JEL Journal of English Language and Linguistics
Vol. 6 No. 2 (May–August) 2025
ISSN:2730-2431 (Print)
ISSN:2821-952x (Online)

The Role of English in the Linguistic Landscape of the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit): A Linguistic Landscape Study

Sattawat Chaiyasit[1], Kamonwan Richter[2*]

[1]*Department of English for Business Communication, Faculty of Science and Arts, Burapha University, Chanthaburi Campus, Thailand*

[2]*Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Education, Universität Hamburg, Germany*

APA Citation:

Chaiyasit, S., & Richter, K. (2025). The role of English in the linguistic landscape of the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit): A linguistic landscape study. *Journal of English Language and Linguistics, 6*(2), 280-296. https://doi.org/10.62819/jel.2025.1172

Received: June 15, 2025
Revised: July 30, 2025
Accepted: July 31, 2025

Abstract

Transport terminals are more than places for catching buses—they are spaces where languages meet real passengers. In Thailand, where people from different regions and countries pass through every day, signage plays an important role in helping everyone find their way. This study looks at how English is used on signs at Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit), a major hub for both Thai passengers and migrant workers. Using Ben-Rafael's (2006) framework, the research analyzed 290 signs collected through fieldwork in May 2024. The results showed that while bilingual signs dominated (183 signs, 63.10%), the terminal also displayed monolingual signs (99 signs, 34.14%) and a small number of trilingual signs (1 sign, 0.34%). Most bilingual signage combines Thai and English, with government signs offering more balanced language presentation than those made by private companies. While English helps with basic communication, it often appears in smaller fonts and with inconsistent quality—especially in bottom-up signage. Interestingly, Chinese was not found, and only a few signs used Burmese or Lao, despite the large number of regional travelers. These patterns suggest that while English is visible, it's not always accessible. The study highlights how language on signs reflects broader issues of inclusion, mobility, and policy, especially in spaces meant to serve the public.

Keywords: English signage, linguistic landscape, multilingual communication, role of English, transport hub

* Corresponding Author.

E-mail address: ksangkasenakul@outlook.com

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) and Bélanger and Walker (2020) reported that effective public signage should support the elderly and the disabled in the city. In other words, these signages should have multisensory input, including large font, icons, Braille, and audio for limited-function users such as the elderly and the disabled. Several developed counties provide signage accessible for all. For example, main train stations in Japan offer Braille signage, multilingual digital boards, and audio announcements in several languages. This reflects that effective signage can facilitate for all groups of people.

Even in the ASEAN community, which consists of 11 countries, the launch of a single market in 2015 has led to increased collaboration, goods and services, investment, and movement of the workforce. Inevitably, English plays a role as a medium to communicate among ASEAN members. This change has led to the signages being used in the broader contexts. The question is whether these signs, especially in Thailand, serve the purpose for this new users' group, such as migrant workers from neighboring countries. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of the English language on signage in the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit) and to explore how English is presented on signage in the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit). In this paper, linguistic landscape (LL) was proposed as one of the alternatives to develop signs for developing signage use in the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit), Thailand.

Literature Review

1. Linguistic Landscape (LL) and Approaches to Linguistic Landscape (LL) Studies

The study of linguistic landscapes has expanded quickly in the last two decades and has been applied in many contexts—from big cities to small communities, from tourist attractions to transport hubs. Different scholars view LL from different angles, depending on their research focus. In general, LL studies look at how languages are used in public spaces through visible signs like billboards, street signs, posters, shop names, and government notices. These signs show not only which languages are used but also reflect deeper issues like social power, accessibility, identity, and language policy.

The most well-known definition of LL comes from Landry and Bourhis (1997), who describe it as the "visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs." This means what languages appear and how visible they are in a given place. Later on, Ben-Rafael and colleagues (2006) expanded this idea by describing LL as the symbolic construction of public space using language. Their approach is widely used in LL research, especially in studies that look at both who creates the signs and why they are made that way.

A key framework from Ben-Rafael (2006) is the division between top-down and bottom-up signs. Top-down signs are made by official bodies like government agencies or transport authorities.

Bottom-up signs come from private companies, shops, or even individuals. This distinction helps us understand how different groups contribute to the public language display and how power is distributed. For example, in some places, government signs may use formal Thai and English, while private signs might include regional languages or creative spellings.

Recently, many scholars also talk about multimodality—which means looking beyond just the language on the sign. LL is now seen as part of visual communication that includes font, colors, logos, images, size, and layout. Kramsch (2014) called LL "discourse in action" because signs do more than just give information—they create meaning, shape how we feel in that space, and even tell us who belongs or doesn't belong there.

LL studies can be quantitative, where researchers count signs and compare language frequencies, or qualitative, where they interpret meanings or talk to people about what the signs mean to them. More recent work looks at LL through a critical lens, focusing on inclusion, exclusion, and how certain languages (like English or Chinese) are used for economic reasons, especially in tourist or business areas.

In this study at Bangkok Bus Terminal, Ben-Rafael's approach was used to categorize signs from government and private bus operators. This helped us explore not just what languages were used, but also the deeper meanings behind the language choices, the sign formats, and the people they aim to serve.

2. Role of English on Signage in Public Transport Hubs

The role of English serves as a medium of communication in signage in different ways. It means that signage in public space could have English as an option for users. When looking at transportation signage around the world, English often plays different—but overlapping—roles, depending on the setting. These functions can be clearly illustrated through real research from various countries and transport settings.

2.1 Communicative and Navigational Function

English helps people move through spaces, follow instructions, and understand services. This function is dominant in highly mobile areas like airports and train stations. For instance, De Los Reyes (2014) showed how English signage in Metro Manila's train stations guided passenger behavior and gave clear instructions. Similarly, Ayyub and Rohmah (2024) noted that English in Kotabaru Malang Station in Indonesia appeared on signs about directions, ticketing, and safety. Ngampramuan (2022) found consistent English use across signage at Suvarnabhumi International Airport in Thailand.

2.2 Symbolic and Prestige Function

English also works on a symbolic level. It suggests modernity, globalization, and internationalization. Pipattarasakul (2021) observed that English at Bangkok's Hua Lamphong Station was not just for directions. It provided an international atmosphere and was inclusive for foreign passengers. image. Ilmia (2022) found that at Juanda International Airport, English was used not only to help travelers but also to make the airport appear more international and appealing to global audiences. Likewise, English signage in Zurich's banking district signaled economic global positioning.

2.3 Inclusivity and Accessibility Function

English is used to ensure access for those who don't speak local languages—especially international visitors. In Khon Kaen, Chanthao and Kobbun (2024) found that English was used to accommodate tourists in a setting that also included Thai and Chinese. Woo and Riget (2020) documented the same at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, where English supported multilingual travelers alongside Malay and Chinese.

2.4 Policy-Driven or Institutional Function

In some countries, English signage is shaped by official policy. In India, English is often mandated alongside regional languages in train stations and airports, functioning as a link language (Ilmia, 2022). Across all these examples, English serves more than one role. It helps people move, signals international identity, and ensures accessibility. These previous studies help clarify how and why English continues to dominate the linguistic landscapes of transport hubs worldwide.

3. Studies of LL in Thailand

In Thailand, especially at major international transport hubs, English plays both functional and symbolic roles. At Bangkok Railway Station (Hua Lamphong), English was extensively used to create an international atmosphere, primarily serving tourists. The multilingual signs—Thai, English, Chinese, French, Japanese, Burmese, Bahasa Melayu, and Yawee—primarily utilized English for enhanced navigation, providing vital information and safety guidelines (Pipattarasakul, 2021).

Studies at Suvarnabhumi International Airport indicate an increase in trilingual signage (Thai, English, and Chinese) driven by rising numbers of Chinese tourists. Despite the increased languages, English maintained its role as the primary foreign language, reflecting its indispensable status as a global lingua franca essential for accommodating diverse international visitors (Ngampramuan, 2022).

In Khon Kaen's transport hubs, multilingual signage prominently included Thai, English, and Chinese, reflecting strong economic and tourist connections with China. Even with the presence

of Chinese, English remained essential for general navigation and information distribution (Chanthao & Kobbun, 2024).

Across global, regional, and local settings, English remains vital in the linguistic landscapes of transport hubs. Its extensive use highlights its role as a lingua franca, crucial for international communication, effective navigation, and facilitating commerce in increasingly multilingual and interconnected transportation environments.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the role of the English language on signage in the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit)
2. To explore how English is presented on signage at the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit)

Methodology

This section covers research design, criteria for selecting data to study, instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

1. Research Design

This study examines the linguistic landscape of Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit), the largest and busiest bus terminal in Thailand. The terminal serves a diverse range of users, including Thai nationals, international tourists, and regional migrant workers. The study focuses on how English and other languages are used, displayed, and organized in public signage throughout the hub. This study employs a mixed method to find the frequency of languages and sizes in signage and to examine the role of English on signage.

2. Criteria on Selecting Data to Study

The data in this study were 290 signs in the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit). The data were discussed on the criteria for the selection of the site and the signage.

2.1 Selection of Site and Signage
2.1.1 Site

In Thailand, there are several ways of public transport, such as airport, SkyTrain, Metro, Tuk Tuk, and bus. Previous studies were presented in Table 1.

Table 1
A Summary of Studies in LL in Thailand

Transport Hub	Author (s)	Findings
Khon Kaen International Airport, Railway Station, and Khon Kaen Bus Terminal	Chanthao, R. & Kobbun, P., 2024	Bilingual (Thai and English) and trilingual (Thai, English, and Chinese) signs were found. The size of letters identified the travel routes to Laos and China.
Suvarnabhumi Airport	Ngampramuan, 2022	The role of Chinese signage in the airport with the increasing Chinese tourists was examined, and English was still dominant.
Hua Lampong, a major railway train terminal	Pipattarasakul (2021)	Aside from main languages on signs, several neighborhood languages were found in the railway station to accommodate the passengers.
Skytrain	Sutthinaraphan (2016)	Advertisements on 3 stations of SkyTrain in Bangkok.
Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang International Airports, and the Sothern Bus Terminal	Ngampramuan, 2010	The correlation of English signs and tourists were studied. Top-down and bottom-up approach were also investigated.

Among LL studies in public transport in Thailand in the past, several transport hubs were studied, such as main airports, railways, SkyTrain, and bus terminals. Looking at years of studies, some studies were outdated. To examine the current conditions and identify existing research gaps, this study focuses on the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit), a major transport hub that has not yet been investigated.

2.1.1.1 The Bangkok Bus Terminal

Situated in Chatuchak in Bangkok, it is a transportation hub for passengers commuting to the North, Northeast, East, Central region, and some parts of the South of Thailand. It also provides some routes for neighboring countries. The routes provided are covered to major areas in Thailand, such as the north, south, northeast, east, west, and border areas. Furthermore, there was research conducted at Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit), which is the largest and has the most passengers, both local and foreign.

Within the four-floor hub, there are two main entrances: Entrance and Exit. The first floor is a terminal for buses to the North, East, and Central regions. The second and fourth floors are areas for bus offices. For the third floor, it is the Northeast terminal. The overall area is 27,000 sq. m.

Passenger numbers at the Bangkok Bus Terminal have fluctuated significantly over the past five years (see Table 2). In 2020, the terminal saw its highest number of users at 3,354,000, but this dropped dramatically to 708,000 in 2022, apparently due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, numbers have been steadily recovering, with 2,137,902 passengers in 2023 and 1,193,041 recorded in just the first half of the 2024 fiscal year. This steady growth highlights the terminal's recovery and the increasing need for clear, multilingual signage to serve its diverse and growing number of users, making this research especially relevant now.

Table 2

Numbers of Passengers Using Service in Each Fiscal Year

Fiscal Year	Number of Passengers
2024 (October 2023–March 2024)	1,193,041
2023	2,137,902
2022	708,000
2021	1,454,000
2020	3,354,000

Note. Last Updated on 29 April 2024. The Transport Co., Ltd.

2.1.2 Signage

The selection of signage followed two main criteria. First, signs had to be publicly visible to travelers and located in areas that did not require special access permissions. In addition, each sign had to contain written text in at least one language. Both fixed printed signs and digital screens were included to capture a comprehensive view of signage types used in the terminal. Temporary handwritten notes, advertisements unrelated to transportation, and signs located inside staff-only areas were excluded from the sample. The goal was to focus on signs intended for public communication that shaped travelers' navigation, access to services, and understanding of the space.

A purposive sampling approach was used to collect the data. The signs were selected, including high-traffic areas such as ticket counters, information booths, main entrances, waiting areas, and platforms from the first and third floors, which are the areas for selling tickets. Signage with handwritten goods and services from merchants and temporary signage were excluded since they do not reflect the languages for official communication in the bus terminal.

In total, 290 signs were photographed during the fieldwork conducted in May 2024. This approach ensured that the dataset reflected a broad range of signage functions and language presentations while focusing on signs relevant to travelers' experiences at the terminal.

2.2 Instrument

There were two research instruments used in this study: the mobile phone and Ms. Excel.
To collect photos of signage in the Bangkok Bus Terminal, a Samsung A52s was used. The data were saved in .jpeg files. In addition, the data collection was stored and categorized in Ms. Excel to analyze the data as in the following Table 3.

Table 3

Ms. Excel format to analyze the obtained data

		Monolingual										Bilingual						Trilingual		
		TH	43.17	EN	1.09	Mynmar	54.64	Lao	0.55	Total	99.45	TH - EN		TH-MYN		TH-LAO		TH-EN-Mynmar		
	top down		-			1	100.00		-	101.00		5	2.94				5.00		0	0
1st floor outside	bottom up	2	2.53	1	50		-	1	100.00	4.00			0.00				0.00		0	0
	top down	5	6.33		0				-	5.00		12	7.06				12.00		0	0
1st flor booth	bottom up	6	7.59		0					6.00		36	21.18				36.00	1	100	1
	top down	21	26.58		0					21.00		25	14.71				25.00		0	0
1st floor inside	bottom up	3	3.80		0					3.00		14	8.24				14.00		0	0
	top down	13	16.46	1	50					14.00		9	5.29			1	10.00		0	0
3rd floor	bottom up	29	36.71		0					29.00		69	40.59			1	70.00		0	0
	Total	**79**	**100.00**	**2**	**100**	**1**	**100**	**1**	**100**	**183.00**		**170**	**100.00**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**172.00**	**1**	**100**	**1**
	top down	39	49.367	1	50	1	100	0	0			51	30.00	0	0	1	52.00	0	0	
	bottom up	40	50.633	1	50	0	0	1	100			119	70.00	0	0	1	120.00	1	100	

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected on-site through photography techniques. The fieldwork took place in May 2024. Photographs were taken systematically throughout the terminal to ensure coverage of different sections and signage types. The dataset included both fixed printed signs and digital screens but excluded private staff areas and temporary handwritten notes as previously explained. The collected signs were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative categorization with qualitative description. Each sign was categorized based on ownership (top-down or bottom-up), language use (Thai, English, Chinese, Burmese, Lao, or others), and communicative function (informational, instructional, or directional). Visual elements such as font size and placement were also examined to understand the visual orders of languages on each sign. Special attention was given to the appearance and positioning of English relative to Thai and other languages.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize language presence, sizes of characters of signage, signage ownership, and communicative functions. Percentages were applied in this session. Qualitative observations were made regarding the visual prominence and design strategies that affected language visibility and accessibility. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of how English and other languages were used and displayed at the terminal.

2.3.1 Coding and Categorization

After data collection, each sign was categorized according to several key coding criteria. First, ownership was recorded, identifying whether the sign was created by government or official authorities (top-down) or by private businesses or individuals (bottom-up). Second, language presence was noted as frequencies, documenting which languages appeared on each sign: monolingual, bilingual, trilingual, and multilingual. Then each language was identified as Thai, English, Chinese, Burmese, Lao, or other. Third, the communicative function of each sign was categorized into informational, instructional, or directional purposes, depending on the primary goal of the message. Finally, visual characteristics were analyzed, focusing on the font size and placement. This coding framework allowed for both quantitative summary of patterns and qualitative interpretation of language visibility, hierarchy, and communicative effectiveness.

3. Research Ethics

This study was approved as exempt from human subject research on 3 April 2024 from Burapha University. The data collection involved photographing signage at the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit), without including any identifiable images of people, such as faces or names. All photographs were used solely for analysis purposes and were securely destroyed after the data had been analyzed and the findings validated.

Results

This section discussed the research findings from the collected signage qualitatively. The overall collected signs from the Bangkok bus terminal were 290, showing notable patterns in language use and multilingual practices in the signage. Signs were categorized as monolingual, bilingual, or trilingual, and the specific languages used were identified to determine both the degree of multilingualism and the proportion of languages represented.

From Table 4, which shows the signage type of 290 signs at the Bangkok Bus Terminal, the majority were bilingual, approximately 63.10% (183 signs), indicating a strong tendency to provide information in more than one language. Monolingual signs were the second most common, making up 34.14% (99 signs). A small proportion of the signs—0.34% (1 sign)—were trilingual, suggesting limited capability of extensive multilingual signage.

Table 4
Types of Signage by Language Use at the Bangkok Bus Terminal

Type	Number of Signage	Percentage
Monolingual	99	34.14%
Bilingual	183	63.10%
Trilingual	1	0.34%
Total	290	100%

Table 4 presents the languages used in the transport hub in 2024. Overall, there were 290 signs, with the number of bottom-up signs (69.66%) notably double the number of top-down signs (30.34%).

In terms of languages, it can be seen that the group of bilingual signs was most prevalent, composing 63.79% of all signage, followed by monolingual (35.86%) and trilingual (0.34%) signs, respectively. According to the data, the bilingual signs included the following languages: Thai and English signs were used the most at 98.92%, followed by an equal percentage of Thai-Burmese and Thai-Lao at 0.54%.

In addition, monolingual signs included Thai (95.20%), English (1.92%), Lao (1.92%), and Burmese (0.96%), respectively. Thai clearly dominated among the languages used, followed by Lao and Myanmar, respectively. However, there is an only one trilingual sign for which the languages were Thai, English, and Burmese.

Table 5

Languages Employed on Signs and Signage Ownership at Bangkok Bus Terminal

	Monolingual				Bilingual			Trilingual	
	Thai	English	Lao	Bur	Th - En	Th - Bur	Th - Lao	Th-En-Bur	Total
Top-down	32	-	-	1	55	-	-	-	88
Bottom-up	67	2	2	-	128	1	1	1	202
Total	99	2	2	1	183	1	1	1	290

Note. Bur = Burmese, Th-En = Thai and English, Th-Bur = Thai and Burmese, and Th-En-Bur = Thai-English-Burmese.

Signage Ownership

Government-provided top-down signage accounted for approximately 62% of the sample, while private bottom-up signage made up about 38%. In top-down signage, English was generally presented consistently alongside Thai, often following formal translation conventions. In contrast, bottom-up signs created by private businesses showed much more variation in language inclusivity. Importantly, private companies were more responsive to local linguistic diversity. While government signs focused primarily on Thai-English combinations, private operators included neighboring country languages that government signage did not provide. For example, private companies offered Thai-Burmese (1 sign), Thai-Lao (1 sign), and even trilingual Thai-English-Burmese (1 sign) combinations, directly serving migrant workers and travelers from neighboring countries. This linguistic flexibility demonstrates that private operators are more responsive to their actual user base and willing to accommodate regional languages that reflect the terminal's diverse passenger demographics.

While government signs maintained standardized Thai-English formats, private companies filled important linguistic gaps by providing localized language services that government signage overlooked. This suggests that bottom-up signage, despite its inconsistencies, may actually be more inclusive of the terminal's multilingual reality, particularly for users from Myanmar and Laos who rely on the terminal for cross-border transportation.

Figure 1

Monolingual Signs Provided by Private and Public Companies in Bangkok Bus Terminal

Private Company

Public Sector

Figure 2

Bilingual Signs Provided by Private and Public Companies in Bangkok Bus Terminal

Private Company

Public Sector

Figure 3
A Trilingual Provided by a Private Company in Bangkok Bus Terminal

Table 6
Size of Languages Scripts on Bilingual Signs

	Bigger Thai	Bigger English	Equal	Total
Top-down	5	0	55	60
Bottom-up	122	0	4	126
Total	127	0	59	186

The analysis of bilingual signage at Bangkok Bus Terminal based on table 5 revealed a clear visual hierarchy mainly in Thai. Out of 186 bilingual signs, 127 signs (68.28%) displayed Thai text in a larger size compared to English, while 59 signs (31.72%) presented both languages in equal size. Notably, none of the signs used a larger font for English.

A closer look at the ownership of signs shows a distinct pattern. In top-down government signage, Thai and English were usually presented with equal prominence; 55 out of 60 top-down bilingual signs (91.67%) showed equal font size for both languages, while only 5 signs displayed Thai text in a larger size. In contrast, bottom-up signage produced by private businesses overwhelmingly prioritized Thai. Of the 126 bottom-up bilingual signs, 122 signs (96.83%) used larger Thai fonts, and only 4 signs (3.17%) maintained equal size between Thai and English.

These findings suggested that while official government signage tends to align with more balanced bilingual practices, private signage reflects a stronger linguistic dominance of Thai. This pattern highlights the influence of ownership on language visibility and demonstrates that visual layout plays a significant role in signaling linguistic hierarchy in public spaces. The absence of larger English scripts also indicates that English, although used functionally to aid communication, is visually positioned as a secondary language throughout the terminal.

Table 7
Language Functions of Signs

Function	Top-down	Bottom-up	Total
To provide information	207	33	240
To provide instructions	0	48	48
To give directions	0	5	5
Total	207	83	290

According to the signage analysis, we can group the signs based on their purposes as follows: to provide information, to provide instructions, and to give directions. Notably, the function of providing information for passengers was the most at 82.75%, followed by providing instructions at 16.55% and giving directions at 1.72%.

The signs on private companies were governed by The Transport Co., Ltd., to assign the sign pattern. In the time of collecting data, it is a transformation of the signs—meaning that they encouraged the private companies to use LED TVs to display the information of each booth, which the big companies can respond to immediately while small companies are changing the signs slowly.

Communicative Functions of Signs

Most signs served informational functions, providing general information such as service details, schedules, or area names. Approximately 68% of the signs were categorized as informational. Instructional signs, which gave rules or commands (e.g., "No Smoking," "Queue Here"), made up around 20% of the sample. Directional signs, such as arrows guiding passengers to platforms or exits, represented the remaining 12%. English was used most consistently in directional and informational signage but much less so in instructional signs, where messages were often presented only in Thai.

Role and Effectiveness of English

English generally supported basic navigation through the terminal, particularly in top-down signage. However, its effectiveness was limited. English translations often provided surface-level information, such as location names or simple directional cues, but rarely appeared in detailed explanations or safety instructions. In private bottom-up signage, English use was inconsistent, and translation errors were not uncommon. Furthermore, the smaller font size and secondary placement of English reduced its visibility for non-Thai readers. These patterns suggest that while English plays a functional role as a lingua franca at Bangkok Bus Terminal, it is not fully optimized to meet the communication needs of all travelers, especially those unfamiliar with Thai. based on the results of 4 aspects, misconceptions of making signage policies.

In summary, this study aimed to answer two main objectives: first, to examine the role of the English language on signage in the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit), and second, to explore how English is presented across different types of signage. The findings confirmed that English plays a practical role in supporting communication for non-Thai speakers, especially in top-down signage where Thai and English are often treated more equally. However, in bottom-up signs, English is commonly used in smaller fonts, in incomplete forms, or as an afterthought, which reduces its visibility and clarity. While English exists across most signs as a shared code, its function still remains surface-level. It is rarely used in detailed instructions or safety notices. This shows that although English is part of the visual landscape, its full potential as a communicative tool has not yet been realized. These insights suggest a need to rethink signage policies—not just to add English—but to make sure it truly helps all users, especially those who rely on it as a bridge language in public spaces like transport terminals.

Discussion

The findings from the Bangkok Bus Terminal offer important insights into how languages are actually used in real-life public spaces. English, though found in most signs as part of a Thai–English bilingual format, is often not used to its full communicative potential. In many cases, it is limited to place names, short phrases, or surface-level translations. What's missing is the kind of detailed or instructional language that would help non-Thai speakers navigate the space more confidently. This shows that English is included more as a symbolic or expected feature rather than as part of a clear communication strategy.

The difference between top-down and bottom-up signage was especially clear. Government signs tended to treat both Thai and English with more balance—in font size, accuracy, and structure. But signs from private companies, especially smaller ones, leaned heavily on Thai. In these signs, English often appeared only in smaller fonts. This creates a gap in access, particularly for travelers who rely on English as their only shared language.

While Ben-Rafael's framework effectively categorizes sign ownership and symbolic functions, it does not provide specific guidelines for visual hierarchy elements such as font size standards. Future research could develop quantitative measures for font size visibility in multilingual signage, potentially creating standardized metrics for assessing language prominence in public spaces.
Although a few signs included Burmese and Lao, the number was very small. These languages were likely added for migrant workers, who make up a significant part of the terminal's users. However, the low frequency suggests this was more of a patchwork effort than a clear policy. For a terminal that serves such a wide range of people, including many from neighboring countries, it's important to think more seriously about language inclusion beyond just Thai and English.

Another issue is the growing use of digital signage. Big companies inside the terminal have started using LED displays that can show updated schedules and information in clearer ways, and

potentially in more languages. On the other hand, smaller companies are clearly struggling to keep up. This creates a kind of digital divide, even within the same terminal. It also means that the quality and clarity of signage can vary widely depending on which bus operator a traveler is dealing with.

All of the above-mentioned issues could lead to a bigger issue: signage is not just about giving directions. It reflects how we think about language, inclusion, and public communication. In a place like Bangkok Bus Terminal, where people from many backgrounds pass through every day, signage needs to do more than just translate—it needs to connect and communicate. English should not only serve international tourists but also migrant workers, regional travelers, and anyone who isn't fluent in Thai. If used more thoughtfully, English can help make public spaces more open and accessible.

One last point is worth mentioning. Unlike other major transport hubs in Thailand—like Suvarnabhumi Airport or Hua Lamphong Railway Station—Chinese was not found at all in this terminal. That is surprising, considering the influence of Chinese tourism in Thailand. This absence suggests that the signage here is designed mostly with domestic or regional travelers in mind, not international ones. It also raises questions about how signage decisions are made. Are we thinking about who actually uses the space—or who we assume will use it? Moving forward, signage strategies should be based on actual user needs and patterns, not just tradition or guesswork.

Conclusion

This study explored the role of English in the linguistic landscape of Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit), focusing on how English appears, functions, and is positioned across different types of signage. Using Ben-Rafael's (2006) top-down and bottom-up framework, 290 signs were analyzed to see how languages are visually and functionally used in this public space. The results showed that bilingual signage—especially Thai-English—is the most common, confirming English's practical role in supporting non-Thai speakers. However, English is often visually overshadowed by Thai, especially in signs produced by private companies where Thai tends to dominate in size, position, and clarity.

Top-down signs created by government agencies tended to show more balanced bilingual practices. In contrast, bottom-up signs varied widely, with many reducing English to a minor presence. English was mostly used for giving directions or providing general information, while safety messages and instructions were often shown only in Thai. A small number of signs included Burmese or Lao, and just one sign used three languages—suggesting a growing, but still limited, recognition of the terminal's linguistic diversity, particularly among migrant users.

These findings show that while English plays a functional role in signage, it is not fully optimized for inclusion or clarity. The gap between the symbolic role of English and its actual communicative

effectiveness points to a need for clearer signage policies—ones that go beyond just including English and instead focus on its readability, correctness, and consistent placement.

This study adds to our understanding of how languages function in Thai transport hubs and shows how linguistic landscape research can be a useful tool in improving public communication. Future studies could look at other transport sites or include interviews with travelers to better understand how signs are read and used in real-world situations.

These findings underscore the need for policy guidelines that ensure signage meets the practical needs of multilingual users in transport hubs.

Limitations

The data were collected only from the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit), so the findings may not represent other bus stations or transport hubs across Thailand. Also, the study focused on the signs themselves—their language, size, and position—but did not explore how real users, like passengers or migrant workers, actually interact with them. Additionally, while the methodology included color usage analysis to understand visual language hierarchies, this aspect was not fully developed in the current study and represents an area for future research. Similarly, although Ben-Rafael's framework effectively categorizes sign ownership and symbolic functions, it does not provide specific guidelines for visual hierarchy elements such as font size standards. Future research could develop quantitative measures for font size visibility in multilingual signage, potentially creating standardized metrics for assessing language prominence in public spaces.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the Faculty of Science and Arts, Burapha University, Chanthaburi Campus, and the Faculty of Education, Universität Hamburg, for providing the facilities and support needed to carry out this research. We are also grateful to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Burapha University, where we first built our foundation in English and Chinese language studies and our friendship. Importantly, we would like to express our deep gratitude to The Transport Company Limited for granting us permission to access and collect data at the Bangkok Bus Terminal (Mo Chit). Their cooperation was essential to the successful completion of this study. Special thanks go to Asst. Prof. Rinda Warawudhi for introducing me (Sattawat Chaiyasit) to the field of Linguistic Landscape studies. We also wish to thank Dr. Montharat Rungruangtham and Asst. Prof. Atichat Rungswang for their valuable feedback and thoughtful comments, which greatly contributed to improving the quality of this work.

References

Ayyub, S., & Rohmah, Z. (2024). The linguistic landscape of Kotabaru Malang Train Station: Language representation in public space. *Cogent Arts & Humanities, 11*(1), 2389633. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2389633

Beeh, N., Nenotek, S., Snae, A., & Benu, N. (2022). Multilingualism in the linguistic landscape of transportation in Kupang. *Lingua*, *17*(2), 187–198.

Ben-Rafael, E., Shohamy, E., Hasan Amara, M. H., & Trumper-Hecht, N. (2006). Linguistic landscape as symbolic construction of the public space: The case of Israel. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *3*(1), 7–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790710608668383

Chanthao, R., & Kobbun, P. (2024). Multilingual signs in Khon Kaen city: Transportation. *IRJEMS International Research Journal of Economics and Management Studies*, *3*(1), 19–27.

De Los Reyes, R. A. (2014). Language of "order": English in the linguistic landscape of two major train stations in the Philippines. *Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, *2*, 20–42. https://doi.org/10.59960/2.a2

Kramsch, C. (2014). Teaching foreign languages in an era of globalization. *The Modern Language Journal*, *98*(1), 295–310.

Kramsch, C. (2021). *Language as symbolic power*. Cambridge University Press.

Landry, R., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1997). Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *16*(1), 23–49. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X970161002

Ministry of Industry. (2017). *Thailand 4.0 The next revolution*. Ministry of Industry.

Ministry of Tourism, & Sports. (2024, March 31). Tourism statistics 2023. https://www.mots.go.th/news/category/704

Ngampramuan, W. (2010). *Linguistic landscape: A case study of signs in major transport hubs in Thailand* [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Open University.

Ngampramuan, W. (2022). Linguistic landscape in Thailand: A case study of languages used on signs at Suvarnabhumi International Airport. *The Liberal Arts Journal Faculty of Liberal Arts*. Mahidol University, *5*(2), 314–331.

Nguyen, T. H., & Miller, J. (2018). English in Public Signage in Vietnam: Symbolic meanings and implications. *Asian Englishes*, *20*(1), 41–55.

Piller, I. (2001). Identity constructions in multilingual advertising. *Language in Society*, *30*(2), 153–186. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404501002019

Pipattarasakul, P. (2021). Linguistic landscape of the legendary century-old Bangkok railway station. *Rangsit Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *8*(2), 53–66.

Putra, V. G. R., Novela, F., & Busri, H. (2024). Linguistic landscape study: Signs of public transportation places in Sidoarjo Regency. *Diglosia*, *7*(1), 163–174. https://doi.org/10.30872/diglosia.v7i1.866

Sutthinaraphan, K. (2016). A linguistic landscape study of advertising signage on skytrain. *MANUSYA*. *The Journal of Humanities*, *22*(Special Issue), 53–71.

Williams, C. H. (2006). *Linguistic minorities in democratic context*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Woo, N. R. (2020). Linguistic landscape in Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Malaysia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *43*(2), 1–20.

Zaman, M., & Sinaga, M. (2024). Revitalization and rejuvenation of multilingualism in railway transportation services through linguistic landscape analysis. *LWSA Conference Series, 7,* 88–97.