs under scrutiny but also the power relationships between linguistic communities in a multilingual context (Spolsky & Cooper, 1991). That is, presence or absence of the out-group or in-group language on the Persian shop signs conveys messages concerning the strength, power and significance of a particular language (Shohamy, 2006). Furthermore, exploring languages on display offers an invaluable tool to study the vitality and presence of minority languages in the public space, their interaction with international and national languages in a multilingual and multicultural context like Sydney.

The LL of the shop signs investigated indexes a type of sociolinguistic reality that has an impact on the relationships between the people who dwell in and beyond this specific area ([Blommaert, 2013](#_ENREF_7)). Shop signs, by their choice of materials, symbolic signs, images and languages, demonstrate what sort of person is expected to shop there. Hence, LL items are “productive signs” and have “important economic and social consequences”, which can have a bearing on “those who would visit, work or live in a given neighborhood” ([Leeman & Modan, 2009, p. 332](#_ENREF_24)).

In the same vein, the study of LLs is viewed important and informative since the existence of written signs shows far more than the language of the participants taking up a particular area. Additionally, as Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Hasan Amara and Trumper-Hecht ([2006](#_ENREF_6)) asserted, the signs reveal the power relations that exist in a certain area. In such a multilingual context, where the different groups’ interests are at stake, debates over the language visibility can even provoke violence (Spolsky & Cooper, [1991](#_ENREF_39)).

The above scenario can be embedded within Bourdieu’s metaphor of linguistic marketplace ([Bourdieu, 1991](#_ENREF_10)) which annunciates the idea of “field” and “capital” so as to explain the relationship between the practice and the social context where the practice occurs. Bourdieu argues that language interaction corresponds to a marketplace, dependent on the degree to which an individual’s economic activity requires knowledge of the standard variety, whose goods are words and the speaker’s linguistic capital (i.e. ways of speaking). These words and ways of speaking have different values which may be invested with the capital value of the states of the social actors. Thus, in a given linguistic marketplace, a minority language may not be equally appreciated. As a result, the sign writers, as social actors in a linguistic marketplace, are supposed to be aware of the importance of a certain language and of the capital that the language carries in that market and the benefits that they may obtain by utilizing a certain language in a specific market ([Ben-Rafael et al., 2006](#_ENREF_6)).

Goffman’s frame analysis can also assist us in the interpretation of the underlying metacultural language-display processes (Coupland, 2012). Goffman (1974) explains *interpretive frames* as participants’ definitions of social situations, of what transpires in a given situation, thus foreshadowing the complexities between actors, their roles and other primary participants. These expectations of the world are drawn from the experiential knowledge that we have accumulated throughout our interactions with others, which roughly connote Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of habitus. For instance, our experience will enable us to recognize that someone is criticizing or teasing. We can refer to such a frame as “teasing” or “joking” and respond accordingly. Through the definition of the situation, people obtain a sense of the statuses and roles of those involved in the situation in order to know how to behave. These situations may have different interpretations as participants have multiple interests and generate what Goffman (1974) may refer to as “motivational relevancies” (Sarangi & Candlin, 2001). For the interpretation and analysis of LLs, interpretative frames can shed light on social and cultural values of the sign producers and their implied audiences (Coupland, 2012; Jaworski & Yeung, 2010).

**Persian shops in Sydney**

As a country with a population from dozens of countries, Australia is an extreme case of multilingualism. The reputation of Australia in humanitarian affairs, its low population, and its growing economy have turned this country into a popular destination for Persian immigrants. The most recent socio-demographic data in 2011 has shown that 22,550 Persians live in Australia, a significant increase of 19.7 percent from the 2001 census. According to this survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011), in terms of the distribution by state and territory, New South Wales has the largest number of Persian residents (11,940) followed by Victoria (4,430), Western Australia (2,190) and South Australia (1,760). It is likely that strong presence of Persians in Sydney, the state capital of New South Wales, may have an influence on linguistic practices and signs in the public space. The Persian immigrants, who have settled in different areas of Sydney, import their languages to the communities where they are situated. Hence, these communities are adding a new element of “plurilingualism to what is already a composite linguistic situation” ([Barni & Bagna, 2010, p. 3](#_ENREF_4)).

Spatially, Persian retail markets, like many other ones, are located in places where ethnic population concentrates. These culturally shopping places are readily distinguished from the mainstream ones. This includes the employees, the ethnicity of the owners, and customers as well as service languages provided, background music, merchandise mix, signage and indoor décor ([Wang & Lo, 2007, p. 684](#_ENREF_41)). This is of major significance for the immigrants as the first generation shoppers may want goods or services that are reminiscent of home ([Popovec, 2006](#_ENREF_32)). In the Persian shops in Sydney, for instance, one can notice that the owner of the shop or the shop assistant usually speaks Persian. In addition, such businesses sometimes serve as a gathering place where immigrants obtain information and reinforce their social connections ([Ehrkamp, 2005](#_ENREF_13)). Many of these businesses are also an important source of employment for new immigrants who are unable to find jobs in their pre-migration fields.

The neighborhoods where the Persian shops are located can be viewed not just as a physical location accommodating shops and their signs but as a “semiotic aggregate”, defined as “multiple semiotic systems in a dialogical interaction with each other” ([Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 12](#_ENREF_36)), of which shop signage compromises a large part. Persian shop signscarry certain discourses which may manifest a mixture of motivations, impacting upon not only language use and choice but also representing cultural meaning. These words “have the power to turn a space into a place” ([Lou, 2007, p. 174; see also Blommaert, 2005; Lemke, 2005](#_ENREF_25)). LL research is therefore associated with what Jaworski and Thurlow ([2010](#_ENREF_20)) might refer to as “the discursive construction of spaces and the use of space as a semiotic resource in its own right” (p.1).

In addition, these shops are viewed not only as a shopping place where purchases are made, but also as social spaces where individuals negotiate and renegotiate their identities through browsing, consuming the goods, and interacting with other co-ethnics. Customers’ account of their shopping interests reveals that Persian shops act as a social and cultural space where they can express their nostalgic feeling to their hometowns back home, through browsing imported products ([Izadi, 2015](#_ENREF_19)). From this perspective, the LL can contribute to the understanding of cultural diversity as it represents the population of the city under investigation.

**Linguistic landscape**

While a concise definition of the LL eludes consensus, there is enough empirical evidence to define the LL as “the use of language in its written form in the public” ([Gorter, 2006, p. 2](#_ENREF_16)). As Backhaus ([2007](#_ENREF_3)) pointed out, although several studies were conducted on LL, it was only with Landry and Bourhis’s (1997) study that the field has acquired “a proper name” (p.54). Despite the fact that Landry and Bourhis’s ([1997](#_ENREF_23)) did not carry out an empirical investigation of the LL per se, their identification of LL as a factor in perceived ethnolinguistic vitality defined the purpose of LL research as exploring “the vitality and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region” (p. 23). This view of what forms the LL is now generally accepted as the standard definition of the term.

However, Ben-Rafael et al. ([2006](#_ENREF_6)) critique Landry and Bourhis for their view of the LL as a given context of sociolinguistic processes and the fact that they overlooked the dynamics of the LL. The authors refer to the LL’s composition as symbolic construction of the public space and take the ‘LL-actors’ into consideration, those “who concretely participate in the shaping of LL by ordering from others or building by themselves LL elements according to preferential tendencies, deliberate choices or policies” ([2006, p. 27](#_ENREF_6)).

The LL may not always be revealing of the ethnolinguistic vitality of the groups inhabiting a given area. This is convincingly argued by Leeman and Modan’s ([2009](#_ENREF_24)) study in the United States where they examined the LL of Washington DC’s Chinatown, a recently gentrified neighborhood. Leeman and Modan found that the new commercial establishments, particularly non-Chinese-owned chains, used Chinese on their signs solely for its aesthetic value, aimed at people who are not able to read the language. Even the *Starbucks* coffee shops appeared to display a Chinese translation of the word *Starbucks*, in contrast to the chain’s outlets in China, which display the company’s name only in English. The authors maintain that both in Washington DC’s Chinatown and in China, the language of the *Starbucks* signs has a primarily symbolic function.

By the same token, Collins and Slembrouck ([2007](#_ENREF_12)) examined shop signs in immigrant neighborhoods of Ghent, Belgium, by broadening their gaze beyond issues of code. They found that passers-by interpret and read the indexical linkages of the signs (such as text size and code) in different ways, depending on their different habitus ([Bourdieu, 1991](#_ENREF_10)) and their positioning in Belgian society.

As convincingly argued by Pietikäinen, Lane, Salo and Laihiala-Kankainen ([2011](#_ENREF_30)), LL researchers cannot examine or (actually observe) the action of writing the signs that led to the LL they have chosen. The ensuing actions can therefore be observed only after the action has been carried out. Perhaps, one way to take this into account is “by approaching the LL as an outcome of a range of actions taken in the past” (p. 281). Objects as well as signs can be viewed as frozen actions because they are embedded in the material world ([Norris, 2011, p. 41](#_ENREF_28)). Norris (2004) views frozen actions as “higher-level actions which were performed by an individual or a group of people at an earlier time than the real-time moment of interaction that is being analyzed. These actions are frozen in the material objects themselves and are therefore evident” (pp. 13-14). Norris (2007, p. 662) also observes how the observer reads objects “as actions that have been performed at some point in time by some individual.” Frozen action incorporates many modes (cf. Norris, 2007, 2011), including the objects, the décor, the choice of color and so forth. By implementing the construct of frozen action to the current study, signs are analyzed as “materialized action” (Pietikäinen et al, 2011, p. 281) in the sense that the LL is a result of social actions undertaken in the past.

Coupland and Garrett’s (2010) work is among the first to identify a range of frames which are closely linked to specific cultural and social values of the sign producers and their targeted audiences (see also Jaworski & Yeung, 2010). This approach makes it possible for researchers to account for the ideological differences and tensions present in the LL.

Linked together, all of these approaches offer explanations for LL. These approaches have concentrated on the different linguistic and multimodal aspects of LL which provide the impetus and foundation for the current study. Implementing such an approach allows for a detailed examination of local practices of the LL of Persian shops and helps understand the role Persian language resources play in the cultural authenticity associated with the domain of LL.

**Theoretical underpinnings: Structuration principles**

The current study is theoretically situated within the domain of sociolinguistic approaches to “semiotic/linguistic landscapes” ([Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010](#_ENREF_20); [Scollon & Scollon, 2003](#_ENREF_36); [Shohamy & Gorter, 2009](#_ENREF_38)). Many of these studies have been informed by Scollon and Scollon’s work on geosemiotics ([2003](#_ENREF_36)), defined as “the study of social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world” (p. 2). From this perspective, Ben-Rafael ([2009](#_ENREF_5)) identifies four sociological principles of structuration to explain the diversity in the LL, namely *presentation of self*, *good reasons*, *collective identity* and *power relations*. These principles may not be applicable to all studies but illustrate different foci of attention and orientations.

Following Ben-Rafael ([2009](#_ENREF_5)) and Scollon and Scollon ([2003](#_ENREF_36)), this study is an attempt to explore the LL of Persian shops in the city of Sydney. The first principle draws on Goffman’s *presentation of self* ([Goffman, 1963](#_ENREF_15)) in which Goffman shows how social actors in a social setting display a favorable image of themselves to others so as to achieve their (social) goals. Ben-Rafael expands this to LL, which competes for the attention of passers-by. In fact, the denser the LL, the more difficult the competition and the “stronger their tendency to choose” (p. 45). There are therefore some restrictions concerning the presentations of the LL tokens. The *good-reasons* principle is concerned with the fact that LL items have to rationally provide the needs of the public and in turn the public have to perceive such LL tokens as rational. An additional structuration principle of LL derives from *collective identity*. This principle indicates to which groups the agent belongs and draws clients on the basis of a shared identity. This aligns with multicultural societies like Sydney. Ben-Rafael (2009, p. 47) argues that such an awareness can show the measure of societal divisions of tolerance to sociocultural differences and the use of linguistic items to include or exclude groups and expressing identity. The fourth principle, *power-relations*, is inspired by the degree to which certain groups tend to impose linguistic regulations to others. It can be taken to mean the degree to which a dominant group’s power is limited by legislation or to the extent to which a dominant group or culture can be tolerant to differences. Ben-Rafael (2009) points out that the imposition of the national language in the LL as an example of power hegemony. In addition, he argues that the greater the role the power-relations principle plays in structuring the LL, the more this aspect could be the object of confrontation.

In addition, in this study, we have adopted Scollon and Scollon’s ([2003](#_ENREF_36)) code preference as languages on multilingual signs cannot share the same position and space and consequently one will be in a rather prominent position. Thus, this visual hierarchy highlights which language is preferred. The first feature indicating this preference is placement and a choice has to be made in relation to the language. The mere fact that ‘these items in a picture or in the world cannot be located simultaneously in the same place produces a choice system” ([Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 120](#_ENREF_36)). Accordingly, if a code is horizontally aligned, the location of preference is on top. However, if they are vertically aligned, the preference code is on the left or in the center.

**Methodological approach**

This research is a social semiotic study of multilingualism in eight selected immigrant neighborhoods of the city of Sydney, in which Persian shops are located. The project commenced with a one-year ethnographic study in which we collected examples of Persian signs and scripts in the LL from the foregoing neighborhoods. We visited the neighborhoods and walked along every street, taking copious notes on the language inside and outside of every Persian shop and restaurant. We carefully documented the languages used and the types of information conveyed in each language, along with the placement and the font size of the different languages. As a complement to our field notes, we took numerous photographs. In our approach to the study of LL, we do not constrain ourselves to linguistic displays, but, following Jaworski and Thurlow’s (2010) approach to social semiotic displays, we have extended our scope to include multimodal aspects, including the use of culturally salient images and symbols.

The data included ethnographic field notes and photographs of shop names and signage inside (i.e. bulletin news, job advertisements, etc.) and outside of the Persian shops situated in more permanent streets. From these samples and ethnographic notes, we have developed a range of frames available for multilingual language displays which are semiotically and linguistically configured. We organize the following discussion around three broad discursive frames, namely: a) the frame of symbolic uses of Persian, b) the frame of collective identity and c) the frame of interaction order. We do not claim that each frame we have suggested here brings with it a particular set of landscape texts. Rather, we believe that any single sign or multimodal aspect is susceptible to be interpreted in many different ways. However, we do suggest, following Coupland and Garrett (2010, p. 15), that particular modes and contexts of indexical display do entail particular interpretive frames for particular groups of readers.

**The frame of symbolic uses of Persian**

The symbolic function of the LL lies in the choice of message and more specifically the choice which is associated with language and iconic signs on public signage. In this section, we discuss the distributional patterns of languages and type of businesses displayed in Persian shops.

There are a total of four main languages found in the signs. There is a clear tendency towards bilingualism in both English and Persian and *monocodism* (Stroud & Mpendukana, 2010) as either visuals or other semiotic resources of Persianness. Of the four main languages used (English, Persian, Arabic, and Armenian respectively), Persian and Arabic share the same script and text vectors (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) but are vastly different languages, which stand out from the Roman script. There was only one shop that used the Armenian script on its shopfront and window. Over half (52%) of the signs were written in English, which is the language that is used most often and dominates the LL in a general way. Next to it, Persian (30%), as expected, is relatively common as a minority language of wider communication among Persian speaking customers. Only a small number of other languages, Arabic (17%) and Armenian (1%), have gained a certain presence on Persian shop signs. It is also interesting to mention that, depending on the areas where these shops were located, the number of signs is of a rather homogeneous LL, English being the leading language followed by Persian and Arabic.

Analysis of the language displays on Persian shops highlights significant differences in the practices of shop signage. The Persian shops seem to have Persian signs both inside their buildings and on the shopfronts. Within the shops, which themselves are semiotic aggregates (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), many discourses intersect, among them shop signage, ethnic food distribution and service, interior design, telephone ordering, money exchanges, ethnic music, and bulletin news (such as job advertisements). Discourse (as social action) in the shops are therefore formed by the arrangements of the shelves and the (narrow or long) passages within the space as well as the position of the shop owner (see Izadi, 2015). In addition, these signs inside and outside of the shops convey many different kinds of information including shop names, menu items, special offers, bulletin news including promoting Persian language classes, and Persian poetry readings. Upon entering the Persian shops, for instance, there is a noticeboard where job opportunities, rooms for rent, Persian language courses (mainly for those who were born in Australia), and newly established (Persian) businesses are frequently advertised (both in English and in Persian, see Figure 1) for the customers to observe. Jones (2010) refers to such space as “a site of display” where the noticeboard has become a tool by which customers engage in a different kind of practice (i.e. identity) in the shops. Interestingly, one of the ads reads (our own translation): “Teach our children the Persian language in order to maintain our identity and to foster relationships between them.” The display of the noticeboard makes the display of the ads possible, which in turn makes it possible for other displays. Thus, for some participants, the information displayed on the board might not be of relevance.

**<Insert Figure 1 HERE>**

These uses of Persian generally seem to be more prominent than any other language on the Persian shop signs. While the signs inside the shops use Persian to promote social interaction (and perhaps educating second generation Persians about Persian culture), the signs on the shopfronts and on the windows use Persian language displays for business purposes. Thus, whereas the important message of Persian is symbolic, English or any other language (e.g., Arabic) hold the functional elements of ideational communication. Based on our ethnographic observations, it appears that Persian shops frequently exhibit their shop names (i.e. Arya, Sahel, Little Persia, Persia, etc.) conspicuously in Persian than in any other language and most commonly use black, green, red and yellow for their language and iconic displays.

From a Bourdieuian perspective (1985), the supporters of the Persian shops often seek to acquire cultural capital by implementing the symbolic economy to enhance and express their uniqueness and sophistication. Investing in this aspect, Persian ethnic shops and restaurants often bring in discourses of authenticity and uniqueness in their advertisement. For instance, on its online promotion (in English) of the Persian cuisine, *The Persian Room*, name of a Persian restaurant in the heart of the city centre, claims to be:

“serving Authentic Persian Food to Sydneysiders, in a tradition of pride and excellence that will continue far into the future. Fully licenced, open 7 days, located in Pyrmont and serving authenticate Persian food in forms of cooking enriched in over 5000 years of history. Most of our spices are sourced from Iran […]”.

One point of note concerning these establishments is that in their signs the choice of Persian (or a sign associated with Persianness) often adds to the authenticity of their product by using Persian authentic names such as Arya, Alborz, Persia, Persepolis, and so on. Figure 2 shows a sign from a shop, where the language is used as a semiotic resource so that the passers-by can interpret it as an *authentic* shop. The name Alborz, for instance, is derived from a renowned mountain range in the Avesta, a Persian language of the East Iranian division, known as the language of Zoroastrian scripture. The combination of Persian and English with a scene of a mountain in the background as semiotic resources in the LL of this restaurant can be interpreted as performing what Kallen (2008) refers to as safe exoticism, where the experience of the passers-by of the “Other” is mediated through a “unique” experience enabling meaningful participation in this community of practice, hence adding to the authenticity of the community.

**<Insert Figure 2 HERE>**

Overall, in this frame it has become evident that the language and the mediational means used on these premises are associated with the symbolic functions of language in the sense that the minority language in the context of Sydney, Persian, presents a certain image of self (presentation of self) and takes on a different value that is borne out of power relations among different groups. These signs not only perform an important role in claiming an authentic identity for the minority inhabitants of these communities but rather along with their visual images would be symbolic mediational means (Scollon, 2001) as they mediate social action and have a history in both the shop-owner’s (perhaps the sign producer) and the Persian-speaking customers’ habitus.

**The frame of collective identity**

In the first frame, ethnic Persian shop displays convey the impression that the signs may have been designed to assert, among other interests, their social actors’ “particularistic identities” (Ben-Rafael, 2009). This is due to the fact that the signs of these kinds, and perhaps signs in general, always have a semiotic scope (Blommaert & Maly, 2014; Scollon & Scollon, 2003) in the sense that they “give off” (Goffman, 1959) social insights into social actors and provide the communicative relationship between the sign writers and their intended audiences, thereby serving the purpose of who the sign writers are as opposed to who they are not. Consequently, they unpack a priori commitment to the Persian community within the general public. These linguistic displays and symbols (icons) imprinted on the Persian shops are never accidental; they always display connections to social structure and demand entitlement and power.

Many of the Persian shop signs juxtapose depictions of the Zoroastrian Symbol and products encompassing the local and global, suggesting a growing trend in discourses of *presentation of self* and of conversationalization (Fairclough,1995). A closer look at Figure 3 clarifies this point further. Figure 3 has two images (a and b), each associated with the emblem of the Zoroastrian Symbol. These social actors self-identify their collective identity in the emblem, which has appeared on the shop signs. The first image illustrates a Kebab shop situated in a not too busy suburb in North Parramatta, 24 kilometers north-west of the Sydney central business district. Well under half (49.3%) of North Parramatta residents were reported to be born in Australia; the next most common countries of birth were China 5.6%, India 5.0%, Iran 2.5%, Lebanon 2.3% and New Zealand 2.3% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011), which is associated with high levels of ethnonationalist identification. The kebab shop-owner’s (actor) identity is characterized in a number of ways.

**<Insert Figure 3 (a and b) HERE>**

It is expected that such food stores and restaurants aim to attract potential clients on the basis of common fellowship or likeness. One of these common fellowships is considered to be the display of “Halal” on the shop signs. In our ethnographic observations, we have found the display of “Halal” on almost all of the restaurants where Persian cuisine was served. As can be observed in Figure 1, there is no mention of the “Halal” text either in Persian or Arabic, which sets unambiguously who the shop-owner(s) is/are. While everyone can potentially be the addressee of the English text and perhaps the Persian-speaking customers are the addressee of the iconic part, the omission of the “Halal” text may emerge as a direct interpellation. In other words, the shop-owner has allowed the customers to decide whether they intend to enter and have their meal there. Suffice to say that if the “Halal” text had been positioned on the shop signage, there would then be no discussion of this kind. Partly because Persian shops selling Persian products aim at ethnically mixed customers, the degree to which the perlocutionary force of their signs is symbolic (Leeman & Modan, 2009) rely on the passers-by: for Persian readers, the signs offer information about the establishment, services, and the products available, which are mostly imported to Australia, while for non-Persian speaking customers, who do not read Persian and who confuse it with Arabic, they provide an interpretation of ethnic authenticity.

One point of note regarding these premises is that the position of Arabic as the minority language on Persian shop signs seems to be unchallenged by any other language. The principle of power relations as applied by Ben-Rafael (2009) may contribute to accounting for the fact that the language of the dominant ethnolinguistic group is used much more frequently in the investigated LLs than the languages of subordinate groups. In other words, the structuration principle of “power-relations may come about through the stronger party’s imposition on weaker actors of a given language, or kinds of wordings or styles, thereby limiting the weaker in their use of linguistic resources of their own” (p. 47). Shohamy (2006), who also discusses this, notes that the presence or absence of certain languages in the public space sends both direct and indirect messages with regard to the centrality or the marginality of those languages in society.

A look at the visual semiotics of Figure 3 a indicates that the iconic part (the Zoroastrian symbol) of this sign is positioned in the middle section of the window and above the linguistic text “Persia” at the top left of the shopfront signage whereas the linguistic part of the sign is in the upper (ideal) and the lower (real) sections. Such co-occurrence is defined as multimodal signs and demonstrates that different modalities (i.e. words versus icons) enjoy different affordances (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Therefore, while the icon of the Zoroastrian symbol is not generally understood to non-Persian speaking customers, the English text is generally understandable for those with a good command of English. Likewise, the combination of *Persia* and *Café* with the accent sign on top of the “e” in Café is carried out through a change in coloring from red to white and is a clear case of decontextualized semiotics. As such, the different modalities seem to possess a different semiotic scope (Blommaert, 2013). In other words, the linguistic text and the icon both select and target different audiences.

The combination of the icon and the English linguistic displays may indicate the exclusion of the “Persian” text on the signage. However, in exploring this further, one needs to draw on the construct of indexicality. Indexicality suggests that the sense people make of a situation or of an account is a product of the experiences and expectations they bring to that situation (see Heritage, 1984). As a result, all interpretive work is tightly linked to the situation, its ecology and in fact to the habitus (Bourdieu, 1991) of the participants involved. Indexicality refers to the observation that one cannot understand the meaning of utterances such as “Kebab House” in Figure 3 a, for instance, by relying on the linguistic meaning. Rather, the meaning resides in its use in a particular context (see Heritage, 1984). This process of indexicality refers to the idea that symbols will ‘index” (Silverstein, 1976) or refer to elements of the social context. For instance, in the context of the Persian restaurant in Figure 3 a, we think that the use of “Kebab House” is both to index and symbolize. Here, English is used to index Persian (foreign) taste and manners; it does not index an English-speaking community.

We believe that there are at least two clues to such an interpretation. One is the name itself which, at least to English native speakers’ ears, is rather non-native-like. “Kebab House” seems a bit odd as the name for a restaurant. The second clue is in the elaboration of the noun phrase “Kebab House” as the identity of the shop-owner. What makes this stand out as quite likely not a native use of the English language but Persian is the emphasis that the author of the sign (i.e. the social actor, the shop-owner) has given to the construction of the noun phrase “Kebab House”, functioning as a modifier to the English version “Kebab Shop”. In Iran, there are a large number of kebab shops named “khane kabab” where kebab is served. The inclusion of a literal translation of “khane kabab” (Kebab House) may forge an ideological link to the commodification of culture and language with its unique use of the term “kebab”.

This account of the term “kebab” in this social field can provide the analyst with a heuristic way to explore how social actors (in this case the shop-owners) exploit mediational tools (Scollon, 2001) (cultural or semiotic resources) to not only express their identities but also to attract potential clients on the basis of common fellowship. Hence, much of what can be understood from mediational tools does not actually need to be unpacked but rather is embedded in the knowledge of the participants engaged in interaction or in this case reading the signs. This kind of reading of the signs defines a cultural space assumed to be all of *Persia*.

In the same vein, the term “Kebab” (Kebab House), as a cultural tool, incorporates a whole range of practices, identities, objects as well as discourses and utterances. These tools reveal some certain patterns of affordances and constraints that are concerned with the actions that can be taken through their use, facilitating certain kinds of action and messages and at the same time limiting others. Understanding mediational tools, therefore, on ethnic shop signs entails taking into account both the socio-cultural histories of one’s habitus and the socio-cultural histories of mediational means.

Texts and icons in the frame of collective identity have a distinctive key, serving the function of “demarcation” (Blommaert, 2013). For instance, the omission of the text “Halal” on Persian shops seems to send out a message that particular codes and rules are operated in this social field to specific audiences.

In a starkly contrasting frame of collective identity in Figure 3 a, the Achaemenid Persian griffin at Persepolis (which is located in Shiraz, Iran) in Figure 3 b appears to be a consumable cultural practice rather than embedded in cultural resources. In terms of what has been previously discussed, it is reasonably clear that the activities (selling Persian sandwiches and kebab) connected to the sign is closely linked to this particular place, Persian Fast Food (Arya). Furthermore, the semiotic scope is relatively clear as the linguistic displays and the Achaemenid Persian griffin icon on the shopfront are designed to provide the passers-by with a story of their producers and their potential clients. It is clearly evident that this sign selects “Persian” audiences and organizes a social interaction between its interlocutors. That is, the clients who intend to purchase the sandwiches and kebab served in this restaurant are more likely to be Persian immigrants and the shop-owners who are serving these customers are almost certainly Persians. Our ethnographic observations were congruent with these findings.

There is yet another level of embedding in the shopfront signs: the two basic information structures, namely *given* and *new* and *ideal* and *real* systems (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). For example, the shop uses an *ideal* and *real* arrangement for this sign. At the *ideal* position, which is the top part of the composition, the concrete information of what services are on offer is found in yellow bold letters in Persian and the translated version in English is found at the bottom at margin *Real* (see Stroud & Mpendukana, 2010) and gives the same amount of information about services offered in this shop. In the *real* position, the images put emphasis on what the name is about by offering icons of the array of products (sandwiches) and services (eat in/take away) on offer. English and Persian are the only languages to occur in position *ideal* in the form of labeling noun phrases and the limited use of information.

Interestingly, at the left top on the shopfront is the shop title with the Achaemenid Persian double griffin placed in the central position and the name of the shop (Arya) in English against a brown frame encompassing the pictorial depiction of the Achaemenid dynasty is found at the *real* position, given prominence by its placement and its bold letter, which is, perhaps, more abstract or general to the eye of non-Persians. Persian here is configured through an *ideal* (top) position and displayed in a bigger font size.

With respect to the *Given-New* distinction, the left position on the building front, the Persian/Arabic word “Halal” serves to frame the pictorial image of the products on sale. At the same time, as the term “Halal” promotes framing and salience, the term “Halal” shapes a *Given-New* system with the icon of the sandwich comprising the whole frame. In Figure 3 b, the order of content in this position is different to the one observed in Figure 3 a. To begin with, it contains some Persian phrases with some images of the products on offer. Additionally, the mid position is important in the following way: while in Figure 3 a it depicts the Zoroastrian Symbol, Figure 3 b depicts the Achaemenid Persian double griffin. Interestingly, right at the bottom, at position *Real*, there is an explicit mention of what kind of food (Halal) is sold in Persian/Arabic with an icon of a sandwich.

However, what seems to be exotic here is the juxtaposition of the Achaemenid Persian double griffin, which occupies influential spaces on the shopfront and on the front window, and the text “Halal” under a sandwich icon on the front. This juxtaposition, which seems to be intermittent on Persian shop signs of the Arabic/Persian text and the Persian icon (the Achaemenid Persian griffin), may index various facets of Persian national and Islamic identity: a) the Achaemenid Persian griffin indexes a powerful and majestic creature. During the Persian Empire, the griffin was perceived as a protector from evil, witchcraft, and slander, hence indexing the political entity “The Persian Empire”; b) the Persian name “Arya” displayed under the double griffin indexes claims to Persian cultural legitimacy and including promotion of a Persian identity that is culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct from “Arab” identity in this case; and c) the text “Halal” conveys an Islamic appeal, indexing a distinctive urban Middle Eastern identity that is less centered upon the Arabic text “Halal”. Nonetheless, the ideological corollary of the display of Arabic (Halal) is to some extent more consciously perceived in the sense that it is an ambivalence to Anglos as the Persian and Arabic characters are somewhat identical. Such indexical readings, we believe, are equivocal and multiple and involve frames of interpretation of various identities which comprise political, cultural, class, ethnic and even regional identities.

Perhaps, a fourth reading of the display of English, “Persian Fast Food”, is nevertheless inherently ideological and grounded on a “structure of interdiscursivity”, referring to the mixing and use of elements in one discourse and social practice associated with social and institutional meanings from other discourses and social practices (see Candlin & Maley, 1997). Thus, “Persian Fast Food” can be seen as interdiscursive through the hybridity of two genres: “the language of developed world” at “the apex of regimes of languages” (Silverstein, 2003, pp. 540-548). In other words, this signage characterizes a traditional product (Persian Food) with its unique cuisine in a new context and perhaps recontextualizes the local food culture with respect to the global context (i.e. Sydney). The purpose of this kind of spatial branding is to produce universal and decontextualized recognition (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) of the Persian cuisine insofar as their symbols become as recognized as the other brand, i.e. Macdonald’s. In addition, arguably, the significance and emphasis on Persianness in such signs plays an important role in the construction of a “collective ethnic and Islamic identity” because of the type of food the information on the signs conveyed and of the nature of the shop as a Persian community. Consequently, the social practices pertinent to the shopping occasions can be seen as powerful resources and sites of engagement for constructing identity.

**The frame of interaction order**

Some Persian shops in our corpus do not specifically target Persian clients or stock products marked as ethnically Persian. These shops tend to have signage exclusively in English as is the case of Figure 3 a above. A second group of Persian shops uses Persian to convey messages and information about services and products to Persian-speaking customers. Frequently, the information supplied in Persian is not translated into English or into any other languages, as in the supermarket shown in Figure 4 (MIHAN MARKET). The use of Persian in such establishments is an instance of language exploited to sell specifically Persian goods, in this case cuisine and imported products to Australia.

**<Insert Figure 4 HERE>**

The Persian signs and icons in these supermarkets and restaurants are closely linked to the interactional order (Goffman, 1971). Scollon and Scollon (2003) have reminded us that it is crucially important to perceive interaction order as semiotic signs in that it “gives off” (Goffman, 1959) social insights into social actors, defined as the way in which individuals organize their social interactions in a social setting. These signs provide information about Persian authentic products that may assist service encounters and other interactions including the provision of the most recent Persian TV series and movies on DVDs; currency exchange and international money transfer; selling telephone cards and tickets for Persian concerts. Nevertheless, the signs also enjoy a symbolic value that is not entirely associated with the specific and precise information they transfer. The symbolic function of Persian language displays in such restaurants and supermarkets suggests commodification of language in such ethnic places. Commodification of language refers to the fact that languages have an intrinsic economic value and that they are commodities in the same way that manufactured goods or labor would be (Tan & Rubdy, 2008). This may refer to all levels of a language, from its capital value in learning a foreign language, to the production of multilingual signs. This aligns with Leeman and Modan’s study (2009) on the LLs of Washington DC’s Chinatown where the researchers conclude that “the state and private enterprise use symbols of Chinese ethnicity and culture, including language, graphics, and architectural forms, to turn Chinatown into a commodity, marketing it and the things in it for consumption” (p. 338). It is quite likely that the same characteristics can be seen used in these Persian shops, and this may explain some of the high ratios of written Persian as well as the emblems that have been observed. Interestingly, we have also observed non-Persian customers shopping from these shops for the purpose of experiencing “Persianness”, buying the “authentic” Persian products, and acquiring the “cultural capital” through interaction that is associated with the culture of *Persia*.

Many of establishments that use Persian in their signage invite the implied audiences to participate or view the “Persianness” in action. Figure 5 is taken from the shop front of a bakery shop which specializes in baking Tandori bread. The shop offers its customers the chance to not only buy authentic bakery but also the chance to experience the kind of existential authenticity, put forward by Wang (1999), by observing the baker at work.

**<Insert Figure 5 HERE>**

Figure 5 clarifies the point further. Reh (2004) has distinguished four possible types of multilingual arrangements relevant to the communicative process namely: a) duplicating; b) fragmentary; c) overlapping; and d) complementary. Types (a), (b) and (c) are referred to those signs in which the languages included either completely (a) or partially (b and c) constitute mutual translation of each other. However, type (d) gives two or more languages showing completely different kinds of content. The fundamental difference between types (a), (b), (c), and (d) is that the latter (d) requires a multilingual reader if one needs to understand completely, while the other three types do not. The shop front sign found in Figure 5 is a sign of type (b). It contains three languages: English, Persian and Arabic. Most of the information is available in all the three languages, although some contents such as address and telephone number are given in English. However, the foreign languages are not the fragmentary translations of the Persian text. As the two languages, English and Persian, carry out complementary functions, none of the information given in one language is contained in the respective other.

With respect to language distribution and information structure, the languages (English, Persian and Arabic) used in Figure 5 contribute to how the frame of interaction order is constituted. This bakery shop comprises layers of Given and New where “Green Wheat” makes up on the Given and Ideal and with the name of the product “BAKERY” that overlaps with the position Real-New. The other layer of Given, on the top left, “Green Wheat”, indexes healthy and nutritious bread created by roasting green wheat. In addition, the choice of green appears closely tied to the product on offer. The shop signage also uses a range of colors, green, yellow, black and white, although a highly saturated (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) green is conspicuous and dominant. The mix of linguistic displays and commonsense visuals (i.e. green and yellow) gives the impression that the bread and services offered in this shop target the local market.

What seems to be interesting here is that the noun phrase “Hot Fresh Tandori Bread” (نان تنوری), the Persian and Arabic translated versions positioned in the center, represents a traditional way of baking bread in an oven. The oven is a shape like one-half of a ball with a surface of pebbles and stones, which is heated with coals. This signage is suggestive of a traditional custom and product in modern terms and recontextualizes the *local* to the *global*. Here, the use of the languages and visuals on the shop indexes such commercial premises as genuinely ethnic which offers the customers the opportunity to experience and consume products that are authentically Persian. It is therefore a commodity and a key resource in emphasizing the uniqueness of the products.

As observed, the signage in this shop enables the analyst to map what linguistic and other semiotic resources are drawn on so as to authenticate and commodify this space. One also should not disregard the importance of the linguistic resources in this signage. The languages displayed here suggest the language power relation, economic motivation and solidarity among the implied customers in this area. The presence of Arabic particularly on this shop signage, where authentic Persian bread is commodified, is probably due to the power relations of the language that impact upon the shop-owner’s (the social actor) economic motivations and their attainable goals (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006).

**Conclusion**

This paper has presented three instances of interpretative frames, namely the frame of symbolic uses of Persian, the frame of collective identity and the frame of interaction order. Not all these frames are equally important for the construction of the semiotic landscape of the Persian shops. These frames, as observed in the data, are framed by cultural commodification and symbolic capital. Such choices are embedded in the historical, economic and power processes that have recontextualized the Persian language as a cultural resource that carries symbolic and economic capital. Such frames not only perform an important role in claiming an authentic identity for the minority inhabitants of these communities but rather along with their visual images index symbolic mediational means (Scollon, 2001) as they mediate social action and have a history in both the shop-owner’s (the sign producer) and the Persian-speaking customers’ habitus. Thus, much of what can be understood from mediational tools does not actually need to be unpacked but rather is embedded in the knowledge of the participants engaged in interaction.

These instances of interpretive frames bring to the fore the metacultural function of these signs to the extent that they all presuppose that making use of the frames helps “communicate cultural difference” (Coupland & Garret 2010, p.14). Nonetheless, cultural difference is variously understood and valued with different framings (Järlehed, 2015). This element, which to some extent connotes Bourdieu’s habitus, emphasizes that any observation of “what is it that is going on here?” (Goffman, 1974, p. 8), either in connection with a socially organized activity (situated social interaction) or “culture”, is an observation of a process in lieu of a range of fixed traits. It is in this vein that Layder (1993) reminds social researchers to include in their research what he calls a “multistrategy” approach which takes into account the orientation towards a historically and socially oriented discourse that is situated within linguistics, sociology and social psychology. In other words, what Layder calls for lies in the fact that all analyses of socially-grounded phenomena are contingent on historical conditions and, therefore, must be open to question. Hence, the mediational tools displayed on the LL of Persian shops cannot be practically separated from the historical circumstances of their use and decontextualized from the social setting in which they are carried out.

Furthermore, the study has reinforced the view that patterns of multilingualism visible in the LL are not static, but are influenced by a large number of factors such as cultural, economic and linguistic resources. In addition, as suggested by the data, the Persian language helps project the country of its origin and could be an expression of Persian identity. One way this occurs is through the design of the signs. Persian, as a minority language in Australia, may be playing an important symbolic role in the broader discourses of LLs. This relative prominence in the design of the sign seems to be a high symbolic value that the Persian speaking immigrants as the LL actors attach to their own language and identity.

Conducting interdisciplinary work and linking semiotics and sociology to the study of LLs, which emphasizes the importance of the social processes, the historical and cultural contexts that underpin such language displays, gives rise to a richer and more profound understanding of the larger sociopolitical meanings of LLs.

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1. In this article, we have used the term “Persian” in the sense that it typically connotes the ethnicity, language and culture which these retail shops are examples of. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)