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English-dominated Chinatown:

A Quantitative Investigation of the Linguistic Landscape of Chinatown in Singapore

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A Quantitative Investigation of the Linguistic Landscape of Chinatown in Singapore

Abstract: The current study reports a quantitative investigation of the linguistic landscape (LL) in Singapore's Chinatown. The database of the study comprises a total of 831 instances of signs in the form of photographs that were collected in Chinatown. The study finds that English dominates the LL while Mandarin Chinese is ranked as the second frequently used language. The study also identifies significant differences in LL features between top-down and bottom-up signs. Specifically, these differences include what languages are used; monolingual, bilingual and multilingual compositions; code preference; and forms of Chinese scripts. The present study suggests that English now dominates the linguistic landscape of Chinatown. Even though many scholars have described the sociolinguistic situation in Singapore as being 'English-knowing', the data shows a shift towards being 'English-dominant', suggesting a gradual but sustained dilution of its multilingual ethos. The study also complicates our understanding of the dominance of English in multilingual societies such as Singapore, where a competing dominant language (Mandarin Chinese) may be seen to continue to exert considerable influence on the dynamics of English-dominant language use but, at the same time, whose main function is shifting towards the symbolic rather than communicative.

Keywords: Chinatown; Singapore; Linguistic Landscape; Quantitative Analysis; English; Mandarin Chinese

1. Introduction

In public spaces, it is inevitable for people to see different types of signs which vary in form and size from the more expansive banners, billboards, shop front signs to the smaller street name signs, directional signs, warning signs. These signs constitute a particular space in the city known as "linguistic landscape" (hereafter referred to as LL) (Landry and Bourhis, 1997). Over the past two decades, LL has gradually evolved into a dynamic field of inquiry. It is recognized as an approach to the study of multilingualism (Gorter, 2006) and a method for studying the sociolinguistic ecology of a city (Spolsky, 2008).

As a multiracial and multilingual society (in fact, with a constitutionally mandated support for 'multilingualism'), Singapore makes for an interesting case to study various sociolinguistic issues (Lim, Pakir & Wee, 2010). Thus far, a handful of language scholars have examined the LL in Singapore and these studies have focused on naming practices for buildings (Tan, 2009) and streets (Tan, 2011), as well as LL in hawker centers (Shang & Guo, 2017), tailor shops (Hult & Kelly-Holmes, 2019) and MRT stations (Tang, 2018). However, little has been done to explore the LL of Singapore's Chinatown, which serves as both the country's ethnic enclave for the Chinese diaspora and a must-visit cultural destination for tourists. In this sense, the present study aims to address this research gap by mapping the LL of Singapore's Chinatown through a quantitative examination of street signage. In recent years, the quantitative method has been challenged by LL scholars who believe that the whole notion of counting languages in multilingual signs is inadequate in providing a critical account of multilingualism in LL (Blommaert & Maly, 2014; Weber & Horner, 2012). We, on the other hand, argue that a quantitative exploration of LL continues to be

useful as a point of conversation for LL scholars to discuss and interrogate issues concerning language use in public domains.

2. Singapore's ethnolinguistic profile and its language policy

According to the Department of Statistics, as of June 2019, the total population of Singapore stands at 5.6 million. The population is composed of three state-determined major ethnicities: 'Chinese' (74.3%), 'Malay' (13.4%) and 'Indian' (9.0%) with the remaining 3.3% categorized as 'Others'. The Constitution of Singapore stipulates that the country has four official languages, namely Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English. The three official languages other than English correspond with the three state-determined major ethnic groups in Singapore, with English serving as the country's working language and inter-ethnic lingua franca (Wee, 2006).

Singapore's racial and linguistic diversity exerts considerable influence on the formulation of its language policy which aims at equipping its citizens with bilingual literacy and proficiency in the English language and a mother tongue (Wee, 2011). Internationalization and linguistic pluralism are two prominent language ideologies behind the country's language policy. Specifically, the bilingual language policy requires that all students be educated in English and in one of the official mother tongues throughout primary and secondary school (Silver et al, 2016). In the public domain, however, Singapore's governing approach is rather lenient towards languages appearing in the public space (Shang & Guo, 2017). The government usually does not interfere in the language choices in public signs so long as the language use in the public domain does not result in ethnic tensions or conflicts.

3. Previous LL studies in the context of Singapore

To date, a small but growing number of researchers have investigated the LL in Singapore. Tan (2009) finds that building names of private developments show a clear pattern of dominance of English. Tan (2011) also examines how languages are used in the street names and finds that English and Malay are highly represented in street name signs, although English is used more often than Malay.

Recently, scholars have developed some interest in the LL of hawker centers, shops and MRT stations. Based on 1097 shop-name signs collected from ten hawker centers in the western part of Singapore, Shang and Guo (2017) find that English is prevalent in all types of shop signs and Chinese is the preferred code on bilingual and multilingual signs. They also note that Malay and Tamil, two other official languages in Singapore, hardly make a presence on shop signs. Hult and Kelly-Holmes (2019) explore the linguistic marketing practices of a tailor shop in Singapore's Chinatown. They identify the use of a range of Scandinavian language and artifacts in the shop. The study shows that the Scandinavian presence facilitates the shop's creative marketing, demonstrating that globalization is manifested through locally situated choices of linguistic resources. Tang (2018), on the other hand, examines the LL in and around the Mass Rapid Transport (MRT). Based on signs collected from 30 stations in the Circle Line, Tang observes a preference for using monolingual English signs inside and outside MRT stations. This study also finds that the bilingual and multilingual signs with Chinese, Malay and Tamil are infrequently used in Singapore's MRT stations.

Thus far, LL studies conducted in Singapore suggest a clear misalignment between official language policy and language use and practice. While there are four official languages, in practice these languages form a linguistic hierarchy, with English

clearly at the top. The review of literature has seen the limited but growing interest among sociolinguists in utilizing LL to investigate the on-going competition among Singapore's four official languages. However, while LL scholars demonstrate their interest in examining the LL in building names, hawker centers, and MRT stations, little has been done to report the LL in Singapore's Chinatown. Thus, using a quantitative approach, the current study aims to address this research gap by answering the following two research questions:

(1) What language, if any, plays a dominant role in the LL of Singapore's Chinatown?

(2) What are the top-down and bottom-up LL features in Singapore's Chinatown?

Examining the LL of Chinatown in Singapore is significant because the most dominant bilingual configuration is that of English and Mandarin Chinese as mother tongue, and while Singapore's shift to English is well documented, Mandarin remains a strong competition for English as a home language (Li, Tan & Goh, 2016; Tupas, 2015). Among all the ethnically distinctive places in Singapore, Chinatown remains a bastion of the material and symbolic power of Mandarin Chinese, having been cast as a 'historic district' and a repository of culture and tradition (Yeoh & Kong, 1994). Thus, an examination of LL in Chinatown provides nuance to the dynamics of power among the dominant languages in the country. To what extent does Mandarin Chinese push back the dominance of English? The results of the study may also serve as a correction to the enduring reference to Singapore as 'English-knowing' (Low, 2020; Low & Pakir, 2018; Pakir, 2010; Tan & Castelli, 2013) instead of 'English-dominant' (Cavallaro & Ng, 2014; Chua, 2010; Tupas, 2011). This may then encourage a more critical engagement with the concept of "linguatocracy" (Pendley, 1983, p. 50) in Singapore, or

social hierarchization along the lines of linguistic differentiation (see also Kramer-Dahl, 2003, p. 162; Zhao & Liu, 2007, p. 121). In fact, we argue for a description of Singapore as 'English-dominated' in order to alert us to the need for more concerted language maintenance efforts in the country (Cavallaro & Serwe, 2010).

4. Methodology

4.1 Choice of research sites

The area under investigation is Chinatown in Singapore. In an urban plan for Singapore formulated in 1822 called the Raffles Town Plan, Singapore was divided into four different ethnic areas for Europeans, Chinese, Indians and Malays. The ethnic Chinese were designated the area southwest of the Singapore River which, thereafter, became Chinatown (Cangi, 1993). Historically, Chinatown covered four distinct areas including Telok Ayer, Kreta Ayer, Bukit Pasoh and Tanjong Pagar, which were gradually developed from the 1820s to 1920s.

In 1965, Singapore gained its independence from the British. Due to the country's urban redevelopment and rehabilitation programs, the present Chinatown is actually only one small section of the original Chinatown. This section was (re)envisioned as the official Chinatown in Singapore which was then given a conservation status by the Singapore Urban Redevelopment Board in 1989 (Official Chinatown, 2007). This official Chinatown is known as 牛车水 (niu2che1shui3) in Chinese language or Kreta Ayer in Malay, meaning "ox-driven water cart" in both languages. Currently, the official Chinatown can be roughly regarded as an irregular

pentagon that is enclosed by Eu Tong Sen Street, New Bridge Road, South Bridge Road, Kreta Ayer Road as well as Cross Street.

Located in the heartland of modern Singapore, Chinatown maintains great historical significance and demonstrates rich cultural diversity. However, the geographic area of Chinatown is still rather large, thus making it is difficult to map out its entire LL. As such, we decided to limit our investigation to eight representative roads and streets which included Eu Tong Sen Street, New Bridge Road, South Bridge Road, Kreta Ayer Road, Mosque Street, Pagoda Street, Temple Street and Smith Street. These roads and streets were selected because they essentially form the key center of culture and business activities.

4.2 Data collection and unit of analysis

Following some classic LL studies (Backhaus, 2007; Huebner, 2006), the present study used photographic materials as data. The photographic data were collected during four trips between late March and mid-April, 2017. In the process of data collection, the unit of analysis became a primary concern. In LL studies, there are two main views concerning this. Backhaus (2007) holds that a unit of analysis is an individual sign containing "any piece of text within a spatially definable frame" (p. 66) while Cenoz and Gorter (2006) take the view that all the signage displayed within one shop facade would be taken as "whole establishment" (p. 71). It was decided that each establishment should serve as a unit of analysis. This present study follows that of Backhaus (2007) because in the field visits, it was observed that top-down signs took the form of individual signs while bottom-up signs were mostly composed of several

signs displayed at the shopfront. Hence, to facilitate the easier comparison of features of top-down and bottom-up signs, 'individual sign' as unit of analysis was used.

Given the messiness of various signs competing within the public space, we also decided to develop five criteria to facilitate the data collection process:

First, each sign was counted as one item regardless of its size. Second, all top-down signs were photographed due to their limited quantity. Third, as is suggested in Backhaus (2007), only stationary bottom-up signs were considered, thereby excluding texts directly written on products, price tags, signs inside shops and department stores, behind the shop windows, roll screens that are temporarily put in front of the shop, printed materials, flyers, stickers, text written on vehicles, clothes, fabrics, etc. Fourth, the data collection for bottom-up signs followed the "one-shop-one-sign" principle proposed by Shang and Guo (2017) who noted that a shop may display more than one sign in different facades but these signs contain identical content. In our case, when a shop has more than one sign containing different linguistic content, the shopfront sign was photographed because the well-designed shopfront sign could be seen as the most essential and prominent for advertising the shop's business. Finally, as for photographing the signs in high-rise buildings, the data collection was confined to the shops with street level frontage.

4.3 Sign coding schemes

We first grouped the photographs into two broad categories, namely top-down and bottom-up signs. According to Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), top-down signs refer to signage issued by the national government and public bureaucracies. In the current study, top-down LL items also incorporated signs issued by enterprises that offer

municipal services such as bus and taxi services, MRT train service, gas supply and power supply. Bottom-up signage, on the other hand, refers to signs created mainly by shop owners, individual private businesses, non-government institutions and clan associations.

Each sign was then coded according to the following coding schemes: 1) different language(s) contained in each sign; 2) number of languages displayed in the sign; 3) language combination patterns; 4) code preference; and 5) types of Chinese script.

5. Findings and Analysis

A total of 831 signs constitute the database for the current study including 269 top-down signs (32%) and 562 bottom-up signs (68%).

5.1 Dominance of English in Singapore's Chinatown

Altogether nine languages are found in the database, namely English, Chinese (in both simplified characters and traditional characters), Tamil, Malay, Japanese (in both hiragana and katakana), Korean, Thai, French and Burmese. English appears on 713 signs (85.80%), Chinese (in both simplified and traditional characters) on 436 signs (52.47%) while Tamil and Malay are only found on 41 (4.93%) and 31 (3.73%) signs respectively. In addition, the usage of the other five languages, namely Japanese, Korean, Thai, French and Burmese in the database is relatively low, with occurrence ranging from 23 signs (2.77%) to 1 sign (0.12%) only. Clearly, English dominates the LL of Singapore's Chinatown, showing strong signs that the country is not merely

“English-knowing” as continuously described by many language and educational scholars (e.g. Low, 2020; Low & Pakir, 2018; Pakir, 2010; Tan & Castelli, 2013 ; Tupas, 2011). The dominance of English in Chinatown over all other languages can be further explained from two perspectives, namely the privileged status of English in Singapore and the perceived economic benefits of the language.

Singapore’s 'founding' by the British in 1819 led to the positioning of English as a language of prestige, authority and power. Since then, English has held a particularly important status in the country, intensifying after Singapore gained its independence in 1965 when it became increasingly clear that nation-building would require the intertwining of English with the state’s vision of growth and development. Today, though designated as one of the four official languages, English serves as the de facto national language of Singapore (Tan, 2011), used as the main language of business, schooling and administration, and the language imbued with the most economic and symbolic capital. Understandably, even in Chinatown, a place supposedly saturated with Chinese cultural and ethnic elements, English now has an overwhelming presence.

5.2 Different LL features among top-down and bottom-up signs

A close analysis of top-down and bottom-up signs shows significant differences in terms of languages present in the signs; monolingual, bilingual and multilingual composition; code preference, and choice of Chinese scripts.

5.2.1 Languages in the signs

Although nine languages have been identified in the database, a closer analysis also reveals that the configurations of languages contained in top-down signs and bottom-up signs are quite different. Table 1 provides a detailed summary of different languages contained in top-down and bottom-up signs.

Table 1 Language Contained in Top-down and Bottom-up Signs

	Top-down		**Bottom-up**	
English	254	94.4%	459	81.7%
Chinese	91	33.8%	345	61.4%
Tamil	39	14.5%	1	0.18%
Malay	31	11.5%	——	——
Japanese	17	6.3%	6	1.07%
Korean	——	——	11	1.96%
Thai	——	——	1	0.18%
French	——	——	1	0.18%
Burmese	——	——	1	0.18%
Total	269	100%	562	100%

- More languages in bottom-up signs

Five languages appear in top-down signs, namely English (94.4%), Chinese (33.8%), Tamil (14.5%), Malay (11.5%) and Japanese (6.3%) while eight languages have been identified in bottom-up signs, namely English (81.7%), Chinese (61.4%), Korean (1.96%), Japanese (1.07%), Tamil (0.18%), Thai (0.18%), French (0.18%) and Burmese (0.18%). In other words, while top-down signs mainly feature the official

languages of Singapore (with the exception of Japanese which was used only minimally), there is a wider spread of language use among bottom-up signs. For both categories of signs, the dominance of English is unmistakable. It is worth noting that this is especially so among top-down signs, highlighting the fact that even with an official 'bilingual policy', English remains the most dominant language. The view from 'below', that is with bottom-up signs, complicates the language situation a bit more because, while English remains the most used, signs in Chinese also have a strong presence, along with far fewer languages other than the official languages of the country. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Backhaus (2007) in Tokyo who finds that languages used in bottom-up signs show more diversity compared with top-down signs. This is expected because when mobilization of languages is left in the hands of 'non-government' users, there is a higher likelihood to depart from the agenda of official language policies (Phan & Starks, 2020; Xiaomei & Daming, 2018).

- The absence of Malay in bottom-up signs

Another observation from Table 1 concerns the absence of Malay in the bottom-up signs. Historically, the indigenous language Malay has had a special status among languages in Singapore. In fact, it remains today as the country's official national language. Once serving as the traditional lingua franca in the Straits region (Platt, 1985; Zhiming & Aye, 2010), Malay was used as the language for administration, trade and commerce before Singapore gained its independence from Malaya in 1965. Even after 1965, Malay was still kept as the national language due to its extensive use among the people and its political value in the region. However, as is suggested by Cavallaro and Serwe (2010), the status of Malay in Singapore is now largely symbolic. As such, it

makes sense that Malay still has some presence in top-down signs, but largely missing in bottom-up signs, thereby indicating the loss of its lingua franca status in the country. Malay has clearly given way to English and, to a lesser extent, Mandarin Chinese. It may be argued the absence of Malay is due to the fact that the LL being investigated is Chinatown where Chinese in all its forms is expected to be dominant and Malay, being associated with another ethnic group, is not expected to have any functional value. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, Malay once served as Singapore's "common inter-ethnic lingua franca" (Platt, 1985, p. 15), thus serving the Chinese community as well. In fact, the indigenized brand of Malay known as 'Bazaar Malay' and used as the lingua franca has "strong Chinese influence in its grammar" (Zhiming & Aye, 2010, p. 157). The absence of Malay in Chinatown cannot simply be explained away by the argument that Chinatown is a Chinese ethnic enclave; rather, the absence is part of a broader historical process of what Wee (2014) calls 'the minoritization of languages' in Singapore.

5.2.2 Monolingual, bilingual and multilingual composition

Table 2 illustrates that both top-down and bottom-up signs are largely monolingual. Nevertheless, we found that 47 (17.47%) multilingual signs take up a moderate portion among top-down signs while there are 249 (44.31%) bottom-up bilingual signs.

Table 2 Monolingual, Bilingual and Multilingual Composition

	Top-down		**Bottom-up**	
Monolingual signs	193	71.45%	306	54.45%
Bilingual signs	29	10.78%	249	44.31%

Multilingual signs	47	17.47%	7	1.24%
Total	269	100%	562	100%

- Multilingual signs in the top-down domain

Forty-seven (47) top-down multilingual signs are found. The multilingual signs fall into five combination patterns, namely:

1) English+Chinese+Japanese,

2) English+Chinese+Tamil,

3) English+Malay+Chinese+Tamil,

4) English+Tamil+Chinese+Japanese,

5) English+Chinese+Malay+Tamil+Japanese.

The use of signs containing five languages is inconsistent with the finding of Tang (2018) who only found monolingual, bilingual, trilingual and quadrilingual signs in the LL of Singapore's MRT stations. It is observed that English and Chinese appear in all combination patterns, while the four official languages are present alongside Japanese. Such a configuration of top-down multilingual signs in Chinatown may have been designed for two considerations. On the one hand, they serve to project a message of cosmopolitanism, modernism and ethnic diversity to visitors because Singapore has been marketed as a world city, a city of modernity (Hui & Wan, 2003) and more importantly, a city of multiple ethnic cultures (Phua & Berkowitz, 2014). On the other hand, multilingual signs, particularly quadrilingual signs indicating public transportation services, can best fulfill the "literacy of the desired or potential readers" (Spolsky & Copper, 1991, p. 94) who, in this case, are Singaporeans of different

ethnicities. These signs also showcase the state's even-handed policy in its treatment of the different ethnic groups.

- Bilingual signs in the bottom-up domain

Another group of signs which complicates the dynamics of language use in Chinatown is the 249 bottom-up bilingual signs. They all take the form of English plus another language, such as English and Chinese, English and Korean, English and French, as well as English and Thai. What is important to highlight here is the undisputed dominance of English-Chinese bilingualism. Among these bilingual signs, 241 or 96.8% signs adopt both English and Chinese, making this combination account for the overwhelming majority of such signs. Thus, bilingualism in bottom-up signs are constituted by, to a great extent, English-Chinese bilingualism. This aligns with the conditions of 'English-knowing bilingualism' (Pakir, 1992; 2010) although such bilingualism is clearly of a particular kind only (English-Chinese), and as we will see later, code preference complicates these conditions even more.

5.2.3 Code preference

In Scollon and Scollon's (2003) *geosemiotics*, there is always a 'preferred code' in signs with two or more languages. Code preference can be reflected in the choice of languages and their arrangement (Amos, 2017; Backhaus, 2007; Ben Said, 2012). In the present study, we analyzed the code preference displayed in the top-down and bottom-up signs.

The preferred code is determined by considering the position and font size of the languages in the signs. When the signs contain two or more languages, where one language is written in a bigger font size compared with the other languages, then this language is regarded as the preferred code (Vandenbroucke, 2010), as this would presumably contain the most relevant information and/or that it would function as the main means of communication to the intended audience. In cases where the font sizes of languages are more or less equally displayed, the preferred code, according to Scollon and Scollon (2003), would be the one that appears at the top, to the left or in the center. The result of code preference in both top-down and bottom-up signs is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Code Preference in Top-down and Bottom-up Signs

	Top-down Signs		**Bottom-up Signs**	
English	66	86.8%	76	29.7%
Chinese	6	7.9%	175	68.4%
Malay	4	5.3%	——	——
Korean	——	——	4	1.6%
French	——	——	1	0.3%
Total	76	100%	256	100%

We can observe the significant difference in code preference between top-down and bottom-up signs. Among 76 bilingual and multilingual top-down signs, 66 (86.8%) signs use English as the preferred code, followed by Chinese (7.9%) and Malay (5.3%). Conversely, among 256 bilingual and multilingual bottom-up signs, 175 (68.4%) signs adopt Chinese as the preferred code, followed by English (29.7%), Korean (1.6%) and French (0.3%). The overwhelming preferred code in the top-down signs is English whereas the overwhelming preferred code in the bottom-up signs is Chinese.

Bottom-up signs may indeed be seen as a push back of Chinese against the dominating presence of English, something that needs to be acknowledged in a critical account of the dynamics of language use in the country. Nevertheless, as we unpack this phenomenon further, we find that the strong presence of Chinese in bottom-up signs does not invalidate the dominance of English in the LL.

We can draw on a preference model formulated by Spolsky and Cooper (1991) to analyze the fundamental reasons for different code preferences. According to the model, there are three conditions for the use of languages in the LL: (i) *sign writer's skill*, writing a sign in a language you know; (ii) *presumed reader*, writing a sign in the language that can be read by the public; (iii) *symbolic value*, writing in your own language or the language you want to be identified with. On the one hand, English as the preferred code in top-down signs can be best explained by the first and second conditions in that English, designated by the government as the "working language" among different ethnic groups, serves as a familiar language shared between both sign writers and presumed readers. On the other hand, Chinese as the preferred code in the bottom-up signs can be interpreted by the third condition because the use of Chinese serves as a symbolic value and makes the public associate the business and products with the shopkeeper's Chinese identity. This is, in fact, also the case for the (symbolic) use of Chinese in Chinatown in other places (Leeman & Modan, 2009; Pang & Rath, 2007). 'English-knowing bilingualism' in this sense does not strongly capture the local dynamics of English-Chinese bilingualism in Singapore through the lens of Chinatown in the country. The power of English in the combination dominates the use of Chinese with the latter being more symbolic and commodified instead of being functional and communicative.

5.2.4 Making sense of 'English-dominated' Chinatown

The concept of "language shift" refers to "the process whereby members of a community in which more than one language is spoken abandon their original vernacular language in favor of another" (Kandler, Unger & Steel, 2010: p. 3835). As a matter of fact, language shift has been on-going for at least the last three decades (Cavallaro & Ng, 2014; Pakir, 1992; Platt, 1985). As for the linguistic choice of public signs in Chinatown, it is easy to take for granted that Chinese should play the most dominant role due to Chinatown's strong ties with the Chinese culture. In Chinatown in nearby Malaysia, for example, while English asserts its strong presence, Chinese remains the most dominant language (Xiaomei & Deming, 2018). However, the present study has revealed the dominant visibility of the English language in Singapore's Chinatown. It presents a strong case of the need to capture the sociolinguistic reality in the country as 'English-dominated', and no longer 'English-knowing'.

Moreover, the dominance of English should also be seen through the lens of English-Chinese bilingualism in the country. As was shown in the data earlier, it was to be expected that English and Chinese constitute the most dominant bilingual configuration. This is not simply because the data were from Chinatown, but also because of the population size of the Chinese in Singapore. The official bilingual policy, which has been in place for more than three decades now where English is the principal medium of instruction while the official mother tongues are the designated language of cultural identification, pretty much frames the general contours of the LL in Chinatown. Nevertheless, unpacking English-Chinese bilingualism shows cracks in the bilingual policy as it is operationalized in practice: in top-down signs, English is clearly the most dominant language, but in bottom-up signs, English and Chinese are

both dominant languages. What complicates the dynamics of English-Chinese bilingualism is that the use of Chinese in all forms from 'below' is significantly symbolic, not functional and communicative, thus unravelling the unequal relations between English and Chinese in English-Chinese bilingualism.

At present, Chinatown is promoted as an important tourist destination in Singapore and thus attracts millions of overseas visitors each year. The shift to English in public signs can facilitate the communication between locals and foreigners, creating a better traveling experience for the tourists. On top of that, the status of languages in public signs can also be related to what Kandler, Unger and Steele (2010) mention as the driving forces of language shift. They argue that the target of the shift is seen as more modern, useful or can give more economic opportunities. Undoubtedly, in the current age of globalization, English is a language of modernity and has been endowed with great economic advantages in global business.

6. Concluding remarks

The present study has selected Singapore's Chinatown as the research area and adopted quantitative investigation to map its LL. The study reveals that English has dominance in the LL of Chinatown. With regard to LL features in top-down and bottom-up signs, the study finds significant differences in terms of languages contained, monolingual, bilingual and multilingual compositions, code preference, and forms of Chinese scripts. Collectively, everything points to the fact that English reigns supreme in Chinatown, and that in English-Chinese bilingualism, the relationship between the two languages is unequal, with English being the more powerful one. This is seen not only through its dominant presence among top-down signs, but also through the increasingly more

symbolic use of Chinese (rather than functional and communicative) in bottom-up signs.

Nevertheless, the present study has many limitations, and these have been acknowledged at the beginning of this paper. Blommaert and Maly (2014) suggest that every sign can be analyzed from three "axes", namely: 1) signs pointing towards the present, to the de facto emplacement; 2)signs pointing towards the past, to their producers and the modes of production; 3) signs pointing towards the future, to the intended audience. Clearly, the present study has only focused on the present emplacement of the signs in Chinatown. Investigation of the historical change of LL, interviews with sign producers and a survey of sign audience's perceptions and their attitudes towards LL could have provided the study with a broader lens through which multilingualism could be examined. These limitations, however, do not invalidate the findings, no matter how limited, on the dynamics of multilingual language use in Chinatown in Singapore. There are multiple languages present, and there is the use of the four official languages, the deployment of English and Chinese bilingualism, and the dominance of English. Together they constitute what Tupas (2015) refers to as 'inequalities of multilingualism' which, in turn, legitimize and sustain what was earlier identified as "linguatocracy" (Pendley, 1983, p. 50) in Singapore.

All this justifies recent calls of scholars for stronger support for language maintenance in Singapore (Cavallaro & Ng, 2014; Cavallaro & Serwe, 2010; Li, Tan & Goh, 2016). What is happening in Chinatown is one of the so-called 'unintended' effects of Singapore's bilingual policy. In this sense, Cavallaro and Ng (2014) capture succinctly the country's linguistic historical trajectory – from 'multilingualism to English plus'. In fact, we would like to go one step further if the language shift remains unabated: from multilingualism to English, no plus. Following Tang (2018), we also

argue based on our data that Singapore is becoming increasingly “more monolingual than bilingual- or multilingual-oriented” (p. 20).

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