

Investigation and Study on the Linguistic Landscape in the China-Myanmar Street, Mengding Town, Gengma Dai and Va Autonomous County, Yunnan Province

Lingyan Niu^a, and Xiangyun Dong^{b,*}

Yunnan Normal University, Kunming 650500, China

^a9039253@qq.com, ^bvemal@163.com

*Corresponding author

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Abstract: Linguistic Landscape is an important symbol reflecting the social ecology and language services of a community, and it serves as a business card of a city or region. In recent years, many Chinese scholars have begun to study linguistic landscapes. However, among these studies, theoretical studies are more dominant than empirical ones in terms of quantity. The fact is that a real case of linguistic landscape, due to involving more complex issues and variables, can reflect social and linguistic problems in a more authentic way. Thus this article is aimed to investigate and study the linguistic landscape in the foreign-related street of the border region of Yunnan Province, so as to help urban planning and policy making and provide some opinions and suggestions for the development of national cultures and international communications. Gengma Dai and Va Autonomous County is located in Lincang City, Yunnan Province, or in the southwestern border area of China. Bounded by mountains and rivers of Myanmar, the county has a boundary line 47.35 kilometers long, and is a part of the most convenient land route connecting Lincang, Kunming, Yangon and KyaukPhyu Port in Myanmar on the coast of the Indian Ocean.

1. The Significance of Language Landscape Survey

As a visual language, linguistic landscape involves a great deal of social and cultural information and economic and commercial value. In recent years, as the economic ties between China and other countries have become increasingly close, many cities in China become more and more internationalized. In this context, languages and linguistic landscapes, as an important factor embodying and catering to internationalization, are being brought into focus. This study on the linguistic landscape in the China-Myanmar Street, Mengding Town, Gengma Dai and Va Autonomous County, Yunnan Province may help probe into the influence of linguistic landscape and the provision of related services in the inland border regions involved with foreign trade in China.

2. Sign boards in the China-Myanmar Street

The author conducted a field survey on China-Myanmar Street in Mengding Town in September 2018 and took pictures of the linguistic signboards of the stores and shops in the visible range on both sides of the street using a digital camera, getting 199 valid samples. During the encoding process, according to the research method of Backhaus (2007), each linguistic signboard with obvious borders was used as a unit of measurement, and the encoding was done according to the distribution of a variety of industries, languages, dominant languages, additional features, etc. Non-Chinese monolingual signboards and signboards containing two or more languages were deemed as multi-lingual signboards. After the encoding, SPSS software was used to analyze the frequency and proportion of all kinds of signboards.

2.1 Use Rates of the Signboards

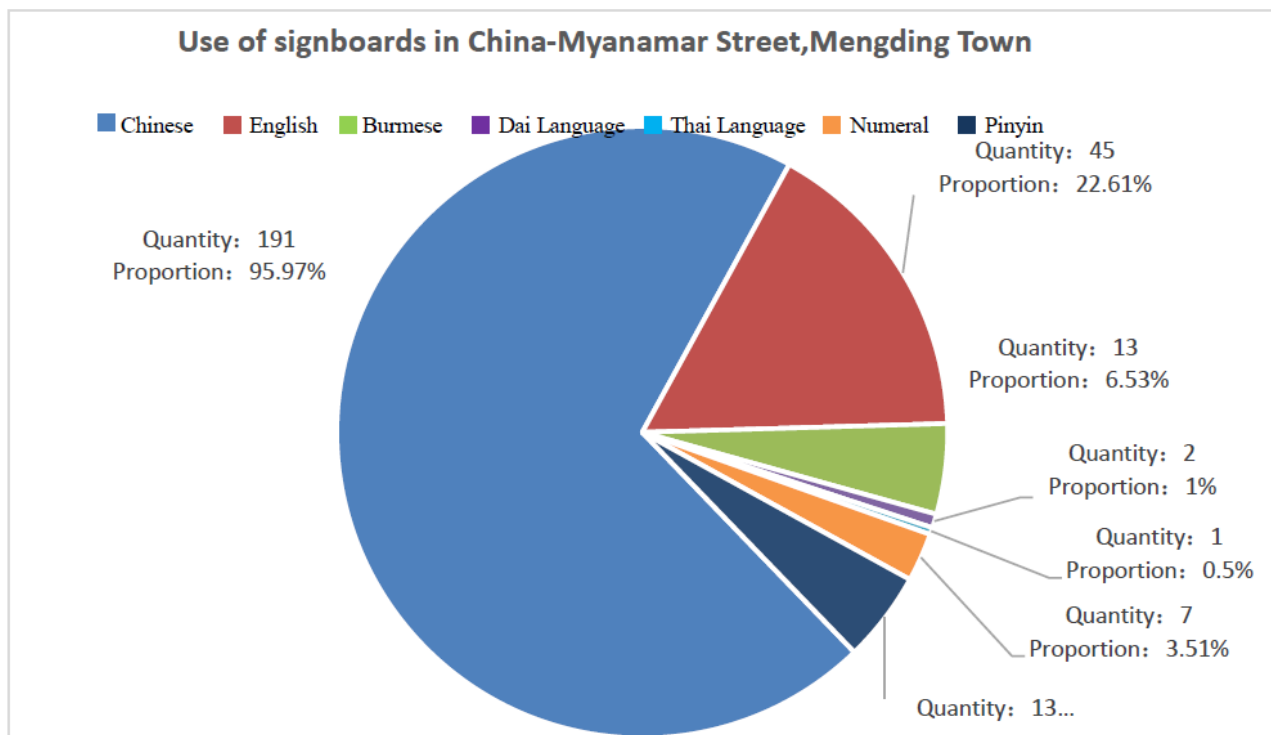


Figure 1. Pie Chart of Use of Signboards in China-Myanmar Street, Mengding Town

As shown in Figure 1, Chinese, English, Burmese and Dai language are used in the linguistic signboards of China-Myanmar Street. The frequencies of use of these languages are 95.97%, 22.61%, 6.53% and 1.5% respectively. And the Chinese words used in the signboards are mainly in the form of standard Chinese characters, though some signboards carry Pinyin, accounting for 6.5% of the total; a few signboards carry numerals, accounting for 3.5% of the total.

Of all the linguistic signboards collected, Chinese is most used, accounting for 95.97% of the total, and the remaining non-Chinese signboards carry English words. In addition to Chinese and English, the linguistic landscape of China-Myanmar Street in Mengding Town also involves Burmese, Dai and Thai languages, accounting for 6.5%, 1% and 0.5%, respectively. Although the street is called the "China-Myanmar Street" due to a lot of Burmese entering and exiting China via the Qingshuihe Port in Mengding Town, but the use of Burmese occupies a fairly small proportion of the total. The Dai language (namely Dai words) appears along with Chinese characters on only two signboards in the China-Myanmar Street. Even in a minority autonomous county like this, there are just a few signboards carrying a minority language. This indirectly reflects the lack of publicity of minority languages.

2.2 Use of Multilingual Signboards

According to the setting of signboards in the China-Myanmar Street, the Chinese signboards basically meet the relevant national and provincial regulations on common spoken and written Chinese. Besides, as international trade increases, a store may be visited by customers from different countries, or involve goods from different countries. This calls for multilingual signboards. As shown in Table 2, among the 199 signboards of the China-Myanmar Street, 125 are monolingual, 71 are bilingual, and 3 are trilingual, accounting for 62.8%, 35.7% and 1.5% of the total, respectively. And among them, there are 10 pidgin signboards, which refer to the signboards using a language that is a mixture of two other languages, such as "Coco Cola Kele House". The number of pidgin signboards account for 5% of the total.

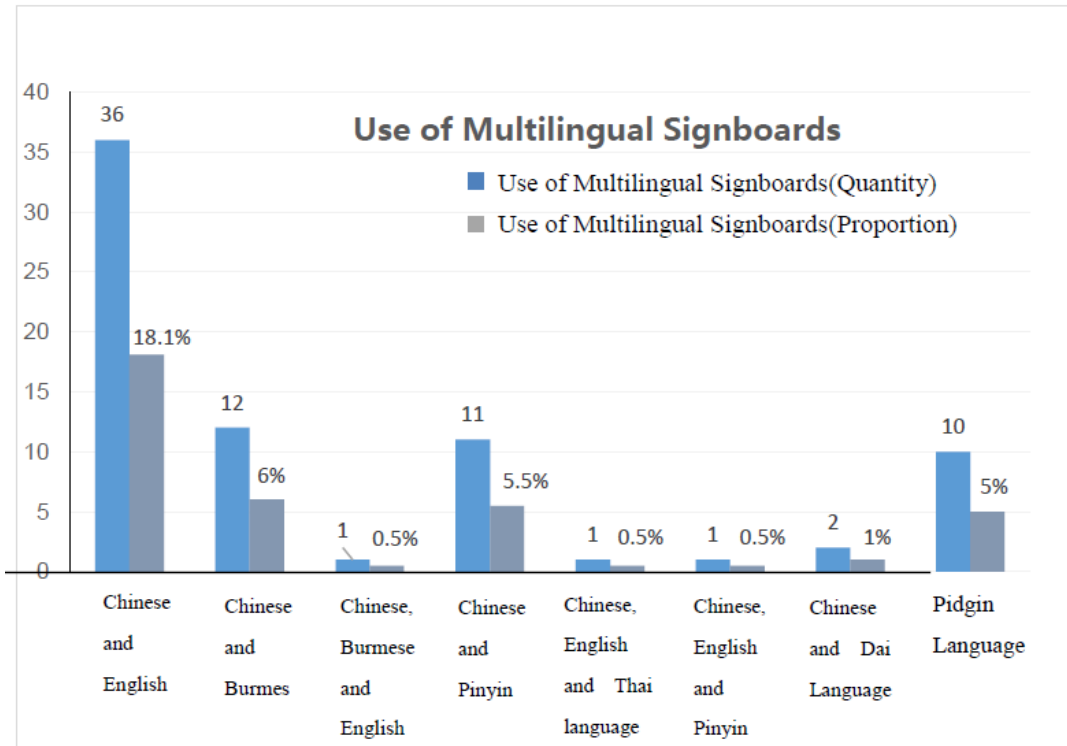


Figure 2. Histogram of Use of Multilingual Signboards

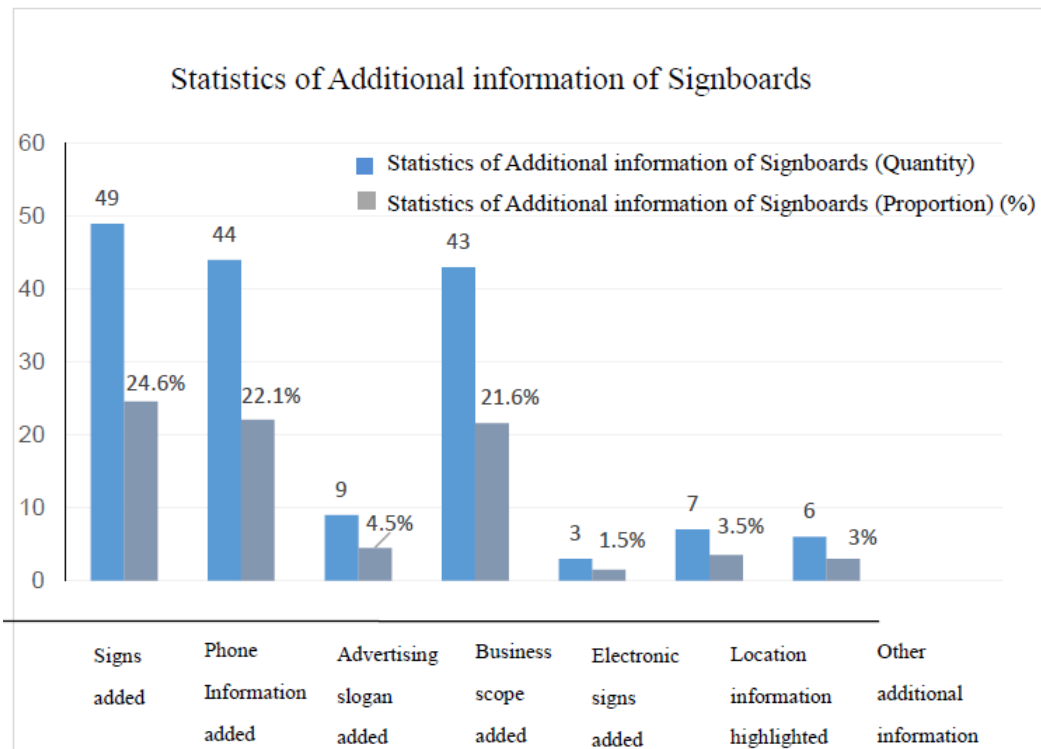


Figure 3. Histogram of Statistics of Additional information of Signboards

2.3 Distribution of Signboards with Various Features

As shown in Figure 3, the additional information of the signboards of the stores to some extent reflects the information about the consumer groups that these business entities want to attract. The survey shows that 112 stores have opted to add some information when making a signboard, and the signboards with additional information account for 56.3% of the total. The additional information includes business scopes, telephone information, advertising slogans, location information, etc.

Among the signboards with additional information, the number of signboards with added signs ranks first in the statistics, accounting for 24.6% of the total. This indicates that the business operators have a strong sense of brand and property rights. And 44 signboards have included phone information, accounting for 22% of the total. Telephone information can help consumers to contact the business operator in time in non-business hours. This will extend not only the business time but also the business scope. Statistics show that 43 stores have added their business scope to their signboards so as to provide consumers with directional and attractive information before they visit the store. 4.5% of the stores have added advertising information to their signboards. This indicates the intention of the storekeepers to actively expand their business and service. 3.5% of the stores have highlighted the locations of them, mainly because their locations are on the second floor or at other places not so easy to find, and the location information can make up for it.

3. Suggestions on Linguistic Landscape Construction in Foreign-related Streets in Border Regions

3.1 Improve the ability of related departments to provide language-related management and services

The development and cultural construction of a country or a city is an integrated project involving all aspects, where language-related policies and services play a special role. In the process of urban development, the language problem is increasingly outstanding. The unregulated wording on signboards or the abuse of languages without giving consideration to regional features and international factors will impede our urban cultural construction. Therefore, government departments as well as urban planners and builders should pay more attention to language-related management and services, taking them as an important part of urban planning and construction, and gradually improve the connotation and soft power of our urban construction.

3.2 Improve the management and regulation on multilingual signboards

With the growth of international trade and the mutual influence of languages, a mixture of different languages or a substitution of characters may be seen on signboards in many regions. In some cases, different languages are mixed together to create innovative expressions. Theoretically, the expressions written on the signboards need to reflect the formal characteristics of the language they belong to. But in fact, a lot of bilingual signs mainly are just repetitions or duplications of information and the texts just have been written following the Chinese rules for making words and sentences, causing some deviations in meaning. As one of the elements defining the image of a city, signboards play a role in conveying information and directions. Those signboards with incorrect information will not only impede commercial development and but also lower the overall quality level of business and urban civilization. As users of signboards, business operators should attach more importance to the regulated use of multilingual signboards, rather than just regarding them as a promotional gimmick. Maximizing the role of signboards in promotion on the conditions that their basic function—conveying information—works properly, it is the principle that business operators should follow. And the related government departments should strengthen the guidance for the use of multilingual signboards, and make plans for them while ensuring the regulated use of them, so as to fully develop and use local features.

3.3 Extract and highlight landscape characteristics and make more effort in linguistic landscape construction

Linguistic landscape serves as a business card of a city. The linguistic landscape formed by various languages on signboards in public places can convey information to residents, consumers and passengers, giving them a good impression on an authentic and fresh way. A country, a city or a region needs to build customized linguistic landscapes to deliver its characteristics and shape its unique image. The statuses of the languages used on signboards of stores and shops in ethnic minority regions offers food for thought. Chinese remains dominant; English follows, and the ability

of minority languages to convey information is weakening. However, in some regions, minority languages are also widely used on signboards and commercial symbols to highlight local features. The characteristics and effects of store signboards in minority regions deserve further research by and attention from scholars and policy-making departments.

In order to properly build up linguistic landscapes in a foreign-related commercial street of a border region, we should get a comprehensive understanding of the internationalized factors involved in the border region, define the target audiences, regulate the use of languages and deliver local features appropriately. Minority languages also have their unique statuses and symbolic meaning in shaping a linguistic landscape. Linguistic landscape planning and studying will help the development of minority languages, local features, the local tourism industry and local commercial trade.

Acknowledgments

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