

Languages on the Signs in Burwood, Sydney

Jiawen Wu

Abstract—Research shows that aboriginal people, the Wangal people, had been lived in the suburb of Burwood for 11,000 years since the British colony arrived in 1788. After the British came, this suburb started to develop as many other European cities did. Houses, roads and other different infrastructural facilities were built and population were getting larger and larger. English is the dominant language in Burwood and this essay is going to present a linguistic landscapes study which aims at exploring how the languages on the signs reflect or interact with the local people and communities.

Index Terms—Linguistic landscapes, language, Burwood, multicultural, multiethnic.

I. INTRODUCTION

The research of linguistic landscape as an appealing area becomes more and more popular for the scholars in all over the world in recent years. Different researchers have conducted numerous studies of linguistic landscape in different cities around the world. For example, Chinatown in Washington DC's [1], Dingle in Ireland and Cardiff in England [2], Transnistria in east of Moldova [3], Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia [4], a Manitoba Town [5] and Toulouse in France [6]. Like the above studies of linguistic landscape happen in both larger cities and small towns as well, Burwood is a small and famous multiethnic and multicultural suburb in Sydney. In addition, there is no other linguistic landscapes studies being conducted in this suburb which shows its potential in the research of this area.

The goal of this essay mainly focuses on discussing different languages on different signs and analysing those languages on the signboards. As Gorter *et al.* [2] mention in their book, linguistic landscape studies both the signs and the people and communities such as producers and readers who are related to them. Besides, linguistic diversity would be revealed through the analysis of linguistic landscape [4].

A. Sociolinguistic Profile of Burwood

Burwood is a multicultural and multiethnic suburb in Sydney. According to 2011 Census, there are total 12,466 people living in Burwood whose ancestries include Chinese (36.4%), English (7.9%), Australian (6.5%), Italian (4.8%) and India (4.6%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Moreover, the census reports that English (25.5%) is the majority language in Burwood which is followed by Mandarin (22.5%), Cantonese (13.1%), Korean (4.3%), Italian (3.2%) and Nepali (2.9%) (Australian Bureau of

Statistics, 2012). Burwood Council [7] has stipulated that language on the signboards should be English, however, other languages could be translated according to English and displayed in smaller letters or characters.

II. METHODOLOGY

There are total 213 signs collected as samples in this research. The collected signs ranged from officially regulatory and infrastructural to privately commercial and transgressive signs. Official signs include streets names, parking information signs and some government-related signs while private signboards consist of advertisements of shops and restaurants and signs of banks etc. All the pictures in this research are taken from the visual linguistic landscapes which are displayed in open or public areas. Guidance for the data collection and analysis is adapted from the article of Manan *et al.* [4].

All the 213 signs are collected from the main street of Burwood named Burwood Road which connects to Liverpool Road of Burwood Height in the south and Paramatta Road in the north. Burwood Road is the most prosperous area within the suburb. There are many shops, restaurants, convenient stores, groceries and butcheries along the Road. It is because of the multiethnicity and multicultural environment of the suburb that the collected signs present a diverse phenomenon in which the languages on the signs are monolingual English or Chinese, bilingual English and Chinese and multilingual English, Chinese and Korean etc. In the following section, the data will be analysed from several perspectives.

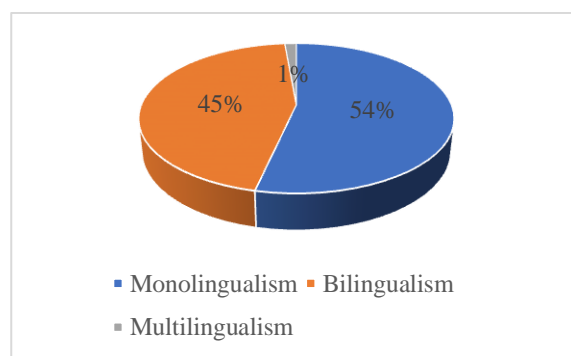


Fig. 1. Degree of monolingualism, bilingualism and multilingualism

III. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis will be demonstrated as comparison among monolingual, bilingual and multilingual signs, comparison between private and official signs and discussion of the most prominent language. Being monolingual means that the signs are in a single language

while being bilingual and multilingual are to say that the signs are in only two languages and more than two languages respectively. The Fig. 1 presents the percentage of languages used in signboards of which 54% are monolingual, 45% are bilingual and 1% are multilingual. Those figures illustrate that monolingual signs occupy the most proportion followed by bilingual then multilingual signage.

According to Fig. 2, 47.42% in monolingual signs are in English and 6.10% are in Chinese. In the signs of bilingual, there are 41.31% in English and Chinese, 2.82% in English and Korean and 0.94% in English and other languages including Spanish and Vietnamese. The last two columns present situation about multilingualism of which 0.94% are in English, Chinese and Korean while 0.47% are in English, Chinese and other languages. The statistics in Fig. 2 report that English monolingual signs are the most prominent signs in Burwood Road. English and Chinese bilingual signs are the second. Therefore, the data reveals that the language policy influences languages use on the signs and the dominant community of this suburb mainly use English.

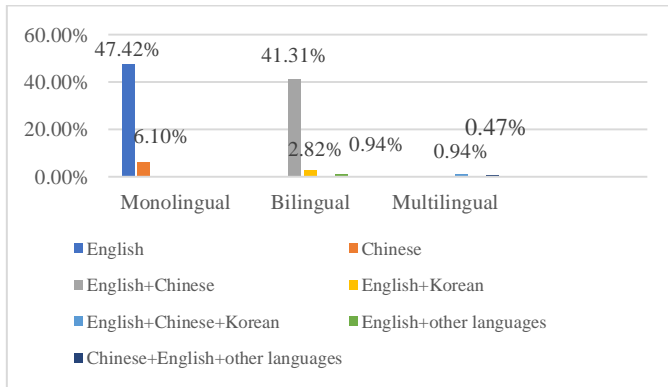


Fig. 2. Languages appearing on monolingual, bilingual and multilingual signs.

In Fig. 3, the situation of official signs and private signs are presented. The data shows that 10% of the collected signs are official signs and 90% of them are private signs.

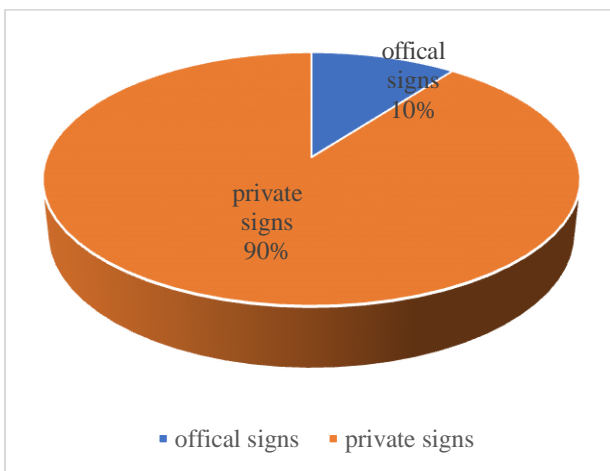


Fig. 3. Degree of official and private signs.

The table below gives information about the situation of the official signs. From the table, it is easy to discover that all of the collected official signboards are in English only

which again reflect the language policy of Burwood.

TABLE I: LANGUAGES APPEARING ON OFFICIAL MONOLINGUAL AND BILINGUAL SIGNS

| Monolingual | Number (%) | Bilingual | Number (%) |
|-------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| English | 22 (100%) | English + Chinese | 0 (0%) |
| | | English + Korean | 0 (0%) |

Table II illustrates the data of private signs. Most of private signs are in English and Chinese bilingual and there are 41.36% belonging to English monolingual signs. Apart from these two languages, Korean is another frequently seen language on the signboards.

TABLE II: LANGUAGES APPEARING ON PRIVATE MONOLINGUAL, BILINGUAL AND MULTILINGUAL SIGNS

| Monolingual | Number (%) | Bilingual | Number (%) |
|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| English | 79 (41.36%) | English + Chinese | 88 (46.07%) |
| Chinese | 13 (6.81%) | English + Korean | 6 (3.14%) |
| | | English + other languages | 2 (1.5%) |

Because of the restricted languages on the signs, it is not surprising that English is the most prominent language in Burwood (see Table III). Despite the official used language is English, Chinese is the second dominant language in this suburb. In the Introduction part of this essay, the sociolinguistic profile has introduced that Chinese is the largest community within this area. Followed the Chinese is Korean and other languages which include Vietnamese and Japanese.

TABLE III: THE MOST PROMINENT LANGUAGES IN ALL THE SIGNS

| Most prominent language | Number | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|--------|----------------|
| English | 200 | 63.49% |
| Chinese | 104 | 33.02% |
| Korean | 8 | 2.54% |
| Other languages | 3 | 0.95% |
| Total | 315 | 100% |

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In terms of the data analysis and the pictures that collected from Burwood, the study identifies three main findings which are English is the most prominent language on the signs, Chinese is the second prominent language and through the taken photos most English and Chinese bilingual signs do not follow the regulation of official display format. The following are discussed in detail:

A. English as the Most Dominant Language on the Signs

The language presented in the public area conveys the value of the certain language [8]. As the Burwood Council regulated in 2001 that language on the advertising signs should be in English. Therefore, the frequent visibility of English over other languages on linguistic landscapes in Burwood shows the power of language policy. Here are some examples:



Fig. 4. English monolingual sign.

Fig. 4 is all English monolingual signs and government-related signs. In addition, these three signs are aiming at giving information to the people around there which means that they face to people from all communities in Burwood.

Apart from the official signs, English also dominates the private signs. For examples:



Fig. 5. English monolingual sign.

These four pictures are all private signs in Fig. 5. (a) was taken from a billboard outside a church which was giving information about the English conversation. (b) is an advertisement about concert of Bruno Mars which is attractive to some fans of him or someone who is interested in it. (d) is a shop sign of a musical instrument shop.

B. Status of Chinese in Burwood

As the above data shows, monolingual Chinese signs occupy 6.81% of the total number of private signs. The following paragraph will analyse the reason why though the policy regulate that English should be the official language using on the signs and other language could be displayed in translation, there are still 13 collected signs in Chinese only which will be discussed in detail in three types.

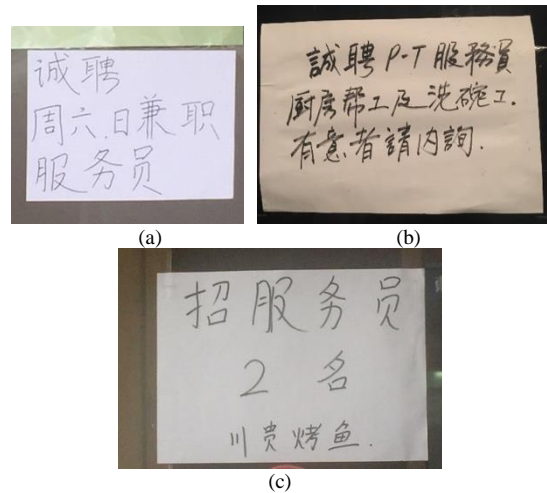
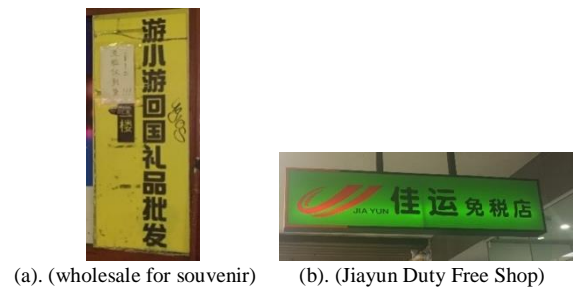


Fig. 6. Chinese monolingual sign.

In Fig. 6, (a) says looking for part time waiters or waitresses for weekend. (b) shows the restaurant is looking for waiters or waitresses and kitchen helper. (c) says looking for part time waiters or waitresses.

These photos are taken from the windows outside the restaurants. In Burwood, most of the Chinese restaurants or shops owned by Chinese immigrants use this method to recruit staff. There are mainly two reasons. Firstly, most customers of these restaurants or shops are Chinese. Thus, the owner prefers to employ Chinese or someone who can speak Chinese working for them because it will be convenient to communicate with customers. Secondly, those recruitment advertisements mostly face to International students from China because hiring a Chinese international student usually does not have to pay them legal salary and tax which is required by the government.



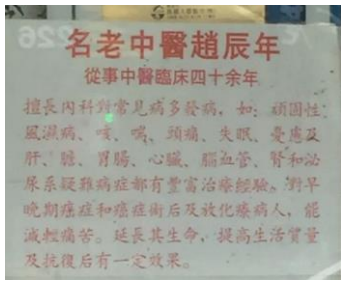
(a). (wholesale for souvenir) (b). (Jiayun Duty Free Shop)



(c). (Lee's tutorial center for math, English, physics and chemistry)



(d). (Shanghai Barber shop whose barber is good at both Chinese and western hair styles)



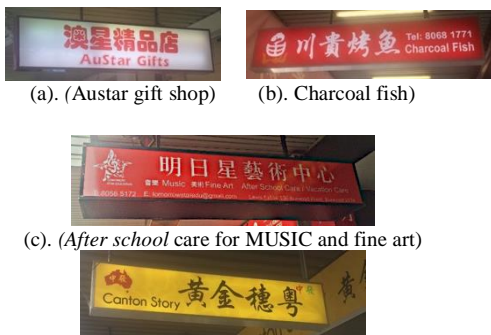
(e). (Introduction of a doctor of traditional Chinese Medicine. This doctor is good at dealing with common diseases of Internal Medicine)

Fig. 7. Chinese Monolingual Sign.

Fig. 7 includes advertisements, shop signs and informative signs in which language are in monolingual Chinese. Images such as (a) and (b) select their specific audience because of the characteristics of the shops. They are all gift stores which are opened for tourists and specific customers. First let's talk about tourists, most of the Chinese tourists could not speak fluent English. Therefore, those Chinese monolingual signs are for their convenience. Besides, some specific customers are those international students from China who buy souvenirs or gifts for their family members or friends in China. Apart from (a) and (b), the left are all advertisements or signs of presenting information about the shop. They are in Chinese only meaning that these shops are open for those who understand Chinese or they select their customers as Chinese people.

C. Situation of Languages Display on Bilingual Signs

As the language policy stipulates that other languages could be translated and presented under English in smaller letter or characters. However, most of English and Chinese bilingual signs do not follow this regulation. Most of them are in a revised situation that Chinese is on the top and English is at the bottom as well as smaller than Chinese. Here are some examples:



(a). (Austar gift shop)

(b). Charcoal fish

(c). (After school care for MUSIC and fine art)

(d). (Canton Story which is a Cantonese restaurant)

Fig. 8. English and Chinese bilingual sign.

From the above examples, it is clearly to see that Chinese is the dominant language in all signs. Although the language policy has the regulation of English on the top then other languages at the bottom, it does not mention any punishments of disobeying this policy. Hence, the shops owners use Chinese as the main language in order to show the Chinese features to attract customers.

Another significant finding is that in those English and Chinese bilingual signs some of them are written in traditional Chinese and others are in simplified Chinese. For examples:



(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

Fig. 8. English and Chinese bilingual sign.

From Fig. 8, they show that (a) and (c) are in simplified Chinese while (b) and (d) are in traditional Chinese. People in mainland China use simplified Chinese and Hong Kong people and Taiwanese will use traditional one which indicate that those signs in simplified are owned by immigrants from mainland China and signs in traditional Chinese are opened by people from Hong Kong or Taiwan. It is very interesting that if you walk in a shop written in traditional Chinese, the staff mostly will speak in Cantonese first and most of the staff could speak both Cantonese and Mandarin.

V. CONCLUSION

Shohamy and Gorter [9] stated that a lot of information would be reflected from the analysis of linguistic landscape in a certain area. Through analysing the linguistic landscape, the messages about this society, people in that area, policy, social classes, identities, multilingualism could be understood [9]. This essay discovers that the study conducted in Burwood can manifest different things which have not been noticed in our daily life. The official policy of language usage in sign regulates the language on the sign should be English, the official language of Australia. The study observes that English predominates the linguistic landscape in Burwood which shows its language power. Additionally, the visibility of Mandarin and Korean could imply that Burwood is a multilingual, multiethnic and multiracial society.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The only author of this work is Jiawen Wu and she conducted the research on her own. She took all the pictures and analyzed the data and finally put everything into words. Jiawen Wu had approved the final version.

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