The Linguistic Landscape of Beijing Tourism Spots: A Field-Based Sociolinguistic Approach

Xiao Rong

Abstract—**The study reported in this paper explores the use of English language in the market-driven Chinese tourism context in the light of wider questions concerning linguistic landscape from a sociolinguistic approach. The researcher draws on theories of linguistic landscape studies as well as research on 'discourse in place' to analyze the special role of English language in Beijing tourism spots. Based on a mixed-methods case study design, the data of this research mainly incorporates digital photographs taken during a one-week fieldwork in Beijing, which is complemented by interviews and survey questionnaires. Results demonstrate that with English becoming an inherent part of the linguistic landscape of Beijing 5A tourism spots, China now actively participates in the globalizing process of English language commodification.**

Index Terms—**Linguistic landscape, English language, sociolinguistics, Beijing tourism spots.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The liaison between tourism and language has been increasingly recognized. Over the past decade, the multi-functionality of language in tourism has attracted considerable sociolinguistic research [1]. Especially prominent is the link between tourism and English language, which, as the global lingua franca, not only acts as the very embodiment of processes in tourism and facilitates host-tourist communication, but also functions as a commodity in itself which can be bought and sold, and facilitates the circulation of goods and services in tourism activities. Instances of written signs in the landscape of tourism destinations act not only as artifacts of negotiations over space, they are also productive signs with important economic and social consequences, and can affect those who would visit a given place [2].

The notion of linguistic landscape has come a long way since its coinage in Landry and Bourhis' [3] seminal article: "the language of public road signs, advertising, billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration". While most linguistic landscape researchers adopt this definition as their starting point, in order to analyze the specific role of English language in Chinese tourism context, the present study takes a context-driven sociolinguistic

approach to linguistic landscape study, and draws on theories of symbolic economy to understand the commodification of English language in the landscape of Beijing tourism spots.

Based on a mixed-methods case study design, in addition to the more traditionally authorized digital photograph data of public and private signboards, this linguistic landscape research is complemented by questionnaire survey and interviews given during a one-week long fieldwork in Beijing in August, 2015.

II. RESEARCH SITE: BEIJING 5A SCENIC SPOTS

Located in East Asia, the capital city of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Beijing, is the nation's political, economic, cultural, educational and international trade and communication center. As one of the six ancient Chinese cities, Beijing boasts a history of over a thousand years and has been the heart and soul of politics and society throughout its long history and consequently there is an unparalleled wealth of discovery to delight and intrigue travelers. Beijing also serves as the most important transportation hub and port of entry in China. With the city's ancient past and exciting modern development over the years, especially after the event of 2008 Olympic Games, Beijing has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, attracting around 4 million international visitors per year, ranking steadily as the nation's second leading major tourism city with regard to the number of foreign tourists per year over the past five years [4]. Hence, as a place where national economy, identity and tourism are ongoing topics of lively debate, Beijing makes a highly suitable case for the purpose of the present study.

According to the official data from China National Tourism Administration (http://www.cnta.gov.cn/), altogether seven scenic areas in Beijing have been granted 5A-class position[1] by 2016, topped the list of all the major tourism cities in China. As the capital of five dynasties, Beijing preserves a large number of imperial palaces, gardens, temples and ancient tombs. Those belong to the 5A scenic spots include: Palace Museum; Temple of Heaven; Summer Palace; Prince Gong Mansion; Badaling-Mutianyu Great Wall Tourist Area and Ming Tombs. A relatively new member to this list is Beijing Olympic Park, a huge site where the 2008 Summer Olympics took place, including the "Birds Nest" national stadium and the "Water Cube" aquatics center.

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[1] A-ranking is a normative and standardized quality rating system administered by China National Tourism Administration (CNTA). AAAAA (5A) is the highest level of honor of the tourism scenic spots in China and represent world-class tourism quality.

For the purpose of this study, five of the seven 5A scenic spots are included as the sites wherein the research takes place over a period of one week in the summer of 2015. They are respectively the Palace Museum; Temple of Heaven; Summer Palace; Beijing Olympic Park and Badaling-Mutianyu Great Wall Tourist Area. These sites are chosen based on the popularity and influentiality of each site and the manageability of the research program.

III. RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA

The main method of data collection used for this study is taking photographs, making inventories of linguistic signs on site. During the period of field work, I underwent an intense experience visiting 5A scenic spots in Beijing in person everyday, walked along both sides of streets taking pictures of the material manifestations of language usage in these scenic spots, which include public road signs, advertising billboards and commercial shop signs, as well as flyers and advertisements posted on walls, poles, and the like. Apart from the language features used, the photographic records also capture the placement of each sign and its surrounding environment, as this may offer additional meanings to the linguistic message conveyed [2], [5]. This contextualized approach to linguistic landscape study is also emphasized in Scollon and Scollon's [6] work on Geosemiotics, which focuses on the emplacement of the text under investigation, and asserts that the emplacement of signs and their contexts of production contribute to their meanings.

During the fieldwork, a total of 159 photos were taken, capturing 238 linguistic signs on site. In addition to material manifestations of language, I also documented and photographed architectural and design elements of the built environment and landscape, such as lampposts and streets, artifacts and antiques relevant to the signs, and the like. In regard of this, an additional 114 contextual photos were taken as a complement to linguistic signs.

These linguistic signs collected then went through descriptive statistical analysis and discourse analysis to gain an insight into the linguistic landscape of Beijing tourism spots. Considering the specialty of research sites in this study as national 5A tourism spots under the regulation of Chinese government, and to avoid potential ambiguities [7], the distinction between private bottom-up signage and top-down official signage [8] from which many linguistic landscape studies depart will not be adopted here, instead, all messages in the signs were categorized with regard to their language content and placement in the scenic spots as belongs to either touristic public-service signs (i.e. maps, road signs, shop signs, etc.); or touristic introductory signs (i.e. introductory signboards to particular sceneries or antiques); or touristic signs (i.e. linguistic signs that are treated as touristic sceneries in themselves, such as handwritings by emperors in Ming and Qing Dynasties). It should be noted here that this distinction is not meant to be exhaustive nor is it as straightforward as it appears, especially considering the mobile nature of linguistic landscape with the functions of signs changing over time, as

will be shown in the following session of this article. However, these distinctions are still adopted as convenient terms for the purpose of data analysis and discussion.

Adopting a sociolinguistic approach to the study of linguistic landscape, the collected and coded photographic data was further triangulated by survey questionnaires and interview data collected from public service workers and English speaking foreign tourists who are visiting the sites during the fieldwork period. Altogether, 22 international tourists with varied self-reported levels of English proficiency participated in the survey, and I managed to interview one local Chinese service worker on site. Survey sampling was theoretically driven but pragmatically constrained (limited to what was feasible to survey in the time given for the fieldwork). It should be noted that the individuals surveyed and interviewed do not constitute a sample, and their responses are not meant to represent their group population as a whole. Rather, they are a group of informants, with diverse affiliations, who provide a range of perspectives on the linguistic landscape in Beijing tourism spots other than the researcher, therefore triangulating the findings effectively.

IV. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE IN BEIJING TOURISM SPOTS

To understand the linguistic landscape of Beijing tourism spots, and to gain an idea of the general distribution of English language in the research sites, the 238 linguistic signs photographed were first analyzed in terms of the number and type of languages on each of the sign.

After collecting and reviewing the linguistic signs, a classification system was developed to categorize signs according to the language used as 1) Chinese only, 2) English only, 3) Chinese and English, 4) Chinese, English and other languages.

Table I shows the number of signs in terms of different languages used and their touristic functions.

TABLE: INTEGRATED LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE DATA

	Chinese Only	English Only	Chinese English	Chinese, English & other languages	Total
Public-service signs	62 (26%)	3 (1%)	39 (16%)	4 (2%)	**108 (45%)**
Introductory signs	14 (6%)	11 (5%)	57 (24%)	3 (1%)	**85 (36%)**
Touristic signs	45 (19%)	0	0	0	**45 (19%)**
Total	**121 (51%)**	**14 (6%)**	**96 (40%)**	**7 (3%)**	**238 (100%)**

The numerical distribution of linguistic signs shows that of all the 238 signs recorded in 5A tourism spots in Beijing, nearly half of them (45%) are found in the public service context, and slightly more than a half (51%) are recorded using only Chinese language. It is also worth noticing that a large percentage (40%) of the recorded signs are bilingual in both Chinese and English.

With regard to the languages used on signs in terms of each

touristic function, Chinese-only signs have a dominant position among all the public-service signs, with a percentage of 26%, which is more than the total of signs in other languages (21% in sum) in this branch. To be more specific, in most of the cases, the simplified version of written Mandarin Chinese is used. Chinese-language-only signs are also the only type of signs that are adopted as touristic signs forming tourist attractions by themselves, with an overwhelming majority of them in traditional Chinese language, which together with the historical sites, create an image of traditional Chinese culture to be consumed. For the touristic introductory function, it is mostly realized through the use of bilingual signs in both Chinese and English, which make up around 67% (57 out of 85) of all the introductory signs. When bringing the multilingual signs with more than two languages into the picture, Chinese is altogether found in 224 linguistic signs, which accounts for 94% of the 238 linguistic signs collected.

In the present article, the use and distribution of English language will be the major concern. As shown in Table II, English appears in 117 of all the 238 linguistic signs, a percentage (49%) much higher than the total of other foreign languages, which appears in only 7 (3%) of all the linguistic signs. Here, it is also worth mentioning that together with Chinese language, English is adopted in all the multilingual signs. It is the most salient foreign language in Chinese tourism marketing and is used as the lingua franca in Chinese tourism context which deserves further academic research. The linguistic landscape in Beijing tourism spots also provides the general background for this study and acts as a starting point and footing stone for this paper.

Table II shows the general distribution of the English language on the signs in Beijing 5A tourism spots.

TABLE II: INTEGRATED ENGLISH LANGUAGE DISTRIBUTION DATA

	English Only	Chinese & English	Chinese, English & other languages	Total
Public-service signs	3 (3%)	39 (33%)	4 (3%)	**46 (39%)**
Introductory signs	11 (9%)	57 (49%)	3 (3%)	**71 (61%)**
Total	**14 (12%)**	**96 (82%)**	**7 (6%)**	**117 (100%)**

As shown in Table II, among all the recorded signs with English language, the overwhelming majority appear in bilingual signs together with Chinese language (82%) and are used for the purpose of touristic introduction (61%). A small percentage of English-only signs (12%) are also available in 5A tourism spots in Beijing, with an even smaller rate (6%) of other multilingual signs with languages like Japanese and Korean.

With regard to the touristic functions of each type of language adopted, 11 out of 14 English-language-only signs are used as introduction to particular tourism spots or ancient architectures. In all the 11 cases, Chinese version of the English signs are also provided (or rather, they could be taken as English translations of the Chinese signs). However, either

because of the large amount of information contained in each signboard in relation to the size of the board, or out of aesthetic considerations, the English and Chinese version introductions are presented on two separate signboards. Normally, the related Chinese and English signboards are located on both sides in front of the tourist attraction concerned.

Following the initial statistical analysis of the percentage of each type of language used on signs, the photographic records are also examined in terms of the degrees of integration or separation of the languages in each sign [9], the saliency of each language on a sign, their relative size of fonts, and their order of appearance [6], as well as the functions attached to the English language signs [3]. The focus of this discursive analysis will be on Chinese-English bilingual signs, which constitute an overwhelming majority (82%) of the recorded signs with English language. When appropriate, attention will also be paid to multilingual signs wherein more than two languages are adopted. The choice of examples reflects the most salient aspects of the bilingual signs in the linguistic landscape of Beijing 5A scenic spots, as was experienced during the fieldwork on site.

V. DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE BILINGUAL SIGNS

Code-switching, which is defined by Sebba [9] as the alternation between two or more linguistic varieties in a single stretch of discourse, is commonly encountered in the linguistic landscape of tourism destinations. The same is true in the context of Beijing. As shown in the above section, a large percentage (40%) of the signs collected in Beijing 5A tourism spots are bilingual in both Chinese and English, the number rises to 47% when taking the multilingual signs with other languages into consideration. In other words, nearly half of the recorded signs involve in the process of code-switching. According to Sebba [9], there are two different ways in which codeswitching may occur within the same textual composition, reflecting degrees of integration or separation of the languages: parallelism and complementarity. A text exhibits parallelism if the same content is repeated in different languages adopted. By contrast, a text exhibits complementarity if two or more linguistic units with different contents are juxtaposed within the framework of a textual composition. Whereas parallel texts do not presume that the recipient can read more than one language, complementary texts seem to be directed to readers who are multiliterate or who at least have sufficient reading competence in both languages.

In the context of Beijing 5A tourism spots, all the bilingual signs collected present some extent of parallel codeswitching between the English and Chinese contents. For instance, Fig. 1 is a photograph of the "Heavenly Center Stone" introductory signboard captured in the Temple of Heaven. The signboard contains two languages: Chinese and English which are in a parallel relationship with most of the information available in both languages. The contents in both languages introduce the center stone of the Circular Mound, its architectural structure and symbolic meaning.

Fig. 1. Signboard of the heavenly center stone.

On the signboard, the Chinese content and English content are evenly distributed, with each occupying half the board. Although the English letters seem to be in smaller font than the Chinese characters, this is rationale considering the different writing patterns of the two languages and the fact that more words are involved in the English description of the Stone.

However, the placement of the languages as either top or bottom does indicate the degree of preference/importance attached to the two languages [6]. According to the system of preference proposed by Scollon and Scollon [6], the preferred code is usually on top, on the left, or in the center position of a sign. In this case, and in fact, in all the collected bilingual and multilingual signs, Chinese always occupies the privileged upper position of any information chunk on a sign, thus is considered to be the preferred language by the engaged tourism spot, with English in a lower and secondary position, followed by other languages. This preference order of different languages is unsurprising as the research sites in the present study all belong to China's National 5A Tourism Spots, and considering the status of Chinese as the official language in China. This discursive study of signs further backs up the statistical analysis in the previous section on the proportion of different languages adopted on site, and thus the different weights attached to each language.

Chinese no doubt topped the linguistic hierarchy of Beijing tourism landscapes. But English, steadily holding a secondary position in China's highest ranking tourism spots, is readily available as the most important foreign language in China and will remain to be so in the foreseeable future. Survey data also demonstrates that all the participants strongly agree that English is the most important foreign language in Beijing tourism spots.

The example shown in Fig. 2 sends a more touristic descriptive message. It is an introduction to the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, which is the earliest and one of the most important architectures in the building complex of the Temple of Heaven. In this figure, an overwhelming majority of the information on the signboard is expressed in Chinese only, with a one-line parallel codeswitching in English to introduce the name of the hall. The content part of the sign, the Chinese description, introduces the time of the completion of the hall (1545); the original name of the hall, and how is was modified to become the present one. In this Chinese introduction, it is also stated that several emperors in Qing Dynasty like Shunzhi and Qianlong, came to the hall to hold a worship ceremony praying to heaven for good harvests, and the "祈年殿" plaque was in Emperor Qianlong's original handwriting with Man Characters on the left and Mandarin Characters on the right. In so doing, the signboard emphasizes the official status of the hall in Chinese history.

Fig. 2. The hall of prayer for good harvests.

Nevertheless, all the above information offered are advertised exclusively to Chinese readers only, and very likely, the Chinese tourists. The sign provides no parallel English introduction to the history of the hall. International tourists have to ask and do some research by themselves to gain a view of the whole picture. When asked why the content was not provided in English language, a service worker on site *explained:*

Of course, it would be ideal to have all the information translated into English language, but this is a very practical issue. First, we need to have English translators, and second, as you can see, the board is too small. We need to consider the space available. It is not possible to present all the information on a single small signboard. Third, to solve the above two problems, we need both people and money. Fourth, even when we have got the people and money, it is always not recommended to make big changes in a national heritage touristic spots, as many related facilities might need to be changed accordingly. You know, you pull one hair and the whole body will be affected.

(Service worker, original interview in Chinese)

As the above examples show, even though Fig. 1 and 2 are all categorized as bilingual Chinese and English signs, the proportion of Chinese and English languages used on different signboards may exhibit huge variation. Considering the weight of different languages on the signboards, the international-tourist survey participants were asked to rate the rough percentage of the information they saw concerning the different languages used on site. The result confirms that

Chinese is the dominant language on site: the participants' perceived percentage of Chinese language occupation in Beijing tourism spots ranks from 99% to 60%, with an average of 79.42%, while English is adopted as the default foreign language for the signboards on site with an average percentage of 18.26%, and all other languages used accounts for 2.32% of the information provided.

Moreover, following Sebba's [9] initial distinction between parallelism and complementarity in codeswitching, the fact that the majority of English information provided are in parallel relationship with the Chinese information, together with the high proportion of bilingual signs as compared to the English-only signs and multilingual signs with other languages demonstrates that the expected customers in Beijing tourism spots may be literate in only one of the languages: either Chinese or English. This, in another sense, provides further evidence that the use of English language on the signboards are mainly externally oriented, providing basic public services and touristic descriptions for international tourists' consumption.

As Heller, Pujolar and Duchêne [10] point out, in tourism context, and especially under the condition of postmodern globalization, the use of different languages is economically valued. While tourism helps promote the navigation of the globalized new economy in ways which allow for the commodification of culture and exploitation of multilingual communication skills, it also holds truth that the adoption of multilingualism presents itself as a means to navigate the globalized economy of tourism. In all the examples given so far, the motivation for the use of English language is at least partly commercial, either to promote the tourism spots directly, or to provide basic services to facilitate international tourists' trip in Beijing, thus encouraging potential consumptions on site. Besides, as a default lingua franca under tourism context, English language adopted on the descriptive signboards helps maximize the market for Chinese culture, selling it and the things in it in the globalized new economy. In fact, tourism has long been treated as an important source of foreign exchange revenue in China (CNTA, 2016), and the English and multilingual signboards may have some roles to play in this process.

As the author repeatedly found during the fieldwork, in Chinese tourism context, although not a must, the ability to communicate in English (most importantly Oral English proficiency) significantly enhances local people's chance to find employment or to make an income from tourism. The service worker interviewee, Chen Bing (a pseudonym), who had worked in the souvenir store for about a year and a half, and who claimed that his English language proficiency was only capable to have basic communications with foreign customers, pointed out that there was another saleswoman in the same store who could speak very fluent English. He then commented that "we really admire her, because she can communicate with the foreign customers without any problem." Chen Bin expressed his willingness to improve his oral English skills. When asked what measures he planned to take to improve his English proficiency, he said, quite confidently,

You know, the best way to improve my Oral English is to practice during my work. There are so many foreign-tourist customers here each day, and this is very practical English training for me. Given time, I believe my English competency would be very good. You know, Feng Bin (the saleswoman who speaks fluent English) has been working here for more than ten years!

(Service worker, original interview in Chinese)

In regard of this, it is not only English language that is actively playing a role in the promotion of tourism destinations, selling them and the things in them for international consumption, but the symbolic economy of international tourism also calls for the need of lingua franca English [11], providing a global market for it, accelerating the commodification process of English language. This is especially the case in China, whereby English language is more readily available than any other language (excepting Chinese), and promising a much wider distribution than the local Chinese language. Therefore, English literacy in Chinese tourism carries with it the potential of economic capital. Mastery of English is part of the general qualifications not only for English-speaking tour guides, but also for most service workers in the tourism sector

VI. CONCLUSION

Adopting a field-based research design, this study takes a sociolinguistic perspective on the linguistic landscape of Beijing tourism spots. A close examination of the distribution of English language signboards on the research sites reveals that English is widely adopted in the linguistic landscape of Beijing 5A tourism spots, offering public services and basic touristic introductory information to international tourists on site. Language choice in Beijing tourism spots as investment choice results in a much higher visibility of English than of any other foreign languages. This wide adoption of English language is governed by market factors [12]: not only because English is the default language that promises the widest reach all over the world, but also because it is the world language that requires the least language-specific investment in Chinese mainland.

With the significance of English language been increasingly recognized in China, observations from the statistical report in this study encourage a second thought on the common perception of China and its people as desperate consumers of English language. In the meantime, although English has been widely adopted and used as a default lingua franca in Beijing tourism spots, it should be re-emphasized that more than half of the signs collected in this study are monolingual Chinese signs. Even for the multilingual signs, Chinese is always in a dominant position, with English occupying a secondary position and in many of the cases missing much of the information. This point is strongly echoed by findings from the survey data. When asked "Does the use of English language in Beijing tourism spots satisfy

your needs?" Nine out of the 22 international-tourist participants chose 'Not at all", five chose "Somewhat", eight "Mostly", and none of them thought that English language proficiency in Beijing satisfy their needs completely during their trip.

Considering this, there is still a long way to go for promoting English language as a lingua franca in Beijing tourism spots. In the meanwhile, we also need to think, is it really necessary to force the change, and to put all the information available in both Chinese and English language with equal weights? Not sure. As the participants in the survey had repeatedly emphasized that, even if English language usage in Beijing tourism spots could satisfy every aspect of their needs during the trip, English still cannot replace Chinese. They came to appreciate the Chinese culture, of which the Chinese characters form an inherent part. Just as in the Chinese touristic signs, the Chinese characters in themselves exhibit as a touristic attraction to international tourists, which could never be translated and appreciated in English language. Other things to think include the amount of time and energy, as well as financial and political considerations concerning the replacement of signboards in Beijing 5A tourism spots, as pointed out by the service worker participant. All these have to be carefully considered before a further step is taken.

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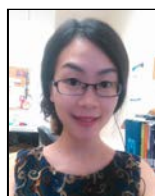
Rong Xiao is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research is situated at intersects of linguistics and tourism study, and discourses around tourism. Ms. Xiao's educational credentials include a bachelor's degree in English language and literature, a master of arts degree in linguistics and applied linguistics in foreign languages at Sun Yat-Sen University, and a master of philosophy degree in applied English linguistics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Her professional work experience includes teaching and researching assistantships at the Chinese University of Hong Kong within the Department of English. She has worked as a lecturer in language education center at Sun Yat-Sen University.

Ms. Xiao is currently a member of the Hong Kong Association of Applied Linguistics (HAAL). She has published a number of papers in Journal of Language and Literature Studies, and China Academy Studies. Her research papers have been presented in local and international conferences.