

MAPPING KARACHI'S CULINARY IDENTITY: A LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF PLACE-NAMED FOOD SPECIALTIES

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Abstract

Karachi's food scene is a vibrant tapestry of regional and global culinary influences. Using qualitative research design, this study aims to analyze and document the linguistic landscape of place-named food specialties through the lens of toponomastics which is the study of place names. The data was collected from seven major areas from each district in the city using the field notes and photographic documentation. Around hundred photos were collected for the analysis of food names. This research helps understand how place-names, both local and international, reflect multicultural diversity of the metropolitan city. The findings reveal that Karachi's linguistic landscape brings a diverse range of food specialties from different origins. The study concludes that the linguistic landscape of food in the city is a dynamic reflection of its worldwide connectedness and socio-cultural variety.

INTRODUCTION

Karachi is one of Pakistan's most populated cities with both national and international migrants (Niazi, & Azad, 2018). Considering that it is a cultural melting pot, it has a culinary landscape in which foods are frequently linked to certain place names. In addition to being labels, the names of food specialties associated with place names serve as a marker for history and cultural identity as well. Despite the popularity of Karachi's food variety, little is known about their linguistic and cultural representation in Karachi's linguistic landscape. This study addresses this knowledge gap by examining the ways in which place-named food specialties impact the city's culinary identity through signage and language.

Particularly, toponomastics is the study of place-name (Puzey, 2011). This research is important because it broadens the focus of toponomastic and

linguistic landscape studies by integrating food naming practices. It also highlights the language employed in Karachi's food-related signs and branding. Additionally, it aids in comprehending how food names preserve regional traditions and historical narratives. Finally, it demonstrates how Karachi's metropolitan nature is shaped by regional cuisines.

This study also helps local businesses understand how place names in branding can increase the marketability of products. Additionally, this study advances research in the fields of toponomastics, sociolinguistics, linguistic landscapes, and culinary studies. Finally, it enhances understanding of Karachi's rich culinary heritage and historical roots while bringing attention to the cultural relevance of food naming customs.

Research Objective

This study aims to achieve the following objective.

- To identify and document food specialties in Karachi's linguistic landscape that are named after place-names.

Research Question

This study investigates the following research question.

1. What are the major food specialties in Karachi's linguistic landscape that are named after place-names?

Literature Review

Linguistic landscape analysis is a significant approach within the field of sociolinguistics, focusing on the visibility and representation of language in public spaces (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Linguistics landscape focuses on analysis of different text forms such as menus, shop names, restaurant names and other written forms in different contexts. The following literature review synthesizes the research carried out in the field and also highlights key findings associated with linguistics landscape of shops and restaurants.

In many countries of the world, the term "food" is not only used to refer to items that people consume to satisfy their hunger or get energy, rather it serves as a symbol of culture and identity (Fatima & Issa, 2025). Many studies have associated "food" with "cultural marker" as dishes and culinary practices demonstrate the interplay between language and culture (Son, 2023). Hence, place-named food serve as examples of how geographical markers are used to build local identities. For example, "Chicago-style hot dogs" do not only refer to the food item, but it also makes a dominant link with the cultural context to the origins of the dish. Moreover, place based names serve as pride as highlighted by Telfer and Hashimoto (2016), who suggested that food items can encourage and motivate local communities and can also potentially serve as cultural ambassadors.

A study by Prapobratanakul (2016) focused on the influence of English on shop names in Si Yan. In the study, it was revealed that a contrast of English and Thai could be seen in the shop names. The study also highlighted that the writers of texts might not be aware of the presence of English Lexicon in naming

of shops. A similar study was conducted by Shang & Guo (2017). In this study, multilingual influence and influence of multiethnic communities while naming shop names was studied focusing on the setting of Singapore. The findings of the study suggested that English was used in monolingual patterns, while in contrast Chinese was dominant in bilingual and multilingual patterns focusing on culture and ethnicity. Another study by Amer & Obeidat (2014) focused on studying the influence of English on Arabic in stores in Jordan. The findings of the study revealed that English was commonly used in naming shops and it served as a "loan word" for Arabic language. This served as a tool for attracting tourists towards those shops.

A similar study focusing on linguistic landscape in culinary business was carried out by Purnanto et al., (2022) in Indonesia. The study focused on examining the frequency of language use in culinary business. Through the analysis of 396 culinary business texts, it was identified that English and Indonesian appeared in monolingual and bilingual text. Further, the findings highlighted that imitating and overlapping techniques were commonly used by the text writers to attract more consumers.

The labelling of food and their representation in menus has also been widely studied. Choi et al., (2018) studied the cognitive processes of humans with food identification. The research identified that cognitive process is not only about food naming but it also includes classifying food components. Further, the study highlights that globalization and transnationalism can influence food markers as migrant communities bring a range of culinary influences which redefine the labels and perceptions associated with food. Another study by Ali (2022) analyzed the language of menu cards in cafes and restaurants of Karachi, Pakistan. The study utilized 300 names of various beverages and dishes and the findings highlight the presence of socio-cultural transformation leading towards the erosion of local identity. Further, the study indicates the necessity for the cafes and restaurants to rewrite their menus and replace the culturally alien words with the words that resonate with Pakistani culture. The study also underscores the need for adding more space on menus for cuisine of Pakistan as food serves as a strong symbol of culture.

Other than the focus on the linguistics analysis of restaurants names and menus, the researchers have also significantly researched the analysis of language in branding, the view of customers on the advertisement being used by the restaurants and the language use in establishing brand identity (Ehsan,2012). Moreover, the use of descriptive language is also being used to enhance the sensory experience of the customers. In the experiment carried out on different menu contexts like entrées and desserts it was revealed that the restaurants which use nostalgic names offer warmer experience in contrast to the restaurants that use generic names. Further, the sensory experience of name was seen as a variable for customer's willingness to pay (Kim & Magnini, 2020)

To conclude, the linguistic landscape analysis of place name food specialties is extensively researched across the world but there is no significant research being conducted in Pakistan. The following study is undertaken to analyze the linguistic landscape for place names which would help in filling the existing literature gap.

Methodology

The linguistic landscape of place-named food specialties in Karachi was investigated in this study using a qualitative research design. Fadillah and Cholsy (2024) used the similar methodology to study the eatery names in the city of Bandar Lampung through descriptive analysis of linguistic landscape. This study analyzed how the city's food scene reflects the intersections of language, culture, and identity. To collect rich, contextualized data, linguistic landscape analysis was conducted. The data were collected through photographs and field notes of signage, and menus with a special consideration over place-named food specialties. In total, 100 photographs were collected from seven areas from each district in Karachi.

In order to ensure adherence to ethical standards for public domain research, food-related signage was photographed in public areas. Further names were collected through online menus. The study was carried out with respect for cultural norms and traditions because of Karachi's diverse cultural landscape. In order to prevent misunderstandings or misrepresentations, researchers ensured that names

associated with food and their historical or cultural connotations were appropriately and accurately conveyed. By following these ethical considerations, the study maintained high ethical standards while contributing valuable insights.

Data Analysis

The data for this research study was collected by analyzing the linguistic landscape of Karachi city in Pakistan. Karachi is one of the cities that represents cultural diversity. People from different religions, languages and ethnicities bring the major population in the city. The cultural diversity is not only reflected through the traditional rituals, festivals and dresses, but also through their food specialties. This brings a huge variety of local cuisine to Karachi. The data is categorized into two sections: local place-names with food specialties and international place-names with food specialties. The data is analyzed through linguistic analysis of Karachi's landscape.

Local Place Names used in Food Specialties:

Karachi is known as the economic hub of Pakistan due to which people from all the provinces migrate there for the purpose of earning. Among those are the ones who bring their local food specialties as well. For instance, Sindhi cuisine has been inspired by a number of cultures, including Mughal, Persian, and Central Asian. Because of this blending, Sindhi cuisine has distinct flavors and traditional cooking styles that are both spicy and fragrant. The ingredients used in Sindhi cuisine have been significantly influenced by the region's closeness to the Indus River. Rice, a primary crop in the area, is used in many cuisines, making rice items popular in Sindhi cuisine like *Sindhi Briyani* and *Hyderabadi Pulao*. Other than that, *Larkana Sajji* and *Mehar Mawa* are also popular dishes from this province. Similarly, numerous traditional delicacies that are intricately linked to the city's history and culture can be found in Lahore, which is frequently referred to as Pakistan's food capital. Like Mughal inspiration in Sindhi cuisine, the Mughal Empire also had a profound impact on the food culture of Punjab and is largely responsible for the development of Lahori cuisine. Besides this, Lahore is also famous for representing the street food culture in Pakistan. For instance, *Lahori Murgh Chana*, *Lahori Chana Chaat*,

Lahori Seekh Kebab, *Multani Chaamp* are very famous. Including that, they are also popular for consuming more fried items making it their food specialty like *Lahori Chargha*. Being rich in agriculture, rice is also a common item in Punjab like *Cholistani Pulao* is famous there. Apart from that, they are also very fond of sweet dishes. In that case, Punjab's *Multani Halwa* is one of the famous sweet dishes.

Furthermore, Balochi food is known for its use of grilled delicacies and slow-cooked meats, as well as for its powerful tastes and simplicity. For instance, *Balochi Tikka*, *Balochistan Sajji*, and *Gwadar Sea Food* are well-known. In addition to that, the local love of tea merged with the British popularization of tea-drinking culture make *Quetta Chai* the highlight of the robust, rich tastes of traditional chai and provide a place for people to gather over a good cup of tea. *Quetta Chai* has established itself as a well-known brand for anyone looking for a traditional yet contemporary chai experience. Including that, *Kashmiri chai* from Kashmir is also popular in Karachi.

Moreover, the food from a province in northwestern Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), is deeply influenced by its Pashtun culture. For example, their *Peshawari Karahi*, *Peshawari Chapli Kabab*, *Peshawari Naan*, *Peshawari Ice-cream*, *Mardan Zarda Pulao*, *Mardan Seekh Kabab*, *Bannu Beef Pulao* are a few of the popular dishes.

Besides that, the cuisine of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), which lies in Pakistan's northernmost region, is also distinctive and varied. Gilgit-Baltistan's cuisine is

designed organically to provide warmth and energy during the severe, frigid winters. Noodles and wheat-based foods are common in the region. Signature delicacies such as *Skardu Pulao*, *Baltistani Chapshuro*, and *Hunza Noodles* are known in the region, but are not commonly found in Karachi's landscape. Minimizing it from provincial food specialty to local areas within Karachi, the food variety only expanded. For instance, *Burns Road Nihari*, *Boat Basin Bun Kabab*, *Water Pump kathiawari Choley*, *Karachi Haleem*, *Kemari Shrimps*, *Johar Bakers* etc. All these examples show an extensive range of food specialties within Karachi.

International Place Names used in Food Specialties:

This city not only brings the local food specialties but takes inspiration from international food specialties as well. Karachi has been a city where people have a vast array of taste in different cuisine. For instance, *Turkish Kabab*, *Izmir Kabab*, *Istanbul Tikka*, *Sulu Kofte*, *Inegol Kofte*, *Broadway Pizza*, *New York Pizza*, *California Pizza*, *Texas Burger*, *Moroccan Steak*, *Moroccan Burger*, *Mexican Burger*, *Korean Wings*, *Korean Burger*, *Korean Fried Chicken*, *Mongolian Beef*, *Sichuan Dumplings*, *Lebanese Boti*, *Lebanese Burger*, *Lebanese Shawarma*, *Vietnamese Iced Coffee*, *Thai Soup*, *Thai Roll*, *Thai Salad*, *Tokyo Chilli Chicken Dry* are very popular in Karachi's landscape.

Being the neighboring countries, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and China also influences the food specialties indicated with place names. For instance, *Bombay Briyani*, *Bombay Behl*, *Delhi Rabri*, *Behari Boti*, *Lucknow Sizzling Kabab*, *Afghani Pulao*, *Afghani Boti*, *Kabuli Pulao*, *Xinjiang Chinese*, *China Town*, *Beijing Chilli Beef*, *Beijing Noodles*, *Dacca Sweets*, *Dhaka Chicken*, *Dhaka Fish* are few to name.

Table 1. Linguistic Analysis of Food Names

Food Names	Place Names	Lexical Borrowing
Sindhi Briyani	Sindhi	"Briyani" (borrowed from Persian/Urdu)
Balochistan Sajji	Balochistan	"Sajji" (Arabic origin)
Gwadar Sea Food	Gwadar	"Sea Food" (English)
Bannu Beef Pulao	Bannu	"Beef" (English) "Pulao" (Persian origin)
Peshawari Chapli Kabab	Peshawari	"Chapli" (Pashto origin) "Kabab" (Persian origin)
Lahori Murgh Chana	Lahori	"Murgh" (Arabic origin, meaning chicken) "Chana" (Hindi/Urdu origin, meaning chickpeas)
Mardan Zarda Pulao	Mardan	"Zarda" (Urdu origin, meaning sweet rice) "Pulao" (Persian origin)
Kemari Shrimps	Kemari	"Shrimps" (English)
Inegol Kofte	Inegol	"Kofte" (Turkish origin)
New York Pizza	New York	"Pizza" (Italian origin)

In Table 1, different linguistic patterns can also be seen in the offered food names depending on morphological structure, naming traditions, and cultural influences. The food names generally follow a pattern of geographical location and food item, where the first part refers to a city, region, or country like Turkish, Izmir, Istanbul, Bombay, Moroccan, Korean, and the second part refers to a type of food such as Pizza, Burger, Biryani, Kebab, Dumplings. Some other variations are adding geographical location, an adjective and then a food item such as *Tokyo Chilli Chicken Dry*, *Lucknow Sizzling Kebab*. Besides these, another pattern is observed with geographical location and a descriptive noun. For example, *China Town*, referring to a food-related location rather than a dish. From a lexical perspective, words like *Kabab*, *Boti*, *Kofte*, *Pulao*, *Shawarma* are borrowed from Turkish, Persian, and Arabic languages, reflecting culinary history and linguistic diffusion. However, words like *Biryani*, *Rabri*, *Behl* originate from South Asian languages either Hindi, Urdu or Bengali.

Discussion

The results of this investigation on mapping Karachi's culinary identity through linguistic landscape analysis provide significant information about how food stalls and restaurants employ place-names in their signage and branding. Place names appear to have a number of purposes when used in food-related signs, including promoting regional identities, arousing cultural nostalgia, and placing food items in relation to well-known metropolitan places.

The usage of place names from both Karachi and other regional or national places is a common pattern in the data. These naming practices emphasize the value of certain places as markers of culinary heritage while also strengthening the local identity. Due to the strong associations of place-names with certain culinary traditions and cultural customs, they frequently convey an impression of authenticity. This use of geographical names can be viewed as a smart marketing tactic because customers often link particular restaurants to particular cuisines, which builds expectations and confidence.

Additionally, the way place names are used in Karachi's various districts varies. Place names seem to be used more freely in more multicultural or

cosmopolitan locations in order to appeal to a wider range of customers. Areas with a more localized population, on the other hand, might rely more on regional names or cultural symbols that correspond with the majority group. This variation in name practices raises questions about the possible impact of regional social dynamics and how restaurants modify their identities to appeal to particular demographics.

In addition, the data indicates that place names frequently function to communicate a feeling of authenticity or "local flavor," which is crucial in the food sector. Businesses that use place- or geographical-based names appear to establish credibility around the food's alleged original origins, which attracts customers who appreciate regionally specific cooking techniques or traditional recipes. Through this study it is understood that the use of place-names in food-related signage plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of authenticity, cultural identity, and culinary heritage. With the purposeful use of place-based references, food vendors in Karachi not only market their products but also add to the city's linguistic and cultural variety. This study shows how place names can be used as a lens to understand the intersections of identity, cultural heritage, and consumer behavior in linguistic landscape research.

Future Research Recommendations

Further research should broaden the scope by looking at other cities in Pakistan or South Asia to compare naming customs across areas, even if this study offers insightful information about the linguistic landscape of Karachi. Comparative research can show how food naming conventions vary across urban and rural contexts or how they change over time as a result of cultural interaction and globalization.

The opinions of customers on place names on food signage may also be the subject of future research. More detailed information about consumer behavior and preferences may be obtained by analyzing how customers perceive these place-based identifiers, including whether they find them to be genuine, appealing, or deceptive. To learn more about the symbolic meanings associated with place names,

anthropological research or customer interviews may be used.

Lastly, scholars should investigate how local language landscapes are impacted by global food patterns. It would be intriguing to investigate how place names in the food sector change to reflect global influences while retaining local relevance as fusion and international cuisine grow more common in urban areas like Karachi. Understanding the harmony between local and global identities in modern metropolitan settings may be aided by this area of inquiry.

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Appendix

