



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**LINGUISTIC FOODSCAPE AS CONVEYED THROUGH ONLINE FOOD  
MENUS**

**LIM CHIA WEI**

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**LINGUISTIC FOODSCAPE AS CONVEYED THROUGH ONLINE FOOD  
MENUS**

By

**LIM CHIA WEI**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

**November 2017**

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Abstract of the thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

## **LINGUISTIC FOODSCAPE AS CONVEYED THROUGH ONLINE FOOD MENUS**

By

**LIM CHIA WEI**

**November 2017**

**Chairman : Professor Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, PhD**  
**Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication**

This research focuses on the current concern of language use in a particular environment which is encapsulated broadly as linguistic landscape. The study provides insights into language use in a narrowed context which will articulate social realities in relation to linguistic “foodscape” with a Malaysian flavour. It examines explores textual and non-textual linguistics in the form of online food menus. For this study, an internet search was conducted to identify online food menus identified by referred to all eatery shops in the largest shopping mall in Klang Valley. The search yielded online menus only from 37 shops. The menus were then studied in detail both for their linguistic expressions related to culinary language and their accompanying non-linguistic expressions. Next, the study explore how different cultures affect the Malaysian linguistic foodscape. The final part of the study discusses linguistics features pertaining to foods that contribute to the linguistic foodscape. The findings show that English is the most widespread language used in the Malaysian foodscape as found in the online food menus. The findings also showcase the interrelations between the patterns of language and script use, and non-linguistic expressions which together convey a distinct Malaysian cultural identity related to food menus. This study adds information to a vibrant area of social language use which has deep implications for practices in human food consumption. They could also reflect sustainability in food economies and market trends which are important aspects in economic and national development. In sum, the study touches on social and cultural capital contextualized within sets of personal values which make language use unique and dynamic.

Abstrak tesis ini dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

## **LANDSKAP LINGUISTIK MAKANAN TERHADAP MAKANAN MENU ATAS TALIAN**

Oleh

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Kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada landskap linguistik iaitu penggunaan bahasa dalam persekitaran yang terdedah dalam ruang awam. Kajian ini memberikan pemahaman tentang penggunaan bahasa dalam konteks, iaitu menggambarkan linguistik "foodscape" yang berkaitan dengan reality sosial dan gaya masakan di Malaysia. Kajian ini menerokai ciri-ciri linguistik teks dan bukan linguistik teks yang dipaparkan dalam menu makanan atas talian. Menu makanan atas talian yang terdapat di sebuah gedung membeli-belah terbesar di Lembah Klang dikenal pasti melalui pencarian internet, dan 37 menu makanan atas talian dipilih untuk kajian ini. Menu makanan berkenaan dikaji untuk mengetahui ciri-ciri bahasa dan bukan bahasa yang berkaitan dengan makanan. Seterusnya, pengaruh perbezaan budaya terhadap linguistik foodscape di kalangan rakyat Malaysia dikaji. Bahagian akhir kajian membincangkan ungkapan linguistik yang berkaitan dengan gaya makanan yang membentuk linguistic foodscape. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa Bahasa Inggeris adalah bahasa yang paling kerap digunakan dalam linguistik foodscape Malaysia. Hasil kajian juga mempamerkan hubungan antara penggunaan bahasa dan skrip untuk menyampaikan identiti budaya Malaysia unik melalui makanan menu. Kajian ini menunjuk bahawa bahasa mempunyai implikasi yang mendalam terhadap amalan penggunaan makanan. Kajian ini juga mencerminkan kemampuan dalam ekonomi makanan dan trend pasaran merupa aspek-aspek yang penting dalam ekonomi dan pembangunan negara. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini merangkumi kontekstualisasi sosial dan kebudayaan dalam nilai peribadi yang menjadikan bahasa unik dan dinamik.

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I also extend my deepest appreciation to my friends whom believing in my abilities. Their sustained interest in and enthusiasm for my research encouraged me to get it done.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 3 November 2017 to conduct the final examination of Lim Chia Wei on her thesis entitled "Linguistic Foodscape as Conveyed Through Online Food Menus" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Arts.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robiah', is written over a horizontal line.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Today' global economy expands knowledge of food from differing geographic, cultural and historical influences. It can be seen that global brandscapes in food traverse virtual space and persuade customers multi-culturally. Digital technology, including emerging trends in online menus, online ordering and delivery services, is changing the way consumers discover, interact with and experience restaurants. One of the interesting discoveries is how knowledge of food culture and the language of food use in a particular work environment, in this case online menus which is encapsulated as linguistic landscape.

This section provides an introductory overview to the research. It contains the scope of the study, background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and definition of key terms used in this research.

### 1.2 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on language of food through the on-line written medium in order to pursue a greater understanding and appreciation for language of foodscape. It explores various food culture in the form of food menus. It reveals the features of language use that represent food identity in menus, and language use in specialized knowledge such as those found in the use of terminology which may involve the use of a foreign language, ingredients, and specialized cooking technical knowledge..

### 1.3 Background of the Study

Human beings have been using signs (i.e. images, symbols, gestures or words) to create messages and convey meaning since the beginning of human history; on stone surfaces, papyrus leaves, papers or the Internet. Thus, a variety of scripts and texts exists to present the linguistic landscape of a place at any one point of time. In addition, language is central to culture because it is the means through which culture is learned and communicated (Ayeomoni, 2011).

Linguistic landscape as a field of study has become a relatively new area of sociolinguistic research which concerns language use in a particular environment. In addition, it also studies the relationship between language and society. The languages of signs on public display have been fascinatingly studied by a number of scholars for

the past forty years (Tulp, 1978; Spolsky and Cooper, 1991; Landry and Bourhis, 1997; Cenoz and Gorter, 2006).

The term 'linguistic landscape' was first used by Landry and Bourhis (1997). In their paper, they reported on the perceptions of francophone high school students on the language of public signs in Canadian provinces. Landry and Bourhis (1997:25):

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region or urban agglomeration.

The study of linguistic landscape has taken different approaches and has focused on different areas of interest, such as multilingualism, spread of English, language policy and public signs. Coulmas (2009) studied linguistic landscaping in the public sphere and highlighted that linguistic landscape is a cultural scene and "landmarks of the city are to be read, which was and is a defining feature of a city life: (p.23). Cenoz and Gorter (2006) used the economy approach to study the market and non-market values of linguistic diversity within linguistic landscape. On the other hand, Bagni and Barna (2010) studied the relationship between linguistic landscape and language presence and vitality in cities of Italy where immigrant communities have settled.

Shopping areas in the city have a high potential for investigating linguistic landscape, and many researches have been carried out in this environment. Since the publication of Landry and Bourhis' paper in 1997, research into linguistic landscape has been growing. A number of researchers have started to look at language text in public space. Landry and Bourhis' paper is commonly quoted by researchers such as Gorter, 2006; Ben-Rafael *et al*, 2006; Huebner, 2006; Backhaus, 2006, 2007; Cenoz and Gorter, 2006; Leeman and Modan, 2009; Pennycook, 2009; Curtin, 2009.

Ben Rafael et al. (2006) studied how Israel-Hebrew, Arabic and English, are used on private and public signs in Israel. Backhaus (2006) studied multilingualism in Tokyo by giving the distinction between official and non-official multilingual signs, and interpreting the differences using the notion of power and solidarity. Additionally, Hueber (2006) examined the linguistic landscapes of Bangkok neighborhoods to explore questions of language contact, language mixing and language dominance.

The city is obviously a place of language contact, attracting people of various origins with differing linguistic backgrounds as they seek to make a living. The city is 'a place of talk' that Halliday (1978:154) mentioned in which a lot of discourses take place, including writing and reading aside from oral discourses. Many researchers started to focus on the urban language contact in the written medium, and the language of the signs on public display. The display of written messages in a variety of languages and scripts dominate much of the linguistic landscape of a place.



These days the high density of signs found in cities can be seen as an indicator of economic development and vibrance. As such, linguistic landscape in the urban setting has also been referred to as “linguistic cityscape” (Gorter, 2006:2). Commercial developments have definitely contributed to the diversity of language use.

Another impact on linguistic landscape is globalization and the narrowing of borders between countries. Foreign goods and services are now very much a part of urban life, making it crucial for consumers and producers to communicate and be understood in the context of the business enterprise. Also, much of the communication can easily take place in the enterprises and is conveyed through texts and images via digital signals.

Textual discourse which is associated with the ways of using language; to think, to feel, to believe, to value, and to be acted upon, can reveal identity, as one or as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network' (Gee 1990: 143). Carter and Long (1991) postulated that stylistics would characterize how language is used in text and how meaning is then constructed by text decoders. What we mean and how we mean it are important as they are the basic features of language for communication and understanding.

Over the past decades, we have witnessed a rise in food-focused media and culture (Stajcic, 2013), and there is an increased status and significance of food within contemporary society and culture (ibid, 5). Gastronomic tradition is dependent upon culture, and it is an unavoidable and promising tool for learning about cultural differences, from the ingredients, preparation, cooking technique, plating to the name of the dish, or even text on the menu. In addition, authenticity is the utmost important element in defining cultural heritage values. Authenticity is referred to originality and uniqueness, which could give a character and image to a constituent (Chhabra, 2005) and has its own historic value which reflects a region's culture. Through menus, the authenticity of food culture is portrayed through language use that is associated with the methods of food preparation, food ingredients and eating manners.

In this study, the focus is on food menu as a representation of text which deals specifically with persuasive language in the public domain as in the cityscape. Its writing has its own paralinguistic and contributes to the creation of image-making and meaning. Food menus also help in exploring relationship between addressers, message and addressees. Grimes (1998) discussed the changes in menu style and content and the way a reader is supposed to respond to the menu. Besides the major aspects of identity (i.e. gender, ethnicity), other categories such as the expression of taste in the consumption of food and food linguistic expression, are part of the minor identity that is displayed linguistically and socially (Lakoff, 2006:143). Food and its menu are significant aspects of culture with food playing a dominant role in our lives, thus giving us a food-related identity and a configuration of food attitudes.

The Sapir-Wharf Hypothesis is relevant in explaining the relationship between language, thought and culture. It states that thought is cast from language: our language shapes our view of reality, identity and attitude. This view of linguistic relativity is manifest in the overt linguistic landscape accessible to the public. One feature of this linguistic landscape is the food landscape. This landscape is further evidenced through a number of language and non-language devices. Linguistics landscape periscopes the interplay among language, food and culture in society. The focus of this study is the food landscape which is further narrowed to the study of online food menus that are illustrative of the food and beverage outlets and their food menus.

People enjoy eating. They find interesting differences in food choices and preferences, located in differing geographic, cultural and historical influences. Through eating, people expand their culinary knowledge and discover gastronomic experience. This is the food culture that shapes that group's relationship to food. According to Gifford and Sinnott (2007), "at the Asian tables, we smell, taste and savor crispy-skinned Peking duck, exquisitely seasoned lobster in Hong Kong, the gorgeous sushi and sashimi of Japan." As a result, "global economy is continuing to expand knowledge of food from other cultures as new foods from afar appear in our markets and on menus" (McWilliams, 2011:5). It is clear that today's foodscape has an international flavor and, therefore, exerts a major linguistic influence on language growth and development in this aspect. With this in mind, the present study has chosen to examine this language phenomenon in relation to that found in menu writing and the accompanying features that bring to life the 'colors' of food expression.

The persuasive and informative writing on the menu would help to invite consumers to savour the food advertized. Food advertisements can appear in different forms and medium. The image of food and ingredients is rooted in the cultural connection between technology, mythology and nature.

Malaysia is a well known food haven for local and foreign tourists. The various races and culture have contributed to the Malaysian foodscape. When we are eating food, either dining in or out, we are experiencing a system or grammar of food (Stajcic, 2013). We can study the significance of food on language and culture ; "how you talk, along with other kinds of social codes such as how you dress or how you behave, is an important way of displaying who you are, in other words of indicating your social identity" (Thomas and Wareing, 1999: 136), and the language of food plays a role in linguistic and social identity.

For this purpose, the research site for the study is the online menus of restaurants found in shopping malls in the Klang Valley. The choice is determined by a setting reflective of the linguistic realizations of food menus. In line with Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of language and social reality, the study investigates writing elements of food menus leading to an understanding of the discourse and identity of the food and beverage outlets.

## 1.4 Statement of the Problem

Linguistic landscapes are always present in local, global, or multicultural settings. Research in linguistic landscape in the Asian region, were undertaken only by Backhaus (2003) who focused on multilingual signs in Tokyo, and Huebner (2006) who covered language mixing and language contact in Bangkok. In the case of Malaysia as a multilingual country, the spread and influence of other languages is visible, especially in the use of English.. Thus, language in the public space is a major indication of language attitude (Landy and Bourhis, 1997: 2). This attitude is illustrative of social reality which includes the presence of a large number of food menus in the restaurants or websites of restaurants found in many Malaysian shopping malls.

As mentioned in the earlier section, an extended development in the linguistic cityscape is foodscape. With social realities being captured in different dimensions, this urban development is another angle which can provide language data that informs on local sociolinguistic practices of a community. The multicultural and multilingual setting of urban Malaysian society provides unique language details that are worthy of study to provide evidence of pragmatic language use in an aspect of cultural practice, which is language use in the context of food advertisement thus giving us an understanding of a life style conveyed through food concerns.

In connection with lifestyle practices in a democratic society, there is the dominance of choice. Together with consumer choice is the need for artful persuasion in the use of business language. In the context of the study, this persuasion is seen in advertising language which aims to sell a product, which in this case is food. The advertisement is specifically studied in relation to menu display which necessarily has to use language in a particular form to persuade, and at the same time give information on the uniqueness of the product.

“Culture and ethnicity are essential foundations of the study of food and people” (Tamang, 2010). ‘Culinary culture’ assembles attitude and tastes people bring to cooking and eating (Mennell, Murcott, Otterloo, 1992). Studies on food culture and food heritage highlight the characteristics of traditional foods or dishes, or ingredients of everyday consumption and to appreciate the important cultural and historical value they possess.

According to Halligan (1988), ‘food for thought’ is not only referring to real food, but it also has a metaphorical interpretation, as well as having a symbolic and cultural context. Food with specific lexis contains more jargonistic vocabulary requiring knowledge in order to be understood, which also refers to the feature of foreign lexis in the description. However, the use of simple language could make the food dishes accessible to a range of consumers, as it avoids alienating them with language they may not understand. The contexts are important, such as words for food, genres surrounding its preparation, and pragmatic routines.

The genre of cookery illustrations is a kind of metalanguage that creates a kind of myth as to what food should look like (Roland Barthes, 1972). This brief description of characteristic features and culinary terms emphasizes the cultural aspect of food and also builds an exotic aura about food. In addition, what we know and what we think we know is culturally contextual. For example, some of us may have been brought up or have acquired the taste of ketchup with french fries, tartar sauce on shrimp and fish, and herb dressings on salad (Lévi-Strauss, 1970).

By studying the online food menus, particular identities of the participating food and beverage outlets would contribute to the illumination of language use in a particular sector of the linguistic landscape in Malaysia. Food menus reflect how language is used in society for the purpose of communication.

Hard copies of menus would not be provided by all the shops. Hence, an alternative workable procedure was adopted and this was to source for materials from the open access domain in the form of the Internet where online menus related to the shops found in the research site are displayed for public consumption and therefore were easily accessible for data capture.

### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to study the linguistic features of on-line restaurant food menus, and how cultures across the region affect the Malaysian foodscape. Besides that, this study looks at how the linguistic features establish food identity.

### **1.6 Research Questions**

Specifically, the study seeks to answer the research questions below:

1. What are the features of menus in the Malaysian foodscape in terms of:
  - a. types of restaurant
  - b. origin of restaurant
  - c. physical layout/images/language
  
2. How does culture reflect on the online food menu?
  - a. Western food
  - b. Asian food
  - c. Malaysian/Singaporean food
  - d. Fusion food

3. What are the linguistic features associated with food identity?
  - a. vocabulary peculiarities in relation to serving of meat and seafood
  - b. vocabulary peculiarities in relation to daily products
  - c. vocabulary peculiarities in relation to pasta/ noodles
  - d. vocabulary peculiarities in relation to method of preparation

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

In the last ten years, research in the area of linguistic landscape has been growing (Gorter and Cenoz, 2008:345). In addition, the study of the linguistic landscape is a new dimension in the field of multilingualism (Landry and Bourhis, 1997; Gorter, 2006; Huebner, 2006; Backhaus, 2006). In Malaysia, studying the linguistic landscape is a relatively new area. Malaysia is one of the countries in South East Asia with vast gastronomic products, and is therefore a hotbed for research on foodscape.

Society and context are important in a discourse analysis, which presents an opportunity to observe social changes in a society. The shopping mall is a fascinating place for language studies as there is a variety of language use for commercial purposes. Therefore, this study will provide insights into the pragmatics of language use in a particular context which will articulate social realities in relation to the linguistic “foodscape” with a Malaysian flavor.

In addition, restaurant food menus contribute to an essential area of language use. A study of this nature also provides a link between discourse analysis, linguistics and communication. Specifically, the study reveals the relationship between linguistic situations that include patterns of language and script use, and identity.

## **1.8 Limitations**

This study is a case for the exploration of the linguistic landscape on the online food menus. However, the data does not provide a total representation of the whole linguistic landscape in relation to restaurant food menus. The sample is restricted to only online food menus from one shopping mall. The shopping mall sets a “virtual geographic” guidelines for online menu data collection in an urban setting as it consists the most eatery shops in Klang Valley.

Research papers need not take a traditionally linguistic approach (i.e. to analyze morphology, semantics and syntax), but to explore the linguistic landscape of food in the public sphere, as mutually presented to the the customers. Also, this study does not look at advertising discourse, even though Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) claim that images have their own grammar and rules whereby language and visual communication both carry systems of meaning that constitute our culture in its own specific forms. This study does not examine how persuasive messages of visual images and texts are presented in advertising the menus.

The menu sample is restricted to only online food menus from one shopping mall. The shopping mall sets a “virtual geographic” guidelines for online menu data collection in an urban setting as it consists the most eatery shops in Klang Valley.

## **1.9 Definition of Terms**

### **1.9.1 Linguistic Foodscape**

The term linguistic landscape refers to “language texts that are present in public space” (Gorter, 2006) and displayed in the multilingual cityscape. In this study, the linguistic landscape is narrowed to linguistic foodscape that refers to written texts in the form of restaurant food menus found on the website of food outlets.

### **1.9.2 Food Menus**

Food menus in this study refer to web-published food menus from the respective food outlets.

### **1.9.3 Origin of Restaurant**

Origin of restaurant refers to the location where it set up in a particular country.

### **1.9.4 Origin of Food**

The analysis of food menu is based on the restaurant concept or the origin of the dishes.

### **1.9.5 Food Cultural Capital**

Cultural knowledge, attitudes, preferences and behaviours and custom customs a diner possess when it comes to food choice.

### **1.9.6 Linguistics Features**

Language and vocabularies used for naming food dishes and writing description of the dishes.

### 1.9.7 Non-linguistics Features

Images, symbols, charts will be studied as the non-linguistics features in the online food menus



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## BIODATA OF STUDENT

Coming from a linguistics background, Chia Wei has strong interest in language, culture, people and social cause. Her involvement in the Deaf community when learning Malaysian Sign Language has motivated her to build inclusive community among the Deaf and hearing individuals through story telling activities such as short film and performance. She is currently a lecturer teaching soft skills such as thinking skills and project management at a private university.





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