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An Investigation of the Language used on Signage in Japanese Town on Sukhumvit Road, Bangkok through the Lens of Linguistic Landscape

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Abstract

This study investigates the language diversities and Japanese language usage reflected on the signage found in Japanese town on Sukhumvit Road, Bangkok. A qualitative research method was used, with which samples were collected by taking fifty photos of signage along five alleys on Sukhumvit Road with Japanese script appearing on them. The framework of Landry & Bourhis (1997) was employed in this study. The results show that Japanese has an important role in the multilingual area of Sukhumvit Road whereas English was used as the international language. Moreover, Thai language appeared on the signage as the national language but English was still the main language used to communicate with the target customers of various nationalities. It is inferred that most people in the area understand everyday English well. Additionally, the signage of Japanese restaurants was the most prominent and most of them represent Japanese culture. In addition, horizontal text was evident in the system of writing. This may be influenced by the Thai writing system as well as the Western languages. Furthermore, Kanji scripts were the most used on the signage compared to Hiragana and Katakana scripts. Overall, Kanji, as the picture scripts of Japanese language, may convey the meaning of lexical words to readers effectively.

Introduction

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the context of linguistic landscape. It is a branch of linguistic studies as a sub-category of sociolinguistics. The purpose of the study of linguistic landscape is to explore and analyze the language when it is present alongside other languages in spoken or written form, and in this case, on multilingual signage. Landry & Bourhis (1997) explained that linguistic landscape refers to the

language used on signage in a particular area such as signage along a road, or a sign placed in front of a hotel. Also, linguistic landscape does not only reflect the language usage in a specific area, but it also reveals the language policy and the power of the language, and the people's identity is exhibited from the language on the signage (Gorter, 2006).

Previous studies relating to linguistic landscape were focused on language, education and culture as an

interdisciplinary study as evidenced in Pakarinen and Björklund's study on the language of school signage in Finland (Pakarinen, & Björklund, 2017). The study revealed that it can interact with students and enhance the students' language proficiency. Another study conducted by Wang (2015) focused on the language used on signage in a school campus in Kyoto, Japan. The results of the study confirmed that the language on signage was directly correlated to education and culture.

In Thailand, turning to the study of Thongtong (2016), found that many languages were used on signage. Furthermore, the findings showed that the role of English on signage in tourist attractions as well as the development of language choices is a classic issue in linguistic landscape. In addition, in a study by Yanhong (2014), it explored how the linguistic landscape reflects multilingualism in Chiang Mai as a tourist attraction in the northern part of Thailand. The results reflected code mixing and the influence of English as a global language. Furthermore, in the study of Meemongkol (2021) wherein the linguistic landscape on two alleys in the center of Bangkok was explored, the findings showed that Japanese language was presented on some signage. It can represent the main role of Japanese culture in Thai society. However, Japanese language was not thoroughly investigated on the studies, both language usage and Japanese culture.

In Japan, the language used on signage was investigated in several dimensions such as multilingualism, linguistic diversification (Backhaus, 2005; Backhaus, 2006), and language as a product of social activity and language usage (Jiang, 2013). It is clear, therefore, that the study of the language used on signage in Japan is an important issue of applied linguistics. This has drawn attention to the use of Japanese on signage in Bangkok, Thailand as many Japanese expatriates live in Bangkok especially in the business areas such as Sukhumvit Road. However, currently, there are only few investigations beneath the scope of Japanese on signage in Bangkok. Therefore, this research has emphasized on multilingualism and Japanese usage that is presented on signage in the business area of Bangkok. Also, in this paper, results of Japanese writing system and Japanese alphabetical sets will be presented as well. The findings will be beneficial for linguists in the future.

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to investigate the language diversities and Japanese language usage

reflected on the signage found in Japanese town on Sukhumvit Road, Bangkok.

Scope of study

This study focuses on the use of Japanese on signage through the concept of linguistic landscape. Thus, grammatical concept of the language such as sentence structure was not analyzed in this study.

Definition of terms

The terms used in this research are defined as follows:

Business signage refers to the signs of shops for buying products as well as some businesses and services such as hotels, restaurants, dental clinics, etc.

Writing system refers to two main writing systems of Japanese: vertical and horizontal.

Sets of alphabets refer to three completely separate sets of Japanese characters called *Hiragana*, *Katakana*, and *Kanji*. The details are as follows:

Hiragana is a set of alphabets used for writing phonetically. For example, にほん (nihon=Japan), わしょく (washoku=Japanese food), やきにく (yakiniku=grilled meat).

Katakana is a set of alphabets used for writing foreign languages. For example,

マッサージ (massaaji=massage), デンタルクリニック (dentaru kurinikku=dental clinic), デザート (dezaato=dessert)

Kanji is a set of characters, originally borrowed from the Chinese language, that represents a concept of meaning. For example, 日本 (nihon=Japan), 和食 (washoku=Japanese food), 焼肉 (yakiniku=grilled meat).

Conceptual framework

In the present study, a theoretical basis for data analysis is provided as follows:

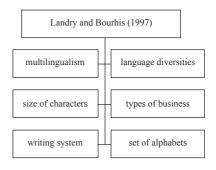


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

As can be seen from the chart, the conceptual framework by Landry & Bourhis (1997) was employed in this study. As explained, the concept of linguistic landscape refers to the language used on signage in a particular area such as those that are used on hotels and restaurants along the road. Linguistic landscape is a sub-field of sociolinguistics and it is an interdisciplinary study among intercultural communication issues. Interestingly, there are many dimensions that should be investigated. Hence, through this research, the analysis of multilingualism, language diversity, size of the characters, types of business, writing system as well as set of alphabets were analyzed by using frequency and percentage as a tool of the statistic fold. However, although the conceptual framework by Landry and Bourhis (1997) was focused on language and culture such as multilingualism and language diversity, types of business were added to this research in the dimension of business study. In addition, writing system as well as set of alphabets were analyzed in this research because it is the outstanding features of Japanese language.

Research methodology

The research procedures involve the following steps:

1. Samples

The samples for this study consisted of fifty photos of signage found on Sukhumvit Road. All was the signage of shops and various businesses—for example, the signage of a restaurant and a hotel. More importantly, the Japanese language must be displayed on the signs including its transliteration in English such as "bento" (弁当)、"okane" (お金)、"honoho" (火の穂). The signage was divided into two patterns in this study: (1) permanent signage and (2) temporary signage (See Figures 2 and 3).

Pattern 1 – Permanent signage



Figure 2 An example of a permanent signage

Figure 2 is a permanent signage of a restaurant's name "Dai Yaki" with the English phrase "Premium Yakiniku" below the name. Interestingly, the kind of food and service were displayed on the sign. The main purpose of permanent signage is to show the name of the shops and/or restaurants.

Pattern 2 – Temporary signage



Figure 3 An example of a temporary signage

Figure 3 is an example of a temporary signage. The details of the available facilities in the hotel were shown on the sign: free Wi-Fi, comfy bed, free coffee, and great value for money. This type of sign can be moved and relocated, and the details on the sign can be changed easily by writing. The main purpose of temporary signage is to show the details of products and services.

2. Collection of data

This study is a sub-project of "Linguistic landscape of main Soi on Sukhumvit Road" which used 200 photos of signage found along 5 alleys on Sukhumvit Road as the sample of the study. Then, researchers recognized the beneficial significance of the Japanese language that appeared on the signs. Thus, 50 photos of signage with the Japanese language were selected to be used as the sample of the further study. Moreover, the selection criterion included: (1) the Japanese language is presented on the signage; (2) the words, phrases and sentences were readable; and (3) the signage belongs to a shop or a type of business such as a hotel or a restaurant. Government signage was not included. This research is not concentrated on government policies.

3. Data analysis

In order to analyze the collected data, data

analysis procedures included the use of descriptive percentage and frequency. The key point of the research question was to investigate the common references in language diversities and the use of the Japanese language reflected on the signage in the business area of Bangkok. At this stage, all of the sampling photos were labelled and numbered from 1 to 50, and were analyzed for the frequency of languages used on them. Next, the size of the characters, the type of business, the Japanese writing system and alphabetical pattern were investigated. The example of data analysis is as follows:

Table 1 The example of signage analysis

pictures	Number of languages	Size of the character	Type of Business	Writing system	Sets of alphabets
DALLY PROMOTION DALLY PROMOTION (Mn) Provide The Train Control of the Young State See STHE See STHE See STHE See STHE See STHE SEE SEE SEE SEE SEE SEE SEE SEE SEE S	2 languages: Japanese and English	Japanese is bigger than English	Restaurant	Horizon	Kanji Katakana Hiragana

As can be seen in Table 1, Picture No.1 will be placed in the left column of the table. The number of languages, size of the characters, type of business, the writing system used, and sets of alphabets are placed in separate columns on the right. The researchers completed the table by filling in the information about the sign. For instance, there are two languages on the sign in Picture No. 1: Japanese and English. Japanese characters are bigger than English. The type of business is a restaurant. The writing system is horizontal and the sets of alphabets were showed on the sign which comprised of Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji. They were ordered according to the size of the Japanese characters. For instance, if Kanji is the bigger than Hiragana, the researchers will put Kanji into the table before Hiragana. All of the sample photos were analyzed in the same way. Lastly, frequency was counted and the percentage was computed into the analysis.

Results

The research findings can be divided into five categories. Interestingly, the data provided convincing evidence of a strong association between language and culture. Moreover, the researchers also studied relevant research papers for discussion.

1. Multilingualism and language diversities

The purpose of the multilingualism and language diversity analysis is to investigate the varieties of languages present on the signage. The results are as follows:

Table 2 Signage categorized by languages

No.	Languages	Number of signs	Percentage
	1 language		
1.	Japanese	4	8%
2.	English		
	(A Japanese word was written in English.)	1	2%
	Total	5	10%
	2 languages		
1.	Japanese and English	16	32%
2.	Thai and English		
	(Japanese words were written in English.)	2	4%
3.	Japanese and Thai	1	2%
	Total	19	38%
	3 languages		
1.	English, Japanese and Thai	20	40%
2.	English, Japanese and Chinese	1	2%
3.	French, Japanese and Thai	1	2%
	Total	22	44%
	4 languages		
1.	Chinese, English, Japanese and Thai	2	4%
	5 languages		
1.	English, Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Thai	1	2%
	6 languages		
1.	French, English, Japanese, Korean, Chinese	1	2%
	and Thai		
	Total	50	100%

Table 2 presents the overall data on the frequency and percentage of several languages as a criterion of data analysis. The total number of signage was 50 signs. Three languages were commonly present in the signage; with 22 signs at 44% of the total. In contrast, there was only one signage with five or six languages present which accounted for two percent of the total. Moreover, signage with one, two and four languages present amounted to five, nineteen and two signs, respectively. Furthermore, most signage had Japanese accompanied with English and Thai.

2. Size and sequence of scripts

The purpose of analyzing the size of the characters is to investigate which language was the focus language characterized by the use of large font size. That is, the analysis was focused on the size of the character font on the signage. The results are as follows:

Table 3 Signage categorized by size of alphabets

No.	Size of characters	Number of signs	Percentage
	1 language		
1.	Japanese	4	8%
2.	English		
	(A Japanese word was written in English.)	1	2%
	Total	5	10%
	2 languages		
1.	English is bigger than Japanese	9	18%
2.	Japanese is bigger than English	7	14%
3.	Japanese is bigger than Thai	1	2%
4.	Thai is bigger than English	1	2%
5.	English is bigger than Thai	1	2%
	Total	19	38%
	3 languages		
1.	English is the biggest	12	24%
2.	Japanese is the biggest	5	10%
3.	Thai is the biggest	4	8%
4.	French is the biggest	1	2%
	Total	22	44%
	4 languages		
1.	Chinese is the biggest	1	2%
2.	English is the biggest	1	2%
	Total	2	4%
	5 languages		
1.	English is the biggest	1	2%
	Total	1	2%
	6 languages		
1.	French is the biggest	1	2%
	Total	1	2%
	Total of 6 patterns of signage	50	100%

The information in Table 3 shows the overall data on the frequency and percentage of size of the characters as a criterion of data analysis. Three-language signage had the highest quantity of 22 signs with a 44 percentage. On the other hand, five- and six-language signage amounted to only one sign with a 2 percentage. Furthermore, two- and four-language signage amounted to nineteen and two signs, respectively. Additionally, the data represents English with the biggest character font size. Moreover, all of the signage was clarified by sequence of languages as a criterion. The results are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4 Signage categorized by the sequence of languages

Size of alphabets	Number of signs	Sequence of languages	Number of signs	Percentage
		3 languages		
 English 	12	1. English 2. Japanese 3. Thai	9	75%
is the bigge	st	1.English 2. Thai 3. Japanese	3	25%
2. Japanese	5	1. Japanese 2. English 3. Thai	4	80%
is the biggest		1. Japanese 2. Thai 3. English	1	20%
3. Thai is the biggest	4	1. Thai 2. English 3. Japanese	4	100%

Table 4 (Continued)

Size of alphabets	Number of signs	Sequence of languages	Number of signs	Percentage
4. French	1	1. French 2. Japanese 3. Thai	1	100%
is the				
biggest				
Total	22		22	
		4 languages		
1. Chinese	1	1. Chinese 2. English		
is the		3. Japanese 4. Thai		
biggest				
English	1	1. English 2. Japanese		
is the		3. Thai 4. Chinese		
biggest				
Total	2			
		5 languages		
 English 	1	 English 2. Japanese 		
is the		3. Chinese 4. Korean 5. Thai		
biggest				
Total	1			
		6 languages		
 French 	1	 French 2. Japanese 		
is the		Korean 4. Chinese		
biggest		5. English 6. Thai		
Total	1			

The data in Table 4 shows that for three-language signage, nine put the Japanese language in the second position in the language ordering after English. For the four-language signage, one placed Japanese in the third position after Chinese and English and one signage put Japanese in the second position after English. For the five-language signage, Japanese was on the second position in the language ordering after English while for the six-language signage, Japanese was on the second position in the language ordering after French.

3. Type of business

The purpose of analyzing the type of business is to classify the nature of business and the information shown on the signage. The results are as follows:

Table 5 Signage was justified by type of businesses.

Type of businesses	Number of signs	Percentage	Type of businesses	Number of signs	Percentage
Restaurant	29	58%	8. Dance studio	1	2%
Massage	4	8%	9. Hotel	1	2%
3. Beauty salon	3	6%	10. Convenience store	1	2%
4. Dental clinic	3	6%	11. Art Gallery	1	2%
5. Karaoke	2	4%	12. International school	1	2%
6. Condominium	n 2	4%	13. Real estate company	1	2%
7. Police station	1	2%	Total	50	100%

Table 5 presents the overall data on the frequency and percentage of business types as a criterion of data analysis. The total number of signage was 50 and most are restaurant signage. There were four massage shop signage and there was only a single count for the other types of businesses such as the dance studio and art gallery.

4. Japanese writing system

The purpose of the Japanese writing system analysis is to divide the writing system by using Japanese writing system as a criterion-that is the vertical, horizontal and a combination of vertical and horizontal writing systems. The examples of signage and the results are as follows:



Figure 4 Vertical writing system

Figure 5 Horizontal writing system



Figure 6 Combination of vertical and horizontal writing systems

Table 6 Japanese writing systems present on the signage

No.	Writing systems were founded on signage	Number of signs	Percentage
1.	Horizontal	32	64
2.	Vertical	11	22
3.	Vertical and Horizontal	7	14
	Total	50	100

Table 6 presents the overall data on the frequency and percentage of Japanese writing system as a criterion of data analysis. Of the 50 signage, the horizontal writing system was the most used. There were 32 signs with a 64 percentage. In contrast, signage with a combination of vertical and horizontal writing systems was seen only in 7 signs with a 14 percentage among the sample group.

5. Japanese alphabetical pattern

The purpose of analyzing the Japanese alphabetical pattern is to explore the orthography sets

that were used on the signage-the Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji. The examples of signage and the results are as follows:



Figure 7 An example of Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji found on a signage.

Table 7 Japanese alphabetical patterns present on the signage.

	<u> </u>		
No.	Japanese alphabetical Patterns	Number of signs	Percentage
	Signage with 1 alphabetical pattern		
1.	Kanji	12	24%
2.	Katakana	8	16%
3.	Hiragana	1	2%
	Total	21	42%
	Signage with 2 alphabetical patterns		
1.	Hiragana and Kanji	6	12%
2.	Katakana and Kanji	2	4%
	Total	8	16%
	Signage with 3 alphabetical patterns		
1.	Hiragana Katakana and Kanji	18	36%
	Total	18	36%
	Signage with a Japanese word written	in English.	
1	A Japanese word was written in English.	3	6%
	Total	3	6%
	Total of 4 patterns of Japanese alphabe	ets 50	100%

Table 7 presents the overall data on the frequency and percentage of Japanese alphabetical patterns. Signage with the pattern of 3 alphabetical sets (Hiragana, Katakana, & Kanji) had the highest quantity. Equally important, there was only one signage that used Hiragana as its sole writing system.

Discussion

In this section, the researchers used the data from the results to support the discussion and several previous studies will be used to construct new knowledge. According to the results, multilingualism and language diversity reflect the varieties of language used in the center of Bangkok. It appears, likely, that six languages are used on a sign. The results can confirm that Bangkok is one of the cosmopolitan cities in the world. Although Sukhumvit Road is an area of many Japanese expatriates in Bangkok, English is still the majority language used on signage as a global language. The result is consistent with the study of Rhekhalilit (2021); Yanhong (2014), which showed the role of English as an international language especially in the business areas of Bangkok and tourist attractions of Chiang Mai.

From the results of the size of the characters and the sequence of languages on the signage, compared with the other foreign languages, Japanese is a main language after Chinese and French. Evidently, although Thai is the national language, there were only four signs found using Thai as its first language position. It is probable that the business factor influencing Thai language represents the target customers in the business area of Bangkok. In most cases, foreigners may be the main target group in the Sukhumvit area. It is equally important to note that most Thais who live in the Sukhumvit area can understand English. However, Rowland (2015) has criticized that there are some factors in effect such as motivation, commercialism, cultural essentialism, and globalization behind English on signage in place of national language (Japanese).

From the results of business types, the result displayed that restaurant businesses used the most signage. Sarot & Kraisame (2018) expressed that many multilingual signs are used by restaurant owners, and beauty and health shops used bilingual signs. Moreover, Jiang (2013) said that language is a product of social activity. That is, multilingual and bilingual signs may be used as a tool in the aspect of business. Without question, although this study focused on signage with Japanese, the results confirmed that restaurants are the main type of business in the business areas of Bangkok. Furthermore, most of them used the multilingual signs for foreign tourists and customers from around the world who can easily understand the information on the signage.

In the context of Japanese writing system, the results show that most Japanese texts are written in a horizontal line. Similarly, Backhaus (2005) indicated that most of the Japanese texts are written in horizontal lines similar to most Western languages. For this critical issue, the opinions of researchers are that Japanese texts in Bangkok are influenced by the Thai writing system and

essentially, the English writing system (horizontal text writing system). Moreover, the results of the analysis of the Japanese alphabetical pattern, showed that Kanji is used most on the signage. In fact, for another reason, as Kanji is a kind of picture language, it is used for the purpose of effectively delivering the meaning of the words to the readers. Therefore, Kanji is written vertically so that it is easier to read and understand than Hiragana and Katakana. Furthermore, the shape of the sign may have an effect in the Japanese writing system used. As evidence, Kanji was more appropriate for Pattern 2 (Temporary Signage) than in Pattern 1 (Permanent Signage). Additionally, there were only three signage that used the English transliteration of the Japanese words to imitate the sound such as "Bento". This signifies the incorporation of Japanese culture in Thai society. It can persuade the local people who are interested in Japanese culture to enter the shop.

It can therefore be deduced that cross-cultural as well as cross-linguistic factors influenced the results. Matwick & Matwick (2019) explained this through the interaction of these factors that occurred in food spaces such as promotional signs and their images. Also, the semiotic landscape will work together with linguistic competency as the elements of communication. In addition, Japanese is deemed informative for Japanese shoppers while symbols can be helpful for non-Japanese shoppers providing a pure, authentic, high-quality, significant and healthy impression.

Overall, the use of Japanese on signage in the business area of Bangkok is similar to the general commercial signage shops in Japan but it showed the role of the Japanese language and culture among Thai people and the Japanification of the multilingual society of Thailand. The limitations of the study would be that there is a vast number of signs in several business areas in Thailand and that semiotics are not included in this study.

Suggestions

In accordance with the limitations of this study, future similar studies must be conducted with the other multilingual and multicultural areas, i.e., Silom Road. Likewise, to address the challenges, future studies should try to conduct the research in different genres such as Japanese on cosmetic and consumer products. Another recommendation for further studies is that it is worth investigating how the Japanese culture has blended with Thai culture in the scope of localization and interdisciplinary studies.

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