

The Linguistic Landscape of Tahrir Square Protest Signs and Egyptian National Identity

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Abstract

This is a study of the languages that occurred naturally in Tahrir Square at the heart of Cairo during the revolution in 2011. This paper proposes a vivid perspective to the Linguistic Landscape (LL) research by investigating the Egyptian revolution protest signs and the semiotic aspects of communication of over one hundred photographs. This paper is situated within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodological approaches and the grounded theory approach which have implications for investigating protest signs. The main objective of this study is to show how the LL of Tahrir Square protest signs can offer some insights into Egyptian national identity. The unit of analysis was protest sign in search for a dominant pattern that represents the Egyptian national identity. After analyzing the protest signs and the photographs, two main dominant patterns found in these signs which are unique features of Egyptian national identity. These patterns were sarcasm and faith.

Keywords

Linguistic Landscape, national identity, protest signs, revolution

1. Introduction

Signs in cities are used to spread or declare important information to the general public in the public sphere. Chandler (2007, p. 2) claims that “in a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects”. However, these signs do not have any value in themselves unless the general public interpret them and add meaning to them. Protest signs may be considered as one form of semiotic sign since they indicate the presence of something else. Protest signs in public spaces usually denote objection or disapproval to an official entity. This entity may be a law or a ruler.

The aim of this study is to show how the LL of Tahrir Square protest signs may offer some insights into Egyptian national identity. To present the theoretical framework of this study, the concepts of semiotics, linguistic landscape, national identity and revolution were discussed. Next, a report of the case study of Tahrir Square was presented. Finally, a discussion and a conclusion were provided.

2. The Concept of Semiotics

The study of signs stems from the work of both Saussure (1857-1913) and Peirce (1839-1914). Saussure claimed that a sign consists of a “signifier” and a “signified”. While the “signifier” represents a tangible material that can be seen, heard, etc., the “signified” represents a concept or a mental image of the signifier (Saussure, 1983). For Saussure semiotics or “semiology” is a field that investigates “the role of signs as part of social life”. In Saussurean terms, a protest sign is a signifier (signifiant) which refers to a concept or a signified (signifié).

In addition to Saussure’s basic concepts of a sign, Chandler (2007) summarizes the general characteristics of Peircean perspectives on a sign. For Peirce semiotics is the “formal doctrine of signs”. Unlike Saussure’s dyadic view of signs, Peirce adopted a triadic model of a sign. Peirce claimed that a sign is composed of three elements: representamen, object, and interpretant. Firstly, a representamen represents the form (or the how) of the sign; this form may be material or concept. Secondly, an object represents something beyond the sign (or the what). Finally, an interpretant represents the meaning inferred from the sign. It may be possible to obtain that Peirce’s representamen and interpretant are similar to Saussure’s signifier and signified respectively. However, Peirce’s unique concept is the object.

Peirce offered three modes of relationship between a representamen and its object or its interpretant. These three modes are symbolic, indexical, or iconic relationships. Symbolic relationship is a mode where there is an arbitrary union between the representamen and the interpretant such as the relationship between a sound and a letter or a word (abstract) and something (material) in the world. This mode of relationship may be learned or acquired from a certain culture.

Iconic relationship is a mode where there is a perceived resemblance or union between the representamen and the interpretant such as the relationship between a cartoon portrait of one person and the same real person. The iconic relationship is a pattern of something or someone that is similar to what it stands for.

Finally, indexical relationship is a mode where there is a direct connection (not arbitrary) between the representamen and the interpretant such as the relationship between traffic green light (sign) and permission to go. It is important to note that a sign may represent a symbolic, an indexical, and an iconic relationship or any combination of the three modes of relationship.

3. The Concept of Linguistic Landscape

The term, linguistic landscape, has become a firm addition to sociolinguistic research in recent years. Sociolinguistic literature reveals a variety of definitions for the concept of linguistic landscape. Backhaus broadly defines a sign as “any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame” (Backhaus, cited in Edelman, 2010, p. 10). Probably the most popular definition of linguistic landscape is found in the work of Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 25) who define linguistic landscape as “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs,

and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration". According to Ben-Rafael et al. (2006, p. 14) linguistic landscape is "any sign or announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location".

Some linguists prefer the term "linguistic landscaping", e.g., Itagi and Singh (2002) and Backhaus (2007) who believe that the term "linguistic landscaping" is more suitable than "linguistic landscape" because it denotes planning and creating of signs. Another suggestion by Cenoz and Gorter (2006) who prefer the term "multilingual cityscape". However, the present study uses the term "linguistic landscape" to avoid any ambiguity since this field of study is relatively new.

A number of scholars (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Botterman, 2011) differentiate between the terms "top-down" and "bottom-up" signs. They consider top-down signs are made and placed by official or government entities. Examples of top-down signs are found on the main gate of a city hall and a municipal government as well as street names. While top-down signs are official, bottom-up signs are private. Unlike top-down signs, bottom-up signs often use more vivid language. Examples of bottom-up signs are names of private businesses and advertising billboards. Naturally, protest signs are bottom-up signs which are the center of investigation of this study.

The significance of LL studies, as stated by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006, p. 27), lies in the fact that LL "allows us to point out patterns representing different ways in which people, groups, associations, institutions and governmental agencies cope with the game of symbols within a complex reality". Furthermore, Backhaus (2007, p. 11) claims that LL analysis "can provide valuable insights into the linguistic situation of a given place, including common patterns of language and script use, official language policies, prevalent language attitudes, power relations between different linguistic groups, and the long term consequences of language and script contact, among others".

Furthermore, Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 25) state that "the linguistic landscape of a territory can serve two basic functions: an informational function and a symbolic function". The informational function can deliver a message about the community that lives in or occupies a certain area; thus, this informational marker can indicate language boundaries among communities. On the other hand, the symbolic function indicates significant symbolic meaning (e.g., identity, power, and status) to the public in a territory. Therefore, the LL may be considered as "a powerful mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, and hence also of expressing and creating identities" (Kotze, 2010, p. 9). For that reason, the prevalence of a language tone or a figure of speech on protest signs visible to the general public may express group or national identities.

4. National Identity

Identity is a dynamic and relational concept. It outlines the dynamic relationship among individuals as well as among groups in a way that indicates relative similarities (we vs they). Needless to say, significant differences exist among individuals of the same group such as preferences, values, and

personality, intelligence, memory, gender and age. In general, *national identity involves some sort of political community, however tenuous. A political community in turn implies at least some common institutions and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community. It also suggests a definite social space, a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong* (Smith, 1991, p. 9).

The study of national identity requires the clarification of two terms: collective identity and nation. National identity may be considered as a form of collective identity; a term introduced by social movement scholars. Melucci (1995) used the term collective identity to refer to a group shared beliefs which lead a group to act collectively. This collective action is “the result of purposes, resources, and limits, as a purposive orientation constructed by means of social relationships within a system of opportunities and constraints” (Melucci, 1995, p. 43). It may be said that Melucci maintains that collective action is not only the effect of manifestation of beliefs. In fact, collective action is based upon people, who are acting collectively and are reshaping their relationships to accommodate solidarity among themselves to achieve a shared and a higher goal.

Some scholars believe that nations are more than ethnicity of people and territory of land they occupy. Anderson (1983, p. 15) claims that nations are imagined communities and they differ from one another “not by their authenticity but by the way in which they are imagined”. Thus a national identity is composed of several features such as faith, language, heritage, etc...

According to Smith (1991, p. 15) national identity contains five fundamental features. These are: “1). an historic territory, or homeland; 2). Common myths and historical memories; 3). a common, mass public culture; 4). Common legal rights and duties for all members; 5). a common economy with territorial mobility for members”. Upon reviewing Smith’s “fundamental features” which are based on Western (European) nation-state analysis, it seems that Smith chose selectively these features to promote the concept of European unity.

Obviously, national identity is a multi-layered concept. For example, individuals who constitute a community have multiple identities because they may be similar in age and in religion but differ in sex or in personalities. Further, national identity is a unifying force that brings together a group of people on a geographical location. National identity is not shaped in one or two generations. The formation of a national identity is relatively long and multi layers process. These layers interact and blend together to constitute a unified but flexible identity of a nation. Keeping the above points in minds, I now briefly turn to some considerations of the Egyptian national identity.

Regarding ethnicity, the majority of Egyptians are “a fairly homogeneous group whose dominant physical characteristics are the result of the admixture of the indigenous African population with those of Arab ancestry” (Britannica Online Encyclopedia). Booth, a British Egyptologist, claims that Egyptians are always willing to accept into their society “anyone willing to accept Egypt as their home and to adopt their customs as their own is something that sets Egypt apart from other nations and makes

ancient Egypt one of the earliest truly multi-cultural society”. Egypt is also unique not only because of being one of the oldest multi-cultural nation but also because of its territorial boundaries. The famous Greek historian Herodotus (about 500 B.C.) defined Egypt as the “land which was Egypt which the Nile came over and watered, and that those were Egyptians who dwelling below the city of Elephantine drank of that river... and the Nile, when it is in flood, goes over not only the Delta but also of the land which is called Libyan and of that which is called Arabian sometimes as much as two days’ journey on each side, and at times even more than this or at times less” (Herodotus II, p. 18; Macaulay, trans., 1890). Actually, Egypt was unified into a single kingdom with clear borders about 5000 years ago (Cooney, 2011).

It might be suggested that faith and language are two essential features of Egyptian national identity. Faith was, and still is, the most unique feature of the Egyptian national identity. By faith I mean the belief in a religion. Herodotus postulated that “they (Egyptians) are religious excessively beyond all other men” (Herodotus II, p. 37; Macaulay, trans., 1890). In fact Herodotus’ remark about Egyptian excessive love for religion remains true throughout the history to date. In the same vein, Mahmoud (1993), a modern Egyptian philosopher, claims that an Egyptian may be different from any other person in being an artisan and a worshiper at the same time. To elaborate, Egyptians often feel proud of what they achieve whether they are well or poorly paid. No matter how much they earn, Egyptian farmers or craftsmen are usually satisfied with their lands crops or piece of work. Egyptians usually have a strong connection to their land (material world) and to their faith (Christianity or Islam alike). Thus, Mahmoud (1993, p. 388) rightly claimed that Egyptians acquired “patience, persistence, and mild manners as well as being sarcastic about those who are attached to the mortals because an Egyptian deeply believe in eternity”. Furthermore, for Egyptians, Muslims in particular, Arabic language is an integral part of the Egyptian identity. It is the language of the holy book , the Quran. It is the language of the Muslims’ five daily prayers. It is also the language of their sarcastic nature. In addition, faith is a vital part of the Egyptians identity as noted earlier by Herodotus.

5. Revolution

The short review, above, of the collective identity and national identity was essential to shed light on revolutionary processes of how people identify themselves and the identities they wish to construct while they are involved in public struggles. It is also important to briefly highlight the relationship between Egyptians and their rulers. Due to the fact that Egypt, after the Pharaonic era, has been ruled by non-Egyptians, Mahmoud (1993, p. 375) draws an analogy to the relationship between the Egyptians and their ruler being like the relationship between “birds and a hunter, not soldiers and a leader”. In fact this analogy, as Mahmoud mentioned, is quoted from Saad Zaghlul, an iconic Egyptian revolutionary and statesman (1859-1927). In fact, the first Egyptian president to rule Egypt was after the 1952 revolution. In a time of crisis (e.g., war or revolution), people tend to soften their differences to achieve a greater goal. Revolution is generally viewed as “a change in the way a country is governed,

usually to a different political system and often using violence or war” (Cambridge online dictionary). Nevertheless, a revolution is more than a removal of the ruling power. To a great extent, revolutions go through a process, that takes time, till power is shifted from one agency or group of actors to another. This process involves several stages of protests which may pave the way to revolutions. Rubinson (2009, p. 2756) outlined three stages of protest movements: opportunity, development of tactics, and the process of mobilization.

Opportunity refers to fluctuations in political factors that increase protestors’ expectations of success which, in turn, leads to the need of collective action. In fact, state weakness creates opportunity for revolution. When popular uprisings take an opportunity, some tactics need to be adopted.

Tactics may include different types such as violent, disruptive, or conventional. A violent tactic is considered ineffective because a state often repress this tactic with a justified use of force. A disruptive tactic includes “non-violent resistance such as marches and sit-ins”; this tactic reveals unity among the protesters and mobilizes the interested population. Non-violent resistance proves to be successful in many parts of the world. Conventional tactics include strikes and petitions. Usually, the last tactic does not lead to revolution.

Mobilization is a process that changes the individuals or groups from being passive to be active actors in order to participate collectively in public life. The process of mobilization has different models. Examples of some models of mobilization are micromobilization and free-rider problem. Micromobilization which is based on mobilizing people on an individual level. If micromobilization is not adopted, the free-rider problem arises after the success of a revolution when most political groups or individuals, falsely or rightly, claim that they have participated in the making of the revolution. Once activists risk their lives and gain more power, the price of cruelty with them becomes very high for the state officials. When activists start experience mental freedom, they act accordingly.

6. Case Study: Tahrir Square

6.1 The Setting

Tahrir Square is the heart of Egypt and it is located in the heart of the capital city Cairo. Its name in Arabic, Tahrir, may be translated as Liberation or freedom. Actually, Tahrir Square was first designed during the reign of Khedive Ismail (1863-1879) as a part of a bigger plan to modernized Cairo. In the 19th century, Woolson (1896, p. 151) eloquently described Tahrir Square which was called the New Quarter in 1890 stating that,

streets shaded by innumerable trees; streets broad indeed... well-kept, bright-faced houses, many of them having beautiful gardens, which in January are glowing with giant poinsettias, crimson hibiscus, and purple bougainvillea—flowers which give place to richer blooms, to an almost over-luxuriance of color and perfumes, as the early spring comes on. If the streets were paved, it would be like the outlying quarters of Paris, for most of the houses are French as regards their architecture.

Originally, Tahrir Square was known as the “New Quarter”, then it was called Ismailia Square after

Khedive Ismail. In 1955, Nasser changed its name to be Tahrir Square, symbolizing the liberation of Egypt from both the British and the monarchy.

Tahrir Square has witnessed several historic events which are engraved in the collective memory of the Egyptians. After the Suez war of 1956, also known as the Tripartite Aggression, millions of Egyptians marched to Tahrir Square to volunteer to drive out the occupation forces from Egypt. Also, following the resignation of Nasser due to the Israeli occupation to Sinai in 1967, millions of Egyptians flooded in Tahrir Square to turn down Nasser's resignation. In 1970, following the death of Nasser, millions of Egyptians poured into Tahrir Square in sorrow following his coffin till his burial place. In short, Tahrir Square was the public place in Cairo where millions of Egyptians have gathered at time of grief, happiness, and challenge.

There are various symbolic buildings located in Tahrir Square (Figure 1a). The first one is the Egyptian Antiquities Museum which houses the largest collection of ancient Egyptian antiquities in the world. This museum is a perfect representation of the Egyptian Pharaonic identity. The second symbolic building is the largest government administrative complex known as the Mogamma which houses numerous ministries. Most Egyptians and foreign residents have visited this building to solve a certain issue with the government. This building clearly symbolizes and embodies the centralized Egyptian state power. The building of the Arab League Headquarters is the third symbolic building which represents the Arabic identity of Egypt. The fourth symbolic building is the National Democratic Party (Mubarak ruling party) which symbolizes Mubark's power. It is important to mention that this was the only building which was set on fire during the revolution. The last symbolic building is the American University complex in Cairo which symbolizes enlightenment. Besides these symbolic buildings, there are several other travel agencies, shops, and businesses around Tahrir Square.

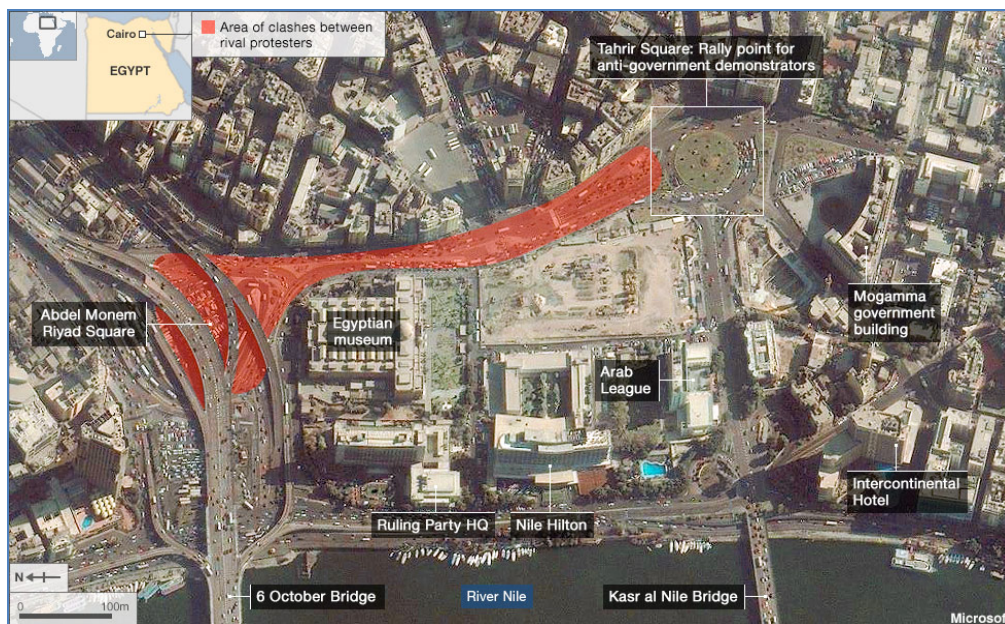


Figure 1a. Satellite Image of Tahrir Square

6.2 Methodology

Several linguistic landscape studies (e.g., Huebner, 2006; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Backhaus, 2007) have adopted a quantitative research approach by tabulating and calculating the number of occurrences of the language(s) used on signs in the public space. Backhaus (2007, p. 2) claims that most linguistic landscape studies include three research parameters namely, the sign writers, the sign readers, and the dynamics of forming the linguistic landscape. However, these studies examined the linguistic landscape from a variety of perspectives. Huebner (2006) examined the linguistic landscape of fifteen neighborhoods with a focus on multilingualism and dominance of language(s) in Bangkok, Thailand. Cenoz and Gorter (2006) compared two main shopping streets in Spain. Backhaus (2007) studied top-down and bottom-up multilingual signs in Tokyo, Japan. In addition to the quantitative approach, the study of Torkington (2009) made use of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodological approach “to examine the nature of the texts themselves and to ask why this particular text is in this particular place, at this particular time, in this particular language” (Torkington, 2009, p. 126). Thus, the current paper adopts the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodological approach and the grounded theory approach.

CDA scholars (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) view language as a “social practice” and give distinctive consideration to context as well as to the relationship between language and power. Critical discourse analysis is usually concerned with exposing abuse of power exercised by elite groups as van Dijk called it “top-down relations of dominance”. However, this paper looks at a moment when protesters (the powerless) resist their ruler (the powerful) in a situation of dramatic shift of power which van Dijk (1993, p. 250) termed “bottom-up relations of resistance” or the counter-power. In this approach of CDA, the focus may be on verbal as well as on non-verbal aspects of communication such as films and photographs. In Fairclough’s words (2001, p. 231) “CDA is analysis of the dialectical relationships between discourse (including language but also other forms of semiosis, e.g., body language or visual images) and other elements of social practices”.

Additionally, the grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method which “consists of a set of systematic, but flexible, guidelines for conducting inductive qualitative inquiry aimed toward theory construction” (Charmaz & Bryant, 2008, p. 374). After data collection phase, data is grouped into patterns of similarity and a theory emerges from comparison of the patterns throughout the research process.

The unit of analysis was protest signs in search for a dominant pattern that represents the Egyptian national identity. Photographs of protest signs may also include people who carry them as well as background of the public space. Protest signs are “the scene of changing ideas and aesthetics, of cultural, social and political events” (Boekraad, 2008, p. 30). In the middle of social and political protests and fluctuations, protest signs may function as communicative and motivational forces.

Data of the linguistic landscape of Tahrir Sq. was collected over the course of the 18 days sit-in Egyptian revolution with a focus on photographs of written protest signs. Over one hundred

photographs were collected mainly from two official sources. The first official source was the web site of Egypt State Information Service (SIS). The second source was an electronic book published by Assiut University. SIS is an official information establishment owned by the Egyptian government and it was an affiliate of the Information Ministry. Recently, the affiliation of the SIS has been transferred from the Information Ministry to the presidency. On the other hand, Assiut University is a public university located in upper Egypt. After data collection phase, I have grouped the data into patterns of similarity or topics utilizing the grounded theory approach.

6.3 Data Analysis

The analysis begins with evidence of reshaping the public space as an indication of rescaling of power, and then examines solidarity, symbolic capital, sarcasm, and multilingual signs.

6.3.1 Reshaping the Public Space of Tahrir Square

Tahrir Sq., with its geographical, historical, national and symbolic status among Egyptians, has been reshaped on the first day of the revolution. Protesters took exclusive possession of the square. Sample photographs of the situation in Tahrir Sq. on the 18 days revolution are presented below. The first two photographs (Figures 1b and 1c) serve as an example of how the public spaces were restructured and reshaped. These two pictures also show the actors of the LL during the first days of the revolution.

Figure 1b shows Mubarak's riot police forces (on the right-hand side) block the way to hundreds of protestors (on the left-hand side) who march towards Tahrir Sq. on January 25, 2011. The police forces were using water cannons against the demonstrators of anti-Mubarak regime, the latter were praying in a complete state of peaceful defiance. This picture represents the ignorance of power exploitation (e.g., the police forces) versus the peaceful protesters (the people). It also demonstrates a major component of the Egyptian national identity namely faith. Most Egyptians would interpret this picture with a simple concept which every Egyptian knows that is justice does not exist in Egypt. This photograph of Kasr el-Nile bridge which leads to Tahrir Square also shows to all Egyptian population and to the whole world the different moral values of the two rival parties (the Egyptian protesters and Mubarak's regime). Most Egyptians would see themselves in the peaceful protesters' position. This situation has created the classic view of we (the people) versus they (Mubarak's regime).



Figure 1b. Reshaped Spaces on Kasr El-Nile Bridge

Source: SIS.

After the protesters had won this confrontation on Kasr el-Nile bridge near by Tahrir Sq., they marched proudly towards Tahrir Sq. enchanting the slogan in Arabic “the people want dignity, freedom, and social justice”. This slogan in itself represents universal values and legitimate demands. Later the same slogan was shortened to be “the people want change of the regime”, “the people want Mubark to leave office”, etc.



Figure 1c. Reshaped Spaces on Tahrir Square

Source: SIS.

A new chapter of the Egyptian history is written and is represented in Figure 1c where thousands or even a million of anti-Mubarak protesters are gathered in one public space (Tahrir Sq.), to declare the sovereignty of the people over their country and to reconstruct the landscape not only of Tahrir Sq., but also of most squares in Egypt. The actors of this landscape are seen as one entity; they are the Egyptians “who give shape to the collection of texts in public space” (Edelman, 2011, p. 7). Moreover, Figure 1c shows Tahrir Sq. symbolic buildings as well as the Egyptian flag, protest signs, people standing everywhere giving a multiple-depth and new perspective to the public space and to the protest signs. This panoramic photograph also declares the rescaling of power, where political, social, and economic changes are obviously coming soon. New fresh faces are going to replace the old ones. People who were politically persecuted though out the last 30 years of Mubarak’s regime are going to rule and rulers most probably are going to court, to hide, or to escape from the masses. For the first time in modern Egyptian history, millions of Egyptians collectively have overcome their fear of their rulers. The power and energy of the masses are visible to the whole world.

6.3.2 Solidarity

After two or three days, to be exact on Friday 28th of January 2011, the riot police forces had withdrawn not only from Tahrir Sq. but also from all protest squares in Egypt. On this day the army is deployed, and the protesters had different signals from the army that the army officers support the revolution. In Tahrir Sq. protesters have attached their signs on traffic light poles and street light poles. Figures 2a, 2b, and 2c use the same protest sign, from different angles at different time of the day, that says in Arabic “Leave”. The protestors have continued their sit-in in Tahrir Square until their demands are met.

Most Egyptians start to be united under the new slogan “Leave” which expresses the general sentiment in Tahrir Sq. and in Egypt at the time, demanding Mubarak to leave office. Figure 2a is similar in message to Figure 1b in indicating the pattern of faith as an integral part of the Egyptian national identity. At the back of the photograph, the sign reads “leave” is at a higher level than the standing and the praying protesters. It is also important to note that many of the standing protesters were Christians protecting their Muslim partners while praying. On the other hand, the photograph of Figure 2b with the same sign at the back shows protesters—male, female, young and old—waving with Egyptian flags. Figure 2c shows the same sign with a toddler and Egypt’s national flag in the front of the photograph. This kind of photograph has created a kind of sympathy and safety among protesters. Who can fight a toddler? Such a photo (Figure 2c) has made several families go out into public squares, particularly, into Tahrir Sq. with the same single demand “Leave”.



Figure 2a. “Leave” with Praying and Non-Praying Protesters

Source: SIS.



Figure 2b. “Leave” Close-Up

Source: SIS.

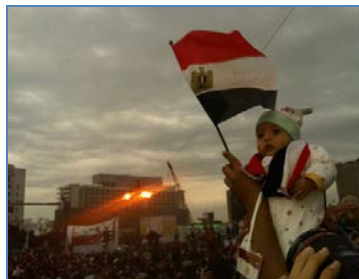


Figure 2c. “Leave” with a Toddler

Source: SIS.

To illuminate the nature of the new reality, let's examine the protest sign "Leave". It is a one word sign. This word is a verb that expresses an action and that falls under the category of directive speech acts in which the speaker/writer—in this case the creator of the protest sign—commands the hearer/reader (Mubarak the head of the state) to do something. In the case of directives, protesters try to make the real world matches their sign. The actors of the LL are the protesters who are the creators of protest signs vs Mubarak who is the symbol of a totalitarian unpopular regime. In other words, the actors are the people (Egyptians) vs the authority (Mubarak). During the making of a revolution, there is a shift of power from the ruling elites to the modest people. The ruled tries to be the ruler and uses directive speech acts indicating a new position of the two conflicting actors. Now, the people have the power to use ordering to make their ruler do what they wish. This is the situation which every dictator fears the masses.

6.3.3 Groups As a Solidarity Image

Group solidarity was also present in a number of images. Figure 3a shows a Coptic priest holding a cross in his left hand and a Muslim Sheikh holding the Quran in his right hand. The two religious men were carried on the protesters shoulders with a text written on the Egyptian national flag saying "Victory or [Martyrdom]". This photograph shows the power of solidarity among non-violent Egyptian Muslims and Christians. As an Egyptian, when I first saw this photograph, it has reminded me of the Egyptian 1919 revolution against the British occupation of Egypt which was depicted by several Egyptian films. Therefore, I may say that this photo has addressed the collective memory of Egyptians and has reminded them of the value of solidarity between Muslim and Christian against oppression. These two peaceful religious scholars were raising the symbols of peace in their hands and were leaning on each other to avoid falling down. It is a perfect image of solidarity among Egyptians.



Figure 3a. Egyptian National Flag with a Text Which Translates As "Victory or Martyrdom"

Source: SIS.

The second example of group solidarity in the photo (Figure 3b) shows a group of young doctors

wearing white coats with a simple handmade protest sign in English that says “Mubarak is (a) malignant tumor must be excised”.



Figure 3b. Doctors with a Protest Sign Says “Mubarak Is (a) Malignant Tumor Must Be Excised”

Source: SIS.

The young doctors employ sarcastic medical terms to better attract and mobilize other doctors as well as the general public. These medical terms are malignant, tumor, and excised. The use of English language sheds light on the fact that English is the language of medical education at almost all Egyptian universities. It can also be noted that these doctors use color to highlight their message, they use red color with only two words “Mubarak and excised”. Further, this image of group solidarity among protesters shows that they hold hands in a physical solidarity involving a group of anti-Mubarak young educated demonstrators.



Figure 3c. Muslim Scholars Waving with a Protest Sign Translates “Scholars of [Muslim] Endowments Are with the People Against the Regime”

Source: SIS.

The third example of Figure 3c above is a group of Muslim scholars waving a protest sign in Arabic declaring that “scholars of [Muslim] endowments are with the people against the regime”. These scholars, with their Azharite uniform, almost never participate in street demonstration or sit-in protest, however, their powerful visible presence creates a sense of emergency as well as a sense of religious

legitimacy which is essential for the success of the revolution in Egypt. It is important to note that Al-Azhar University, where these Muslim scholars were educated, is among the oldest university not only in Egypt but also in the world. The history of this key institution dates back to the 10th century. Its religious scholars are usually considered to be a good representation of moderate Muslims. The participation of these scholars with their uniform signal a huge historic event is taking place.

The three examples mentioned above demonstrate the importance of group as a solidarity image. Especially noteworthy is the highly esteemed status of doctors and religious scholars (Muslim and Christian) among most Egyptians. Thus their remarkable participation in the revolution adds credibility to the event and helps in gaining the support of almost all Egyptians. In addition, their notable appearance in Tahrir Sq. with their uniforms has refuted false claims of the Egyptian national media which were used as a propaganda organ of Mubarak's autocratic regime; during the 18 days of the revolution, all Egyptian national TV and newspapers claim that the protesters were driven by a foreign agenda, some of the protesters were not Egyptians, or most protesters are paid by outside evil intelligences who foster political instability in the country through toppling down Mubarak and his regime.

6.3.4 Symbolic Capital

Symbolic embodied capital may be attained through personal message and experience (Bourdieu, 1986). During the 18 days stand-in revolution in Tahrir Sq. protesters used creative protest signs. Some protesters have decided to take off parts of their clothes (Figure 4a) and use their bodies as protest signs to defy the regime; other used their clothes to express their voices (Figure 4b).



Figure 4a. A Defiant Protester Uses His Body As a Protest Sign with a Message in Arabic Translates “Paper Has Finished, What Else Can I Do for You [Mubarak]?”

Source: Assiut University.

Photo (Figure 4a) above shows a topless protestor with the Egyptian national flag painted on his face

and a protest message written on his chest in Arabic saying literally “Paper has finished, what else can I do for you [Mubarak]?” This sign is hand written on the protester’s body after many protesters have written several protest signs saying “leave”. This expressive photograph (Figure 4a) conveys a multilevel message. On one level, national pride is expressed through the national flag, however, on another level, an act of rebelliousness is clearly expressed by the young man against the topless young old regime. On a deeper level, this powerful protest sign goes beyond the semantic meaning and conveys a sarcastic state of despair and defiance. To write a protest sign on one’s body is a new way of declaring dissent in Egypt. Despite the fact that the message in itself, on a textual level, conveys peaceful and sarcastic meanings, it does not lack muscles. The power of this kind of protest sign lies in the physical fitness of the young man as well as on his serious eyes and facial expression on the photo.



Figure 4b. A Sit-In Protester Uses His T-Shirt As a Protest Sign with a Message in Arabic Translates “Down with Mubarak”

Source: Assiut University.

In Figure 4b another sit-in protester uses his clothes as a protest sign with Mubark’s face printed with red color. The protest sign on the back of his t-shirt says in Arabic “Down with Mubarak”. The protester way of sitting on a blanket and way of reading a newspaper signal an act of willingness of staying in the public space forever or until the fall of Mubarak’s regime. It also gives the feeling that the protesters are finally at home. It shows that protesters have nothing to do except to remove the oppressive ruler from power. They were fulltime rebels. Peaceful but challenging sit-in protest has proven successful for Egyptian protesters.

6.3.5 Sarcasm

Sarcasm, a distinctive quality of Egyptian national identity, was abundantly present in protest signs. The dominant sarcastic pattern of protest signs employed by the protesters permitted them to express their detest of Mubarak’s regime. Furthermore, protesters used their hilarious handmade signs to build a sense of safe community among themselves as well as to mobilize the rest of the population. As stated earlier, most protesters became united under the sign “leave”. Yet, Mubarak hasn’t left office within the first few days. As the time passes, many sit-in protesters created protest signs that expressed their defiance as well as their sense of humor. The photograph (Figure 5a) shows a smiling girl carrying a

protest sign in Arabic that says “leave, I want to have a shower”. Several protest signs used the same sarcastic style with a twist such as “leave, I want to get a haircut”, “leave, my arms hurt”, “leave, I want see my children”, etc... Looking at this photo (Figure 5a), we see a female protester with no fear posing to the camera with her protest sign. The language used by this protester is Egyptian colloquial Arabic which is deployed to create solidarity with other protesters. This sense of humor and smiling faces from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds create a safe feeling for protesters and successfully mobilizes the rest of the nation. In fact, several families have gone to Tahrir Sq. to share in the revolution. Further, the collective peaceful behavior of the protesters has made millions of Egyptians go out not only to Tahrir Sq. but also to many squares all over the country as if they were going to a party not to a high risk public place where they might be killed. The people felt for the first time that they are unstoppable. They have decided to take control of their country.



Figure 5a. A Smiling Girl Carrying a Protest Sign in Arabic Says “Leave, I Want to Have a Shower”

Source: Assiut University.



Figure 5b. Arabic Mirror Writing Saying “Leave, Maybe He [Mubarak] Does Not Understand Unless It Is the Other Way Around”

Source: Assiut University.

Egyptians, famous for their defiant political sarcasm, have been making fun of Mubarak's stupidity for about thirty years. This is apparent in Figure 5b of the man with a fresh wound on his eyebrow posing with a handmade protest sign with the word "leave" in Arabic mirror writing saying "Leave, maybe he [Mubarak] does not understand unless it is the other way around". Arabic is written from right to left, however, this protester has chosen to write in Arabic the word "leave" in his protest sign from left to right to express hopelessness of Mubarak's understanding the meaning of the word "leave". The fresh wound of the protester gives another message of defiance. In other words, despite the brutality of Mubarak's police, protesters are still alive and visibly make fun of the head of the state.

6.3.6 Bilingual Signs

Most protest signs were written in Arabic, the mother tongue of Egyptians. However, several other languages were also present on protest signs. Egyptian protesters have employed foreign languages in a sarcastic way. They even played with Hieroglyph, a unique Pharaonic extinct language, to deliver their sarcastic message. The photograph of a man carrying a handmade bilingual (hieroglyphic alphabets and Arabic) protest sign (Figure 6a) reading "Leave, in Hieroglyph, O Pharaoh, you might understand". It is worth noting that the hieroglyphic alphabets used in this protest sign are transliteration of the word "leave" in Arabic. Further, the word "leave" in Arabic is written with separate letters which is never used in Arabic language. Thus this protest sign serves initially to create a sarcastic message.



Figure 6a. A Bilingual (Hieroglyphic Alphabets and Arabic) Protest Sign Reading "Leave, in Hieroglyph, O Pharaoh, You Might Understand"

Source: SIS.

The message of this protest sign reiterates the sarcastic nature of Egyptians. The use of the word pharaoh (metaphor) expresses a general feeling among many Egyptian that a pharaoh would never leave office willingly; it is a word that is used by Egyptians referring to a dictator. This sign is a simple reference to the Egyptian Pharaonic identity.



Figure 6b. A Bilingual (English and Arabic) Protest Sign

Source: SIS.

Additionally, English was the most popular foreign language used on protest signs due to its widespread in Egypt and in the world. Another man (Figure 6b) was carrying a big protest sign in both Arabic and English stating “Facebook against every unjust” in reference to the role of Facebook in the revolution. In fact social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, have played an essential role in the Egyptian revolution. Egyptian middle class young men and women have used the internet social media to mobilize and organize the protesters. Most users of the social media have never met each other, however they were unified before they have met in Tahrir Square. They have used their energy to bring about changes. The same man in the photograph was hanging another protest sign around his neck in Arabic reading “Time of fear is over”. These two signs are carried by one person in a public space create a strong statement of determination and warning. To explain, ruling people through fear does not work anymore in Egypt.

7. Discussion

This study has attempted to address the linguistic landscape of Tahrir Sq. protest signs during the Egyptian revolution from a CDA perspective. The Egyptian revolution has been exemplified because of the cultural effects it had on the rest of the Arab countries; in addition, Egypt is the most populous country in the Arab World. Sarcasm and faith were found to be the most dominant features of the Egyptian national identity on the protest sign photographs. These two features were cooperating with and supporting each other. At the sit-in revolution in Tahrir Sq., Arabic was the dominate language, yet other foreign languages were present, the most noticeable foreign language was English. However, several other languages such as Chinese, Hebrew, French, and German were also present on protest signs. Egyptian protesters have played with Hieroglyphic alphabets, an extinct language, to deliver their message in a unique sarcastic manner. The presence of children, women and men of all age groups and of all social classes as well as the absence of any ideological pattern in protest signs has generated an iconic peaceful revolution image of Tahrir Square. Also, the appearance of different groups such as doctors and Muslim and Christian religious figures has created a solidarity image. They are different

groups with diverse educational and social backgrounds, however, they all have the same message and goal that is the overthrow of Mubarak's oppressive and corrupt regime. Moreover, the unprecedented unified and determined large number of Egyptian protesters waving with their funny protest signs against the regime has changed the geographical and the linguistic landscape of Tahrir Square. To conclude, all these factors, among others, in combination with the linguistic landscape of Tahrir Sq. have contributed to the transformation of resistance into noticeable power change. Furthermore, this study suggests that the language used by the protesters had a new substantial role in social and political changes in Egypt.

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