

Globalization and Localization: A Geosemiotic Analysis of a Quanzhou Coffee Shop

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Abstract:

This paper offers a thorough examination of “Local Fish Coffee Shop”, a commercial space situated in Quanzhou City in China. Employing the framework of geosemiotics, the study delves into the linguistic landscape of the shop, highlighting the significance of multilingual and multimodal semiotic resources and the sensory elements contributing to the construction of a multicultural environment within the space. Through an analysis of various symbolic resources such as shop signs, menus, and posters, the paper reveals the interplay of international and local elements within the shop. It explores how the shop owner strategically employs bilingual signs and curates art and decor to create a space that highlights both global and local cultural elements amidst the trend of globalization. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic landscape within the shop, the study aims to understand the intricate relationship between language, space, and place and how this relationship operates in the creation of a multicultural environment. Adopting a qualitative approach to linguistic landscape, which underscores the significance of spatial context and encompasses an examination of human communication, linguistic, and material resources, leads to a deeper understanding of the broader socio-cultural implications of linguistic landscapes.

Keywords:

Geosemiotics, Globalization, Localization, Coffee Shop, Quanzhou

1. Introduction

Coffee first entered China during the Qing Dynasty, and it was in the early 1920s that coffee shops emerged in the Shanghai International Settlement, primarily catering to foreigners [19]. During the period of the Republic of China, when a frugal societal ethos was promoted, coffee remained outside the view of the general population. It was only with the Economic Reform and Opening-up of the 1980s that Nestlé, a Swiss coffee brand, pioneered the Chinese market, making instant coffee a common consumer product. In 1999, Starbucks, a global chain, opened its first coffee shop in Beijing, marking the beginning of the boutique phase for coffee in China. Coffee,

especially in coffee shops, began to symbolize sophistication, fashion, and globalization. In recent years, with the inheritance and development of traditional cultures, an increasing number of affordable and local coffee shops have gained popularity.

Quanzhou, located on the southeastern coast of Fujian Province where tea culture prevails, historically had more tea shops than coffee shops. However, following the successful UNESCO heritage designation on July 25, 2021, this open and inclusive city has continuously absorbed various cultures, integrating and innovating with local culture. The integration of foreign coffee culture is now blending with Minnan culture, giving rise to coffee shops with a distinctive style.

This paper examines a sample from one of the coffee shops in Quanzhou. The linguistic and visual semiotics are deployed in the shop to create coherent, bilingual texts, and local context. In doing this, the pioneering work of Scollon and Scollon [15] particularly their work “Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World”, provides a useful framework in terms of three main semiotic systems, “interaction order,” “visual semiotics,” and “place semiotics”.

2. Theoretical Framework

This research is based on Scollon and Scollon’s [15] geosemiotic framework, examining the multilingual, multimodal, and multisensory repertoires (Gorter and Cenoz, 2015) of the local coffee shop in the historical area of Quanzhou city. The three semiotic systems mentioned in Scollon and Scollon’s [15] book are “interaction order,” “visual semiotics,” and “place semiotics”. Sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists acknowledge the importance of language in the construction of space while also recognizing it as just one factor among many. The term “semiotic landscape” was first introduced by Jaworski and Thurlow [4] to broaden the scope of research beyond language and explore other influences on spatial construction. They gradually expanded the study of linguistic landscapes to include other modes of communication, such as the visual, auditory, and architectural. Furthermore, this paper builds upon their work and extends it to incorporate olfactory aspects, following the expanded framework proposed by Pennycook and Otsuji [12].

The first system “interaction order” is composed of primary symbolic resources such as language, non-verbal cues, and spatial elements. These resources form the foundation for social interactions, enabling individuals to establish social or psychological positions in the social-physical space and time. The focus of the system is not solely on non-verbal communication but rather on the indexicality of language. The research on semiotic landscapes not only broadens the visual space but also takes this argument further by incorporating the olfactory sense [12]. In this paper, there will be a particular emphasis on utilizing the perceptual spaces within this system. The Scollons argue that the dominance of the visual and auditory aspects in our understanding of meaning is so important that we have extensive traditions in art history, linguistics, and other studies centered on sound and vision. The second system in the geosemiotic framework is “visual semiotics”, which analyzes “the representations of that interaction order in images and signs” [15]. The term “visual semiotics” was adopted from Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen [5]. It addresses the challenge of understanding how visual images serve as indexes to the real-world contexts in which they are situated. Additionally, it explores the issue of how social

actors interpret and use these abundant images, constructing continuous social performances as integral components of the social situation.

Addressing the third system, we delve into the realm of "place semiotics.". Place semiotics defined by Scollons, serve as a bridge between urban planning, cultural geography, micro-level social interaction studies, and language use. Its focus lies in the meaningful structure of spatial organization, alternatively described as "the extensive amalgamation of semiotic systems that are not situated within the individuals or within the framed artifacts of visual semiotics". [10]

3. Data and Methods

Local Fish Coffee Shop is situated at the intersection of Chengtian Alley and Hou Alley, precisely at the crossroads within the alley, and is less than 600 meters away from the famous Chengtian Temple, a famous tourist attraction in Quanzhou. The store consists of two parts: the coffee shop on the second floor and the bookstore with space for art exhibitions on the first floor. The books and decorations in the store are personally selected by the owner. According to the shop's social media page, the philosophy of this store is to "build a local coffee brand with a global perspective on coffee and a view beyond second-and third-tier cities." The data sources for this study come from pictures taken by the author inside the stores and interviews with store staff conducted during an ethnographic observation of the shops on December 29th and 30th, 2023.

The analysis in this study emphasizes the interactions within the semiotic landscapes of the store, exploring how the space carries socio-cultural meanings. Drawing inspiration from the geosemiotics perspective articulated by Scollon and Scollon [15] and informed by the ethnographic research on linguistic landscape, this study employs a qualitative analysis approach. There are two questions will be addressed in this study:

- a. What linguistic, semiotic, and material resources does the coffee shop have?
- b. How do these geosemiotic aggregates shape the space of a local coffee shop?

4. Analysis and Findings

The linguistic landscape inside Local Fish Coffee Shop includes shop signs, temporary signs (menu, posters, and photographic works) and artifacts. The store consists of two floors. In addition to Local Fish Coffee Shop on the second floor, the first floor is a bookstore named "Chizi Space", which also frequently hosts various exhibitions. Both of these spaces belong to the same shop, co-owned by a married couple.

4.1. Multilingualism and multimodality in the shop

In Local Fish Coffee Shop, the posters, menus, and shop name involve a combination of multiple languages. The owner's language preference for these symbolic resources reflects the idea of this establishment. In Figure 1, the English shop name on the store sign is on top of the Chinese counterpart, with the font of the English store name slightly larger and in a darker color. The word "coffee" is relatively smaller. On the right side of the store name in both Chinese and English is the store's logo, an icon of a fish, which serves as the symbol of this store. The choice of "Local" instead of translating it to "Japanese Jack Mackerel" is likely due to

considerations of the target customers' proficiency in English. The store is located in a Chinese community where the majority of customers are locals and tourists. Additionally, this choice aims to emphasize the concept of local culture, as "Banglangyu" is a local dish in Quanzhou. It is an economic seafood, and locals often sun-dry it into dried fish for congee side dishes. Therefore, "Banglangyu" holds significant local symbolic meaning, serving as a symbol of localization. This inference is further confirmed by interviews with the staff. When foreign customers inquire about the meaning of the store name, the staff explains that the choice of "Local Fish" as the store name reflects the local significance.



Figure 1. The sign of Local Fish Coffee Shop.

The lower part of the store sign is the sign for the bookstore. In the English section of the store name, the choice of Pinyin for "Chi Zi" may also be considered the lower competency of English in the community where the store is situated. Moreover, according to interviews with the staff, the term "Chi Zi" is derived from a Chinese idiom, symbolizing a person with a pure and kind heart. Therefore, instead of translating into English, "Chi Zi" is represented using the unique Pinyin form in Chinese, rather than English. Additionally, the icon features the "Erythrina variegata", also known as Zayton, which is the city flower of Quanzhou. This is closely linked to the geographical location of the coffee shop, situated in the old town area characterized by a strong traditional cultural atmosphere. It is noticed that the Chinese characters of the bookstore name are larger than the English ones, and the icon of the Zayton is also larger than the store name. Except for the differences in language preference and font choice, the shop sign of Chi Zi Space also incorporates the color red. This choice is influenced by both the Erythrina variegata flower and the term "Chi Zi", both of which involve the color red. On the other hand, the sign for Local Fish Coffee shop is in black. This serves to distinguish the distinct functions of the two spaces, and the use of black aligns with the color of coffee. This deliberate emphasis on size, color, and prominence suggests a strategic visual representation, reinforcing the store's connection to the local culture.

Similarly, the same example can be observed in the posters and menus within the store. In Figure 2, the menu displays titles in both English and Chinese. The English text is positioned above, while the Chinese text is below. The font size of the English text is noticeably smaller than that of the Chinese text. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the Chinese titles incorporate a sentence in the Hokkien dialect, which has not been translated into English. The meaning of the dialect is "If you drink, you will get the blessing," reflecting the special cultural context in Quanzhou. The religious atmosphere here is profound, and it serves as a distinctive feature attracting tourists from other regions. Another feature is the translation of a dessert on the menu. This dessert is a famous local delicacy in Quanzhou. The menu also lists the name of the shop selling this delicacy, which is not far from the coffee shop. This kind of detailed

information serves the purpose of promoting local culture. Besides, similar to “Local Fish”, the name of this dessert is not translated through phonetic or literal means. Instead, it is translated as “Local Cake”, serving the same purpose of emphasizing local elements and maintaining consistency with the shop’s translation related to local concepts. Except for the menu, the posters (Figure 3) on the walls inside the store convey information about recent exhibitions in both Chinese and English. However, only the address and date information are translated into English. The design of the store name continues to incorporate multimodal and bilingual elements, where English serves as a form of graphic design in this context.



Figure 2. The menu of the shop with English, Chinese and Hokkien.



Figure 3. The bilingual poster.

In summary, the integration of English in the store’s linguistic landscape reflects an embrace of globalization without evident resistance. However, the differing emphasis placed on the two languages and the strategic utilization of multimodal elements both attest to the nuanced approach employed by the shop owner to convey different intentions. Through the multifaceted use of visual symbols at varying frequencies, the emphasis on local elements signifies a process of localization.

4.2. Globalization, localization and construction of space

Scollons [15] articulated various semiotic resources that form the foundational elements of the interaction order, playing a crucial role in producing and interpreting discourses in a given space. These semiotic resources include the sense of time, perceptual spaces, interpersonal distances, and personal front. This comprehensive framework extends the study of linguistic landscape beyond language alone, encompassing diverse modes of communication. As we demonstrated before, Local Fish Coffee shop consists of two floors, with the first floor being a bookstore and the second floor for the coffee shop. Upon entering the shop, the customer will be drawn to the displayed books first, and as they ascend the stairs, they may catch the scent of coffee and hear classical music playing in the coffee shop. Moreover, the walls of the alley across from the coffee shop are adorned with posters advertising recent exhibitions. Customers sitting outside the store, sipping coffee and reading books, contribute to creating a unique ambiance. All these factors briefly immerse passersby in the distinctive space of the coffee shop, whether or not they enter (Figure 4).

Furthermore, the artifacts exhibited in the store also display a fusion of globalization and localization. We can take a look at Figure 5, regarding the Christmas decorations inside the store, the owner has used seashells and fishing nets to adorn the Christmas tree and mistletoe. Moreover, the area beneath the Christmas tree is simulated to resemble a beach, and the mistletoe is hung on a ship anchor. According to the interview with the store owner, these ship parts were collected from

an old vessel, with the intention of aligning with the store's name and creating an ambiance reflective of the distinctive maritime culture in Minnan, which is characteristic of the local culture. This decoration choice aims to resonate with the coastal culture associated with the store's name and its connection to Quanzhou. These decorations allow visitors to experience the Christmas atmosphere of Western culture while still evoking the rich maritime heritage of the local coastal town.



Figure 4. People drink and read outside the store.



Figure 5. Local and global artifacts in the store.

5. Conclusions

By observing the geosemiotic aggregates of the Local Fish Coffee shop, this paper seeks to understand the relationship between language, space, and place in creating a multicultural and blended environment. Table 1 summarizes its geosemiotic aggregate using the theoretical framework outlined earlier in this paper.

Table 1. The Geosemiotic aggregates in the Local Fish Coffee shop.

Interaction order	Visual semiotics	Place semiotics
1. The scent of coffee and classical music at the coffee shop’s staircase landing. 2. The posters on the walls of the alley outside the store. 3. The staff will introduce customers to Minnan culture and the meaning behind the store’s name.	1. Bilingual and multimodal store name, menu, and posters. 2. The store features Christmas decorations with maritime elements.	1. The coffee shop is located in the old town with a rich historical background. 2. The shop seamlessly integrates the spaces of a coffee shop and a bookstore.

As a symbol of foreign culture, coffee represents fashion and modernity. As Zhang and Chan [17] suggest, English is widely recognized as a global or international language. These elements of globalization are evident in bilingual signs, menus, posters, and other symbolic resources within the shop. However, the emphasis on “local” semiotic elements can also be observed in language preferences and artifacts. Moreover, in the alley, a blended environment of coffee and local culture is created.

Employees not only perform their regular duties but also take on the responsibility of explaining the store's philosophy and promoting local culture. All of these aspects showcase the perceptual spaces in the shop that emerge from human interactions with semiotic (including language) and material resources. The analysis utilizes the geosemiotic framework proposed by Scollon and Scollon [15], to explain how Local Fish Coffee Shop establishes connections between language practice and geopolitical identity in the context of localization and globalization within an old town area. It is hoped that this study will illuminate the process of constructing a space within a multicultural context and contribute to a model that aids in examining how Quanzhou can develop its local culture within the globalization background.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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