EXPLORING THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF JINAN'S HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BLOCK: POLICY AND PRACTICE

LI, L.[1*] – SOON, C. T.[1] – SITI, R. B. J.[1]

[1] *Center for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Sabah, Malaysia.*

**Corresponding author*
e-mail: scarlettlizy[at]outlook.com

(Received 15th March 2026; revised 08th May 2026; accepted 18th May 2026)

Abstract. This study examines the relationship between language policy and linguistic landscape practice in the Furongjie-Baihuazhou historical and cultural block of Jinan. Based on the political and physical dimensions of Trumper-Hecht's analytical model, this study investigates whether signage in the physical dimension reflects government goals toward internationalization. A mixed-methods approach combines photographic data of 432 signs with an analysis of policy documents. Research findings reveal a significant gap between policy intentions and practices. While policies advocate for standardized bilingual signage, the landscape remains heavily Chinese-dominated, with 62.8% of official and 86.4% of non-official signs being strictly monolingual. Moreover, Chinese exhibits absolute visual salience in over 90% of bilingual and multilingual signs, alongside prevalent mistranslations and pragmatic failures. The study concludes that current practices fail to realize the internationalization goals, offering practical implications for enhancing the international language environment of historical blocks. These findings also provide useful directions for future policy implementation.
Keywords: *public signage, internationalization, physical dimension, political dimension*

Introduction

In the context of increasing global mobility and international tourism, the role of the linguistic landscape in public spaces has become increasingly important. The concept of the linguistic landscape was introduced by Landry and Bourhis (1997), who defined it as "the languages that appear on public street signs, billboards, street names, place names, store signs, and public signs on government buildings together constitute the linguistic landscape of a territory, region, or city group". Linguistic landscapes not only function as symbolic representations of space but also play a crucial role in facilitating communication in public settings. In contexts involving international visitors, the absence of multilingual signage may lead to misinterpretation of critical information. For instance, in a reported incident, two Chinese tourists were fatally injured at a tram crossing in Kobe, Japan, after misinterpreting monolingual Japanese safety warnings. This incident suggests that the absence of multilingual signage may create comprehension barriers for international visitors, highlighting that the linguistic landscape functions as a medium that affects communication efficiency, urban safety, and public service inclusiveness in the process of urban internationalization.

As municipal governments increasingly utilize public signage to project a city's global identity, Jinan, the capital of Shandong Province, has intensified its efforts toward internationalization, as outlined in the Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of Jinan City and the Long-Term Goals for 2035, which explicitly proposes the development of Jinan into a modern international

metropolis and a globally recognized cultural tourism destination. As a premier cultural tourism destination, the Furongjie-Baihuazhou historical and cultural block plays a crucial role in representing this international image. However, the realization of such urban internationalization goals faces significant challenges. Previous empirical investigations into Jinan's linguistic landscape have identified issues such as limited linguistic diversity, monolingual code dominance, inconsistencies, and non-standardized English translations in public signage (Chen, 2022). These issues affect the experience of international visitors and significantly undermine the city's progress toward becoming an international metropolis.

Academically, previous case studies of the linguistic landscape mostly focus on ethnic minority areas, commercial districts, and foreigner settlements, paying less attention to historical and cultural blocks, which embody the typical spatial contexts in China's new normal of urban development (Li, 2021). Furthermore, Chinese scholars rarely analyze the codes used in the linguistic landscape together with other factors in an integrated way. This study is based on the political and physical dimensions of Trumper-Hecht's Three-Dimensional Analytical Model to examine how the physical realization of the linguistic landscape aligns with the policy objectives of urban internationalization, using a corpus of 432 public signs and relevant policy documents.

Literature review

Linguistic landscape

Landry and Bourhis (1997) defined the linguistic landscape as "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". In linguistic landscape research, signs are commonly classified according to their producers into official signs and non-official signs (Spolsky and Cooper, 1991). Official signs are typically issued by governmental or institutional authorities, whereas non-official signs are produced by private businesses or individuals. Landry and Bourhis (1997) further proposed that the linguistic landscape serves two main functions, namely the informational function and the symbolic function. Research has also emphasized the relationship between linguistic landscape and language policy. Shohamy (2006) argues that public signage can function as an instrument of language policy, while Backhaus (2009) shows that the implementation of policy does not always correspond to actual linguistic practices.

Linguistic landscapes in historical and cultural blocks

Research on linguistic landscapes in historical and cultural blocks is relatively limited. Li and Xu (2017) first explored the linguistic landscape of Liyang in Mount Huangshan and found that foreign languages mainly serve an informational function, whereas Chinese performs both informational and symbolic functions. Their study also indicates that tourism influences the presence of multilingual signage. In the study of a Russian-style street in Dalian, report that signage is predominantly Chinese, with limited representation of other languages, which may constrain accessibility for non-Chinese readers. Similarly, Wu and Zhan (2022) examined language codes in two historical and cultural streets in Guangzhou from a glocalization perspective and found that Chinese functions as the dominant code, while English serves a secondary role.

Most research pays limited attention to policy factors. The relationship between linguistic landscape and language policy therefore requires further investigation.

Analytical frameworks

Several theoretical frameworks have been developed in linguistic landscape research. Scollon and Scollon (2003) propose the concept of geosemiotics, which examines the relationship between signs and their spatial placement. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) introduce a sociological framework that explains language choice in public signage through factors such as identity and power relations. The critical linguistic landscape paradigm advanced by Shohamy (2006), emphasize the role of language policy, ideology, and agency in shaping linguistic landscapes. Building on these approaches, Trumper-Hecht (2010) proposes a three-dimensional analytical model, which includes the physical, experiential, and political dimensions. This model provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing linguistic landscapes. In the present study, the analysis focuses on the physical dimension and the political dimension to examine the relationship between linguistic landscape practices and policy objectives.

Policy documents

Policy documents concerning public signage in China encompass both national and municipal administrative levels. At the national level, the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language requires the use of standard Chinese in public domains. In addition, the Regulations on the Translation and Writing of English in Public Service Fields provide guidance on the use of English in public service areas, encouraging the translation of public signage into English while maintaining consistency with Standard Chinese. At the municipal level, policies in Jinan emphasize urban and tourism development. The Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of Jinan City and the Long-Term Goals for 2035 explicitly proposes developing Jinan into a modern international metropolis and a globally recognized cultural tourism destination. Previous studies indicate that policy requirements are not always fully implemented in practice. Backhaus (2009) shows that linguistic landscapes may diverge from official regulations. This discrepancy between policy and practice constitutes an important issue in linguistic landscape research and forms the focus of the present study.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design grounded in Trumper-Hecht (2010) Three-Dimensional Analytical Model, focusing specifically on the physical and political dimensions. For the physical dimension, the primary instrument is a corpus of photographic data. As McEnery and Hardie (2012) state, corpora are structured, principled, and representative bodies of data designed for empirical linguistic research. This corpus is utilized to conduct quantitative statistical analysis of landscape types and language code combinations, alongside qualitative textual evaluation of multilingual information and translation quality on public signage. For the political dimension, the study employs a policy document analysis. According to Babbie (2016) and Scott (1990), the analysis of policy documents through archival methods is an established approach for investigating the intent and outcomes of public policy. This method

qualitatively explores governmental ideologies, policy orientations, and the alignment between policy intent and urban internationalization goals. This study was conducted in Jinan, the capital and the political, economic, cultural, and financial hub of Shandong Province in mid-eastern China, covering a total area of 10,244.45 square kilometers. Driven by accelerated internationalization efforts and robust foreign trade, Jinan is actively enhancing its global influence. The research focuses on the Furongjie-Baihuazhou historical and cultural block, which is a prominent tourist destination in the city. Featuring rich linguistic landscape resources, this vital intersection of local culture and international tourism provides an ideal setting for this examination. To ensure spatial representativeness, data collection targeted a continuous tourist route encompassing Furong Street, Qushuiting Street, the perimeter of the Baihuazhou water area, and Xigengdao Street. These interconnected locations collectively ensure a highly representative sample for this study.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach integrated within the three-dimensional space theory of Trumper-Hecht (2010). To investigate the physical dimension, a corpus of 432 valid photographs of fixed public signs was collected from the research site between August and October 2024. Following the criteria of Backhaus (2007), these signs were systematically coded into official and non-official categories. Linguistic features were analyzed using the visual-semiotic approach of Scollon and Scollon (2003) to determine language salience, while the functional relationships between language codes were classified according to the typology of Reh (2004). Furthermore, expert translators audited the corpus for translational accuracy and the quality of linguistic expression. For the political dimension, qualitative content analysis was applied to relevant policy documents concerning public signage, language use, and urban development collected from official national and municipal websites. Finally, this study synthesizes findings from the physical dimension with political dimension to investigate whether the linguistic landscape is consistent with the city's international positioning.

Results and Discussion

Code types

The data for the physical dimension comprises 432 public signs. In terms of ownership, there are 145 official signs (33.6%) and 287 non-official signs (66.4%). This distribution indicates that private actors contribute more than twice as many signs as official institutions in the surveyed area. The distribution of code types in official and non-official signs is shown in *Table 1*. A comparative analysis of code types reveals a significant discrepancy between official and non-official signage regarding language diversity. While both sectors are dominated by Standard Chinese, the non-official sector exhibits a much higher degree of monolingualism. Official Signage: Nearly two-thirds (62.8%, n=91) of official signs are monolingual. These signs exclusively feature Standard Chinese to convey regulatory or administrative information. A representative example is the normative sign "禁止携带宠物入园" (BH005S, No Pets Allowed in the Area), which utilizes only Standard Chinese to communicate behavioral restrictions to the public. Bilingual signs, predominantly pairing Chinese and English for road directions , represent the smallest official proportion at 17.2% (n=25).A representative example is the road direction sign "北 芙蓉街 南 / North Furong Street South"

(FR174B). Multilingual signs, constitute 20.0% (n=29) of the official corpus. These are primarily reserved for critical safety alerts, such as the "小心地滑/ CAUTION Wet Floor/ 滑りやすいので、ご注意！/ 바닥이 미끄러우니 조심하세요" (BH062M), which employs a four-language format comprising Chinese, English, Japanese, and Korean to ensure international accessibility. These signs are all concentrated in the Baihuazhou water area revealing a localized administrative intervention rather than a systemic urban transformation.

Table 1. *Distribution of code types in official and non-official signage.*

Code Type	Official Signage (N=145)	Non-Official Signage (N=287)
Monolingual	62.8% (n=91)	86.4% (n=248)
Bilingual	17.2% (n=25)	13.2% (n=38)
Multilingual	20.0% (n=29)	0.3% (n=1)
Total	100% (N=145)	100% (N=287)

Non-official Signage: The monolingual tendency is far more pronounced in the bottom-up linguistic landscape, where 86.4% (n=248) of signs feature only one language. The vast majority of these are Chinese-only storefronts, such as the "臭豆腐" (QSS137, Stinky tofu) which can only serve the local tourists. Bilingual signs represent a minority of 13.2% (n=38) and are typically found in established brands, such as the "中国福利彩票 / CHINA WELFARE LOTTERY" (QS158B), where English is added to align with corporate identity. Multilingual signs account for only 0.3% (n=1). The sole instance is the "越南中原传奇咖啡 TRUNG NGUYÊN LEGEND" (XG055M), which incorporates Vietnamese, English, and Chinese to highlight its international origins as a brand name. This data demonstrates that the internationalization of the linguistic landscape relies on top-down administrative force, failing to trigger organic bottom-up integration within the broader commercial sector.

Linguistic salience

The distribution of salient language in official and non-official signage is shown in *Table 2*. When foreign languages are present, the visual hierarchy reveals an almost unanimous preference for Chinese dominance across both official and non-official domains. This section analyzes the distribution of the salient language based on the visual hierarchy of font size, spatial positioning, and color prominently used on bilingual and multilingual signs. Official Signage: In the visual hierarchy of official bilingual and multilingual signs, Chinese serves as the salient language in 98.1% (n=53) of cases. This dominance is primarily established through a vertical layout where the Chinese text is positioned at the top in a larger or bolder font, or a horizontal layout with Chinese on the left. A representative example is the multilingual warning sign "小心地滑/ CAUTION Wet Floor/ 滑りやすいので、ご注意！/ 바닥이 미끄러우니 조심하세요" (BH062M). It establishes textual dominance through a hierarchical layout: the Standard Chinese characters are positioned at the top in a significantly larger font than the English, Japanese, and Korean text below (*Figure 1*). The single instance where English is the salient language is the tourism promotion sign "Friendly Shan

dong / 好客山东" (FR402B), where the English slogan is placed at the top in a larger, stylized font.

***Table 2**. Distribution of salient language in official and non-official signage.*

Salient language	Official signage (N=54)	Non-official signage (N=39)
Chinese	98.1% (n=53)	92.3% (n=36)
English	1.9% (n=1)	7.7% (n=3)
Total	100% (N=54)	100% (N=39)

***Figure 1.** Official sign with Chinese salience.*

Non-official Signage: Similar to the official sector, Chinese dominates the visual hierarchy in 92.3% (n=36) of non-official bilingual signs. In most cases, Chinese occupies the top or left position in a prominent font, such as the restaurant sign "泉水小酒馆 / SPRING BISTRO" (XG045B, *Figure 2*). English serves as the salient language in only 7.7% (n=3) of signs, primarily limited to international brand identifiers or decorative logos. For instance, the sign for "MAGIC SHOP" (QS035B) features the English brand name as the primary visual identifier. This shared visual strategy demonstrates that across both top-down and bottom-up linguistic landscapes, foreign languages are positioned as auxiliary or symbolic elements rather than primary information carriers.

***Figure 2.** Non-official sign with Chinese salience.*

Multilingual information relations

The functional relationships between languages, as categorized by the typology of Reh (2004), highlight a sharp contrast in communicative intent between institutional and commercial actors. The distribution of multilingual information relations in official and non-official signage is shown in *Table 3*. Official Signage: A vast majority of official bilingual and multilingual signs (87.0%, n=47) exhibit a duplicating relationship, where the foreign language provides a full and equivalent translation of the Chinese message. This aligns with the political vision of a "service-oriented" international city. A typical

example is the road direction sign "北 芙蓉街 南 / North Furong Street South" (FR174B), where the English text provides equivalent information to the Chinese source (*Figure 3*). Fragmentary relations are limited to 13.0% (n=7) of cases, such as the warning sign "严禁攀爬 / No Climbing" (FR385B), which only translates the core prohibition. Non-official Signage: The functional logic shifts dramatically in the private sector, where the duplicating type accounts for only 38.5% (n=15) of signs, such as the hotel nameplate "海右旅行艺术酒店 / Haiyou Travel Art Hotel" (FR384B). Fragmentary (33.3%, n=13), complementary (17.9%, n=7), and overlapping (10.3%, n=4) relationships are more prevalent. For example, the fragmentary sign "藍胖胖的時光機" (Blue chubby's time machine, FR184B, *Figure 4*) only translates the core brand concept "TIME MACHINE" while leaving detailed product descriptions exclusively in Chinese. Furthermore, the complementary sign for "微醺酒咖·牛排餐厅" (Tipsy Wine & Coffee Steakhouse, FR411B, *Figure 5*) uses English "AMERICAN COUNTRY / HAWI TOWN /" symbolically to establish atmosphere while Chinese practically details the food offerings. These findings suggest that while official actors prioritize information accuracy, private actors utilize foreign languages as symbolic ornaments to establish a "Western" or "modern" atmosphere, often sacrificing information completeness for symbolic value

***Table 3**. Distribution of multilingual information relations in official and non-official signage.*

Information relation	Official signage (N=54)	Non-official signage (N=39)
Duplicating	87.0% (n=47)	38.5% (n=15)
Fragmentary	13.0% (n=7)	33.3% (n=13)
Overlapping	0.0% (n=0)	10.3% (n=4)
Complementary	0.0% (n=0)	17.9% (n=7)
Total	100% (N=54)	100% (N=39)

***Figure 3.** Official sign with duplicating information relation.*

***Figure 4.** Non-official sign with fragmentary information relation.*

Figure 5. *Non-official sign with complementary information relation.*

Translation and expression quality

The quality of linguistic expression further highlights the gap between political intent and the physical reality of the linguistic landscape. This analysis focuses on the English quality of signs exhibiting a duplicating relationship, as they directly aim for semantic equivalence. Official Signage: While 46.8% (n=22) of official duplicating signs feature accurate translations, 53.2% (n=25) are categorized as inaccurate or inconsistent. Official errors are often characterized by pragmatic failures and terminology inconsistency. For instance, the sign "**禁止渔猎 禁止放生**" (BH009M, *Figure 6*) is translated as "No Fishing No Hunting No Life Release Activity"; the term "Life Release" is a direct translation of a religious concept, resulting in a severe pragmatic failure in the context of a public park regulation (*Figure 6*). Additionally, inconsistencies are observed in facility naming, where "**公共卫生间**" is translated as "Toilet" (QS025B) on some signs and "RESTROOM" (BH133M) on others, undermining standardization. Non-official Signage: In the private sector, 66.7% (n=10) of duplicating signs demonstrate accurate translations, while 33.3% (n=5) are inaccurate. Errors here are more "surface-level," consisting primarily of orthographic mistakes and syntactic redundancy. A representative example is the sign for "**芝士火鸡面烤冷面**" (Grilled Cold Noodles with Spicy Chicken Noodles & Cheese, FR248B, *Figure 7*), which is translated as "GRILLED COLDNOODLES WITH TURKEY NOODLES WITH CHEESS", containing the spelling error "CHEESS", missing spaces, and redundant syntax. This data demonstrates that the linguistic landscape suffers from a dual deficit: official signage fails at the level of deep pragmatic and terminological consistency, while non-official signage lacks basic orthographic accuracy, collectively hindering the city's internationalization goals.

Figure 6. *Official sign with pragmatic failure in English translation.*

Figure 7. *Non-official sign with orthographic error & mistranslation in English translation.*

Conclusion

This study demonstrates a significant structural discrepancy between the governmental political vision of urban internationalization and the physical reality of the linguistic landscape within Jinan's historical and cultural block. The empirical findings reveal that while the official sector achieves high standards of multilingualism through localized administrative interventions, specifically concentrated in high-stakes zones like the Baihuazhou water area where 20.0% of signage is multilingual, the broader commercial sector remains predominantly monolingual, with an 86.4% reliance on Standard Chinese. The functional analysis further indicates that official signage prioritizes informational equivalence despite deep-level pragmatic failures, whereas non-official signage frequently employs foreign languages as symbolic ornaments characterized by low orthographic accuracy. This disparity demonstrates that the current internationalization of the linguistic landscape relies on top-down administrative force rather than organic bottom-up integration. Consequently, the municipal government should transition toward a dual-track management strategy, combining rigorous pragmatic auditing for official signage with the provision of standardized linguistic service platforms to support private commercial actors in aligning their signage with the city's international branding goals.

Acknowledgement

This research is self-funded.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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