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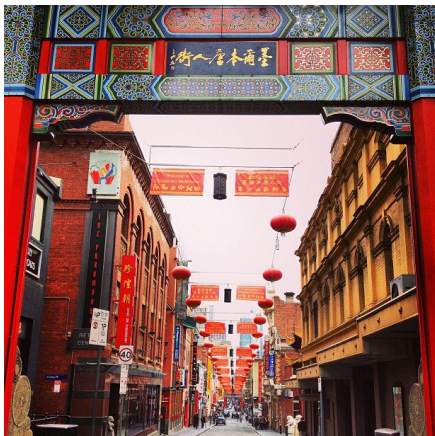
Bilingual Advertising in Melbourne Chinatown

Sherry Yong Chen, BA
The University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong)

Abstract

This paper explores the function of bilingual advertising by analyzing a case study of bilingual advertising in the Chinatown of Melbourne, Australia. The use of bilingual advertising in an immigrant setting differentiates itself from those in Asian settings where English is not used by dominant proportion of speakers in the society, and this phenomenon has its significance from a sociolinguistic perspective. In this paper, I will adopt the concept of “linguistic landscape” to discuss in detail the general functions of bilingual advertising. By integrating the theories into my case study, I aim to demonstrate how the Chinese and English versions of bilingual advertisements in Melbourne’s Chinatown differ in literal meaning, and to explain why they are designed this way.

Key words: Bilingual Advertising, Chinatown, Linguistic Landscape, Intercultural Communication, Globalization, Immigrant.



My experience as an exchange student in Melbourne, Australia has granted me, as an English-Chinese bilingual and transcultural person, the opportunity to look into the interaction between English-speaking and Chinese-speaking communities. To do so, I examined the use of English and Chinese in public signs around Chinatown where large proportions of Chinese immigrants live in Australia. The use of bilingual advertising in an immigrant setting differentiates itself from those in Asian settings where English is not used by dominant proportion of speakers in the society, and this phenomenon has significance from a sociolinguistic perspective.

In this paper, I adopt the concept of “Linguistic Landscape” to discuss in detail the general functions of bilingual advertising. By integrating the linguistic landscape theory into my case study, I aim to demonstrate how the Chinese and English versions of bilingual advertisements in Melbourne’s Chinatown differ in literal meaning, and to explain why they are designed this way.

Linguistic Landscape

Advertising is defined as a form of persuasion that functions to help companies sell their products to an identified group of customers (Dominick, 2005). Under the influence of globalization, advertising has also found its place in intercultural communication, often in the form of bilingual advertising. To understand bilingual advertising as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, I introduce the concept of “Linguistic Landscape” (LL), a relatively recent field of study. As a new approach to multilingualism, it focuses on analyzing the use of more than one language in a given context. In the broad sense, LL refers to “the description and analysis of the language situation in a certain country” or “for the presence and use of many languages in a larger geographic area” (Gorter, 2006). Specifically, when related to advertising, LL is concerned with “the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 23). This definition emphasizes the commercial signage and place names that immediately turn our attention to brand names or features of commodities, and this paper will make use of the latter definition.

Meanwhile, Huebner (2008) points out that the current debates in LL theories center around the ambiguity of its definition and a lack of identification of genres within a LL. Firstly, researchers are inconsistent on what constitutes a sign, and in various studies, signs have been placed into categories that are not mutually exclusive; a certain degree of arbitrariness in the process of codification is frequently recognized (Huebner, 2008, p. 71). Secondly, the lack of “an agreed upon, or even clearly identified, unit of analysis” produces problems in LL analysis, which include putting equal weight on signs of different sizes, and not taking into account “the variety of possible intended audience” for items in a LL (Huebner, 2008, p. 71). In most case studies of LL, only one of the speech communities is addressed as the participant in discussing the meaning of bilingual advertising practices, ignoring the potential participation of other communities. Finally, the lack of identification and description of the genres within a given LL has also made comparisons cross various studies impossible (Huebner, 2008, p. 72). Huebner (2008) argues that researchers pay attention to the labels assigned to genres and consider the immediate context of a sign of LL.

Recent LL case studies (see Shell, 1977; Kasanga, 2010; Koslow, Shamdasani, and Touchstone, 1994, etc.) have examined the perception of the visibility and salience of a certain language and its relation to the symbolic function of that language in various language-contact situations. Studies of bilingual advertising in Asian settings often draw upon the use of English as functioning to shape a desired identity of the audience. For example, Bhatia (2001) mentions that the use of English in Asian advertising is to create “a favorable psychological effect upon targeted audience”; Takashi’s (1992) study of Japanese-English advertising also demonstrates the construction of a more “modern”, “cosmopolitan”, and “successful middle-class” customer identity through the use of English in bilingual advertising in Japan.

However, the scope of these case studies is limited to the use of English in bilingual advertising in parts of the world where English is not used by dominant proportion of speakers in the society, and the involved societies are monolingual to a large extent. The function of bilingual advertising in an immigrant setting, where English is used by most people as native language and another language is used at the same time by bilingual immigrants (or descendants of immigrants), is much less explored. One of the case studies about using Spanish in bilingual advertising in the U.S. points out that Spanish is used to “increase Hispanic consumers’ perception of advertiser sensitivity to Hispanic culture”, signaling solidarity among Hispanic community in the U.S., which in turn enhances the persuasion of advertisements (Koslow, Shamdasani & Touchstone, 1994). In

light of the outcome of this study, paragraphs that follow are devoted to finding out how bilingual advertisements in an immigrant setting interact with both speech communities.

Case study: Bilingual Advertising in Melbourne Chinatown

The arrival of Chinese immigrants in Melbourne can be traced back to the mid-19th century with the occurrence of gold rush in Victoria, Australia. Today, the Chinese community makes up approximately 6.1 percent of Melbourne's entire population, with most of them being English-Chinese bilingual to varying degrees. In addition to Australian born residents, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2012 Australia had 192,600 enrolled international undergraduate students, with over 90,000 of these being Chinese students. Melbourne's Chinatown provides an example of bilingual advertising in an immigrant setting, which in this case, happens to be the oldest Chinatown in Australia and has the longest continuous Chinese settlement in Australia (Melbourne's cultural precincts, 2013).

In this case study, I walked around Melbourne's Chinatown and collected more than twenty pictures of bilingual advertisements. Eighteen advertisements are selected, with most of them being brand names displayed on a billboard, and a few being names of Chinese dishes on a bilingual menu displayed outside Chinese restaurants. These pictures (see Appendix 1) of bilingual advertisements illustrate a careful modification of the literal meanings in two different languages, rather than a direct translation from Chinese to English. They represent how the Chinese advertisers maximize the visibility and saliency of their advertisements to the Chinese-speaking community and English-speaking community by using two languages at the same time. My research question is (i) how the literal meanings of the Chinese and English versions of bilingual advertisements differ from each other, and (ii) how the Chinese and English versions function to attract customers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, I aim to build knowledge about the underlying relationship between the Chinese-speaking community and English-speaking community by examining the different linguistic strategies deployed in these bilingual advertisements.

Discussion

In the case of Melbourne's Chinatown, Chinese and English are used in bilingual advertisements to attract both Chinese-speaking and English-speaking customers. For the purpose of my paper, I will only scrutinize the linguistic strategies deployed in producing the Chinese and English versions of these bilingual advertisements. In my analysis I regard the various sizes of advertisements as equally weighted in visibility and salience despite of the fact that they may not be so in reality (see Appendix I for a summary of linguistic strategies).

The advertisers and customers are respectively the agents and audience of this LL. The advertisers in Melbourne's Chinatown are mostly bilingual Chinese immigrants, or second generation of immigrants with Chinese cultural background and varying competence in Chinese languages. From my observations, the customers mostly consist of Chinese-speaking community, including Chinese immigrants and Chinese tourists in Melbourne, and the Australian English-speaking community, which, generally has limited knowledge about Chinese culture and little competence in reading Chinese characters. Bilingual advertising in Melbourne's Chinatown targets both communities, and the visibility and salience of a piece of advertisement is attributed to the different linguistic strategies deployed in the Chinese and English versions of this piece of advertisement. Generally, the two versions do not tend to deliver same literal meanings, and I will introduce two most common strategies that I have summarized from my examination of the selected bilingual advertisements.

The first strategy concerns adding or deleting a Chinese city's name in the English version of the advertisement. For example, a Chinese restaurant's name which literally means "Small Bun Restaurant" adopts an English name as "Shanghai Street" (item 2) ; another named "Authentic Lanzhou Beef Handmade Noodles" in Chinese has an English name as brief as "Noodle Kingdom", with the name of the city "Lanzhou" deleted (item 6).

This strategy functions to attract both Chinese-speaking and English-speaking communities: in the Chinese version, the presence of "Lanzhou" helps Chinese customers recall the national reputation of that city's noodles, hence it increases the salience of this commercial sign; in the English version the city "Lanzhou" is little known to English-speaking customers, so it is deleted from the sign to save more space for other words with higher possibility of attracting the English customers. On the other hand, the presence of a famous Chinese city's name, such as Shanghai, triggers English-speaking customers' knowledge about China and creates familiarity between the advertisers and the targeted customers.

Another common strategy in producing bilingual advertisements in Melbourne's Chinatown involves replacing a Chinese phrase with a semantically-irrelevant name in English. For example, a restaurant named after a traditional Chinese expression "Good Luck" advertises itself as "City BBQ Chinese Restaurant" in the English version (Item 17) and a piece of advertisement that uses a conventional Chinese phrase "Time-Honoured Brand" crowns itself as "Best Duck in Town" in English (Item 18).

This type of strategy in bilingual advertising that produces completely different meanings in Chinese and English is usually accompanied by a shift of salience, typically from culturally salient meaning to a direct reference to the feature of commodities. The Chinese phrases used in the Chinese versions are very culturally oriented, and they often draw upon the cultural background of Chinese customers. Using Chinese phrases that have no equivalent in English is a way of reinforcing the customers' Chinese identity and bringing together the Chinese-speaking community in Melbourne. This in turn promotes the visibility of a commercial sign to Chinese customers. In the meantime, the English versions often focus on features of commodities, mostly about what it is ("BBQ") and how it is ("best in town"). A direct reference to features of commodities becomes an alternative for advertisers, as it is more effective in attracting English-speaking customers who cannot make sense of the cultural meaning.

The choice of using two languages and how to use them relies on the nature of advertising, that is, to accommodate to the linguistic and cultural background of Chinese and English speakers and therefore to enhance the salience of commercial signs to different customers. However, it is noteworthy that the use of one language also has significant visibility to the other speech community. Having Chinese characters in bilingual advertising offers a taste of China for English-speaking customers who come to Chinatown in pursuit of an exotic experience. Meanwhile, producing an English version of advertisement shows Chinese immigrants have merged into and made contributions to the local culture; it also tells the Chinese tourists that their traditions have survived and thrived in a foreign land.

Munday (2004) notes that bilingual advertising is often to identify how to best "create appeal in different lingua-cultural contexts" (p. 171). The practice of bilingual advertising in Melbourne's Chinatown demonstrates that linguistic habits and advertising styles can differ greatly across cultures, and which, consequently, requires different ways of using languages (Sidiropoulou, 2008). Shell (1997) points out that bilingual advertising "depends on and itself expresses the reciprocity

between two languages”, as is in the case of Melbourne’s Chinatown. The production of bilingual advertisements not only maintains a high degree of salience to both Chinese-speaking and English-speaking communities, but it also manifests the interactions between the immigrant community and the local community who live under the same roof in Australia and will continue to contribute to the country’s economy as a whole.

Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the function of bilingual advertising in an immigrant setting by adopting the concept of LL. I have analyzed the bilingual advertisements in Melbourne’s Chinatown, and discovered the marketing strategy deployed in these bilingual advertisements and a facet of the underlying reciprocal relationship between the Chinese-speaking and English-speaking communities in Melbourne. The Chinese versions of bilingual advertisements are often very culturally-oriented, and they symbolize a Chinese identity which functions to maintain the solidarity among the Chinese community in Melbourne while providing English-speaking customers with an exotic experience. The English versions aim to trigger customers’ knowledge about China, or otherwise present central features of the commodities, and they also represent the Chinese immigrants’ immersion into and contribution to the local environment.

This case study provides an example of bilingual advertising in an immigrant setting and therefore enriches the literature of LL research. It has further demonstrated the interaction between different languages and different speech communities in a world of increasingly higher social mobility. The wheels of time have brought us into an irreversible trend of globalization, and more convergence as well as clashes between languages and cultures is here to stay. Future research in LL may follow the direction of examining language interactions in migration-caused language contact situations, and exploring where globalization has taken us and our languages.

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Appendix 1

Summary Table of Bilingual Advertisements in Melbourne Chinatown

Item No	Chinese Version	Literal Meaning	English Version	Features	
1	 <p>蓋澆飯類 (Dishes on Rice) 144. 上海炒飯 Shanghai Fried Rice with Shredded Pork 145. 牛肉炒飯 Shanghai Fried Rice with Sliced Beef 146. 雞球炒飯 Shanghai Fried Rice with Diced Chicken 147. 素炒飯 Vegetarian Fried Rice 150. 魚香牛肉飯 Sliced Beef in Chilli & Sweet Sour Sauce on Rice</p>	上海炒飯; 牛肉炒飯; 雞球炒飯	Shanghai Fried Rice; Beef (&) Fried Rice;	Shanghai Fried Rice with Shredded Pork; Shanghai Fried Rice with Sliced Beef;	Adding a city's name
2		小籠館	Small Bun Restaurant	Shanghai Street	Adding a city's name
3		紅雙喜	Red Double Happiness	China Red	Adding a country's name
4		不夜天	Never-night day (Non-sleeping day)	China Bar	Adding a country's name
5		貴族世家	Aristocratic Family, Blue-blooded family	Brazilian Crystal	Adding a country's name
6		正宗蘭州牛肉拉麵	Authentic Lanzhou ^A Beef Handmade Noodles	Noodle Kingdom	Leaving out a city's name
7		揚州炒飯	Yangzhou ^B Fried Rice	Special Fried Rice	Leaving out a city's name
8		重慶樓	Chongqing House/Building	Hotpot	Leaving out a city's name

9



蘇杭川菜館

Su Hang^C Chuan Food Restaurant

Shanghai Village

Replacing a city's name

10



山城泉水雞

Mountain city^D Spring Water Chicken

Chongqing Style Triple-cooked Chicken in Chilli Sauce

Replacing a city's name

11



小平菜館

Xiao Ping^E Restaurant

Post-Deng Café

Adding prefix to a person's name

12



夫妻肺片

Couple Ox Tripe & Tongue

Hot Spicy Couple

Leaving out part of the dish's name

13



東藝風水

Oriental Art Feng Shui

Rosewood Feng Shui & Furniture

Replacing a Chinese phrase with semantically-irrelevant English names

14



怪味合

Weird Taste Matching/Suiting

1st Choice Restaurant

Replacing a Chinese phrase with semantically-irrelevant English names

15



新潮樓

New Trend House/Building

Red Silks Restaurant & Bar

Replacing a Chinese phrase with semantically-irrelevant English names

16



食為先

Eating Comes First^F

Shark Fin House

Replacing a Chinese phrase with semantically-irrelevant English names

17



鴻運

Good Luck^G

City BBQ Chinese Restaurant

Replacing a Chinese phrase with semantically-irrelevant English names

18

唐人街老
字號Chinatown old
brand^H (Time-
honoured brand)

Best Duck in Town

Replacing a
Chinese phrase
with
semantically-
irrelevant English
names**Notes**

- A. a city in Western China, the capital city of Gansu Province; famous in China for the handmade noodles
- B. a city in Eastern China, in central Jiangsu Province; famous in China for the special fried rice
- C. short form for Suzhou, a city in Jiangsu Province, and Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang Province. The combination of their names is famous in China because the two cities together were praised as “a heaven on earth” in ancient Chinese poetry.
- D. a nickname for Chongqing City, well-known to Chinese people
- E. the name of Deng Xiaoping, an influential politician and reformist leader of the Communist Party of China
- F. related to the traditional Chinese concept that “people regard food as their primary need”
- G. a traditional way of wishing good luck in Chinese
- H. a fixed way of referring to a well-established brand in Chinese

About the Author:

Sherry Yong Chen is a second year undergraduate student and Research Assistant at Department of Linguistics, the University of Hong Kong. She was an exchange student at the University of Melbourne during July 2013 and December 2013. Her research interests include language contact, language assessment, language and identity, and computer-mediated communication in Mainland China. She can be reached at: schen613@connect.hku.hk