

## **Photographic Documentation as a Mode of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: A Case of Pilot Testing in Linguistic Landscape**

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### **Abstract**

*Qualitative research is known as an exploratory research, in which the common modes of data collection are interviews, focus group discussions and observational methods. Though there is a large amount of data available on how to conduct qualitative research through the above-mentioned three modes, little do we know about photographic documentation as a rather new and under researched mode of data collection in qualitative research. This paper attempts to explore photographic documentation as a primary mode of data collection in linguistic landscape. Linguistic landscape is a very popular and thriving area of research in applied linguistics. It is the visibility and salience of languages in public spaces, most commonly conducted on public and private signboards. The usual norm of conducting research in linguistic landscape is to click pictures of signboards and conduct an analysis of the language used on those signboards. This paper discusses the pilot testing of this mode of data collection, i.e. photographic documentation. After clicking pictures of public signboards from two public parks in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan (following a very systematic approach), mediated discourse analysis was applied on it. Mediated discourse analysis is a specialized form of discourse analysis, having its roots in critical discourse analysis. Mediated discourse analysis observes the relationship between discourse and action. According to Scollon & Scollon (2003), we can only fully interpret the meaning of public texts by considering the social and physical world that surrounds them. The photographic data collected was analyzed at three levels; the text, the physicality of signboards and the social world in which they are displayed. This study suggests ways in improving this mode and procedure of data collection as to get notable findings in a qualitative research on linguistic landscape.*

**Keywords:** Linguistic Landscape, Mediated Discourse Analysis, Photographic Documentation, Pilot Test, Qualitative Research

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## **I. Introduction**

This paper seeks to find out how photographic data can be used as a mode of data collection in qualitative research. The intention of the study was to conduct a pilot study on linguistic landscape, in the backdrop of which, photographic data was tested as a primary source of data collection. The data was then analyzed in the light of mediated discourse analysis. Following are the research objectives of this study:

- To explore photographic documentation as a mode of data collection in qualitative research.
- To find out how photographic documentation can be used as a primary data source in linguistic landscape studies.
- To find out how the visual data obtained from photographic documentation can be analyzed using mediated discourse analysis.

## **II. Literature Review**

Research in social sciences is either conducted by using a quantitative approach or a qualitative approach. In a quantitative approach, the data is gathered in a numerical form, measured to test a theory which is then later supported or rejected. This approach is also used to establish general laws of behavior in any of the sub-fields of social sciences, where the data is typically drawn from experiments and questionnaires. While talking about qualitative approach, it is a descriptive approach, where the data is gathered in the form of opinions and viewpoints. A qualitative approach observes phenomenon rather than measuring it, and it uses participant observation and interviews as the two main sources of data collection. The definition given by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) asserts, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p.13).

This current research paper sheds light on a new form of data collection in qualitative research, which is photographic documentation. Research on photography as a data collection tool in social sciences has been the center of a few studies, like that of Norman (2010), Basil (2011), Wang and Dong (2013) and Holm (2014). According to Basil (2011), ‘Photography allows us to record behavior in its situational context; it also allows for reflection, the use of informants, coding, and allows us to illustrate the situation or behavior to others’ (p.6). Though photography has been used both as primary as well as secondary data but little light has been shed on how to conduct photographic data using a systematic manner and secondly, how to analyze that visual data. Confusion or a lack of understanding about how to use visual data has probably been the most limiting factor in its adoption in social research (Emmison and Smith,

2000). Generations of verbal-based research has further pushed our methods and journals to a verbal orientation (Basil, 2011, p.9). So this research paper will add up to the literature in this manner. Photographic documentation can be adopted as a mode of data collection in both qualitative and quantitative research, but this paper specifically talks about it in the setting of a qualitative research. As Basil (2011) stated, ‘the photographs may be used by ‘the qualitative researchers to allow a deeper understanding to emerge through reflection and hypothetic-deductive synthesis’ (p.8).

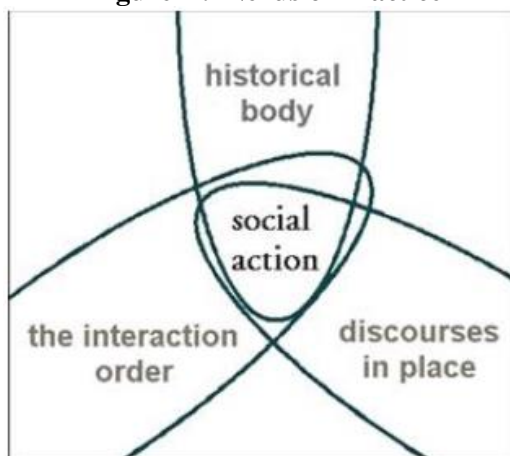
The data used by the researcher was a part of pilot study which was conducted on pictures of signboards. When one conducts research on signboards, it is included under the heading of linguistic landscape in the field of applied linguistics. Linguistic landscape is a relatively new field of research in applied and sociolinguistics. The term was first used by Landry and Bourhis in their paper which was published in 1997. According to them:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region or urban agglomeration.

Shohamy and Gorter (2009) expanded the works on linguistic landscape when they came out with their research study. They widened the scope of linguistic landscape by saying, “language and environment, words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces, that is the center of attention in this rapidly growing area referred to as linguistic landscape (LL)” (p.7). Dagenais, Moore, Sabatier, Lamarre and Armand (2008) called linguistic landscape as “environmental print” which researches by taking cities as “texts” (p.21). The present study deals with the linguistic landscape of the capital of Pakistan, Islamabad. Public signboards of different public institutions were studied to observe the maintenance of social order through them. This maintenance of social order will be observed by applying the theory of mediated discourse analysis on the data. Scollon & Scollon (2003) said, “We live our lives within elaborate socially constructed worlds of discourse and social interaction” (p. 16) and this will be observed on the language of public signboards.

The focus of mediated discourse analysis is not only on discourse but the whole interaction of discourse, the mediational means, the social world, the participants and the social action that they take due to that discourse. This interaction is termed as ‘nexus of practice’ by Scollon. The following figure (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p.154) presents a better idea of how nexus analysis situates social action at the intersection of the following three factors:

**Figure 1. Nexus of Practice**



*Source: The authors*

Scollon (2001, p. 145) puts forward five points around which the mediated discourse analysis is built. These are: mediated action, site of engagement, meditational means, nexus of practice and community of practice. As mentioned earlier, photographic documentation of public signboards is the main source of data collection in linguistic landscape studies. A pilot study, also known as a preliminary data analysis was conducted by the researcher. Three reasons were kept in mind before conducting the preliminary or a pilot study. Firstly, pilot study helps the researcher to become familiar with the type of data to be collected and from where to be collected. Secondly, it enhances the probability of success in the future of a research study intended by the researcher and thirdly, pilot studies are exploratory endeavors which aids the researcher in deciding in what they are going to do is worth to give a try or not.

### **III. Methodology**

The data collection was conducted by the researcher in March' 2018 in the capital city of Pakistan, Islamabad. The data was collected from two public parks in Islamabad, named Children's park and Daman-e-Koh park. A total of twenty photographs of public signs were collected, as it is a pilot study. The data collection procedure was conveniently executed as planned. The photographs were taken in daylight and the time and date were recorded. For the photographic documentation of public signage, the data collection procedure or plan used for this research is in some ways similar to the one proposed and then used by Backhaus (2007). He came with his three steps data collection procedure; determine the survey area, the items to be surveyed and the coding categories.

Firstly, the researcher had a walking tour of the areas from where the data was to be collected, to get an overview of the linguistic landscape of the selected areas. The exact sites of

data collection were then decided. Many researchers have taken data from one important landmark to the other (Burdick, 2012; Abid, Ahmad & Iqbal, 2016) or streets included in between two subway stations (Backhaus, 2006). In this research, the areas covered will be two public parks in Islamabad. The researcher also asked permission from the relevant authorities as public signage will be photographed, so it was important to take consent from the offices of the local government administrating the sites of data collection. Lastly, the researcher conducted photographic documentation, with the help of a digital camera. A good camera is one of the keys to achieve good quality data in photographic documentation. The systematic procedure that the researcher has suggested includes the following points:

- (a) The photographs of the signboards should be taken in the morning time around 10 am so that there is less rush of movement (of people and vehicles) in order to be as unobtrusive as possible.
- (b) The clicks should be taken with close proximity so that they are clear enough to be later used for data analysis. The proper way is to stand at a fifty-inch distance from the signboard. And take three clicks of every signboard. The reason behind taking three clicks is to gain the most perfect shot. The researcher can later on sort out the images and delete the blurred ones.
- (c) The date and time should be recorded with each shot taken as to increase the validity of the photos.
- (d) The photographs should then be stored in the photo storage software 'Google photos'. Google maps can also be utilized at this point.

The photographs that were taken by the researcher were then deeply studied keeping in mind the research objectives and to check whether this data and theoretical framework will be feasible in the long run to achieve the intended objectives or not. The main aspect the researcher is trying to find is how the signage under study is a reflection of the manner the ruling authority wants to maintain social order in the country. The data was then analyzed in the light of mediated discourse analysis or nexus analysis by Scollon & Scollon (2003).

#### **IV. Data Presentation**

After photographic documentation, the unit of analysis is the next important step. The units of analysis used in this research has been adopted from Barni and Bagna (2009). They used five main criteria to enter their data in the database. These are: mono vs multilingual signs (e.g. Urdu/English or in both languages), textual genre (e.g. warning sign, information sign), location (e.g. in neighborhood X in city Y), domain (e.g. signs in a health center, public park,

airport, military area) and place (e.g. signboard hanged on a tree, placed on the gate, on the wall, kiosk etc.).

According to the first criteria, all the signboards are monolingual signs, written in Urdu language as Urdu is the official language of Pakistan and also the lingua franca among the people. To give an overview of how the public signboards are composed in Pakistan, the English translation of all the collected signs is given in Table. 1. The translation was done by a translator, an Assistant Professor in the department of English, in a university in Islamabad. The criterion of textual genre divided the signs into five types: warning signs, informational signs, polite reminders, motivational signs and prohibitory signs. Table.1 presents the criteria of textual genre, location and place of each signboard. As according to the criterion of domain, all the signboards come under the domain of public park, so it is not included in the table. Similarly, all the signboards are monolingual, so this has also not been made part of the table below.

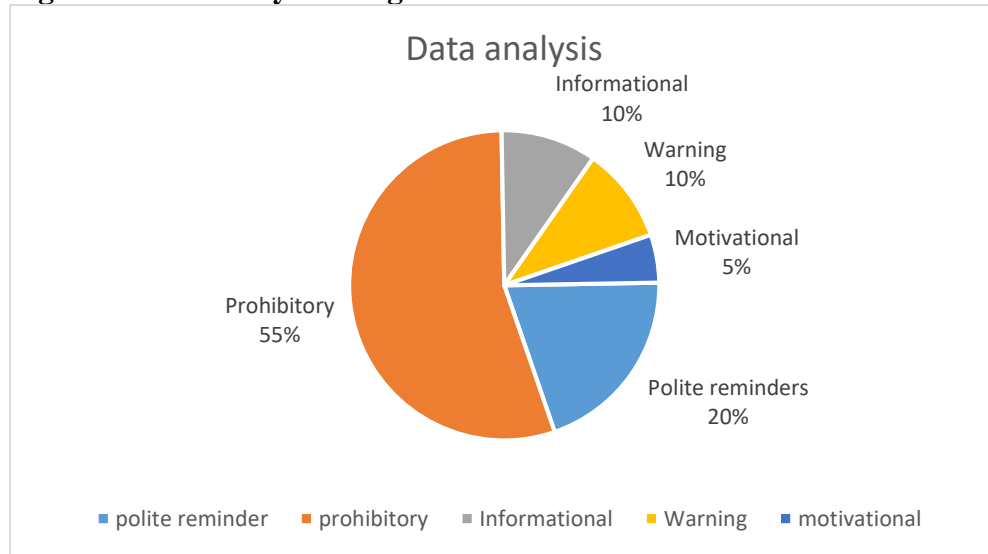
**Table. 1 Description of Variables**

Sr. #	Text of the Sign	Textual Genre	Location	Place
1.	Avoid entering inside.	Polite reminder	Children's park	Near the pavement.
2.	It is strictly prohibited to park your car on the sides of the road. In case of disobedience, rupees hundred will be fined or the person will be arrested by the police.	Prohibitory sign	Children's park	On the grass.
3.	This is a restricted zone. Parking your car in front of the barrier on the road or inside it is strictly prohibited.	Prohibitory sign	Children's park	On a barrier
4.	Sitting and eating inside the car in the parking is prohibited.	Prohibitory sign	Children's park	In the parking, near the road.
5.	Do not litter.	Prohibitory sign	Children's park	On a dustbin.
6.	It is prohibited to smoke in the park.	Informational sign	Children's park	In the green belt.
7.	Treat children with kindness.	Polite reminder	Children's park	Next to the children's play area.

8.	It is prohibited to sit in this lawn.	Prohibitory sign	Daman-e-Koh park	On the grass.
9.	It is prohibited to sit on this bridge.	Prohibitory sign	Daman-e-Koh park	Near the bridge.
10.	It is prohibited to listen and play songs in the park.	Prohibitory sign	Daman-e-Koh park	Next to the jogging track.
11.	Cooperate with the park's administration.	Informational sign	Children's park	On the grass.
12.	It is prohibited to walk on the grass.	Prohibitory sign	Daman-e-Koh park	Hanged on the tree.
13.	It is prohibited to play on the grass.	Prohibitory sign	Daman-e-Koh park	Hanged on the tree.
14.	The person plucking the flowers will be fined.	Warning sign	Daman-e-Koh park	Hanged on the tree.
15.	Plucking of flowers is prohibited.	Prohibitory	Daman-e-Koh park	Hanged on the tree.
16.	A clean country is a reflection of a clean nation.	Motivational sign	Daman-e-Koh park	Hanged on the tree.
17.	Do not destroy the beauty of natural landscape by littering.	Prohibitory sign	Daman-e-Koh park	Hanged on the tree.
18.	Take care of the plants.	Polite reminder	Daman-e-Koh park	Hanged on the tree.
19.	Please avoid littering.	Polite reminder	Children's park	On a dustbin.
20.	Do not pluck flowers. In case of flower plucking, rupees 100 will be fined.	Warning sign	Children's park	In the green belt, near the flowers.

It was revealed that prohibitory signs have the highest number i.e. eleven, after that at second comes polite reminders which were four, then there were two warning signs and two informational signs and one motivational sign was found. Figure 1 below gives the account of all the signboards in percentage.

**Figure 2. Data analysis of signboards**



Source: The authors

### V. Mediated Discourse Analysis of Data

The data shows that there exists a showcase of power as far as the message (content) of the signboards is concerned. The tone of language on more than half of the signboards is such which hint towards negation or prohibition. It is as if everything is being prohibited by the administration operating the signboards. The administrating body in both the parks is Capital Development Authority (CDA). Naturally, it governs on the orders of the ruling authority in the country. There seems to be an element of negation being observed on numerous signboards. For example, the signboard given below, which is in Urdu reads ‘Sitting and eating inside the car in the parking is prohibited’. Any action that the visitors in the park take after reading this signboard will be termed as the mediated action.

**Figure 3. Example of Prohibitory Sign**



Source: The authors



According to Scollon & Scollon (2003), there exists a relationship of discourse and action whenever we are looking at a signboard. When a visitor parks their car, and gets out of it, the first thing they notice is this signboard. This signboard acts as a primary mediational means for the visitors. It is called as the primary mediational means because without this signboard, the visitors cannot take any action related to it, or any further discourse cannot be generated without this signboard. While they have not even entered the park, this is what they are being given to observe. The 'control' by the government which elucidates its power, is evident right at the entrance of the park and tells us about the 'community of practice' of the administration of the park. The discourse that arises after reading this signboard revolves around the restrictive nature of the authority. It doesn't even allow a person to sit in his own car and eat something, which is something not seen anywhere else in the world. Something which cannot be termed as normal. Scollon & Scollon (2003) have given a lot of importance to the location of the signboard. According to them, "we cannot fully interpret the meaning of public texts unless we consider the social and physical world that surrounds them" (p. 144). The physical location of this board is the site of engagement according to MDA and it is placed right next to a popular fast food chain, McDonald's. On the left side is the park in front of which it is its parking, while on the right of it is McDonald's. There are many a times when people take a long round of the park with their kids and then come to McDonald's, order something and as they are tired, they go back to their car to eat it. And for instance, this is not the case, then somebody who is not feeling well to climb all the eleven stairs of the restaurant (as it is on a height) can just send someone up to bring them the food where they can enjoy it in the serenity of their car. But this is not the mindset of the administrative body of the park. They have without any justification or reasoning put this board that it is simply not allowed to sit in the car or eat in the car while it is being parked in the parking area.

Another signboard reads, 'It is prohibited to listen and play songs in the park'. Restriction on listening and playing of songs in a park doesn't look lucid. This signboard can be observed at a nexus of two levels. Firstly, it restricts on listening to music and secondly on playing. Listening to music is usually done through ear phones in a public place full of hustle and bustle. And even if it is not on ear phones, it is on high volume on a mobile phone, which comes under 'playing' of music, and somebody restricting it looks odd. One can comprehend it, if such words were written in a school's library or a hospital premises as it could disturb the people over there but in a park, looks irrational. People visit a park to enjoy, relax and unwind their tiredness in whatever way possible they can. The government think they have a right to

delimit people's perception of relaxation. Music is known as a natural relaxant and healer and if somebody wants to use it in the tranquility of a park then there should not be any restraint in doing so. Even if we look the other way around and somebody believes that music should not be played for relaxation, no matter what is the reason behind their perception (be it personal or religious), still nobody has the right to restrict people in playing music. If the government, the very supreme body in the country start putting restrictions on such trivial matters, then one can foresee the level of tolerance of that nation, that how the local people will perceive it. It is being stated in the theory of mediated discourse analysis that it's focus is not only on discourse but the whole interaction of discourse, the meditational means, the social world, the participants and the social action that they take due to that discourse. So, by reading and analyzing these signboards one can actually explore the 'nexus' of the whole interaction.

Plucking of flowers is an element which was observed in both the parks. In one park it was written as a warning, 'Do not pluck the flowers. In case of flower plucking rupees 100 will be fined'. While in the other park it was displayed on two separate sign boards. 'The person plucking the flowers will be fined' and 'Plucking of flowers is prohibited'. In the case of both the parks, the language used displays restriction and control by the authorities. Here the researcher would like to add the picture of a signboard taken from a park located in the vicinity of a private hotel in Pakistan. According to mediated discourse analysis, giving pictures of contrasting signboards while conducting analysis acts as complimenting meditational means and helps us to ponder deeply about the given site of engagement. The picture of the contrasting signboard is given below:

**Figure 4. Signboard in a Private Park**



*Source: The authors*

The first thing to notice on this board is that it is bilingual, i.e. written in two languages, English and Urdu. Whereas, if we look at the photographs of signage collected, they all are monolingual, written only in Urdu language, which means they target only the local population, not the foreigners. Secondly, the message delivered is the same of telling people not to pluck flowers, but the way it is written is very different from how it was written in the previous two parks. It uses no prohibition at all and the signboard is a type of request rather than an order or restriction as it starts with the word 'please'. Although comparison of public and private signage in Pakistan is a totally separate area to be explored, but a little comparison of the publicly owned park's signboards with the one which is privately owned gives us an idea how things are going wrong. It makes us ponder how social order is being maintained by the government related to signboards in Pakistan. According to Bhatia, Flowerdew and Jones's ideas on mediated discourse analysis, "discourse cannot be studied in isolation from the situated social actions that people take with it" (2008, p. 229). Hence, a signboard written as a request will have a different impact on people while a signboard which bounds them to do something will make them react differently.

There were three signboards related to prohibition on sitting, walking and playing in the grass. People come in a park to enjoy the greenery but here they are not even allowed to step on the grass. And the odd thing observed is that there was not any grass on the ground (at two instances where the boards were displayed) in the first place. Here the researcher would like to include a contrasting photograph of a signboard being placed in the sports center of University Utara Malaysia, Malaysia where she is currently studying. Giving contrasting mediational means will further probe the nexus of practice related to the discourse on prohibitory signs.

**Figure 5. Signboard in University Utara Malaysia**



*Source: The authors*

This signboard is an example of how a signboard if uses a request form rather than prohibition, conveys a totally different meaning to people. The signboard uses ‘please’ instead of ‘do not/it is prohibited’. The sign makers have also added a reason why they want people to keep off their feet from the grass, which is because of the maintenance work being done. Also, we can see that this signboard also caters to people who cannot read the words as there is an image added to the board, which is acting as a supporting mediational means. We can also say that it is added to emphasize what they are trying to say, as people are jogging on the athletics track next to the grass and it is easier for them to comprehend the message on the signboard by just looking at the image rather than reading the words. The element of geosemiotics given in nexus analysis also plays its part here. In geosemiotics, language is being studied in relation to how “it is materially placed in the world” (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p.2). The site of engagement of this signboard tells us that it is placed right next to the jogging track and the same signboard is placed at two points in the ground, i.e. in front of the two entry/exit gates for the readability convenience of people. This is called as smart sign making, just a simple request, a reason why the request is being made, an image supporting the request and the correct physical placement of the signboard. The sign makers in Islamabad can learn a lot from this. Controlling the public by telling them not to play on the grass, walk on the grass etc. without even caring to mention a reason seems illogical.

Warning signs being observed were two and they were related to flower plucking, where the public was warned for plucking flowers that if they pluck the flowers they will be

liable to pay fine. Now informational signs will be discussed. The function of an informational sign is to provide information to the public without having any restrictive tone. There were very few informational signs being observed, i.e. only two. One of them reads, 'It is prohibited to smoke in the park'. Though it looks like a prohibitory sign but the reason why it is put under informational sign is because it is not restrictive in nature. According to tobacco control laws in Pakistan, "Smoking is prohibited in all places of public work or use, and on all public transport" ("Legislation by country Pakistan", 2018). Moreover, it is a matter of common sense that a park is a public place where people of all age groups come to enjoy, and smoking can cause nuisance for them so it is not allowed there. Another example of informational sign being observed was 'Cooperate with the park's administration', which reminds the visitors about the observance of public signboards in the park.

Polite reminders are a good strategy of making signboards rather than prohibitory signs. These type of signs are a good way of delivering the message, as they use soft words which are politely conveyed. In the play area in the Children's park, it was written 'Treat children with kindness'. Similarly, at another point in the same park, a decorative large sized tea saucer and tea cups is constructed and on its boundary, it was written, 'Avoid entering inside'. In the Daman-e-Koh park, it was mentioned, 'Take care of the plants', which in an indirect manner, politely imply not to pluck and destroy the plants. The use of indirect manner is called as reverse psychology and is commonly used in many first world countries in the West. Reverse psychology makes people to do what otherwise they won't do if instructed directly. Just like polite reminders, another type of sign observed was motivational sign. A motivational sign encourages the public to discreetly follow what is inscribed on the signboards, rather compulsorily. Only one motivational sign was found which reads, 'A clean country is a reflection of a clean nation'. These polite reminders and motivational signs should be adopted more by the sign makers, as they hint towards a liberal and more tolerable society, where people's actions are not forcibly controlled, rather politely suggested. Moreover, they also effect the type of mediated actions the social actors take as they receive positive vibes from such signboards.

## **VI. Conclusion**

So, all in all we can say that this research paper has documented how photographic documentation can be used as a mode of data collection in qualitative research. For elaboration, the setting of linguistic landscape was taken as an example, which is a sub-field of applied linguistics. Pictures of public signboards in two public parks were taken as primary data and

were captured in the capital city of Pakistan, Islamabad. The collected photographs were then analyzed to see how the authorities of these parks use the language of signboards to maintain social order in these public places. A mediated discourse analysis of the data revealed the authorities of the parks use prohibitory signs the most to maintain social order and motivational signs the least. Negation or prohibition is the element most commonly used by the authorities on signboards, in order to maintain social order. Apart from negative way of control in the form of prohibition and warning, some positive elements were also observed. For example, motivational signs and polite reminders. Although they were few but still they were present there which shows there is a room for improvement and things can get better if awareness among people is generated and issues are being pointed out.

Photographic documentation in qualitative research is a new and interesting mode of data collection and should be further explored. It provides the researcher with real time data as Deshpande (1983) said, 'the photographic approach can provide naturalistic, descriptive, and "rich" data' (p.8). The piloting of data has helped the researcher in becoming familiarized with the data, its categorization and the procedure of analysis. It has also helped the researcher to get an idea of the nature of research. Going into the field before the main data analysis has actually helped the researcher to gain more knowledge of issues she will be dealing with. The analysis of photographic data has affirmed that investigation of public signage is a topic worth exploring as there hasn't been much work conducted on it in the Pakistani context. Research on such a topic can raise and also answer many questions related to the hierarchy of public institutions in Pakistan and how language is used by the ruling authorities as a tool for exercising power.

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