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An Investigation into the Linguistic Landscape of tourist area in China: A case study of Fulai Mountain tourist area in Shandong Province

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Abstract. Given the current situation that the research on the linguistic landscape in the tourism field is relatively insufficient, we try to carry out an investigation on the construction of linguistic landscape in the Fulai Mountain tourist area of Shandong Province, China, from the perspective of the tourism language landscape in domestic tourist areas. This study found that the language signs in the tourist area are mainly monolingual, supplemented by bilingual and trilingual signs. There are three languages in the Fulai Mountain tourist area: Chinese, English and Korean, among which Chinese is the preferred code, while English and Korean are marginalized in the linguistic landscape. The administrative department of the Fulai Mountain tourist area plays a decisive role in the construction of the linguistic landscape. We also find some problems with the linguistic landscape in the Fulai Mountain tourist area, such as insufficient construction of a diversified linguistic landscape, non-standard translation of language, and lack of design ideas and regional characteristics of the language signs. In the future, tourist area management departments should attach importance to the value of linguistic landscape construction, fully consider tourists' multi-language needs, improve linguistic landscape design, and regularly carry out linguistic landscape surveys.

Keywords. Tourist area, Linguistic landscape, Fulai Mountain, Language sign

1. Introduction

The Fulai Mountain tourist area is located in the Fulai Mountain Geological Relic Provincial Nature Reserve in Rizhao, Shandong Province, China. It is a national 3A level tourist area, famous for its scenic spots such as the oldest ginkgo tree in the world and a thousand-year-old temple, Dinglin Temple. There are three peaks in the north, west and south of the tourist area, named Folai Peak, Fulai Peak and Feilai Peak, and the Dinglin Temple locates in the east. According to textual research, Dinglin Temple was built in the Southern and Northern Dynasties, with more than 1500 years of history. It is one of the oldest temples in Shandong Province, China. It is also where Liu Xie, a critic of ancient literary theory of China, hid away

and collected books to study classics in his later years. An ancient ginkgo tree in Dinglin Temple, more than 3,500 years old, can be called the living fossil of the plant kingdom.

This study attempts to start from the perspective of the construction of linguistic landscape in Chinese tourist areas and takes the Fulai Mountain tourist area as the investigation area of the linguistic landscape. The purpose is to understand the overall appearance of the linguistic landscape of the Fulai Mountain tourist area, sort out the problems existing in the linguistic landscape construction of the Fulai Mountain tourist area, and put forward measures and suggestions for the construction of the linguistic landscape in the tourist area in the future. Meanwhile, it can enrich our understanding of the linguistic landscape construction of tourist areas in China and make up for the shortcomings of the existing research. Through this work, the authors also hope to awaken the sense of responsibility of management departments, make them realize the value of the linguistic landscape, and create a linguistic landscape with regional characteristics and cultural images while improving the serviceability of tourist areas to make contributions to the development of Chinese tourist areas.

2. Research background and methods

2.1. Research background

Linguistic landscape refers to the landscape with language and character marks in public space^[1,2], which has become one of the important points in the field of sociolinguistic research in the past two decades. Landry and Bourhis first proposed the concept of Language landscape in 1997, and relevant research results were published in *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, a famous academic Journal^[1]. Since then, with the continuous exploration of the depth and expansion of the research breadth of the linguistic landscape by researchers, this field has gradually become one of the hot topics in interdisciplinary research, such as applied linguistics and sociolinguistics^[3]. Many researchers also turned their attention to various linguistic landscapes in tourist attractions^[4], constantly enriching the connotation of linguistic landscape study. As a language sign, the linguistic landscape of tourist attractions plays the role of transmitting information to tourists, showing the local cultural connotation of tourist areas, reflecting the local historical context, social culture and economic level^[4-6], and is an important tourism cultural resource that can be utilized^[7].

After the survey and statistics, Chinese scholars have carried out research on the linguistic landscape of tourist areas, such as the Qianmen area in Beijing^[8], the former concession of Hankou in Wuhan^[9], Shantang Street in Suzhou^[10], Sanhe old town in Hefei^[11], Maiji Mountain in Tianshui^[12], Haikou Crater Park^[5], Qingcheng Mountain in Sichuan^[6], Nalat Grasslands, Sayram Lake and Kanas Lake in Xinjiang^[13]. However, the tourism industry in China started relatively late, and most research on the linguistic landscape of tourist areas focuses on large cities and world-class and national tourist attractions. The attention paid to the rich linguistic landscape of small and medium-sized cities and rural areas is still seriously insufficient, and the relevant research is also relatively scarce, let alone the formation of systematic and coherent research accumulation.

2.2 Research methods

This study mainly carries out work from the following three aspects. First, what are the overall characteristics of the linguistic landscape in the Fulai Mountain tourist area? Secondly, what problems exist in the linguistic landscape in the Fulai Mountain tourist area? Thirdly, what are the suggestions for upgrading the linguistic landscape in the Fulai Mountain tourist area in the future?

Our data are from field investigation, with a digital camera photographing various language signs in the tourist area. In the data collection, the following principles were kept: first, only fixed signs such as information signs, shop signs and restaurant billboards are photographed, without considering the language signs inside houses (toilets, offices, shops, temples, etc.), nor the text, price tags or various texts existing on tourism goods. Secondly, the data collection focuses on information boards, indicators, warning boards, or shop signs. Ancient calligraphy plaques and ancient steles have become part of the historical culture of scenic spots and do not match the scope of this study. Under the above two principles, we collected 275 qualified language signs in the Fulai Mountain tourist area.

3. Overall characteristics of linguistic landscape

3.1. Types of language signs

According to the statistics, there are three types of language signs in the Fulai Mountain tourist area: monolingual, bilingual, and trilingual (Table 1). Among them, 115 monolingual signs, accounting for 41.8% of the total signs in our statistics, are the most significant number of language signs. The number of bilingual signs ranked second, with 105 pieces, accounting for 38.2%; The number of trilingual signs is the least, only 55, accounting for 20.0%. Excluding monolingual signs, language signs using two or three languages still accounted for 58.2% of the total number of signs in the tourist area. However, the monolingual signs in the scenic spot still account for more than 40%, and there are only three language types on the signs in the tourist area, and the language and character types are significantly less. The high proportion of monolingual signs in the Fulai Mountain tourist area and the few language types of signs may limit the display and dissemination of the rich natural heritage and long history and culture. The above data show that the management department of the Fulai Mountain tourist area has realized the necessity of the multilingual language landscape to a certain extent, paid attention to the needs of foreign tourists to obtain information through the linguistic landscape, and considered the experience and feelings of foreign tourists when visiting.

Table 1. Types of language signs in Fulai Mountain tourist area.

| Serial number | Types of language signs | Quantity/piece | Percentage/% |
|---------------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1 | monolingual | 115 | 41.8 |
| 2 | bilingual | 105 | 38.2 |
| 3 | trilingual | 55 | 20.0 |
| | Total | 275 | 100 |

3.2. Types of language used

According to the survey statistics, three languages, including Chinese, English and Korean, are used in the language signs of the Fulai Mountain tourist area (Table 2). Compared with the domestic tourist areas where linguistic landscape research has been carried out^[1-14], the three language types are relatively few. Of the 275 language signs we counted, all signs appeared in Chinese. Chinese is in a dominant position in the language landscape of the Fulai Mountain tourist area, which is consistent with the situation of the vast majority of tourist areas in China. English appeared in 160 language signs, accounting for 58.2% of the statistical signs, indicating that English was second only to Chinese in importance. That reflects the guiding role of the National Standard for Tourist Attractions in constructing domestic scenic spots, which requires comparing Chinese and English in the language signs. It also highlights the incomparable dominance of English as an international and global language. The frequency of

Korean in the Fulai Mountain tourist area is low, accounting for only 20.0% of the statistical data. As for the addition of Korean signs, the management department explained that it is mainly related to creating an international tourism image of the tourist area and considers the source of overseas tourists.

Table 2. Language frequency of Fulai Mountain tourist area.

| Serial number | Types of language | Quantity/piece | Percentage/% |
|---------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1 | Chinese | 275 | 100 |
| 2 | English | 160 | 58.2 |
| 3 | Korean | 55 | 20.0 |

As far as Chinese is concerned, simplified Chinese characters are used as the primary language of various signs in the tourist area so that domestic tourists can feel convenient when watching and visiting. Of all the signs containing Chinese, 270 used simplified Chinese characters, accounting for 98.2% of the total number of signs. The public service takes simplified Chinese characters as the primary service characters, which also conforms to the relevant provisions of China's National Common Language Law. In addition, five language signs in the scenic spot use traditional Chinese characters, accounting for about 1.8%. However, we noted that traditional Chinese characters with different writing styles are used as cultural symbols in the Fulai Mountain tourist area. For example, the traditional Chinese character 壽 is carved into the rock, which can remind tourists of the long history of Fulai Mountain to a certain extent and create an actual situation for tourists to experience the local culture.

3.3. Function of the linguistic landscape

According to the theory of Geosemiotics, if more than two codes are used on language signs, one will be used as a preferred code^[12]. Under this theory, we found on the language signs of Fulai Mountain tourist area, Chinese is usually in the middle and on the top position, font is bigger, generally is the preferred code in the tourist area, playing the function of information and communication functions, to a large extent and as a symbol of Chinese culture. English is often arranged after Chinese or below Chinese and is written in a smaller font than Chinese. Korean are generally below or near English, and the fonts are smaller than Chinese and the same as English (Figure 1). From the interpretation of Geosemiotics, English and Korean do not belong to the preferred code; they belong to the marginalized code in the linguistic landscape. Although the marginalized codes show the same or similar information as the Chinese, they are more symbolic, making the tourist area more international and diverse.

3.4. Top-down and bottom-up linguistic landscape

In the study of linguistic landscape, the linguistic landscape is divided into two types according to the difference of landscape creators: top-down linguistic landscape and bottom-up linguistic landscape. In the Fulai Mountain tourist area, the top-down linguistic landscape is set up by the management department, while the merchants set up the bottom-up linguistic landscape in the tourist area^[4, 12]. There are 257 top-down signs in the Fulai Mountain tourist area, accounting for 93.5% of the total signs. There were 18 bottom-up signs, 6.5% of the total signs we counted. The former is 14 times that of the latter (Table 3), and the language signs set up by management departments constitute the main body of the linguistic landscape. That

reflects that the management department of the Fulai Mountain tourist area has a very high degree of participation in the construction of the linguistic landscape and is in a strong position.



Figure 1. Part of the language signs in the Fulai Mountain tourist area.

Table 3. Top-down and bottom-up linguistic landscape of Fulai Mountain tourist area.

| Serial number | Types of language signs | Quantity/piece | Percentage/% |
|---------------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1 | top-down | 257 | 93.5 |
| 2 | bottom-up | 18 | 6.5 |
| Total | | 275 | 100 |

4. Problems in linguistic landscape

4.1. Insufficient diversified linguistic landscape

The frequency of English in the linguistic landscape of the Fulai Mountain tourist area is only 58.2% (Table 2), which is consistent with the average value of domestic tourist areas, and even worse than some in remote areas in central and western China (Table 4). In addition to Chinese and English, the frequency of Korean in the Fulai Mountain tourist area is low, accounting for 20.0%. By investigation, the management department has not done statistical work on the country of overseas tourists. However, according to the statistics released by Shandong Province, the main source countries of overseas tourists in Rizhao from 2016 to 2020 are South Korea, Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Philippines, and France. According to this, English and Korean in the language signs of the Fulai Mountain tourist area can only meet the language needs of part overseas tourists, which may not be conducive to the international dissemination and export of the history and culture of Fulai Mountain. To sum up,

the three languages in the linguistic landscape of tourist areas have not yet met the diversified language needs of overseas tourists.

Table 4. Frequency of English in the language signs of tourist areas in China.

| Serial number | Name of tourist areas | Percentage/% | References |
|---------------|------------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Hefei Sanhe old town | 93.18 | [11] |
| 2 | Tianshui Yuquan Temple | 90.7 | [4] |
| 3 | Tianshui Maiji Mountain | 63.4 | [12] |
| 4 | Haikou Crater Park | 62.9 | [5] |
| 5 | Suzhou Shantang Street | 58 | [10] |
| 6 | Sichuan Qingcheng Mountain | 56.9 | [6] |
| 7 | the former concession of Hankou in Wuhan | 56.86 | [9] |
| 8 | Xinjiang Sayram Lake | 55.88 | [13] |
| 9 | Qianmen District in Beijing | 52.08 | [8] |
| 10 | HongKong Middle Road in Qingdao | 51.7 | [7] |

4.2. Non-standard translation of language signs

Problems such as translation errors and non-standard translation are long-term and universal phenomena in domestic tourist areas^[15]. The linguistic landscape is integral to the cultural landscape in scenic spots. Non-standard or even wrong language landscape will directly affect the overall image of scenic spots, which will not only bring inconvenience to information transmission but also directly damage the overall landscape of tourist areas^[4]. Field research has found that there are also many typical language translation errors and non-standard practical problems in the language signs of the Fulai Mountain tourist area, nearly one-third of the bilingual or trilingual signs involved. According to the literature review, some researchers have made a detailed investigation and study on this phenomenon^[15]. However, they have not attracted enough attention from the management department of the Fulai Mountain tourist area, and the language translation problem has not been effectively rectified.

The phenomenon of English translation errors and non-standard translation in the Fulai Mountain tourist area has dramatically affected its external image and tour experience. For example, ‘检票处’ is translated as ‘The Ticket Examiner’, while The correct translation should be ‘The Ticket Office’, which is a typical translation error. For another example, ‘三教堂’ is translated as ‘The Third Religion Churches’, but in fact ‘Three Churches’ refers to ‘The Temple of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism’, which should be translated as ‘The Temple of Three Religions’, rather than ‘Third church’. Such low-level translation errors and translations that ignore the real cultural connotation distort the original meaning entirely, often resulting in improper information transmission, making foreign tourists have a bad impression, and then lose interest in the scenic spot and even the whole tourist area.

4.3. Lack of design ideas and regional characteristics

The language signs from the Fulai Mountain tourist area are made of seven materials at present. The colours and materials of the signs of various materials are different, which may be from different constructors. As a result, the tourist area does not present a relatively unified linguistic landscape style, which affects the construction of the overall image. According to statistics, 71% of the signs in the scenic spot are made of concrete and resin, which are poorly

coordinated with the surrounding environment and appear to be more abrupt and crude in the tourist area. At the same time, these signs are mostly simple stacking and combination of words, and the graphic symbol font design lacks aesthetic sense. In order to highlight the text information, colours such as bright red, dark blue, golden yellow and pure white are used frequently, and dark colour is always selected as the background colour.

There are 27.3% of language signs in the tourist area for paper, cloth, metal and wooden signs. This kind of sign resistance to weathering is weak, and some have appeared text decolorization, blurred, some damage and decay, yellowing ageing, to a great extent, affect the overall external image of the scenic area. That also reflects the fact that the management department of the Fulai Mountain tourist area has not fully paid attention to the linguistic landscape and did not establish a perfect linguistic landscape sign renewal and replacement mechanism. In addition, these signs are not integrated with the elements that can reflect the local nature, history, and culture, not to highlight Fulai Mountain's rich geological heritage.

5. Measures and suggestions

The 14th Five-Year Plan for Tourism Development of China points out that the position of tourism as a strategic pillar industry of the national economy has gradually consolidated. Under such a background, the authors put forward the following measures and suggestions based on the problems existing in the construction of the linguistic landscape in the Fulai Mountain tourist area for the management department.

Pay attention to the value of the linguistic landscape. First of all, the management department of the tourist area must fully realize the importance of the linguistic landscape and know that the linguistic landscape is an important part of the whole tourist area, which has the function of transmitting information to tourists, showing the local cultural connotation of the scenic spot, reflecting the local historical context, social culture and economic level. Secondly, the management department establishes the official linguistic landscape in the tourist area, which plays a decisive role in constructing the linguistic landscape. It is responsible for improving the tourist area's tourism and cultural image.

Thoroughly consider the multilingual needs of tourists. The management department should increase the number of signs containing English and at least present Chinese and English words on important information signs. In addition, the linguistic landscape should closely combine with the real language needs of tourists, not only including English and Korean. It is suggested that the tourist area count the number of tourists and their countries through access control, online ticketing, mobile payment, scanning code registration and other channels to provide a basis for setting multi-language signs. Given the limited space on the language signs, the management department can also consider printing guidebooks and promotional materials in English, Korean, Russian, German and French. These means can not only better introduce the tour information to foreign tourists but also play the symbolic role of linguistic landscape to the extreme so that tourists feel welcomed and valued, thus producing a good visit experience.

Strengthen the design ideas of the linguistic landscape. Nearly 40% of the existing signs in the Fulai Mountain tourist area use concrete materials. Although durable, they look simple and boring in design and lack apparent features. The management department can strengthen the unified design of all signs in the tourist area in future work and highlight the regional culture and local characteristics. The tourist area should strengthen cooperation with professional institutions and social organizations, and integrate cultural elements such as geological relics, ginkgo trees and Dinglin temple into the design of the language signs, to highlight the local

characteristics to project the historical and cultural value more through the artistic appreciation value of the linguistic landscape.

6. Conclusions

From the perspective of the linguistic landscape of tourist areas in China, this study has conducted a field investigation on constructing the linguistic landscape in the Fulai Mountain tourist area of Rizhao City, Shandong Province, China. The study shows that the linguistic landscape in the Fulai Mountain tourist area presents four primary characteristics. First, the language signs are mainly monolingual, supplemented by bilingual and trilingual signs. Second, there are three languages in the tourist area, Chinese, English and Korean, in order of proportion. Third, Chinese is the preferred code in the linguistic landscape of the tourist area, while English and Korean are marginalized language codes. Fourthly, the management departments of the tourist area play a decisive role in linguistic landscape construction. After a comprehensive analysis of the collected data, three main problems in the linguistic landscape construction of the Fulai Mountain tourist area show up: insufficient construction of diversified linguistic landscape, non-standard translation of language signs, and lack of design ideas and characteristics of signs. Based on the above findings, the author suggests that management departments should pay attention to four aspects in the future: first, pay attention to the value of linguistic landscape construction; second, the multi-language needs of tourists should be fully satisfied; third, strengthen the design idea of the linguistic landscape; fourth, carry out linguistic landscape surveys regularly. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, as the tourism industry as a strategic pillar industry develops forcefully, tourist areas, such as making the linguistic landscape of their own scientifically to cater to the tourist's experience, will promote high-quality tourism development in China and its related industries also have a profound impact.

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