

## A Linguistic Landscape in a Thailand Chinatown Area

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### ABSTRACT

This is to reveal the language displayed at a street in a Chinatown area, Thailand. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method; it is to describe the conditions or phenomena. The data were taken from a Google Streetview application in Chinatown, Thailand. The data were analysed in terms the language(s) used and the sources of the signages. Based on the analysis, the signs in the area can be divided into three types: monolingual, bilingual, and trilingual. The languages displayed in monolingual signs are : Thai, and English. Meanwhile in bilingual signs, the language pairs employed are Thai-English, and, Thai-Chinese. Finally, trilingual signs show the trios of Thai-English-Japanese, and Thai-Chinese-English. In terms of their sources, all the monolingual signs are private signs, meaning they were made by non-governmental agencies. They are from the business institution. Most bilingual signs are public signs or top-down signs, made by the governmental agencies. Some others are displayed by private sectors. Finally, all the signs made in trilingual are bottom-up. All of them are shops signs displaying their products to cover a wide catch.

**Keywords:** *shop signs, Chinatown, sign, bottom-up signs, top-down signs, bilingual, multilingual.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Linguistic landscape is a linguistic subdiscipline. Linguistics Landscape is a field of study that focuses on the use of language in public spaces and the reasons for doing so. The majority of linguistic landscape data comes from the public domain. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25), "the linguistic landscape of a certain territory, region, or urban agglomeration is formed by the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial retail signs, and public signs on government buildings."

From the explanation above, landscape linguistics is closely related to making a sign. Signs are markers made to provide information to the public about something, be it warnings, announcements, road markers, or the name of a marker for a place such as a park, shop, office, building, etc. Signs are usually put in public places that are easily seen by local residents.

The public space area in the above notion is made up of traffic signs, billboards, street names, place names, stalls, cafes, restaurants, and government buildings, and it forms a linguistic landscape study. The purpose of this work is to explore and analyze the existence of signs in Chinatown area, Thailand, as well as to raise awareness of the necessity of such studies in a multilingual context.

Thailand is a country in Southeast Asia with Thai or Phasa Thai as its official language. In writing, the Thai language uses alphabet letters. Thai is one of the languages in the world that is difficult to learn, this is because apart from having to memorize the letters, the pronunciation, and the choice of words used must also be considered so as not to deviate from other meanings. Therefore, various kinds of signs are displayed there are bilingual and even multilingual with the aim of making it easier for foreign tourists to understand the existing signs. One of the places that use bilingual and multilingual signs a lot is in the Chinatown area, where the majority of the population is of Chinese race. In addition, this city is also one of the famous tourist attractions in the country. It is not surprising that the signs displayed do not only use Thai and Mandarin but also mixed with English.

The Chinatown area in Thailand was chosen for two reasons: first, this area is one of the most attractive spots for the tourists, and secondly, it is an area with a mix of culture between Thai culture and Chinese culture. This promises variety of languages used in the landscape there. This is to reveal the unique language scene in the area in terms of language dynamics in daily use.

## METHOD

This employed a qualitative descriptive approach. The sampling was taken purposively by choosing a specific landscape area in an urban context. Thus, it took the Chinatown area in Thailand. The data were collected by using digital resources, i.e. *Google Streetview*. This facilitates a virtual survey to the spot only by clicking a spot in *Google Map*. The data were analyzed based on the categories of language number and their sources. They were grouped into a monolingual sign, a bilingual sign, or a multilingual sign and whether they are top-down (signs made by authorities such as the government for the community) or bottom-up (signs made by the community). They were also elaborated from their genre or social functions (ads, direction, street signs, or others).

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the analysis of the sign taken were explored. There are eight signs selected to represent the language situation in the area. They were grouped based on the number of languages displayed, and other discussion on their source and social functions are also elaborated along the discussion.

### 1. Monolingual Signs

They are the signage using a language displayed. The language in such a signage is considered to be a strong language to stand alone. It means the user believe that the language can function well in the context. It does not need any other language to stand with. In sum, the language can represent sufficiently the coverage of the information there. Here, two languages in a monolingual signage are English, and Thai. It implies that besides Thai language, the majority of the public in the area are considered to be familiar with English, at least in the particular display.



Figure 1 English Sign



Figure 2 Thai Language

The pictures above are two pictures of signs in the Chinatown area, Thailand, that use one type of language or monolingual sign. Monolingualism, sometimes known as unilingualism, is the ability to speak only one language, as opposed to multilingualism. "Unilingualism" can also refer to a language policy that favours one official or national language over others. Monolingual sign means a sign that only uses one type of language. Usually, the language used is the native language of the country or place. In figure 1, the sign displayed in front of a shop or office uses English, while in figure 2, the sign displayed on the billboard is a monolingual sign using Thai characters. The sign in figure 1 and figure 2 has a different purpose. In figure 1, the sign displayed is a sign that is displayed in front of a shop or office with the aim of making it easier for people to find the place and find out what services can be obtained at that place. There are several words in English, namely ATM, Express Exchange, and The Wisdom. ATM and Express Exchange are two English words that mean that the place provides these two services, namely money withdrawal services, cash deposits, transfers, and also money exchange.. The use of English is considered to make it easier for foreigners who are visiting the place. This place is a place that provides services related to foreign tourists, namely exchange or a place to exchange foreign currencies.

In figure 2, it is a monolingual sign using Thai. The sign intends to advertise a large billboard that can be rented by calling the number listed on the billboard. The reason for using Thai is because most of the trusted tenants are Thai natives or residents who have lived in Thailand for a long time and have official permission to advertise a product.

The two signs are bottom-up signs, namely signs displayed by the owner of a company or business owner with the aim of marking a certain place belonging to the owner so that local residents know the type of business and what types of services are provided at that place.

## 2. Bilingual Signs

These signs are written in two languages. The languages may overlap or translate each other. It means they have two different audiences in terms of their language repertoire. Such a case is commonly found in public facilities in an international space like airport in which the directions made in national and international languages. In another case, the two languages complement each other; each takes different functions, or diglossia. Such signs are common in ads in which the brand and tagline are usually put in a prestigious language, and the products or their description in another language familiar for its target audience.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 3

The three pictures above are three examples of signs, namely in Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5. The three images above are three images of signs in Chinatown, Thailand that use bilingualism. Bilingualism is the ability to communicate in two languages in everyday situations. In many regions of the world, bilingualism is common and on the rise, with one in every three individuals being bilingual or multilingual (Wei, 2000). Language interaction in the brain is the background that supports bilingualism. Language contact happens as a result of population movement for educational, political, economic, religious, and natural disaster causes, resulting in contact with the languages of other speakers. Bilingual sign means a sign

that uses two languages in writing a word or sentence with the aim of making it easy to understand by both natives and immigrants. In Figure 3 the languages used are Thai and English, in Figure 4 the languages used are Thai and Mandarin. The three signs were installed in three different places but still in the same area. These three signs have different meanings and meanings from each other.

The sign in figure 3, there is a sign written in two languages, namely Thai and English. That is a bilingual sign indicating street names on the streets of Chinatown. The inscription in English on the sign is "Yaowarat Rd.". "Rd." is an English abbreviation which means "Road". The sign aims to give instructions to road users to find out the name of the road they are passing. The sign is written in two languages with the aim that road users other than native Thais who still don't understand and can't even read Thai characters still understand the name of the road they're on.

The sign in figure 4 is a bilingual sign displayed in front of a shop. The sign aims to display the name of the store and the type of service provided at the store. The languages used are Thai and Mandarin. The use of Thai is because Thai is the main language in Thailand, while Mandarin is used because the shop is in the Chinatown area where the majority of the population is Chinese. Bilingualism is used so that both Thais and Chinese can know the name of the store as well as the types of services available at the store.

The sign in figure 5 is a sign displayed in front of a police post in the Chinatown area. The languages used are Thai and English. The purpose of the sign is to let local residents know that the post is a police post. The use of two languages is used to make it easier for local people, both foreign visitors and natives, to know what types of services can be provided from the place.

Figure 3 and figure 5 are signs with a top-down type, namely the type of sign made by the government or government staff aimed at the local community. Figure 3 is a sign made by the government with the aim of indicating the way for people who cross the road. While in Figure 5, the sign is written as a description of a small post which is a Police post. While the sign in figure 4 is a type of bottom-up sign, which is deliberately made by the shop owner to show the name of the shop and its services.

### 3. Multilingual Signs

As implied in its notion, they have more than two languages displayed. Similarly, the presence of many languages in a sign can contain a single information packed in various tongues to cover a maximum coverage for multi-ethnic publics. However, in other cases the multilingual may function as a symbol of uniqueness for products—in which they should be presented in its original name and/or scripts. Meanwhile other languages function to inform the general points.



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

The three pictures above are three pictures of signs in Chinatown, Thailand that use multilingualism. Multilingualism is the act of using more than two languages or many languages either by individuals or by society. The cause of multilingualism is the existence of cultural mixing factors, resulting in an environment that has the ability of more than one language. Like Chinatown in Thailand. The place

has a cultural mix between Chinese culture and indigenous Thai people. The mixing of cultures causes the use of more than one language to facilitate the native Thai and Chinese people. In addition, when times have begun to advance, more and more foreign tourists are visiting the area, so the use of an international language, namely English, is also included to make it easier for foreign people to visit the place.

The first sign in figure 6 is a sign displayed in front of a shop selling Japanese food. The sign uses three languages including Thai, English, and Japanese. Thai language is used because it is the first language used by all people in Thailand, while English is used to make it easier for foreign tourists and to give information that the place sells Fishball food, Japanese is used to identify that the food place is a place that sells food. Japan. The purpose of installing the sign is to provide a name sign on the food place so that it is easily seen and known by the surrounding community.

The second sign in figure 7 is a multilingual sign that uses three languages including Thai, Mandarin, and English. The sign is displayed in front of a building. The Thai language used is intended so that the Thai people better understand and understand the name of the place and what types of services are offered by the place, as well as Mandarin and English which are used have the same purpose but are intended for foreign visitors and Chinese nationals who visit the place. This place is a place that provides services related to foreign tourists, namely exchange or a place to exchange foreign currencies. Thus, the use of these three languages is very important.

The sign in figure 8 is a sign that uses three languages including Thai, Mandarin, and English. The sign is written on a Chinese restaurant that sells Chinese specialties. Thai language is used because it is the first language used by all people in Thailand in order to be more easily accepted by local people. Mandarin is used with the first purpose to show the identity that the restaurant sells Chinese specialties, the second is that the majority of the population in the city are Chinese people so that the use of Chinese is very natural and even very necessary in that environment. The English used is intended so that foreign visitors can also know the name of the restaurant and the type of food provided.

The three signs are a type of bottom-up sign. This sign is made by the community owner of a business to mark the store and its area and provide information about what types of services are offered or the types of products sold. This type of sign is usually installed in front of a building, shop, or sales stall. The use of multiple languages is a good goal so that all people, both local people and foreign visitors, can understand and understand what the sign on display means.

## CONCLUSION

In the analysis above, the researcher found two monolingual signs in English and Thai languages. Both are bottom-up signs. Three bilingual signs are identified; they are street name in Thai and English (top-down sign), a shop sign using Thai and Chinese (bottom-up sign), and another sign showing the name of a police posts written in Thai and English (top-down sign). The multilingual signs observed are a sign in English, Thai and Japanese created by a typical Japanese restaurant, another sign showing Thai, Chinese and English displayed in front of a foreign currency exchange, and last sign shown in Chinese restaurant with Thai, Mandarin, and English. The three are bottom-up signs. Thus, it can be concluded that the use of signs in the area is dominated by signages in bilingual and multilingual. This is due to the fact that the location is a place of cultural exchange between Thailand and China, and also its potential status as the international tourist destination.

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