Language Diversity on Tourist Attraction Signs: A Case Study in Nakhon Pathom

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ABSTRACT

This linguistic landscape (LL) study is aimed to investigate the diversity of languages used on signs in the Nakhon Pathom province. This study was framed based on the reviewed empirical LL research studies previously conducted over the past decade. Nakhon Pathom was selected as the main research setting based on the convenient sampling method. Ten (10) most visited tourist attractions in Nakhon Pathom were chosen to be investigated. The samples of the study included 558 signs which were sorted into three categories based on recommendations by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT): (1) history, religion, and museum, (2) nature and outdoor, and (3) food, shopping, and entertainment. Descriptive statistics, namely frequency and mean, were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that the most commonly found signs were monolingual signs containing Thai or English (71%), bilingual signs containing Thai-English or English-Thai (28%), and multilingual signs containing Thai-English-Chinese, Thai-Chinese-English, Thai- Russian-Chinese, or Thai-English-Chinese-Japanese-Burmese (1%), respectively. According to the findings, Thai appeared to be the dominant language in majority of the examined signs, while multilingual signs were found the least, which expressed the multilingual needs for foreign tourists. Therefore, it is suggested that the local private and government sectors should provide more multilingual signs for a more effective communication and promote the tourism in Nakhon Pathom. For this reason, further research should put greater emphasis on the significance of language uses and symbols on public signs.

Keywords: Linguistic landscape, tourist attraction signs, language diversity

1. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic landscape (LL) is defined as the scene where the public space, such as road signs, advertising billboards, place or street name and signs of shops or government buildings, is constructed in a way of marking the objects with distinctive linguistic tokens and symbolization to convey a certain information (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Hasan, & Trumper-Hecht, 2006; Shohamy & Gorter, 2008). The analysis of LL may be the relative prominence of language usages with syntactic and semantic features. The language analyzed manifests some linguistic features which are fabricated with specific intent. Many studies reported that here existed a linguistic diversity as in monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual expressions of meanings in the public materials. The reason behind the use of different and diverse languages is to get the predetermined messages, like warning, suggestion, or instruction, across to the target groups of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds living or travelling in the target areas. The linguistic diversity is also displayed on lexical and syntactic choices which vary according to a given socio-cultural context, ethnic, religious, and commercial factors. The multilingual dimension and linguistic variation are a common phenomenon found in the materials, particularly public signs.

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The focus of this current research is on studying and analyzing the linguistic landscape in tourist attractions of Nakhon Pathom, as a principle town in Thailand. According to the statistical data from the Tourism Authority of Thailand in 2019, the percentage of the change of the number of foreigners who visited Nakhon Pathom and the revenues from them in 2019 and 2018 is +1.96 and +3.52, respectively. Also, Nakhon Pathom has the highest occupancy rate of hotels in the Central Region of Thailand, as shown in Table 1 below. To date, very little research which focuses on tourism has been conducted in LL in Nakhon Pathom.

Table 1 Occupancy Rate of Hotels in the Central Region of Thailand

Province	Occupancy Rate		
	2019 (P)	**2018**	**% Change**
Bangkok	79.16	80.46	-1.30
Lopburi	44.16	47.86	-3.70
Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya	55.79	60.15	-4.36
Saraburi	47.09	51.54	-4.45
Chainat	62.34	71.14	-8.80
Nakhon Pathom	**70.98**	**76.73**	**-5.75**
Singburi	50.57	56.79	-6.22
Angthong	55.48	63.22	-7.74
Nonthaburi	59.68	59.86	-0.18
Prathumthani	47.29	50.13	-2.84
Samutprakarn	61.07	62.58	-1.51
Samutsakorn	52.42	59.89	-7.47
Chachoengsao	53.17	56.20	-3.03

Retrieved from https://www.tat.or.th/th

To fulfill the inadequate amount of research in LL in Thai tourism context, this empirical study was carried out. The aim of the study is to investigate the language diversity on the public sings from 10 tourist attractions in Nakhon Pathom. The findings of the study will raise an awareness of a variety of language use in tourism business sectors adopted in public signs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past three decades, some research related to LL is conducted as shown in Table 3. The first piece of study on LL took place in Israel by Spolsky and Cooper (1991), in which 100 language signs in Jerusalem were analyzed. The compelling results of the analysis in this study contributed to the development of other studies in the realm of the linguistic landscape in practical ways. It provided a workable set of criteria to establish taxonomies of language signs and gave three possible taxonomies:

1) The function and use of the signs (street signs, advertising signs, warning notices, building names, informative signs, commemorative plaques, signs labelling objects, graffiti);
2) The materials used to make the signs (metal, tile, poster, wood, stone), and
3) The diversity of languages used in signs (monolingual signs, bilingual signs, multilingual signs).

According to Spolsky and Cooper (1991: 81-84), three rules of writing signs were designated. Such rules were based primarily on how language was used to achieve the particular objectives or purposes. Three types of rules are discussed in Table 2.

Table 2 Sign Rules and their Purposes

Sign rules	Purpose
Skill	The language(s) used the writer knows
Presumed reader	The language(s) used the intended readers knows
Symbolic value	The language(s) used are ones which the owners wish to be identified

(Spolsky and Cooper, 1991)

To be more specific, Spolsky and Cooper stated that sign Rule 1 is an essential indication; that is, the sign-writer can speak the language(s) on the sign to a certain degree of proficiency. This rule is closely related to the linguistic competency of the sign-writer – be it his/her native tongue or foreign languages.

On the one hand, Rules 2 and 3 are somewhat overlapped in respect of intended readers. Both of them are processed, evaluated, or even appreciated by some target group of people in particular public places; hence, there exists the variation in comprehension expressed in languages used in signs, depending on the linguistic proficiency and cultural background of the readers. More specifically, Rule 2 is concerned with one's selection and decision of word choices and structures to produce the desired wordings, whilst Rule 3 involves the design or invention of images and symbols, in a specified layout, to respond to the meanings delivered by the selected language in Rule 2. Still, to the full effectiveness in meaning conveyance, Rule 2 and Rule 3 have to work in unison to make a sign become a practically informative and symbolic object to serve a purpose in certain contexts.

Some of the research studies on linguistic landscapes have adopted the concepts of Sign Rules proposed by Spolsky and Cooper. They are briefly summarized and tabulated below.

Table 3 Previous Research Studies on Linguistic Landscapes

Researcher(s)	Landscape(s)	Main Findings	
		LanguageDiversities	Language Functions
Huebner (2006)	613 signs in 15 local communities in central and suburban Bangkok	45% of monolingual and 55% of multilingual *[Thai, English, Chinese, and other languages (e.g., Japanese and Arabic)]*	***official use*** - naming national institutions - giving directions - regulating traffic - announcing police station ***commercial use*** - servicing businesses - advertising

Yanhong and Rungruang (2013)	262 signs from five tourist attraction areas in Chiang Mai	10% of monolingual, and 75% of multilingual *[English, Thai, and Chinese]*	- informational - symbolic - mythological - commercial
Siricharoen (2016)	195 signs in theFaculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University	34.9% of monolingual and 65.1% of multilingual [*English, Thai, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Italian, German, Latin, French, Spanish, and Lao*]	***informational function*** - conveying information ***symbolic function*** - offering token support and minimal input for the most popular languages providing a sense of authenticity
Sutthinaraphan (2016)	107 advertising signs in Mochit, Payathai, and Siam BTS stations in Bangkok	13% of monolingual Thai, 22% of monolingual English, and 65% of bilingual English and Thai	***informational function*** - conveying information ***symbolic function*** - expressing an identity or evoking an emotion
Rungswang (2018)	97 shop signs in Thai community center in Singapore	44% of monolingual, 50% of bilingual, and 6% of multilingual [*English, Thai, Chinese, and Tamil*]	- naming shop - providing shop details
Chuaychoowong (2019)	350 signs in one university in the northern part of Thailand	51.8% of monolingual, 46.2% of bilingual, and 1.9% of multilingual [*Thai, English, Chinese, French, and Lanna dialect*]	-
Andriyanti (2019)	890 signs from five senior high schools in Yogyakarta	84.3% of monolingual, 13.6% of bilingual, and 2.1% of multilingual [*Javanese, Bahasa Indonesia, Arabic, English, French, Latin, and Sanskrit*]	***informational function*** - instruction ***symbolic function*** - school identity marker - cultural symbol

As can be seen from Table 3, research studies were conducted in different parts of Thailand, ranging from central (Bangkok) to northern (Chiang Mai) parts to even foreign countries like Singapore and Indonesia. The locations in these studies cover tourist attractions, shopping malls, high schools, and universities.

The research studies also revealed different proportions of language diversities (e.g., Thai, English, and Chinese), language uses (e.g., telling information and advertising products), and symbolic expressions (e.g., evoking of emotions or expressing of cultural identity, and authenticity), depending on the location at which the signs were located.

This present study was then framed based on previous studies to see the language situations from ten (10) tourist attractions in Nakhon Pathom.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Signs from ten tourist attractions │
│            in Nakhon Pathom          │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                   │
                   ▼
        ┌────────────────────┐
        │   Diversities of   │
        │      language      │
        └────────────────────┘
                   │
                   ▼
        ┌────────────────────┐
        │  - Monolingual     │
        │  - Bilingual       │
        │  - Multilingual    │
        └────────────────────┘
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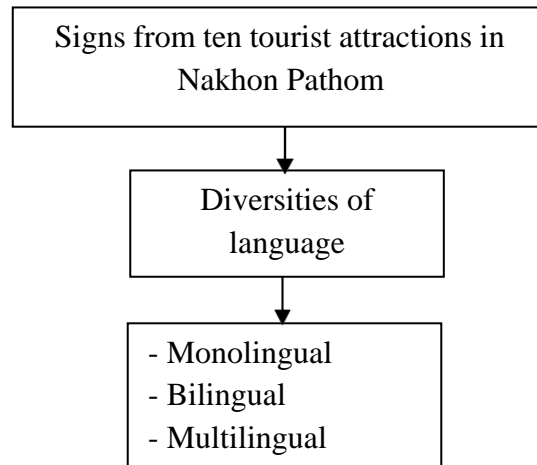
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of this Study.

As described in Figure 1, after categorization, 558 signs were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics (frequency and mean) to describe their language diversities.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study implemented three steps in the data collection process. Firstly, was the selection of the research setting and appointed research fields, which was retrieved from the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Next was the collection of the pictures of signs using a mobile camera and downloading them on Cloud device. Finally, languages used on signs were investigated and noted them down into the sign analysis form. The research setting, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis for the current study were discussed in details as followings.

3.1 Research Setting

The study employed the convenience sampling method in the selection of Nakhon Pathom as the research setting. Ten (10) recommended tourist attractions in Nakhon Pathom as recommended by the Tourism Authority of Thailand were selected as the main research settings. With this, the ten (10) tourist attractions were categorized into three categories as stated by the Tourism Authority of Thailand as shown in Table 4.

As for the ethical concerns, the researches strictly abided by the regulations and norms of each place when taking a picture.

Table 4 Tourist Attractions Sorted by Categories

History, Religion and Museum	Nature and Outdoor	Food, Shopping, and Entertainment
Phra Pathom Chedi	Khlong Maha Sawat	Don Wai Floating Market
Sanam Chan Palace		Tha Na Old Market
Jesada Technik Museum		Lam Phaya Floating Market
Mueang Maya		Sookjai Farmer's Market
		All-night Market at Phra Pathom Chedi

3.2 Research Instruments

In an attempt to answer the research questions, this study used a quantitative study for data collection and analysis as suggested by Creswell (2003). Two research instruments were used for data collection. The first research instrument was a mobile camera. The mobile camera was used to take pictures of the signs. It was the convenient and portable device to keep the large data files like pictures. The researchers can also choose the high definition mode to extend the definition of sign pictures. After taking the pictures, we can connect to the Internet and upload pictures on Cloud application immediately so as to prevent the picture files disappear from any errors or accidents that may cause. Another instrument was a sign analysis form. It allowed for the collection of the sign pictures. It was categorized into the following aspects: picture identification, location, and type of language.

3.3 Data Collection

From late January to early February 2020, 558 signs were collected from ten research settings, hoping to reflect preliminary accounts of sociocultural dimensions of these local linguistic landscapes. The selected characteristics of signs appeared in different shapes and sizes, handwritten and printed signs with/without pictures, colors, and graphs. They were stable and non-stable characteristics. The selected signs featured were mostly monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual scripts. Specifically, monolingual sign refers to as a sign with either Thai or English. Bilingual sign refers to a sign with two languages, while multilingual sign refers to a sign with more than two languages written on it.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis of language diversity was presented and counted using frequency and percentage. The trustworthiness of each researcher' analysis was ascertained by peer debriefing. Three researchers who are specialized in linguistics were asked to analyze the function of language individually. After individual analysis, all results were compared and cross-checked. If there were disagreements of the answers, all researchers were required to finalize the answers by discussing and posing questions. Therefore, the data was analyzed more than three times before confirming the results.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research question, all 558 signs were categorized and analyzed to reveal the language diversities. The results showed a few language diversities in Nakhon Pathom as seen in Figure 2. Most of the signs were displayed using monolingual language (71%). There were 28 percentages of bilingual language usage and only 1 percentage of multilingual usage.

The monolingual signs were written in Thai (97%) and English (3%), as shown in Figure 3. By considering the local language situations, most of the selected tourist attractions were designed to use the Thai signs for two reasons. Firstly, the majority of visitors were Thais because the research settings were mainly in local places. Therefore, local Thais were the target tourism promoted group of the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Secondly, there were a few indigenous inhabitants with multinational nationality so that it did not reflect much language diversities. The bilingual signs were stated in Thai and English which has two patterns: a Thai-English pattern (75%) and an English-Thai pattern (25%), as shown in Figure 4.
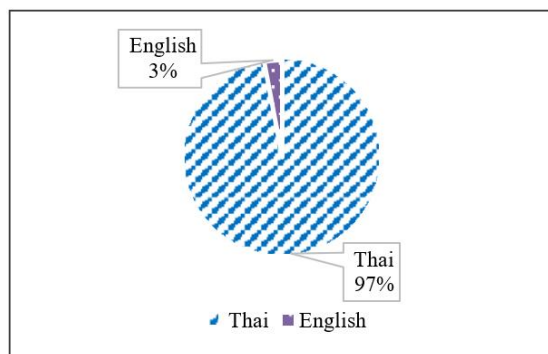

Figure 2. Language Diversities in Nakhon Pathom.

Generally, the Thai-English pattern on bilingual signs was used to convey some particular information for visitors. Most of the informational signs served as a warning, as in Figure 5, giving directions, as in Figure 6, or naming national institutions, as in Figure 7. The signs also carried out the commercial function, such as naming products or servicing businesses, as in Figure 8. Furthermore, they performed mythological function, connecting the place to the past and ancient culture, as shown in Figure 9. On the whole, the use of languages were necessarily influenced by the settings, such as market, temple, or museum.
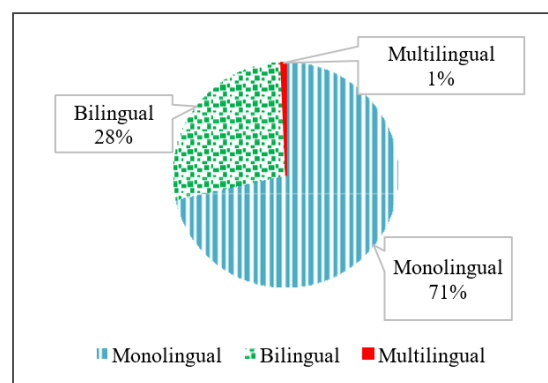

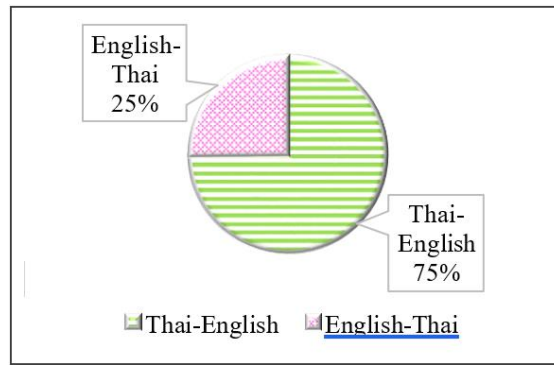**Figure 3.** Monolingual Signs in Nakhon Pathom.

Figure 4. Bilingual Signs in Nakhon Pathom.

Figure 5. Informational Signs Serving as Warning.

Figure 6. Informational Signs Serving as Giving Directions.

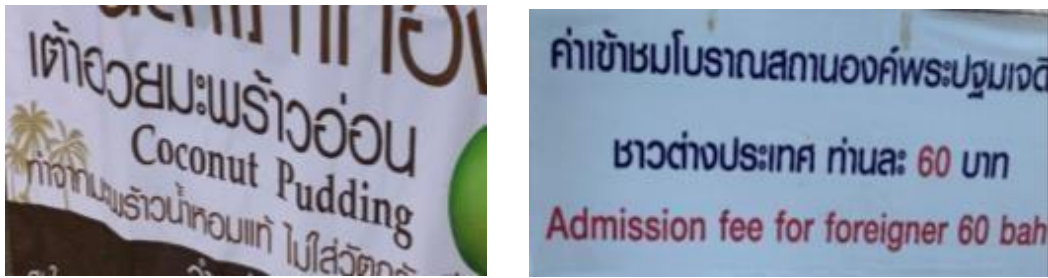**Figure 7.** Informational Signs Serving as Naming National Institutions.

Figure 8. Commercial Signs Functioning as Naming Products or Servicing Businesses.

Figure 9. Signs Performing the Mythological Function.

However, 25% of bilingual signs used the English–Thai pattern. This was because most of the English-Thai signs were used to tell information and advertise product, as in Figures 10 and 11. The messages conveying through such signs also varied according to the word choices and structures selected or formed by the sign-writer.

Figure 10. Informational Signs Serving as Warning.

Figure 11. Commercial Signs Functioning as Advertising Product.

Apart from the monolingual and bilingual signs, multilingual signs were rarely found. The findings indicated that multilingual signs consisted of Thai, English, Chinese, Japanese, Burmese, and Russian script.

Figure 12 showed that the multilingual signs consisted of four patterns: Thai-English-Chinese (25%), Thai-Chinese-English (25%), Thai- Russian-Chinese (25%), and Thai-English-Chinese-Japanese-Burmese (25%). These results revealed the number of foreign tourists who visited Thailand were mostly Asians, especially Chinese. However, the results also indicated that there was a sign stated in the Western language, i.e. Russian, in order to provide information for Russian tourists. Thus, the use of the Western language apart from English which is the universal language means an increasing of European tourists in Thailand, as in Figure 13.
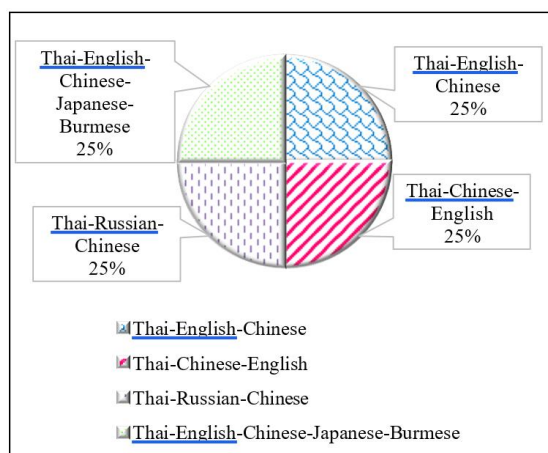

Figure 12. Multilingual Signs in Nakhon Pathom.

Figure 13. Informational Signs Serving as Giving Instruction.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

To sum up, the language diversities on public signs in Nakhon Pathom were not prominent. The sign-writer preferred to utilize different languages to convey the messages. The findings of this current study could be summarized briefly as follows.

As for the language diversity in signs, monolingualism was used the most because Thai is the sign-writer's native language. Therefore, he/she has a rather considerable degree of language proficiency and competency. Moreover, numerous languages were employed in both bilingual and multilingual signs since the sign-writer was influenced by cultural, ethical, religious and commercial factors. These factors depend on the backgrounds of the intended readers which encompass particular groups of foreign tourists i.e. Asians and Westerners. With reference to the types of signs, most of the examined signs were commercial signs, followed by informational signs. This is mainly because all ten tourist attractions investigated aimed to attract a general public at large to buy products and participate in activities.

Obviously, public signs play a crucial part in communicating with both the locals and foreigners. The proper or improper use of languages and symbols, more or less, has a profound impact on the image of Thai tourism. The local and state sectors should put greater importance on the languages used in signs - be it monolingual or multilingual ones. Likewise, it is suggested that further research be conducted to underline the significance of an appropriate use of languages and symbols on public signs.

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