

# Investigation and Analysis of the Linguistic Landscape in High-end Consumer Business District in Guangzhou——Taking TaiKoo Hui as an Example

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**Abstract:** Linguistic landscape has become an emerging research topic in sociolinguistics due to the development of urban linguistic landscape. Based on the development of linguistic landscape in TaiKoo Hui, its diverse characteristics are analyzed, and the language signs, usage, and codes are summarized. It is found that there is poor transmission effect of multilingual landscape information and improper use of linguistic landscape in TaiKoo Hui. This paper concludes that the linguistic landscape of Taikoo Hui can be optimized from two aspects to enhance its attractiveness and competitiveness, including improving the informational function of foreign language signs and regulating the use of linguistic landscape.

**Keywords:** Guangzhou city; High-end consumer business district; Linguistic landscape; TaiKoo Hui

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## 1. Introduction

The development of online shopping platforms and e-commerce has made some impacts on the operation and sales in physical stores. Many consumer businesses have begun looking for ways to attract more consumers. They have optimized traditional consumer business in two aspects, which are external landscape, and internal services and promotional activities. They also promoted the transformation and upgrading of traditional businesses <sup>[1]</sup>. As an emerging research topic in sociolinguistics, linguistic landscape has attracted the attention of scholars in recent years. Linguistic landscape was originally defined as the language signs in public places. These public language signs make up the linguistic landscape of a certain territory, region, or city. Domestic research on linguistic landscape began relatively late, and it is now an emerging topic in the field of linguistic sociology <sup>[2]</sup>. Scholars have gradually discovered that the linguistic landscape of a region reflects the implementation of the language policy, vitality, and competition. Linguistic landscape will negatively affect the economic vitality, influence, popularity, and cultural integration of the region <sup>[3]</sup>. Linguistic landscape of consumer business district shapes the consumers' first impressions of the business district. This affects the popularity and competitiveness of the business district, and consumers' consumption activities. This paper conducts an investigation on the current situation and overall analysis of the linguistic landscape of Taikoo Hui,

a high-end consumer business district in Guangzhou.

## 2. Survey descriptions

TaiKoo Hui, a high-end consumer business district in Guangzhou, is located in the core area of the Tianhe Central Business District. The shopping malls and office buildings were officially opened in 2011, while Mandarin Oriental Hotel and serviced residences began operations in 2013. Taikoo Hui consists of a large shopping mall, two Grade A office buildings, Mandarin Oriental Hotel and serviced residences, and a cultural center. It was rated as a national five-star shopping center in 2019. There are more than 180 well-known brands in Taikoo Hui, including world-renowned brands, domestic and foreign fashion brands, home or lifestyle brands and many gourmet brands. The third floor of the shopping mall is transformed into a garden landscape, allowing consumers to experience nature in the city. After over 10 years, Taikoo Hui has become a famous landmark in Guangzhou with significant development.

In this survey, the linguistic landscape of TaiKoo Hui was collected until May 2023. The linguistic landscape is divided into four types, namely shop signs, road signs, public place slogans and billboards. The linguistic landscape of TaiKoo Hui is analyzed from two aspects, which are linguistic diversity and overall analysis.

## 3. Linguistic landscape analysis

### 3.1. Linguistic diversity

The diversity of linguistic landscape reflects the richness of the regional linguistic landscape. Various types of language codes, symbolic languages, and special language phenomena constitute an ever-changing linguistic landscape <sup>[4]</sup>.

#### 3.1.1. Language codes

Language codes of linguistic landscape can be divided into monolingual signs, bilingual signs, and multilingual signs. In the area of TaiKoo Hui, it can be considered that a sign with only one language is a monolingual sign. If there are Chinese (simplified or traditional characters) or Chinese and its corresponding pinyin, it is also a single-language sign. If the sign contains two languages, it is a dual-language sign. The sign containing more than two languages can be considered as a multi-language sign.

According to the survey, there are abundant monolingual and bilingual signs in Taikoo Hui, with more bilingual signboards in Chinese and English. Among the monolingual signs, the most prominent and distinctive one is the name of Taikoo Hui, as shown in **Figure 1**. It adopts a silver-white, three-dimensional design, and integrates into the modern shopping mall building, blending with the overall design style. In the selection of language codes, simplified Chinese and Cantonese Hong Kong pinyin are used. Simplified Chinese reflects the pulse of the times and enhances the Chinese people's sense of national identity, while Cantonese Hong Kong pinyin represents the brand image of Taikoo Hui. It also reflects the use of Cantonese in Guangzhou as the local characteristics, and displays the richness of Chinese characters and local dialects. Many business brands use brand-fixed language signs, hence there are also monolingual signs in English, Japanese, French, and other languages. Various shop names, slogans, and public signs including highway signs and billboards in the business district are bilingual, such as Chinese-English, Chinese-Japanese, Chinese-Korean, etc. This shows that TaiKoo Hui has a high level of internationalization and tolerance for foreign affairs, languages, and cultures.



**Figure 1.** Taikoo Hui name logo

### 3.1.2. Symbolic linguistic landscape

A symbolic linguistic landscape is a recognizable pattern, picture, or letter, that enables people to instantly understand the meaning. For example, through patterns or letters in the brand image of classic brand logos, people can easily recognize the brand logos<sup>[5]</sup>. Symbolic linguistic landscape allows people to instinctively understand the content and meaning of the signs. There are numerous shop signs in Taikoo Hui that are uniformly designed by the brand. These shop signages are rich in styles. Many shops will include brand patterns while marking the brand name, commonly known as brand logos. The international brands in Taikoo Hui shopping malls contribute to the rich symbolic linguistic landscape. In comparison, some local brands have less symbolic linguistic landscape, which is limited by brand influence. In order to facilitate consumers' identification, a large number of local brands use language logos directly. The road signs around Taikoo Hui business district are uniformly designed by the government as an official linguistic landscape, with high degree of symbolization. For example, the signs marking the bus station use the symbol of the bus, the signs marking the subway use the symbol of Guangzhou Metro, and the parking area has a sign with the letter "P." Slogans in public places are either set by the business district itself or uniformly set by the city management department, and they also reflect symbolic features. The languages of the facility signs in Taikoo Hui shopping malls include simplified Chinese and English, with simple and easy-to-understand icons. For example, the toilet signs in Taikoo Hui, as shown in **Figure 2**, utilize clear and concise icons. These icons help people to determine the direction of the facilities rapidly, and they also provide accessibility to people from non-English-speaking countries. Shopping malls and stores in Taikoo Hui use static billboards for the advertisement of upcoming activities. These billboards are mainly composed of text and graphics, which can leave a deep impression on viewers.



Figure 2. Toilet signs in Taikoo Hui

## 3.2. Overall analysis of linguistic landscape

### 3.2.1. Language signs

The language signs in Taikoo Hui can be divided into official and unofficial settings. Official language signs are mainly road signs and public signs, in which the format and content are set uniformly. Bilingual signs facilitate transport and maintain public order. Unofficial language signs are set by shopping malls, shops, and event organizers, reflecting the individuality and diversity.

### 3.2.2. Language usage

Based on the analysis of the diversity of linguistic landscape, it is found that the linguistic landscape in Taikoo Hui is mainly composed of one and two languages. For monolingual signs, there is no significant difference in the number of Chinese signboards and signboards in other languages. The internationalization of the business district also reflects the characteristics of Guangzhou as an open city. The use of Chinese reflects the regional characteristics of Guangzhou as an important commercial center in South China, and provides convenience for domestic tourists. Taikoo Hui business district utilizes simple fonts and colors in their brands. Traditional and well-known brands choose fonts and colors that exhibit the brand tradition, while emerging brands prefer modern design styles. In terms of cultural elements, linguistic landscape of Taikoo Hui business district shows the characteristic Guangzhou and Cantonese culture. Certain signs use Cantonese pinyin, while some also have the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture.

### 3.2.3. Language codes

The language codes of linguistic landscape in TaiKoo Hui have inclinations towards commercialization, regionalization, internationalization, and artisticization. As a business district, the linguistic landscape of Taikoo

Hui is clearly inclined to commercial and trademark language codes. Language signs in businesses are designed to attract the attention and interest of customers, and shape the image of a particular brand or business entity <sup>[6]</sup>. As the commercial center of Guangzhou, the language logo of Taikoo Hui often uses local cultural elements and symbols to attract customers. These include Cantonese dialect, Guangzhou-specific vocabulary and expressions, integrating into the local traditional culture and historical background. With increasing internationalization of Guangzhou, the linguistic landscape of Taikoo Hui business district also presents the characteristics of international language code. International brands, shops, and road signs adopt bilingual or multilingual signs to accommodate customers from different countries and regions. This helps to demonstrate the global image of the business district and attract international consumers and investors. As a cultural center, the linguistic landscape of TaiKoo Hui is also quite artistic and innovative. This can be seen in activity slogans that adopt unique artistic forms, font layout, and typesetting design.

## **4. Existing problems in linguistic landscape and countermeasures**

### **4.1. Existing problems**

According to the investigation of the current situation, this paper finds that there are two main problems in linguistic landscape of Taikoo Hui business district.

The first problem is the poor transmission effect of multilingual information. As an international shopping mall, Taikoo Hui business district uses multilingual signs to meet the needs of customers with different language backgrounds. However, the effectiveness of multilingual information delivery can be problematic. On the one hand, the use of multiple languages may lead to information redundancy and visual confusion, affecting customers' understanding and experience. On the other hand, translation quality and accuracy are also a challenge, in which improper translation may lead to misinterpretation of information or loss of original meaning. Several foreign language signs in Taikoo Hui adopt literal translation, which lack informational function.

The second problem is the improper use of linguistic landscape. Art and innovation can add to the richness of linguistic landscape, but some linguistic landscapes lose their normativity in the pursuit of artistic innovation <sup>[7]</sup>. Promotional slogans in TaiKoo Hui have bold and unconventional linguistic landscape design in order to highlight the novelty of some activities. However, there will occasionally be some terms that are unintelligible and confusing for the audience.

### **4.2. Countermeasures and suggestions**

To solve the mentioned problems, Taikoo Hui business district should improve the informational function of foreign language signs, and the language to use in linguistic landscape should be chosen according to the needs of the audience. The language codes selection in TaiKoo Hui linguistic landscape should also suit the needs of the audience. By conducting consumer surveys, the selection of language codes can be optimized. Translation of language signs requires professional translators to avoid literal translation and guarantee the translation quality.

Other than that, the use of linguistic landscape should be regulated. Taikoo Hui business district still needs to maintain the characteristics of being simple, modern, and international. The use of linguistic landscape should be regulated by removing non-standard linguistic landscape. At the same time, it is necessary to balance the relationship between artistic innovation and functions of linguistic landscape.

## 5. Conclusion

Through investigation and analysis of linguistic landscape in Taikoo Hui business district, this paper found that Taikoo Hui, as a high-end business district in Guangzhou and even in China, has many various characteristics. These include the diversity of language codes, the richness of symbolic linguistic landscapes, and the distinctive inclinations of linguistic landscapes. The overall development of linguistic landscape in TaiKoo Hui can be optimized by improving foreign language signs and regulating its use, which will improve the attractiveness and competitiveness of TaiKoo Hui business district.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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