Chapter 2
Language and Inter-language in Urban Irish and Japanese Linguistic Landscapes

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Introduction

Urban areas often pose acute problems for the linguistic landscape. Their physical design frequently creates competition for spatial dominance, while social diversity in many urban areas – seen both in the resident population and in the transient population of tourists, businesspeople, students and other such groups – brings together different languages and linguistic value systems without necessarily seeking consensus or a common linguistic order. The heightened economic and administrative activity of urban areas often generates large amounts of multilingual signage in a compact space. While it is possible to draw correlations between the linguistic landscape and the city as a geographical and social entity (as in Backhaus, 2007; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Spolsky & Cooper, 1991; Trumper-Flecht, 2009), our concern in this chapter is with the relationships between the languages of individual units of signage. Our fundamental argument is that since signage uses language in the visual channel, it opens up ways of going beyond the literal message of the sign to invoke covert meanings by the use of visual devices such as fonts and colours and by the use of inter-language expressions and forms of wordplay that could not arise in purely oral communication. While some of these semiotic concerns may appear not to be strictly limited to urban areas, the common occurrence in cities of the kinds of text we examine here suggests that the diversity of the city encourages this kind of linguistic mixing. In comparing linguistic landscapes from selected urban areas in Ireland and Japan, we argue that both landscapes use the same semiotic properties of signage, but point out that these properties can be used toward very different ends.

The cities that we discuss here prove no exception to the characterisation of the urban linguistic landscape as polyphonic and multilingual. Galway, a coastal city in the west of Ireland, is the third largest city in the Republic of Ireland, with a population of 72,414. Dublin, from which we discuss one example, is the capital city of the Republic of Ireland,
and has a population of nearly 1.2 million people in its metropolitan area (Central Statistics Office, 2007a: 40). Galway is a major tourist centre and a site that attracts considerable foreign investment. The economy of Dublin depends on a greater diversity of enterprises, many of them also involving overseas investment, and the city receives a large number of international tourists each year. Current census figures (e.g. Central Statistics Office, 2007b: 104–105) also demonstrate considerable diversity (as measured by birthplace) within the resident population. As documented in Kallen (2010), this diversity is manifested in the Dublin linguistic landscape, and our experience suggests that linguistic diversity has also increased in the Galway linguistic landscape.

Fukuoka, on the island of Kyushu in the south of Japan, is the eighth largest city in the country, with a population of approximately 1.4 million people. Though it does not have any large non-Japanese communities, it does have a significant tourist industry. According to official figures (City of Fukuoka, 2008), 620,600 overseas tourists, 80% of whom were from Korea and Taiwan, entered the city through its seaport and airport in 2007. Though this chapter will focus on the use of Japanese and English in Fukuoka, our sample, which makes no claims to be exhaustive, also includes official and commercial signage in Chinese and Korean, as well as commercial signage using French, Russian, Finnish and Portuguese.

The signage that we discuss in detail comes from two sets of data. The Galway material dates primarily from 2005, and was collected as part of a study of tourism and language policy in relation to the use of Irish and English: see Kallen (2009). Most of this material was collected in the city centre in places readily accessible to tourists; it has been supplemented in later visits and constitutes a file of 103 photographs. The material from Fukuoka was shaped by the observations of the second author during a year’s residence in Fukuoka (2006–2007) and comes from a file of 181 photographs taken by the first author in March 2007. These photographs emphasise the city centre areas of Tenjin and Hakata, yet they also include material from less central urban districts including Asakura-Gaido and Futsukaichi, and give prominence to areas with special attraction for tourists such as the historic Dazaifu area, with its important shrine complex, and the Momochi district, which includes the Fukuoka Tower and SoftBank Hawks baseball stadium. While space limitations preclude a detailed presentation of the complete files, we have ample evidence that the theme of inter-linguistic reference that is explored here is broadly representative of themes found elsewhere: with regard to signage in Tokyo, for example, cf. Vartanian and Martin (2003) and Backhaus (2007, 2009).
Models of Multilingual Signage

Looking at the linguistic landscape purely as a place where information is put into the public domain, a natural expectation might be that multilingual sign texts should convey the same information in each of the languages of the text. Our sample contains many such signs: street and information signs in English and Irish in Galway, and in Japanese and English (or, additionally, Chinese and/or Korean) in Fukuoka. Yet this expectation of textual symmetry is often violated. Asymmetry could represent differential knowledge of particular linguistic codes on the part of the sign creator, or, as Lanza and Woldemariam (2009) point out, attempts to reach different audiences through the use of different languages. In this section, then, we turn our attention to the development of models that attempt to account for the complexity of mappings between message content and linguistic choice.

As a point of reference, we use the model that Reh (2004) proposes in distinguishing four types of relationship between message content and the languages used in signage: (a) duplicating multilingual writing, which presents the same information in each language; (b) fragmentary multilingualism, where ‘the full information is given only in one language, but in which selected parts have been translated into an additional language’ (Reh, 2004: 10); (c) overlapping multilingual writing, which describes a unit of signage ‘if only part of its information is reported in at least one more language, while other parts of the text are in one language only’ (Reh, 2004: 12); and (d) complementary multilingual writing, ‘in which different parts of the overall information are each rendered in a different language’ (Reh, 2004: 14). Such a model is intuitively satisfying and accounts for much of the signage that we have observed in Ireland and Japan. Though it is not identical to the models of, for example, Inoue (2005) or Backhaus (2007), it is sufficiently similar to suggest a general consensus on how to categorise the relationships between content and language choice in multilingual signage.

In order to focus on those elements of plurilingual signage that are not well accounted for by such models, we develop here an argument based on three main points, outlined as follows.

(1) Writing systems themselves introduce choices that generate meanings independently of the message content. The Irish linguistic landscape makes particular use of two related, yet distinguishable, writing systems. One is the modern Roman orthography that is now generally used for both English and Irish. A second system is based on Irish language manuscript tradition and has been used in print for Irish since the 17th century (see McGuinne, 1992). This system has been adapted into a stylised font for use in
English—what we refer to here as Celticised English. In Japan, the linguistic landscape is dominated by the Japanese language, which employs three writing systems: Kanji (the pictographically derived system based on Chinese orthography), Hiragana (a phonetic syllabary used to spell out Japanese words without using Kanji and to represent certain grammatical features of the language) and Katakana (a second, visually distinct syllabary generally used for non-Japanese loanwords). The Roman alphabet (referred to as Rōmaji) is also used for transliterations of Japanese. As Inoue (2005) points out, the co-existence of these systems, and the elements of choice between them, are highly significant in the shaping of the Japanese linguistic landscape.

(2) Signage plays on linguistic awareness to create linguistic hybrids that accomplish specific purposes apart from the literal meaning of the text. What we refer to here is a notion similar to metaphorical codeswitching as discussed originally by Blom and Gumperz (1972). For Blom and Gumperz, metaphorical codeswitching relies on a contrast between two codes, each of which is normally available for communication within a distinctive context of use. The normal pairing of code and context leads to associations in which, as Blom and Gumperz (1972: 425) put it, ‘the context in which one of a set of alternates is regularly used becomes part of its meaning’. Metaphorical usage arises when a form is ‘employed in a context where it is not normal’, since the unexpected use of the code ‘brings in some of the flavor of this original setting’. Though the Blom and Gumperz model is developed for spoken language, the material we consider below demonstrates that multilingual signage also relies on the metaphorical invocation of frames of discourse associated with specific languages.

(3) Linguistic landscapes show varying reactions to modernity and globalisation. A contrastive study of urban and rural landscapes would lie outside the scope of this chapter, yet we suggest that urban environments that function as centres for tourism, international economic activity, immigration and inward migration, public administration and competition for space are especially conducive to the development of signage that reflects debates of nationhood and national identity (associated with modernism) and changing definitions of identity arising from globalisation. Ireland and Japan are both countries with national languages that predate industrialisation and the growth of cities.

Use of the Irish language in Ireland extends back at least 2300 years. English was introduced in the 12th century, but remained a minority
language associated from the late middle ages with urban areas, while Irish continued as the first language of the overwhelming majority of the population (apart from certain areas in Ulster) into the late 18th century. Today the so-called Gaeltacht areas in the Republic of Ireland, where Irish is maintained as a community language, are all rural. (For further details see Kallen, 1994; Ó Cuív, 1986; Ó Giollagáin & Mac Donnacha, 2008.) It is crucial to note, then, that while current census figures in the Republic show that just over 40% of the population over the age of three can speak Irish (Central Statistics Office, 2006c: 12), estimates based on linguistic surveys show that no more than 5% of the population 'use Irish as their first or main language' (Ó Riagáin, 2007: 229). Against this historical background, Irish is now often used to reference cultural authenticity and a look backwards to an essentially rural tradition, real or invented, but can also be used to look forward, pointing to Ireland's status as a nationally conscious player in the cultural and economic marketplace of globalisation. English, by contrast, can be seen variously as the legacy of colonialism, the modernising response of the majority of the Irish population to the economic and political developments of the late 18th century onwards, or the utilitarian adoption of an international language of wider communication, accelerated by large-scale emigration to English-speaking countries in the 19th century.

The introduction and development of Japanese in Japan (see Rozycki, 2003) dates to roughly the same time as Irish in Ireland, but since Japan has not undergone a comparable language shift, Japanese maintains an unchallenged position as the language of cultural authenticity and national unity. (See, however, Gottlieb, 2005: 18–38 for a review of language diversity in Japan.) Many commentators (e.g. Backhaus, 2007, 2009; Inoue, 2005; Tanaka, 1994) have noted that English in Japan is often associated with modernity and internationalisation. Our sample supports this view: while there are instances where English simply fulfils a communicative role for English speakers, we see many signs in which the use of English is best understood as a general signifier of modernity that is oriented to native speakers of Japanese and is anomalous or even incomprehensible to monolingual speakers of English.

We thus point out that while the Irish and Japanese linguistic landscapes both use linguistic diversity to index values pertaining to national identity in the (post)modern world, Irish as the national language, now spoken as a first language by a minority population, fulfils a very different role from English as a global language used in Japan. Though these linguistic hierarchies are not themselves intrinsically urban phenomena, we suggest that the urban linguistic landscape, whether putting Irish into the city or bringing Japanese-English hybrids
into the everyday lives of native speakers of Japanese, brings such ideological references into particularly sharp focus.

Ireland: Irish and English, Old Roles and New Relationships

We start with a consideration of what Reh’s (2004) taxonomy refers to as ‘complementary multilingual writing’, in which the messages displayed in two languages are entirely different. We analyse Figure 2.1 as a single unit that presents the public face of a shop known as ‘An Taiscín’ (or ‘The Little Treasure’) by using two sets of messages in two languages. The sign over the door welcomes customers to the shop in Irish, using a traditional Irish font. On the left hand side is a statement in English on the value of customers, which uses a modern Roman font. An internet

![Figure 2.1 An Taiscín shop front, Galway](image)
search shows that this text has been adapted and used by a variety of healthcare providers, community groups and businesses around the world. It is frequently attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, though our search of standard references (e.g. CWMG website) provides no evidence to support this attribution. On the right hand side, we find three proverbs using the Irish language and orthography: *Is beag an rud is buaine ná an duine* ('Any little thing may serve as a reminder of someone'), *Is buaine chú ná saol* ('Fame lasts longer than life') and *Bíonn siúlach scéalach* ('Travellers have tales to tell').

Useful though it may be to categorise the signage of Figure 2.1 solely by reference to the relationship between message content and language choice, we suggest that this categorisation is incomplete. There is no obvious reason why a tourist-oriented shop in Galway should express philosophy or proverbial wisdom in any language. The value of these messages can only be understood as part of a self-presentation strategy to influence consumer behaviour. The customer relations statement on the left is based on a globally circulated text and speaks to a modern marketing concept. The proverbial wisdom on the right, however, takes an entirely different tack. The use of traditional Irish orthography may make the message obscure even to the younger generation of Irish people, and will be doubly opaque to the international visitor. Assuming, however, that the signage as a whole is intended to communicate something relevant to the reader, we can only infer that it is the juxtaposition of the two messages – one global and consumer oriented, the other local and perhaps semantically problematical but nevertheless visually salient – that makes for a single unit of signage. The complementary messages are not addressed to different audiences, but have the effect of indexing the shop's claim to be simultaneously global and modern as well as local and traditional.

Turning to a more linguistically complex case, we consider Figure 2.2. The sign in this figure was photographed in Dublin, though its occurrence on a van means that it is not tied to a single location. Since the van belongs to a company that offers window installation and repairs, we assume that the intended audience is purely local and the tourism element of Figure 2.1 does not come into play.

The advertising material on this van, which offers a 'complete design and installation [sic] service' and 'fast repair service', could easily be translated into Irish. The word *Bríshta*, on the other hand, looks more like Irish and is certainly not English. On these grounds, we could classify this signage as an example of complementary multilingual writing. Yet this description would miss the important role of hybridity and language awareness in the sign. In fact, the company name *Bríshta* is not a word of English or Irish. The Irish word *briste* 'broken' is phonetically ['brʲɪtʲa'], and is a high-frequency word that would probably be learned by most
Irish children in primary school. The anglicised spelling <Brishta> is a transliteration that would thus be recognised by most of the target audience. This Irish-like coinage could not be translated to provide a matching English expression: writing 'Broken' in the signage, for example, would convey a message at the literal level that would be detrimental to the image of the company as one that fixes, rather than breaks, windows. The word-form <Brishta> thus does not simply provide information, but rather catches the eye in presenting a linguistic puzzle that can be resolved with a small amount of effort by anyone with sufficient awareness of the Irish language and the English orthographic system. The language used here indexes the shared experience of learning the Irish language in school: the playful use of metaphorical codemixing is not designed to convey literal content, but to achieve indexicality by presenting an anomalous use of Irish in an unexpected setting.

Figure 2.3 also relies on the linguistic awareness of the intended audience. Ostensibly, the shop front here is a simple example of complementary multilingual writing, since the name of the business and the list of services available are given only in English, while two additional lines of text appear only in Irish. The business name, Claddagh Laundrette, is written in a Celticised English, straddling the two languages. This element incorporates a further semiotic reference in its picture of the Claddagh ring (featuring a heart held by two hands and topped by a crown), which is traditionally associated with the Claddagh area of Galway. The Irish orthography in the rest of the signage is based on, though not completely consistent with, the traditional Irish system.
When we analyse the use of the two languages in this shop front, however, we again find that the complementary text analysis does not fully account for the signage. The greeting on the left, Fáilte isteach, ‘welcome in’, is conventional and is a common Irish phrase that a tourist or occasional visitor might learn. Since this laundrette is located close to tourist areas and a university, this conventional greeting could be directed both to overseas visitors and more local audiences. The Irish writing on the right, however, is anything but conventional. The phrase slán agus beannacht is conventionally used as a farewell and literally means ‘health and blessing’. It too is a phrase that may be casually encountered by visitors or those with only a passing knowledge of Irish. The word glan in Irish, however, means ‘clean’, and the phrase glan agus beannacht, literally ‘clean and blessing’, is neither grammatical nor idiomatic in Irish. Like <Brishta> in Figure 2.2, the use of the word glan here has general relevance to the business that is being advertised, but creates an intentional violation of the rules of the language. Some effort must be expended by the reader to make sense of this linguistic anomaly, but this effort yields a reward in the decoding of a linguistic puzzle. As a type of metaphorical codeswitching, the sign thus reaches out to readers who
understand the sign’s linguistic humour, while retaining the appearance of authentic Irishness even for those who do not.

Figure 2.4, from the shop front of the Galway branch of the Schuh chain of shoe shops, focuses our attention on the use of Irish in contemporary globalisation. The Schuh chain opened in 1981 in Edinburgh and operates in the UK and Ireland (see Schuh website for a history). Despite the German name, it has nothing to do with Germany. This use of a foreign language metaphorically does not index tradition, but rather the commercial activity of a multinational company within a multilingual Europe. As we will see below, Figure 2.4 is thus more comparable to the use of European languages in the Japanese linguistic landscape.

Apart from the Schuh name partially shown at the top of Figure 2.4, the main message on the right of the figure looks like a simple case of what Reh (2004) calls duplicating multilingual writing, since the Irish éadach do chosa is equivalent to the English ‘clothing for feet’. This use of equivalent

![Figure 2.4 Schuh shoe shop, Galway](image-url)
messages, however, does not arise from language policy (as with the duplicating multilingual writing on street signs) or communicative necessity. Rather, we point to the signage as a whole and suggest that the use of language here invokes a metaphorical reference to Irish as the national language of Ireland in an international, postmodern context in which Scottish-based shoe shops use the German language to advertise goods that have no necessary connection to any German-speaking country.

**Japan: Repurposing English for Local Meanings**

Turning to our material from Japan, we first consider Figure 2.5, a poster from a commuter train, which shows a purposeful and extreme degree of Reh’s ‘fragmentary multilingualism’.

The full name of the company, *Melon Bridal Counter*, is given in English much more prominently than it is in Japanese. The Japanese name is written in Katakana only in a small font in the first line of the paragraph in the middle of the sign. It would be wrong to assume, though, that the company is advertising to English speakers: there is no other English text in the sign. Variation within the Japanese language is exploited to index many non-Japanese referents. Many of the services offered in the

![Figure 2.5 Melon Bridal Counter on commuter train](image-url)
advertisement are described using loanwords written in Katakana – dresses, hairdressing, nails, dessert buffets and a ‘wedding school’. Since most of these concepts could have been described using native Japanese words and written in Kanji, the use of Katakana makes a metaphorical reference to the West. The model provides a further point of exotic reference, since she is wearing a Western wedding dress. Western-style weddings are now more popular in Japan than traditional Shinto weddings, and a whole industry has developed to provide this service (see, e.g. BBC News, 2006). Thus, Figure 2.5, while functionally aimed at a Japanese clientele, accomplishes its task by the use of an English name, Japanese that is markedly rich in foreign loanwords, and Western imagery. A model of bilingual signage needs to incorporate these additional references in order to understand ways in which English, rather than being simply imported into Japan, has been repurposed to suit contemporary Japanese culture.

In Figure 2.6, we see a quintessentially Western symbol placed in a novel context that is as much Japanese as American. This poster comes from a shopping centre near the Fukuoka Tower and advertises a limited-edition teriyaki egg burger that was available at McDonald’s during spring 2007.

Noticing and celebrating the four seasons of the year has long been an essential aspect of Japanese traditional high culture and aesthetics (see, e.g. De Mente, 2006: 104–105). In modern times, Japanese businesses often hold special promotions to go with the seasons. The seasonal element is prominent in Figure 2.6, where the most salient images are the cherry blossom and the hybrid Japanese-American teritama (coined from teriyaki + tamago ‘egg’ and denoting a teriyaki burger with an egg on top). The cherry blossom is the classic traditional symbol of spring in Japan, and cherry-blossom imagery is ubiquitous at this time of year. The legend at the right announces that ‘Spring comes in together with teritama’ and uses the traditional top-to-bottom, right-to-left orientation of writing in Japanese in order to index traditional orthography and culture (much like the use of Irish orthography in our earlier examples). The McDonald’s logo also appears in the bottom corner, along with the slogan ‘I’m lovin’ it’, which in Europe appears on McDonald’s packaging in several European languages, but here appears in English alone. Semiotic hybridisation reaches its peak in the stylised cherry blossom at the top of the poster, which contains the kanji 今年 spring’ and, in Roman letters, the English word ‘mac’, used here as shorthand for a McDonald’s product (as in McMuffin, McNugget, and so on). The resulting hybrid word, harumac, is not a real word in either language (just as Brishta in Figure 2.2 is neither Irish nor English), but is filled with associations pertaining both to Japanese culture and to Western consumer culture. English is thus used not to communicate concrete information,
but as a reference to the McDonald’s brand. One could argue that this poster as a whole thus reflects the cultural hybridity that accompanies globalisation – a point that goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

Figure 2.7, from the Shintencho shopping area in central Fukuoka, appears comprehensible to the European at first glance. ‘Lotteria’ is (or closely resembles) the word for a lottery in several European languages, so an outsider might readily guess that this shop sells lottery tickets or scratch cards.

In fact, Lotteria is a fast-food chain based in Japan, which also operates in South Korea, Taiwan, China and Viet Nam. Its product range includes
Western-style fast food such as burgers and chips, more Asian-style food such as squid rings and tongue stew, and fusion foods including shrimp burgers and green tea ice cream. The name Lotteria comes from the parent corporation, Lotte, which in turn is named after the character Charlotte in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Goethe. Though the name ‘Lotteria’ in this setting is uninformative to anyone unfamiliar with the Lotte brand history, there is no doubt that the original intention of the brand name is to appeal to ideas of European high culture and literature: the Lotte website states that the company is named after Charlotte.
because she is ‘a character who stays in the memory for a long time and is deep in the hearts of many people around the world’. Adding to the specific historical references of the Lotte company, we can see a more general global reference in the -eria ending of Lotteria. As pointed out by Barni and Bagna (2009), this word form has taken on a life of its own in international signage, combining not only with Italianate roots (pizzeria, gelateria, etc.), but with a wide range of other elements. Thus, while the sign in Figure 2.7 is linguistically very simple, its multiple systems of reference express far more than its referential meaning.

Figure 2.8 shows a poster for a 390-yen shop in the Daimyo area of Fukuoka, which includes a number of ‘cool’ shops aimed at a young clientele. The English text here, Thank You Mart, while composed of legitimate English words, does not convey a particularly meaningful message. This phrase is in fact a pun directed solely at Japanese speakers. Many Japanese speakers pronounce the expression thank you as ['sanjku], which sounds exactly like the Japanese words san ‘three’ and kyuu ‘nine’.

Figure 2.8 Thank You Mart, Daimyo district
Thus, san kyuu ‘three nine’ is a reference to the fact that everything in this shop costs 390 yen. Though the shop name is also transliterated in Hiragana at the bottom of the poster, the main effect of the sign is to create a message in which English words are divorced from their original meanings, yet still trade on the popularity of English as a branding device.

Conclusions

In this investigation of signage in two urban areas widely separated by geography, language and culture, we have focused on the ways in which multilingual signage can be indexical of more than the literal message of the sign. Our observation is that notions such as duplicating multilingual writing or complementary multilingual writing account for the relationships between languages in multilingual signs when the analysis focuses on linguistic codes and literal meanings alone. We would go one step further, though, and suggest that metaphorical reference in the linguistic landscape – whether achieved by language choice, choice of font or writing system, or complementary relationship to other semiotic systems – must also be fully accounted for.

We also argue that the approach we have developed here allows for an assessment of the ways in which language communities use the linguistic landscape in different ways to address issues such as globalisation. We see that in the Irish linguistic landscape – particularly in the city, where Irish is not the expected language of everyday communication – Irish can be used to refer both to tradition and to globalisation when juxtaposed with other languages. In Japan we see that while the use of English is often indexical of modernity and postmodern hybridity, metaphorical references to modern globalisation can also be accomplished by multilingualistic reference to an 18th-century German Romantic character. We further hypothesise on the basis of our urban evidence that the recontextualisations of language that we have seen here are more typical of urban environments, with their social diversity and cross-cultural encounters, than of rural settings. Further contrastive research may be needed on this point as the field of linguistic landscape continues to develop.

References

