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## APPROACHING ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL CONCEPTUALIZATION

Pham Ngoc Truong Linh\*

*Vietnam Aviation Academy,**No.104 Nguyen Van Troi Street, Ward 8, Phu Nhuan District, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

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**Abstract:** With the rise of globalization, English has developed numerous varieties in the communities it has entered and remained in. The native languages in these communities have also evolved due to prolonged interaction with English. This transformation goes beyond the surface manifestations and occurs in deeper levels, known as cultural conceptualizations. Thus, assessing cultural and social interactions within a linguistic landscape should consider not only the number of classified language groups but also the cultural conceptualization contacts evident in linguistic manifestations. Drawing from the cultural conceptualization systems encoded in American English and Vietnamese public signage, as generalized from previous studies, several key similarities and differences between the two speech communities are identified. These findings provide a criteria foundation for evaluating and classifying linguistic landscapes in Vietnam. Accordingly, public signage is categorized into four groups from a cultural conceptualization perspective: culturally native signage, culturally foreign signage, culturally hybrid signage, and culturally equivalent signage. Preliminary research results from the linguistic landscapes in Vietnam indicate an increasing presence of native English signage. Some English items also show signs of incorporating Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations, forming a variety known as Vietnamese English. Additionally, while Vietnamese public signage retains typical usage habits, it also integrates elements of the English cultural conceptualization system. The research findings and implications can significantly enhance the understanding, learning, and use of English and Vietnamese within Vietnam's linguistic landscapes.

**Keywords:** linguistic landscape, public signage language, cultural conceptualization

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\* Corresponding author.

Email address: [truonglinhpham101@gmail.com](mailto:truonglinhpham101@gmail.com)

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# TIẾP CẬN CẢNH QUAN NGÔN NGỮ TIẾNG ANH VÀ TIẾNG VIỆT TỪ GÓC ĐỘ Ý NIỆM HÓA VĂN HÓA

Phạm Ngọc Trường Linh

*Học viện Hàng không Việt Nam,*

*Số 104 Đường Nguyễn Văn Trỗi, Phường 8, Quận Phú Nhuận, Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, Việt Nam*

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**Tóm tắt:** Với quá trình toàn cầu hóa, tiếng Anh đã phát triển thành nhiều biến thể tại các cộng đồng mà nó đã đi qua và ở lại. Các ngôn ngữ bản địa trong các cộng đồng này cũng đã có nhiều biến đổi do sự tương tác lâu dài với tiếng Anh. Sự biến đổi này vượt ra ngoài các biểu hiện bề mặt và xảy ra ở các cấp độ sâu hơn của các ý niệm hóa văn hóa. Do đó, việc đánh giá các tương tác văn hóa và xã hội trong cảnh quan ngôn ngữ không nên chỉ dừng lại ở số lượng các nhóm ngôn ngữ được phân loại mà còn phải được xem xét thêm ở các ý niệm hóa văn hóa tiềm tàng trong các biểu hiện ngôn ngữ. Dựa trên các hệ thống ý niệm hóa văn hóa được mã hóa trong ngôn ngữ của các loại biển công cộng tiếng Anh Mỹ và tiếng Việt từ các nghiên cứu trước đây, một số điểm tương đồng và khác biệt chính giữa hai cộng đồng ngôn ngữ được xác định. Những phát hiện này cung cấp một số đặc điểm cơ sở cho việc đánh giá và phân loại cảnh quan ngôn ngữ ở Việt Nam theo bốn nhóm ý niệm hóa văn hóa: văn hóa bản địa, văn hóa ngoại lai, văn hóa hỗn hợp và văn hóa tương đồng. Kết quả khảo sát sơ bộ từ các cảnh quan ngôn ngữ ở Việt Nam cho thấy sự hiện diện ngày càng tăng của các loại biển công cộng tiếng Anh bản địa. Một số đối tượng tiếng Anh cũng có dấu hiệu mã hóa một phần hay toàn bộ các ý niệm hóa văn hóa tiếng Việt (Vietnamese English). Ngoài ra, kết quả khảo sát cũng cho thấy các đối tượng tiếng Việt vẫn lưu giữ những thói quen sử dụng điển hình nhưng đồng thời có nhiều dấu hiệu tiếp thu các ý niệm hóa văn hóa tiếng Anh. Các kết quả nghiên cứu có thể tăng cường đáng kể sự hiểu biết, học tập và sử dụng hiệu quả tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt trong các cảnh quan ngôn ngữ tại Việt Nam.

*Từ khóa:* cảnh quan ngôn ngữ, các loại biển công cộng, ý niệm hóa văn hóa

## 1. Introduction

Public signage plays an important role in creating civilization and efficiency when being used as a tool for accessing public services and facilities. English and Vietnamese-English bilingual public signage also contributes to the development and desire for peaceful and comprehensive exchange and cooperation of Vietnam on an international scale. However, this environment of cultural contact between English and Vietnamese also leads to some problems related to the language use. Specifically, the current use of English public signage in Vietnam is reported to have many errors in spelling, grammar, semantics, and expression structure caused by direct transcoding from Vietnamese into English (Nguyen et al., 2017; Nguyen, 2018). In addition to the negative interference of the source language (Vietnamese) to the application of English, the Vietnamese language has undergone some changes due to contact with English. For example, many Vietnamese signs for 'toilets' are replaced with *WC*, *Restroom*, or *Toilet*; many store signs use *Shop* instead of its Vietnamese equivalents; some Vietnamese expressions are imported from a very common usage in English such as *Cám ơn bạn không xả rác* 'Thank you for not littering', and *Bún Bò Mẹ Mui từ 1935* 'Mama Mui's beef noodles since 1935'. Accordingly, language interaction not only occurs with the phenomena of code switching, code mixing, and syntax borrowing, but also includes the phenomenon of

pragmatic borrowing by importing new expression structures and the potential to interpret them so that new communicative effects are created for the same purpose of speaking. Therefore, the study of cultural contact in the language of public signage (and language in general) should not only cover the surface form expressions but also consider the interaction and transformation of cultural conceptualizations taking place in the perception of speech communities. This type of interaction belongs to what Cultural Linguistics calls “cultural cognition”, a form of perception that connects the members and their community, underpinning the understanding of linguistic characteristics as experiences that can be shared, applied, and restructured (Sharifian, 2017).

The language of public signage is the main object of linguistic landscape. In general, research in this approach mainly sees English as a manifestation of integration and development in a geographical area due to the social needs of interacting with tourists, customers, and partners from many parts of the world. However, from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics, the above approach is not satisfactory since English is only a coding tool that can encode different systems of cultural conceptualization between different speech communities, forming many English varieties (i.e., World Englishes). Hence, to affirm the presence of indigenous or foreign cultures, it is necessary to consider from the basis of cultural cognition with cultural conceptualizations entrenched in the use of English in a certain region. As a result, studies of English and Vietnamese linguistic landscapes at the level of cultural conceptualization can focus on the following aspects: (i) the English linguistic landscape in Vietnam reflects the cultural conceptualizations of native English or Vietnamese communities; (ii) the Vietnamese linguistic landscape in Vietnam reflects the cultural conceptualizations of the indigenous culture (i.e., Vietnamese community) or has signs encoded from the native English cultural conceptualizations; and (iii) how the phenomenon of blending cultural conceptualization is manifested in the linguistic landscapes. The above approaches can be taken based on qualitative data to indicate existing phenomena and quantitative data to indicate the level of cultural contact, thereby having a scientific ground to assess the level of cultural preservation and integration of a speech community. The research questions include:

- (1) What are the cultural conceptualizations reflected in the English and Vietnamese linguistic landscapes in indigenous communities? How are they similar and different?
- (2) To what extent do the English and Vietnamese linguistic landscapes in Vietnam reflect the cultural conceptualization systems of native English and Vietnamese?

The article will first clarify the definitions and approaches of linguistic landscape and establish the theoretical framework of cultural conceptualization in addressing the problems of linguistic, cultural, and social interaction of a linguistic landscape. Subsequently, the collection and processing of linguistic materials from the English and Vietnamese linguistic landscapes of native communities will be described by qualitative and quantitative analyses. The research results include statistics of the linguistic landscapes in Vietnam according to cultural conceptualization groups with several evaluations and discussions. Finally, the article outlines some cultural proposals for the application and study of linguistic landscapes in Vietnam.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1. Linguistic Landscape***

Research in the field of linguistic landscape focuses on studying language in written form in public spaces, often in contexts with multilingual phenomena. Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 25) pioneered this field by defining linguistic landscape as the visibility and salience

of language on public signage in a certain territory. They also argued that the linguistic landscape of a place performs two basic functions, including informational function that identifies linguistic features in performing general communicative purposes, and symbolic function that clarifies the linguistic expressions in affirming the importance, position, power, and personal or community identities of the languages in the contact. In fact, rather than being distinct, these two functions continuously interact, mutually supporting and influencing one another, that is, linguistic characteristics are the basis for understanding the level of contact and position between languages, whereas the characteristics of power between the languages serve as a basis for explaining linguistic expressions when performing different communicative and social acts. For example, Gorter (2007, p. 4) argued that the presence of English in the linguistic landscape in Rome may have affected the widespread acceptance and use of the language when it was spoken to each other in Rome as well as in Italy; or Dixon (2015, p. 25) also believed that experiencing and learning from the linguistic landscape might help children improve their language awareness and thereby might have effective language acquisition solutions to second languages. Then the acquired languages, in turn, will embark on their exposure and competition with indigenous languages, which eventually leads to different linguistic positions.

Cenoz and Gorter (2006) are considered pioneers in approaching the linguistic landscape as a methodology for multicultural contexts. Scholars in this proposition mainly rely on the number and distribution of different languages used on public signage for assessing the level of cultural integration, interaction, and diversity as well as the level of preference for indigenous languages and cultures. For example, Akindele (2011), Thongtong (2016), and Zimny (2017) based on the high frequency of English in the linguistic landscape compared to the native languages to confirm the level of economy and tourism development in the research sites. However, the penetration and dominance of English in the linguistic landscape has raised some concerns as local identities are perceived to be in danger of being eliminated or assimilated for economic integration and globalization (see Whiting, 2008; Ruzaitė, 2008; Aristova, 2016). To solve this problem, some localities have adopted language preservation policies, or more extremely, to completely limit the introduction of foreign languages and cultures. For instance, Tabajunda (2018) explored 406 signs in public spaces of De La Salle University, Philippines and showed that English prevailed but had no suppression or dominance over the indigenous language (i.e., Filipino) thanks to the language preservation policies of the country; or a study by Inya (2019) on 58 religious signs in Ado Ekiti of Nigeria showed that while English gained a strong pervasiveness, the indigenous Yoruba language had always been preferred in areas with a conservative religious culture.

In the context of Vietnam, Phan and Starks (2019) studied language interaction in public places of long-established districts in Hanoi. The research clarified the impact of mainstream and unorthodox language policies on the use of monolingual, multilingual, and mixed language signage. The results of the study showed that the investigated area had very diverse linguistic expressions (6 languages) with Vietnamese signs occupying a dominant position over English ones. In addition, Vietnamese-English bilingual signs were the most popular compared to other multilingual signs. It was believed to be a consequence of educational policies and economic development strategies in Vietnam with English being encouraged to be researched and used in many fields, especially in tourism and commercial contexts, yet required to be limited to a certain extent when there is direct contact with Vietnamese.

In summary, linguistic landscape studies often assess the level of social and cultural interaction at the semiotic level. Specifically, the approach favors observation, statistics, and analyses of the languages in a public space as well as their code-switching and code-mixing

expressions. The results of the approach include quantitative data that show the distribution of these languages and their interaction rates through the varied numbers in expressions of bilingualism, language switching, and language mixing. However, this approach cannot fully cover conceptual interactions since language is only a tool to encode cultural conceptualizations. Through the process of linguistic and social interaction, indigenous languages can encode some cultural conceptualizations from other speech communities, and vice versa, foreign languages can be used as a tool to encode cultural conceptualizations in a particular indigenous speech community. Therefore, the approach of Cultural Linguistics will contribute to explaining the problems related to cultural interaction of a linguistic landscape at the conceptual level, making the study of these objects more comprehensive.

## **2.2. Cultural Linguistics and Cultural Conceptualizations**

According to Sharifian (2017, p. 2), the theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics consists of two central concepts, i.e., “cultural cognition” and “cultural conceptualization”, which are built on the foundations of many other fields such as cognitive psychology, complexity science, distributed cognition, and anthropology. Cultural cognition is a multidisciplinary concept related to a type of cognition that is beyond the level of human perception; that is, it exists objectively, naturally, and dynamically in an interactive world where humans are the main subjects who both influence and at the same time get influenced by cultural cognition in thinking, behavior, and language. Cultural cognition encompasses the properties of activation, uneven distribution, and dynamics; and can be analyzed as a CAS (a complex adaptive system) with emergent, nested, and open characteristics. For example, in Vietnamese cultural cognition, people often say *Thượng lộ bình an* ‘on road safely’ as a goodbye to someone beginning a journey; therefore, a road sign reading *X chúc quý khách thượng lộ bình an* ‘X wishes you on road safely’ will be widely interpreted among the Vietnamese as ‘this is the ending point of X’s territory’ (i.e., enactive property). Nevertheless, such interpretation is not equally shared with every Vietnamese since one with less common knowledge and experience might perceive it as a reminder of driving carefully (i.e., unevenly distributed property). Over the time, the expression *Thượng lộ bình an* is also frequently used to say goodbye to the dead so the road sign might often replace it with *X tạm biệt quý khách, hẹn gặp lại* ‘X saying goodbye to you, see you again’ (i.e., dynamic property). In general, the perception of *Thượng lộ bình an* in the use of public signage language is emergent from the Vietnamese interactions although it can be understood differently from one individual to another as nested in many other contexts. Such perceptions are not static but rather continuously open to new negotiations and changes over time and space.

Cultural conceptualization is the process of forming a cultural concept due to conceptualizations constantly changing between different cognitive fields with different attention stimuli belonging to different communities and finally encoded in different language systems. Therefore, it can be said that cultural conceptualizations are also products of cultural cognition. Sharifian (2011, 2015, 2017) affirmed that many aspects of language structure and language use are formed based on cultural conceptualizations and thus reflect cultural conceptualizations; but at the same time, language is an environment for cultural cognition to be structured and restructured through human language interaction, thereby creating the development of cultural conceptualizations. To explore the connection between language and culture, or between linguistic features and cultural conceptualizations, Sharifian (2014, 2017) suggests using analytical tools such as cultural schema, cultural category, and cultural metaphor. A cultural schema is a concise representation of knowledge related to a particular domain that has not been thoroughly addressed. Thus, cultural schemas act as cultural frames

or scripts for practicing and analyzing comprehensive meanings grounded in cultural cognition and expressed through the lexical system. For example, the act of ‘greeting’ associated with the polite cultural schema in Vietnamese is often related to the food schema (e.g., Vietnamese people when seeing each other around mealtime often say *Anh/Chị đã dùng cơm chưa?* ‘Have you eaten yet?’ or *Cậu đã ăn gì chưa?* ‘Have you eaten anything?’ as a way to say hello). In different speech communities, cultural categories often include prototypes that vary in quantity, semantics, and pragmatic meanings due to diverse systems of cultural conceptualizations. For instance, in Vietnamese, the father’s younger sister is called *cô* and the mother’s younger sister is called *dì*, while these in English are all collectively referred to as *aunt*. Cultural metaphors are essentially conceptual metaphors that arise from communal elements and are shared among members through traditional experiences and customs. To illustrate, HEAVEN AS A JUDGE OF ETHICS is a cultural metaphor in Vietnamese (e.g., *Trời sẽ không tha người bất nghĩa* ‘Heaven will not spare the unrighteous,’ or *Ăn ở ác coi chừng bị trời đánh* ‘Living evilly, watch out for heaven strikes’). By employing these tools, the cultural conceptualizations encoded in a language can be studied through the structures (schemas), contents (categories), and modes (metaphors) of linguistic expressions.

In summary, each speech community has different cultural cognition, forming different systems of cultural conceptualization, and therefore the cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural metaphors associated with each speech community are also very diverse. From the above understanding, I hypothesize that the cultural conceptualizations encoded in the language of public signage also have a notable variation of cultural schemas, categories, and metaphors between speech communities. The following section will present the data collection and analysis process of public signage language to have a conceptual basis for the observation and evaluation of these objects at the level of cultural conceptualization.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### ***3.1. Design of the Study***

This is a mixed-method study with a view to categorizing English and Vietnamese public signage in Vietnam based on the two cultural conceptualization systems. Therefore, the study is first intrinsically qualitative with data of various cultural conceptualizations entrenched in public signage language collected from the native speech communities. The data is then analyzed and compared to find the similarities and differences between the speech communities so that the criteria for the categorizing process of the cultural conceptualization contact can be constructed. After that, the study will move to the quantitative stage with the data of public signage in the linguistic landscape of Vietnam. Such data will be classified and counted in percentage to provide some evaluation on the distribution and contact of native English and Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations in the contexts of Vietnam.

#### ***3.2. Scope of the Study and Data Collection***

The focus objects include signs for directing, warning, compelling (together often referred to as “public signs”) and advertising (or “commercial signs”). The English public signage analyzed is limited to examples from the United States because American English is a major international language with significant influence on the education and economy of many countries, including Vietnam. The Vietnamese public signage analyzed is restricted to examples within Vietnam. Since cultural cognition and conceptualizations vary, different linguistic expressions tend to be created and perceived. However, this study examines public signage

language at a systematic level, emphasizing the most general features and disregarding some variations due to regional, group, or individual differences.

To achieve the research objectives, this study draws on findings from Pham (2021a, 2021b, 2024a, 2024b) regarding cultural conceptualizations in public signage. These studies analyzed over 800 public signs and 1,748 commercial signs in American English (collected from various states across the U.S.), and 945 public signs and 1,585 commercial signs in Vietnamese (gathered from various districts and cities in Vietnam, primarily Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi). In addition, a research of 400 English public signs and 400 English commercial signs randomly collected in major cities of Vietnam was also conducted to investigate the distribution and contact of cultural conceptualizations (*see Appendix for details of investigated places, years, and sources*). The cultural conceptualizations embedded in the language of these signs were identified through pragmatic cultural schemas (reflecting common usage structures), cultural categories (reflecting common contents), and cultural metaphors (reflecting common cognitive models) with a double-check by two other professionals in the field.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Approaching a linguistic landscape at the level of cultural conceptualization can be adopted by classifying linguistic expressions according to the groups of cultural conceptualization they encode. There are four possible groups as follows:

(1) Group of culturally native public signage (encoding typical cultural conceptualizations of a speech community, e.g., American English signage and native Vietnamese signage),

(2) Group of culturally foreign public signage (encoding typical cultural conceptualizations of other speech communities, e.g., Vietnamese English reflecting Vietnamese cultures, and Vietnamese reflecting American English cultural values),

(3) Group of culturally hybrid public signage (encoding many different cultural conceptualization systems at the same time, e.g., American English-Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations entrenched in the same signage),

(4) Group of culturally equivalent public signage (encoding conceptualizations that are common in many different cultures, e.g., similar between American English and Vietnamese).

The classification groups mentioned above are only approximate, given that cultural conceptualizations and cultural cognition are inherently enactive, distributed, and constantly evolving (Sharifian, 2017). Consequently, the ways in which language is used and understood within a speech community are continuously shifting across time and space. Over time, certain indigenous cultural conceptualizations may gain global recognition, while others introduced from different cultures can be assimilated and eventually regarded as native. Nonetheless, initial studies conducted at specific points in time may still reveal a general pattern of cultural interaction within particular regions (for instance, the interplay between English and Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations in Vietnam's linguistic landscape).

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1. Classification of Linguistic Landscapes Based on Cultural Conceptualization Systems

#### 4.1.1. Culturally Native Public Signage

The collection of English and Vietnamese public signage believed to represent indigenous culture consists of items that convey distinct cultural conceptualizations rooted in

each speech community's way of thinking. These conceptualizations clearly reflect the underlying thought patterns, psychological traits, historical backgrounds, traditions, and social influences that shape how public signage language is used and understood. The results of Pham's studies on American English and Vietnamese objects show some typical cultural conceptualizations as briefly presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

*Indigenous Cultural Conceptualizations in American English and Vietnamese Public Signage (collected from Pham, 2021a, 2021b, 2024a, 2024b)*

	<b>Cultural Conceptualizations</b>	<b>American English</b>	<b>Vietnamese</b>
1	Indigenous places, names, symbols, things, and phenomena [Cultural categories & metaphors]	e.g., <i>California, Jason, Phoenix, Cedar, Snow</i>	e.g., <i>Hanoi, Sơn</i> 'mountain', <i>Nón lá</i> 'leaf hat,' <i>Cây me</i> 'tamarind tree,' <i>Triều cường</i> 'tidal wave'
2	Things identified with a typical functional or object focus [Cultural schema]	e.g., <i>Restroom, Coatroom, Locker Room</i>	e.g., <i>Nhà vệ sinh</i> 'house of hygiene,' <i>Quầy gửi đồ</i> 'bag keeping counter,' <i>Phòng thay đồ</i> 'changing room'
3	The state of the object [Cultural schema]	Less attached to objects (e.g., <i>Sold out, Reserved</i> )	Always attached to an object (e.g., <i>Hết vé</i> 'tickets sold out,')
4	Fixed structure with the current location [Cultural schema]	<i>X stops here</i>	<i>X tại đây</i> 'X here' / <i>Ở đây có X</i> 'here is X'
5	Marking a residential area territory [Cultural schema]	e.g., <i>X Begin, X End</i>	e.g., <i>Lối vào X</i> 'Entrance X,' <i>X Lối ra</i> 'X Exit'
6	Marking the ending point of a region territory [Cultural schema]	Notice of departure (e.g., <i>You are now leaving X</i> ) (Picture 1)	Safety wishes (e.g., <i>Chúc quý khách thượng lộ bình an</i> 'wish you on road safely') (Picture 2)
7	Priority objects [Cultural schema & categories]	Mentioned collectively or exclusively (e.g., <i>Courtesy Seat, Priority Seating/ Lane, Staff only</i> )	Specifically mentioned (e.g., <i>Ghế ưu tiên: người già, người bị thương, phụ nữ có thai, trẻ nhỏ</i> 'priority seats: the elderly, the injured, pregnant women, young children')
8	Traffic accident warning [Cultural schema]	Safely driving request and mention of the deceased (e.g., <i>Drive carefully, in memory of X</i> )	Safely driving request and mention of accident history (e.g., <i>Chú ý quan sát, Tuyến đường thường hay xảy ra tai nạn giao thông</i> 'watch carefully, accidents often occur on this road')
9	Compelling [Cultural schema]	Requests, thanks, and announcements (e.g., <i>Please X, Please do not X, Thank you for not X-ing, No X-ing, No X</i> )	Orders and prohibitions (e.g., <i>Không X</i> 'don't X,' <i>Không được X</i> 'do not X,' <i>Cấm X</i> 'prohibit X')
10	Typical contents on	e.g., <i>Panhandling, Bad</i>	e.g., <i>Đề phòng trộm cắp</i> 'beware of



prompting signs [Cultural categories]	<i>weather, Wildlife, Suspension, Tow, Prosecution, Use of firearms</i>	theft,’ <i>Tai nạn đuối nước</i> ‘drowning accidents,’ <i>Nguy hiểm chết người</i> ‘deadly dangers,’ <i>Thú dữ</i> ‘angry animals’
11 Typical contents on commercial signs [Cultural categories & metaphors]	Diversity of customers in terms of gender/ age/ occupation/class, house size, local origin, father category, organic category, dollar store concept, business establishment time ( <i>since/est.</i> )	Target customers include male & female groups ( <i>nam nữ</i> ), students ( <i>sinh viên</i> ), common people ( <i>bình dân</i> ), middle-aged ( <i>trung niên</i> ), mother and child ( <i>mẹ và bé</i> ), supermarket/paradise/world scale, international/export/ import/ homemade/ official origin, kinship category +name/ ordinal number, signature object category, proper name, preferential starting prices ( <i>0 VND, 0%</i> ).

The sets of cultural conceptualizations can be used as a basis for assessing the cultural origins of an English or Vietnamese signage expression when these languages are considered as a coding tool. Accordingly, when a sign is operated and received with the typical pragmatic structures, cognitive models, and contents as stated in Table 1, it can be considered as “culturally native (American) English signage” or “culturally native Vietnamese signage” with the differences compared. Hu (2016) advocates that these are the most natural “cultural labels” of a speech community, whereas Kecskes (2010, 2014) calls them “formulaic language”. The terms all refer to the characteristic linguistic expressions of a certain pragmatic unit shared among members of a speech community and therefore, regarded as a cultural marker for the ability to identify and integrate with native speakers.

#### Picture 1

*Territory End Sign in the US, “Leaving Kansas, Come Again”*



#### Picture 2

*Territory End Sign in Vietnam, “Wish You on Road Safely”*



### 4.1.2. Culturally Foreign Public Signage

The group of culturally foreign public signage includes linguistic objects belonging to one community but encoding cultural conceptualizations from other speech communities. For example, Vietnamese cases such as *Cảm ơn bạn đã không hút thuốc* ‘Thank you for not smoking,’ and *Bún bò mẹ Mui từ 1935* ‘Mama Mui’s beef noodles since 1935’ (Picture 4) and *Bếp của Boon* ‘Boon’s kitchen’ are linguistic expressions that show signs of borrowing the typical cultural schemas of English objects. The above conceptualization phenomena are not many, but they are the driving force for the Vietnamese language as well as its cultural conceptualization system to be expanded, restructured, and developed day by day.

Similarly, English public signage when used in the Vietnamese community also reflects the Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations. Some practical cases are *Caution! Danger of death*

(mentioning casualties as warning), *Please give priority to the elderly, handicapped, pregnant and baby stroller* (listing all the priority objects), *Never use mobile phone* (using commands or orders), *Lotus Mart* and *The Rice Restaurant* (Picture 3, mentioning the Vietnamese cultural symbol flower and plant), *Nice silk, tailor-made within 24 hours, men & women* (mentioning the fixed structure of ‘men-women’ to indicate the whole customers), *Madam Cuc 127 Hotel* (using personal pronouns to indicate the business owner), *We sell coffee here* (emphasizing the business with the current location), *Three sisters* (using the kinship categories with the category of number), or *The Tree Coffee* (relating to the characteristic object of the shop). The above-mentioned ways of using English to encode Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations are often criticized for “word-by-word translation” and not taking the focus of native English as the root (i.e., encoding English cultural conceptualizations). However, if considered from the perspective of cultural selection and maintenance, this approach will help preserve and reflect Vietnamese identity at the international scale (i.e., Vietnamese English).

### Picture 3

*English Signs Encoding Vietnamese Cultural Categories, “Lotus Mart”, “The Rice”*



### Picture 4

*Vietnamese Signs Encoding (American) English Cultural Schemas*



### 4.1.3. Culturally Hybrid Public Signage

The group of culturally hybrid public signage consists of signs that display a blend of different cultural conceptualization systems—in this case, American English and Vietnamese. For instance, the sign *No gathering for vending* employs the typical English structure *No X-ing* while referring to culturally specific practices in Vietnam. In commercial signage, a common pattern involves combining a Vietnamese proper name with a product or service (e.g., *Bong Shop*, *Dung Cafe*, *Cuong Mobile*, *Ms. Kim Massage*), reflecting Vietnamese cultural identity but using an English syntactic format where the agent or identity precedes the product or service. Unlike the common English possessive construction (e.g., *Penelope’s Boutique*, *Tony’s Breakfast*), these Vietnamese signs typically omit the possessive marker, resulting in new hybrid forms that merge both English and Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations. Additional examples of such cultural blending include combinations like Vietnamese identity + since + year (e.g., *BBQ Cô Lê since 2011*, *Cơm tấm Nguyễn Văn Cừ since 1989*), Vietnamese identity + house (e.g., *Saigon House*, *Vietnam House Restaurant*), or Vietnamese identity + possessive form (e.g., *Binh’s Siam hair salon*, *Linh’s furniture*). These examples showcase the fusion of Vietnamese elements with features from English commercial signage, such as establishment year, naming structures, and expressions of ownership (see Pictures 5 & 6).

Kecskes (2014) describes the interaction between cultural schemas as “intercultural pragmatics”. This concept goes beyond the mixing of morphological or syntactic elements, focusing instead on how language is used to express varied meanings and cultural understandings. According to Fludernik (1998, p. 13), such a hybrid form is not just a simple fusion of components but acts as a ‘third space’ - a dynamic platform where elements interact

and simultaneously influence the development of their hybrid identity. Therefore, when English and Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations are used together in culturally hybrid signage, they contribute to a shared cultural environment in which meanings, experiences, and linguistic expressions from both systems are constantly negotiated and transformed, ultimately reshaping the cultural conceptualizations involved.

#### Picture 5

*Vietnamese Identity (Cơm Tấm Nguyễn Văn Cừ) Combined with English Cultural Schema (Since 1989)*



#### Picture 6

*Vietnamese Identity (Hàng) Combined with English Cultural Schema (Góc Của – ‘S Corner’), ‘Hàng’s Corner’*



#### 4.1.4. Culturally Equivalent Public Signage

The group of culturally equivalent public signage encode concepts with little significant differentiation in cognition between cultures. Accordingly, the structure of expression may be different, but in terms of semantics and pragmatics, they are quite similar. These objects are often fixed terms, phrases, and structures that are used frequently and become familiar in multilingual contexts with little error, confusion, or “culture shock.” Therefore, the larger the number of such objects, the more advantages in accessing and applying other languages. Some similar cultural conceptualizations between American English and Vietnamese from previous research results can be summarized as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

*Similar Cultural Conceptualizations in American English and Vietnamese Public Signage (collected from Pham, 2021a, 2021b, 2024a, 2024b)*

	Cultural conceptualizations	American English	Vietnamese
1	Things, phenomena, and actions that are perceived equally [Cultural categories & metaphors]	e.g., <i>Bus station</i> , <i>Green Life Market</i> , <i>Sorry for the inconvenience</i>	e.g., <i>Trạm xe buýt</i> , <i>Bách hóa xanh</i> , <i>Xin lỗi vì sự bất tiện này</i>
2	Instructions for use, contact, and movement [Cultural schema]	e.g., <i>Pull out</i> , <i>Use the call button</i>	e.g., <i>Kéo ra</i> , <i>Ấn nút gọi</i>
3	Courtesy requests [Cultural schema]	e.g., <i>Please X</i> , <i>Please do not X</i>	e.g., <i>Vui lòng/Đề nghị X</i> , <i>Vui lòng không X</i>
4	Issuing orders for life-threatening and environmentally damaging behaviors [Cultural schema]	e.g., <i>Do not X</i> , <i>X not allowed</i>	e.g., <i>Không X</i> , <i>Không được X</i>
5	Prohibition for acts of violating the law and threatening order and security [Cultural schema]	e.g., <i>X prohibited</i>	e.g., <i>Cấm X</i>
6	Commitments to trust, health and quality [Cultural categories & metaphors]	Categories of morality, love, health safety, royalty, extreme, promotion, and positivism	

## 4.2. Assessment of Cultural Conceptualization Contact in Linguistic Landscapes

Linguistic landscape research at the conceptual level does not stop at analyzing and classifying cultural conceptualization groups but is necessarily going on with an investigation of the distribution of these groups based on quantitative data to better clarify the level of cultural contact in a geographical territory. The following sections will illustrate this research approach with some general quantitative findings based on the number of English and Vietnamese signs collected in the contexts of Vietnam.

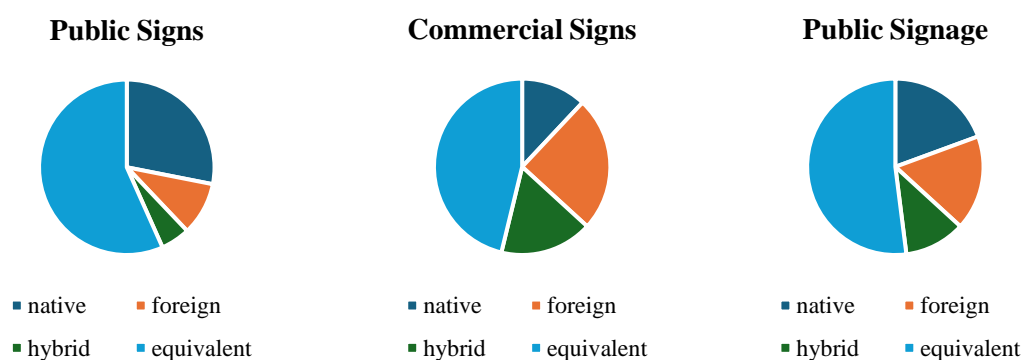
### 4.2.1. Cultural Contact in English Public Signage of Vietnam

Table 3 and the charts below illustrate the statistics of English as an international language to encode a variety of different cultural conceptualization systems. Specifically, the group of public signage that is supposedly like native (American) English in many typical conceptual aspects such as cultural schemas, categories, and metaphors accounts for only about 27% in the group of public signs and 12% in the group of commercial signs. English in contexts of Vietnam also has many signs of borrowing or blending with the Vietnamese cultural conceptualization system, most clearly manifested in the commercial sign group (about 25% and 17%, respectively), while these phenomena in the public sign group have a lower level (about 10% and 5.5%, respectively). However, the English public signage generally has a high similarity in terms of cultural conceptualizations (about 52%) compared with Vietnamese, demonstrating a balance in the selection of objects whose expressions create the same effects on the members of both speech communities. The results are in line with Phan and Starks' study (2019), reflecting some practical effects on the linguistic landscape from Vietnam's educational and economic policies which promote the research and use of English in various fields, particularly tourism and commerce, yet there is some controlling requirement to its use when it directly interacts with Vietnamese.

**Table 3**

*Statistics of English Public Signage in Vietnam by Cultural Conceptualization Groups*

	English public signage encoding cultural conceptualizations								Total	
	Native		Foreign		Hybrid		Equivalent			
	(English)		(Vietnamese)		(E-V)		(E-V)			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	N	%
Public signs	107	26.8	40	10.0	22	5.5	231	57.7	400	100
Commercial signs	48	12.0	99	24.8	68	17.0	185	46.2	400	100
Total	155	19.4	139	17.4	90	11.2	416	52.0	800	100



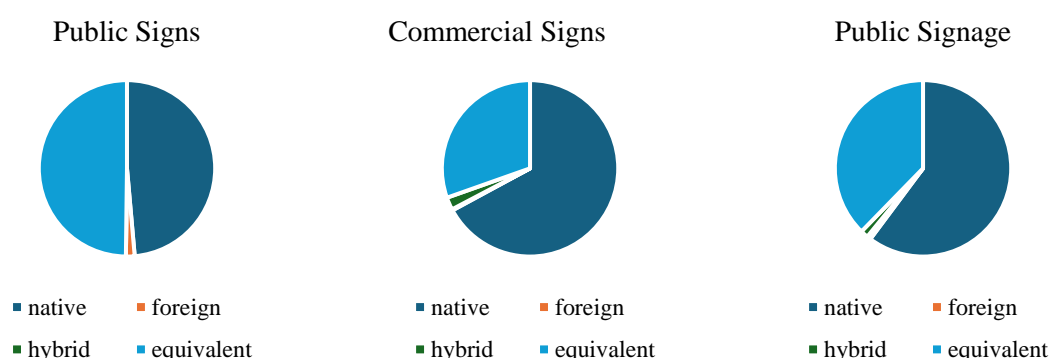
#### 4.2.2. Cultural Contact in Vietnamese Public Signage of Vietnam

Table 4 and charts below show that indigenous Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations generally dominate the Vietnamese linguistic landscape in Vietnam (about 60%) and are more frequent in commercial sign group (about 67%) than in public sign group (nearly 50%). This indicates that indigenous culture is still being preserved at a high level. The results also show that there are many significant cultural similarities in the application and reception of Vietnamese public signage compared to English. The level of cultural similarity is higher in the group of public signs (nearly 50%) than in the group of commercial signs (about 30%). This can be seen as a favorable condition for the transfer of public signage language from Vietnamese to English while ensuring the same effects at the international scale. In addition, the data shows that a small part of Vietnamese public signage in Vietnam borrows from English cultural conceptualizations, especially the public signs (1.6%), while the group of commercial signs often has more culturally hybrid conceptualizations (2.3%). The effects of English on the use of other languages in the constant contact have also been reported in many previous studies. For example, Thongtong (2016) identified various phenomena such as transliterations, lexical blends, homophones, personifications, speech acts, and politeness strategies in the public signage language of Chiang Mai, Thailand, influenced by English due to cultural exchange. Similarly, ALHyari and Hamdan (2019) examined the linguistic features of commercial signs in Salt, Jordan, and discovered that Arabic signage included transliterations from English, with modifications to fit the native phoneme system.

**Table 4**

*Statistics of Vietnamese Public Signage in Vietnam by Cultural Conceptualization Groups*

Vietnamese public signage encoding cultural conceptualizations										
	Native		Foreign		Hybrid		Equivalent		Total	
	(Vietnamese)		(English)		(V-E)		(V-E)			
	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	N	%
Public signs	459	48.6	15	1.6	0	0	471	49.8	945	100
Commercial signs	1,064	67.1	3	0.2	36	2.3	482	30.4	1,585	100
Total	1,523	60.2	18	0.7	36	1.4	953	37.7	2,530	100



## 5. Conclusion

Along with the development of economic integration, cultural exchange, and cross-border trade, English has more and more varieties in the communities it has traveled through



and stayed in. The native languages in these speech communities also have certain changes caused by long-term interaction with English. This transformation does not stop at the linguistic expressions but also takes place at the depths of concepts (i.e., cultural conceptualizations), such as the way in which new meanings are formed and received that are unprecedented in the system of a speech community. Therefore, the assessment of cultural and social interaction of a linguistic landscape should not only be conducted at the number of classified language groups but also be further considered in the cultural conceptualization contact instantiated in linguistic manifestations. Based on the cultural conceptualization systems encoded in (American) English and Vietnamese public signage generalized from the results of previous studies, typical similarities and differences between the two speech communities were identified as a characteristic ground for evaluating and classifying the linguistic landscapes in Vietnam. Accordingly, there are four groups of public signage that are approached from the perspective of cultural conceptualization, including: culturally native signage, culturally foreign signage, culturally hybrid signage, and culturally equivalent signage.

Preliminary research results from the actual situations of the linguistic landscapes in Vietnam show that native English objects in Vietnam appear with increasing frequency, almost completely applying the common cultural conceptualizations in native English. Meanwhile, a significant part of these English objects shows signs of encoding all or part of Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations, forming the Vietnamese English variety. In addition, the Vietnamese public signage still retains typical usage habits but at the same time absorbs the contents, structures, and modes of expressions from the English cultural conceptualization system. However, the above foreign factors in the application and reception of the public signage language in Vietnam are still quite limited in both number and level of distribution and dynamics. In general, English and Vietnamese public signage in Vietnam still have many cultural similarities that serve as a foundation for a favorable language transition between these two speech communities.

An understanding of different systems of cultural conceptualization can help English and Vietnamese speakers choose to create or translate the language of public signage for the purposes of cultural preservation or integration. To be specific, the use of English can be updated and expanded when encoding Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations; and vice versa, Vietnamese also can develop new applications when encoding the cultural conceptualizations of the native English language (or from other speech communities' cultural conceptualizations that have been encoded in English). Finally, language users can improve their meta-cultural competence with the ability to adapt, exchange, learn, and interpret these cultural conceptualizations through approaching and studying the linguistic landscape, which is believed to be the most accessible authentic input (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Gorter, 2006), especially English in the form of a variety to reflect the local cultural conceptualizations as a result of globalization (Sharifian, 2017).

Despite achieving certain goals, this study still has some limitations. For example, the study of linguistic landscapes at the conceptual level is illustrated by the limited number of English language materials collected in Vietnam; besides, the overall linguistic data has not yet reached the typical characteristics of the linguistic landscape in a particular place, but instead scattered from many parts of Vietnam. Therefore, the research results only reflect a certain degree of distribution and variation of different cultural conceptualization systems on a general scale. Future research in this approach should be applied to specific international tourist destinations in Vietnam to have more appropriately localized strategies for cultural conservation or integration in the language use.

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## Appendix

### Statistics of English and Vietnamese Public Signage

Statistics of American English public signs:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1od-c1Jh65RcrRH1-bi--uZ6tuMUQENm>

Statistics of American English commercial signs:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18VZCsu1R3\\_Pi000oOQIN3AO0VFQfJq-k](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18VZCsu1R3_Pi000oOQIN3AO0VFQfJq-k)

Statistics of Vietnamese public signs:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1CZDjQ6EaNGX6ZuZ3w2cSB460M9fF5HrY>

Statistics of Vietnamese commercial signs:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1y8Y6FnXBEQQpA-Bo-loepYHdqNsYWyQ>

Statistics of English public signage in Vietnam:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11252YkadlmP9QssaBBy7g6lbbhqo8h9e>