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Metrolingual Linguistic Repertoire and Business Sovereignty：Geosemiotic Analysis of Linguistic Landscapes in Sydney Chinatown

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have focused on global Chinatowns in the U. K. and the U.S. regarding the visual language use, but few studies have investigated Sydney Chinatown that has held abundant linguistic resources and history. Dixon Street, the centre of Sydney inner-city Chinatown is marked by the community and enclave of various cultures. The diverse Linguistic Landscapes (LLs) have been a significant linguistic index of Chinatown's political, economic, and cultural history. This project collects and compares the LLs in pictures of Dixon Street, Chinatown, ranging from 1980s to 2021. This project investigates the LLs through the lens of geosemiotics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and metrolingualism to unveil the development of Chinatown's social functions and status. Metrolingualism in the case of Chinatown is redefined as the linguistic fluidity across business districts and borders of Chinese and Australian cultures. This paper argues that Chinatown constructs the business sovereignty upon the prevalent practice of metrolingua francas through the geosemiotic patterns of the LLs. Through the example of Sydney Chinatown, this study will contribute to future language policy and planning concerning linguistic diversity and social equality.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, geosemiotics, systemic functional linguistics, metrolingualism

1. INTRODUCTION

Sydney inner-city Chinatown is located at the southern part of the Central Business District, which is well-known due to the historic pedestrian mall with traditional Chinese dragon gateways guarding the entrances. Dixon Street, the centre of the Sydney Chinatown, is the embodiment of an "ethnoburb" of "a variety of cultural attachments" [1]. Apart from being a tourist attraction, Sydney Chinatown has retained strong associations with greater Chinese migration since 1800s and been housing some of the city's established restaurants [2]. Diverse Linguistic Landscapes (LLs) have resided on Dixon Street area, as a significant linguistic index declaring Sydney Chinatown's political, economic, and cultural history.

This paper investigates the LLs through the lens of geosemiotics and metrolingualism to unveil the development of Chinatown's social functions and status. Metrolingualism in the case of Chinatown is redefined as the utilitarian linguistic fluidity across business districts and borders of Chinese and Australian cultures. This

paper argues that Chinatown constructs the business sovereignty upon the prevalent practice of metrolingual linguistic repertoire as reified and construed by the LLs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The section elaborates on the linguistic coverage of LL though several recent studies of LL. Then the section reviews and examines Chinatown's history chronologically from 1900s to post-lockdown period in 2021. Besides, the section investigates concept of metrolingualism and metrolingua francas.

2.1. Precarious Sydney Chinatown

An investigate of Sydney Chinatown into the chronology of historical events may help clarify the linkage between LL construction and the various social factors underlying. The LL corpus in Chinatown is marked by English, Cantonese (traditional Chinese), and Mandarin (simplified Chinese). Some historic LLs may been known as *Emperor's Garden* (*皇冠海鮮酒樓*), *New*

Tai Yeun Restaurant (新太源酒樓), and *Dixon House* (德信大廈). Inglis elaborates on the Chinese settlement and construction of markets in 1909 nearby Dixon Street area, which remains the centre of Sydney Chinatown. Before the WWII, Chinese economic activities were "furniture makers, cooks, tradesmen, market gardeners", remained around Dixon Street [5]. The "White Australia Policy" adopted in 1901 has been restricting Chinese population within 20,000 people [3]. Teo argues that Chinatown, except for being an ethnical enclave, had declined to a service centre that supplied "most of the provision needs of its members and offering a limited number of employment opportunities in the restaurants and provision stores" [4].

The abolition of White Australia Policy and the country's "open-door policy" in 1970s marked the first big change of Sydney Chinatown [3]. The first hundred years of Chinatown was dominated by Cantonese speakers from the Guangdong province of China and Hong Kong, but the newer arrivals were marked by diverse linguistic repertoires and cultural backgrounds [1]. Mandarin's "linguistic displacement" of Cantonese in the Haymarket area has led to the blend use of traditional and simplified Chinese LLs [5]. The Australian government's decision to promote study in Australia has attracted "international fee-paying students" from mainland China from 1980s [1].

The Sydney Chinatown was reconstructed through another governmental decision to revitalize "the southern end of Central Business District including Chinatown", which has brought significant appearance change that attracted and involved many Chinese and non-Chinese around Dixon Street 1970s [1]. The redevelopment is partly tallied with the community of Hong Kong immigrants in Sydney, due to "political uncertainties" in Hong Kong entailed by the 1997 Handover [3]. According to the Census QuickStats 2016, the Chinese-ancestry population was nearly half a million (7.8% of Greater Sydney population). Mandarin has become the first (4.7%) top "language spoken at home (LANP)" other than English, while Cantonese is the third top LANP (2.9%) [6]. With the rise of apartments, hotels, and various commercial buildings, Sydney Chinatown has been attributed with financial and touristic values.

The "cultural cohesion" of Chinatown has been disrupted by mainlanders, along with other Asian communities [3]. However, the linguistic diversity and "constant population flow" has become the obstacle to render Chinatown a solidary inclusive community [3]. It is no longer a "Chinese communal enclave" isolated from Sydney society despite of its Mandarinisation trend [5].

centred in Chinatown, "stretching around Australia to the South Pacific and back to Hong Kong and China" [1]. By 1963, however, just 15 percent Chinese people in Sydney were living in Chinatown and "adjacent suburbs such as the

2.2. The Coverage of Linguistic Landscapes

Gorter defines linguistic landscape as both the literal study of language signs and the sociocultural representation of the languages from a sociocultural perspective" [7]. Cenoz et al. claim that LL is not exclusively limited to the "display of visible written language", but the "multimodal" elements involved [8]. This claim engenders a methodological and theoretical problem of LL analysis: what should be the coverage of LL studies?

Lou conducts a case study of DC's Chinatown under a socio-historical perspective. She examines the geosemiotic features of several shop signs, which reveals that the Chinatown is a heterotopia built with conflicts and compromise during the urban revitalization process [9]. Compatible with Lou's sociolinguistic methodology, Hult believes that looking behind the signs is to encompass "how policies are experienced and negotiated by policy actors in daily life" [10].

Amos argues that LLs are "central to the construction of ethnic identity" [11]. In the case study of Liverpool Chinatown, Amos recognizes the authenticity of it alongside to the "otherness" of bilingual texts that represent "aestheticized expression of cultural tourism" [11]. The LLs selected suggest that the exclusive identity of Chinatown constructs a "genuine ethnic space" independent of the "engagement with the out-group" [11].

This paper leans on the geosemiotic approach that focuses on "the social meaning of material placement of signs and discourses" [12]. Different from Lou, this project investigates LLs from three geosemiotic principles: Indexicality, Dialogicality, and Selection [12]. Indexicality concerns with the significant ideational meaning. Dialogicality is the interdiscursive dynamic among signs, in other words, the modality. Selection includes process of a particular individual selecting different meaning potentials from a subset of signs.

2.3. Geosemiotics and Systemic Functional Linguistics

The three geosemiotic principles are interconnected with the three metafunctions of language as developed in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The interpersonal metafunction that enacts relationships is represented as Selection in geosemiotics. The ideational metafunction that represents experience is termed as Indexicality. The textual metafunction that organizes text is construed by Dialogicality [13].

To illustrate the principles, Scollon & Scollon provide an example: a mother of three school-aged boys in their neighbourhood had urged the authorities to place a "stop" sign at an intersection of flowing cars and children, while developing a habit of watching carefully when she drove through this intersection. A day after the placement of the "stop" sign, she drove straight through the intersection past the sign as driven by her habit [12]. The Indexicality of the sign was construed by the word "stop" that supposed to create dynamics. The Dialogicality was the interactions underlying between the sign and the surroundings (e.g., cars, people, crossings), in which the sign functions as am accompanying monologue. The Selection is determined by the "habitus of the social actor" and the "interaction order" [12]. In this case, the woman backgrounded the "stop" sign while foregrounding the traffics on the street, which indicates the distant contact and unequal power status [13].

The associations with SFL may connect geosemiotics with a larger scope of sociolinguistics, as the SFL model of language recognizes different social functions. The synthesis of geosemiotics and SFL helps increase the layers of discourse analysis and link up with various social factors.

2.4. Metrolingual Multitasking and Metrolingua Francas

Otsuji & Pennycook define metrolingualism as "creative linguistic conditions across space and borders of culture, history and politics, as a way to move beyond current terms such as multilingualism and multiculturalism" [14]. To contextualize metrolingualism, Pennycook & Otsuji offers a daily dialogical transaction in a French restaurant in Tokyo [15]. The customer and the staff exchanges information in Japanese, French, Italian, and English within a 30-second dialogue. Pennycook & Otsuji identifies the interaction as "metrolingual multitasking", underpinned by "local accounts of multiplicity" and "grounded accounts of language users" [15]. The context above resembles that in shops and restaurants in Sydney Chinatown. Instead of plural languages, metrolingualism in Chinatown is marked by "fluid and fixed" plus "global and local" practices accommodated to reconstruct language and identities [15].

To build up on metrolingual multitasking, Pennycook & Otsuji brings up the developing "metrolingua francas" in the Central Market in Sydney Chinatown [15]. The workers commonly recognize English as the default language of "commercial transaction", while Cantonese as the language of "social interaction" [15]. Several informants indicated in the interview that Mandarin was the de facto lingua franca in the market as it was widely used in both business and social interactions. Besides, the study observes "a more local level Hokkien, Indonesian,

Vietnamese, Thai and Spanish all emerged as languages used across areas of work" [14]. Pennycook & Otsuji proposes "metrolingua francas" not to suggest a static multilayered lingua francas, but a highly dynamic and fluid linguistic practice emergent from "the available spatial repertoires" [15].

The paper views LL through the lens of metrolingualism to investigate the balance of fixity and fluidity of the linguistic heterogeneity in Sydney Chinatown.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on the research questions below:

- By comparing the LLs between now and the 1980s/90s, what are the social factors that have progressed the linguistic and historical changes?
- To what extent has Chinatown been accommodating the burgeoning of metrolingualism?

The data is compounded of primary resources and secondary resources. The five historic pictures of Chinatown, all taken in Cantonese-dominant era of 1980s and 90s, are retrieved from the City Archives, a business archive established by the Council of the City of Sydney. The current pictures were taken during the research regarding a similar composition, pattern, space, and frame to each selected historic picture. The pictures are arranged in five pairs within which the historic and current picture are juxtaposed and compared. The Findings section amplifies some sharp contrasts and shows more close shots of specific LLs of linguistic importance.

This project incorporates geosemiotic and SFL theory to analyse the LLs in the pictures. The analysis captures the three geosemiotic facets of LL as associated with the three metafunctions of language: Indexicality (ideational), Dialogicality (textual), Selection (interpersonal) [12]. Indexicality realizes basic business function of the LLs, which is concerns with the ideational meaning. Dialogicality construes the LL's place semiotics that indicate code preference (language choice), inscription (material design), and emplacement (material location; it concerns with the textual meaning of the LLs. Scollon & Scollon deploys "inscription" to cover fonts, material, layering, state changes. Selection concerns with the interpersonal meaning, as construed by the sense of time, perceptual spaces, interpersonal distances, and personal front. Perceptual spaces are based on at least five senses of human being [12]. Personal front is concerned with "involvement" and "civil inattention" [12]. The synthesis of geosemiotics and SFL helps to unveil the general social functions of the LLs in Chinatown by investigating how they "represent our experience to each other", "enact our social

relationships", and "organize our enactments and representations as meaningful text" [13].

4. FINDINGS

This project presents the LLs regarding their Indexicality, Dialogicality, and Selection in the pictures. This section deals with the general features of the LLs, along with some distinctive linguistic attributes.

4.1. Indexicality – Ideational Metafunction

Regarding Indexicality, the most notable similarity of the pictures is the LLs remained. One is the Chinese signage engraved on the dragon entrance gateway:

Figure 1 The dragon entrance gateway in 1980 (top) and 2021 (bottom) [16].

The big Chinese signage on the top, which remains exactly the same, writes "通德履信" (Understanding Virtues and Trust), an ancient Chinese philosophy. Another similarity among the LLs is the remaining historic merchants and restaurants. An example is Emperor's Garden Restaurant ("皇冠海鲜酒楼"):

Figure 2 Emperor's Garden Restaurant in 1991(top) and 2021(bottom) [17].

This restaurant claims its history by indicating "EST 1979". Similar restaurant LLs are Nine Dragons Restaurant ("龍珠酒樓") and New Tai Yeun Restaurant ("新太源酒樓"). The three restaurants are all marked by Cantonese (or Hong Kong) gastronomy. The LL of Dixon House ("德信大廈"), a multifunctional business building, has also remained the same.

The differences concerning Indexicality are suggested by the new LLs appearing, for instance, the new poster in below. The deictic and time adverbials in the slogan catch attention [13]:

Figure 3 Close shot of the Emperor's Garden poster, 2021.

"喺度" in Cantonese means "is here", from "經典味道，始終喺度" (the classic flavour is always here) on the poster. The deictic adverbial "喺度" emphasizes the remaining location of Emperor's Garden Restaurant. The time adverbial "始終" means "always", from the same slogan LL. The time adverbial "始終" along with "EST 1979" indicates the long history of the restaurant against the new restaurants around. Another difference is revealed by the LL alteration of New Tai Yeun Restaurant ("新太源酒樓"):

Figure 4. New Tai Yeun Restaurant LL in 1982(top) and 2021(bottom) [18].

The classifier "Chinese" has been added between "New Tai Tuen" and "Restaurant", implying a broader customer orientation that involves Chinese mainlanders.

4.2. Dialogicality – Textual Metafunction

The integration of multiple languages and their material placement have constructed the metrolingual repertoire that organizes the LL cluster in the Chinatown. The material design of the LLs is discussed below. Specifically, the font styles of the Chinese characters in the brand LLs signify different business identities. For instance, the juxtaposition of English and tradition Chinese LLs, now along with simplified Chinese, suggests the complexity of business identities regarding a broad customer orientation in the multicultural Chinatown. Code preference is a key LL indicator depending on and indexing "geopolitical location" [12]. A common similarity among the pictures is the juxtaposing English and traditional Chinese LLs, now along with simplified Chinese. Another similarity lies in the metrolingual multitasking of LLs:
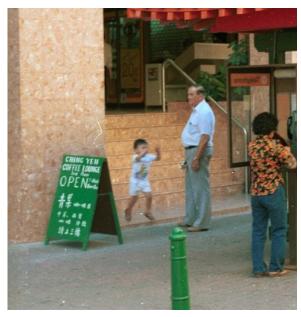
Figure 5. Metrolingual LLs in 1984 (top)

The LL of Ching Yeh Coffee Lounge (top) deploys English and traditional Chinese to address different information, for instance, business name in English and cuisine in Chinese (e.g., "咖啡" coffee, "中餐" Chinese food, "西餐" Western food). Similarly, Good Luck Hot-Pot (bottom) has the recruitment notice in simplified Chinese but the Voucher and COVID-19 information in English. Besides, Chinese LLs tend to be more predominant as opposed to old times.

Second, The LLs in Chinatown have developed new inscription (i.e., material design) out of the traditional design. Höllmann & Donicht (2017) introduce seven basic Chinese script styles, among which seal, clerical, and regular script used as the official script for documentation [20]; running script (i.e. semi-cursive script) and cursive script are developed for "simplicity" and "convenience" [20]:

Figure 6. development of Chinese script styles [20].

Traditional Cantonese business brands are marked by Chinese LLs in formal scripts like seal, clerical, and regular, even in modern era:

Figure 7. Traditional Cantonese business brands LLs in seal (top), clerical (middle), and regular (bottom) scripts. Nine Dragons Restaurant ("龍珠酒樓") in seal script, Emperor's Garden Cakes & Bakery ("皇冠麵包餅店") in clerical script, Live Crafts Centre ("活藝") in regular script. All photos were taken by Jiayang Hu, May 26, 2021.

However, modern Chinese LLs in Dixon Street are commonly designed in running, cursive, and even handwritten style:

Figure 8. Modern Chinese business brands LLs in running script. Xing Xing Sichuan Dish ("星兴川菜") and Skewer BBQ ("小時候") in running script. All photos taken by Jiayang Hu, May 26, 2021.

Compared to the overall regular-script LLs in old times, the shift of inscription indicates an aesthetic change, along with the gradual elimination traditional Cantonese fine dining business as impacted by modern (fast-food) Chinese business.

The LLs above are promoting trendy merchandises, payment choices, council recognition, and coronavirus information. Such intense emplacement of LLs, as a metrolingual multitasking practice, implies the business' struggle amid the pandemic.

4.3. Selection – Interpersonal Metafunction

The new LLs in Chinatown create perceptual spaces by producing primarily "visual space" and "auditory space" [12]. The LLs appeared more united and accumulated at the re-opening as shown in the top picture in Figure 1, but more scattered now as the bottom one depicts. The different visual space draws a comparison between the close business community in the past and the independent business individuals nowadays. As for auditory space, the rhythm of the slogan "經典味道，始終喺度" (ging1 din1 mei6 **dou6**, chi2 jung1 hai2 **dou6**) in Figure 3 would establish close contact with Cantonese-speaking customers.

In addition to perceptual space, some LLs create "the sense of time" [12]. Figure 2 contains a metrolingual slogan LL "港式奶茶，鮮磨咖啡" (Hong Kong milk tea, fresh handmade coffee), which is nuanced from the English version "Takeaway Hot Coffee & Tea":

Figure 9. The metrolingual slogan LL by Emperor's Garden.

The Chinese version is inclined to a slow and enjoyable lifestyle while the English version creates an "urgency" by the classifier "Takeaway" [12]. The metrolingual practice adapts the traditional Cantonese restaurant to both Aussie and Chinese manners of life.

5. DISCUSSION

The Sydney Chinatown has been deluged with new Indexicality of LLs, contributed by "community activists, business owners, real estate agents, residents and visitors" [5]. The notable simplified Chinese LLs come from the new business established by mainlanders, along with "the rise of China" [5]. Wong presents that the business units in Dixon Street are largely "funded or developed" by mainland Chinese [21]. The mainland property investment underlying has financially contributed to the Mandarinisation trend, which has been underpinning the arising status of the simplified Chinese LLs as the cultural accessories. However, a transactional relationship "doesn't build a shared sense of the region as (a common) home" [5]. The LLs' new Indexicality suggests that Chinatown has transformed to "an icon for Australian multiculturalism", from an isolated enclave that sheltered Chinese people [5].

The remained historic merchants have adapted their LLs in diverse Dialogicality for the regeneration. The Findings section presents the significant historic Hong Kong business behind the LLs recorded by the old pictures: Emperor's Garden, New Tai Yeun, and Dixon House. Emperor's Garden has deployed multiple brand LLs demonstrating their business history and signature cuisine. New Tai Yeun has altered its brand into "New Tai Yeun Chinese Restaurant" as indicated by the in-store LLs. The entrance of Dixon House has been flooded with Mandarin LLs promoting various business and retail/office spaces on lease. By redesigning the LLs, the Hong Kong-based business can hardly retain their distinctive identity from mainland Chinese, albeit the "increasingly pronounced variations" that defy "one Asian stereotype" [22]. The elder Chinese-origin generations that witnessed Chinatown's Cantonese past may feel alienated from the regeneration, as "Chineseness" has now became an object of (self-)commodification [5].

The project investigates Chinatown further through the lens of the metrolingual LLs. Contextualized in Sydney Chinatown, metrolingualism can be defined as the utilitarian linguistic fluidity across business districts and borders of Chinese and Australian cultures, as a practice to move beyond pluralization of languages and cultures. New Tai Yeun keeps its Chinese brand as "新太源酒樓" (New Tai Yeun Restaurant), which is distinct from the current English brand "New Tai Yeun Chinese Restaurant". The metrolingual multitasking LL performs the Selection of an identity compromise to non-Chinese speakers for business, but a cultural preservation against Chinese speakers for highlighting their Cantonese-speaking identity. Likewise, businesses in Chinatown are inclined to put up notices in different languages giving different information, based on divergent Selections. Except for Chinese-oriented business promotions, recruitment notices are written in Chinese as underpayment appears to be widely accepted and undertaken in Chinatown [23]. These notices are commonly juxtaposed with English LLs such as menu and COVID-19 information [24]. The "commodified form" of Chinatown is embodied by the overtly visible and intelligible English and Chinese LLs, as Chinese language is "evoked as a possession" of cultural heritage [5]. All Chinese elements, including the language per se, are commodified to promote the business. However, the operational form of Chinatown is manoeuvred by Mandarin and Cantonese, as Chinese languages remain functionally untranslated to preserve the Chinese business sovereignty. Chinatown has developed high fluidity of Dialogicality from its linguistic heterogeneity [25]. Accordingly, this project argues that the multitasking LLs in Chinatown represent the social functions – as demonstrated by Indexicality, Dialogicality, Selection – of the metrolingua francas that consolidate Chinese sovereignty in the White society.

Inevitably, Chinatown's icon of multiculturalism will perpetuate, as the city government seeks the opportunity to promote economic development. The Chinatown's commodified form will be reinforced by the proliferating LLs that intensely promote Chinese elements as opposed to the past. As Chinatown has been substantially commercialized and transitory, it deviates from "the natural place to come to" for old-generation Chinese people, as described by George Wing Kee, "a long-time Chinatown community leader" [5]. Meanwhile, the metrolingua francas will keep balancing Chinatown's operational form that encompasses the business sovereignty.

6. CONCLUSION

Sydney Chinatown has evolved from the heterotopia to a highly commodified business centre with diverse and transitory metrolingual English and Chinese LLs. Chinatown presents through the LLs the localized metrolingualism as the utilitarian linguistic fluidity across business districts and borders of Chinese and

Australian cultures. The geosemiotic analysis justifies the prevalent practice of metrolingua francas in Chinatown. This project concludes that Chinatown has built its business sovereignty upon the metrolingual linguistic repertoire, on which the LLs have shed light.

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