INSIDE THE SHOP NAMES: HYBRIDITY, LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND GLOBALIZATION IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF A LOCAL COMMERCIAL NEIGHBORHOOD IN BANGKOK

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Abstract

The present study explores the patterns of language use and the influence of English on the shop names in the linguistic landscape of Si Yan market, a local commercial neighborhood in Bangkok, Thailand with respect to script, lexicon and syntax. Using photographs and interviews with the business owners as sources of data, analysis of the language in shop names showed that a combination of Thai script, lexicon and syntax were found most often, followed by shop names with a mix of Thai and English script, lexicon and/or syntax. Shop names written with English script, lexicon and syntax were a distant third. Shop names written in English script with Thai lexicon or syntax were not found in the area. The

interviews with the business owners revealed that most of the creators of the shop names with a combination of Thai and English script, lexicon or syntax were not aware of the presence of English in the shop names. This study suggests that English lexical borrowing and the hybridization of language provide evidence not only of the globalization of English but also of the subconscious nature of the pervasive influence of English on Thai.

Introduction

In recent years, the study of linguistic landscape (LL) has attracted many scholars from a variety of disciplines to explore different spaces around the world (e.g., Curtin, 2015, Kasanga, 2012, Lai, 2012, Manan et al., 2015, Stroud and Mpendukana, 2009). Languages on the public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, or commercial shop signs are among the visual records being investigated to uncover the identities, values, and relationships within a given area (Landry and Bourhis, 1997 cited in Huebner, 2009).

Shop names are another piece of evidence explored in the field of linguistic landscape (Lou, 2010; Manan et al., 2015; O'Rourke, 2015) as they not only serve the function of identifying the shops but the language used in the shop names themselves also represent language trends and the language situation in a particular area. Bolton (2012) for example points out that the increasing influence and use of English in the public spaces of cities around the world together with the national languages and local languages has received growing attention and has been intensively investigated in the past decade. This increased use of English around the

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world could be seen as ‘the instantiation of processes related to economic and cultural globalization (p 32).’

With respect to Thailand, Huebner (2006) investigated the linguistic landscapes of various neighborhoods in Bangkok and found not only a great diversity of languages present in the Thai capital, but also the pervasive influence of English on all aspects of Thai, including lexicon, syntax, orthography, and phonology, resulting in a unique hybrid English-Thai variety.

The present study extends Huebner’s 2006 study with an investigation into the patterns of language used and the influence of English on the shop names in the linguistic landscape of Si Yan Market, a neighborhood of predominantly locally owned commercial shops serving a predominantly local clientele. Unlike international franchises, most of the shop names in Si Yan Market were created by the shop owners themselves. The focus of this study is specifically the choice of the script, lexicon and syntax, and on any evidence of the hybrid varieties described in Huebner (2006). In addition, the study expands on Huebner’s quantitative analysis by providing qualitative data to discover why shop names were chosen and to what extent shop owners are aware of the influence of English on the choice of the shop names. The research questions guiding this investigation are:

1. What are the patterns of shop names in the area of Si Yan Market with respect to the script, lexicon and syntax used?
2. To what extent is the hybridity described in Huebner (2006) evident in a neighborhood serving an almost exclusively local clientele?

3. What are the reasons behind the choice of script, lexicon and syntax in the shop names in the area of Si Yan Market?
4. To what extent are shop owners aware of the influence of English on the names of their shops?

Linguistic Landscapes and Hybrid Varieties

Defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25 cited in Manan et al., 2015), linguistic landscape refers to the study of the written form of language in the public sphere:

“It is 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.”

The linguistic landscape exhibits the linguistic culture of a particular area (Huebner, 2006) including ‘the set of behaviors, assumptions cultural forms, prejudices, folk belief systems, attitudes, stereotypes, ways of thinking about language, and religiohistorical circumstances associated with a particular language’ (Schiffman, 1996: 5 cited in Huebner, 2006). The exploration of linguistic landscapes has not been limited to the language on the street. Postcards (Jaworski, 2010), monuments (Abousnnouga and Machin, 2011), and cyber spaces (Ivkovic and Lotherington, 2009; Troyer, 2012) are also among the spaces being investigated within the framework of linguistic landscape.

Because linguistic landscape studies have been concerned with multilingualism and

languages in contact, it is not surprising that the focus has often turned to phenomena like language prominence, code switching, and language mixing. In language contact situations, language mixing can result in the creation of a hybrid language. Swann *et al.* (2004) explains that this particular type of language often draws upon each pre-existing language for different spheres of vocabulary and different facets of grammar. Some mixed codes may draw on one language for its vocabulary and another for its morphology or grammar. An example of “Hybrid Englishes” in modern urban settings is Tex-Mex, a variety spoken with extensive code-mixing in the border areas of Texas and Mexico (MacArthur, 1998 cited in Swann *et al.*, 2004). An example of hybrid language in the context of linguistic landscapes is the various combinations of Thai and English lexicon, syntax, orthography and even phonology found in the Bangkok linguistic landscape as reported in Huebner (2006).

The Linguistic Situation in Thailand, Bangkok and Si Yan Market

Smalley (1994 cited in Huebner, 2006) investigated the situation of languages in different regions of Thailand and provided a useful taxonomy of the languages spoken in Thailand. He reported that standard Thai is the official language of Thailand and it is the appropriate language to be used by people of all classes and generations for political and cultural purposes including ‘the conduct of internal government affairs and high prestige cultural activities’. Standard Thai is also the language of upper class Thais. In addition, Thailand has regional languages spoken in different parts of the country including Central Thai or *Thai Klang* in

the central region, Lao in the northeast, Northern Thai or *Kham-Mueang* in the north, and Southern Thai or *Paktai* in the southern region.

English is considered the language for international communication in Thailand. English is a required subject for every Thai student from upper elementary school through university. It is also the language of specialized knowledge and also a symbol of modernity.

In Bangkok, among local Bangkokians, Standard Thai and *Thai Klang* are among the languages pervasively used and are the main languages for everyday communication in the city. Languages of the country’s other regions are also used by people from those parts of the country immigrating to work in the capital city. Apart from standard Thai and Thai dialects, English and Chinese are also dominant languages in Bangkok and English is the language directed at tourists and others from abroad (Smalley, 1994 cited in Huebner, 2006). Signs on the Bangkok streets are in Standard Thai or Thai in combination of other languages, particularly English and Chinese (Huebner, 2006).

Si Yan market is a local commercial neighborhood in Bangkok. The market area is situated on the Nakhon Chaisi Road from the Ruam Chit Intersection to Si Yan Intersection and on Sam Sen Road from *Sam sen* Canal to Khiakhaika Intersection. According to Klumsom (2007), in her book about various important commercial neighborhoods in Bangkok, the area of Si Yan market first became a commercial area during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910), when Sam Sen Road was built and increasing

Figure 1: The Si Yan market area

numbers of people began to use the road for travelling. At that time, the area was not yet called Si Yan. Khunphra Soponpetcharat, a Chinese-Thai business tycoon who made his fortune in teak forests and lumber and rice mills, built the first ten commercial buildings near the Si Yan market. Later, Korn Chaturachinda, an important property owner around the Si Yan market at the time, further developed the area and, in hopes of a more prosperous future for the area, changed its name from Payap, a homophone for words meaning destruction, to Si Yan, meaning an honored area. Many years later, Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, Prime Minister at the time (1958-63) ordered Nakorn Chai

Sri fresh market to be built, followed by Si Yan fresh market.

At present, the Si Yan market area is populated by locally owned shops in the commercial buildings along the main road, with only a few international franchised stores around the area. Nearly all the customers in the Si Yan market are local people who speak Thai and some Chinese. Rarely are foreigners present around that area since the market is not adjacent to any tourist attraction.

Script	Lexicon	Syntax
Thai	Thai	Thai
English	English	English
Thai	English	English
Thai	Thai	English
Thai	English	Thai
<i>*English</i>	<i>Thai</i>	<i>Thai</i>
<i>*English</i>	<i>Thai</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>*English</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Thai</i>

*Combinations not found in Huebner (2006)

Table 1: Possible types of mixing – Thai and English Script / Lexicon / Syntax

Methodology

The data for the present study were collected in the area of Si Yan Market through photographs of shop names and tape-recorded interviews with merchants whose shop names include a mix of Thai and English with regard to the script, lexicon and syntax. The unit of analysis is restricted to the shop names permanently printed and affixed on the front of the shops. A total of 165 shop names were analyzed and interviews with ten shop owners were conducted. The shops under investigation were along the 800-metre stretch of Nakhon Chaisi Road from the Ruam Chit intersection to the Si Yan intersection and on the 400-metre stretch of Sam Sen Road from Sam Sen Canal to the Khiaokhaika intersection. The investigation was limited to only the shops along the main roads not in the small sois, or alleys, along the Nakhon Chaisi and Sam Sen Roads. Figure 1 is the map of the route in the Si Yan market area under investigation of the study. The darkened areas show the route of the investigation.

Apart from the analysis of the shop names, interviews with the business owners in the area of Si Yan Market were also conducted. The shops selected for the interview were shops with names

displaying a combination of Thai and English script, lexicon or syntax.

Results and Discussion

To analyze the patterns of language use and the influence of English on the shop names, the present study followed the framework proposed by Huebner (2006) by categorizing the possible types of mixing between Thai and English as shown in Table 1.

Theoretically, there could be eight possible types of mixing of English and Thai with regard to the script, lexicon and syntax. However, consistent with the Huebner 2006 study, there were only five patterns of language displayed in the neighborhood as shown in Figure 2 and Table 2. English script with the combination of Thai syntax or Thai lexicon was not found in the shop names in the Si Yan market area. However, as the targeted customers of Si Yan market were mostly local Thai people, the great majority of signs were written in Thai script with only 7 (4.24%) occurrences of shop names written in English script. Nevertheless, the influence of English can be seen in the choice of lexicon and syntax.

Figure 2: Distribution of Types of Mixing – Thai and English Script / Lexicon / Syntax

Script	Lexicon	Syntax	
Thai	Thai	Thai	94 (56.97%)
English	English	English	7 (4.24%)
Thai	English	English	41 (24.85%)
Thai	Thai	English	17 (10.30%)
Thai	English	Thai	6 (3.64%)
*English	Thai	Thai	0
*English	Thai	English	0
*English	English	Thai	0
		Total	165 (100%)

Table 2: Distribution of different types of mixing – Thai and English

Shop names with Thai script, lexicon and syntax ranked first with 94 occurrences (56.97%) among all the shop names. This was typical and predictable for the area as the intended customers are local Thai people. However, there were 64 occurrences (38.79%) of shop names

found with the combination of Thai script with either English lexicon or syntax or both English lexicon and syntax. This influence of the use of English lexicon and syntax with Thai script was in line with the results of Huebner's (2006) study. He found that, at the syntactic level, the

branching direction (head-modifier vs. modifier-head word order) of the shop names is affected. At the lexical level, use of English lexicon with Thai script both reflects and reinforces lexical borrowing.

Examples of the shop names with Thai script, English lexicon and English syntax were 'New Chai Phan,' 'T R Cosmetic,' 'Si Yan Beauty,' 'Khun Noi Optic,' 'Daeng Collection', and 'Prawit Barber,' (See Figures 3-7), all of which are combinations of the proper names and the English words showing the merchandise sold or the service provided. The names were put together with the English syntax (modifier-head word order). Another interesting example was from the shop name with Thai script, Thai lexicon and English syntax like 'Wiboon Karnfaifa' (Wiboon electrical shop, Figure 6), which shows the use of Thai lexicon with the English syntax of modifier-head word order.

Though not many, the combination of Thai script, English lexicon and Thai syntax was also found, e.g. 'Beauty Hair' (Figure 7), a shop name for a women's hair salon. This particular example along with the shop names with a combination of Thai script with either English or Thai lexicon or syntax were also evidence showing the trace of the hybridization of language between English and Thai.

When queried about the history of the shops and their names, interviewees reported that most of the shops have been in business for about 30-40 years with not many new shops. Some of the shops were taken over by new owners without changing the shop names and the types of businesses they run as the owner of a

photo studio named 'Photosilp Colorlab' reported "... *I have taken over the shop from the previous owner without changing the name of the shop ... the shop has probably been in business for about 30-40 years already ...*" Some shops were run by the second generation or the original owners themselves. An example is the 'Tawee Textile' drapery shop which is run by the second generation at the time of the study and "... *the shop was first started by my father ... now he is retired so I took over ...*" while 'Sopon Barber,' a men's barber shop, for example, was still managed by the original owner.

Figure 3: Shop names with Thai script, Thai lexicon and Thai syntax

Figure 4: Shop names with English script, English lexicon and English syntax

Figure 5: Shop names with Thai script, English lexicon and English syntax

Figure 6: Shop names with Thai script, Thai lexicon and English syntax

Figure 7: Shop names with Thai script, English lexicon and Thai syntax

The results from the interview revealed that the combination of the name of the area or of the owner written in Thai script with the English lexicon of the type of the shop or product / service provided became the tradition of creating shop names around this area. The owner of 'Siyan Alai,' a shop selling car parts, said "... it's the tradition of creating the shop names by putting the name of the area or the shop owner's name first and then followed by what you sell ...". When asked why the English lexicon was chosen, some of the shop owners reported that they did not know that these words were from English. An example was the 'Sopon Barber' whose owner himself said "... it was the trend of using some particular words for particular kinds of shops e.g. 'barber' for men's barber shops and 'salon' for women's hair salon shops ...". In case these words were used, they traditionally were preceded by the name of the owner or the area as reported by some of the shop owners e.g. 'Sopon Barber'. 'Sopon' was the name of a soi in the area and 'barber' was used to signify that this shop was a men's barber.

This trend of English lexicon and English syntax (modifier-head word order) in the shop names seemed to arise from the unconscious copying from other shop names as some business owners reported copying the pattern of shop names from other shops that sold similar products or provided similar services. There were also some shop owners who intentionally used English lexicon for their shop names and one popular reason was for the feeling of modernity as perceived by the customers.

Conclusion

This study of the linguistic landscape of a local commercial neighborhood in Bangkok showed that Thai language was the most prominent language used for the shop names in the Si Yan market area with respect to the script, the lexicon and the syntax. However, the influence of English was also found in quite a few occurrences and also at all levels whether the script, the lexicon and the syntax. The results of the study demonstrated that the same kind of hybridization reported in other Bangkok neighborhoods by Huebner (2006) existed in even a very Thai neighborhood like Si

Yan market. The appearances of English used in the shop names around this area showed the evidence of lexical borrowing of English and the hybridization of language suggesting the influence of English as a result of language contact, in some cases dating back to 30 or 40 years ago when many shops in the Si Yan market area were first established. The fact that the merchants who are the shop owners in the area were not aware of the influence of English on the names of their shops suggested that this hybridization ran very deep and can even be considered nativized. These lexical borrowings and the hybridization of language further demonstrated that the globalization of English could be found even in a small local commercial neighborhood like Si Yan Market in Bangkok.

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