

LINGUISTICS AND VIETNAMESE LINGUISTICS

CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS THROUGH LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE: A CASE STUDY OF PHU MY HUNG QUARTER, HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT: This study looks at cultural features shown in the language signs at Phu My Hung, a modern urban area in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Many Korean people live here, so this place is special to study cultural interaction and how cultures mix through public signs. The study uses ideas from language landscape theory (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) and cultural transfer theory. It mixes qualitative content analysis with data from 992 signs, like shop signs, information boards, and advertisements. The results show Korean language and cultural symbols are clear, along with Vietnamese, English, and Chinese. This shows how cultures live together, adapt, and share symbolic power in the city. This research helps explain how language shows and builds multicultural city identity. It also gives ideas for future studies about urban sociolinguistics and sustainable cultural growth in fast-growing Asian cities.

KEY WORDS: Cultural Characteristics; Linguistic Landscape; New Urban Model; Phu My Hung Quarter.

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1. Introduction

In modern cities, signs show many languages and tell us about society, power, and culture mixing. In places with many cultures, signs are not just for talking but also show how people live and who they are.

Phu My Hung in District 7, Ho Chi Minh City, is a good place to study signs because it's a fancy area with many foreigners. A lot of Korean people live there, about 20,000, and they have their own shops, schools, and culture places since the late 1990s. This makes the area have many languages on signs.

Vietnam and South Korea are similar because they share ideas like Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. But Korean language on signs, compared to Vietnamese or other languages, makes us think about which language is stronger and how culture and identity work in this city.

This study uses ideas from linguistic landscape studies and culture mixing to look at signs in Phu My Hung. It checks 992 signs from shops, homes, and schools, using both number data and deeper analysis. The study asks these questions: 1/What are the key characteristics of the linguistic landscape in Phu My Hung Quarter?; 2/How are Korean and Vietnamese cultural elements expressed through public signage in this area?

By answering these, the study helps us understand how culture and identity appear in city signs. It also gives ideas about language rules, mixing cultures, and how language helps make strong city identities.

2. Literature review

2.1. Linguistic Landscape

The idea of linguistic landscape started with Landry and Bourhis (1997). It means how languages show up on public and shop signs in an area. Their work made linguistic landscape a field that mixes sociolinguistics, signs study, city studies, and language rules. It looks at how language on signs

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shows and builds social identity, power, and culture.

Later studies (Backhaus, 2007; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009) looked more at signs with many languages in cities. They studied how these signs show things like globalization, people moving, and identity changes. Researchers also checked how main languages and smaller languages work together or fight in public places. This shows ideas and power rankings (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Blackwood & Tufi, 2015).

In Southeast Asia, people started studying linguistic landscapes to see how foreign communities affect fast-growing cities (Firdausiyah et al., 2020). Shohamy (2006) said signs are like a real language policy. Language use comes from both government rules and people's choices. So, linguistic landscape studies help us see culture, language rules in action, and how communities mix.

2.2. Cultural Transfer

Cultural transfer is about how ideas, habits, values, or symbols move from one group to another. They get changed, mixed, or accepted by new communities. It's not just passing things on but also involves talking, changing, and mixing cultures (Clifford, 1997). Clifford (1997) called cultural transfer like "travel" or "translation." He meant cultures move, mix, and make new meanings. These ideas help people study globalization and cultural signs. Cultural transfer happens in small ways, like people talking, or big ways, like people moving to new countries. When cultures meet, they create new identities, change old ways, and bring social changes. In cities, this shows up in language signs, shop brands, and symbols (Savski, 2016; Barakos & Unger, 2016).

This study uses cultural transfer ideas to look at how Korean culture appears in signs in Phu My Hung, Ho Chi Minh City. It shows how foreign communities help build the city's cultural identity in modern Vietnam.

2.3. "Little Seoul" Phu My Hung Quarter

Phu My Hung is in District 7, Ho Chi Minh City. It's a big city project and a popular place for foreigners, especially Koreans, to live. In the late 1990s, it changed from a swamp to a multicultural area with Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, and many Korean people. People call Phu My Hung "Little Seoul" or "Asian Quarter" because it has lots of Korean shops, schools, cultural places, and homes. Streets like Bui Bang Doan, Dang Dai Do, and Sky Garden are called "Korean streets" by locals and foreigners. They have many Korean signs and Korean-style services. These signs give information and show Korean culture and identity. About 178,000 Koreans live in Vietnam, and around 90,000 are in Ho Chi Minh City. Nearly 11,000 live in Phu My Hung (Ho Chi Minh - Korea Friendship Association, 2023). This makes it the biggest Korean area in the city. It's a good place to study how Korean culture and language appear in signs.

This study looks at three main areas in the Korean quarter: (1) Hung Gia Street (Hung Gia 1–5), which has many entertainment and cultural places; (2) Sky Garden, where many Koreans live and have businesses; and (3) Nguyen Duc Canh Boulevard and nearby streets, with fancy shops, clinics, and cafes for Koreans. These areas have signs in Korean, Vietnamese, and English. The signs show how cultures mix and compete in this multicultural place.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method approach combining quantitative data collection and qualitative discourse analysis. Fieldwork was conducted in March 2024 across three sub-areas of the Phu My Hung urban zone: Hung Gia Street, Sky Garden, and Nguyen Duc Canh Boulevard. A total of 992 signs were documented and categorized, including 508 monolingual, 372 bilingual, and 112 multilingual signs. Signage was photographed and catalogued with attention to language type, location, and communicative function.

For quantitative categorization, the study employed the classification framework proposed by Ben-Rafael et al. (2010), which distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up signage, and between monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual types. The contextual analysis also followed Backhaus (2007), focusing on code visibility, language positioning, and spatial distribution.

Qualitative analysis was guided by discourse analysis, particularly focusing on the interplay between linguistic landscape and language policy. Drawing on the perspective of Hult (2009) and Tollefson & Pérez-Milans (2018), the study examined both visible language practices and underlying ideologies expressed through signage. This allowed us to investigate how language policy—explicit or implicit—shapes multilingual realities in urban public space.

To strengthen interpretation, signs were also categorized by field of activity (e.g., education, commerce, services), revealing domain-specific language choices and patterns of cultural transfer. Representative signs were selected as case studies to illustrate the dynamics of Korean-Vietnamese linguistic interaction in the area.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Characteristics of linguistic landscape in Phu My Hung Quarter

4.1.1. In terms of linguistic components

Table 1. Statistics of languages displayed on signs in Phu My Hung Quarter

SURVEY LOCATION (Tan Phong Ward, Dist.7)		Number of surveys		Language elements on signs									
		Store number	Signage number	Monolingual				Bilingual				Multilingual	
				Vietnamese	Korean	English	Others	Korean - Vietnamese	English - Vietnamese	English - Korean	Others	Vietnamese English - Korean	Others
HUNG GIA QUARTER (Phan Khiem Ich Street, Cao Trieu Phat)	1	36	77	13	5	30	0	2	16	5	0	6	0
	2	55	137	9	21	39	4	5	20	15	7	14	3
	3	68	131	10	11	32	1	7	28	16	2	17	7
	4	48	123	9	22	27	1	7	21	21	0	12	3
	5	21	28	10	0	4	0	1	7	3	1	2	0
SKY GARDEN QUARTER (Pham Van Nghi Street)	1	25	42	4	9	5	0	1	13	3	1	5	1
	2	15	39	3	4	11	0	2	6	5	3	3	2
Ton Dat Tien Street		42	153	18	3	57	2	0	50	10	2	7	4
NGUYEN DUC CANH boulevard	Nguyen Duc Canh	80	142	15	11	50	1	3	37	7	4	10	4
	Ly Tu Trong	17	42	4	5	15	0	0	10	6	0	2	0
	Pham Thai Buong	57	78	15	2	26	0	3	19	3	0	10	0
TOTAL		464	992	110	93	296	9	31	227	94	20	88	24
				508				372				112	

The linguistic landscape of the Phu My Hung Quarter reveals distinct patterns of language usage, reflecting both global and regional influences. Among the 992 signs surveyed, monolingual signs accounted for the majority (508 signs, 51.2%). Notably, English monolingual signs (296) significantly outnumber Vietnamese monolingual signs (110), underscoring the role of English as a global lingua franca and a marker of international prestige in this urban space. The dominance of English, particularly in commercial signage, suggests its central role in facilitating communication among diverse foreign residents and promoting services to international clientele.

The substantial presence of English can be understood through the lens of globalization and market-oriented language policy. As Ha, Ha, and Dat (2014) observed, English functions as a gatekeeping tool in access to employment and education, making its visibility in public signage a reflection of both economic aspirations and cultural capital. This also aligns with Shohamy's (2006) assertion that linguistic landscapes serve as a form of *de facto* language policy.

Korean is the second most prevalent foreign language in the signage, corresponding to the high concentration of Korean residents in Phu My Hung. Korean appears prominently in monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual signs, particularly in areas such as Sky Garden, Hung Gia, and Nguyen Duc Canh streets, where Korean businesses cluster. This reflects what Ben-Rafael et al. (2010) call a bottom-up initiative where private actors use their preferred language in signage, signaling cultural presence and identity. Multilingual signs, though fewer in total number (112 signs), offer valuable insight into language mixing patterns. Among them, the most common combination is English-Korean-Vietnamese (88 signs), followed by English-Korean (94 signs) and Vietnamese-Korean (31 signs). These patterns reveal differing communication strategies among business owners: Korean shop owners often prioritize Korean and English to target both the local Korean community and broader international audiences, while Vietnamese shop owners tend to use English-Vietnamese signs (227) to serve both domestic and foreign customers.

Additionally, signs in Chinese, Japanese, and occasionally French or Spanish were recorded, though in smaller quantities. These reflect the presence of Northeast Asian residents and the area's international orientation, especially along Ton Dat Tien and Hung Gia streets. Overall, the language distribution in signage illustrates not only demographic realities but also symbolic power dynamics, where English and Korean dominate the visible space. This affirms the multicultural and multilingual nature of Phu My Hung, shaped by transnational migration and urban globalization.

4.1.2. In terms of functional scopes

To study the language signs in Phu My Hung, the authors grouped signs by business type and who owns them. They used ideas from Ben-Rafael et al. (2009), which splits signs into top-down (from government or institutions) and bottom-up (from private shops or businesses). Since other languages are rare, the study looks only at English, Vietnamese, and Korean. Government signs, like street names or public boards, follow Vietnam's language rules. Vietnamese is always first, and English or Korean comes second in smaller letters or only when needed for foreigners. This shows the government controls language use in a city with many languages.

Private business signs are different and change a lot. Signs for shops, restaurants, services, or schools often use English, Korean, or both, depending on who they want to serve. Most businesses use signs in two languages to make things clear and attract more customers. Signs for things like laundry, car repair, or photo shops are called "other services" and usually mix English and Vietnamese. English is used to look modern and professional, not just for international people. In Hung Gia, where many Koreans live, this is very clear. Official signs are mostly in Vietnamese and English, but Korean shows up more in private signs for healthcare, private schools, and religious places. These signs often use English or Korean to help foreigners and Koreans. Even though people call this area "Little Seoul," the Korean community follows Vietnam's rules for government signs.

The mix of sign types, languages, and business purposes shows how signs reflect culture and help manage many languages in the city.

In the informal sign system (bottom-up), the Korean community is prominently represented in food and beauty shops, often referred to as a "land of martial arts". As the capital for Koreans, the Korean language dominates the signs of many restaurants such as Gangnam BBQ, Red Ginseng, Korean Noodles, and in massage and hair salons. Conspicuous points of Korean services also show how to use the phrase "Household Business" in Vietnamese, the English phrase "Korean Restaurant" and the accompanying Korean name. According to the survey, many corporate stores display only the Korean language on advertising signs or glass panels, with limited content in English and/or Vietnamese. The use of familiar languages creates challenges for many Vietnamese and Western customers seeking services. Besides the pure Korean signs, this Korean area features a significant number of signs in English and Vietnamese, especially in popular sectors like dining and beauty. But often showing the message in English words first, bigger and more focused to illustrate their field of operation shows that many shops are violating the Vietnamese State Policy in Clause 2, Article 18. Through the general observations, the services - utilities here prioritize English - Vietnamese languages right in the Korean community. However, foreign languages (English and Korean) are often prioritized over Vietnamese. This causes many difficulties for domestic residents coming from far away.

Table 2. Linguistic landscape in functional scope in Hung Gia Quarter

Classification		Number of units surveyed	English, Vietnamese monolingual and bilingual English – Vietnamese signboard					Korea monolingual and bilingual Vietnamese - Korean, English - Korean signboard				
			Number of signboard in English/Vietnamese	English signboard	Vietnamese signboard	English-Vietnamese signboard	The ratio of UK coming first	Number of signboard in English/Vietnamese	Korea signboard	Vietnamese-Korea signboard	English – Korea signboard	The ratio of Korea coming first
Official sign system	Religion	3	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	1
	Government	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Education	9	9	4	0	5	8	0	0	0	0	0
	Medical	6	5	1	1	3	4	1	0	1	0	1
	Signboard	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Notification	5	5	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Signposts	25	25	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Informal sign system	Food and drink	72	50	23	6	21	40	11	5	6	0	9
	Trading	33	16	4	3	9	10	3	1	1	1	2
	Hotel	22	22	9	4	7	15	0	0	0	0	0
	Real estate	11	9	2	3	4	5	2	1	0	1	2
	Beauty	33	26	11	4	11	18	6	3	2	1	6
	Others	53	37	21	9	7	26	5	2	1	2	3

Table 3. Linguistic landscape - functional scope in Sky Garden Quarter Nguyen Duc Canh Boulevard

Classification		Number of units surveyed	English, Vietnamese monolingual and bilingual English – Vietnamese signboard					Korea monolingual and bilingual Vietnamese - Korean, English - Korean signboard				
			Number of signboard in English/Vietnamese	English sign board	Vietnamese signboard	English – Vietnamese signboard	The ratio of the UK coming first	English/Vietnamese/K in	Korea signboard	Vietnamese-Korea signboard	English – Korea signboard	The ratio of Korea coming first
Official sign system	Religion	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	1
	Government	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Medical	3	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Signboard	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Notification	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Signposts	4	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Informal sign system	Food and drink	13	6	4	0	2	1	7	2	2	3	2
	Trading	20	16	7	1	8	6	2	0	0	2	0
	Hotel	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Real estate	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Beauty	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
	Others	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Nguyen Duc Canh Boulevard connecting Hung Gia, Sky Garden, and Ton Dat Tien street functions as a central commercial corridor in Phu My Hung. This area is characterized by a high concentration of transnational businesses and reflects a blend of Eastern and Western cultural elements. Based on Table 5, the food and retail sectors dominate in this zone, which positions Nguyen Duc Canh as a symbolic “bridge” within the urban linguistic landscape. The analysis reveals that foreign-language signs particularly bilingual ones outnumber monolingual Vietnamese signs. English-Vietnamese signage is especially prevalent among international brands such as Concung, BreadTalk, Koi, The Alley, Lotteria, and Gogi House. This trend reflects business owners’ awareness of the need to comply with Vietnam’s language policies while remaining attractive to foreign consumers. In line with Backhaus (2007), such signs exemplify bottom-up practices shaped by commercial motivations and audience orientation.

Korean-owned businesses in this area often prioritize Korean over Vietnamese. In many cases, Korean is placed before or more prominently than English on signage, while Vietnamese appears marginally or not at all. Although these practices may cater to Korean residents, they do not align with Article 18 of the 2012 Vietnamese Advertising Law, which requires Vietnamese to be presented first and prominently. The lack of Vietnamese-language compliance on private signs suggests either limited awareness of language regulations or different attitudes toward public signage norms among

Korean business owners. This contrasts with European or Vietnamese signage practices, which more often incorporate Vietnamese as a standard component. In contrast, top-down signage in this area such as street names and official public notices consistently adheres to Vietnamese language policies. Government-regulated signs predominantly feature Vietnamese and, where necessary, display English or Korean in subordinate positions for clarity and accessibility. This juxtaposition of top-down compliance and bottom-up divergence illustrates the sociolinguistic dynamics of multicultural urban development. It highlights how language choice in signage reflects not only regulatory frameworks but also the cultural identities and communicative priorities of diverse resident groups.

Table 4. Linguistic landscape - functional scope of Nguyen Duc Canh Boulevard

Classification		Number of units surveyed	English, Vietnamese monolingual and bilingual English – Vietnamese signboard						Korea monolingual and bilingual Vietnamese - Korean, English - Korean signboard			
			Number of signboard in English/Vietnamese	English signboard	Vietnamese signboard	English – Vietnamese signboard	The ratio of UK coming first	English/Vietnamese/Ko in	Korea signboard	Vietnamese-Korea signboard	English – Korea signboard	The ratio of Korea coming first
Official sign system	Religion	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	1
	Government	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Education	13	9	3	0	6	4	2	0	0	2	1
	Medical	5	3	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1
	Signboard	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Notification	2	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Signposts	8	8	0	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Informal sign system	Food and drink	60	48	21	9	18	8	6	3	2	1	2
	Trading	49	33	15	2	16	11	12	0	3	9	5
	Hotel	7	7	6	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Real estate	3	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0
	Beauty	12	11	4	0	7	4	1	0	0	1	1
	Others	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0

The linguistic landscape in the core Korean areas of Phu My Hung particularly Hung Gia and Sky Garden streets reflects strong transnational influences shaped by the Korean community. According to Table 6, monolingual signs constitute 49.2% of total signage in this area (284 out of 577 signs). Notably, Korean monolingual signs (72) outnumber Vietnamese ones (58), accounting for 25.4% of all signs, which highlights the cultural and linguistic imprint of the Korean diaspora. Although multilingual signs are relatively rare in this sub-area (13%), the most common combination observed is Vietnamese-Korean-English (59 signs). This pattern suggests attempts to balance communication needs among three primary audiences: local Vietnamese, Korean residents, and international visitors. However, the overall preference among Korean-owned businesses remains focused on bilingual

formats, especially English-Korean signs (68), which are significantly more common than Vietnamese-Korean ones (25).

This linguistic preference reflects what Backhaus (2007) described as “audience design” in bottom-up signage, where private business owners tailor language use to match the perceived linguistic repertoires of their customers. In this case, Korean business owners emphasize English as a global lingua franca to expand their market reach beyond their ethnic community. This strategy may also indicate a symbolic alignment with modernity and global connectivity, a point consistent with Shohamy’s (2006) interpretation of signage as soft policy in multilingual societies. The dominance of Korean and English in signage over the national language also raises questions about compliance with Vietnam’s language policy, particularly in areas where Vietnamese is not prioritized. However, such practices can be understood within the context of community clustering and the socio-economic functions of signage in serving a linguistically defined clientele.

4.2. Cultural transfer in the “Little Seoul” Phu My Hung Quarter

Culture is a composite picture of many different elements. This study on cultural transfer in the Phu My Hung Quarter focuses on signs, directional indicators, and signposts. They clearly show the cultural exchange and transformation between Korea and Vietnam, creating a diverse spatial picture of cultural colors in Phu My Hung area.

Cultural exchange always takes place in any area. With Phu My Hung, a special area with clear cultural exchange, cultures such as indigenous culture, European - American culture and Asian culture (Korea) always integrate and blend with each other. The integration process has led to exchanges between indigenous, European-American, and Asian (Korean) cultures, resulting in a unique cultural blend. The blending of prominent cultural features creates diversity.

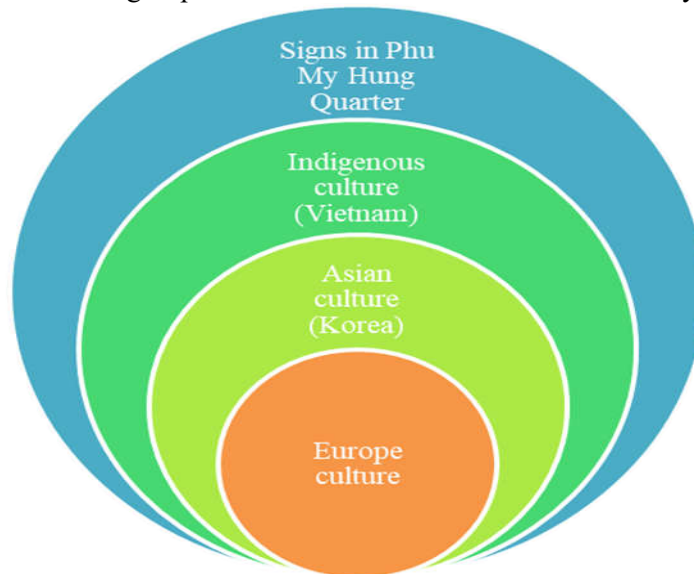


Figure 1. Diagram showing the relationship of cultural transfer phenomenon across linguistic space in Phu My Hung Quarter

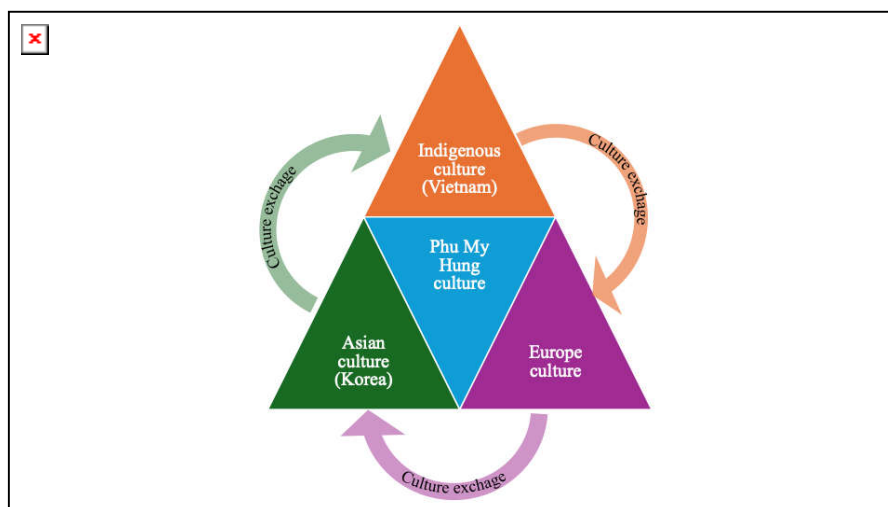


Figure 2. Diagram showing the relationship between cultures in Phu My Hung Quarter

The linguistic landscape of the stores illustrates their characteristics and functions, reflecting business and advertising strategies, while also conveying cultural values that resonate with customers, particularly foreign students. Not only that, the messages expressed through cultural characteristics can shape and evaluate acceptable standards or not when displayed in the outdoor space of a certain residential community. In this article, the authors focus on surveying several typical signs showing Korean cultural values at two locations: Hung Gia Quarter and Sky Garden Quarter - places crowded with tourists and visitors. Korean immigration to live and work.

Food-and-drink culture: The linguistic landscape of Phu My Hung not only reflects transnational demographics but also encodes symbolic representations of Korean culinary culture. Food signage, particularly in Hung Gia and Sky Garden neighborhoods, provides a semiotic lens into how cultural identity and audience orientation manifest in commercial discourse.

Korean Barbecue: Restaurants such as Gangnam BBQ House and Suwon King of Grilled Ribs (수원 왕 갈비) display signage in both Korean and English. Terms like “BBQ” (a Western culinary abbreviation) and “갈비” (galbi, Korean ribs) illustrate the hybridization of culinary terminology. The use of “Gangnam” evokes associations with modernity, wealth, and Korean pop culture, possibly referencing the global influence of Gangnam Style as a cultural export. This aligns with Clifford’s (1997) notion of cultural transfer as travel and translation, where culinary naming becomes both a commercial strategy and a symbolic act.

Korean Noodles and Hotpots: Signage for dishes such as Budae Jjigae (부대찌개) often retains the Korean Romanization without translating the cultural-historical meaning (e.g., “military stew”). This choice reflects a preference for foreignness as brand identity over local semantic clarity. The use of “Han Quoc Shab Noodle” on signs despite “shab” lacking precise meaning suggests an attempt to localize through phonetic appeal, albeit at the expense of cultural specificity. Such practices echo Shohamy’s (2006) critique of how commercial signs selectively transmit or obscure cultural content for marketability.

Soy-Based Dishes and Naming Strategies: Dishes like Jajangmyeon (자장면), or “traditional black bean noodles”, show signs with bilingual labeling. For instance, signs may include the Vietnamese term “mì tương đen truyền thống” along with Korean characters and Romanized Korean. This trilingual format reflects a balance between authenticity, accessibility, and ethnic targeting. The term yetnal jajangmyeon (“once upon a time noodles”) is often omitted in signage, indicating a focus on function rather than historical narrative.

Korean Alcohol Culture: Drinks like soju and makgeolli are often seen on signs and menus, usually with grilled meats. Signs show brand names like Chamisul or Chum Churum, written in Korean with nice pictures. These names show how important drinking is in Korean social life. But the signs don't explain deeper meanings, like how drinking brings people together or is part of rituals. Overall, food signs in "Little Seoul" show a mix of languages shaped by Korean culture, business brands, and knowing who looks at the signs. These signs are not just labels; they carry cultural ideas, show identity, and make the city feel modern and global.

Beauty culture: The beauty industry is a big part of Korean culture, and it's easy to see in Phu My Hung's "Little Seoul." In Hung Gia and Sky Garden areas, many beauty businesses like salons, spas, cosmetic shops, and wellness centers use signs to show Korean style and sell their services.

Korean-language signs in these establishments often prioritize key terms such as "skin care," "beauty care," and "spa," frequently appearing in English, Korean, and occasionally Vietnamese. The use of English-language terms reflects a broader commercial strategy to attract both Korean-speaking and international customers. Meanwhile, signs that incorporate Korean characters, especially Hangul phrases paired with stylized icons (e.g., facial silhouettes, skincare drops), function as symbolic representations of cultural expertise and brand authenticity. These semiotic elements align with Clifford's (1997) concept of cultural transfer, whereby signs mediate not only products but also lifestyle ideologies.

Beauty salons in the area also reflect the Korean jjimjilbang spa model, where wellness, relaxation, and aesthetics intersect. Although some signs refer to these practices only through visual cues, others explicitly reference Korean origins, further contributing to what Shohamy (2006) describes as "linguistic visibility in public spaces" as a soft form of cultural policy. The inclusion of iconic Korean beauty terms and spa services in signage signals both identity expression and cultural commodification.

Furthermore, the signs reflect shared values in skincare between Korean and Vietnamese women, especially in terms of facial aesthetics. According to Kang, Lee, and Kim (2020), bright, clear skin is considered essential in both cultures, and is frequently emphasized through public imagery and text in beauty signage. However, the preference for Korean phrases and English terms over Vietnamese translations suggests a shift toward aspirational consumption and symbolic prestige in the beauty sector.

Ultimately, beauty-related signs in "Little Seoul" reveal more than service offerings they perform cultural work by transmitting ideals of appearance, wellness, and self-care through linguistic and visual design. As such, they are integral to understanding how Korean soft power and consumer culture are embedded in the multilingual urban environment of Phu My Hung.

Health culture: In "Little Seoul," the presence of Korean red ginseng shops such as those labeled "Cửa hàng Hồng Sâm Hàn Quốc" illustrates how health-related cultural values are embedded in the linguistic landscape. The prominence of Vietnamese-language signage, despite the Korean ownership, reflects both compliance with local language policy and the strong brand recognition of "Hồng Sâm" among Vietnamese consumers. These signs function as hybrid semiotic devices, using minimal textual elements while leveraging symbolic visuals (ginseng roots, Korean script, national flags) to convey health, longevity, and transnational trust.

Greeting culture: Greeting norms, rooted in Confucian philosophy, are also reflected in store signage and interactional scripts. While the verbal greeting "Annyeonghaseyo" (안녕하세요) is widely observed through oral interaction, its influence is semiotically evident in store slogans promoting politeness, sincerity, and respect. Phrases such as "Món ăn là tấm lòng thành" (Food is sincerity) or "Món ăn là niềm tin" (Food is belief) demonstrate how moral values translate into linguistic expressions that align commercial hospitality with deeper cultural meanings. These

practices reflect Shohamy's (2006) idea of "cultural messaging" through signage that shapes public space behavior.

Spiritual culture: Religious presence is visually represented by Korean Protestant churches such as "Phu My Hung Meeting Point" and "South Saigon Baptist Church," which include bilingual or English-only signage with religious symbols (crosses, churches). These signs reinforce the visibility of spiritual identity within an urban context, offering not only places of worship but also cultural continuity for Korean expatriates. According to Clifford (1997), such spaces exemplify "cultural transfer zones," where traditions travel, adapt, and root in new environments.

In Korean spiritual beliefs, Musok-gyo is considered a phenomenon of polytheistic folk beliefs that have been present in Korea for worship, fortune-telling, and séances since ancient times. However, in modern spiritual life, Protestantism (gaesingyo – 개신교) is regarded as one of the major religions of Korea and has a great influence on the Korean community. Conducting a survey along the streets of the "Little Seoul" neighborhood, there are two Protestant churches "Phu My Hung Meeting Point" and "South Saigon Baptist Church" together with typical religious symbols (Figure 18). The specific content shown on signs like this not only helps the Korean community participate, but also harmonizes with Vietnamese people in these neighborhoods.

Protestantism became the most popular religion of the Korean community. Many historians of Protestantism in Korea believe that Protestantism combined with nationalism to form "Christian Nationalism" (Seyoon Kim, 1986, p.32). This is an outstanding reason that almost no other Eastern country has. In addition, the important influence of Protestantism on Korea is its contribution to promoting the process of modernizing Korean society since the second half of the twentieth century. Protestantism significantly innovated Korea's education system post-independence, transforming the spiritual landscape of Korean society, through the diverse activities of the education system, health care, social activities in the direction of Western modernization.

The linguistic landscape of Phu My Hung's "Little Seoul" encapsulates a dynamic cultural interplay where language, signage, and symbolic imagery intersect to express identity, commerce, and community. Through signage related to food, beauty, health, and spirituality, Korean culture is made visible, accessible, and integrated into Vietnam's urban fabric.

This study illustrates how cultural values are not only preserved but reinterpreted in shared spaces via language. The dominance of Korean and English signs over Vietnamese in private enterprises suggests a bottom-up semiotic agency that negotiates identity and communicative efficacy, while top-down signage generally complies with Vietnamese language policy.

With more globalization and different cultures in cities, language signs are important for how people see culture, mix with others, and make cities look nice. Kim Do-Yeon (2016) said Vietnam and Korea keep their traditions strong but also take some outside ideas. So, using language signs carefully can help keep cultures alive, letting different cultures and national identity stay together with good signs, symbols, and smart communication.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that the language signs in Phu My Hung, a modern area in Ho Chi Minh City, are a place where cultures mix, symbols talk, and identities show. By looking closely at signs for food, beauty, health, religion, and shops, the study finds Vietnamese, Korean, and English used together. These signs show who lives there, business plans, culture sharing, and soft power.

The results agree with ideas that language signs are both government rules for language use and people's way to show their culture (Shohamy, 2006; Backhaus, 2007). Government signs mostly use Vietnamese rules, but private signs often use Korean and English to be seen, reach more customers, and show value. Here, language is a tool for practical use and a way for communities to show they exist, are important, and belong.

Phu My Hung's language signs show how city planning, mixed cultures, and communication work together. As Vietnam grows and gets more diverse, managing signs with rules and community help will be important for building city identities that include everyone and keep cultures strong. Future studies can look at what people think about language use, how signs change over time, and how signs connect to digital city spaces.

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Đặc trưng văn hoá qua cảnh quan ngôn ngữ - Nghiên cứu trường hợp khu phố Phú Mỹ Hưng, Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, Việt Nam

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này khảo sát các đặc điểm văn hóa được thể hiện trong cảnh quan ngôn ngữ tại khu đô thị hiện đại Phú Mỹ Hưng, Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, Việt Nam. Với cộng đồng người Hàn Quốc sinh sống đông đảo, khu vực này trở thành một địa điểm đặc biệt để khám phá sự tương tác văn hóa và quá trình tiếp biến văn hóa thông qua hệ thống biển hiệu công cộng. Dựa trên lý thuyết cảnh quan ngôn ngữ (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) và lý thuyết chuyển giao văn hóa, nghiên cứu kết hợp giữa phân tích nội dung định tính và dữ liệu định lượng thu thập từ 992 biển hiệu, bao gồm biển hiệu thương mại, biển thông tin và bảng quảng cáo. Kết quả cho thấy sự hiện diện rõ nét của ngôn ngữ và biểu tượng văn hóa Hàn Quốc bên cạnh tiếng Việt, tiếng Anh và tiếng Trung, phản ánh các quá trình cùng tồn tại văn hóa, bản địa hóa và sự thương thảo quyền lực biểu tượng trong không gian đô thị. Nghiên cứu này góp phần làm sáng tỏ vai trò của ngôn ngữ như một phương tiện biểu đạt và định hình bản sắc đô thị đa văn hóa, đồng thời cung cấp những gợi ý hữu ích cho các nghiên cứu tương lai trong lĩnh vực xã hội ngôn ngữ học đô thị và phát triển bền vững văn hóa tại các thành phố châu Á đang phát triển nhanh chóng.

Từ khoá: Đặc trưng văn hoá; cảnh quan ngôn ngữ; mô hình đô thị mới; khu phố Phú Mỹ Hưng.