

Linguistic Landscape of a Multilingual Community in Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper explores the patterns of Romanisation of Chinese company signage in a Federal Territory in Malaysia. The main aim of this paper is to examine the notions of linguistic landscape and multilingual language practice in the business domain. This qualitative research applied linguistic landscape of Ben-Rafael (2009) to study the patterns shown by Chinese businessmen in romanising the company signage from Mandarin to either English or/and Malay or other languages and what language/s is/are practised by the businessmen on their company signage besides Mandarin. The data comprising 233 photographs of brand names were collected and analysed by using Content analysis approach. The sound translation has the highest frequency to romanise the Chinese lexis of company names; the English language practice on company names is slightly higher frequency than Malay language practice in the business domain on the island.

Keywords: Chinese lexis, linguistic landscape, sound translation, English, Malay

Introduction

Malaysia is a multilingual and multicultural country. Malay and English are having the statuses of national language and second language. Other languages such as Mandarin, Tamil, Kadazan-Dusun language (in the state of Sabah) and Iban language (in the state of Sarawak) are practised in the country. Furthermore, the business world highlights the criteria of memorable, easy to pronounce and meaningful brand name. Language(s) was/were used by the businessperson through the process of naming their companies (Soon, 2011, p. 7).

The language choice in the public linguistic space may display a description of the actual practice of the sign-makers and the expected readers. Study of language choice in public linguistic space reflects the language used in a community (Abongdia & Foncha, 2014). In Malaysian context, the former Malaysian Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage, Rais Yatim stated billboards and posters that displaying 'mutated forms' of Malay language could be fined up to RM1000 (Spolsky, 2009, p. 31).

Nonetheless, the local governments set a rule that Malay is the priority language used on the company signage. Furthermore, all the new advertisements to be put up with the Malay language must be reviewed and approved by the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, DBP* or the Institute of Language and Literature (a government body coordinating the use of Malay language and literature in Malaysia) before applying for the approval from the city council. These language policies were promulgated to standardise Malay language practice on the company signage.

With the guideline provided by the city council, the businessmen abide by certain criteria before getting the approval of their company signage. Therefore, romanising the Chinese lexis on their company signage is necessary before they apply for approval. This study aimed to examine the notions of linguistic landscape and language practice by using company signage in Labuan. The study attempts to address those research questions: i) what are the patterns shown by Chinese businessmen to romanise the Chinese lexis on company

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signage? And ii) what language/s is/are practised by the businessmen on their brand names besides Mandarin?

Literature Review

There are languages displayed in spaces and places. These languages are conveying messages, meaning, purposes and contexts. Therefore, the languages displayed and exposed in these public spaces are needed to be studied and indeed to be deeply interpreted (Shonamy & Gorter, 2009, pp.1-2). Examining language in the public space provides different information about multilingualism because the public signage is the evidence of sociolinguistic ecology multilingual (Spolsky, 2009, p. 25).

Linguistic landscape (LL) is the sub-field of sociolinguistic and language policy which studies the public multilingual signage (Spolsky, 2009, p. 25). Linguistic landscape refers to linguistic objects that mark the public space – every space in the community or the society which is not private propriety (Ben-Rafael, 2009, pp. 40-41). According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), signage comprises public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, places names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings are the components of the linguistic landscape (cited in Coulmas, 2009, p. 15).

LL has two functions: symbolic and informative (Olufemi Akindele, 2011, p. 2). LL analyses the language utilised, the relative saliency, syntactical and semantic aspects of the signage (Ben-Rafael, 2009, p. 40). Therefore, it can be referred as the symbolic construction of public space because it speaks out through languages and symbols evince the landmarks of the space ((Ben-Rafael, 2009, p. 41).

LL is also the marketing and advertising arena of the corporations to exercise their influence and deliver messages. The business signage and advertisement presumably are informative. The sign makers would choose the language they presumed or their desired reader (Spolsky, 2009, p. 34). The official language policies may affect the language practice of the language community but the sign makers may defy the language policies (Shonamy & Gorter, 2009, p. 3). This deduced that the language in this domain is the ‘real life’, authentic, dynamic and energetic (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009, p. 3).

Pavlenko (2009) agrees that LL is the first place to identify the language (in Abongdia & Foncha, 2014, p. 623). This is because analysing LL based on the frequency of a language appears in a bilingual or multilingual context, the relationship between presumed translation, the prominence of a particular language as well as the mobility of signs would suggest whether the country is monolingual, bilingual or multilingual (Abongdia & Foncha, 2014, pp. 623-624). The changes in the linguistic landscape should be seen as ‘a direct outcome of language changes in political regimes’ (Pavlenko in Abongdia & Foncha, 2014, p. 624).

Research Method

Corpora data

The notions of linguistic landscape and language practice were examined by using corpus data which making up 233 photographs of company names with Chinese lexis in this study. The corpus data was collected in an island named Labuan. Labuan was the second federal territory of Malaysia in the year 1984 and it becomes International Offshore Financial Center (IOFC) since 1990. This island has an area of 92 km² situated on the South Chinese Sea with estimated total population of 100,000 in the year of 2016 (Department of Statistics Malaysia). The majority of the Chinese ancestors of the island came from the provinces of Hokkien and Kwangtung in China.

The data was collected by applying purposeful sampling method. Photographs of multilingual company signage, specifically with Mandarin lexis and other language(s) in the public place in the town of Labuan were collected and examined. Only the companies in the

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town area were focused because majority of the Chinese companies are located in the town of Labuan Federal Territory.

The companies' signage which was put up at the only shopping mall in Labuan, the Financial Park Complex was not targeted in the study. This is because these companies are in a private premise – the Financial Park and these companies are under the management of Financial Park Labuan. Therefore, these companies are not fulfilling the criteria of linguistic landscape - at the public space as defined by Landry and Bourhis (in Coulmas, 2009, p. 15) in the study.

Data analysis

The corpus data of the study is analysed to formulate the patterns of Romanising Chinese lexis and the language/s practised by the businessmen in their company names. The translation methods were applied by the businessmen to translate the proper nouns - their company names. Hervey and Higgins (1986) suggested by practicing transliteration, the proper names are to be shifted from the SL (Source Language) to TL (Target Language) conform to the phonic rules (in Behnaz Sanaty Pour, 2009, p. 8) and Peter Newmark (1988) also recommended the semantic translation (in Behnaz Sanaty Pour 2009:9). Besides that, the authors (company name makers) may use the substitution strategy (Fernades in Behnaz Sanaty Pour, 2009, p. 10). The company name makers may replace the TL name with the SL name which is phonetically or semantically not related. In this study, the Mandarin lexis and the photographs of romanised company names were examined, analysed and compared the SL and TL and the applied translation strategy/ies was/were summarised.

Research Findings

There are 14 company names in the collected data with Mandarin as the TL. The SLs of these company names are Malay and English. Therefore these company names are excluded in the study. 219 (n=219) company names with Chinese lexis or Mandarin are employed as the SL collected on the island are analysed.

Translation strategies

Table 1

Translation strategies

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Transliteration	122	55.71
Semantic translation	38	17.35
Substitution	59	26.94
Total	219	100

Most of the company names on the island were translated by the businessmen by applying the transliteration strategy followed by substitution strategy and semantic translation.

More than 1/2 of the company names were translated from Mandarin to either English or Malay by transliteration; 1/4 of the Chinese name of the companies were substituted with new names in English or Malay language, and 1/6 of the Chinese name of the companies were semantically translated into English or Malay language.

This deduced the transliteration strategy is a more productive approach practised by the businessmen on the island to romanise the Mandarin lexis of their company names.

Transliteration The company names with Mandarin lexis were literally translated into TL by using roman alphabets based on the Mandarin or Chinese dialects phonic system.

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Table 2 illustrates.

Table 2

Transliteration patterns

Patterns	Frequency	
Transliteration of full names	Pure transliteration	3
	Transliteration with other language/s	111
Transliteration by using acronym	8	
Total	122	

Transliteration of Mandarin lexis with other language/s There are 114 of the phonic translated company names were translated into TL by using roman alphabets with full names. 111 out of the 114 full names phonic transliterated company names mix-coded with other language/s.

The Mandarin lexis of ‘乐声’ (lè shēng) is phonetically translated into roman alphabets based on the Chinese dialect – Cantonese, with mix coding of another language (Figure 1). The languages practised in mix coding of the company names is to be further discussed in other section in the study.



Figure 1. Transliteration of Mandarin lexis with other language/s

Pure transliteration There are only three company names purely transliterated into roman alphabets. ‘胜丰’ (shèng fēng) is purely transliterated to roman alphabets from the phonic of one of the Chinese dialects – Hokkien (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Pure transliteration of Mandarin lexis

Transliteration of Mandarin lexis by using acronym Eight or about seven per cents of the company names were transliterated into other language/s with the acronym of roman alphabets. The Mandarin lexis of ‘丰美’ (fēng měi) is transliterated into the roman alphabets. Then, the acronyms for both of the lexis are combined by taking the initial ‘F’ of ‘丰’ (fēng) and ‘M’ of ‘美’ (měi) (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Transliteration of Mandarin lexis by using acronym

Substitution About 30 per cents of the translated company names on the island were translated into other language/s through substitution strategy. The translated company names in other language/s neither phonetically nor semantically related to the SL i.e. the Mandarin lexis.



Figure 4. Substitution

The businessman translating the Mandarin lexis ‘樺源’ (huá yuán) (as SL) of his company name into roman alphabets by using substitution strategy; the name ‘Our Place’ as TL has neither phonic nor semantic relationship with the SL. This deduced the Mandarin lexis of ‘樺源’ (huá yuán) was substituted by the roman alphabets of ‘Our Place’ (Figure 4).

Semantic translation There are 38 company names with Mandarin lexis in the corpus data translated into other language/s through semantic translation i.e. the meanings of company names in TL and SL are the same.



Figure 5. Semantic translation

The company signage of with Mandarin lexis of ‘海燕’ (hǎi yàn) which means ‘a kind of sea bird’ is directly translated into English as ‘petrel’ (Figure 5).

Language practice

There are monolingual, bilingual and trilingual company signage put up by the businessmen on the island.

Monolingual company signage The company signage which is translated into roman alphabets using pure transliteration is monolingual. The three company signage which was translated into roman alphabets by transliteration transferred only the phonic system from the SL i.e. in Mandarin or Chinese dialects into the TL which was neither English nor Malay.

As in Figure 6, the signage maker of ‘永丰’ (yǒng fēng) has phonically translated his company into roman alphabets Eng Hong which is neither English nor Malay.



Figure 6. Monolingual company signage

Bilingual company signage The businessmen on the island practised code-mixing in naming 184 company names in the corpus data. The businessmen used code-mixed of the Romanised Mandarin lexis with another language to form their business names. According to King (2006, pp. 222-223), code-mixing is ‘the intentionally use of more than one language by the bilingual language user for the symbolic, strategic or communicative purposes’. The frequency of English and Malay practised by the businessmen with Mandarin lexis translated by using the three strategies is analysed and summarised as in Table 3. The frequency of English language practice by the businessmen is higher than the frequency of Malay in three translation strategies.

Table 3
Pattern of Bilingual company signage

Translation strategy	Frequency	
	Malay	English
Transliterated Mandarin lexis	48	53
Semantic translated Mandarin lexis	9	22
Substituted Mandarin lexis	21	31
Total	78	106

Malay language practice Malay is code-mixed with the Mandarin lexis romanised by using the transliteration, semantic translation and substitution. The frequency of Malay code-mixed with Mandarin lexis romanised by transliteration is twice the substitution strategy; and substitution strategy is twice semantic translation.



Figure 7. Transliterated Mandarin lexis code-mixed with Malay

Figure 7 shows Malay lexis of ‘Kedai Kopi’ is code-mixed by the businessman in the company signage with the Mandarin lexis of ‘顺兴隆’ (shūn xīng lóng) transliterated into ‘Soon Hin Leong’.



Figure 8. Semantic translated Mandarin lexis code-mixed with Malay

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The Mandarin lexis ‘龙’ (lóng) with the meaning of ‘dragon’ and ‘凤’ (fèng), the ‘phoenix’ are semantically translated into English as ‘Dragon & Phoenix’. The company named by the businessman through Malay code-mixed with translated Mandarin lexis is the ‘Kedai Kopi Dragon & Phoenix’ (Figure 8).



Figure 9. Substituted Mandarin lexis with Malay

‘金沙’ is pronounced as ‘jīn shā’ and has a literal meaning of ‘golden sand’. The Mandarin lexis is romanised by the businessman by practising substitution strategy as ‘Manila’, which has no relationship with the phonic and semantic features of ‘金沙’ (jīn shā). The substituted Mandarin lexis is being used by the businessman with Malay lexis of ‘Kedai Emas’ to name his company as ‘Kedai Emas Manila’ (Figure 9).

English language practice English is practised 50 per cents more than Malay to code-mix with the romanised Mandarin lexis by the businessmen in the data. The frequency of English to code-mix with transliterated Mandarin lexis is the highest followed by the romanised Mandarin lexis through substitution. However, the frequency of substituted Mandarin lexis is slightly higher than the semantic translated Mandarin lexis.



Figure 10. Transliterated Mandarin lexis code-mixed with English

The company signage shows the Mandarin lexis of ‘甜心’ (tián xīn) which is transliterated into ‘Ten Sing’ code-mixed with an English lexis ‘shop’ to form a bilingual company name as ‘Ten Sing Shop’ (Figure 10).

Furthermore, the Mandarin lexis of ‘海洋’ (hǎi yáng) is semantically translated by the businessman into the English - ‘Ocean’ used with English lexis of ‘Shipping’ and ‘Enterprises’ to name the company as ‘Ocean Shipping & Enterprises’ (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Semantic translated Mandarin lexis with English

In addition, the Mandarin lexis ‘开心’ is pronounced as ‘kāi xīn’ and has the meaning of ‘happy’. The businessman applied substitution translation strategy to substitute ‘开心’ (kāi xīn) with Malay lexis ‘nusantara’ which means ‘archipelago’. The lexis of ‘nusantara’ is neither phonetically nor semantically similar to ‘开心’ (kāi xīn). The businessman named

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his/her company by using the substituted Malay lexis of ‘nusantara’ code-mixed with English lexis of ‘steamboat’ and ‘restaurant’ i.e. “Nusantara Steamboat Restaurant” (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Substituted Mandarin lexis code-mixed with English

Multilingual company signage A multilingual company signage is formed by the company signage maker using more than two languages in naming the company. Besides the Mandarin lexis as SL, the languages practised by the company signage makers, the businessmen are English and Malay.

Table 4

Pattern of Multilingual company signage

Translation strategy	Frequency
Transliterated Mandarin lexis	12
Semantic translated Mandarin lexis	18
Substituted Mandarin lexis	7
Total	37

37 company signage in the data practised a minimum of three languages by the businessmen on the island. The company signage businessmen code-mixed, the romanised Mandarin lexis by applying the translation strategies with English and Malay. The company signage which comprised English and Malay code-mixing with the semantic translated Mandarin lexis have the highest frequency.

This deduced the semantic translated Mandarin lexis code-mixed with English and Malay is the most productive approach to name the companies by the businessmen. The two mentioned languages code-mixed with transliterated Mandarin lexis is less productive than the semantic translation, and substituted Mandarin lexis code-mixed with the two languages is the least productive approach.

There are two types of multilingual company signage found in the corpus data:

- a company signage comprises three statements with a Mandarin statement as the SL, an English statement as the TL and a Malay statement as the TL;
- a company signage comprises two statements where a Mandarin statement as the SL and a statement builds up of romanised Mandarin lexis translated by using translation strategies of transliteration, semantic translation and substitution; and code-mixed with English and Malay in the statement as the TL.

Multilingual company signage with three statements The Mandarin lexis ‘练英财’ (lèn yīng cái) is transliterated into roman alphabets based on the Chinese dialects – Hakka becomes ‘Len Yin Choi’ romanised Mandarin lexis code-mixed with the Malay lexis of ‘Kedai and ‘Pergigian’ and formed Malay statement of ‘Kedai Pergigian Len Yin Choi’. In addition, the romanised Mandarin lexis is also code-mixed with English lexis of ‘licensed’ and ‘dentist’; which formed the English statement of ‘Len Yin Chooi Licensed Dentist’.



Figure 13. Multilingual company signage with three statements

The two above mentioned company names and the company name in Mandarin lexis of ‘练英财牙科’ (lèn yīng cái yá kē) become a multilingual company signage.

Multilingual company signage with two statements There is multilingual company signage which comprises lexis of three languages in two statements i.e. one statement in Mandarin lexis and the other statement with romanised Mandarin lexis transformed into two languages through the three translation strategies.

Transliteration strategy The Mandarin lexis of ‘星光’ (xīng guāng) in the company name is transliterated into roman alphabets as ‘Sing Kwang’. The romanised Mandarin lexis is code-mixed with the English lexis or ‘electronic centre’ and Malay lexis of ‘Sdn Bhd’ which is the abbreviation of the Malay lexis of *Sendirian Berhad* which means ‘private limited’.



Figure 14. Multilingual company signage with transliterated Mandarin lexis

Semantic translation strategy The meaning of the Mandarin lexis ‘先进’ (xiān jīn) in English is ‘advance’. The company signage maker named the company by using the romanised Mandarin through semantic translation and code-mixed with English lexis and Malay lexis.



Figure 15. Multilingual company signage with semantic translated Mandarin lexis

In Figure 15, the company name with the Mandarin statement of ‘先进验血所’ (xiān jīn yàn xuè suǒ) is transformed into a romanised statement by using semantic translated Mandarin lexis of ‘Advance’ code-mixed with English lexis of ‘Diagnostic Laboratory’ and Malay lexis of ‘Sdn Bhd’ i.e. ‘Advanced Diagnostic Laboratory Sdn Bhd’.

Substitution strategy The businessman named the company with Mandarin lexis of ‘纳闽’ (Nà mǐn) which is the name of the island – Labuan in Mandarin; ‘海鲜楼’ (hǎi xiān

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lóu) brings the meaning of ‘seafood restaurant’ and ‘有限公司’ (yǒu xiàn gōng sī) i.e. *Sendirian Berhad* in Malay.



Figure 16: Multilingual company signage with substituted Mandarin lexis

During the process of romanising the Mandarin lexis, the company signage maker substituted the lexis of ‘纳闽海鲜楼’ (Nà mǐn hǎi xiān lóu) with English lexis of ‘Fisherman’s Wharf Restaurant’ with the short form of ‘Sdn Bhd’ which means *Sendirian Berhad*.

Conclusion

In order to fulfil the criteria set by the Licencing Department of the city council, Malay is the priority language to be practised in all the to-be-set-up company names; and the characters used on the company signage must be romanised.

Therefore, Chinese businessmen on the island of Labuan practised the three strategies namely the transliteration strategy, semantic translation strategy, and substitution strategy to romanise their company names. The transliteration strategy is the most productive strategy used by the businessmen on the island to romanise the Mandarin lexis of their company names into roman alphabets.

There are only three company names in monolingual or directly transformed the sound of Mandarin lexis by using roman alphabets; more than 180 company names are in bilingual; with about 40 company names are in multilingual. The frequency of practising English in bilingual company names is higher than Malay language practice. This deduced that English is the dominant language practised in the business domain on the island.

The study investigated all the company signage on the island with Mandarin lexis. Further investigation on the company signage without Mandarin lexis is needed to summarise the language practice in the business domain on the island in the future study.

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