

## **Cultural Adaptation And Paralinguistic In McDonald's Arabia Advertising: A Semiotic Analysis Using Roland Barthes' Framework**

**Fathir Khalid\***

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Jawa Barat,  
40614, Indonesia

[fk882069@gmail.com](mailto:fk882069@gmail.com)

**Dedi Supriadi**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Jawa Barat,  
40614, Indonesia

[dedi.supriadi@uinsgd.ac.id](mailto:dedi.supriadi@uinsgd.ac.id)

**Siti Muslikhah**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Jawa Barat,  
40614, Indonesia

[smuslikah75@uinsgd.ac.id](mailto:smuslikah75@uinsgd.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

This study analyzes the verbal and nonverbal structures in McDonald's Arabic advertisement “*ماك أربيا من ماكدونالدز*” using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Through a descriptive analytical method with a qualitative approach, the researcher identifies paralinguistic elements to reveal McDonald's cultural adaptation strategies in the Arab market. The results of the study indicate that McDonald's implements a localization strategy through the use of standard Arabic combined with local dialects, cultural symbols such as traditional clothing, and Arab societal values. At the denotative level, the verbal structure includes local culinary terms and Arabic slogans, while the nonverbal structure depicts a happy family togetherness in an Arab environmental setting. At the connotative level, the advertisement aligns global modernity with local traditionalism, creating the perception that foreign products can integrate with Arab cultural identity without threatening local values. These findings contribute to the understanding of cross-cultural communication in global advertising and demonstrate how semiotics can reveal cultural adaptation strategies in contemporary advertising media.



**Keywords:** *Semiotics, Roland Barthes, Arabic Advertising, McDonald's, Glocalization*

## **1. Introduction**

The development of the modern era has brought significant changes in various aspects of life, including in cross-border marketing practices (Stiglitz, 2017). Global advertising is a complex phenomenon that has undergone significant transformations along with the development of economic and cultural globalization processes (Lee & Johnson, 2013). In this context, producers are required to develop advertising strategies that are not only effective and efficient but also capable of transcending complex cultural boundaries (Radikovna Sakaeva et al., 2019). One important approach in this global marketing phenomenon is globalization, which is a strategy that combines global orientation with local adaptation. Globalization allows companies to maintain their global brand identity while adapting their marketing messages to the cultural values of the local market where the product is sold.

Intercultural communication is a vital element in glocalization strategies, particularly in international advertising, which serves to convey cross-cultural messages effectively (Feriha, 2022). Advertising, as a paid communication medium used to promote products through mass media (Astuti, 2017), contains complex symbolic structures. According to Johansen & Larsen (2005) in semiotics, advertising is understood as a sign system consisting of three main elements: the representamen (the sign perceivable by the senses), the object (the reality referred to), and the interpretant (the meaning produced). Two important elements in advertising, namely verbal and nonverbal elements, serve as the primary means of forming and conveying meaning (Ni Nyoman Tri Jayanti et al., 2021).

This study addresses the issue of how global companies such as McDonald's adapt their communication strategies in advertising to the Arab cultural context. The advertisement “ماك أربيا من ماكдонаلدز” (Mac Arabia from McDonald's) serves as a relevant case study because it illustrates the process of globalization in the realm of marketing communication. This advertisement offers an example of how multinational companies respond to cultural diversity through the construction of verbal and nonverbal messages tailored to Arab societal values. The primary objective of this research is: “How does McDonald's balance its global brand identity with Arab cultural values through semiotic strategies, and what paralinguistic elements are contained in its adaptation?” This question aims to explore the mechanisms used by



McDonald's in creating advertisements that not only maintain its global image but also respect and reflect the cultural values and norms of Arab society.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the verbal and nonverbal structures in Mac Arabia advertisements using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. By identifying the denotative and connotative meanings of the advertisement's elements, this study aims to uncover the cultural adaptation strategies employed by McDonald's in the Arab market. Given the importance of cross-cultural communication in global advertising, McDonald's campaigns in the Arab world serve as a relevant case study, illustrating how multinational corporations navigate cultural nuances to engage local audiences. This analysis fills a gap in the literature on semiotic interpretation in advertising and deepens our understanding of how global brands can effectively integrate into diverse cultural contexts. Ultimately, this study aims to provide a solid foundation for exploring the relationship between global marketing strategies and local cultural identities.

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory offers a comprehensive analytical framework to understand how meaning is structured in media texts, including advertisements. Barthes developed a semiotic theory that divides three levels of meaning in signs: denotative, connotative, and myth (Zaimar, 2008).

Denotative meaning is the literal meaning of a sign, which is directly related to the signifier and signified in external reality (Bouzida, 2014). In the context of advertising, denotative meaning is always related to what is literally conveyed, either through visual or verbal forms. This level of meaning is objective and can be identified directly through good observation.

Connotative meaning, on the other hand, arises when the signifier is linked to cultural aspects such as certain beliefs, attitudes, or frameworks (Ayu Famila Putri et al., 2023). Connotation is a meaning that is more subjective and contextual, where this meaning is strongly influenced by cultural background, personal experience, and social values. In ad analysis, connotative meaning helps explore and reveal how visual and verbal elements produce deeper cultural adaptations.

The third meaning, myth, is a higher-level communication system that serves to normalize cultural or ideological concepts into something that seems natural and universal (Tohar et al., 2007). In Barthes' understanding, myth is not based on traditional stories, but on the dominant way of understanding and interpreting reality in a particular society. In the context of advertising, myths operate to accept certain values and ideologies as natural and believable.



This study analyzes how McDonald's applies Roland Barthes' three-level theoretical framework, denotation, connotation, and myth, in the advertisement “ماك أربيا من ماكدونالدز” (Mac Arabia from McDonald's) to create effective marketing communication in the Arab cultural context. Following the discussion of the theoretical framework, the application of Barthes' semiotic model in a real-world context becomes essential. The advertisement “Mac Arabia from McDonald's” serves as an ideal case study, showcasing McDonald's efforts to adapt to Arab culture and illustrating how verbal and nonverbal communication elements can effectively convey messages aligned with local values.

Through an analysis of this advertisement, this case study will examine how visual elements, such as color selection, symbols, and images, as well as verbal elements, including language and expressions used, contribute to a clear denotative understanding. Additionally, this research will uncover deeper connotative meanings related to Arab cultural values, such as community, family, and tradition. Furthermore, this study will identify how the advertisement constructs myths linking McDonald's products to widely accepted social norms in Arab society, thereby making the brand appear more natural and acceptable. Thus, this study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of cross-cultural advertising, highlighting how multinational companies can adapt their messages to align with local values while maintaining a strong global brand identity. Therefore, Barthes' semiotic model is very relevant and appropriate for analyzing McDonald's Arabic advertisements.

Previous studies emphasize the importance of adapting advertising messages to local cultures to support the success of cross-cultural communication. Busnaina (2014) In her study on fashion marketing in the Arab world, she emphasizes that the success of global brands is greatly influenced by the extent to which advertising messages are adapted to Islamic values and local traditions. Visual, narrative, symbolic, and linguistic aspects play an important role in this adaptation process. A similar point is made by Saputra & Agung (2023), who found that verbal and visual elements in fast food advertisements are shaped according to the cultural context of the target audience to enhance consumer engagement.

In the context of fast food advertising, cultural adaptation strategies are becoming increasingly relevant given that food is a basic need (Kim, 2017). As stated by Utami (2018), food not only fulfills biological needs but also has social, cultural, and even religious significance. McDonald's, as a representation of Western food, must overcome potential cultural resistance by adopting local elements in its marketing communications. Therefore, McDonald's, as a symbol of Western food, needs to adopt local



elements in its advertisements to reduce cultural resistance from Arab societies. Such strategies enable broader acceptance of the brand within communities that value collectivism, solidarity, and religiosity (Ben Abdallah El Alaoui, 2011).

The verbal structure in advertisements includes word choice, language style, slogans, and narratives. In a global context, language must be adapted to local dialects, idioms, and norms so that the message is more easily accepted and evokes emotional closeness Craig (2007). Roszi & Mutia (2018) Identified several cultural dimensions that influence communication behavior, such as individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and long-term/short-term orientation. Meanwhile, nonverbal structure includes visual and audio elements such as body movements, facial expressions, clothing, setting, music, and sound effects (Winarni et al., 2024). The three main elements in nonverbal structure, namely vocal, visual, and graphic elements, serve to convey meanings that often cannot be explicitly conveyed through verbal language.

The interaction between verbal and nonverbal structures forms a complex “multimodal text” in advertisements. The meanings that emerge are not only literal but also carry specific cultural values and ideologies. Therefore, analyzing the Mac Arabia advertisement through Barthes' theory allows us to trace how McDonald's not only adapts visuals and narratives but also constructs certain myths that reflect local values within a global identity framework.

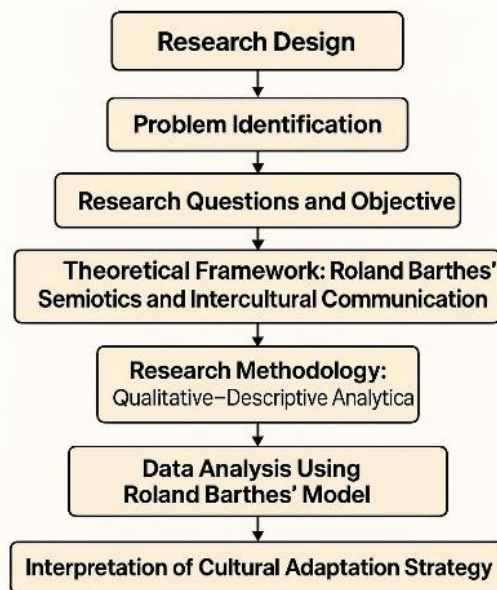
## **2. Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method to examine the verbal and nonverbal structures in McDonald's Arabic advertisement titled “ماك أربيا من مكدونالدز”. This approach was chosen because it is in line with the research objective, which seeks to understand the construction of meaning in depth, rather than measuring symptoms quantitatively. The descriptive-analytical method is used to systematically describe the communication phenomena evident in the advertisement, then analyze them through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Semiotic analysis is interpretative and emphasizes how a sign constructs meaning within a specific social and cultural context (Abdul Fattah, 2023), making this approach the most relevant for uncovering cultural adaptation strategies in cross-cultural marketing communication.

The primary data in this study consists of the Mac Arabia advertisement video uploaded through McDonald's Middle East's official channel on YouTube, with a duration of 75 seconds. This video was



selected because it explicitly displays globalization strategies, namely, the adaptation of global brands to local Arab cultures in complex symbolic, visual, and verbal forms. The selection of the video as the unit of analysis is based on its full representation of the advertising message to be conveyed, as well as the completeness of communication elements within a concise yet meaningful duration. Secondary data was obtained from various relevant academic references, such as books, journal articles, and research reports discussing semiotics, intercultural communication, global advertising, and the social and cultural values of Arab society. The 75-second duration of the advertisement will be acknowledged as a limitation, as it constrains the depth of content that can be analyzed.



**Figure 1.** Research Design

Data collection was conducted through documentation, observation, and literature review techniques. Documentation involved archiving advertising videos and recording key elements such as dialogue, narration, product visualization, cultural symbols, and supporting elements like music and actor expressions. The observation technique focused on both verbal and nonverbal communication structures. Verbal analysis examined word choice and narrative style, which can shape audience perceptions, while nonverbal analysis considered gestures, clothing, setting, color, and sound, all of which add meaning beyond words. The literature review



supported the interpretation of these signs through relevant theories and previous research.

Data analysis in this study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, which categorizes the meaning of signs into three levels: denotative, connotative, and mythical. A detailed description of the analysis procedure is essential for methodological accuracy. Denotative Analysis: This level identifies the explicit content of advertisements, including visual elements, spoken language, and text, with each component coded based on its direct representation. Connotative Analysis: This level explores hidden meanings and cultural implications by analyzing how symbols and images resonate with local Arab values. Coding criteria include cultural relevance, emotional impact, and conformity with social norms. Myth Analysis: This aspect evaluates the narratives and ideologies conveyed by the advertisement, assessing its contribution to or challenge to existing myths in Arab society, with coding focusing on historical context, collective memory, and identity representation.

Barthes' analytical framework is used by first mapping each element of the sign in the advertisement and classifying it according to three levels of meaning. The results are then analyzed in the context of Arab culture, taking into account the values that the advertisement seeks to convey. This analysis uses triangulation of visual data, verbal narratives, and library references to ensure depth and scientific validity. This approach enables the study to not only identify the semiotic elements in the advertisement but also explain the cultural adaptation strategies used by McDonald's to align its global identity with local Arab values. Additionally, triangulation goes beyond visual-verbal-literary comparisons by incorporating insights from secondary sources, such as academic literature on semiotics and intercultural communication.

The Completeness of the analysis was done through several means, including: a multimethod data approach that involved comparing observational findings with academic literature, discussing with colleagues to verify interpretations, and researcher reflexivity to be aware of potential biases in the analysis process.

### **3. Results**

Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis reveals that McDonald's uses a comprehensive globalization strategy, which not only adapts to the culture of the Arab community but also explores the socio-cultural values of the Arab community. This advertisement succeeds in creating the perception and belief that foreign products can merge and coexist with Arab cultural identity without threatening the local values of the community itself



through harmonization and fusion of verbal and nonverbal elements that are significant and appropriate to the target cultural context.

**Table 1. Verbal Analysis**

No.	Verbal Analysis	Key Findings
1	Product Name: "ماك أربيا" (Mac Arabia)	A combination of the word "Mac" from McDonald's (global element) and "Arabia" (local marker) indicating a local product adapted from a global brand.
2	Slogan of Mac Arabia: "ماك أربيا، أصيلة وفصيلة عربي"	This slogan literally means "Arab tradition and Arab choice," emphasizing that the product aligns with local cultural identity.
3	Promotional Phrase: "استمتع بنكهات ماك أربيا العربية الأصيلة والشهية والجديدة"	This Slogan Literally Means "Enjoy the authentic and delicious Arabian flavors of Mac Arabia". This phrase literally invites consumers to enjoy the Arabian flavors of Mac Arabia. It highlights the emphasis on genuine and innovative taste.
4	Menu List of Mac Arabia "كفتة، دجاج كرسبي" (Kofta + Chicken crispy)	Mentioning local specialty dishes in Arabic that are familiar to the target audience reinforces cultural relevance.
5	Introductory Language Fusha Arabic with Amiyah insertions in advertsing	This combination shows respect for formal language while also connecting with the everyday lives of Arab communities. as the ideal consumption unit of fast food companies.

Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of McDonald's "Mac Arabia" advertisement communication strategy reveals that the communication strategy used is a complex message communication strategy that combines global elements with local elements. The following table shows five dimensions of analysis that include verbal and non-verbal structures, ranging from denotative and connotative aspects to the mythical level that has deeper meaning. This approach makes it possible to provide a deep



understanding of how McDonald's builds meanings and symbols that are appropriate to the socio-cultural context of Arab audiences while maintaining its brand identity.

**Table 2.** Nonverbal Analysis

No.	Non Verbal Analys	Key Findings
1	Traditional Clothing in advertising: Thobe, ghutrah, black abaya	Shows a distinctive Arab visual identity, while creating cultural closeness with the audience. This connotation of authenticity reinforces the idea that McDonald's respects and embraces local customs, making the brand more relatable and trustworthy.
2	Mac Arabia Restaurant Setting Interior with Arab motifs	McDonald's design accommodates local cultural elements to create a sense of familiarity. This setting connotes a sense of belonging and comfort, suggesting that McDonald's is not merely a foreign entity but a brand that integrates into the local culture.
3	Gestures and Expressions Smiling of family members	Reinforces the impression of family warmth and the importance of togetherness in Arab culture.
4	Family Composition	Grandfather, father, mother, children Emphasizes collective social structure and the importance of family roles in advertising. This representation connotes respect for family roles and the significance of intergenerational relationships.
5	Background Music with Modern Arabic music	A combination of modern and traditional instruments that creates a familiar local atmosphere.

The application of the concept of glocalization in McDonald's advertising in the Arab market requires an appropriate adaptation strategy. The table below outlines the six main strategies used by McDonald's to combine global brand elements with local elements, while maintaining brand consistency. Within Roland Barthes' semiotic myth framework, McDonald's leverages signs with dual meanings. They retain global



symbols such as the logo and iconic products while adapting relevant local elements, such as the menu and Arabic language in advertisements. This approach not only appeals to local consumers but also strengthens the brand's global identity, reflecting the interaction between global and local elements in line with Barthes' theory of myth.

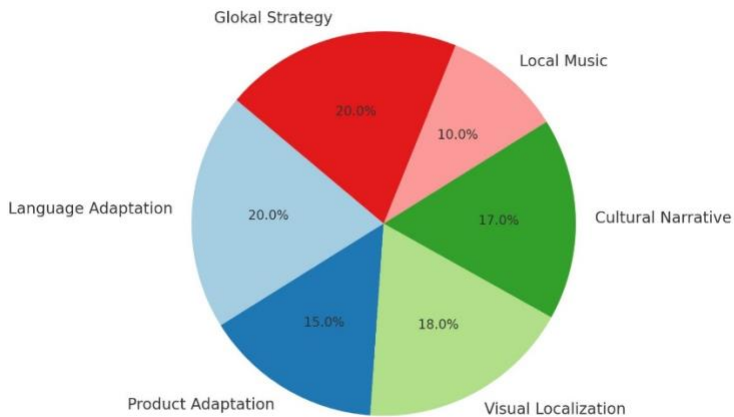
**Table 3.** Adaptation Strategy Analysis

No.	Strategy Adaptation Analysis	Key Findings
1	Language Adaptation	Combination of Fusha and Amiyah Shows respect for the language and strengthens emotional ties with the audience.
2	Product Adaptation	Menu items such as “Kofta” and “Krispi Ayam” Adapts product flavors to local preferences without losing brand identity.
3	Traditional Visuals	Clothing and interior design Demonstrates McDonald’s openness to accommodating local aesthetic values.
4	Cultural Narrative	Tradition themed slogans Constructs a brand image that supports and understands local values.
5	Local Music	Contemporary Arabic music Music is selected to evoke a sense of locality and emotional identity with the advertisement.

Each communication strategy for message delivery in this advertisement is designed in such a way that it can bridge the gap between local consumer expectations and McDonald's global standards as a multinational brand, so that a distinctive consumption experience is formed with brand consistency but remains familiar to Arab society.



Proportion of Cultural Adaptation Strategies in McDonald's Arabia Ad



**Figure 2.** Proportion Of Cultural Adaptation In McDonald's Arabia Advertising

#### 4. Discussion

McDonald's Arabic Advertisement "ماك أربيا من ماكдонаلدز" or "Mac Arabia from McDonald's" is an advertising campaign designed specifically for the Arabic market. It features the "Mac Arabia" product, which is a local cultural adaptation of the McDonald's burger with flavors tailored to Arab tastes and culinary preferences. Lasting 75 seconds, the ad depicts a family meal at a McDonald's restaurant located in the Middle East.

The setting of this advertisement features the interior of a McDonald's restaurant with an atmosphere that combines elements of global modernity and local touches, as seen from the ornaments and decorations that adapt traditional Arabic motifs. The main characters in the advertisement consist of an Arab family consisting of a grandfather, father, mother, one son, two small children (boy and girl), and one adult son. The men in traditional Arabic clothing of a thobe (long white robe) and ghutra (head covering), while the mother is wearing a modern abaya with a black hijab. The daughter is dressed as a young girl with her hair in a ponytail.

The narrative structure of the ad begins with a visualization of one of the families delivering the McDonald's food ordered and being greeted in a friendly and joyful manner by the waiting family members. The next scene shows a close-up of Mac Arabia products served in special packaging with the product name in Arabic and Latin letters. The ad narration uses standard Arabic spoken with a local accent, interspersed with some Arabic culinary terms that emphasize the unique taste of the product.



After the order arrives, the mother distributes the food one by one. In the middle of the advertisement, a boy is shown who can't wait to eat the food that has arrived, when he wants to eat it, his brother warns him to wait for his grandfather who has difficulty opening the unique and easy packaging of mak arabia (prioritizing parents), after a long wait, finally the whole family is shown enjoying the food with a satisfied expression, interspersed with the words "العادات الأصيلة ما تغير عليك, بس نكهات ماك اربي دائما" (Authentic traditions never change for you, but the flavors of Mac Arabia are always renewed for you) followed by the words "استمتع بنكهات" (Enjoy the authentic, delicious, and innovative flavors of Mac Arabia) and ends with the slogan "ماك أربيا, أصيلة" (Mac Arabia, The tradition and choice of the Arabs). At the end of the ad, the McDonald's logo is displayed with the McArabia tagline, which maintains the brand's global visual identity. The background music uses instrumentation that blends modern elements with traditional Arabic melodies, creating a contemporary yet appropriate and familiar atmosphere for local audiences.

#### 4.1 Analysis Of Verbal Structure In Mcdonald's Arabic Advertisement

At the denotative level, the verbal structure in McDonald's Arabic advertisement "ماك أربيا من ماك دونالدز" includes dialog, narration, and written text that clearly appear in the advertisement. The main dialog in the ad uses standard Arabic or fusha combined with some terms with local dialect or amiyah, especially when the mother mentions the product name when distributing food. The use of the word "ماك أربيا" (Mac Arabia) as the name of the product part of McDonald's is a clear example of how McDonald's has made linguistic adaptations by combining global (Mac) and local (Arabia) elements.

The advertising narrative spoken by the voice over in the advertisement uses a simple and direct Arabic sentence structure, focusing on the product description and an invitation to try the Arabic tradition of "ماك أربيا, أصيلة وفصلة عربي" which means "McArabi, Old traditions, new choices". Some key phrases in the narrative such as "استمتع بنكهات" (Enjoy the Taste) and "أصيلة وفصلة عربي" (Tradition and choice of Arabs) directly refer to the local characteristics of the product. The use of the adjectives "أصيلة" (native/tradition) and "فصلة" (choice) emphasizes the authenticity and uniqueness of the product in the context of local cuisine. The voice over in the middle of the ad says "استمتع بنكهات ماك اربيا العربية الأصيلة الشهية والجديدة" which means "enjoy the original, delicious and new taste of Mc Arabia", this is a message to tempt the audeins to taste and enjoy the new menu



variants that are available and have been adapted to Arabic tastes and culture.

In the middle of the advertisement, the mother distributes the food using Arabic dialog with Amiyah Arabic dialect which is difficult to understand for other than native Arabic speakers (Arabs), when the mother distributes the food, she says: *ماك عربي كفتة, دجاج, كرسبي, دجاج كرسبي*, which are the menus found at Mc Arabia. These words also promote the new menus found at Mc Arabia without losing the taste of McDonald's which has distinctive characteristics.

The written text contained in the advertisement includes the product name "Mc Arabia" displayed in Latin modified in such a way as to maintain the aesthetics of the McDonald's brand with local cultural adaptations, as well as the slogan "*ماك أريبيا, أصلة وفصلة عربي*" (McArabi, Old traditions, new choices) mentioned at the end of the advertisement to captivate the audience. It is important to note that the audio of the Arabic voice over is presented while maintaining McDonald's visual identity, as seen from the choice of colors and fonts that are consistent with the authentic global standards of the brand.

At the connotative level, the verbal structure of the ad contains more complex meanings related to the cultural values and social expectations of the Arab community itself. The use of standard Arabic (fusha) combined with local dialects creates a formal yet familiar impression of Arab culture, bridging the gap between the global brand identity and the local context. The choice of language also conveys a sense of respect for the Arabic language as an important element of Arab cultural identity, while encompassing the linguistic habits of Arabs in their daily communication.

The main slogan in this advertising goes beyond a description of flavors, but also has the effect of honoring Arab culinary traditions and recognizing the authenticity of local culture. This creates the perception and belief that although McDonald's is a foreign brand, its products can accommodate and respect local culinary preferences. The use of the word "*أصلة*" (original/authentic) has a strong cultural resonance in Arab societies that value authenticity and tradition, especially in the context of food as an expression of cultural identity, this also explains that Mc Arabia has a clear and consistent identity.

The slogan "*العادات الأصلية ما تتغير عليك*" (old traditions will never change) connotes the harmonization of the global modernity represented by McDonald's with local values and gives a deep meaning that Mc Arabia is in accordance and will always be in accordance with Arab traditions. The sentence structure that places "*العادات الأصلية*" subtly connotes a hierarchy



in which McDonald's global foundations are enriched with local elements, rather than the other way around. This reflects a glocalization strategy that seeks to maintain the global essence of the brand while adapting and customizing certain aspects to appeal to the local market.

The phrase "بس نكهات ماك اربي دائما تتجد لك" which means "but the taste of McDonald's will always be updated for you" connotes and combines local flavors with the distinctive authentic taste of McDonald's products that will always be updated to suit local tastes, while the phrase "استمتع بنكهات ماك اربيا العربية الأصيلة الشهية والجديدة" emphasizes that Mc Arabia will provide authentic and distinctive flavors according to Arab tastes and will provide an experience that will be very satisfying.

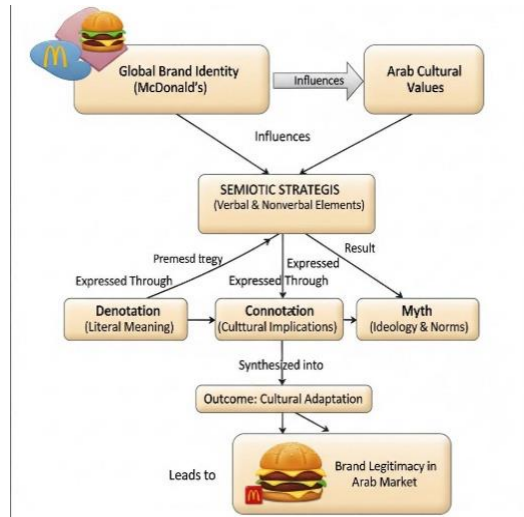
The product name "ماك أربيا" (Mac Arabia) itself connotes a fusion of identities, where "Mac" which is a global element is modified by the addition of "Arabia" which explicitly refers to a regional identity. This naming connotes that the product is not simply adopting a foreign culture, but rather an adaptation that recognizes and respects Arab identity.

#### *4.2 Analysis Of Nonverbal Structure In Mcdonald's Arabic Advertisement*

At the denotative level, the nonverbal structure in McDonald's Arabic advertisement includes various visual and auditive elements that are clearly displayed in the advertisement. character portrayal featuring an Arab family with clothes that reflect the dress and dressing culture of Arab society. The father and son wear a thobe (robe) and ghutra (head covering with a typical Arab turban), the mother wears a black robe and black hijab according to the local tradition of Arab women who wear all-black closed clothes while still paying attention to modesty according to Arab community standards.

The setting of the advertisement shows the interior of the McDonald's restaurant which is modified in such a way that is combined with local design, seen in the advertisement the design of the McDonald's restaurant is still accompanied by the very authentic and distinctive M logo. Mac Arabia products are presented with packaging that features bilingual writing, namely Arabic and Latin with the dominance of red and yellow, which are the basic colors of McDonald's products with the consistency of McDonald's global visual identity.





**Figure 3.** Conceptual Diagram of Semiotic Interaction in the Cultural Adaptation of McDonald's Arabia Advertising

The kinesic elements of gestures and expressions in the advertisement include a mother's friendly gesture when distributing food, warm interactions between family members, a grandfather who has difficulty opening the package due to the modern form of packaging, a child who feels annoyed waiting for a grandfather who has difficulty opening the package because of tradition and manners to put parents first and an expression of satisfaction when enjoying food. The proxemic aspect (communication distance) is shown through the close distance between the characters that reflects the norms of social interaction in the context of an Arab family.

The background music uses instrumentation that combines modern elements with melodies inspired by traditional Arabic music. The energetic and fun tempo of the music creates a cheerful and inviting atmosphere that is in line with McDonald's global image. In the middle of the commercial the music pauses while waiting for grandpa to open the package, but afterwards the music returns to normal which adds to the fun and excitement as the family enjoys the meal. Paralinguistic aspects such as intonation and accent in the narration reflect the characteristics of language use in the Arab region, with clear pronunciation and smooth flow.

At the connotative level, the nonverbal structures in the advertisement contain deeper meanings related to social values, cultural expectations, and ideologies in Arab society. The visualization of a family dressed in traditional Arabian clothes implies respect for local traditions and cultural identity. The presence of the father as the central figure who leads the



family when placing orders and bringing food and the mother who distributes food to all family members reflects the traditional values that are still strong in the Arab family structure.

The dress of the female characters (mother and daughter), who wear hijab in an all-black but fashionable style, connotes a combination of adherence to religious values and openness to global fashion trends. This reflects the contemporary reality in many Arab societies, where traditional and modern values are intertwined in daily life practices.

The restaurant setting, which combines McDonald's global design elements with a touch of local aesthetics, embodies the concept of a "third space" where global and local identities meet and negotiate. The use of the restaurant's geometric motifs with the distinctive McDonald's "M" in decorative elements connotes an attempt to create a familiar and comfortable environment for Arab consumers, while recognizing the cultural significance of these aesthetic elements without losing the authenticity of the McDonald's brand itself.

The visualization of Mac Arabia products with seemingly "local" ingredients such as Arabic spices and sauces connotes a culinary adaptation that respects local preferences. The appearance of the product, which retains the basic shape of McDonald's kebabs, potatoes, and chicken but with modifications to the contents tailored to local tastes, connotes a blend of global standardization and local adaptation in the product marketing strategy.

The interactions between the characters in the ad, especially the moments of family togetherness while enjoying food, connote the value of collectivism or strong cultural patterns in Arab society. This visualization emphasizes that McDonald's is not just a place to get food, but also a social space where family ties can be strengthened and cemented. This is in line with Arab values that emphasize the importance of family togetherness in daily activities, including eating.

The music, which blends modern elements with traditional Arabic melodies, connotes a harmonization between modernity and tradition, creating a familiar yet fresh background sound for Arab audiences. The use of this music reinforces the visual narrative of McDonald's as a global brand that respects and adopts local identities.

#### *4.3 Myths In McDonald's Arabic Advertisements*

Myth-level analysis reveals how McDonald's Arabic advertisements contribute to constructing and appropriating certain values and ideologies in society. The main myth identified in the advertisement is "modernity juxtaposed with tradition". The ad promotes the idea that the values of global modernity represented and displayed by McDonald's can coexist



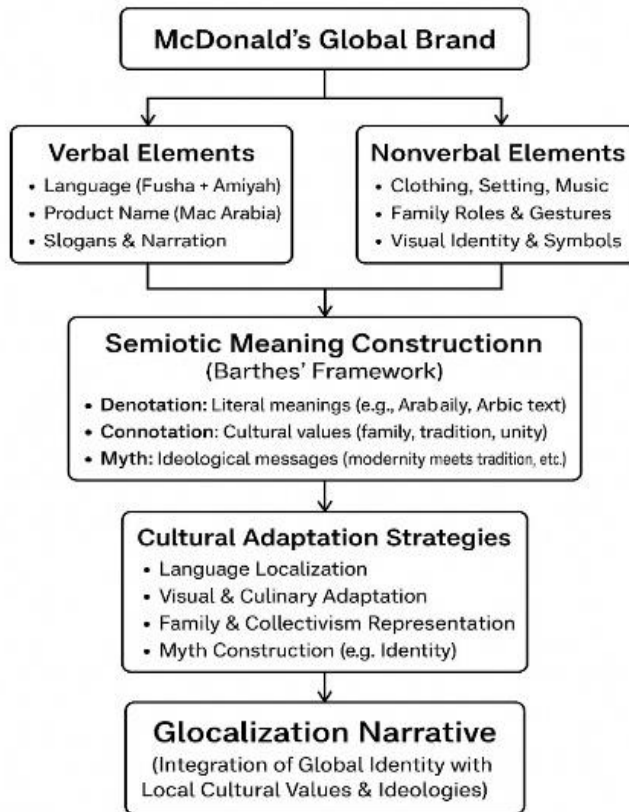
harmoniously with traditional Arab values without creating a conflict or contradiction.

This myth operates through the adaptation of the relationship between McDonald's as a symbol of Western modernity and traditional elements of Arab society. Through verbal and nonverbal structures in advertising, McDonald's strategizes marketing not as a foreign entity that threatens local values, but rather as a global brand that respects and accommodates the uniqueness of Arab culture. This naturalization process acknowledges McDonald's presence in the Arab cultural landscape and normalizes the consumption of its products as a practice that is in line with Arab identity.

The second myth identified is "consumption as a form of expression of cultural identity". The ad promotes the idea that consuming Mac Arabia is not just a culinary activity, but also a form of expression and acceptance of Arab identity. Through verbal structures that emphasize the authenticity and authenticity of the Arabic taste, as well as nonverbal structures that show visual elements associated with the Arabic identity, the advertisement constructs the meaning that consumption of Mac Arabia is a practice that affirms and strengthens, rather than threatens, the consumer's cultural identity.

The third myth is "family as the ideal consumption unit". The advertisement represents the meaning that the traditional Arab family is the ideal consumption unit for McDonald's products. The depiction of a harmonious family enjoying a meal together naturalizes the idea that consumption of McDonald's products is an activity that is in line with family values in Arab society. This integrates the McDonald's brand into the social narrative of the ideal Arab family and legitimizes its presence in family consumption practices.





**Figure 4.** Model of Semiotic Meaning Construction and Glocalization in McDonald's Brand Communication

Based on the analysis of the verbal and nonverbal structures contained in McDonald's Arabic advertisements, several cultural adaptation strategies implemented by McDonald's in its marketing communication strategy in the Arab market were identified:

1. **Linguistic Adaptation:** McDonald's uses Arabic as the main communication medium in this advertisement, blending standard Arabic (fusha) and local dialects to create a familiar attachment with the audience. The product name "Mac Arabia" is a form of linguistic adaptation that combines global and local elements.
2. **Visual Localization:** Visual elements in the Mc Arabia advertisement, such as the characters in the advertisement, clothing, and setting, are adapted and adjusted to the local context. The use of traditional clothing and the portrayal of an Arab family



creates a cultural proximity and cultural familiarity with the local audience.

3. **Product Adaptation:** Mac Arabia represents product adaptation tailored to local culinary tastes. This strategy recognizes that food has a deep cultural influence, and taste preferences will be heavily influenced by people's cultural background.
4. **Integration of Cultural Values:** Mc Arabia's advertising integrates values that are important in Arab society, such as family togetherness, giving precedence to elders, and respect for tradition and culture. This creates an emotional continuity between the brand and the audience by showing that McDonald's understands, adapts, and respects their values.
5. **Visual Harmonization:** The visual design in this Mc Arabia ad blends McDonald's global visual identity with elements of local tradition. The use of colors and fonts that are consistent with McDonald's global standards and the very distinctive "m" symbol, combined with Arabic motifs and writing, creates a visual harmony that connects global and local elements.
6. **Glocalization Narrative:** The narrative of this advertisement overtly promotes the concept of glocalization through the slogan "authentic and Arab traditions". It recognizes McDonald's presence in the Arab market as a very positive combination of adaptation between global and local values.

These advertising marketing communication strategies demonstrate McDonald's approach to cultural and values adaptation that goes beyond superficial changes to advertising messages, but involves a deeper understanding of the values, culture, expectations, and socio-cultural context of Arab society. McDonald's approach in representing its advertisements allows the product to maintain its globalized and generic brand identity and create cultural influence with local consumers.

#### *4.4 McDonald's Cultural Adaptation Strategy In The Arab Context*

An analysis of verbal and nonverbal elements in McDonald's Arabic language advertisements reveals that the company employs a strategic adaptive approach to align its marketing communication with local cultural values. This adaptation reflects McDonald's commitment to understanding the social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics of Arab society, evident in the use of language, visual representations, and narratives that reflect local values.

The use of Arabic in advertisements reflects a linguistic adaptation strategy that goes beyond literal translation, involving a choice between formal Arabic (fusha) and local dialects, depending on the audience



context. This demonstrates sensitivity to linguistic diversity within Arab society, from formal to everyday language.

Product naming strategies, such as “Mac Arabia,” demonstrate precision in building a locally relevant brand identity without losing its global aspects (glocalization). This name creates local resonance and affirms that the product is the result of cultural interaction, not the dominance of one culture over another, reflecting the hybridization of identity in the context of globalization.

Visuals in the advertisement also play an important role. Characters wearing traditional Arab clothing and interacting in a distinctive environment reinforce local nuances and create psychological closeness between the audience and the brand. The clothing worn, such as thobes and abayas, reflects respect for traditional dress that emphasizes modesty.

The family structure depicted in the advertisement is relevant to the social values of Arab society. The family is portrayed across generations, emphasizing the importance of togetherness and respect for elders. The advertisement not only showcases product consumption but also the social context in which that consumption occurs.

The use of body language and facial expressions in the advertisement is part of an effective nonverbal communication strategy. Friendly gestures and character expressions convey the message that the dining experience at McDonald's remains warm and familiar. The proxemic aspect, or the physical distance between characters, reflects social norms in Arab culture, indicating that dining is an important moment for social interaction.

The background music in the advertisement plays a significant role in building an emotional atmosphere. The musical composition, which combines modern instruments with traditional Arabic melodies, creates a familiar atmosphere for the local audience. One interesting moment is when the music pauses briefly as the grandfather struggles to open the packaging, creating humorous tension that demonstrates sensitivity to norms of politeness.

The verbal narrative in the advertisement is carefully constructed, using intonation that conveys warmth and familiarity. Clear accents and pronunciation create a sense of trust and closeness between the brand and consumers. The advertisement also presents the restaurant as a social space, not just a place to eat, with interior design that blends global aesthetics and distinctive Arab motifs.

The product packaging, which features text in two languages, Arabic and Latin, demonstrates a visual strategy that maintains global identity while remaining open to local adaptation. The use of local ingredients in Mac Arabia products reinforces the connotation that McDonald's is



capable of integrating with local culinary traditions, reflecting a localization strategy.

The depiction of a family enjoying a meal together in a warm atmosphere underscores McDonald's support for the value of collectivity in Arab culture. Eating is positioned as a social activity, relevant to the custom of using mealtimes as a moment for gathering. Small details in the advertisement, such as how the characters hold and share food, reflect attention to behavioral norms in Arab culture. The presence of a respected elder in a modern context reflects the intergenerational values held in high regard.

Connotative analysis shows that the nonverbal structure in the advertisement carries complex social and ideological meanings, conveying a message about preserving cultural identity amid modernity. This advertisement creates a narrative that globalization is not a threat but an opportunity to enrich local identity.

The myth that emerges is that consumption can be a form of identity affirmation. Consuming Mac Arabia is not only fulfilling a need, but also a cultural expression and symbol of membership in the community. The advertisement positions McDonald's as a space where family values can be celebrated, showing that consumption takes place in a public space that functions as an extension of domestic values.

Although this strategy successfully presents a harmonious narrative between globality and locality, there are several potential limitations. However, this harmony often conceals deeper contradictions that require critical review. Although the advertisement depicts McDonald's consumption as being in line with Arab values, it also contributes to the normalization of foreign fast food consumption, which has the potential to accelerate the homogenization of global consumer culture. This raises an important question: can cultural adaptation through glocal branding truly preserve local identity, or does it subtly reinforce Western corporate dominance through local symbols? The cultural representations presented tend to be idealistic and do not fully reflect the complexity of Arab society. By presenting a single idealized image of Arab culture centered on family, tradition, and politeness, these advertisements risk ignoring alternative identities, such as urban youth, women in non-traditional roles, or ethnic minorities in the Arab world. This idealized image simplifies the pluralism of Arab society into a single, easily digestible narrative.

Compared to other global brands, this analysis is less in-depth. The brief mention of KFC or Starbucks does not explore key differences in their localization strategies. A more rigorous comparison, such as KFC's focus on urban youth and halal certification frameworks, or Starbucks' emphasis



on café culture and local sustainability, could highlight how McDonald's tends to be more conservative in promoting traditional values and family-oriented messages. Unlike Starbucks, which promotes cosmopolitan and individual-centered experiences, McDonald's emphasizes communal and intergenerational bonds. These differences reflect distinct strategies for engaging Arab consumers, and a more in-depth analysis would enrich the discussion.

The advertisement depicts Arab culture by relying on idealized images of family unity, gender roles, and traditions, which, while relatable to some, risk ignoring the social and cultural diversity within Arab communities. By highlighting certain symbols such as traditional clothing and communal meals, the advertisement may inadvertently promote a narrow and romanticized view of Arab identity. Furthermore, semiotic interpretation assumes a uniform audience response, ignoring how meaning can vary depending on individual and cultural contexts. Phrases such as "authentic Arab traditions" may resonate with some viewers, but to others, they may appear as cultural tokenism. Recognizing these interpretive biases is essential for a critical understanding of how advertisements shape and challenge cultural meanings.

Additionally, the section on limitations remains underdeveloped. This section does not sufficiently explore how idealized cultural representations may obscure the realities of life and diversity within Arab societies. For instance, the portrayal of a single, uniform family model may inadvertently overlook non-traditional family structures or urban lifestyles, thereby reinforcing a narrow vision of "Arabness." A more nuanced critique could address how this form of cultural simplification may appeal to a market segment driven by tradition, but alienate younger, cosmopolitan consumers seeking authenticity beyond imposed cultural tropes.

By analyzing this advertisement through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, this study contributes new insights into how cross-cultural communication strategies can operate simultaneously at three levels of meaning: denotative, connotative, and mythological. This study also demonstrates how advertising is not merely a promotional tool but a cultural practice that shapes the interpretation of identity in an increasingly complex global society.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study examined the verbal and nonverbal structures in McDonald's Arabia's advertisement titled ماك أربيا من ماكдонаلدز using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory framework. Through an analysis of three levels of meaning: denotative, connotative, and mythological, this study reveals



how McDonald's marketing communication strategies shape a cultural narrative that not only promotes the product but also builds a symbolic connection with Arab culture.

Key findings indicate that McDonald's employs an expressive localization approach, blending global elements with local wisdom through the use of Arabic language that mixes standard and colloquial dialects, as well as visualizations of Arab cultural values such as family togetherness, traditional attire, and local aesthetics. At the connotative level, this communication strategy conveys harmony between global modernity and local tradition, while at the mythological level, the advertisement reinforces the brand's legitimacy within the Arab cultural framework, normalizing the consumption of foreign products without sacrificing local identity. Meanwhile, at the mythological level, this advertisement successfully constructs brand legitimacy through an ideological narrative that normalizes the consumption of foreign products within the framework of local culture.

The main contribution of this research lies in how Barthes' semiotic model, particularly at the mythical level, can be used to uncover ideological structures in cross-cultural advertisements. This approach enriches the study of global marketing communication by demonstrating that symbolic representations in advertisements play a crucial role in the negotiation of meaning between global brands and local audiences.

The significance of these findings shows that cultural representation in advertising not only affects brand image but also the audience's perception of collective identity. Therefore, communication strategies need to go beyond superficial textual and visual aspects. In practice, global advertisers are advised to involve local cultural experts in the creative process to ensure that the cultural elements depicted are not merely symbolic but rooted in meanings that are alive within society.

The practical implications of this research underscore the importance of constructing narratives that are not only linguistically appropriate but also culturally and emotionally relevant to the local community. This requires the involvement of local actors in the creative process and contextual testing of messages to ensure that advertising campaigns resonate with the symbolic aspects that matter to the audience.

For future research development, a more specific approach is needed, such as comparative studies between other global brand communication strategies also operating in the Middle East. By comparing cultural representations across brands, further research can test the consistency or variation in the application of Barthes' semiotic model. Additionally, expanding the theoretical approach is important, for example, by



integrating cross-disciplinary cultural dimensions such as collectivist values or social relations into sign analysis. This study opens opportunities for more concrete cross-cultural comparisons, particularly in the context of globalization strategies between global brands in the Middle East and other regions such as Southeast Asia or North Africa. Such studies will enrich our understanding of how local narratives are formed, negotiated, and maintained in an increasingly complex global context. Semiotic studies are not merely descriptive but also more reflective of the cultural and ideological contexts that shape them.

## Reference

- Astuti, S. P. (2017). Persuasi dalam Wacana Iklan. *Nusa: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 12(1), 38. <https://doi.org/10.14710/nusa.12.1.38-45>
- Ayu Famila Putri, Arin Inayah, & Wageyono. (2023). A Semiotic Analysis Of Aladdin Movie By Using Roland Barthes Theory. *LUNAR*, 6(2), 376–386. <https://doi.org/10.36526/ln.v6i2.2453>
- Ben Abdallah El Alaoui, H. (2011). The Split in Arab Culture. *Journal of Democracy*, 22(1), 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2011.a412889>
- Bouzida, F. (2014). *The semiology analysis in media studies - roland barthes approach. International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities.*
- Abdul Fattah. (2023). *Buku metode penelitian kualitatif*. Harva Creative.
- Busnaina, I. (2014). *Fashion Marketing in Arab World: Brand Identity vs. Adaptation*. 9(1).
- Craig, J. (2007). Arab society: characteristics and contradictions. *Asian Affairs*, 38(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068370601108517>
- Johansen, J. D., & Larsen, S. E. (2005). *Signs in Use* (0 ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203994146>
- Kim, Y. Y. (2017). Cross-Cultural Adaptation. In Y. Y. Kim, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.21>
- Lee, M., & Johnson, C. (2013). *Principles of Advertising: A Global Perspective, Second Edition* (0 ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203050262>
- Ni Nyoman Tri Jayanti, I Dewa Ayu Devi Maharani Santika, & Desak Putu Eka Pratiwi. (2021). Analysis of Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs in Nivea Nourishing Body Lotion Advertisemnts. *ELYSIAN*



- JOURNAL: English Literature, Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 1(1), 93–103. <https://doi.org/10.36733/elysian.v1i1.1584>
- Perić, N., & Jevtović, A. (2022). Importance of local culture in advertising: Case of Serbia. *Bastina*, 56, 541–552. <https://doi.org/10.5937/bastina32-36823>
- Radikovna Sakaeva, L., Aidarovich Yahin, M., Vladimirovna Kuznetsova, E., & Venera Latipovna, I. (2019). Functional Languages in the Context of Globalization: The Language of Advertising. *Research in Applied Linguistics*, 10(Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Applied Linguistics Issues (ALI 2019) July 19-20, 2019, Saint Petersburg, Russia). <https://doi.org/10.22055/rales.2019.15125>
- Roszi, J., & Mutia, M. (2018). Akulturasi Nilai-Nilai Budaya Lokal dan Keagamaan dan Pengaruhnya terhadap Perilaku-Perilaku Sosial. *FOKUS Jurnal Kajian Keislaman dan Kemasyarakatan*, 3(2), 171. <https://doi.org/10.29240/jf.v3i2.667>
- Saputra, I. P. A., & Agung, I. G. A. M. (2023). Semiotic analysis of verbal signs found in fast food advertisements. *English journal of indragiri*, 7(1), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.32520/eji.v7i1.2159>
- Stiglitz, J. E. (2017). The overselling of globalization. *Business Economics*, 52(3), 129–137. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s11369-017-0047-z>
- The Glocal Marketing Strategies of Global Brands: Coca-Cola and McDonald's. (2022). *Journal of International Business and Management*. <https://doi.org/10.37227/JIBM-2022-06-5414>
- Tohar, V., Asaf, M., Kainan, A., & Shahar, R. (2007). An Alternative Approach for Personal Narrative Interpretation: The Semiotics of Roland Barthes. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 6(3), 57–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690700600306>
- Utami, S. (2018). Kuliner Sebagai Identitas Budaya: Perspektif Komunikasi Lintas Budaya. *CoverAge: Journal of Strategic Communication*, 8(2), 36–44. <https://doi.org/10.35814/coverage.v8i2.588>
- Winarni, I. D., Ghanistyana, L. P., Purwanto, E., & Sari, D. N. (2024). Representasi Nilai Keluarga dalam Komunikasi Nonverbal pada Film Horor dan Thriller (Analisis Semiotika Film “A Quiet Place”). *Jurnal Bisnis Dan Komunikasi Digital*, 1(4), 8. <https://doi.org/10.47134/jbk.d.v1i4.3167>



Zaimar, O. K. S. (2008). *Semiotik dan penerapannya dalam karya sastra*. Pusat Bahasa, Departemen Pendidikan Nasional.