RESEARCH ARTICLE

Scripts in Dialogue: Reinterpreting *Visible Language* Covers through Bilingual Design Workshops in Kuwait

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Abstract: This study investigates how postmodern graphic design strategies can be critically reimagined — reframed through the lens of bilingual design pedagogy to engage issues of cultural identity, script interaction, and typographic experimentation — within Arabic–English bilingual contexts. Using the *Visible Language* journal (late 1960s–2025) as a foundational reference, the research was conducted over three academic semesters with 90 undergraduate design students in Kuwait. Through a structured practice-led research methodology, participants analyzed historical cover designs and developed original bilingual compositions inspired by postmodern aesthetics. The project addressed typographic challenges, including directionality, visual hierarchy, and the interplay between Arabic calligraphic and Latin modular forms. Design strategies — including layering, fragmentation, and grid disruption — were systematically explored to facilitate visual integration across scripts. Outcomes ranged from cohesive bilingual compositions to instances of double monolingualism reflecting varied levels of synthesis. Cultural motifs and script-specific conventions emerged as influential factors shaping design decisions. The study concludes that adapting postmodern design principles to bilingual contexts requires more than stylistic translation; it entails critical negotiation of cultural identity, linguistic equity, and the visual dynamics of multilingual communication.

Keywords: Arabic–English visual communication; bilingual typography; cultural semiotics; design pedagogy; postmodern graphic design

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1. Introduction: Background and Rationale

For over five decades, *Visible Language* has been a leading platform for experimental and research driven inquiries into typography and visual communication (Wrolstad, 1971; Poggenpohl, 2025). Its evolving editorial direction — and status as the oldest peer reviewed design journal (*Visible Language*, 1967) — has enabled cover designs that reflect postmodern strategies such as disrupted grids, fragmented hierarchies, and layered compositions (Margolin, 1994; Blauvelt, 1994; Cross, 2025). These visual experiments — documented across multiple decades and not limited to volume 59 — challenge conventional standards of legibility and neutrality, positioning typography as a culturally embedded, discursive practice (McCoy, 1994).

In parallel, contemporary scholarship on bilingual and multilingual design has highlighted the cultural and spatial complexities of integrating structurally divergent scripts, particularly Arabic and Latin. Researchers stress that such work requires more than graphic juxtaposition; it is a process of ideological and cultural negotiation (AbiFarès, 2001; Abdel Baki, 2013, 2024; Ashrafi, 2015; Blankenship, 2003). The fluid cursive structure of Arabic offers a contrasting spatial rhythm to the modular form of Latin, prompting reconsideration of how typographic equity can be visually articulated across scripts.

This study investigates how postmodern design principles — such as layering, fragmentation, and spatial disruption — can be reimagined within Arabic–English bilingual typography. Conducted in Kuwait with undergraduate design students, the research draws on *Visible Language*'s archival covers (late 1960s–2025) as both inspiration and critical framework. Students engaged with the archive not as historical artifacts alone but as provocations for visual inquiry and cultural reflection (Weingart, 2000; Hue & Eye, 2025).

The central research question guiding this study is: How can postmodern design strategies be critically adapted to Arabic–English bilingual typography in ways that balance cultural specificity, visual experimentation and pedagogical relevance?

By addressing this question, this project contributes to the ongoing discourse on cross-cultural semiotics (Vanderschantz & Daly, 2023), decolonial design pedagogy (Escobar, 2018; Mignolo, 2000; Tunstall, 2013), and multilingual visual communication (Bassiouney & Walters, 2020; Li & Westland, 2023).

Through a structured pedagogical framework, students were tasked with developing bilingual typographic compositions that reflected identity, legibility, and cultural hybridity. Their responses not only highlight the tensions of Arabic–Latin integration but also demonstrate the value of design as a method of inquiry into complex sociocultural dynamics.

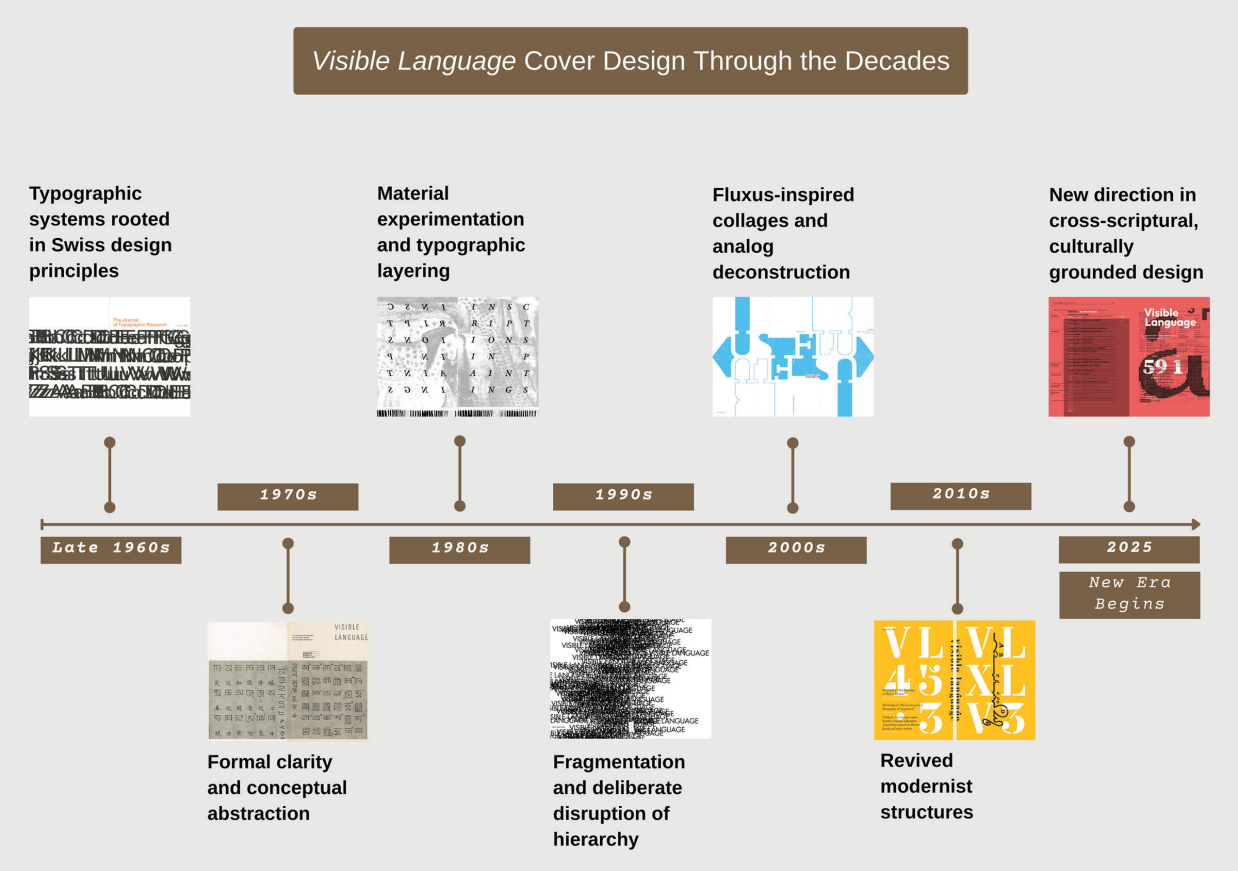

Figure 1. Timeline of *Visible Language* cover designs (late 1960s–2025), annotated with summaries of dominant visual strategies per decade. This visual history served as both a pedagogical prompt and a conceptual framework for the bilingual design workshop. Cover images courtesy of *Visible Language*.

Figure 1 presents a curated timeline of *Visible Language* covers from the late 1960s to 2025, mapping shifts from structural modernism to expressive postmodernism. Annotated with key visual strategies from each decade, this visual chronology serves as both a conceptual framework and pedagogical tool, guiding students' bilingual reinterpretations and demonstrating how archival design can function as a site of critical inquiry and innovation in global design education.

While many scholars place the peak of postmodern design between the 1970s and the 1990s, this timeline deliberately extends into the 2020s to trace how postmodern strategies, such as layering, collage, and typographic disruption, continue to influence contemporary cover designs. Rather than framing postmodernism as a fixed historical period, this study approaches it as a set of visual strategies and critical attitudes that remain in circulation, albeit in hybrid or re-contextualized forms.

2. Contextual Foundations

This study draws on intersecting frameworks from postmodern graphic design, typography as discourse, and bilingual visual communication, situating student-led experiments within a robust scholarly and pedagogical context. These intersections frame typography not only as an aesthetic tool, but also as a medium for cultural negotiation and ideological critique.

The *Visible Language* journal served as both an archive and discursive platform, offering front-cover designs as visual texts for critical inquiry. By analyzing and reinterpreting these covers through a bilingual lens, students moved beyond formal aesthetics to explore script politics, visual equity, and cross-cultural communication.

Conducted within undergraduate design curriculum in Kuwait, a multilingual context, this study reflects students' lived experiences navigating Arabic–Latin typographic systems. Their work becomes both a learning tool and a form of knowledge production, grounded in local culture and informed by global design discourse.

The theoretical grounding is structured around four core themes, each informed by foundational design theory, visual communication scholarship, and educational research:

- Postmodern aesthetics: fragmentation, layering, and disruption provide a foundation for hybrid and nonlinear graphic exploration (Carson, 1995; Heller & Ballance, 2001; Lupton & Miller, 2014; Venturi, 1977).
- Typography as discourse: type mediates cultural values and power, particularly across languages with divergent scripts (Kinross, 2004; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Lupton, 2010; Stöckl, 2005).
- Bilingual and bicultural design: integrating Arabic and Latin scripts requires semiotic sensitivity, respecting both visual integrity and communicative balance (Abdel Baki, 2023; AbiFarès, 2015; Hofmann, 1998).
- Pedagogical practice: design education must address language, culture, and identity. This workshop model emphasizes reflective practice, critique, and iteration as research methods (Barnard, 1998; Dewey, 1933; Gay, 2010; Schön, 2017).

By embedding student work within these frameworks, this study demonstrates how typographic experimentation can become a method of inquiry. It affirms that design pedagogy is a critical site for exploring identity and visual culture in multilingual societies.

2.1. Postmodern Graphic Design: Disruption, Multiplicity, and Visual Discourse

The late 20th century marked a pivotal shift in graphic design, departing from the rationalist clarity of modernism toward the layered, pluralistic aesthetics of postmodernism. Rooted in movements such as the Bauhaus and Swiss International Style, modernist design champions neutrality, order, and universality (Britannica, 2025; Medley Home, 2024). These ideals are epitomized in Beatrice Warde's influential essay, *The Crystal Goblet*, originally delivered as a speech in 1930, which argues that typography, like a clear goblet, should be invisible, allowing content to shine through without visual interference (Warde, 1956). While these principles fostered clarity and functional communication, they also imposed a homogenizing aesthetic that often overlooked cultural specificity.

Postmodern graphic design emerged in critiques of these assumptions, foregrounding fragmentation, hybridity, and subjectivity (Design Reviewed, 2023; Poynor, 2003). Key figures such as Wolfgang Weingart, April Greiman, David Carson, and Katherine McCoy challenged the notion that legibility should be the primary design goal. Weingart's "New Wave" typography disrupted the Swiss grid through layering, dynamic spacing, and nonlinear arrangements (Hue & Eye, 2025; Weingart, 2000). Carson's experimental editorial layouts embrace visual dissonance, treating design as expressive and interpretive rather than transparent (Hue & Eye, 2025). McCoy's pedagogy at the Cranbrook Academy of Art reframed design as discourse, encouraging students to view typography as a site of cultural and ideological negotiation (AIGA Eye on Design, 2023; Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research, 2023; McCoy, 1994).

Within this intellectual milieu, *Visible Language* played a foundational role. As a research-focused journal dedicated to visual communication, it documented and advanced postmodern typographic inquiries. Themed issues such as *Typography: Designing the Text* (*Visible Language*, 1993) and *Cultural Dimensions of Communication Design* reflect a turn toward viewing typography as a discursive and culturally embedded practice (Cross, 2025; Poggenpohl, 2025). The journal's covers, ranging from Fluxus-inspired collages in the 1970s to contemporary digital manipulations, functioned as experimental canvases where visual language was continuously deconstructed and reassembled (Lonsdale, 2025).

This legacy directly informed the present study. By engaging with the *Visible Language* archive, students encountered aesthetic forms and the intellectual ethos of postmodernism. These encounters position design as a form of critique, translation, and cultural expression. In Kuwait and the broader Gulf region, where modernist pedagogies often remain dominant, revisiting postmodern frameworks offers students a critical lens for exploring bilingual typography as an intersection of identity, multiplicity, and visual experimentation.

At the same time, we acknowledge that the term 'postmodernism' becomes increasingly fluid beyond the 1990s. Scholars have debated whether postmodernism persists in the 21st century or gives way to new paradigms, such as metamodernism or digimodernism (Kirby, 2009; Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010). For this study, 'postmodern strategies' refer to recurring visual tropes — layering, disruption, and hybridity — that persist in contemporary design, regardless of strict epochal classifications. Our aim is not to reassert periodization but to examine how postmodern visual languages are adapted and reinterpreted in bilingual, cross-cultural educational settings.

2.2. Typography as Discourse: From Neutral Tool to Cultural Agent

Contemporary typographic theory increasingly challenges the notion of type as a passive conduit of language. Instead, typography is recognized as visual rhetoric — an active constructor of meaning shaped by formal, spatial, and material decisions (Lupton, 1996; McCoy, 1994). Variations in weight, rhythm, alignment, and density do not merely affect aesthetics; they operate semiotically, guide interpretation, and embed the reader within particular ideological and cultural frameworks (Frascara, 2004).

Rather than being universally legible, typography is culturally oriented. Scholars argue that typographic forms carry historical and political connotations that can either uphold or disrupt the prevailing narratives. For instance, Blankenship (2003) observes that the juxtaposition of Arabic calligraphy and Latin typography can result in either exoticization or empowerment, depending on the context and intention. Building on Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, Ashrafi (2015) frames bilingual typography as a dialogic space in which two distinct visual languages negotiate meaning, each bringing about its own cultural weight, voice, and visual logic.

Visible Language has long advanced this view of typography as discourse. Since its inception, the journal has published work exploring how typographic forms intersect with politics, culture, and systems of knowledge (Cross, 2025; Wrolstad, 1971). This commitment to critical inquiry aligns with the broader discourse presented in *Uncorporate Identity*, which examines how studios such as Metahaven and Experimental Jetset position design as a tool for social critique and ideological resistance (Van der Velden & Kruk, 2010). Typography has become more than a technical solution for spatial balance or readability; it has become a means of cultural mediation. This aligns with contemporary arguments introduced by Murphy, who explored how font design and typographic form shape affective, cultural, and political meaning — framing "fontroversy" as the socially loaded debates surrounding typographic choices (2017, p. 63). For students in this study, this discourse-oriented approach provided a conceptual lens for interrogating Arabic–English bilingual designs. Student projects treat typographic choices as politically and symbolically charged, using type not only to convey content but also to express identity, heritage, and power relations embedded in language systems.

2.3. Bilingual Design: Typographic Tensions and Visual Negotiation

Designing across structurally divergent writing systems — particularly Arabic and Latin — requires critical engagement with visual conventions that have historically centered Latin script as the typographic norm. Arabic's cursive, contextual letterforms, and fluid ligatures operate within a distinct spatial logic that disrupts the modular, left-to-right structure of Latin typography (AbiFarès, 2001; Bouabdallah, 2020). Rather than treating Arabic as a 'complication' within existing typographic systems, this study frames these differences as an opportunity to question and deconstruct inherited design assumptions.

In many global typographic frameworks, alignment, spacing, and hierarchy are built around Euro-American modernist standards that implicitly marginalize scripts such as Arabic. Thus, cross-scriptural design must contend not only with aesthetic tensions but also with the lingering legacies of colonial visual systems. The lack of expressive, widely available Arabic typefaces in mainstream design platforms further reflects these structural inequities and restricts creative agency in bilingual practices (Oliveira, 2023).

This project does not seek to adapt Arabic to fit into postmodern or Western typographic ideals. Instead, it asks how postmodern strategies — such as fragmentation, layering, and spatial disruption — can be critically reinterpreted through the Arabic–English design lens. It explores how visual negotiation across scripts can serve as a decolonial design method, resisting reductive binaries and affirming the cultural specificity of each typographic system.

At the compositional level, typographic hierarchy has become a central issue. Decisions on which script receives visual prominence are rarely neutral and often reproduce broader sociopolitical dynamics. Abdel Baki (2024) describes this imbalance as a form of "double monolingualism", a condition in which two languages coexist within the same layout but are treated as isolated visual systems. In contrast, dialogic approaches, inspired by Bakhtin's theory of polyphony, seek mutual interaction between scripts, positioning bilingual design as a site of negotiation rather than a juxtaposition (Ashrafi, 2015).

Recent studies have explored a range of techniques to mitigate asymmetry and promote visual equity between scripts. These include mirrored layouts, dual-baseline grids, and typographic code-switching, which emphasizes rhythm, relational positioning, and semiotic cues (Li & Westland, 2023; Shaikh, 2007). Vanderschantz and Daly (2023) further argue that readers' perceptions of dominance in bilingual layouts are shaped not only by size and weight but also by the spatial choreography of elements across scripts.

Efforts such as the *Multilingüe* conference (Typeroom, 2023) have emphasized the global urgency of developing thoughtful bilingual design practices. In the Arabic–English

context, this urgency is intensified by the script's deep religious, historical, and cultural significance. Experimental manipulation of Arabic forms must be approached with cultural sensitivity, as distortions can unintentionally offend or misrepresent sacred traditions (Bassiouney & Walters, 2020). As such, designers must balance innovation with respect to calligraphic and linguistic heritage (Communication Arts, 2023; Li & Westland, 2023).

In this study, the students directly confronted these tensions. While employing postmodern techniques such as layering, fragmentation, and disruption, they simultaneously embed culturally specific references, including motifs such as the keffiyeh and Kufic-inspired calligraphy. These design choices reflect an understanding of bilingual typography not merely as a functional tool for translation but also as a semiotic and cultural interface, where identity and form are co-constructed.

2.4. Pedagogical Context: Typographic Workshops as Reflective Practice

This study was conducted over three semesters within a structured pedagogical setting titled the *Visible Language* Typographic Workshop. Grounded in practice-led research, the workshop integrated theory and making, enabling students to explore design as both a method and output. Practice-led research conceptualizes creative practice not merely as an illustration of existing knowledge but as a generator of new understanding through visual inquiry (Rust et al., 2007). In this context, design becomes a form of epistemology — producing insight through doing.

The pedagogical framework draws from Schön's (2017) notion of the "reflective practitioner," in which learning occurs through a recursive process of making, critiquing, and refining. This model treats design not as a linear progression from problem to solution but as an iterative cycle in which reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action shape creative outcomes.

Studio pedagogy, which is widely recognized in design education, supports this model by fostering critical literacy, conceptual depth, and research integration. According to Biggs and Büchler (2008), studio projects gain academic rigor when students are prompted to articulate both theoretical frameworks and practical design intent. In this workshop, students were encouraged to interrogate the historical *Visible Language* cover archive not as static design artifacts, but as culturally situated texts open to reinterpretation. Their task was not replication, but critical translation — recasting typographic strategies from a postmodern, bilingual perspective.

This approach aligns with collection-based methodologies that emphasize the pedagogical potential of archives. *Visible Language* covers were positioned as both design resources and cultural documents, fostering curatorial sensitivity and contextual awareness (*Visible Language*, 1993). Thus, students' reinterpretations became acts of

informed transformation, engaging questions of identity, authorship, and cultural specificity.

In the Gulf region, where design education remains in an emergent phase, such pedagogical models represent a critical intervention. Traditional curricula often prioritize technical proficiency over cultural inquiry. By embedding the workshop in themes of bilingualism, decoloniality, and typographic discourse, the course challenged students to reconceptualize design as a mode of cultural production. Their work addressed not only the aesthetic integration of Arabic and Latin scripts but also the ideological tensions surrounding visibility, language hierarchy, and heritage in a globalizing design landscape (Benkharafa, 2013).

Ultimately, the workshop fostered a reflective and critical design ethos. It encouraged students to see bilingual typography as more than a spatial or formal task; it became a vehicle for exploring cultural negotiation, linguistic representation, and the politics of visual form.

3. Methodology

This study employed a practice-led design pedagogy approach grounded in a practice-led research framework (Candy, 2006; Niedderer & Roworth-Stokes, 2007), using typographic experimentation as a means of inquiry. Conducted across three consecutive semesters (Winter, Spring, and Summer 2025) in the Department of Art Education, College of Basic Education in Kuwait, the *Visible Language* Typographic Workshop involved 90 undergraduate students enrolled in a typographic design studio course. The workshops were designed as an immersive sequence of research-based studio projects in which students critically reimagined selected cover designs from *Visible Language* (late 1960s–2025) in Arabic–English bilingual forms.

3.1. Workshop Structure

The workshops were scaffolded across three phases:

1. Historical analysis: Students studied selected *Visible Language* covers from the journal archive, identifying postmodern characteristics, such as layering, distortion, type fragmentation, and grid disruption.
2. Bilingual reinterpretation: Each student created one or more bilingual typographic reinterpretations using Arabic and English, integrating visual experimentation with cultural and linguistic negotiation.
3. Critical reflection: Each student submitted a process book and a written reflection that explained design decisions, typographic choices, and challenges encountered in bilingual integration.

3.2. Archival Source and Timeline

Students worked with *Visible Language* journal covers spanning the late 1960s to 2025. This timeframe reflects the publication's evolving engagement with typographic experimentation, from early modernist compositions to more layered and fragmented postmodern strategies. Covers were selected from the institutional archive based on their typographic diversity and relevance to postmodern themes.

To contextualize this progression, the covers were curated into a visual timeline (Figure 1) that illustrates how aesthetic approaches have shifted across decades. This timeline served not only as a historical reference but also as a stimulus for critical reinterpretation within bilingual design settings. To support students' analytical and creative inquiry, the workshops were supplemented by theoretical readings of postmodern aesthetics (Lupton, 1996; Poynor, 2003), bilingual design and Arabic typography (Abdel Baki, 2023; Shaikh, 2007), and design pedagogy (Tselentis, 2011).

3.3. Phases of Research

The project unfolded over three interrelated phases that structured the workshops' inquiry-based pedagogy:

1. Analytical phase: Students conducted a critical analysis of selected *Visible Language* covers, examining typographic hierarchy, spatial logic, and hallmark postmodern features such as layering, fragmentation, and deconstruction. Group discussions explored how these characteristics might be adapted within bilingual contexts, particularly in relation to script contrasts, directionality, and cultural semantics.
2. Creative production phase: Building on these insights, the students created original bilingual cover designs using postmodern strategies. The visual outcomes ranged from integrative, dialogic layouts to instances of "double monolingualism" (Abdel Baki, 2024). Designs were iteratively refined through critique sessions and feedback from peers and instructors.
3. Reflective phase: Each participant composed a short written reflection (300–500 words) that articulated their conceptual intent and evaluated the cultural, aesthetic, and linguistic tensions encountered in their design process. These written accounts provided valuable qualitative data for subsequent thematic coding and analysis.

3.4. Data Collection, Selection, and Analysis

This study analyzed three types of data collected during the workshops:

- Visual artifacts: 90 bilingual cover designs were produced across three semesters, of which 12 are highlighted in Figures 2–13.

- Process documentation: Student sketches, drafts, and design iterations provided insights into developmental thinking.
- Written reflections: 300–500 word essays by each student explaining their design rationale and discussing cultural and linguistic challenges.

A multistage review process was followed to select the 12 featured spreads:

- The instructional team identified a preliminary shortlist of 25 designs based on conceptual clarity, typographic execution, and visual experimentation.
- These were then analyzed using thematic coding (Saldaña, 2021) to ensure representation across four analytical categories: dialogic integration, double monolingualism, symbolic divergence, and hybrid disruption.
- The final selections aimed to balance the diversity of bilingual strategies, script interaction, and aesthetic style.

Analysis focused on:

- The application of postmodern design strategies in bilingual contexts
- Patterns of script integration versus separation
- Cultural motifs and semiotic layering in typographic decisions

The findings were triangulated across the visual outputs, reflective essays, and classroom discourse.

3.5. Analytical Framework

Student designs were interpreted as critical visual arguments using a hybrid thematic coding approach (Saldaña, 2021). This analytical framework includes both predefined (*a priori*) and emergent codes.

A priori codes (derived from relevant literature and initial research questions):

- Polyphonic integration (Abdel Baki, 2023; Bakhtin, 1981)
- Double monolingualism (Shaikh, 2007)
- Postmodern layering and typographic disruption (McCoy, 1994; Weingart, 2000)
- Typographic mimicry as a method (Biggs & Büchler, 2008; Candy, 2006)

Emergent codes (identified during analysis of student reflections and process books):

- Symbolic divergence
- Vernacular resistance (e.g., integration of keffiyeh, Sadu, or calligraphic motifs; AbiFarès, 2010)
- Mimicry as learning (Niedderer & Roworth-Stokes, 2007)

Coding was applied to both visual outputs and accompanying reflective essays, offering insights into each student's design intentions, cultural background, and evolving understanding of postmodern design.

While a single primary researcher conducted the coding, consistency and interpretive reliability were strengthened through iterative peer review sessions with the teaching staff. These collaborative reviews served as informal triangulation, ensuring that thematic interpretations aligned with pedagogical objectives and student contexts. Although this approach lacked a formal second coder, it allowed for critical feedback loops and increased analytical trustworthiness.

3.6. Ethical Approval and Considerations

In the absence of a formal institutional review board at the college level, the study adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011), which emphasize participant welfare, informed consent, and data protection, respectively.

Ethical approval was granted by the academic department overseeing the course, which reviewed the study design and approved its implementation within the curricular framework.

All students were informed about the research component at the outset of the workshop series and were given the option to decline participation or opt out of having their work included in the study without any impact on their academic standing. Written consent was obtained from all participants whose work was featured in this study.

4. Findings and Analysis

The analysis of 90 student-designed covers revealed four overarching themes in how postmodern aesthetics were reinterpreted within bilingual Arabic–English contexts: (1) dialogic visual integration, (2) double monolingualism, (3) cultural symbolism and vernacular reference, and (4) Variations and Hybridity Across the Sample.

Figures 2–13 illustrate representative examples of these categories.

4.1. Dialogic Visual Integration

Several students pursued strategies that actively integrated Arabic and Latin scripts into cohesive dialogic compositions. These works resisted conventional script segregation by employing layering, fragmentation, and modular grids to construct visual relationships grounded in hybridity and disruption.

Figure 2. Student cover design inspired by *Visible Language* issue 59.1 (2025), *In with the New!*. This bilingual reinterpretation mimics the original cover while integrating Arabic "اللغة المرئية" and English "*Visible Language*" through pixelated layering and typographic fragmentation. Both scripts are given equal visual prominence, reflecting dialogic hybridity within the postmodern design framework. Here, mimicry functions both as a technical exercise and a critical lens, exposing the challenges of adapting Latin-centric design strategies to Arabic typographic structures.

Figure 2 exemplifies this approach through pixelated typographic layering, in which Arabic *"*اللغة المرئية*"* and English "*Visible Language*" gain equal prominence. Directionality and form were intentionally destabilized, allowing both scripts to interact without being hierarchically fixed. Ambiguous typographic flow aligns with the postmodern aesthetics of fragmentation and spatial disruptions.

Importantly, this design mimics the typographic logic of *Visible Language*, Vol. 59.1, positioning imitation as a pedagogical strategy. Through close stylistic alignment, the student engaged deeply with the visual language of a contemporary postmodern model, emulating strategies of layering, opacity, and grid disruption. Yet, this imitation also exposed the limitations of transplanting Latin-centric design grammars into Arabic script. While Latin typography was mapped more seamlessly onto the original grid-based system, Arabic's cursive and contextual forms resisted direct adaptation. This tension highlights the cultural and structural biases embedded in postmodern design methodologies that are often tailored to Latin typographic conventions. Thus, mimicry served both as a means of technical exploration and as a critical lens for interrogating visual norms.

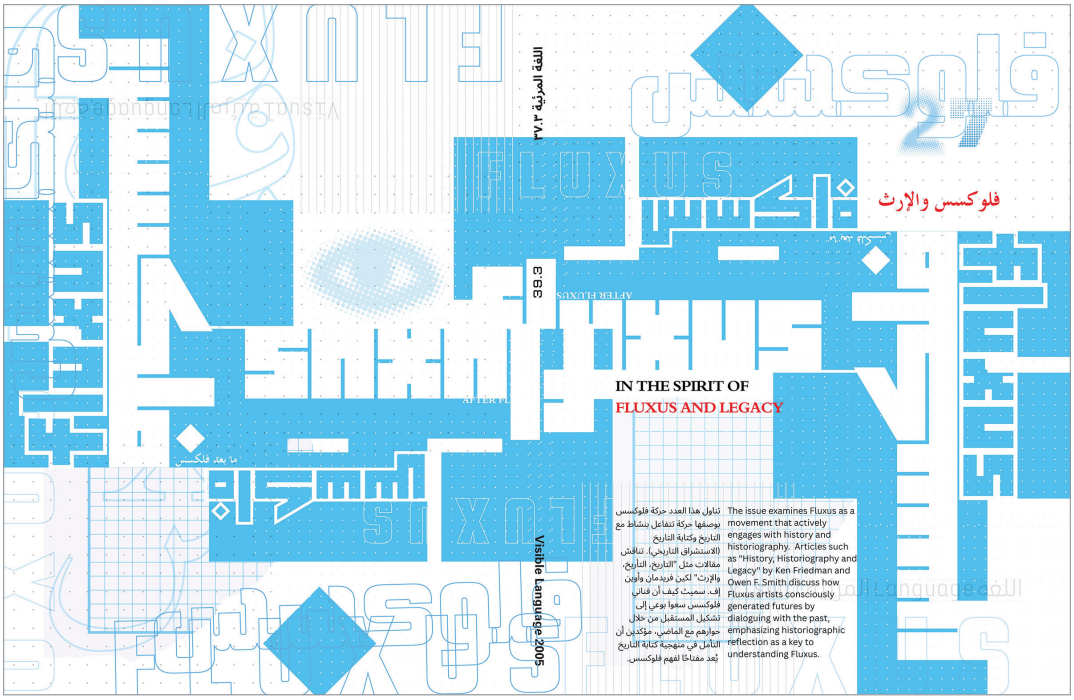

Figure 3. Student cover design inspired by *Visible Language* issue 39.3 (2005), *In the Spirit of Fluxus and Legacy*. This bilingual reinterpretation references the original modular composition while introducing Arabic and Latin scripts in a layered configuration. Through mirrored disruption, transparency, and visual rhythm, the student creates a dynamic interplay between scripts that reflect postmodern hybridity and bilingual negotiation.

By contrast, Figure 3 reinterprets the aesthetics of *Visible Language* Vol. 37.3 through modular structuring and rhythmic composition. Translucent Arabic letterforms intersect with bold sans-serif Latin typography, creating a layered visual field that foregrounds dialogic exchange. Rather than imposing a dominant reading order, the design encourages interpretive navigation across spatial planes.

These works resonate with Bhabha's (1994) theory of the "Third Space," where hybrid meaning emerges through negotiation rather than synthesis. Typography, in this view, becomes a site of encounter between linguistic and cultural systems — less of a vessel for transparent communication than a platform for semiotic play. The use of spatial layering, opacity, and nonlinear structure echoes Derrida's *différance* (1981), which emphasizes deferral, instability, and multiplicity of meaning. Viewers must oscillate between scripts, engaging ambiguity as a generative, not obstructive, condition.

However, these hybrid strategies do not eliminate the asymmetry. As Spivak (2008) warns in her critique of "double monolingualism," even integrated designs can reinforce underlying hierarchies, where Arabic may be visually present but semantically peripheral, while English anchors legibility. These tensions reflect Mignolo's (2000) articula-

tion of design's entanglement with colonial logic, in which aesthetic hierarchies mirror the global structures of knowledge and power.

4.2. Double Monolingualism

While some student designs aspired to hybrid integration, others embodied what Yildiz (2012) described as "double monolingualism" (pp. 2–3), a condition in which two languages coexist spatially but remain visually and semantically segregated. These designs do not seek fusion between Arabic and English but rather maintain distinct formal systems, reinforcing the autonomy of each script even within a shared composition.

One student's reinterpretation of *Visible Language* 54.3 (2020) (Figure 4) exemplified this approach. Arabic and English elements were arranged in parallel, divided by a central axis, and differentiated using bold chromatic contrast and scale. Despite occupying similar visual weights, the two scripts functioned independently and coexisted without interaction. This juxtaposition stages bilingualism as co-presence rather than integration.

While Figures 2 and 4 share a surface-level symmetry and typographic balance, they fundamentally diverge in spatial logic and script interaction. Figure 2 emphasizes

Figure 4. Student reinterpretation of *Visible Language* Vol. 54.3 (2020). Arabic and English scripts are juxtaposed along a central axis, emphasizing contrast through typographic scale, color, and orientation. Rather than integration, this design foregrounds parallelism, staging bilingualism as visual co-presence rather than synthesis.

dialogic integration: Arabic and English intersect visually and conceptually through layering and mirrored disruption, promoting mutual influence. In contrast, Figure 4 enacts double monolingualism: the two scripts are displayed side by side without visual interplay, maintaining linguistic autonomy. These examples illustrate that visual alignment alone does not imply integration; instead, integration depends on interscriptual exchange and the breakdown of spatial segregation.

Simultaneously, elements of both strategies can coexist within a single composition, suggesting that dialogic integration and double monolingualism may operate along a continuum rather than as binary categories.

A second example (Figure 5) reimagines the typographic density of *Visible Language* 24.3 (1990) using the monospaced Courier typeface across both Arabic and English. Here, shared typographic structure does not produce visual fusion. Instead, each script adheres to its own spatial rhythm and typographic behavior. Although the same grid is used, it becomes a neutral scaffolding that preserves separation rather than encouraging dialogue. This symmetrical division echoes Spivak's (2008) warning that inclusion efforts can inadvertently reinforce hierarchical or exclusionary dynamics.

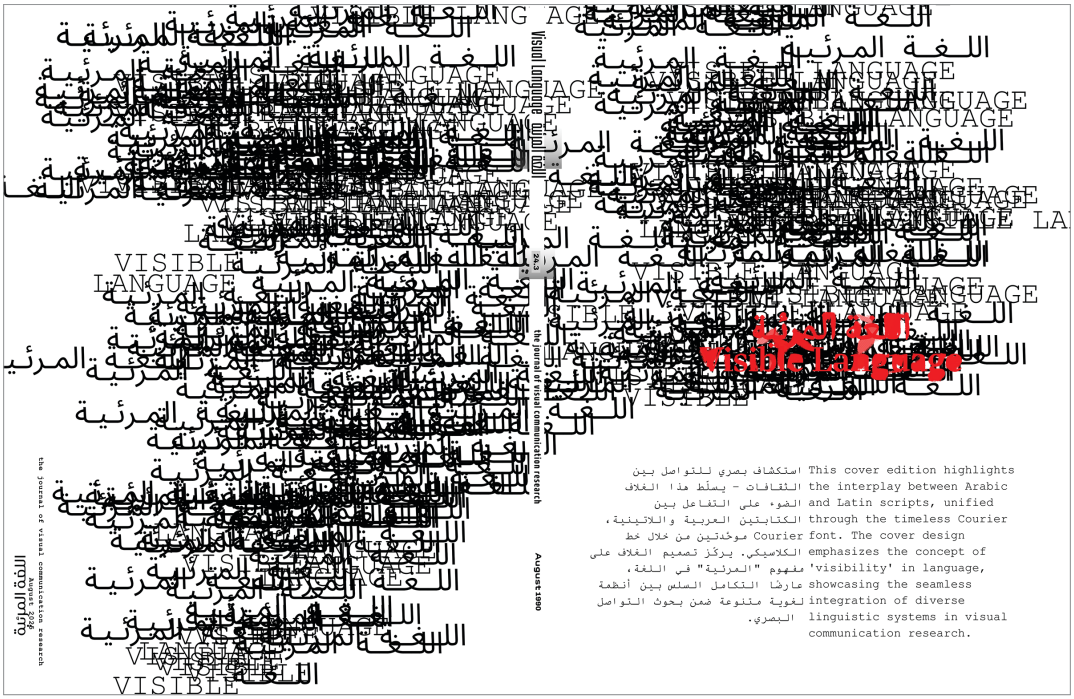

Figure 5. Student design experiment inspired by *Visible Language* Vol. 24.3/4 (1990), using the monospaced Courier typeface in both Arabic and English. Although the two scripts share a unified grid and typographic scaffold, they remain graphically autonomous. The composition reflects spatial proximity without visual or conceptual integration, illustrating a parallel rather than a dialogic relationship between languages.

Figure 6. Student redesign of *Scripts in Dialogue* (2025). Although the composition aspires to visual harmony, Arabic and Latin alphabets are carefully paired without typographic merging. The design reflects structural complementarity rather than integration, underscoring the persistence of visual separation in bilingual projects.

Together, these examples demonstrate how bilingual layouts can visually affirm linguistic pluralism while still falling short of integration, underscoring the conceptual tension between coexistence and hybridity in typographic practices.

Another student's response to the *Scripts in Dialogue* theme (Figure 6) approached bilingual design as a structural pairing rather than a merged typographic entity. Arabic and Latin letters were aligned with precision, creating formal harmony without integration. While the composition gestures toward dialogic balance, it preserves the autonomy of each script. This suggests that even when visual equilibrium is achieved, the default mode often remains typographic parallelism rather than hybridity.

A final example revisits the archival 1971 issue *Littera Scripta Manet* (Figure 7), reinterpreting its historical sensibility through sepia textures, layered manuscript marks, and typographic anatomy. Here, Arabic and Latin scripts appear as neighboring artifacts, coexisting yet unmerged. Each script retains its visual logic and historical references, signaling respect for typographic distinction rather than an attempt at fusion. This composition frames bilingualism as a dual historiographic narrative, rather than a unified discourse.

Figure 7. Student reinterpretation of *Littera Scripta Manet* Vol. 5 No. 1 (1971). Evoking archival aesthetics and typographic anatomy, the design presents Arabic and English as historically resonant yet visually distinct systems, positioning bilingualism as parallel rather than integrated discourse.

Together, these examples underscore the persistence of *double monolingualism* in student work, even within contexts explicitly themed on integration. Despite efforts to create a visual dialogue, many bilingual compositions default to discrete spatial zones, script-specific aesthetics, and compositional symmetry. As Yildiz (2012) and Mignolo (2000) argue, true hybridity requires more than juxtaposition; it demands critical rethinking of inherited linguistic and visual hierarchies.

Although Figures 3 and 5 both use shared grids and spatial overlap, their treatments of bilingual interaction differ significantly. In Figure 3, integration is achieved through layering, transparency, and mirrored disruption — visual strategies that promote interdependence between scripts and invite active interpretations. In contrast, Figure 5, although built on a unified typographic scaffold, maintains graphic separation; the scripts coexist spatially but do not visually or conceptually engage with one another. This suggests that proximity alone does not constitute hybridity. Rather than assigning value judgments, we frame these differences as varying degrees of semiotic entanglements. To support a more objective analysis, future studies might incorporate concepts such as “reciprocal disruption” or draw on cross-cultural frameworks (including — but not limited to — Gestalt principles) while remaining attentive to their epistemological biases.

4.3. Cultural Symbolism and Vernacular Motifs

A third cluster of student responses emphasized the symbolic dimension of bilingual typography by embedding cultural references, vernacular aesthetics, and traditional forms into their visual language. These projects position design not merely as linguistic mediation, but as a conduit for cultural memory and visual identity, articulated through postmodern strategies.

One student's design (Figure 8) integrated Diwani calligraphy into a disrupted modular layout, forming the body of a peacock through Arabic and English letters. The design merges the ornamental elegance of historical script with postmodern abstraction, staging a temporal dialogue between tradition and experimentation. Here, decorative flourishes function more than embellishment — they articulate a visual rhetoric of hybridity grounded in cultural specificity.

Although Figure 8 employs recognizable forms, its postmodern abstraction lies in the visual treatment: fragmented layering, disruptive color contrast, and nonlinear composition undermine straightforward representation. The imagery resists singular interpretations, functioning more as a collage of cultural signifiers than as a narrative illustration.

Figure 8. Student integrating Diwani-inspired calligraphy into a modular composition. Arabic and English letterforms form the body of a peacock, staging a temporal dialogue between tradition and experimentation. The juxtaposition of ornamental script and fragmented layout underscores the cultural resonance and symbolic potential of bilingual typography.

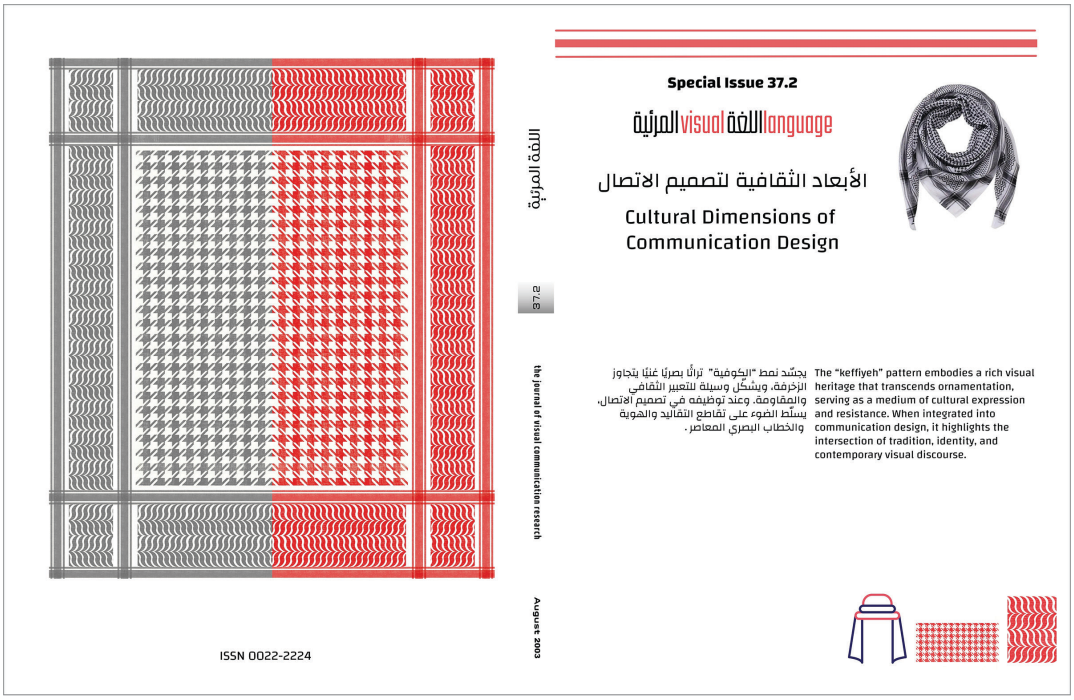

Figure 9. Student cover design reimagining *Visible Language* 37.2 (2003) through a reinterpretation of the keffiyeh pattern. Minimalist Latin typography is layered against a dense vernacular weave, foregrounding indigenous ornamentation as a communicative surface. Design situates textile heritage within the formal language of postmodern design education.

In another example, a student reimagines *Visible Language* 37.2 (2003) by transforming the iconic keffiyeh textile into a layered, typographic surface (Figure 9). Juxtaposed with minimalist Latin type, the design blends indigenous symbolism with grid disruption, reframing craft not as nostalgic decoration but as a living semiotic system within bilingual visual communication. This visual strategy foregrounds the keffiyeh not only as a cultural motif but also as an aesthetic statement.

A third design, titled *Form and Meaning*, leverages the gestural energy of Arabic calligraphy to form the head of an Arabian horse (Figure 10). Interwoven with modular English typography, this composition moves beyond the legibility of visual metaphors. In this context, Arabic script becomes both language and image — an embodiment of movement, identity, and cultural poetics. The design illustrates how typography can be animated to represent not only linguistic meaning, but also embodied cultural narratives.

In Figure 8, layering is achieved by overlaying Arabic calligraphy on English headlines, producing visual tension through opacity shifts. Figure 9 juxtaposes typographic grids with organic pattern motifs, while Figure 10 fragments both scripts by slicing and reassembling them in modular clusters that disrupt reading flow.

Figure 10. Student reinterpretation of "Form and Meaning," using Arabic calligraphy to shape the head of an Arabian horse. Gestural strokes and typographic abstraction transform script into metaphors, whereas modular English text anchors design. This composition exemplifies how a script can function simultaneously as a word, image, or cultural signifier.

Together, these examples localize postmodern formal tools such as layering, juxtaposition, and fragmentation within Kuwaiti cultural and visual traditions. They demonstrate that bilingual typography is not solely a functional task, but a symbolic practice that negotiates histories, aesthetics, and identities.

4.4. Variations and Hybridity Across the Sample

While previous sections identified key typographic strategies — dialogic integration, double monolingualism, and cultural symbolism — several student projects defied these boundaries, enacting hybridity as a fluid and dynamic condition. These works resist fixed categories and explore visual language as an open system of negotiation.

One striking example reinterprets *Visible Language* 49.3 (*Critical Making: Design and the Digital Humanities*) using a flow map of bilingual keywords (Figure 11). English and Arabic terms circulate through a network of directional lines, evoking systems thinking and data visualization. Language here becomes cartographic, a visual structure of interconnection, not simply transmission. This design transforms bilingual content into an information landscape, emphasizing semantic and spatial hybridity.

Another cover design draws inspiration from *Visible Language* 53.3 (2019), pairing the Arabic letter "غ" with the Latin letter "g", both rendered in pop-art halftones and layered

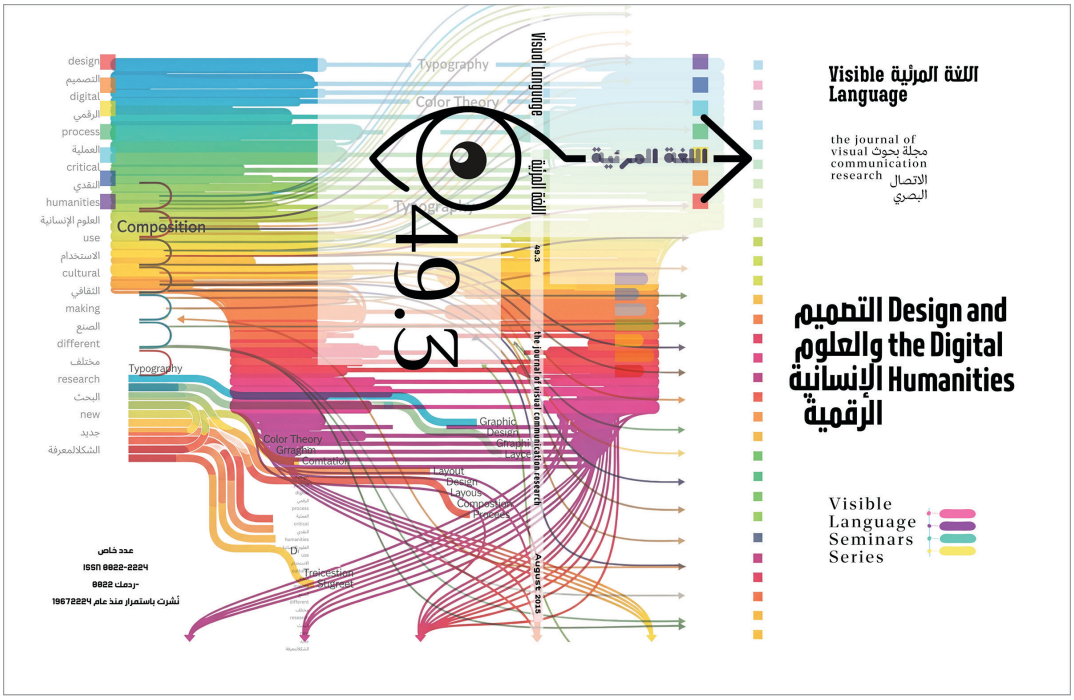

Figure 11. Student response to *Visible Language* 49.3 (2015), mapping bilingual keywords through directional grids and color-coded flows. The composition references data visualization and systems thinking, rendering bilingual typography a network of spatial and semantic interrelations. Language is a dynamic cartography of meaning.

textures (Figure 12). Rather than clarifying meaning, the work embraces opacity and abstraction, foregrounding near illegibility as a critical design gesture. This tension between legibility and expression challenges typographic norms and invites viewers to reconsider the communicative limits of form.

Finally, a reinterpretation of *Visible Language* 52.3 (Student Special Issue) combines modular English typography with graffiti-style Arabic lettering (see Figure 13). Arabic calligraphy, formed from the faces of actual students involved in the project, anchors the design in local voice and resistance. The composition evokes an urban manifesto aesthetic, aligning bilingual design with activism, youth culture, and postmodern disjunction. Rather than simply imitating the original, the student issue becomes a site of assertion, where form embodies both message and identity.

Taken together, these projects suggest that hybridity in bilingual design is not merely the blending of scripts but the active negotiation of difference — linguistic, cultural, and aesthetic. By testing and bending typographic legibility conventions, students revealed that bilingualism in visual communication is both a design problem and a cultural proposition.

Figure 12. Student cover inspired by *Visible Language* 53.3 (2019), pairing the Latin "g" with the Arabic "غ" in layered halftone textures. The resulting surface embraces ambiguity, challenging the legibility of the foreground typographic form as a critical expression. This pairing highlights linguistic differences while creating a shared visual rhythm.

5. Discussion

This study reveals the layered negotiations involved in adapting postmodern design strategies for Arabic–English bilingual contexts. While postmodernism is broadly associated with fragmentation, layering, and the disruption of formal conventions (Foster 1996; Jencks 1989), its application across structurally divergent scripts reveals not only its aesthetic potential but also deep cultural and linguistic tensions. The student work demonstrates that translating Euro-American postmodern aesthetics into bilingual typographic design is not merely a stylistic endeavor; it requires engagement with cultural identity, linguistic equity, and semiotic complexity. Through typographic juxtaposition, layering, and hybrid compositions, students produced layouts that operated across multiple registers of meaning. This semiotic complexity emerges from the interaction of visual signs — scripts, motifs, and spatial configurations — each embedded with cultural and communicative significance. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue, such visual communication is inherently context-sensitive and requires interpretation shaped by cultural perspectives.

Figure 13. Student reinterpretation of *Visible Language* 52.3 (2018), combining modular English text with graffiti-style Arabic calligraphy. Featuring portraits of the students themselves, the cover channels a manifesto aesthetic rooted in youth identity and cultural voices. This design merges postmodern fragmentation with vernacular resistance.

5.1. Postmodernism and Bilingual Visual Discourse

Scholars have emphasized postmodernism's capacity to destabilize fixed hierarchies of meaning (Harvey, 1997; Hutcheon, 2003). In this study, students who pursued dialogic visual integration (Figures 2–3, 9) enacted this destabilization by hybridizing Arabic and English scripts through layering, opacity, and disrupted grids. These designs resonate with Derrida's notion of *différance* (1981), in which meaning arises not from individual elements but through a relational interplay across a fragmented visual field.

These approaches also prompt a reconsideration of the binary distinction between 'Western' and 'non-Western' design traditions. While postmodernism is often linked to Euro-American contexts, its visual strategies, such as layering, fragmentation, and spatial disruption, have long intersected with global artistic practices shaped by colonial encounters and cross-cultural exchange. By reinterpreting these strategies through an Arabic–English bilingual design, students challenge the framing of postmodernism as a Western export and foreground its potential for recontextualization. This reflects broader calls in design studies to move beyond fixed geographic binaries and to recognize the plural and entangled histories of visual culture.

In complicating legibility, students surfaced the productive tension between form and meaning, echoing typographic experimentation found in earlier issues of *Visible Language* (Buchanan, 1985; Poynor, 2003).

However, not all projects embraced this hybridity. Designs categorized under double monolingualism (Figures 4 and 5) reinforce Spivak's (2008) critique of bilingualism as a superficial juxtaposition of isolated systems. These compositions maintained clear typographic boundaries while mimicking postmodern tropes such as asymmetry and disruption. Their persistence within the sample suggests that the visual politics of bilingual design may have resisted total integration. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Mirzoeff (1999) remind us, design is always embedded within broader dynamics of power, identity, and representation.

5.2. Cultural Symbolism as Pedagogical Strategy

Student works incorporating vernacular motifs and regional calligraphic traditions (Figures 6–8, 10, and 13) suggest a localized reworking of postmodernism. The inclusion of textile patterns, Kufic and Diwani scripts, and urban signage demonstrates how design functions as a conduit for cultural memory, and not merely as formal play. These projects reflect Barnard's (2005) and Skov and Melchior's (2010) arguments that design is never culturally neutral.

Such localization also complicates postmodernism's anti-foundational claims. While grid disruption and layering typically aim to unsettle meaning, culturally anchored works suggest that heritage and experimentation can coexist. Calligraphy, in particular, is not used as a pastiche but as a critical device to foreground cultural specificity. These insights contribute to global debates in design history (Margolin, 2015; Triggs, 2011) by reframing postmodern aesthetics as tools for expression within non-Western frameworks rather than as stylistic imports.

5.3. Implications for Bilingual Design Pedagogy

This study has several important pedagogical implications. Teaching design in multilingual contexts demands not only technical instruction but also critical awareness of the politics of language, culture, and representation. Through reinterpretations of *Visible Language* covers, students navigated both global design legacies and local linguistic realities. This reflects Lupton's (1996) view of typography as a cultural practice and supports Tselentis' (2011) argument that typographic experimentation should be central to critical design education.

Moreover, the emergence of dialogic integration and double monolingualism within the sample reveals unresolved tension between integration and preservation. Hybridity can risk collapsing the integrity of distinct scripts, whereas separation may preserve

identity but reify the division. These pedagogical challenges echo broader debates in cultural and translation theory around the visibility of differences versus the dangers of homogenization (Bhabha, 1994; Venuti, 2018).

Ultimately, the application of postmodern strategies in bilingual design sheds light on the underlying questions of hierarchy, representation, and pedagogical responsibility. Far from being a neutral aesthetic toolkit, postmodernism has become a lens for negotiating identity in design education. By engaging with these tensions, this study contributes to the scholarship on typography, visual culture, and multilingual pedagogy, offering a model for how design education might foster awareness of linguistic justice and cultural hybridity within a globalized design landscape.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how postmodern design strategies — fragmentation, layering, and grid disruption — can be reimagined in Arabic–English bilingual design education. Through the analysis of *Visible Language* covers spanning six decades and the creation of 12 student reinterpretations, participants engaged with the structural and cultural tensions inherent in adapting Western-derived aesthetics to multilingual contexts. The results revealed a continuum of design approaches, from dialogic integration, in which Arabic and English functioned as interdependent elements, to double monolingualism, in which the scripts remained visually and semantically separate. Many students also embedded cultural motifs and calligraphic forms, suggesting that postmodern experimentation can be localized as a vehicle for cultural expression, rather than being deployed as a stylistic import.

While postmodernism provided the initial conceptual lens, its application was not regarded as a prescriptive ideal. Instead, students critically engaged with its limitations — particularly its Eurocentric assumptions — and reinterpreted its strategies in culturally grounded ways. This reinforces that Arabic–English bilingual design need not conform to Western typographic models but can instead generate its own paradigms through reflective, situated practice.

6.1. Contributions

This study contributes to three overlapping areas of research. First, it expands postmodern typographic theory by demonstrating how design strategies born in the Euro-American context can be critically reinterpreted in the Global South. Second, it advances discourse on bilingual design by showing that cross-script integration involves more than technical execution; it is a negotiation of cultural identity and linguistic equity. Third, it offers a pedagogical model that integrates historical analysis with practice-led experimentation to foster critical reflections among design students.

6.2. Limitations

This study has several limitations. Conducted at a single academic institution in Kuwait and involving 90 undergraduate students over three semesters, its scope, while sufficient to identify patterns, limits generalizability across all bilingual or multilingual design contexts. Furthermore, the evaluation relied on qualitative visual interpretation rather than quantitative metrics, such as legibility, usability, and audience reception. Future research should incorporate user studies to better assess how different audiences engage with dialogic and monolingual design strategies.

6.3. Future Directions

There are several promising directions for future research in this area. First, applying the same practice-led framework to other script pairings, such as Arabic–French in North Africa or Chinese–English in East Asia, could yield comparative insights into multilingual design practices. Second, longitudinal research could track how exposure to bilingual postmodern designs shapes students' professional trajectories over time. Third, the increasing presence of digital tools and generative AI in design education opens a new terrain, and future studies could critically explore whether and how these technologies can accommodate and respect the cultural and linguistic nuances of cross-script typography.

Ultimately, this study affirms that postmodern design principles remain vital in design education — not as fixed stylistic formulas, but as adaptable strategies for interrogating language, culture, and power. When applied to bilingual contexts, these principles compel both students and educators to confront the politics of visual communication and cultivate a design practice that is at once experimental, culturally grounded, and critically reflective.

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