

# Languages on Display: Multilingual Culinary Signage in the Linguistic Landscape of Western Visayas, Philippines

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## Abstract

Linguistic Landscape (LL) research has gained increasing attention in sociolinguistics as a means of examining language use in public spaces. However, studies focusing on culinary signage in specific local contexts remain limited. This study investigates the linguistic landscape of culinary signs in two highly urbanized cities in Western Visayas, Philippines. Employing a descriptive content analysis design with both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study analyzed 49 publicly displayed culinary signs collected from selected local food establishments. The analysis examined language distribution in terms of monoglossic and heteroglossic forms, language features based on code preference, inscription, and emplacement, and language functions categorized as informative and symbolic. Findings indicate the dominance of English across both monoglossic and heteroglossic signs, as well as its prominence in terms of visual placement, font size, and color. English is primarily used for informative purposes, while local and foreign languages tend to serve symbolic functions related to identity, authenticity, and cultural representation. The presence of multiple languages in signage reflects the multilingual and transcultural dynamics of the region. The study contributes to the growing body of linguistic landscape research by providing context-specific insights into culinary signage in a regional Philippine setting. It also suggests directions for future research, including broader investigations across different types of public signage and deeper exploration of the semiotic and ideological dimensions of language use in commercial spaces.

**Keywords:** linguistic landscape, multilingualism, culinary signage, semiotic analysis, Philippines

## 1. Introduction

The study of Linguistic Landscape (LL) has emerged as a significant area in sociolinguistics, focusing on the visibility and salience of languages displayed in public spaces (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Recently, as cities across the globe become increasingly multilingual and multicultural, LL studies offer insights into language ideologies, identity construction, and sociolinguistic hierarchies manifested in signage. Beyond its early concern with official and public signs, the field has expanded to include commercial, educational, and cultural spaces, where language choice is often strategically motivated by symbolic, economic, and ideological considerations. This expansion reflects the growing recognition of LL as a dynamic and interdisciplinary research domain. For instance, as shown in a recent scientometric review of LL research, Peng et al. (2022) demonstrated a steady global increase in LL studies, noting a shift toward themes such as commercialization, tourism, identity, and multilingualism. However, they also observed that while the scope of LL research has widened, in-depth semiotic and functional analyses of specific commercial domains remain unevenly explored, indicating the need for more context-sensitive and interpretive investigations.

Recent studies across Asian contexts demonstrate that linguistic landscapes in urban and tourist spaces reflect the interplay of cultural identity, language hierarchy, and globalization. Across these settings, English frequently emerges as a dominant language for commercial and communicative purposes, often co-existing with national and local languages that serve symbolic and identity-related functions. For instance, studies conducted in Indonesia highlight the prominence of Indonesian and English in multilingual signage, alongside the marginalization of local languages (Mubarok et al., 2024; Sudarmanto et al., 2025). Similar patterns are observed in Thailand and Vietnam, where multilingual signage balances tourist accessibility with cultural representation (Bennui, 2024; Nguyen, 2024; Sha, 2025). In Baubau, Oda et al. (2025) further illustrate how public signage reflects both local identity and global tourism objectives. Moreover, Baudinette (2018) demonstrates how linguistic landscapes function as symbolic resources that shape identity and cultural values in urban spaces. Collectively, these studies suggest that linguistic landscapes operate not only as communicative tools but also as sites where globalization and local identity are continuously negotiated.

In the Philippine context, linguistic landscape (LL) studies highlight the complex interaction of language, culture, and power across diverse public spaces. Across various settings, English consistently emerges as the dominant language in signage, reflecting its institutional prestige and global orientation, as observed in rural Quezon (Balog & Gonzales, 2021), heritage areas such as Boac, Marinduque (Luna, 2023), and academic environments like Mindanao State University (Abbas et al., 2022), as well as in higher education contexts where multilingual signage reflects institutional diversity and language use practices (Clorion et al., 2024b). Similar patterns are

evident in nonmetropolitan contexts, where English dominates alongside national and local languages that remain visible as markers of linguistic identity, as shown in Zamboanga City (Clorion et al., 2024a). At the same time, local languages continue to function as important markers of identity and authenticity in multilingual communities, as evidenced in Dipolog City (Cantina, 2021). In tourism-oriented settings such as Baguio City and San Juan, language mixing has been shown to balance global accessibility with local identity (Mendoza & Bernardo, 2024), a pattern similarly observed in Bislig City (Mundiz & Tarusan, 2024). This dynamic is further supported by studies on tourist perception, which indicate that English signage is often associated with convenience, safety, and modernity, while multilingual signage is still preferred to enhance cultural experience and inclusivity (Sieras, 2024). Furthermore, English-dominant signage in academic institutions has been associated with perceptions of authority and social hierarchy (Marcelo, 2024), while in post-disaster contexts such as Tacloban and Palo, signage has served both communicative and symbolic functions related to resilience (Doroja-Cadiente & Valdez, 2019). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that while Philippine LL research has begun to account for symbolic meanings, such analyses remain largely concentrated in institutional, educational, and tourism-related spaces.

Within the food industry, culinary spaces have been widely recognized as important sites for examining the relationship between language and culture. Food is inherently tied to cultural identity, making restaurant environments particularly rich contexts for linguistic interaction (Chau, 2017). In multicultural settings, restaurants function not only as commercial spaces but also as sites of identity construction, where language plays a central role in representing cultural meanings (Amos, 2012). Across Southeast Asia and beyond, recent studies demonstrate that food establishments strategically employ multilingualism, code-switching, and symbolic naming practices to appeal to diverse audiences and construct distinct brand identities (Benu et al., 2025; Vitasari & Setyawan, 2025). For instance, research on restaurant and street food naming practices highlights how linguistic creativity, including code-switching and culturally embedded expressions, is used to attract target consumers and reflect socio-cultural values (Kittiveja et al., 2025), while studies on restaurant naming in diasporic contexts show that language choice, such as the use of Spanish, functions as a marker of identity, visibility, and social positioning (Matus-Mendoza, 2025). As observed, a consistent pattern across these studies is the functional differentiation of languages within culinary signage. English is frequently used to signal modernity, global orientation, and wider accessibility, while national and local languages serve to anchor establishments within specific cultural and geographic contexts (Kurniawati & Rohmah, 2023; Setiari & Utami, 2024). Similar dynamics have been observed in other contexts, where national languages remain dominant in everyday commercial communication, while foreign languages serve complementary symbolic and economic functions (Purwanto & Filia, 2020; Wirhayati & Nainggolan, 2025). In addition, commercial signage often exhibits linguistic and semiotic markedness, wherein deliberate variations in language choice, typography, and visual design are employed to attract attention and enhance symbolic value (Mahyuni et al., 2023). Taken together, these findings underscore that language in culinary signage operates simultaneously as a communicative tool, a branding strategy, and a medium for cultural representation.

Despite these developments, culinary spaces remain theoretically and methodologically underexplored in Philippine LL research. Food-related signage—such as restaurant names, menus, and storefront displays—has often been treated as ordinary commercial text, resulting in an overemphasis on language frequency and visibility rather than on the symbolic, ideological, and semiotic motivations behind language choice. To date, only one Philippine study has explicitly focused on culinary signage. Ambion (2023) examined coffee-related signages in Amadeo, Cavite, and found that English dominated signage to project modernity and attract educated local and foreign consumers. While the study offered valuable insights, it was limited to a single product type and locality and relied primarily on quantitative sign counts, providing limited discussion of inscription, emplacement, and symbolic meaning.

More broadly, Philippine LL research has remained geographically and conceptually concentrated in metropolitan centers and institutional spaces. This concentration constrains our understanding of how linguistic landscapes function in other socio-cultural settings, particularly in everyday commercial domains where language choices are shaped by consumer orientation, cultural identity, and local economic practices. By situating LL within the culinary landscape of Western Visayas, the present study does not merely address a geographic gap but responds to a broader need for context-sensitive, semiotic, and function-oriented analyses of commercial signage. Given the region's multilingual communities, strong culinary traditions, and expanding urban economies, examining food-related signage offers critical insights into how language, culture, and commerce intersect in everyday public spaces.

Finally, LL also offers important pedagogical implications, as public signs constitute authentic representations of local linguistic and cultural realities. Scholars have emphasized the value of LL as a pedagogical resource in language education (Dumanig & David, 2019; Rowland, 2013; Sayer, 2010). As Gorter (2013) noted, LL research provides critical insights into societal multilingualism and can inform language education policies. In the Philippine context, this is particularly relevant to the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), as linguistic landscapes serve as empirical indicators of whether language policies align with actual language practices. Examining culinary signage in Western Visayas therefore contributes not only to LL scholarship but also to broader discussions on language education, policy, and multilingual realities.

Thus, to address these research gaps, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (a) What languages are used in the culinary signs of local food establishments as categorized into monoglossic and heteroglossic forms?
- (b) What language features characterize these culinary signs in terms of code preference, inscription (font size and color), and emplacement?
- (c) What language functions are present in culinary signage as categorized into informative and symbolic functions?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive content analysis design integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component focused on identifying patterns in language use through frequency counts and categorical distributions, including the occurrence of monoglossic and heteroglossic signs, the distribution of preferred and less preferred languages, and the classification of language functions as informative or symbolic. While basic statistics were used, these numerical results served primarily as a foundation for interpreting broader linguistic and semiotic tendencies rather than as standalone statistical analysis. Hence, the qualitative component involved an interpretive analysis of selected culinary signs, providing detailed descriptions and explanations of language choice, visual features, and semiotic meanings. This mixed approach enabled the study to capture both observable patterns and contextualized meanings, consistent with current methodological practices in linguistic landscape research.

### 2.2 Locale of the Study

The research was carried out in Iloilo City and Bacolod City, both classified as highly urbanized cities in the Western Visayas region of the Philippines. These sites were deliberately chosen because they share similar levels of urban development while exhibiting strong food cultures and multilingual social environments, conditions that are particularly conducive to linguistic landscape inquiry. Iloilo City serves as a regional center for education, trade, and heritage-oriented tourism, where food establishments range from long-standing local enterprises to globally influenced dining venues, reflecting the coexistence of tradition and modernity. Bacolod City, on the other hand, has gained widespread recognition for its culinary reputation, with local cuisine and food-related festivals playing a central role in shaping the city's cultural image and everyday urban experience. Across both locations, commercial food spaces constitute linguistically rich environments in which local (e.g., Hiligaynon), national (Filipino), and international (English) languages are routinely displayed and combined in restaurant signage. These patterns of language use are closely linked to tourism, market positioning, and the symbolic construction of identity in public space. Taken together, Iloilo City and Bacolod City provide comparable yet distinct urban contexts that enable a nuanced examination of how language selection, visual prominence, and semiotic strategies function within the culinary linguistic landscape, facilitating systematic comparison within a shared regional and sociolinguistic framework.

### 2.3 Data and Data Gathering Procedure

For the purposes of this study, culinary signs refer to publicly visible textual and visual displays directly associated with food establishments, including restaurant name signs, storefront signage, banners, menu boards, and promotional displays positioned outside or at the entrance of establishments. These signs were selected because they function as primary points of contact between food establishments and the public, serving both communicative and symbolic purposes. Specifically, a total of fifty (50) culinary signs were selected, consisting of twenty-five (25) signs from Iloilo City and twenty-five (25) signs from Bacolod City. The sample size was determined to allow for manageable yet comparable qualitative and quantitative analysis while remaining consistent with sample sizes used in similar linguistic landscape studies focusing on specific domains.

Signs were collected from locally owned food establishments based on several criteria: they were among the Top 25 local restaurants in each city according to Tripadvisor, ensuring visibility, operation, and relevance in the local culinary scene; they held a valid business permit from the respective Business Permit and Licensing Office (BPLO), confirming legal registration and operation; they were locally owned, excluding national or international franchise chains to focus on locally grounded linguistic practices; and for establishments with multiple branches, only one branch was included to prevent duplication and overrepresentation. Prior to data collection, brief informal conversations were conducted with establishment owners or staff to request permission to photograph the signs, verify the establishment's operational status, and gather contextual information relevant to sign interpretation.

The sampling procedure adopted in this study was intended to capture a manageable yet meaningful representation of culinary signage within the selected urban contexts. However, several limitations should be noted. The reliance on purposive sampling, particularly the selection of establishments based on Tripadvisor listings, may have resulted in the inclusion of more visible and commercially established businesses, while smaller or less digitally represented establishments may not have been captured. Furthermore, the decision to focus exclusively on locally owned establishments, although necessary to highlight locally grounded linguistic practices, limits the extent to which the findings can be extended to settings that include national or international chains. The number of signs analyzed, while consistent with similar studies focusing on specific domains, may not fully reflect the range of linguistic practices present across all areas of the two cities. These considerations suggest that the findings are best understood within the specific context of the sampled establishments and should not be interpreted as representative of all forms of public signage in the region.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the individual sign served as the unit of analysis. Following Valerio (2018), signs were categorized as either monoglossic (containing one language) or heteroglossic (containing two or more languages). This categorization addressed the first research objective concerning language distribution in culinary signage. Further, to address the second research objective on language features, the study employed Scollon and Scollon's (2003) Place Semiotics framework, which examines how meaning is constructed through the spatial and visual arrangement of signs. Specifically, the analysis focused on: a.) Code preference, determined by the position of language (e.g., top, center), font size, and color intensity; b.) Inscription, referring to typographical features such as font size and color;

and c. ) Emplacement, classified as decontextualized, transgressive, or situated, indicating how signs relate to their physical and social environment. A language was considered preferred if it occupied a central or top position, appeared in larger font size, or was displayed in brighter or more prominent colors. To address the third research objective on language functions, Landry and Bourhis' (1997) informative and symbolic distinction was used. Languages were categorized as informative when they conveyed practical information (e.g., product type, services offered) and symbolic when they indexed identity, prestige, authenticity, or cultural affiliation. The integration of these frameworks ensured alignment between research objectives, analytical categories, and interpretation of findings.

As limitations, personal names appearing on signs were excluded from language categorization due to their ambiguous linguistic origins and historical layering, which make unilateral classification unreliable. As a result, forty-nine (49) signs were included in the final analysis, as one sign contained only a personal name with no additional linguistic material.

To ensure analytical reliability, three independent intercoders participated in the coding process. Each coder was provided with a coding guide based on the selected frameworks. The coders independently categorized the signs according to language type, code preference, emplacement, and language function. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus, thereby enhancing the validity and consistency of the analysis.

**3. Results**

*3.1 Languages Used in Signs*

As shown in Table 1, a total of 23 monoglossic signs were found in the two cities which is equivalent to 46.94 % of the total signs analyzed. This means that almost half of the signs in these two highly urbanized cities were monoglossic signs. Thus, English is considered to be the preferred language based on the frequency of use in the signs because twenty - one out of twenty - three monoglossic signs (91.30 %) are in English. The remaining two signs or 4.35 % each employ other languages which are Spanish and Portuguese, respectively. Also, combining the frequencies of heteroglossic signs found in both cities, the results reveal a total of twenty - six heteroglossic signs (53.06 %). The results also show that heteroglossic category outnumbers monoglossic category with a frequency of twenty - three or 46.94 %. These heteroglossic signs identified were further classified into various categories and ranked based on the frequency of languages used. English – Hiligaynon ranked first with ten signs or 38.46 %. It is followed by English – Tagalog with three signs or 11.54 %. English – Spanish and English – Vietnamese categories tied in third rank with two signs each or 7.69 %. The rest of the categories belong to the same rank because all these remaining categories got one representative sign or 3.85 %. These categories include, Hiligaynon – Tagalog, English – Italian, English – Chinese, English – Costa Rican Spanish, English – Hiligaynon - Tagalog, English – Hiligaynon - Japanese, English – Hiligaynon – German, English – Spanish – Italian, and English – Hiligaynon - Chinese – Spanish.



Figure 1. Ponsyon By Breakthrough

This is an example of heteroglossic sign which employs two languages which are English and Hiligaynon. Specifically, there are three words in this particular sign, and these are “ponsyon”, “by”, and “breakthrough.” Words “by” and “breakthrough” are English words while “ponsyon” is a Hiligaynon word or a word for feast.



Figure 2. Fogo

This sign is an example of monoglossic sign which employs a foreign language which is Portuguese. No other languages are found in the sign except Portuguese. These words are “muito”, “gostoso”, and “fogo.” “Muito gostoso” means “very tasty” or “very delicious” in English”. The word “fogo” means “fire” in English.

Table 1. Languages used in the culinary signs as categorized into monoglossic and heteroglossic

Category	Iloilo City	%	Bacolod City	%	Combined	%	Rank
<b>Monoglossic</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>45.83</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>46.94</b>	<b>1</b>
* English	12	100	9	81.81	21	91.30	1
*Spanish	0	0	1	9.09	1	4.35	2.5
*Portuguese	0	0	1	9.09	1	4.35	2.5
<b>Heteroglossic</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>54.17</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>53.06</b>	<b>2</b>
*English – Hiligaynon	5	38.46	5	38.46	10	38.46	1
*English - Tagalog		1 7.69	2	15.39	3	11.54	2
*English – Spanish	1	7.69	1	7.69	2	7.69	3.5
*English – Vietnamese	1	7.69	1	7.69	2	7.69	3.5
*Hiligaynon – Tagalog	1	7.69	0	0	1	3.85	5.5
*English – Italian	1	7.69	0	0	1	3.85	5.5
*English – Chinese	0	0	1	7.69	1	3.85	5.5
*English – Costa Rican Spanish	0	0	1	7.69	1	3.85	5.5
*English – Hiligaynon - Tagalog	0	0	1	7.69	1	3.85	5.5
*English – Hiligaynon – Japanese	1	7.69	0	0	1	3.85	5.5
*English – Hiligaynon – German	1	7.69	0	0	1	3.85	5.5
*English – Spanish – Italian	0	0	1	7.69	1	3.85	5.5
*English – Hiligaynon - Chinese - Spanish	1	7.69	0	0	1	3.85	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>		<b>24</b>		<b>49</b>		

3.2 Language Features

First, based on the analysis of code preference, 28 or 57.14 % of the signs in the landscape have English as their preferred language as shown in Table 2. Hiligaynon comes after English in the number of signs which consider this language as more preferred language. A total of six signs (12.24 %) are considered to have Hiligaynon as more preferred language than other languages in the signs. In addition, not only English and Hiligaynon languages are considered preferred in the signs. Tagalog ranked third with four sign or 8.16 %. Other languages are also found to be preferred in some of the signs like Spanish, Vietnamese, and Italian languages which are preferred languages in six signs or two signs in each of these languages.



Figure 3. Punot Restaurant

This is an example of heteroglossic sign with Hiligaynon as more preferred language. The Hiligaynon term “punot” or fish pen in English is located on top over the English component “Flavours of Modern Iloilo.”



Figure 4. Troi Oi

The Vietnamese component ‘Troi oi’ which means ‘Oh My God’ in English is located above the English component ‘Vietnamese Street Food.’ This sign shows that Vietnamese is more preferred than English based on their locations in the sign.

Table 2. Preferred languages based on code preference or location of the components in the culinary signs

Languages	Iloilo City	Bacolod City	Combined	Percentage (%)	Rank
English	16	12	28	57.14	1
Hiligaynon	4	2	6	12.24	2
Tagalog	1	3	4	8.16	3
Spanish	0	2	2	4.08	4.5
Vietnamese	1	1	2	4.08	4.5
Italian	1	1	2	4.08	4.5
Japanese	1	0	1	2.04	7.5
German	1	0	1	2.04	7.5
Chinese	0	1	1	2.04	7.5
Costa Rican -Spanish	0	1	1	2.04	7.5
Portuguese	0	1	1	2.04	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>49</b>		

Second, as for the analysis of font size of languages in signs, English still holds the status of being the preferred language among the signs analyzed as shown in Table 3. There are twenty - four signs or 58.98 % of the total signs analyzed consider English as preferred language. There are also signs with two or more preferred languages or both languages are preferred because they have the same font size in the signs. For example, five signs or 10.20 % considered both Hiligaynon and English as preferred languages. There are also four signs which consider Hiligaynon only as the preferred language. For example, in Figure 3, the Hiligaynon component ‘Punot’ has a bigger font size than the English component below it. Likewise, in Figure 1, the Hiligaynon component “Ponsyon” is bigger than the English component “by breakthrough.” Similarly, there are also four additional signs which consider Tagalog as the preferred language as in Figure 5. Vietnamese, Spanish, and Italian languages are preferred in only two heteroglossic signs each. Other languages also include Chinese and Costa Rican Spanish.

Table 3. Preferred languages based on font size of the components in the culinary signs

Languages	Iloilo City	Bacolod City	Combined	Percentage (%)	Rank
English	13	11	24	48.98	1
Hiligaynon and English	3	2	5	10.20	2
Hiligaynon	3	1	4	8.16	3.5
Tagalog	1	3	4	8.16	3.5
Vietnamese	1	1	2	4.08	5.5
Italian	1	1	2	4.08	5.5
Spanish	0	2	2	4.08	5.5
Chinese	0	1	1	2.04	8.5
Costa Rican Spanish	0	1	1	2.04	8.5
Portuguese	0	1	1	2.04	8.5
Japanese and Hiligaynon	1	0	1	2.04	8.5
Spanish and English	1	0	1	2.04	8.5
Spanish, Chinese, and English	1	0	1	2.04	8.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>49</b>		



The Tagalog component ‘Buto’t Balat’ has a bigger font size than the English component printed below it. Thus, Tagalog is the more preferred language in this sign.

Figure 5. Buto’t Balat

Third, as for the analysis of color, English is still the preferred language with twenty - two or 44.90 % as shown in Table 4. In addition, it can be observed that there are additional languages listed as the sole preferred language in the heteroglossic signs. These languages are Hiligaynon, Tagalog, Japanese, German, Portuguese, and Spanish. It can also be noted that the results from colors and font size share the same trend because they both report signs with no preferred language due to similar font size and colors.



This is an example of heteroglossic sign considered English as more preferred language. The English component "Golden Restaurant" is in color red which made it to appear bright in the sign. The rival language which is Chinese is the less preferred because the three characters employed dark color which is green.

Figure 6. Golden Fortune Sea Food Restaurant

Table 4. Preferred languages based on color of the components in the culinary signs

Languages	Iloilo City	Bacolod City	Combined	Percentage (%)	Rank
English	12	10	22	44.90	1
Hiligaynon and English	4	3	7	14.29	2
Hiligaynon	1	2	3	13.5	3
Tagalog	1	1	2	4.08	4.5
English and Spanish	1	1	2	4.08	4.5
English and Vietnamese	1	1	2	4.08	4.5
English and Costa Rican	0	1	1	2.04	7.5
English and Tagalog	0	1	1	2.04	7.5
English and Italian	1	0	1	2.04	7.5
Hiligaynon and Tagalog	1	0	1	2.04	7.5
Japanese	1	0	1	2.04	7.5
German	1	0	1	2.04	7.5
Spanish	0	1	1	2.04	7.5
Portuguese	0	1	1	2.04	7.5
English – Hiligaynon – Spanish	1	0	1	2.04	7.5
English – Spanish – Italian	0	1	1	2.04	7.5
English – Hiligaynon – Tagalog	0	1	1	2.04	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>49</b>		

Fourth, in terms of emplacement, all culinary signs analyzed in this study were classified as examples of decontextualized semiotics following Scollon and Scollon’s (2003) framework. These signs are permanent fixtures because they carry the official establishment names, which remain stable over time and across locations. The permanence of these signs reflects their function not merely as directional or temporary markers, but as institutional identifiers that construct brand identity and public recognition.

While the majority of the restaurants operate only a single branch due to their local ownership, several establishments—such as Butot Balat, Biscocho House, Tatoy’s Manokan, Netong’s, Nena’s Beth Chicken Inasal, Aida’s Chicken, Bob’s, and others—maintain multiple branches yet consistently employ the same establishment names and sign designs regardless of location. This uniformity indicates that these signs are not shaped by immediate spatial or situational contexts, but rather by branding practices that prioritize recognizability and continuity. Consequently, emplacement analysis in this study demonstrates how culinary signs function as fixed semiotic resources that project stability, authenticity, and commercial identity within the urban linguistic landscape.

### 3.3 Language Functions

The results in Table 5 show that more than half of the overall preferred languages are classified under informative with a frequency of twenty - five or 51.02 %. It is followed by symbolic function with a frequency of seventeen or 34.69 %. There is also one category created to cater preferred languages with dual function or those languages which function informatively and symbolically. Seven signs or 14.29 % are clustered under this category. Further, the results revealed that informative function is the most common function which would then imply that preferred languages are utilized mostly on communicating information with the public or sign readers. Customers from general public tend to look into the most basic, relevant and necessary information first before they enter a particular food establishment. These may include information on the type of food establishment (bakery, bar, seafood place, coffee shops), and most importantly the food and services that these establishments offer. Specifically, the results also revealed that English is primarily for informative purposes. Meanwhile, almost all foreign languages in the signs such as Vietnamese, German, Portuguese, Italian, Japanese and Chinese have symbolic function. Moreover, a certain language may seem to function as symbolic in the area where this particular language is foreign to majority of the people in the area.



This an example of English which has informative function rather than symbolic function. The English component “since 1965” simply informs the sign readers that the establishment started to operate in 1965.

Figure 7. Bob’s

Table 5. Language functions of preferred languages in the culinary signs

Languages	Informative Function	Symbolic Function	Both Functions	Combined
English	17	4	6	27
Hiligaynon	3	3	0	6
Tagalog	2	2	0	4
Spanish	3	0	0	3
Vietnamese	0	2	0	2
German	0	1	0	1
Portuguese	0	1	0	1
Italian	0	1	1	2
Costa Rican –Spanish	0	1	0	1
Japanese	0	1	0	1
Chinese	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>51.02</b>	<b>34.69</b>	<b>14.29</b>	
<b>Rank</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	



The Tagalog component ‘sandok’ has symbolic function because it symbolizes a kind of food which is “lutong – bahay” or home – made. The term has a local or native connotation because it is commonly used at home when mixing, cooking or preparing food. It exemplifies the typical Filipino kitchen because most of all Filipino families have ‘sandok’ as an essential cooking utensil at home.

Figure 8. Sandok



The Hiligaynon term ‘masskara’ has a symbolic function as it presents the identity of Bacolod City as the home of Masskara Festival held every October. The word would then imply that the main dish they serve is chicken inasal which is the famous delicacy of the city. The word ‘masskara’ carries this identity of this city which will make the foreign tourists or visitors from neighboring and other provinces in the country to savor the authenticity of the cuisine and feel the local culture and ethnicity of this particular place.

Figure 9. Masskara Chicken Inasal



Figure 10. American Legacy

The English component has a symbolic function because the establishment name “American Legacy” presents an American identity, specifically an American taste in the dishes or foods that they serve in this restaurant. The color blue and red as well as the presence of stars resemble the image of American flag which add to this symbolic value in the sign. However, this sign also shows an informative function because the English component which says “Pop Culture Food” informs the target readers or passersby that they offer pop culture food or modern American food.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the dominant role of English in the culinary linguistic landscape of Iloilo and Bacolod, not only in terms of frequency but also in visual prominence and functional distribution. For example, English appears primarily as proper nouns (“American Legacy,” “Bob’s”) and nominal phrases (e.g., “Pop Culture Food”), serving both informative and symbolic purposes. This dominance reflects the broader sociolinguistic positioning of English as a language associated with modernity, mobility, and commercial appeal in multilingual urban contexts. Within the framework of linguistic landscape theory, the prominence of English can be interpreted as an index of linguistic power, where visibility corresponds to perceived status and communicative reach (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). This pattern is consistent with previous studies that identify English as a language capable of standing independently in signage, often without reliance on local linguistic support (Bolton, 2012; Gorter & Cenoz, 2009; Hassa & Krajcik, 2016). At the same time, similar dynamics have been observed in other commercial and culinary contexts, where English functions as a strategic resource for attracting wider audiences while co-existing with national and local languages that retain cultural significance (Purwanto & Filia, 2020; Wirhayati & Nainggolan, 2025). However, beyond its informational function, the use of English in this context also reflects strategic positioning by business owners, who employ it to align with global consumer expectations while maintaining local relevance.

In contrast, the role of Hiligaynon in the signage reflects a different, yet equally significant, sociolinguistic function. Its presence is largely confined to heteroglossic signs, where it co-occurs with English rather than appearing independently. Examples include names such as “Masskara Chicken” or “Sandok Comfort Food,” where Hiligaynon terms evoke local identity and culinary authenticity, while English provides global accessibility. This pattern suggests that Hiligaynon operates primarily as a marker of local identity and cultural authenticity, while English provides broader communicative accessibility. Such functional complementarity between global and local languages has been observed in other multilingual urban settings, where minority or regional languages contribute symbolic value but rely on dominant languages for wider comprehension (Mannan & David, 2016; Sha, 2025; Oda et al., 2025). This complementary relationship is also evident in other culinary contexts, where local languages enhance cultural grounding while dominant languages ensure market reach and inclusivity (Wirhayati & Nainggolan, 2025). In this sense, the coexistence of English and Hiligaynon reflects not a competition between languages, but a negotiated balance between global visibility and local identity.

As also noted, foreign languages, such as Italian or American lexical items, appear in a limited number of signs and are primarily used to signal authenticity or cultural association rather than to convey direct informational content. These foreign terms are typically paired with English to ensure comprehension, further reinforcing the latter’s role as the dominant communicative medium in the landscape. This pattern suggests that foreign languages function as symbolic resources that contribute to the construction of culinary identity and thematic branding in commercial spaces. Similar observations have been made in studies of restaurant naming and linguistic creativity, where language choice is used to construct social identity, enhance visibility, and differentiate establishments within competitive environments (Kittiveja et al., 2025; Matus-Mendoza, 2025). Such use aligns with Dixson’s (2015) observation that foreign language signage often serves to evoke authenticity rather than facilitate direct communication with speakers of the language. In this sense, the strategic inclusion of foreign lexical items reflects what Mahyuni et al. (2023) describe as linguistic markedness, where language choices are deliberately manipulated to enhance both the commercial appeal and symbolic value of signage.

Further, a closer linguistic analysis reveals distinct patterns in word classes and phrase structures. Proper nouns, such as “Netong’s” and “Tatoy’s,” function as identity markers. The use of the apostrophe + s (’s) follows English possessive grammar, granting these local terms a sense of global recognition while signaling professionalism. Nominal phrases, such as “Pop Culture Food” or “Comfort Food,” serve an informative function by describing the type of cuisine offered. Local nouns and cultural terms, particularly Hiligaynon words such as “Sandok” (ladle) or “Masskara” (festival), evoke local culture and culinary traditions, contributing symbolic meaning to the signs. Code-mixing is evident as English frequently frames or supports local terms, creating heteroglossic signs. This integration demonstrates functional complementarity, whereby local languages convey cultural identity while English ensures broader comprehension and enhances commercial appeal (Artawa et al., 2023; Purnanto et al., 2022; Ambion, 2023; Kurniawati & Rohmah, 2023).

In terms of language features, font size, color, and placement indicate English occupies the preferred position. English terms are often

larger, positioned at the top of signs, and appear in brighter or contrasting colors to signal prominence and functional priority. Hiligaynon and foreign words generally appear smaller or secondary, reinforcing their symbolic role. These distinctions align with Scollon and Scollon's (2003) framework, in which visual salience signals linguistic dominance. Emplacement analysis shows that most signs fall under decontextualized semiotics, serving as permanent identifiers for establishments. Even chains with multiple branches, such as Tatoy's and Nena's Beth, maintain consistent names across locations, indicating that brand recognition and global appeal take precedence over local variation, reflecting patterns noted by Jazul & Bernardo (2017). Pennycook & Otsuji (2015) also highlight that such signs "float" above local contexts, using English more for symbolic power than functional communication.

In addition, anchoring on Landry and Bourhis' (1997) framework, English in these signs functions primarily as an informative tool, providing essential details such as cuisine type, services, and contact information, while also serving symbolic purposes, signaling modernity, professionalism, and cosmopolitan identity. Hiligaynon functions mainly symbolically, reinforcing local identity and culinary authenticity, but its communicative function often depends on English. Foreign languages are almost exclusively symbolic, projecting an exotic or international image and frequently appearing alongside English to ensure comprehension. English's presence in the landscape is both pragmatic and prestige-driven, reflecting its globalized status as a key language of commerce, education, and social mobility (Bolton, 2012; Gorter & Cenoz, 2009; Golden, 2017; Hassa & Krajcik, 2016).

To emphasize, these findings highlight the multilingual realities and power dynamics in Western Visayas' culinary landscape. English dominance reflects globalization and commercial pragmatics, consistent with studies in Metro Manila (Mendoza & Bernardo, 2024) and other Philippine urban areas (Abbas et al., 2022). Hiligaynon's presence in heteroglossic signs illustrates cultural negotiation, asserting local identity while maintaining accessibility, whereas foreign languages primarily enhance authenticity and cultural branding. The interplay of linguistic and semiotic strategies indicates that language choice is driven by commercial and cultural motivations, supporting economic growth and tourism. These findings align with previous research showing English as a lingua franca in commerce and tourism (Balog & Gonzales, 2021; Luna, 2023; Cantina, 2021), the symbolic positioning of local languages (Sha, 2025; Oda et al., 2025), and the marketing-driven role of foreign lexical items (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Dixon, 2015).

Overall, the findings of this study respond directly to the gaps identified in existing linguistic landscape research, particularly the limited attention given to culinary signage within localized Philippine contexts. While previous studies have primarily examined institutional, educational, and tourism-related spaces (Abbas et al., 2022; Mendoza & Bernardo, 2024; Mundiz & Tarusan, 2024), food-related signage has often been treated as a peripheral domain, with greater emphasis placed on language visibility and frequency rather than on symbolic and semiotic interpretation. By contrast, the present study offers a more focused account of culinary signage, demonstrating how language choice in food establishments is shaped by both communicative and symbolic considerations, consistent with observations on the role of language in commercial and cultural representation (Artawa et al., 2023; Kurniawati & Rohmah, 2023; Setiari & Utami, 2024). In relation to the research objectives, the findings reveal that language use in culinary signage is systematically patterned across distribution, visual features, and functional roles, with the predominance of English—alongside the complementary use of local and foreign languages—reflecting a broader pattern in multilingual settings where English serves global accessibility while local languages index identity (Balog & Gonzales, 2021; Clorion et al., 2024; Cantina, 2021). This pattern likewise aligns with studies emphasizing the symbolic role of foreign languages in constructing authenticity and cultural appeal in commercial signage (Purnanto et al., 2022; Vitasari & Setyawan, 2025). These findings are further illuminated through Scollon and Scollon's (2003) place semiotics framework, which explains how spatial positioning and visual features contribute to language prominence, as well as Landry & Bourhis' (1997) distinction between informative and symbolic functions, which clarifies the dual communicative and identity-related roles of language in signage. Taken together, the results underscore that linguistic landscapes function as sites where language, identity, and commercial intent intersect, reinforcing broader sociolinguistic patterns of globalization and localization (Gorter, 2013; Bolton, 2012), while also demonstrating that domain-specific analyses of culinary signage can reveal dimensions of multilingual practice that are less visible in more commonly studied public spaces.

#### 4. Conclusion

English is the language of power in the area due to its capacity to stand alone in the signs without being mixed with other languages and its presence in most of the heteroglossic signs identified. The need to include English in these heteroglossic signs implies that English occupies a hegemonic position in the area, and its presence in the LL is very much relevant and significant to cater a wider number of audience and target sign readers in this modern era. The lingua franca in the region which is Hiligaynon is still being valued in the LL because this language comes next to English as preferred language in the signs. However, Hiligaynon was found to have been clustered under heteroglossic signs combined with other languages in the landscape. This further means that Hiligaynon words cannot stand alone without the presence of other languages specifically English. Thus, the presence of Hiligaynon in most of the heteroglossic signs in the LL means that Hiligaynon as a language should be combined with other languages, specifically English, to serve its communicative purposes and intentions to the target sign readers and in public spaces as a whole. Also, the presence of other languages including foreign languages means that there is a rivalry or power relations of the languages in the landscape which is also an indication of the multilingual reality in the region or transculturalism. Izadi & Parvaresh (2016) claim that patterns of transculturalism and multilingualism are not static because these are influenced by several factors such as cultural, economic, and linguistic resources which people used in public spaces. These two highly urbanized cities have been improving through the years in terms of economics, tourists visits, infrastructures, business and entrepreneurship, migration, and transculturalism which are believed to have contributed to multilingual realities in the region specifically

in these two cities under investigation which represent Western Visayas as a whole.

Moreover, the results of the present study on the analysis of font size and color used in the front signs would lead to a recommendation that other components might be considered in future studies because these two mentioned components would not be enough as basis in claiming that a certain language is more preferred than another language/s. It is also recommended that other establishments might also be considered in future LL studies to add relevant information in understanding the linguistic situation of the region. The limited number of signages may not capture the entire data to comprehensively cover the linguistic realities due to the fact that the signs were only purposively chosen. Hence, researchers may also consider adding more food establishments or other institutions such as schools in rural areas, hospitals and government offices or even places of worships and cemeteries because linguistic and cultural interactions might also take place in these places. Also, other types of signs such as warning signs, prohibitions, graffiti, and others might be included in future LL studies. These signs are also authentic sources of information in understanding multilingualism in the area as well as some linguistic issues that pertain to the relation of language, culture, and society. In conducting future studies, it is also recommended that interviews with the sign owners could be considered so as to widen the understanding of the concept of LL of a certain area under investigation. Creation of instructional material is also recommended to reflect the pedagogical implications of LL as authentic sources in teaching language in the classroom.

Finally, it is also worth noting that Bacolod City has recently been administratively reclassified under the Negros Island Region. While this study situates Bacolod alongside Iloilo City within Western Visayas based on the context at the time of data collection, such geopolitical shifts may have implications for regional identity, language use, and cultural representation. Future research may therefore examine how changes in administrative boundaries influence linguistic landscapes and the sociolinguistic positioning of urban centers.

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#### **Authors' contributions**

This study has only one author. He does all the works related to this study.

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#### **Competing interests**

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Not applicable. It is because the study does not involve any human participants.

#### **Ethics approval**

Not applicable. It is because the study does not involve any human participants.

#### **Provenance and peer review**

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#### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data only include 50 photos gathered.

#### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

#### **Open access**

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