

Research on Linguistic Landscape of Nanchang Historical and Cultural District from the Perspective of Social Semiotics: Taking Wanshou Palace as an Example

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic landscape is an important spatial component and "slice" of fresh language in historical and cultural blocks, as well as a space-time code for local residents' cultural identity and collective memory inheritance. From the perspective of social semiotics, this paper chooses Wanshou Palace, a representative of the millennium culture of Gan Po, as the research material, investigates the current situation of the linguistic landscape of the block, analyzes the differences between official and private signs, explores the interactive relationship between "author", "reader" and text of the signs, and makes a typical case analysis of the orientation, inscription and placement of the code, in order to provide suggestions for the setting and management of urban linguistic landscape.

Keywords: *Linguistic landscape, Social semiotics, Historical and cultural district.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of "linguistic landscape" was put forward by Landry & Bourhis (1997), which means that "the language appearing on public street signs, billboards, street names, shop signs and public street signs of government buildings together constitute the linguistic landscape of a certain territory, region or city group". Linguistic landscape is a hot topic in the fields of semiotics, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, attracting the attention of semiotics, sociolinguistics and psychologists. The study focus on the use of language in space and places, not only to investigate the characteristics and rules of language use, but more importantly to explore the policy orientation, power, identity and other issues behind the choice of language.(Wuxili, 2022)

Based on the existing research results and from the perspective of social semiotics, this paper selects Wanshou Palace, which is the most representative historical and cultural site in

Nanchang, as an example to investigate the current situation of the district linguistic landscape, explore the selection and distribution of language symbols, and the laws behind the code orientation, in order to provide suggestions for the setting and management of the urban linguistic landscape.

2. RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE AND RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Perspective

The research perspective of this paper is social semiotics which was firstly proposed by Halliday (1978), which mainly studies how human practical meaning is generated in specific social and cultural contexts, emphasizing the role of symbols in the formation of human practical meaning and the sociality of symbols. He believes that language is not only a means of reflecting social reality, but also a means of representing social reality. Therefore, language is a shared meaning potential, a social symbol system, a complex system of

meaning, coding, and interrelationships. This system provides a dynamic, evolutionary, and functional mechanism for creative interpretation, control, and adjustment of the external world. Therefore, language is a very special and important social symbol system, on the one hand, language itself is one of many social symbols, on the other hand, it is the medium of other social symbol system encoding and decoding. It can be said that language is the most significant symbol system and the foundation of the construction of social structure.

As a symbol, social structure contains social relations such as social stratum, power system and hierarchy, which can be sustained and changed through human interaction activities and social processes. Linguistic landscape is a kind of public discourse, and the construction of linguistic landscape is a kind of language process. Therefore, the meaning of human social practice can be constructed through linguistic landscape. In other words, social relations are constructed through linguistic landscapes, and linguistic landscapes also reflect social relations. Historical and cultural blocks have typical linguistic features of multi-language coexistence, and the "visibility" and "prominence" of different codes reveal the identity, status and vitality of languages and ethnic groups.

2.2 Research Method

By using the field survey method, the author collected photos of the language signs in 9 historical streets in Wanshou Palace historical and cultural district of Nanchang City, including Cuihua Street, Qiaobu Street, Contract Alley, Luobao Alley, Qizhai Street, Qin Alley, Wanshou Palace Alley, Luo Alley and Guangrunmen Street. According to the combination form of the code on the sign, statistical coding classification is carried out, and the frequency and proportion of different types of signs are counted by SPSS statistical software. The differences between official and private signage are compared, and the orientation, engraving and placement of the code are analyzed in typical cases.

The authors adopt the interview method to investigate the attitude of signage creators (including official and unofficial) and tourists towards the linguistic landscape of Wanshou Palace historical and cultural district, in order to investigate the interactive relationship between signage text, "author" and "reader". The

interviewees are mainly from government workers, shop owners, tourists and other groups.

3. LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF WANSHOU PALACE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL DISTRICT

3.1 Code Selection Distribution Overview

The distribution of code selection mainly investigates the combination types and distribution of language symbols in the linguistic landscape. There are 354 valid samples in this research. "Table 1" shows that there are 6 languages in the block, including Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean, Thai and Vietnamese, etc. Among them, Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean are the four most used codes. Chinese signs are absolutely dominant, appearing in 98.6% of the sign samples, with the highest visibility in Wanshou Palace historical and cultural District. As an international language, English retains its status as the first foreign language, with a frequency of 37%. Japanese and South Korean codes ranked third and fourth, with a frequency of 20.9% and 20.4%, respectively, mainly appearing in official language signs and a small number of Japanese and South Korean restaurant or cultural shop signs. In addition, both Vietnamese and Thai appear on private bilingual signs as supplementary languages.

Table 1. The Distribution of Code Selection of Wanshou Palace

Sign Code	Official Signs		Private Signs		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage (%) (N=188)	Frequency	Percentage (%) (N=166)	Frequency	Percentage (%) (N=354)
Chinese	90	47.9	124	74.7	214	60.5
English	/	/	5	3	5	1.4
Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean	74	39.3	/	/	74	20.1
Chinese and English	24	12.8	31	18.7	55	15.5
Chinese and Japanese	/	/	3	1.8	3	0.8
Chinese and Korean	/	/	1	0.6	1	0.3
Chinese and Vietnamese	/	/	1	0.6	1	0.3
Chinese and Thai	/	/	1	0.6	1	0.3
Total	188	100	166	100	354	100

3.2 Official Signs and Private Signs Code Distribution, Orientation Comparison

With a total area of about 6.3 hectares, Wanshou Palace block is composed of 9 streets and alleys. In the evolution, the traditional alley spatial pattern of four streets and five alleys, five horizontal and four vertical curves is finally formed. The whole block has rich historical and cultural heritage and unique historical style. Within the block, 29 buildings have been registered as immovable cultural relics, 18 buildings have been announced as Nanchang historical buildings, and 46 buildings are traditional style buildings. For this reason, the government has strong dominance and intervention, and the official road signs, signage, building nameplates, and scenic spot introduction cards are densely distributed in the streets and alleys. On the other hand, the palace of Time-honored restaurants, intangible cultural heritage technology, film and television theater, catering, fashion play, clothing, cultural creation and other new forms of business throughout them, shop signs, promotional posters and other commercial signs frequently appear, become an important part of the local business and market culture of Wanshou Palace.

The above characteristics of the linguistic landscape of Wanshou Palace historical and cultural block have a potential impact on the number of official and private signs and the

distribution and orientation of the code. There are differences between these two types of signs, so it is necessary to carry out a comparative analysis of them, which is helpful to further explore the internal texture of the linguistic landscape code use in the historical and cultural block.

Code orientation refers to the preferential relationship between languages on bilingual or multilingual signs, so as to reflect their social status within the language community (Shang Guowen and Zhao Shouhui, 2014). Specifically, different codes compete with each other in the public space. Due to differences in power and status, different degrees of prominence are displayed in the linguistic landscape through code preference order, engraving methods, information load and other forms.

As can be seen in "Table 1", among the 354 effective linguistic landscape samples, 188 cases of official language signs were set up, accounting for 53.1%, and 166 cases of private signs were set up, accounting for 46.9%. The code distribution of the official signs of Wanshou Palace Historical and Cultural District reflects the language policies and ideologies of the national and local governments. There are four kinds of code types: Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean. The main forms of code used are Chinese monolingual (47.9%), Chinese-English Japanese and Korean (39.3%) and Chinese-English (12.8%). It can be seen that Nanchang municipal government advocates that the

text should be dominated by Chinese, the official language, followed by English, the international language. In the sample, all signs in Chinese, English, Japanese and South Korea appear in the official signs as “Figure 1”, giving full consideration to the language needs of the target population of the scenic spot, providing maximum convenience for foreign tourists, and reflecting the official multilingual orientation.

According to the survey, most official multilingual or bilingual signs are arranged in a downward order, with Chinese usually at the top of the sign in larger font as shown in “Figure 1” and “Figure 2”, followed by English. In “Figure 1”, the font size of Japanese and Korean in "Lao Chen Mie hang" is similar, and Japanese is on top, showing the priority relationship of "Chinese-English - Japanese - Korean" from top to bottom. It also confirms the theory of place semiotics that when different codes are arranged up and down, the dominant codes are on the top; when they are arranged left and right, the dominant codes are on the left; when they are arranged encircling, the dominant codes are in the middle (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). In “Figure 3” "Nanpu Gallery" of the official architectural name plate, the author found that the left and right arrangement patterns are traditional Chinese text vectors from right to left, and the writing direction is vertical row, and the preferred position is the right side as in “Figure 3”. These results indicate that there are differences in visual grammar in different contexts, and the specific characteristics of linguistic cultural context should be considered in determining the preferred location of linguistic landscape. It is worth mentioning that the Chinese character code of this kind of code sign adopts the Song Dynasty font and the form of retro engraving, which helps to strengthen the prominence of the Chinese code and the cultural and historical significance, and has a positive construction effect on the authenticity of historical and cultural blocks.



Figure 1 Chens Bamboo-strip Woven Article Shop.



Figure 2 Warning signs against falls.

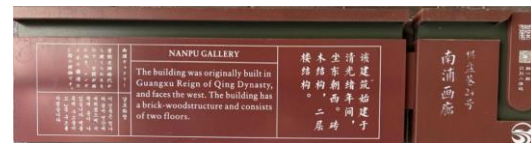


Figure 3 Nanpu Gallery.

The choice of private signage code mainly reflects the business characteristics of the shop and the needs of consumer groups, and its signage setting has greater freedom. Statistics in “Table 1” show that the code types of private signs in Wanshou Palace are diverse, among which Chinese monolingual signs occupy the absolute highest level, reaching 74.7%, and Chinese-English bilingual signs account for 18.7%. There are 5 cases of pure English signs, all of which are fashion restaurant names of foreign catering brands, such as Starbuck (Starbucks), Kumokumo cheese (cheesecake), etc. In addition, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese are all bilingual structure signs of Chinese and auxiliary languages, and a small number of them appear on the corresponding regional flavor restaurant signs. In contrast, in private language signs, Chinese has more advantages in symbol competition and is easier to achieve economic value.

In the samples of private signage, the trend of diversification of language symbols is obvious. Many merchants' marketing and advertising slogans

appear in Nanchang dialect, or present the folklore and legends of Wanshou Palace in the form of pictures and images, infiltrating historical elements, which can convey the historical and cultural value of the shop to customers, establish a brand image, gain a sense of identity, and stimulate their purchasing power. Promote the production of economic value, as shown in "Figure 4", the Wanshou Palace cultural and creative collection hall of propaganda symbols).



Figure 4 Wanshou Palace Cultural and Creative Collection Hall of Propaganda Symbols.



Figure 5 The Crafter's Original Heart.



Figure 6 Li Ji Sugar Cake.

The code placement sequence of private signage samples is diversified and personalized. As shown in "Figure 5", a non-heritage technology shop inlays the propaganda Chinese character "The crafter's original heart" on the outer facade of the wall, while the English "follow" is placed next to the Chinese character "Ben" and "the heart" is placed inside the heart character, forming a semi-enveloping structure. The sign cleverly blends Chinese and English characters together to produce a unique artistic effect, and does not affect the identification and highlighting effect of the code, so that tourists will be unforgettable, stimulate their exploration psychology, and then improve their desire to buy. "Figure 6" shows the sign of a Nanchang time-honored pastry shop, which adopts the form of simplified Chinese characters and is

paired with a retro wooden sign carrier to strengthen the historical sense of the time-honored shop.

4. THE CREATOR AND READER'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF WANSHOU PALACE

The creator of the official sign of Wanshou palace is numerous, including the writer and translator of the text of the sign, the writer of the relevant rules of the provincial and municipal language committees, and the relevant personnel of the scenic area management department. The author conducted an interview with them and found that in the production of signs, Chinese is the official language of China as the benchmark, in order to meet the language needs of different tourists as the principle, and to the scenic area construction planning as the guidance, unified planning of scenic area signs. Sign creators have the highest recognition of Chinese, followed by English, Japanese, Korean and other international languages. When setting up the sign, it integrates the unique nostalgic style and image of the Wanshou palace, such as the imitation of Song style and seal cutting signs, which not only performs the basic information function, but also pays attention to the harmony and unity of the surrounding environment and cultural atmosphere.

The "author" of a private sign includes the author and translator of the content of the sign, the shop operator, and the company to which the shop belongs. The author conducted interviews with the relevant personnel of a number of shops and found that the "author" of private signs generally believed that the establishment of shop signs should reflect the characteristics of the store's products, and pay less attention to the positioning and image of historical and cultural districts. They agree with the Chinese monolingual signs very much, for English, many operators said they do not know, did not want to put on the sign. Only a small number of operators of national cultural products identify with English signboards.



Figure 7 Warning signs of No Climbing.



Figure 8 Ice and Fire.

The research group randomly selected 6 foreign tourists and 6 Chinese tourists to interview, in order to explore the attitude of signage readers and obtain relevant suggestions. Chinese tourists say that the official signs can accurately convey the message, especially the signage, which is written in a seal script imitating the Song Dynasty, is well suited to the historical and cultural atmosphere of the neighborhood. But to point out that the vast majority of architectural signage as in “Figure 1” and “Figure 3”, only reflect the age of the building and the building materials, seems too simple, should be enriched with information. Two other foreign tourists pointed out that the language translation is not standard, as shown in “Figure 7”, which should be translated as "No Climbing".

For private signage, Chinese tourists think that the design of private signage is clear and reasonable, while foreign tourists hope that the logo will appropriately add English translation. In “Figure 8”, taking the menu at the door of a gourmet restaurant as an example, most menus only indicate the name of the dish, but ignore the English translation of the dish name, and do not fully consider the effective interaction between foreign "readers" and the sign.

5. CONCLUSION

According to the survey results, the pattern of code selection, distribution and code orientation analysis in Wanshou Palace historical and cultural district shows the same pattern: Chinese is an

absolutely significant code, followed by English, and non-universal languages are in a subordinate position in most cases. The linguistic landscape analysis of official and private signage reflects the unique and diverse linguistic mechanisms of the neighborhood. Code preference position, font size, simple font and calligraphy font are commonly used to highlight the code-oriented strategies in China's urban linguistic landscape. The language signers highlight the status relationship of the code through the flexible combination of these strategies, and strengthen the construction of the authentic, local, modern and international (aesthetic) language space of the block.

Compared with the ancient streets such as the string golden Tower and Tengwang Pavilion in Nanchang City, the Wanshou Palace Historical and cultural District is a new reconstruction and restoration project completed and opened in 2021, and was selected as the first batch of "intangible cultural heritage tourism blocks" in the country, and the language management and service awareness of the creator of the official sign has been greatly improved. For example, signs fully take into account the needs of the target population of the scenic spot, set up multi-language or bilingual signs, and the signs are highly ornamental. However, there is still a cross area in the supervision of different departments' signage Settings, some indicating signs and warning signs have different code choices, only monolingual Chinese code, and individual warning signs are translated incorrectly. Such signs usually carry language service functions, which is inconvenient for foreign tourists and also affects the coherence and order of public language space. On the other hand, the ability of private sign creators varies, generally considering economic interests and personal preferences and other factors to make signs, coupled with the historical and cultural district planning awareness and participation is not high, in the code selection and sign design can not serve the functional positioning and image building of the block.

The wave of globalization has promoted the diversity and complexity of the social, cultural and linguistic landscape. The flow of Nanchang's historical and cultural districts has surged, a large number of tourists from different countries have visited or businesses have entered, and a series of advantages and disadvantages such as the official language (mother tongue), the global common language (English), minority languages and even Nanchang dialect have mixed together. How to plan the power relationship of different languages and

how to construct the interactive relationship between sign discourse and social space need to be further explored.

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