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SOCIETAL LANGUAGE DOMINANCE OF COVID-19 RELATED SIGNS IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF A SOUTHERN PHILIPPINE CITY

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Abstract

The instantaneous spread and repercussions of COVID-19 brought a sudden change in Valencia City, Bukidnon, for its local government required all public and private entities to install appropriate markings and signs that would direct people to observe physical distancing, proper handwashing, and wearing of masks. However, no language policies were issued relevant to the health crisis despite the multilingual context of the city, and people were found violating health protocols despite the presence of signs. This qualitative-descriptive study employing Linguistic Landscape (LL) analysis identified the code preferences of top-down and bottom-up actors. It revealed the societal language dominance in the code preferences of the actors. Furthermore, this study utilised the available COVID-19 signs in select streets in Valencia City through photographs and observational protocols. The results showed the top-down actors preferred monolingual English, bilingual English-Filipino, and bilingual English-Cebuano. On the other hand, the bottom-up actors preferred monolingual English, monolingual Cebuano, bilingual English-Filipino, bilingual English-Cebuano, and trilingual English-Cebuano-Filipino. Overall, English, Cebuano, and Filipino are the most prevalent codes, while Ilonggo, Ilocano, and Binukid were not seen in COVID-19 signs. This study revealed that English is, therefore, the dominant language in COVID-19 related signs at the societal-institutional level.

Keywords: linguistics landscape, COVID-19, societal language dominance, Philippines, Bukidnon

Introduction

Valencia City is a multilingual city that is in the province of Bukidnon, the Philippines. Based on the recent ethnolinguistic profile of the city, most residents speak Cebuano, while some speak Ilonggo and Ilocano in their local communities (Local Government Unit of Valencia, 2016). Meanwhile, English and Filipino are widely used in schools, businesses, and government offices (Philippine Cities, 2016). The visibility of foreign nationals doing business in the city is also a contributing factor to claim the multilingual context of the city, such as Indians, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese. Likewise, the presence of Binukid, an indigenous language, is evident because the city is the home of three out of seven indigenous peoples of Bukidnon province, namely, Talaandig, Manobo, and Bukidnon (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2020).

Valencia City, Bukidnon, is known, too, for its geographical advantage of being in the centre of Mindanao (Province of Bukidnon, 2016). With this, the city is monikered as the commerce and business hub of the province of Bukidnon and has become one of the fastest local economies in Mindanao (Bolido, 2019). As a result, the city itself attracts well-known retail stores, malls, franchised companies, foreign-owned merchandise, and even major banks (Philippine Cities, 2016).

Despite the prosperity that Valencia City gained, the city was not spared from the instantaneous spread and repercussions of COVID-19. The *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) o*r *2019-nCoV* is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus (Zhou et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2020). COVID-19 is pronounced to spread primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (World Health Organization, 2020). And, worst, the virus is responsible for more fatalities than the SARS, and MERS combined (Petrosillo et al., 2020).

As a result, Valencia City shifted to the 'new normal' and spaces were delimited to the public. The Local Government Unit of the city responded immediately to the health crisis. It released *Local Executive Memo No. 15-2020*, which mandated workplaces and establishments to follow health protocols for opening the local economy. The said memo set a sudden change for both private and public entities because it requires installing appropriate markings and signs that would direct people to observe physical distancing, proper handwashing and wearing masks and face shields. These mandated markings and signs include thermal scanning and disinfection facilities such as foot baths and hand basins. However, there is no mention made as to what languages must be utilised in COVID-19 related signs despite the multilingual nature of the city.

On top of the preceding claim, the Department of Interior and Local Government (2020) reported that some residents and offices located in Barangay

Poblacion and other thirteen (13) barangays were not following the regulations during the active surveillance. Moreover, signages like "*No Facemask, No Entry*" were present in the barangays, but health workers and some residents were caught of not wearing masks and not observing physical distancing (Department of Interior and Local Government, 2020)

The report was congruent with the information received by the Valencia Task Force Against COVID-19 from concerned citizens. Accordingly, residents were not wearing masks and observing physical distancing despite strict regulations and the presence of COVID-19 related signages in private establishments, schools, and religious institutions (Valencia Task Force Against COVID-19, 2020). Meanwhile, the news became viral on the internet as Velez (2021) reported on Cable News Channel (CNN Philippines) that some health and safety protocols were not followed during a parish mass. Additionally, the local government closed several establishments for their customers, violating the minimum health standard (Local Government Unit of Valencia, 2020).

The researcher believes that language plays a vital role in these COVID-19 related signs, for language is used not only for speaking but also for display and representation (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). An establishment would need a language that effectively conveys instruction or guidance for people to observe health protocols in a multilingual setting such as Valencia City. And Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, and Trumper-Hecht (2006) refer to this language in display and representation as linguistic landscape (LL).

Linguistic landscape (LL) refers to linguistic objects that mark the public space (Ben-Rafael, 2009). It is the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combined to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Additionally, LL refers to the languages that are visible in a specified area, and more precisely, the language that can be found in cities, indoor markets, shops, schools, offices of government and big corporations, campuses, beaches, and so on (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

Malinowski (2010) believes that signs are not random products with which people have lost control. Instead, some actors created and set the look of these signs. Subsequently, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) extended the analysis of the Linguistic Landscape by distinguishing the *actors* involved as top-down and bottom-up: the former being the products of governmental agencies, such as the Local Government Unit of Valencia City and the Department of Health, which are committed to the dominant culture, regulations and policies, while the latter being associated with the individual, group and corporate actors, such as McDonald's

Restaurant and Double M hotel, which have autonomy of producing and placing signs. However, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) and Malinowski (2010) postulated that there are instances in the language profile of top-down and bottom-up signs that may be quite similar and contribute to a consistent and coherent LL. Thus, the code preferences of these actors involved were considered in this study.

In the words of Fishman (1964), as cited in Baker (1996), people often prefer one of the two languages depending on the medium, role, domain, or situation. Likewise, this preference is an actual choice pattern that the position of the language in a sign can determine. Thus, it is called code preferences (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003). Consequently, to analyse these code preferences with a single method, Loth's (2015) postulated the *Code Preference Indicators (CPI),* which she intertwined the following theories: Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003) *code preference* and *inscription,* and Backhaus's (2007) *multilingual writing styles* to determine the dominant and marginalised codes.

Societal language dominance refers to the social process of determining the dominant language or the dominant code used by different domains at the societal level (Fishman, 1964). The prevalence and prominence of a certain language to signs and actors would not just reveal the level of importance of a dominant language but also reveal the inclusion and exclusion of other languages within the society, thus, reflecting the societal language dominance (Fishman, 1964; Fishman, Singleton, & Ó Laoire, 2013; Accurso, 2015).

The researcher believes that studying the societal language dominance in COVID-19 related signs LL of Valencia City is regarded as part of the greater whole, such as the study of Dela Cruz (2009) on two train stations, Torkington (2009) on golden triangle, and Leech (2011) on the marketplace, and Kasanga (2012) on commercial district. Although many researchers have already conducted linguistic landscape studies of different cities around the world, including Bangkok (Huebner, 2006), Washington D.C. (Lou, 2009), and Manila (Monje, 2017), there have never been studies exploring the linguistic landscape of Valencia City, especially, in the time of the pandemic.

This qualitative-descriptive research aims to reveal the societal language dominance in COVID-19 related signs in Valencia City using Linguistic Landscape analysis. Specifically, this study determined the following: (a) the code preferences used by different actors; and (b) the dominant language in COVID-19 related signs at the societal level. Along with this analysis, the researcher presented the data in the form of photographs and observational protocols. For this reason, the researcher found it necessary to embark into the Linguistic Landscape to reveal the societal language dominance in COVID-19 related signs. The researcher hopes

to carry out this research not to provide answers to the health crisis but to allow this problem to be viewed in a linguistic position.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Societal Language Dominance

This study is based on the established concept of Fishman (1964) on societal language dominance, which refers to the dominant language choices formed by different domains in the "societal-institutional level". According to Fishman (1964), there are basic concepts to consider describing the choice patterns or simply the dominating language within a given society.

First, group membership is a controlling factor in language choice and must be viewed in a socio-psychological sense of group reference (Fishman, 1964). Second, *the situation* is characterised as formal informality, status, solidarity-non-solidarity, and equal inequality. A domain might see one language as informal to use, while the other is formal, like in correspondence, advertising, and announcements. Third, *the domain* includes institutions of society, namely, family, school, church, the press, the military, courts etc. Each of these has distinguishable language behaviour that leads to the choice of language. The domains' different language behaviour may reflect how they interact with populations (residents and non-residents of a certain locality) and their sociocultural systems regarding autonomy, power, influence, and domain centrality (Fishman, 1964). Fourth, *media* refers to the means used to convey the message. Media is rationalised as the degree of inclusion or exclusion of a language in each society is different in each media, such as writing, reading, and speaking.

Linguistic Landscape

According to Fishman (1964), a language must be included or excluded in each society by determining the media to be utilised, such as writing, reading, and speaking. It is, thus, appropriate to employ a *Linguistic Landscape* study because it is the written language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combined to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

Additionally, LL refers to the languages that are visible in a specified area, more precisely, the language that can be found in cities, indoor markets, shops, schools, offices of government and big corporations, campuses, beaches, and so on (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

The researcher supported the Linguistic Landscape with Backhaus's (2006) methodological framework for specific data collection. Backhaus (2006) pointed

out the following parameters: first, the survey areas are the roads, streets, and railway lines which are considered orientation markers of the Linguistic Landscape (Backhaus, 2006); second, the countable items are any piece of the written text within a spatially definable frame (Backhaus, 2006). This definition of the countable item is physical. Backhaus (2006) emphasised that the unit of analysis must be the language written on signs; and third, the distinction between monolingual and multilingual signs must be apparent in categorising the codes in the signs (Backhaus, 2007). The monolingual sign contains one language. However, if the message of the sign is available in more than one language, it is considered as multilingual (bilingual, trilingual, quadrilingual etc.).

The spatial mobility of the object inscribed is also worth mentioning in defining countable items. The carrier of a sign can be either stationary or mobile. According to Backhaus (2006), stationary carriers include the fronts of buildings, trees, signboards, and other sorts of backgrounds for fixed physical announcements. The other carrier is called mobile, which are moving by nature, such as cars, buses, t-shirts, pamphlets etc. In the context of this study, only signs in stationary carriers were considered countable items.

Top-Down* and *Bottom-Up Approach

Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) *Top-Down* and *Bottom-Up Approach* were utilised to categorise different actors in the city's linguistic landscape. For Fishman (1964), the overall status of language dominance at the societal-institutional level is reliant on the various domains and group membership.

The domains are, then, described by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) as 'top-down' actors who are the governmental agencies, which in one way or another, act under the control of local or central policies. For example, the Department of Health (DOH), Local Government Unit (LGU) and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) are a few of the top-down actors in each locale. Meanwhile, 'bottom-up' actors are individuals, associative or corporations who enjoy the autonomy of action within legal limits. For example, hotels, malls, and fast-food chains are a few of the bottom-up actors. Ben-Rafael et al. explained that the main difference between these two domains lies in the fact that the former is expected to reflect a general commitment to the dominant culture. At the same time, the latter is designed much more freely according to individual strategies.

Code Preference Indicators (CPI)

This study utilised Loth's (2015) *Code Preference Indicators,* a single methodology that reveals the dominant and marginalised codes of the signs made by different actors. According to Fishman (1964), there must be 'choice-patterns' within the

media to reveal language dominance at the societal level. These are the following theories involved in CPI:

The first consideration is Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003) *code preference*, which identifies the languages involved and determines the languages' position on the sign. It involved the *code prevalence* (how often codes are used in general) and the *code prominence* (how codes are arranged in signs). Together, as Scollon and Wong Scollon (2003) note, signs create meaning based on their position and location in the world.

In code prominence, Scollon and Wong Scollon (2003) proposed three positions to consider when determining the dominant and marginalised codes; these are: 1) when the positioning is *Center-Margin*, the dominant code is in the centre of the sign, and the marginalised code is on the margins; 2) when the positioning is *Top-Bottom*, the dominant code is on the top, while the marginalised code is on the bottom; 3) when the positioning is *Left-Right*, the dominant code is on the left, while the marginalised code is on the right.

The second consideration is *inscription* or *physical materiality,* including fonts and materials (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003). Aside from code's position, the font components of the signs can be analysed as contributory elements to determine the use of a language or languages. Therefore, this inscription can be used as additional evidence to the first consideration, which would lead to determining the societal language dominance in the Linguistic Landscape (LL).

The third consideration is Backhaus's (2006) *Multilingual Writing Styles*. Using this theory, the language in which most lexical units and information is provided is considered the dominant language on the sign.

The following are a different styles: 1) *Homophonic writing,* mutual translation or transliteration is completely available in this writing style; 2) *Mixed writing,* mutual translation or transliteration is partially available; 3) *Polyphonic writing*, mutual translation or transliteration is not available because both languages convey different thoughts or ideas; 4) *Monophonic writing*, mutual translation or transliteration is not available because it is only written in one language. Furthermore, Backhaus (2006) hypothesised that multilingual writing can be used to describe the dominant languages in each society.

From the notion of Linguistic Landscape, it is composed of different items that form a coherent whole or gestalt (Ben-Rafael, 2008). This coherent whole means that the collected data in an LL study reveal the dominant and marginalised languages of the actor's sign in each space. To describe and identify the actors of the signs, the researcher employed the Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approach (Ben-Rafael, 2006), while to reveal the dominance of languages in signs, the researcher employed Code Preference Indicators (Loth, 2015). The CPI consists of Code

Preference and Inscription (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003); the Multilingual Writing Styles (Backhaus, 2007)

The study by Loth (2016) entitled The Linguistic Landscape as Construct of the Public Space: A Case Study of Post-Apartheid Rural South Africa implored the use of pictures, walks, interviews, and participant observations to analyse townships in South Africa.

From Loth's (2016) methodological perspective, one must follow the visual hierarchy to identify the dominant and the marginalised codes in the LL. First, it must employ Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003) code preference. Second, it must be congruent with Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003) inscription. However, if there is a conflict between both systems, using Backhaus's (2007) should be employed as the third consideration. Moreover, the study brought the following learnings and guidance to the present study:

First, the linguistic choice in signs is the byproduct of the choices made by myriad actors with different motivations and memberships in society. Second, the code preference indexes power relations and identities. The availability or non-availability of languages in the LL depends largely on the power of a certain group or individual to impose or negotiate. This brings us to the third learning: not only the languages that constantly change over time but also the dominance of these languages when there is a sudden or even expected shifts in society.

Since the study of Loth (2017) was highly focused on the post-apartheid effect on South Africa's linguistic landscape, she proposed a model to coherently explore the patterns of language choices in public space with a concentration on space's regulatory, legitimising and implementation facets. Her Language Policy and Planning (LPP) Space Model is exemplary and an important contribution to the body of knowledge because it allows a researcher to relate Linguistic Landscape to another field of Applied Linguistics. Loth's model (2017) would also become a springboard for researchers who would like to explore the socio-political transformation, such as what happened in South Africa, and even the language policies and ideologies currently at play in their respective societies.

The study of Loth (2016) and the present study are similar in investigating the patterns of language choice in the public space. The present study adapted the Code Preference Indicators of Loth (2016), including code preference, inscription, and multilingual writing. Both studies distinguished code prevalence and code prominence as essential systems to determine code preference. However, both studies used different survey items to identify preferences. Loth (2016) used language policies and diverse signs in the research locale, while the present study used COVID-19 related signs as survey items.

Marshall (2021) conducted an LL study entitled Navigating COVID-19 Linguistic Landscape in Vancouver's North Shore: Official Signs, Grassroots Literacy Artefacts, Monolingualism, and Discursive Convergence focused on the visual representation of change brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. He conducted the study on the parks and trails of Vancouver using walking ethnography and photography. Moreover, he utilised Scollon and Wong Scollon's place semiotics, Ben-Rafael et al. (2003) notion of the top-down and bottom-up approach.

Marshall (2021) found that the most common approach for the placement of new COVID-19 related signs was to place them alongside existing signs. The multimodality of signs combined several communicative modes, such as colours, shapes and text in different sizes. In all languages on signs, English was the most dominant, followed by Chinese, Punjabi, Farsi, French, Spanish and American Sign Language. Thus, he concluded that Vancouver is a highly multicultural city with a high degree of social multilingualism but an inherently English-dominant population.

The Marshall's (2021) study proved that Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) top-down and bottom-up approach is useful in categorising the actors and revealing the languages used in signs is possible using the linguistic landscape lens, and Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2007) place semiotics, specifically, code preference and inscription.

The study of Marshall (2021) and the present study are similar in terms of utilising the top-down and bottom-up approach of Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), and Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2007) code preference and inscription, which are under the Place semiotics system. Additionally, both studies' survey items are COVID-19 related signs. However, Marshall (2021) collected COVID-19 related signs in parks and trails, while the present study collected COVID-19 related signs in 4 identified streets in the LL of Valencia City.

In the Philippine linguistic landscape studies, De Los Reyes (2014) examined the country's metro stations in his study entitled Language of "Order": English in the Linguistic Landscape of Two Major Train Stations in the Philippines. He determined the languages used, the ways these languages were used, and the possible explanations for the ways these languages were used. His study was made possible by taking pictures and field notes, and he collected 76 signs in two train stations. Additionally, he conducted the study using Ben-Rafael et al.'s (2006) notion of Top-Down and Bottom-Up actors and Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003) concept of Place Semiotics, specifically Code Preference and Inscription.

In Perez, Dalman, and Maxilom-Mangompit's (2020) study entitled Linguistic Cityscape of Billboard Advertisements in Mandaue City, she analysed

the billboard advertisements found in the selected areas in Mandaue City and the occurrence of linguistic compositions and linguistic landscapes in billboard advertisements using Reh's (2004) notion of Multilingual Writing Styles, which is identical to Backhaus's (2007). The specific corpora of the study were the billboard advertisements along the highways and flyovers in Maguikay, Subangdaku, Umapad, Banilad, Tipolo, and Guizo, Mandaue City.

Perez et al. (2020) study revealed that English was the dominant language in billboard advertisements and even multilingual writing styles. Also, writing on phrases prevailed among other types. The emotional appeal was the commonly used advertising appeal in non-official signs; thus, customers' purchasing power was based on emotions (Perez et al., 2020).

Another LL study in the Philippines is by Monje (2017) entitled "Hindi Bayani/Not a Hero": The Linguistic Landscape of Protest in Manila. Monje (2017) examined the LL of Manila during a protest march in November 2016 in response to the burial of deposed president Ferdinand Marcos at the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* (Heroes' Cemetery). Her data comprised mobile posters, placards, banners, and other 'unfixed' signs, including texts on bodies, t-shirts, umbrellas, and rocks.

The reviewed studies revealed that LL studies are necessary to reveal the dominant and marginalised codes within a given locale. It revealed, too, that Scollon and Wong Scollon's code preference and inscription and Backhaus's (2007) multilingual writing styles are useful theories to index societal language dominance. It is also evident that Ben- Rafael's (2006) Top-Down, Bottom-Up Approach was seen as a highly recommended approach to distinguish the actors of the signs.

The present study was conducted to reveal the dominant language in a multilingual society like Valencia City, Bukidnon, as reflected in the COVID-19 related signs found on the city's major streets.

Languages in Valencia City, Bukidnon

During the Spanish colonial era, Bukidnon was one of the unconquered territories in Mindanao (Corpuz, 1997). It was relatively isolated from the horrors of massive transformations in Luzon and Visayas political economies through the war of subjugation and the pacification of Spain (Corpuz, 1997).

According to Alamon (2017), the indigenous people of Bukidnon always had the option to go further into the interior, where resources remained untapped and abundant. However, everything changed when the Americans ruled the country through a cession of Spain in 1889. In 1907, Americans formally occupied Bukidnon (Lao, 1987). They promulgated resettlement policies that enticed landless peasants (the Christian settlers) from Luzon and Visayas to move in.

According to the Provincial Government of Bukidnon (n.d.), the most spoken language by members of the households in the city is Cebuano, a major language of the Visayan islands and of the non-indigenous settlers of Bukidnon, Mindanao. It is the language of communication of 44.51 percent of the total households. Other languages were Hiligaynon or Ilonggo (the language of settlers originating from Central Philippines) with 7.29 percent, and Binukid (the language of the indigenous peoples of Bukidnon) with 6.81 percent. The out-groups dominated the occupation and even affected the vitality of languages spoken in the city.

Methodology

This study is qualitative-descriptive research in nature since it tried to explore societal language dominance as a social phenomenon. However, this phenomenon would be understood further by employing Linguistic Landscape analysis, which involves any piece of written sign in each locale.

The countable items were only those stationary COVID-19 signs with one of the following keywords (including their similar translation in other languages): 1) mask; 2) social and/or physical distancing; 3) limited occupancy; 4) face shield; 5) wash hands; 6) alcohol; 7) sanitise; 8) cough, fever and other illnesses; 9) temperature; and, 10) virus, COVID-19, coronavirus; 11) stay at home; 12) foot bath are considered. Furthermore, only signs with texts were analysed, while pictures, emblems, and pictograms were disregarded. The research was only focused on the language/s of signs. For this reason, excluding pictures and the alike was justifiable. The identified codes of the actors were geographically distributed by creating a map in Quantum Geographic Information System (QGIS), a geospatial data analysis software to visualise the prevalence of codes in the LL of Valencia City. Visualisation of the languages to further analyse the corpora was also seen in the studies of Shomamy and Gorter (2008) and Kasanga (2012).

For the survey areas, the COVID-19 related signs were found in the Linguistic Landscape of Valencia City, Bukidnon, specifically, 1) Mabini Street; 2) Quezon Street; 3) Roxas Street; And 4) Pepito Street. All streets were entirely on public transportation routes, thus, fairly busy streets frequented by vehicle traffic. Additionally, all streets are identified as 2-lane, and neither have canopies nor traffic islands.

The researcher utilised MaxQDA, a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data, text, and multimedia analysis in academic, scientific, and business institutions. Thus, instead of the traditional process of hand coding, the researcher utilised the software to organise, sort and search from the database.

It is important to highlight that the researcher triangulated the digital materials (photographs) with rich, thick, and detailed notes for each sign with the help of observation protocols. This triangulation means that while the researcher took pictures, he wrote important details using field notes and even took some videos just to be reminded of details in a specific street. Then, the researcher encoded the final observation notes. These notes include observations and reflexive notes of the researcher. These were made to examine evidence from different sources to build a coherent justification for themes (Creswell, 2014).

Results and Discussion

Top-Down and Bottom-up Distinction

To determine all actors involved in the creation, initiation and erection of a sign is not always doable, but signs are generally linked with a specific actor in a linguistic landscape. These actors are considered sign owners and are categorised into two (2), namely, the top-down domain and the bottom-up domain (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). Therefore, the coding procedure was carried out to assign each sign to a specific actor.

Table 1: Code Preferences of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Actors

Code(s)	% Top-Down	% Bottom-Up
Monolingual English	57.15 (n = 4)	77 (n = 84)
Bilingual English-Cebuano	14.28 (n = 1)	13.80 (n = 15)
Bilingual English-Filipino	28.57 (n = 2)	4.59 (n = 5)
Monolingual Cebuano	-	2.71 (n = 3)
Trilingual English-Cebuano-Filipino	-	1.90 (n = 2)
Total	**7**	**109**

Source: Calculated by the author, data from fieldwork, 2021.

Table 1 shows that 57.15% of top-down actors prefer the monolingual English code with four occurrences. 28.57% of the top-down actors prefer bilingual English-Filipino code with two occurrences, and 14.28% prefer bilingual English-Cebuano code with one occurrence. Surprisingly, there are no top-down actors whose signs contain monolingual Cebuano code. There are no even top-down actors whose signs contain the Trilingual English-Cebuano-Filipino code.

Most importantly, 77% of the bottom-up actors prefer the monolingual English code with 84 occurrences. Only 13.80% of bottom-up actors prefer using the bilingual English-Cebuano code with 15 occurrences, while 4.59% of bottom-up actors prefer the bilingual English-Filipino code with five occurrences. Only

2.71% of bottom-up actors prefer monolingual Cebuano code with three occurrences. Moreover, 1.90% of the bottom-up actors prefer trilingual English-Cebuano-Filipino code with two occurrences in the LL.

Aside from the code preferences, Table 1 shows the proportion of the two types of actors for the 116 signs collected in the research locale. The results reveal a highly significant distribution of bottom-up actors in the LL, while the top-down actors make up the numerical minority of the distribution. Thus, Table 1 becomes a point of reference for the proceeding discussions, for it shows that the present study is undeniably formed more by the private establishments and citizens than by the authorities, such as the Local Government Unit-Valencia (LGU), and Department of Health (DOH).

However, this highly significant occurrence is evident that bottom-up actors were frequent in research locales (Siwina & Prasithrathsint, 2020; Loth, 2016; Kasanga, 2012). It might be because the selected city streets in LL studies were mostly commercial areas, and Phillips (2011) said that businesses produce the majority of the LL in urban landscapes in the present time.

Top-Down Context

Top-down is one of the categories of actors with only seven occurrences. According to Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), top-down includes various levels of government actors. In the context of the Philippine government structure, the researcher coded top-down signs as belonging to national, provincial, local and/or semi-privatised government actors. To be categorised as top-down, the actor must include information about ownership, such as the 'ergonym' or name of the government agency, for example, Department of Health (DOH), Local Government Unit (LGU) and alike.

In the case of this study, there were no COVID-19 related signs that national and provincial had solely initiated. All top-down signs belong to either the Local Government of Valencia or semi-privatised government actors.

Figure 1 shows the Local Government Unit's as a top-down actor. Its COVID-19 related sign notifies the public of the safe opening of the supermarket in Quezon Street.

It is one of the anticipated actors in a given territory, and it occurred in the reviewed studies of Tan (2018), Kasanga (2012), Lou (2017) and De Los Reyes (2014). Local governments mostly manage and regulate government-owned properties that are directly involved in the socio-economic movement of a given territory, such as city markets and streets. Also, the sign was displayed to regain the confidence of the public and the supermarket's patrons.

Figure 1: Local government sign
(Source: The author.)

Subsequently, top-down actors use English-Cebuano, and English-Filipino in COVID-19 related signs, and the researcher observed two distinctions. The first distinction is that top-down actors, who are not only operating in Valencia City, used English-Filipino in COVID-19 related signs (See Figure 2). And the second distinction is that locally situated top-down actors used English-Cebuano (See Figure 3).

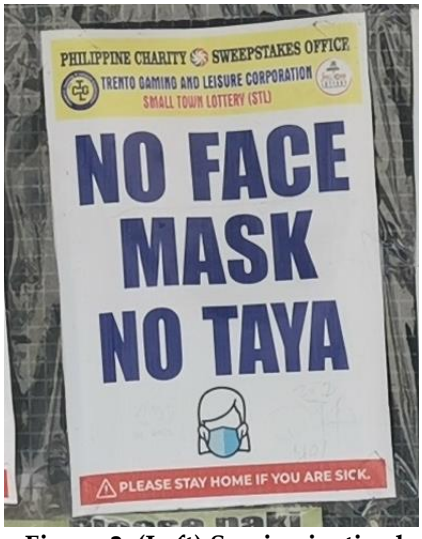

Figure 2: (Left) Semi-privatised government sign and Figure 3: (Right) Public market sign
(Source: The author.)

Figure 2 shows a lottery outlet of the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) on Pepito Street. Semi-privatised government actors are those who provide services that are sent out for tender by the government (Ben-Rafael, 2006). The main purpose of lottery outlets is to sell tickets or scratch cards (Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, & Barni, 2010), and the Philippine government is using the revenues for medical access programs, higher education, and infrastructure (Nicolas, 2021). Loth (2016) mentioned that although a lottery is a shared venture between the government and private entities, it remains a centralised actor (Loth, 2016). In simple terms, lotteries are still within the rules and regulations of the government, while private entities locally manage the outlets. The English lexical units are "No Face Mask No" while there is one (1) Filipino lexical unit, "Taya (bet)" Thus, Figure 2 is categorised as a bilingual English-Filipino.

Figure 3 shows a paper-made COVID-19 sign on a concrete wall near the entrance of the City Market. The marketplace is highly involved in the traverse between buying and selling commercial goods and services. To Goncalves (2012), people would use their local language to transact, such as using Portuguese in commercial signages instead of English. Two codes are found in Figure 3, namely, Cebuano and English.

The researcher looked for COVID-19 related policies that would at least connect or reflect the actions of the top-down actors since they are supposed to follow central policies (De Los Reyes, 2014). Unfortunately, no specific guidelines were found on the use of languages in COVID-19 related signs coming from the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) Against COVID-19, the Department of Health (DOH) and even the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), but rather a vague direction to 'install signages that promote or impose minimum health standard' from local executive orders (Local Government Unit of Valencia, 2020).

Bottom-Up Context

Most of the bottom-up actors belong to commercial interests, while private initiatives are far behind. The bottom-up actors under commercial interest dominate the entire bottom-up domain. This phenomenon is projected to happen, given the nature of the survey area. As Phillips (2011) mentioned, businesses produce most of the LL in urban landscapes in the present time.

The researcher observed that the locally operating bottom-up actors show an overwhelming preference for English, especially in its monolingual capacity (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Figure 4: (Right) Sari-sari store and Figure 5: (Left) Construction firm
(Source: The author.)

Figure 4 and Figure 5 underscore the position of Barni and Bagna's (2009) that the use of a single language may indicate that it has the "power to stand alone". The use of English in COVID-19 signs from a simple goods seller (sari-sari store) to a construction service provider would mean that the code does not need any other codes to convey messages. Or, it would also mean English has high prestige and power since it is used from a small-scale, small-earning sundry store to a large-scale, million-peso worth firm.

The researcher observed the following: first, the bottom-up actors with external influence are national franchises that, in one way or another, patronise the Filipino language and culture; And second, this kind of bottom-up actors does not use Cebuano in COVID-19 related signs. The zero prevalence of Cebuano as a regional language mirrors that the decision may come from the top management, and there may be uniformity of COVID-19 signs for different branches nationwide.

The presence of trilingual codes in a bottom-up sign is visible, and it only confirms the notion of Ben-Rafael (2006) that these bottom-up actors are not restricted and are designed according to individual preferences or purposes.

Additionally, these abovementioned signs confirm the "autonomy of bottom-up actors to strategise on how they would like to portray themselves in the general public" (De Los Reyes, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Ben-Rafael, 2006). Their strategy might assume that most of their target audience would comprehend English, Filipino Cebuano-written COVID-19 signs.

Overall, the English-only code is enjoying its preference at a wider variety of other codes at the bottom-up and top-down domains, including multilingual options such as the bilingual English-Filipino, bilingual English-Cebuano and trilingual English-Cebuano-Filipino. The Cebuano-only code.

Societal Language Dominance in the Code Preferences in COVID-19 related Signs

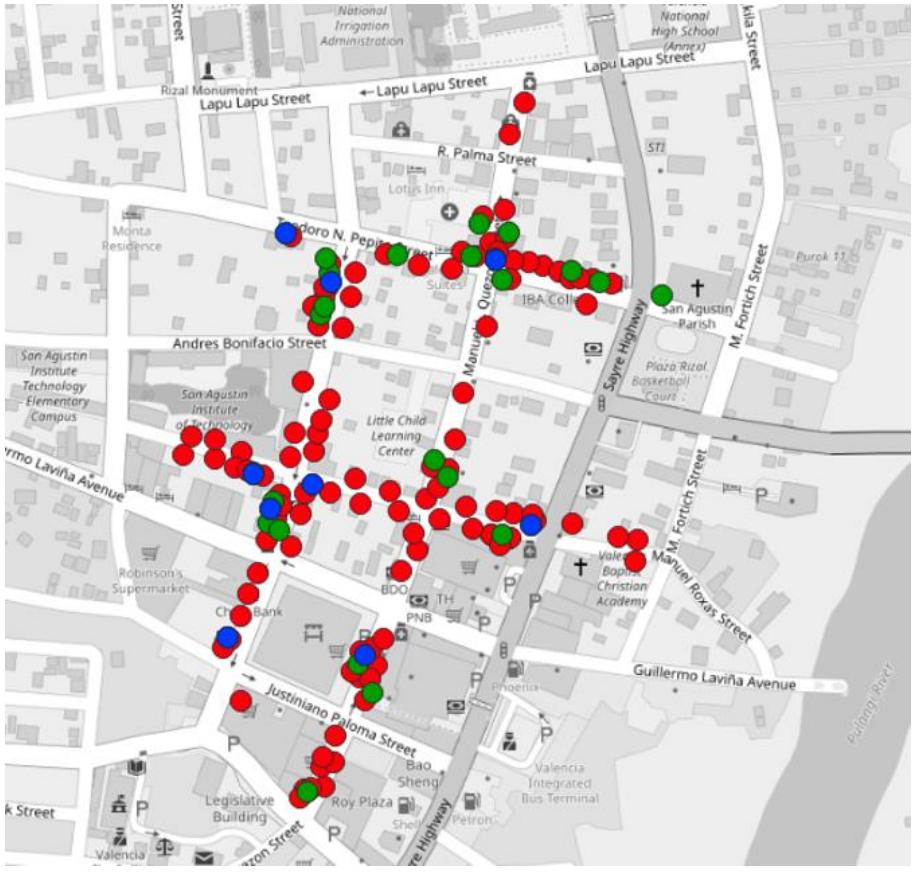

Figure 6: Map of major codes in COVID-19 sign
(Source: The author.)

Figure 6 shows all the major codes involved in creating COVID-19 related signs in all streets involved. English (red spots), Cebuano (green spots), and Filipino (blue spots) were the only codes that were widely spread and available in COVID-19 related signs in the LL of Valencia City. These codes were either used as a lone code or as mixed code. Regardless, English dominates among them.

Figure 6 shows the unequal distribution of codes in the LL. There are spots in the LL where Filipino and Cebuano were negated or not visible.

In Roxas street, the entire location was dominated by English and followed by Filipino. It can be closely associated with the actors in this location. As mentioned, it is monikered as the "milk tea capital" of the city because most cafés

are located in this area. Also, some well-known fast-food chains are located on Roxas street. Thus, the high economic activity throughout the street, including the intersections of Roxas street and Quezon street and of Roxas street and Mabini street, might be a determining factor in choosing English.

As Cenoz and Gorter (2009) focused on the economic approach to studying the linguistic landscape, they emphasise that English has a market value in giving instructions and orders to store owners (actors). Moreover, they noted that actors would adopt English as the language of the majority to be able to advance their economic condition.

In Pepito street and Mabini street, English still dominates, but there is a greater indicator of Filipino and Cebuano codes in these areas. This, perhaps, can be associated with the convergence of residential and commercial establishments. The manifestation of Cebuano and Filipino codes was even recognisable in the intersections between Pepito street and Mabini street, and Mabini street and Quezon street.

Although the present study would not be able to correlate population density and the frequent use of regional and national languages, Loth (2016) would attest that there was a relationship between the LL and the locality in which the signs were displayed. Thus, actors would sometimes consider the use of language depending on the locality it belongs to accommodate a specific linguistic community, like the Cebuano-speaking community.

Pepito street is described as a street for residents who want to improve their physical well-being because it situates a fitness gym, family-owned dental clinic and suite, a dermatological clinic, and a medical hub. While Mabini street is known to base locally-owned food businesses. Many residents have shown interest in putting up in the street for its strategic location because it is home to the oldest catholic school in the city.

In Quezon street, it is worth noting that this street is a meeting point between government-owned establishments, such as the City Hall and Central Market, and private establishments, such as bank and remittance centres, grocery stores, pizza pubs, bakeries, hotels and hospital.

Although English dominates the street, Cebuano and Filipino are also used, respectively. However, these codes are more associated with top-down actors than with bottom-up ones.

Since English is still dominating as a major code in Quezon street, then, using the words of De Los Reyes (2014), the bottom-up actors of this street are much free in their strategies.

The geographic distribution verifies and cooperates with the claims in the code preferences of different actors. Also, the geographic distribution confirms

that there are patterns of choice in the LL, determined by the affiliation to a certain actor and locality. Simply, Fisherman (1965) called it a group membership, where the choice of codes depends largely on location and/or group.

Monolingual Signs

Monolingual sign only shows information in one language (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003; Backhaus, 2006). According to Barni and Bagna (2009), monolingual signs exist to restrict readership, whereas different modes of multilingualism indicate various degrees of inclusivity. Thus, the people in this LL could be either restricted with an English monolingual sign or a Cebuano-only sign. However, the dominance of a certain code in monolingual signs does not only index a speech community but rather a strong symbolic function for the population it serves (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

Only two codes were used for monolingual signs by top-down and bottom-up actors. As a result, there are only 88 occurrences of Monolingual English (Figure 7) and three occurrences of Monolingual Cebuano (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Monolingual English sign
(Source: The author.)

Figure 8: Monolingual Cebuano sign
(Source: Fieldwork, 2021.)

In schools, management restricts persons to monolingual English signs before entering the premises. Without the accommodation of other codes in COVID-19 signs, it shows how academes become an instrument to use English as the main code for all purposes, not just for classroom instruction but also for safety measures such as COVID-19 related signs. Schools, as part of society, maintained the use of English despite the pandemic. Perchance, the high status of monolingual English could be explained by the common practice of using English as a *lingua franca* within academic circles (Legge, 2015). Thus, they would like to maintain their identity as an English-speaking community because of its reputable value.

According to Spolsky and Cooper (1991), actors may prefer to write a sign in a language with which they wish to be identified. However, it becomes problematic when persons, such as parents and other community members, would enter the school without proficient language knowledge.

Despite the preference for English, there are still textual errors in signs esp. those owned by bottom-up actors. According to the researcher's observations, some actors committed errors on pluralism. Instead of "2 persons" the actor only wrote "2 people" and instead of "Get 2 face masks", the actor only wrote "Get 2 face masks". Another actor incorrectly spelt "pesos" to "peasos". Hypothetically, if the target customers understood the signs perfectly well in spite of errors, then the problem alone might be on the bottom-up actors' linguistic knowledge.

Both signs mentioned are proof of how English projects prestige or affluence in the community. As Spolsky and Cooper (1991) mentioned, an actor may prefer to write a sign in a language they wish to be identified despite the lack of linguistic knowledge or background.

Two of the three Cebuano monolingual signs were private initiatives of non-governmental organisations and civic organisations. Then, the target readers of these organisations were those from the Cebuano-speaking population. The researcher personally believes that, in daily activities, Cebuano is the language of the majority in Valencia. Based on the City profile of Valencia, most people speak Cebuano, while some speak Ilonggo and Ilocano (Local Government Unit of Valencia, 2016).

At the very least, there were dedicated actors in using the local language, especially in times of health emergency, to convey instruction or notice. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) and Leeman and Modan (2010) supplemented that the language on city streets is shaped and constrained by other components of the built environment. Thus, it is built not only by 'government bureaucrats' but also by various interested parties, including civic organisations, NGOs, and coalitions.

Unfortunately, there were no Filipino monolingual COVID-19 related signs, but only at a multilingual capacity in the LL of Valencia City. The researcher deemed it necessary to mention such because, according to Fishman (1964) as cited by Accurso (2015), responding to societal language dominance must involve conscious awareness and naming of the dominance. Just like what Ben-Rafael (2006), Cenoz & Gorter (2009) said that, many actors mistakenly assumed the use of English to attract a larger readership, but one of the outcomes of such a choice was the visibility of other languages became diminished. In this case, the diminishment of Filipino at its monolingual capacity.

Multilingual Signs

The overwhelming dominance of English in COVID-19 related signs in the LL of Valencia City seems to negate other codes and variations. However, the researcher's in-depth exploration of COVID-19 related signs reveals interactions among codes. This interaction can be found in multilingual signs. Although interaction exists in multilingual signs, actors make constant choices, meaning they put the preferred codes in a pattern or in a system (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003). According to the same authors, codes are either preferred or marginalised.

There were only three codes used in creating multilingual signs. These are English, Cebuano, and Filipino. In particular, the following are the combinations: English-Filipino (4 occurrences), English-Cebuano (8 occurrences), Filipino-English (3 occurrences), Cebuano-English (8 occurrences), and English-Cebuano-

Filipino (2 occurrences). For each combination, the first code stated is the preferred or dominating code, while the proceeding codes are the marginalised codes.

Figure 9: English-Filipino commercial sign
(Source: The author.)

Like Figure 9, Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003) said that the preferred code is on the top (English), while the marginalised code (Filipino) is on the bottom. The inscription of the sign can also reveal the actor's preference between English and Filipino. As mentioned, Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003) inscription includes word-processing fonts and professional typefaces, including size and shape. Thus, an actor prefers a code not only through positioning but using fonts.

Figure 26's sign states that "COVID-19 Update. In Cooperation With DOH. Store No. 2748. Update As Of. Active Cases. Increase and Decrease of Cases. BIDA Solusyon Sa COVID-19. Bawal Walang Mask. I-Sanitize Ang Mga Kamay. Dumistansya Ng Isang Metro. Alamin Ang Totoong Impormasyon".

To dissect the entire text of the sign, the English code is "Update In Cooperation With. Store No. 2748. Update As Of. Active Cases. Increase and Decrease of Cases. Sanitise". The English code serves as an update board to all incoming customers. This is visible to all the customers because, as mentioned, the sign is attached to the glass door.

While the Filipino code is "BIDA Solusyon Sa. Bawal Walang Mask. I-Sanitize Ang Mga Kamay. Dumistansya Ng Isang Metro. Alamin Ang Totoong

Impormasyon." The Filipino code serves as a safety sign through an acrostic, where each letter of BIDA has a corresponding meaning in Filipino. However, it serves much more like a COVID-19 branding and/or a creative campaign of Department of Health (DOH) and does not entirely serve the general purpose of the sign which is to update the customers of the COVID-19 cases in the city.

This argument made the researcher postulate that the preference of English and Filipino in these signs is for 'uniformity' of COVID-19 related signs in the entire country. It may be the top management, not the local management, that decides on the codes to use in their signs, given the nature of fast-food chains. So, the researcher's assumption can be explained by Ben-Rafael's (2009) principle of collective identity, which refers to the shared identity of actors in each LL.

Actors used English in multilingual writing because most COVID-19 related words do not have a direct translation or equivalence in Cebuano. Before the pandemic, English words like foot bath, thermal scanner, disinfect, mask and face shield were not used in daily activities. These words were only utilised as the city was forced to lockdown and limit the movement of people within localities during the pandemic.

According to Fishman (1964), actors may lack the specialised terms for a satisfying discussion of X in language Y, partially because language Y itself may currently lack as exact or as many terms or handling topic x as those currently possessed by language X, and partially because it is considered strange or inappropriate to discuss x in language Y.

In application, the English code contains more necessary lexicons than the Filipino code in delivering information related to COVID-19. There is a sense of awkwardness when these English lexicons are translated to Cebuano in providing instructions to the target audience, like "palihog sul-ob ug panagang sa nawong" for face shield, "palihog tunob sa basa na trapo / basa na tumbanan" for foot bath. It would even create misunderstanding of the words use, like and "pusil sa kainiton o pamatikod sa kainiton sa panlawas" for thermal scanner. Given the multilingual, multi-ethnic setting of Valencia, these signs need to be written in the language in context to avoid difficulty in making sense.

This sense of awkwardness is like the study of Parthama, Alit Ida Setianingsih, and Tri Ediwan (2018) in the LL of Denpasar and Badung, Indonesia, where the challenge is to transfer the meaning from the source language to the target language of the public information signs. The English version was awkward when translated from the source language, Bahasa Indonesia. According to Parthama et al. (2018), the Bahasa lexicons were weird to sound and understand from the English version. So, the incorrect lexical choices only show confusion in understanding the meaning.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researcher's journey has shown the societal language dominance in COVID-19 related signs in the Linguistic Landscape of Valencia City. The researcher revealed the prevalent codes used by top-down and bottom-up actors such as monolingual English, bilingual English-Cebuano, bilingual English-Filipino, monolingual Cebuano, and trilingual English-Cebuano-Filipino. The researcher even had to be cautious and meticulous with the prominent positions of the codes on signs through the use of the theoretical frameworks.

The researcher realised that using a Linguistic Landscape is undeniably essential because it allows the researcher to be aware of how the hierarchy of languages deeply affects the presumed language vitality of a given space. The researcher realised that not all spoken languages are reflected in the linguistic landscape.

However, there could be many reasons actors preferred one language over the other. It might be because of the lack of language policies and instruction from the authorities in relation to COVID-19 response, the actor's ideological stance and identity or even linguistic knowledge, and, perhaps, the limitation or unavailability of lexicons in a certain language. Indeed, the researcher learned many things in his journey, including how LL revealed the prominence of English, the inclusion of Cebuano and Filipino, and the exclusion of languages on signs at the societal level, like Ilonggo, Ilocano and Binukid.

The researcher realised that in a multilingual setting like Valencia City, English is foreseeable to flourish, given the influx of foreign nationals and non-locals. Although English is a great 'neutraliser' and the *lingua franca*, in times of a health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to accommodate the local and minority languages on health-related signs; thereby, no ethnolinguistic community is left behind.

Based on the previous findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

First, English teachers may use the Linguistic Landscape as a pedagogical resource to teach spelling, conjunctions and parts of speech. Since English-only signs dominate Valencia City, English teachers may use these signs as authentic material to enhance the English language proficiency of learners.

Second, policymakers in the education sector may consider using Linguistic Landscape in creating language policies to localise curriculum, develop teaching manuals, and strengthen the promotion of local languages, not only the English language.

Third, policymakers in the government may consider prescribing and specifying the languages that will be used in COVID-19 related signs and other

health or disaster-related signs. The policymakers may swiftly consider this consideration to fulfil its pledge to accommodate both national and local languages as a public interest.

Fourth, the future researcher may start studying the COVID-19 related signs by increasing the number of streets in Valencia City as survey areas and extending the locale to other landscapes in Bukidnon for comparison. Or, the future researcher may conduct an LL study that is focused more on bottom-up actors and non-COVID-19 related signs in the same streets of Valencia City for comparison.

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