

Using Linguistic Landscapes as Pedagogical Resources: A Study of Multicultural Society Perspective in Mae Sot, Thailand

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
EDU-2026-140310455

Volume: 14

Issue: 3

Month: June

Year: 2026

P-ISSN: 2320-2653

E-ISSN: 2582-1334

Received: 30.03.2026

Accepted: 05.05.2026

Published Online: 01.06.2026

Citation:

Surin, P., & Klomkaew, T. (2026). Using Linguistic Landscapes as Pedagogical Resources: A Study of Multicultural Society Perspective in Mae Sot, Thailand. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 14(3), 43–55.

DOI:


<https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v14i3.10455>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License


Phongsatorn Surin

Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Tak, Thailand

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4929-0859>

Thayakorn Klomkaew

Kamphaeng Phet Rajabhat University, Thailand

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6772-1756>

Abstract

This study explores the linguistic landscape (LL) in Mae Sot District to discuss how the languages, forms, and functions of public signage reflect social dynamics while offering ways ahead for pedagogical practice. Methodologically, using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 528 public signs in the Nai Muang Subdistrict in April 2025 across four categories: shop signs, advertising and promotional signs, institutional and government signs, and directional signs. The analysis quantitatively revealed language distribution tendencies. Qualitative analysis applied the LL frame and the concepts of linguistic diversity and multicultural society. The findings show that Thai is predominant in the signs of institutions and governments, indicating state power and national identity. Nonetheless, commercial signage shows a prevalence of both Burmese and English, as one is aware of the traces left by migrants, cross-border trades, and engagement in the global economy. This study examines bilingual and multilingual signs in the borderland area, especially Thai–Burmese and Thai–English ones, both as communicative tools (a means of hindering or promoting social diffusion) and as symbolic resources that mediate power, identity, and inclusivity. In conclusion, public signage in Mae Sot does more than provide information; it offers a meaningful window into the coexistence and interaction of languages in a diverse society. Pedagogically, these insights suggest that LL can be brought into the classroom as authentic learning resources, helping learners connect language with real-world use, develop intercultural understanding, and engage more critically with multilingual environments in the classroom. More importantly, LL-informed tasks such as analysing or making multilingual signs may be applied in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Thai for Specific purposes (TSP). Future research should examine other border areas, adopt multimodal and ethnographic perspectives, and explore how linguistic landscapes can be effectively integrated into classroom practice.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscapes, Multilingualism, Pedagogy, Border Studies, Language Policy, Intercultural Communication

Introduction

Mae Sot District in Tak Province, a border area with cultural and ethnic diversity, has gained a significant cross-border resource in terms of economy, society, and culture (Visessiri & Buddhisaro, 2021). The diversity in this local area can be observed in the variety of languages used, especially in public spaces such as road signs and shop signs, which illuminate the coexistence of multiple languages in a particular area. The preliminary survey shows that public signs in Mae Sot often show Thai, Burmese, and English, with some signs having languages of specific groups, such as Chinese or Northern Thai (Lanna). These aspects go beyond written communication because they reflect identities, social roles, and the dynamics of language intersecting

with intergroup relations. At this juncture, exploring the linguistic landscape through the linguistic and sociological perspectives is crucial. Interestingly, government signs essentially use Thai with English for international communication, while private sector signs, such as shops and markets, often employ Burmese due to the significant presence of migrant workers and Myanmar nationals. Thus, these variations illustrate how language choice is adjusted to social contexts and target audiences.

Regarding the aspects, it leads to these questions: Do different types of signs influence language choice? What factors determine this choice? Examining these issues could deepen the understanding of how language in public areas functions as a tool of communication and as a “representation of power”, illustrating patterns of dominance, acceptance, and prioritisation among different languages in society. Although some scholars have already conducted studies on the linguistic landscape in the border region of Myanmar, such as [Siwina \(2020\)](#) in Thakheek. However, Mae Sot is both academically and policy-wise important for further investigation. This helps us better understand the role of language in multicultural areas and informs language policy, public communication strategies, and efforts to create a more inclusive and sustainable multilingual society. This study aims to examine the languages between the borderline of Myanmar and Thailand, addressing the following three research questions:

- How do the languages used in public signs manifest in the Mae Sot District, Tak Province?
- What forms do public signs take in Mae Sot District, Tak Province?
- What are the functions of the public signs used in the Mae Sot District, Tak Province?

Review of Literature

This section provides the notions of linguistic landscapes and linguistic diversity together with multicultural society, and reviews relevant past studies.

The Notions of Linguistic Landscapes and Linguistic Diversity

The term “linguistic landscape” (LL) refers to the existence of language in public spaces, such as

street signs, shop signs, advertisements, government signs, and written messages displayed in various locations. As [Landry and Bourhis \(1997\)](#) suggest, these visual manifestations of language reflect the social, economic, political, and cultural roles of the communities in which they appear. As asserted by [Shohamy and Gorter \(2009\)](#), the LL also serves as a crucial tool for understanding ethnic coexistence, power dynamics, and the construction of social identities. At this point, both works from (e.g. [Landry & Bourhis, 1997](#); [Shohamy & Gorter, 2009](#)) are the baseline for further investigation in this study, where trade, culture, economics, and tourism are reflected through the use of different kinds of languages in signage in the Mae Sot District. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights into language policy, intercultural communication, and trends in language change within multilingual contexts. Linguistic diversity is closely connected to the concept of LL. This notion refers to the coexistence of multiple languages or language varieties within a single society or community, including official languages, mother tongues, neighbouring languages, regional dialects, and international languages used for communication. At this juncture, the Mae Sot area in this study has a variety of languages used in the borderline, such as Thai, Myanmar, English, Chinese, and Lanna (Northern Thai). This could reflect the linguistic diversity in this area, which is found to be similar to [Edwards \(2012\)](#), in which linguistic diversity reflects the dynamics of intercultural and interethnic coexistence, social and economic exchange, and adaptation to communication in multicultural settings. Likewise, it plays a crucial role in preserving group identity, transmitting local knowledge, and creating cultural capital that links local practices to a globalised context ([Crystal, 2000](#)).

Multicultural Society

The two proposed concepts of the LL and linguistic diversity are situated within the broader framework of a multicultural society. This society recognises diversity in ethnicity, language, religion, and cultural values, allowing different groups to maintain their distinct identities while coexisting peacefully. In addition, multicultural societies value difference, equality, and peaceful coexistence, which

are crucial for fostering intercultural understanding and promoting social development in the context of globalisation ([Kymlicka, 2007](#); [Banks, 2015](#)).

The integration of LL and linguistic diversity is not a neutral reflection of a multicultural setting but is actively shaped by underlying power relations and social hierarchies. While multilingual signs in Mae Sot may suggest inclusivity and coexistence, they could also reveal which languages are given visibility, legitimacy, and economic value and which are marginalised or restricted to specific domains ([Landry & Bourhis 1997](#); [Shohamy & Gorter 2009](#)). In this sense, LL functions as a site where cultural identities are represented, negotiated, and contested. Therefore, linguistic diversity is unevenly distributed rather than equally experienced, shaped by factors such as migration, commerce, and policy ([Crystal, 2000](#); [Edwards, 2012](#)). Viewed together within a multicultural framework, these concepts reveal that public signage is both a product of diversity and a mechanism through which social inequalities and intercultural dynamics are reproduced and, at times, challenged ([Banks, 2015](#)).

Previous Studies

[Huebner's \(2006\)](#) seminal study of Bangkok showed how the distribution of languages and frequent code-mixing are linked to globalisation and the growing prominence of English in urban contexts. This study established a foundation for viewing signage not simply as communication but as an index of social change. Subsequent studies in Thailand have expanded this focus to include universities and other educational institutions. For example, [Meemongkol \(2020\)](#) examined bilingual signage (Thai and English) on university campuses and argued that its prevalence reflects policies of internationalisation in higher education. The Linguistic Uniscape project conducted by [Pan \(2024\)](#) similarly found that campus landscapes serve as sites where institutional language policies are materially realised. Parallel to these institutional studies, a significant body of work has investigated tourist and commercial areas. Research in areas such as Phuket, Chiang Mai, Lampang, PrachuapKhiri Khan, and KhonKaen ([Pathanasin, 2025](#); [Choeirod & Chanthao, 2023](#); [Srichomthong, 2016](#); [Potisuwat,](#)

[2019](#); [Kavilanan, 2024](#); [Mongkolyos et al., 2023](#); [Supanunt et al., 2024](#); [Pramual and Jitbanjong, 2023](#)) has demonstrated how signage functions as a marketing strategy (indexicality) to attract visitors and display the ethnic identity of business owners. In Chiang Mai and Lanna cultural areas, scholars have highlighted the role of regional languages, such as Northern Thai, and their integration with modern tourism, suggesting that signage can mediate between heritage and global consumerism ([Thongtong, 2016](#); [Boonmalert, 2023](#)). Recently, attention has turned to Thailand's border regions. Studies by [Siwina \(2020\)](#), [Maleelai \(2025\)](#), and [Anantawan and Buakaw \(2022\)](#) showed that while linguistic diversity is evident, national languages and English retain symbolic dominance. These studies also note signs of linguistic convergence, where language use adapts to patterns of cross-border communication. These findings reveal the role of signage as a material expression of power relations and ideological hierarchies. Comparative studies in Southeast Asia further reinforce these dynamics. Research in different contexts, such as Vietnam ([Tran, 2022](#)), China ([Li & Yang, 2022](#)), Hong Kong ([Lam, 2022](#)), Taiwan ([Chen, 2022](#)), Malaysia ([Ong & Ben-Said, 2022](#); [Jiao & Singh, 2024](#)), and Singapore ([Charmaine, 2022](#)) consistently illustrates that signage reflects the interplay of ideology, economy, and identity. In summary, these international empirical studies provide valuable theoretical and methodological frameworks for analysing borderland contexts.

Despite these extensive studies, gaps remain in the study of linguistic landscapes in the Thai and Myanmar border areas. Existing studies have tended to focus on urban centres or tourist zones, leaving cross-border districts such as Mae Sot under-explored. Investigating Mae Sot's multilingual signage can thus provide fresh insights into how languages are mobilised in spaces shaped by migration, commerce, and cultural interaction.

Methodology

This section outlines the research procedures used in this study. The first part discusses the research design, followed by the data collection procedures and data analysis. The final part delves into the ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study aimed to examine the languages used on signs at the border between Thailand and Myanmar in the Mae Sot District, Tak Province, Thailand. This study employed a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative analyses. For the quantitative analysis, it involved counting the frequency of signs (tally marks) was counted and their percentages were calculated. This was done to obtain the diversity of languages used in the signs. However, the qualitative approach focused on analysing the linguistic landscape, linguistic diversity, and multicultural society. Moreover, quantitative data were used to complement the qualitative analysis, driving the findings. This was done to answer the major research questions of the present study.

Data Collection

Previous studies (for example, [Bagatto and Hélot \(2010\)](#) and [Hult \(2014\)](#)) noted the difficulty of fully capturing large metropolitan areas, leading linguistic landscape research to focus on specific urban zones ([Backhaus, 2007](#); [Hult, 2014](#)). Accordingly, this study collected data from the Nai Muang Subdistrict of Mae Sot in April 2025, covering four sign types: shop signs, advertising and promotional signs, institutional and government signs, and directional signs ([Worrahin et al., 2025](#)). A total of 663 public signs were gathered at first, and they were then cleaned following [Lai \(2013\)](#). The Nai Muang area was selected because it was primarily connected to the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge. This location is the main area where the citizens of both nations gather and exchange trade in the port area ([Liu, 2025](#)), culture, economics, and tourism, as can be observed through different kinds of languages reflected in the signage used in this selected area. Signs were excluded if they were duplicated in the same location, visually unclear, or lacked linguistic content. Identical signs in different locations were retained because they targeted different audiences. In total, 135 signs were removed, leaving 528 signs for further analyses.

Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures were based on the

utilisation of the 528 signs and their calculations into percentages. Additionally, the three notions of LL, linguistic diversity, and multicultural society were used to analyse the languages, forms, and functions of public signs and to examine the public signs in Mae Sot District that reflect Thai society and culture. To strengthen the validity and reliability of the research findings, this study employed intra-rater reliability as a principal strategy for verifying the consistency of the qualitative analysis. Both researchers, who also served as the sole coders separately, systematically reanalysed the dataset on multiple occasions to ensure that the interpretations remained consistent and accurate. The intra-rater reliability procedure was carried out in three stages to ensure stability across the analysis. First, the data were analysed following collection using the three guiding concepts proposed in the literature review: linguistic landscape, linguistic diversity, and multicultural society. Second, after the first phase of data analysis was completed, the researcher revisited and reassessed the coding decisions after a deliberate pause to reduce potential bias, while recording reflections in a research journal. Third, a selected portion of the data was re-examined during the writing stage to confirm alignment with the research objectives and questions. Overall, these processes helped shape the dependability and trustworthiness of the findings.

Ethical Consideration

Since the data of this study were not human subjects, the researchers still considered ethical issues. By bridging this point, the researchers requested ethical consideration by sending the proposal to the host institutions for granting the research project according to the Declaration of Helsinki. Therefore, this ethical consideration proposal was granted on 22 October 2025.

Findings

This study aims to examine the language, forms, and functions of public signs in Mae Sot District, Tak Province. It will also investigate the relationship between these signs and Thai society and culture, as detailed below.

Languages on Public Signs in Mae Sot
Table 1 Languages Used on Public Signs in Mae Sot District

Public Sign		Frequency	(%)
Language	Type		
Thai	Institutional and Government Signs	123	30.83
	Directional Signs	97	24.31
	Shop Signs	96	24.06
	Advertising and Promotional Signs	83	20.80
	Total	399	100
Burmese	Shop Signs	85	36.96
	Advertising and Promotional Signs	72	31.30
	Institutional and Government Signs	37	16.09
	Directional Signs	36	15.65
	Total	230	100
English	Advertising and Promotional Signs	83	36.09
	Shop Signs	69	30.00
	Institutional and Government Signs	48	20.87
	Directional Signs	30	13.04
	Total	230	100
Chinese	Shop Signs	28	43.75
	Advertising and Promotional Signs	26	40.63
	Institutional and Government Signs	10	15.62
	Total	64	100
Japanese	Shop Signs	5	45.45
	Advertising and Promotional Signs	6	54.55
	Total	11	100
Vietnamese	Advertising and Promotional Signs	1	100
Hindi	Advertising and Promotional Signs	1	100
Arab	Institutional and Government Signs	1	100
Lanna	Institutional and Government Signs	1	100
Total		938	

As reported in Table 1, the linguistic landscape of Mae Sot, Tak Province, showcases how different languages are distributed and symbolically positioned within public spaces. Thai, the official language mandated by state policy, dominates institutional and government signs (44.31%), directional signs (26.95%), and is exclusively present. In contrast, the Burmese occupy a markedly different role. It appears predominantly on shop signs (46.09%) and advertising and promotional signs (24.22%), serving as the primary medium of communication with the large migrant and ethnic communities from Myanmar in the Mae Sot district.

Meanwhile, the use of English on signs takes on a transnational and economic role. English is frequently found on advertising and promotional signs (31.43%) and shop signs (27.72%) connected to international trade, tourism, and cross-border commerce. It operates as an economic lingua franca (ELF), signifying modernity, openness and inclusivity.

While other languages play a role in Mae Sot's linguistic landscape, their role is more limited. Vietnamese and Hindi, for instance, appear only on advertising and promotional signs, whereas Arabic and Lanna are confined to institutional and government signs. This restricted presence suggests that these languages lack the demographic or social networks necessary to establish dominance in public spaces. Instead of serving as everyday communicative tools, they largely operate as marketing strategies or symbolic markers aimed at specific audiences. Consequently, unlike Thai, Burmese, and English, these three languages occupy peripheral positions in the local linguistic hierarchy.

Forms on Public Signs in Mae Sot

Table 2 Forms Used on Public Signs in Mae Sot District

Public Sign			Frequency	(%)
Aspect	Language	Type		
Monolingual Signs	Thai	Institutional and Government Signs	64	27.23
		Directional Signs	47	20.00
		Shop Signs	17	7.23
		Advertising and Promotional Signs	12	5.11
	Burmese	Shop Signs	27	11.49
		Advertising and Promotional Signs	16	6.81
		Institutional and Government Signs	8	3.40
		Directional Signs	3	1.28
	English	Advertising and Promotional Signs	13	5.53
		Shop Signs	12	5.11
		Institutional and Government Signs	10	4.26
		Directional Signs	6	2.55
		Total		235
Bilingual Signs	Thai and English	Institutional and Government Signs	18	9.23
		Directional Signs	17	8.72
		Shop Signs	12	6.15
		Advertising and Promotional Signs	14	7.18
	Thai and Burmese	Shop Signs	23	11.79
		Advertising and Promotional Signs	11	5.64
		Institutional and Government Signs	13	6.67
		Directional Signs	26	13.33
	Thai and Chinese	Shop Signs	10	5.13
		Advertising and Promotional Signs	8	4.10
		Institutional and Government Signs	7	3.59
	Thai and Japanese	Shop Signs	5	2.56
	English and Burmese	Shop Signs	13	6.67
		Advertising and Promotional Signs	15	7.69
	English and Chinese	Shop Signs	3	1.55
	Total		195	100
Multilingual Signs	Thai, English and Chinese	Shop Signs	7	7.15
		Advertising and Promotional Signs	11	11.22
		Institutional and Government Signs	3	3.06
	Thai, English and Burmese	Shop Signs	14	14.29
		Advertising and Promotional Signs	18	18.37
		Institutional and Government Signs	16	16.33
		Directional Signs	7	7.14
English, Chinese and Burmese	Advertising and Promotional Signs	3	3.06	

Multilingual Signs	Thai, English, Chinese and Burmese	Shop Signs	8	8.16
		Advertising and Promotional Signs	3	3.06
	Thai, English, Burmese and Japanese	Advertising and Promotional Signs	5	5.10
		Advertising and Promotional Signs	1	1.02
	Thai, English and Arab	Institutional and Government Signs	1	1.02
	Thai and Lanna	Institutional and Government Signs	1	1.02
Total			98	100
			528	

Monolingual Signs

In Mae Sot, monolingual signs serve as “symbols of power and identity” for the linguistic communities in the area. At this juncture, signs written solely in Thai reflect the state’s role and the legal authority that reinforces Thai as the official language marking spaces where the state asserts “Thainess.” Even in the multicultural borderland of Mae Sot, the prevalence of Thai in official signage reinforces its status as the language of power and national identity. Conversely, signs written only in Burmese signify not only the direct targeting of this audience but also the strength of the Burmese community, which in some instances can “claim symbolic space” without recourse to Thai. This highlights how a nationally minoritized language can achieve local dominance in specific sociocultural contexts. Regarding signs in English alone, they embody globalising ideologies and cross-border trade, connecting Mae Sot to the global economy and extending its function beyond communication to the projection of cosmopolitanism and global connectivity.

Therefore, monolingual signs in Mae Sot are not just linguistic instruments but also mechanisms that delineate linguistic domains and highlight the dynamics of a multicultural society in this borderland context. For instance, the exclusive use of Thai on institutional and government signs (27.23%) could signify the state’s authority and the Thai language’s legal status. In contrast, Burmese-only shop signs (11.49%) signify the symbolic dominance of the Burmese migrant community, while English-only advertising and promotional signs (5.53%) point to globalising ideologies and commercial

communication. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the evidence of public signs taken from the Mae Sot area.



Figure 1 The Use of Thai on Institutional and Government Signs as Monolingual



Figure 2 The Use of Burmese on Shop Signs as Monolingual

Bilingual Signs

Apart from monolingual signs, bilingual signs in Mae Sot play a vital role as a “medium” connecting different language groups while reflecting linguistic power negotiations among them. These signs

illustrate the need for communication between people from different groups, such as Thai and Burmese, and the coexistence of diverse ethnic communities in the borderland. For example, Thai–Burmese shop signs (11.79%) illustrate everyday transactions with Burmese speakers, whereas Thai–English signs signify modernity and attract international customers. In advertising, Thai–Burmese (5.64%) attracts the main local market, whereas Thai–English (7.18%) extends its reach and adds global symbolic value. Institutional signs are primarily in Thai for legal purposes, with English added for accessibility and Burmese to support the local migrant population (Thai–English 9.23%; Thai–Burmese 6.67%). Directional signs mostly follow Thai–English conventions (8.72%), though Thai–Burmese (13.33%) appears in border areas to bolster local navigation. In short, Thai–Burmese and Thai–English remain the main bilingual patterns in the Mae Sot area.

The distribution of bilingual pairs reflects demographic realities, policy frameworks, and market strategies. To recapitulate, Thai–Chinese appears in commercial and institutional signs (3.59%–5.13%) as a language of commerce, but is absent in directional signage due to standardisation. However, Thai–Japanese (2.56%) and English–Chinese (2.55%) occur only in shop signs, serving niche markets and showing symbolic prestige. When it comes to English–Burmese combinations (6.67%–7.69%), they target Burmese residents and international visitors in commercial contexts but are not used in official signage, which prioritises Thai–English for consistency, safety, and public service. Therefore, Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate the following evidence.



Figure 3 The Use of Thai–Burmese on Shop Signs as Bilingual



Figure 4 The Use of Thai–Chinese on Advertising and Promotional Signs as Bilingual

Multilingual Signs

In Mae Sot area, multilingual signs serve as “spaces of cultural and economic diversity.” This reflects the town’s role as a borderland where multiple ethnic groups interact, such as Thai, Burmese, and Chinese. On the other hand, Burmese is widely used due to its regional relevance, and languages such as Hindi and Vietnamese appear less frequently (1.02%) and are limited to advertising and promotional signs. These uses reflect the existence of Indian and Vietnamese migrant workers and consumers, particularly in the trade and service sectors. Rather than serving public or institutional communication, these languages are strategically used as targeted marketing tools, demonstrating how signage helps promote engagement in terms of economic and cultural relations with specific ethnic groups.

In contrast, Arabic only appeared in institutional and government signs (1.02%), especially in educational contexts. Although Arabic is not a local language, it holds religious and educational importance among Muslim communities, particularly for Islamic studies and Qur’anic literacy. Its inclusion in official signage reflects institutional recognition of cultural and religious diversity, rather than commercial intent.

Similarly, Lanna (Thai Northern dialect) revealed a lower frequency of institutional and religious signage (1.02%), particularly in temples. As a historical script of the former Lanna Kingdom, its use symbolises cultural heritage and local identity, where the majority of Mae Sot people are northern people. When compared with Burmese, which plays a prominent role in everyday communication, Lanna remains largely symbolic. This contrast highlights the tension between preserving cultural identity

and adapting to the socio-economic realities of a multicultural border society. Hence, Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the evidence of the multilingual use of languages on public signs in Mae Sot.



Figure 5 The Use of Thai-English-Chinese-Myanmar on Advertising and Promotional Signs as Multilingual



Figure 6 The Use of Thai-English-Arab on Institutional and Government Signs as Multilingual

Functions of Public signs in Mae Sot

The findings of this study indicate that public signs in the Mae Sot District of Tak Province serve two main functions: providing information and conveying symbolic meaning. First, in its informational capacity, signage communicates practical messages such as traffic and directional guidance, official government announcements, event promotions, and advertisements for stores and services. These functions facilitate public understanding and access to necessary information, which is especially vital in a border area such as Mae Sot, where Thai, Burmese, and international populations live and travel. In such a multilingual context, the presence of multiple languages on signs enhances the clarity

and inclusivity of communication. Second, signage also carries a symbolic dimension by reflecting and constructing social and cultural identity. For instance, temple signs written in Lanna script signify regional traditions, shop signs in Burmese represent the presence of ethnic communities, and bilingual Thai-English government signs convey a sense of global orientation aimed at engaging international visitors to the area. Accordingly, public signs in Mae Sot area extend beyond the transmission of information; they operate as cultural markers that reveal the district's multicultural character and highlight its socio-economic and cross-border interactions.

Discussion

Public signage in Mae Sot District, Tak Province, is closely connected to broader social and cultural dimensions, including power and ideology, the economy and tourism, language policy, identity, multiculturalism, and advertising. These dimensions can be interpreted in relation to previous studies. First, the absence of Thai on certain signs challenges the notion of “linguistic authority”, which positions Thai as the dominant, official language. The deliberate use of Burmese instead can be seen as a symbolic negotiation of power, allowing Burmese communities to construct their own linguistic space that reflects their identities and communicative needs. This finding aligns with borderland studies ([Siwina, 2020](#); [Maleelai, 2025](#); [Anantawan and Buakaw, 2022](#)), which highlight the visibility of minority languages in specific sociocultural contexts. Simultaneously, the non-use of Thai reflects a language ideology that prioritises ethnic identity, consistent with [Scollon and Scollon's \(2003\)](#) concept of discourse in place. Similarly, the presence of Chinese and English in the religious and commercial domains reflects broader ideologies associated with global and economic languages ([Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994](#); [Woolard, 1998](#)). Thus, signage functions as both a marker of inclusion and a means of identity expression. Second, in terms of the economy, the findings reinforce previous research that reveals the importance of signage in border trade and tourism. Mae Sot serves as a cross-border hub, and multilingual signs—primarily in Thai, Burmese, and English—facilitate communication and service provision. This supports

earlier studies ([Siwina, 2020](#); [Visessiri & Buddhiso, 2021](#)) that emphasised the economic role of signage in border regions. Moreover, multilingual shop signs and advertisements reflect [Park and Wee's \(2012\)](#) argument that linguistic diversity expands customer reach and supports cross-cultural commerce in the following ways. In line with [Pennycook's \(2007\)](#) notion of “symbolic infrastructure”, Mae Sot’s signage contributes to both local economic activity and sustainable tourism. Third, linguistic landscapes offer important insights into language policies. The selection, arrangement, and visibility of languages on signs reveal their relative social status and can inform context-sensitive policymaking. This supports [Cenoz and Gorter \(2006\)](#) and [Meemongkol \(2020\)](#), who argued that linguistic landscape research is valuable for policy development. Consistent with prior studies ([Meemongkol, 2020](#); [Siwina, 2020](#)), the findings suggest that promoting multilingual signage, including migrant languages such as Burmese, enhances inclusivity, safety, and representation. Furthermore, echoing [Cenoz and Gorter \(2017\)](#) and [Srichampa \(2018\)](#), the results indicate the potential for integrating migrant languages into educational and community initiatives to foster intercultural understanding and reduce prejudice toward them. Fourth, signage plays a significant role in constructing identities. Thai-language signs reinforce national identity and authority ([Wang, 2018](#)), whereas Burmese signage reflects the lived experiences of migrant communities. English and Chinese contribute to global and commercial identities, consistent with findings in other multilingual contexts ([Lytra, 2016](#); [Manan et al., 2015](#)). Together, these elements support the view that signage acts as a “mirror of shared identity”, reflecting the interaction between local, national, and global forces. Fifth, the multilingual nature of the signage reflects Mae Sot’s multicultural character. The coexistence of Thai, Burmese, English, and other languages demonstrates linguistic diversity and cultural coexistence, aligning with [Crystal's \(2000\)](#), [Edwards \(2012\)](#), and [Gorter's \(2013\)](#) perspectives. Thus, signage functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a symbolic representation of inclusivity in a multicultural borderland. Finally, the strategic use of languages such as Hindi, Vietnamese, and Arabic in advertising

highlights the transnational nature of Mae Sot’s workforce and its visitors. This supports [Nikolaou's \(2017\)](#) view of signage as a recognition strategy for minority groups and aligns with recent Thai studies ([Pathanasin, 2025](#); [Choeirod and Chanthao, 2023](#)) that emphasise its role in expanding markets. Consistent with [Landry and Bourhis \(1997\)](#), these signs serve both informational and symbolic purposes, reinforcing Mae Sot’s position as a multilingual commercial centre.

Pedagogical Implications

This study sheds light on the usefulness of integrating linguistic landscapes (LL) into language teaching classrooms, particularly in multilingual settings such as EFL and ESL classrooms. For example, public signs in Mae Sot could function as authentic learning resources that help students raise sociolinguistic awareness, critical literacy, and insight into how language is exercised in real-life contexts. Incorporating activities such as examining multilingual signage could promote learners’ understanding of language choice, target audiences, and communicative intentions. The findings further advocate multilingual and translanguaging approaches, where learners are encouraged to use their entire linguistic repertoire. Integrating local languages, including Burmese, alongside Thai, English, or even Chinese, could foster inclusivity, affirm learners’ identities, and promote an intercultural mindset. With regard to curriculum design, LL can be embedded within task-based and experiential learning practices, such as community-based projects in which learners collect and analyze local signage. This is similar to the suggestion of [Delmas \(2025\)](#), who found that LL can be applied within project-based, student-centred curricula. This could help bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world language usage. Notably, this study also contributes to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Thai for Specific Purposes (TSP) pedagogy. The multilingual nature of signage reflects authentic communication in fields such as tourism, business and cross-border commerce. ESP and TSP facilitators can develop activities such as analysing advertising language, creating multilingual signage, or simulating workplace interactions. These

tasks could, at the very least, enhance learners' professional communication skills and awareness of audience needs. In a nutshell, employing LL in language teaching in both Thai and English fields can strengthen learners' intercultural competence, helping them to communicate effectively in diverse and globalised professional environments.

Limitations

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged in future studies. First, the signages were collected from a single subdistrict, NaiMuang, which may not fully represent the broader district or other border contexts of Mae Sot District. Moreover, this study focused only on written signages and did not consider other semiotic elements, such as images, symbols, or digital media, which also shape linguistic landscapes. In addition, the analysis was primarily descriptive and interpretive, without including the perspectives of key stakeholders, such as sign creators or users, including local residents, migrants, and tourists in the particular area. Finally, as the data were collected in April 2025, the findings may not reflect changes over time resulting from evolving migration patterns, policy developments, or economic shifts.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Future research could build on the limitations of this work by conducting comparative studies across different border regions, employing multimodal analytical frameworks, such as multimodality analysis, and incorporating ethnographic approaches, such as interviews or classroom-based interventions. In particular, further studies could investigate how the linguistic landscape can be more systematically integrated into pedagogical practices and examine its effects on learners' language development and intercultural competence.

Conclusion

This study examined the public signage in Mae Sot District, Thailand. It was found that signage serves as a communication tool and symbolic resource that constructs meanings regarding power, identity, economy, and multiculturalism. Thai predominates in institutional and governmental

signage, signifying national authority, whereas Burmese and English are vital in commercial and promotional aspects, reflecting migrant communities and global trade. Occasionally, languages such as Hindi, Vietnamese, and Arabic are used to recognise minority groups and transnational networks. Mae Sot's linguistic landscape reflects a multicultural society where local, national, and global dimensions meet. This study sheds light on the applied value of multilingual signage for policy, education, business, and tourism. Viewing signage as both functional and symbolic promotes inclusivity, intercultural value, and sustainable development in linguistically diverse border regions.

References

- Anantawan, C., & Buakaw, S. (2022). A linguistic landscape study of Tha Sadet Market, Nong Khai Province. *Humanity and Social Science Journal Ubon Ratchathani University*, 13(1), 101-134.
- Backhaus, P. (2007). *Linguistic Landscapes: A Comparative Study of Urban Multilingualism in Tokyo*. Multilingual Matters.
- Bagatto, F., & Hélot, C. (2010). Linguistic landscape and language diversity in Strasbourg: The Quartier Gare. In E. Shohamy, E. Ben-Rafael, & M. Barni (Eds.), *Linguistic Landscape in the City* (pp. 275-291). Multilingual Matters.
- Banks, J. A. (2015). *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching*. Routledge.
- Boonmalert, P. (2023). *The Linguistic Landscape of Signs with Names of Places in Chiang Mai Province*. Mahasarakham University.
- Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2006). Linguistic landscape and minority languages. In D. Gorter (Ed.), *Linguistic Landscape: A New Approach to Multilingualism* (pp. 67-80). Multilingual Matters.
- Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2017). Minority languages and sustainable translanguaging: Threat or opportunity?. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 38(10), 901-912.
- Charmaine, N. (2022). Constructing a visual multilingual reality in Singapore's schools. In S. H. Mirvahedi (Ed.), *Linguistic Landscapes*

- in *South-East Asia: The Politics of Language and Public Signage* (pp. 55-86). Routledge.
- Chen, S. C. (2022). Multilingual cityscape as symbolic construction of the public space in Taiwan: A study of two urban settings. In S. H. Mirvahedi (Ed.), *Linguistic Landscapes in South-East Asia: The Politics of Language and Public Signage* (pp. 30-52). Routledge.
- Choeirod, R., & Chanthao, R. (2023). Linguistic landscape at Patong, Phuket, Thailand: Language perception on public signs. *NeuroQuantology*, 21(1), 250-261.
- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language Death*. Cambridge University Press.
- Delmas, M., Kruk, J., Willoughby, L., & Angouri, J. (2025). Doing multilingualism through transnational linguistic landscaping: The MultiDiv experience. *Linguistics and Education*, 86, 1-13.
- Edwards, J. (2012). *Multilingualism: Understanding Linguistic Diversity*. Bloomsbury.
- Gorter, D. (2013). Linguistic landscapes in a multilingual world. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 33, 190-212.
- Huebner, T. (2006). Bangkok's linguistic landscapes. In D. Gorter (Ed.), *Linguistic Landscape: A New Approach to Multilingualism* (pp. 31-51). Multilingual Matters.
- Hult, F. M. (2014). Drive-thru linguistic landscaping: Constructing a linguistically dominant place in a bilingual space. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 18(5), 507-523.
- Jiao, Y., & Singh, M. K. M. (2024). Linguistic landscape in George Town, Malaysia: Language visibility in a postcolonial and globalized context. *Ampersand*, 13, 1-11.
- Kavilanan, S. (2024). The linguistic landscape of business signage at 'Kad Kong Ta' market in Lampang Province: A reflection of lost cultural diversity. *Humanity and Social Science Journal Ubon Ratchathani University*, 15(1), 257-282.
- Kymlicka, W. (2007). *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*. Oxford University Press.
- Lai, M. L. (2013). The linguistic landscape of Hong Kong after the change of sovereignty. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 10(3), 251-272.
- Lam, P. W. Y. (2022). Understanding the identities of Hong Kong people through transgressive signs. In S. H. Mirvahedi (Ed.), *Linguistic Landscapes in South-East Asia: The Politics of Language and Public Signage* (pp. 141-161). Routledge.
- Landry, R., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1997). Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16(1), 23-49.
- Li, S., & Yang, H. (2022). Semiotic practices, power and identity: Linguistic Landscape at the airport in Shanghai. In S. H. Mirvahedi (Ed.), *Linguistic Landscapes in South-East Asia: The Politics of Language and Public Signage* (pp. 162-184). Routledge.
- Liu, Z. (2025). Linguistic landscape as semiotic stance-taking interactant: Orders of affect and citizen-consumer subjectification in 'treaty port area'. *Language & Communication*, 104, 66-81.
- Lytra, V. (2016). Language and ethnic identity. In S. Preece (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity* (pp. 131-145). Routledge.
- Maleelai, A. (2025). Linguistic landscape in public signs of government and private agencies along the Mekong River Bank Road in Nakhon Phanom Municipality, Nakhon Phanom province. *Journal of Variety in Language and Literature*, 9(1), 39-57.
- Manan, S. A., David, M. K., Dumanig, F. P., & Naqeebullah, K. (2015). Politics, economics and identity: Mapping the linguistic landscape of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 12(1), 31-50.
- Meemongkol, K. (2020). Linguistic landscape of a university in Thailand. *Journal of Liberal Arts Rangsit University*, 15(2), 165-185.
- Mongkolyos, W., Karncharoen, K., Kavilanan, S., & Kaewjungeat, W. (2023). The linguistic landscape of Hua Hin Soi 57: A study of commercial business signs. *Journal of Liberal Arts, Maejo University*, 11(2), 194-217.
- Nikolaou, A. (2017). Mapping the linguistic

- landscape of Athens: The case of shop signs. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 14(2), 160-182.
- Ong, T. W. S., & Ben-Said, S. (2022). Accommodating Chinese community languages in Penang. In S. H. Mirvahedi (Ed.), *Linguistic Landscapes in South-East Asia: The Politics of Language and Public Signage* (pp. 87-113). Routledge.
- Pan, Z. (2024). Linguistic uniscape: A comparative study of universities in Thailand. *MANUSYA: Journal of Humanities*, 27(1), 1-28.
- Park, J. S., & Wee, L. (2012). *Markets of English: Linguistic Capital and Language Policy in a Globalizing World*. Routledge.
- Pathanasin, S. (2025). A study of the linguistic landscape on Phuket Island: Identity, tourism and policy. *rEFLECTIONS*, 32(1), 213-233.
- Pennycook, A. (2007). *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows*. Routledge.
- Potisuan, S. (2019). *Exploring the role of English in shaping the Linguistic Landscape: A Case Study of the Metropolitan area of Chiang Mai, Thailand*. Naresuan University.
- Pramual, T., & Jitbanjong, D. (2023). Language used in business and service signs in the business areas, at municipality of Khon Kaen: A linguistic landscape study. *Journal of Liberal Arts, Ubonratchathani University*, 19(2), 135-161.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (2003). *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World*. Routledge.
- Shohamy, E., & Gorter, D. (2009). *Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery*. Routledge.
- Siwina, P. (2020). *Multilingual Landscape in Thailand's Border Areas*. Chulalongkorn University.
- Srichampa, S. (2018). Language: Right and power for development. *Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 35(1), 78-98.
- Srichomthong, P. (2016). *Language Landscape in Lanna (Northern Thailand)*. Office of Academic Administration and Development.
- Supanunt, R., Yuwaprom, C., Sreewira, A., & Kavilanan, S. (2024). Business names in Hua Hin 72 Alley: A linguistic landscape study. *Journal of Humanities Naresuan University*, 21(3), 88-104.
- Thongtong, T. (2016). A linguistic landscape study of signage on Nimmanhemmin road, a Lanna Chiang Mai chill-out street. *MANUSYA: Journal of Humanities*, 72-87.
- Tran, T. T. (2022). Language ideology in the linguistic landscape of Hanoi. In Seyed Hadi Mirvahedi (Ed.), *Linguistic Landscapes in South-East Asia: The Politics of Language and Public Signage* (pp. 9-29). Routledge.
- Visessiri, V., & Buddhiso, R. (2021). Mea Sod studies: Pluralism in ethnic diversity to buddhism. *Journal of Buddhist Innovation and Management*, 4(2), 96-110.
- Wang, Z. (2018). *Memory Politics, Identity and Conflict: Historical Memory as a Variable*. Springer.
- Woolard, K. A. (1998). Language ideology as a field of inquiry. In B. B. Schieffelin, K. A. Woolard, & P. V. Kroskity (Eds.), *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (pp. 3-47). Oxford University Press.
- Woolard, K. A., & Schieffelin, B. B. (1994). Language ideology. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23, 55-82.
- Worrahin, P., Jitbanjong, D., & Wannaudorn, S. (2025). Linguistic landscape of public signs in Pakse city, Champasak province, Lao. *Mekong-Salween Civilization Studies Journal*, 16(1), 1-43.

Author Details

Phongsatorn Surin, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Tak, Thailand,
Email ID: phongsatorn_surin@rmul.ac.th

Thayakorn Klomkaew, Kamphaeng Phet Rajabhat University, Thailand, Email ID: thayakorn.klom@gmail.com