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A REVIEW OF TOURISTS' READERSHIP IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

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Abstract: This article reviews the literature of Linguistic Landscape studies in tourism discourse to examine how the tourists read and experience the Linguistic Landscape. 19 peer-reviewed journal articles were examined and included in the literature. The selection criteria consist of topic relevance and the content focus. The research procedures involve searching and screening databases to gather relevant data before synthesizing the retrieved information. The findings indicate that the readership of tourists: (1) can be conceptualized from psychological, sociological, spatial, and ideological dimensions; (2) can be investigated primarily through the implementation of structured questionnaires, physiological experiments, interviews and participant observation; (3) is fundamentally characterized through the symbolic consumption of local scripts, the active co-construction of space through subjective experiences, and the multimodal, holistic engagement with non-textual semiotic resources. This review highlights the optimization of the Linguistic Landscape to enhance the tourist experience and underpin tourism management practices.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscape, semiotic landscape, signage, tourist

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KHẢO CỨU VỀ TIẾP CẬN CẢNH QUAN NGÔN NGỮ CỦA DU KHÁCH

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Tóm tắt: Bài viết khảo sát các nghiên cứu quốc tế về cách khách du lịch tiếp cận Cảnh quan ngôn ngữ. Quy trình thực hiện nghiên cứu bao gồm: tìm kiếm, sàng lọc, tổng hợp và phân tích dữ liệu ở mục Phương pháp và Kết quả từ 19 bài báo. Các bài báo này tiếp cận Cảnh quan ngôn ngữ từ điểm nhìn của khách du lịch trên các tạp chí khoa học dựa trên tiêu chí về nhà xuất bản và trọng tâm của nội dung nghiên cứu. Các phương pháp nghiên cứu được thực hiện đối với du khách bao gồm: thí nghiệm sinh học, phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc, quan sát, và bảng câu hỏi. Kết quả các nghiên cứu cho thấy khách du lịch có xu hướng: (1) tiêu thụ ngôn ngữ địa phương thông qua chức năng biểu tượng; (2) tiếp cận Cảnh quan ngôn ngữ một cách chủ động với vai trò đồng kiến tạo không gian dựa trên trải nghiệm cá nhân; (3) nhìn nhận Cảnh quan ngôn ngữ thông qua hệ thống hình ảnh, biểu tượng, màu sắc và chất liệu của biển hiệu thay vì thông tin chữ đơn thuần. Bài viết cập nhật các xu hướng nghiên cứu mới nhất hướng tới việc tối ưu hóa trải nghiệm của du khách và cải thiện Cảnh quan ngôn ngữ du lịch.

Từ khóa: Cảnh quan ngôn ngữ, ngôn ngữ, biển hiệu, khách du lịch

1. Introduction

Linguistic Landscape research and its intersection with tourism studies have become increasingly recognized over the past decades. Noting that foundational studies involving the two disciplines have prioritized analyzing static photographic documentation of signage and the dynamics of authorship, this paper aims to narrow the gap by synthesizing existing scholarly literature concerning the two disciplines from the perspective of the readers in order to explore how tourists consume the Linguistic Landscape. In particular, by capturing the literature through a review of 19 articles until the year 2025, the paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. *How has tourist readership been conceptualized in tourism-oriented Linguistic Landscape studies?*
2. *What methodological approaches have been used to investigate tourists' readership of The Linguistic Landscape?*
3. *What major thematic patterns emerge from the findings of the studies regarding tourist readership in the Linguistic Landscape?*

2. Literature Review

2.1. Linguistic Landscape

2.1.1. Linguistic Landscape Definition

The definition of Linguistic Landscape has evolved significantly. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), the initial definition of Linguistic Landscape involves "the language on public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs,

and public signs on government buildings of a given territory or region". Shohamy and Gorter (2008) later broaden the definition beyond merely physical written signs to include "words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces". Contemporary scholars have pushed the boundaries even further, highlighting the critical role of physical and social placement; non-linguistic elements such as imagery, sounds, architecture, industrial designs; and even the movement of human beings (Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Shohamy & Waksman, 2008), with the public space increasingly viewed as mobile, dynamic and multimodal (Blommaert, 2010; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009). Ivkovic and Lotherington (2009) propose that the scope of the Linguistic Landscape has now permeated digital contexts and cyberspace, creating a virtual Linguistic Landscape that redefines conventional physical boundaries.

Considering the Linguistic Landscape as a form of discourse, Kallen (2008) conceptualizes two primary forces that constitute a "communicative event" of a physical sign as readers (sign recipients) and producers (sign instigators). There, the focus is shifted from the sign as a static object to the sign as a course of dynamic interaction, shaped by the perspectives of the actors involved.

2.1.2. Readership and the Experiential Dimension

Historically, the existing literature has primarily focused on agency and production, specifically by distinguishing between top-down (official) and bottom-up (private) authorship, with researchers frequently analyzing the intended meanings and motivations of the sign-makers' linguistic choices. However, as authorship is a highly complex, multi-dimensional process where sign producers cannot fully control the final message outcome and readers play a role in co-constructing meaning (Malinowski, 2008), there is now a heightened emphasis on studying the perceptions of those who navigate and interpret the Linguistic Landscape, utilizing methods like walking tour interviews, cognitive maps and community surveys to document how local residents and temporary readers cognitively and emotionally respond to the semiotic environments (Garvin, 2010; Trumper-Hecht, 2008). Backhaus (2007) argues that analyzing urban signs must be approached both through their production ("LL by whom") and through their readership ("LL for whom"). Pennycook (2008) argues that the field must move beyond simply identifying official versus unofficial languages and into understanding exactly how they are read, interpreted, and experienced dynamically as people move through and interact with the semiotic environment. Mapping onto Lefebvre's spatial triad, Trumper-Hecht (2010) distinguishes between the objective, physical reality of the landscape and the Experiential dimension or its "lived space", the environment actually experienced by the people navigating it. Rather than viewing signs as static texts with fixed meanings, understanding readership or reception requires researchers to focus on the specific interests, linguistic and cultural competences, subjective interpretations, and varying discourses that different individuals who decode the message bring to the physical environment.

2.2. *Linguistic Landscape in Tourism*

2.2.1. Tourism as a Semiotic Field

Thurlow and Jaworski (2011) refer to Tourism as an industry that fundamentally produces and consumes semiotic contexts, where the goods tourists can purchase extend beyond merely tangible objects and pragmatic services into "images, lifestyles, memories, tastes, encounters". Central to Linguistic Landscape research in this field are the transformation of local and minority languages into commodities, and the performative consumption of languages driven by banal globalization, through which tourists engage with highly scripted local

languages to project a cosmopolitan image (Heller et al., 2014; Leeman & Modan, 2009; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011).

2.2.2. The Tourist as a Reader in the Linguistic Landscape

Smith (1989) characterizes a tourist as a temporarily leisured individual who voluntarily visits a place away from home to search for a new experience. This definition draws distinctions between tourist and other mobile groups, excluding those continually moving as a lifestyle, those travelling for professional or academic purposes, and those experiencing forced migration. Considering the communicative roles of tourists in the Linguistic Landscape, Kallen (2008) categorizes them into three components. Specifically, tourists can be considered the "addressee" when they are the explicit target, the "audience" when they are a part of a wider group being addressed, and the "eavesdropper" when they observe signs intended for other local readers. Regarding the tourist experience, he outlines four anticipated expectations of tourists that need to be fulfilled by the Linguistic Landscape, the need for an authentic experience, for feeling secure, for breaking away from the normal routine, and for creating distinctive memories.

2.2.3. Existing Literature of Linguistic Landscape and Tourism Literature Reviews

Despite a growing number of studies on linguistic landscape and tourism, scholarly syntheses of the interdisciplinary remain scarce. One discovered paper, the systematic review by Hasni et al. (2022), interrogates 21 international studies to evaluate how Linguistic Landscape research of tourist spaces has evolved over the eight-year period from 2014 to 2022. The paper identifies trends such as multimodality and language policy, highlighting two prevailing themes shaping the field, which involve the English language dominance on public signs that signifies modernity and reliability, as well as the marginalization of local languages and the emergence of multilingual practices as a commitment to local heritage preservation. However, a significant topic and analytical gap remain as the study primarily involves static, quantitative approaches and focuses on the perspective and underlying motivations of the sign producers. Consequently, the paper leaves a gap by failing to address the interactive role of tourists as readers and meaning-makers who actually consume and interpret the linguistic landscape. Therefore, additional synthesis is required, especially for the later period until the year 2025, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Linguistic Landscape from the perspective of the tourist readers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

The four-stage PRISMA framework was applied for the data collection to ensure the quality of the selected data.

Identification The search was conducted on the Scopus database due to its extensive, high-quality coverage of peer-reviewed literature. A structured search strategy was developed prior to screening, using standard Boolean operators (AND, OR) and truncation (*). The alternative keyword "semiotic landscape" was chosen for "linguistic landscape" to yield more inclusive insights. Utilizing specific keywords including "linguistic landscape", "semiotic landscape", and "touris*", the search was formulated as TITLE-ABS-KEY (("linguistic landscape*" OR "semiotic landscape*") AND "touris*"). The initial search yielded 258 records (n=258).

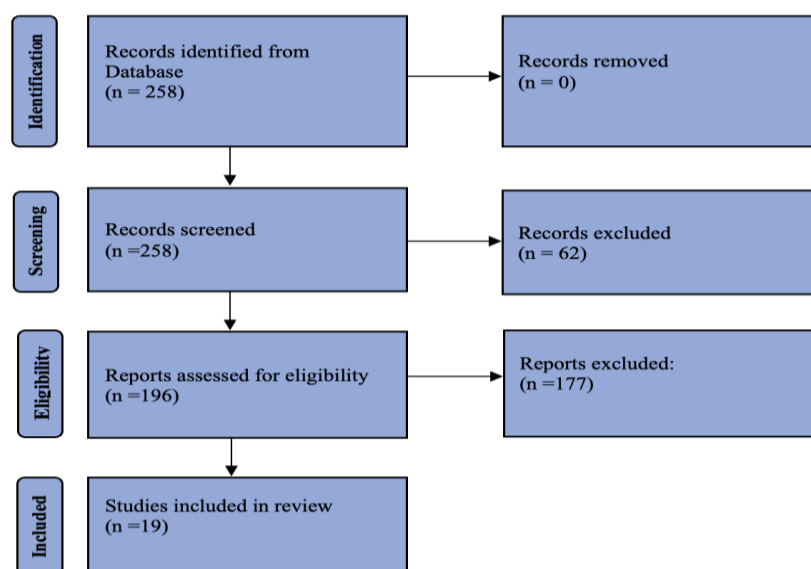
Screening: A screening phase was then applied to filter out journal articles which did not satisfy the criteria of language of publication and full-text accessibility. Specifically, the scope was limited to articles originally published in the English language. The chosen articles also had to be fully accessible across all sections, including methodology and findings, excluding articles accessible through abstracts alone. Additionally, articles from the year 2026 are excluded, and all duplicate records were manually identified and removed. After the process, 196 articles remained (n=196).

Eligibility: The remaining articles underwent an eligibility assessment to ensure alignment with the research objectives. The Exclusion Criteria were designed to omit studies that focused exclusively on the distributive analysis of signage without investigating human stakeholders. Furthermore, articles that only investigate other stakeholders like creators of the signs, local residents, management authorities or tourism service workers but failed to investigate tourist subjects were excluded from the final corpus.

Inclusion: Following the eligibility assessment, a total of 19 articles (n=19) were included for further investigation.

Figure 1

PRISMA Diagram for Systematic Review



3.2. Data Analysis

After the selection process, Content Analysis was adopted for RQ1 and RQ2. For RQ3, Thematic Analysis was applied implementing the framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The research methodology followed a systematic process consisting of six phases: familiarization with the data, establishing initial codes, identifying themes, refining themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a thematic report.

4. Findings

This section discusses the conceptualization of tourists' readership, the prominent methodological approaches employed and the recurring themes in the findings across the studies.

4.1. Conceptualization of Readership

Table 1

Tourists' Readership in Different Studies

Authors	Aspects of tourists' readership covered	Linguistic Landscape components
(1) Bruyèl-Olmedo and Juan-Garau (2009)	linguistic expectations; evaluation of the presence and quality of written English, the extent to which linguistic errors influence understanding and affect the overall satisfaction of the trip	multilingual English commercial and official signs
(2) Burdin (2021)	evaluation of Jewish authenticity	small cards, restaurant menus and signs
(3) Chang et al. (2022)	emotional experiences (arousal and pleasure)	commercial shop signs, public road signs, architectural ornaments, and advertising billboards featuring localized (Shaanxi dialect texts) versus globalized (English texts) Linguistic Landscapes
(4) Chang et al. (2025)	visual attention	official signs versus private signs; in calligraphy versus printed fonts; in Chinese, English, or Arabic/Thai
(5) Cui et al. (2025)	perception of Tibetan, a local minority language, as a cultural symbol	multilingual public road signs, traffic reminders, police stations, and private commercial storefront signs and packaging.
(6) Dai et al. (2024)	psychological (involvement, immersion) and behavioral responses (to revisit or recommend the destination)	historical private house plaques, commercial plaques, stone tablets, and memorial arches
(7) He and Chen (2024)	Engagement and attention based on positional and intended readership	signboards (menus, wall billboards, book displays) in different positioning
(8) Lang and Numtong (2025)	affective resonance (novelty, nostalgia, foreignness), sense of place	menus and informative plaques with traditional calligraphy and classical color schemes
(9) Li et al. (2023)	perception of informational function, sense of place	public transport signs, billboards, street names, shop names, commercial posters
(10) Li et al. (2024)	perception of informational and symbolic function, emotional reactions (cultural insecurity)	multilingual labels, official signs, and private shop signs with different materials, fonts, and arrangements
(11) Lu et al. (2020)	overall satisfaction, language preferences, opinions on effectiveness and physical characteristics	official signs and private signs

(12) Nenotek et al. (2025)	perception of effectiveness (clarity, visibility), sense of place	directional signs, name boards, regulatory signs
(13) Pan (2025)	evaluation of Chinese authenticity	Chinese billboards, shop signs, and posters with different colors, images, and languages with different colors and decorations
(14) Wang and Gao (2025)	satisfaction with English signage, perceptions of authenticity	multilingual maps, shop signs, informational displays, hotel signboards, and posters promoting services
(15) Wang et al. (2024)	language combination preferences	multilingual commercial shop signs
(16) Xiao and Lee (2022)	attitudes toward English language combinations, perception of language distribution, informational and symbolic function	English public-service signboards, introductory signboards, captions, and touristic signs
(17) Xiao et al. (2025)	perception of staged authenticity	English introductory signboards
(18) Yan and Lee (2014)	perception of informational function, language preferences dictated by demographics and travel modes	trilingual (Chinese, Portuguese, English) street signs and street names
(19) Zhang and Xie (2025)	perception of the function of Dongba script as a pseudo-language	private shop signs, official notice boards, and customized souvenirs with Dongba script

From a comprehensive overview of the studies, readership encompasses a wide range of psychological, sociological, spatial and ideological interactions tourists can have with the public space. From a *psychological* dimension, tourists' readership addresses how the human brain processes a dense, chaotic urban environment filled with competing visual stimuli. There, readership operates through "attention structures", a cognitive framework that helps individuals selectively filter the landscape and focus only on the semiotic objects relevant to their immediate needs (Jaworski & Yeung, 2010). Tourists as readers are required to engage in active interpretation, organization, and synthesis to construct social meaning. The linguistic landscape also functions as an external environmental "stimulus" that interacts dynamically with the consumer's internal psychological state, filtered through their personal cognition to trigger specific emotional experiences. From a *sociological* perspective, readership can be evaluated through tourists' overall satisfaction with the linguistic environment through elements such as linguistic accuracy or effectiveness of information dissemination. This is underpinned by Ben-Rafael (2008) who draws on Boudon's "good-reasons" principle, which frames the readers as a rational consumer whose instrumental needs and rational cost-benefit calculations need to be fulfilled by the landscape to avoid extra costs associated with miscommunication, thereby enhancing the destination's market value and generate economic utilities. From a *spatial* dimension, readership is physically enacted by how tourists navigate physical trajectories in the material world to construct a sense of place. As individuals navigate an environment, a geographic space transforms into a culturally meaningful place. From an *ideological* lens, readers' experience the public space is shaped by their ethnic, historical experience in correspondence with inter- and intra-personal relations and identities.

4.2. Methodological Approaches

In order to study tourists' readership, the papers are approached from different methods of data collection and data analysis. Among those, five of the studies rely exclusively on quantitative approaches of numerical or statistical data (Chang et al., 2022; Chang et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2020; Xiao & Lee, 2022; Yan & Lee, 2014). The majority of studies adopt an entirely qualitative, ethnographic approach, which rely predominantly on participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Three of the studies employ combined methods that simultaneously incorporate quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect and analyze their data (Cui et al., 2025; Dai et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

4.2.1. Quantitative Approaches

Structured questionnaires: Self-reports were frequently employed across the studies the using multiple-choice questions (Cui et al., 2025; Dai et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024) and point-based Likert scales (Chang et al., 2022; Chang et al., 2025; Dai et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2020). In the questionnaires, tourists are asked to quantitatively assess different variables of Linguistic Landscape components including effectiveness of information dissemination and materiality (Lu et al., 2020), their level of engagement and attention paid to signs and language combination preferences (Wang et al., 2024), the probability of revisiting or recommending the destination (Dai et al., 2024), and overall satisfaction. Among those, Xiao and Lee (2022) conducted Cognitive Mapping Comparison by comparing the individuals' subjective perceptions of language distribution against the objective, photographic reality of the Linguistic Landscape. After systematically capturing digital photographs of 3,285 linguistic signs, the researchers surveyed international tourists and asked them to rate the percentages of the different languages they had encountered on site, revealing an overestimate or underestimate of the presence of certain languages.

Physiological experiments: To overcome the potential limitations of subjective self-reporting and measure real-time physiological responses to environmental stimuli, researchers have adopted a quantitative psychological and experimental approach using wearable equipment and tools including eye-trackers and eye-movement indicators (Chang et al., 2022; Chang et al., 2025). The experiments were conducted within a controlled, monitored environment in terms of temperature, lighting, sound ambience and interior materials. A significant strength of these experimental approaches lies in their increasingly robust, innovative approaches such as biometric tools, eye-tracking technology, and physiological measurements. However, while laboratory experiments provide valuable controlled data, one shortcoming is not being able to fully capture the multi-sensory complexities and inherent unpredictable conditions of the complex, real-world authentic tourist experience.

4.2.2. Qualitative Approaches

Interviews: While purposive *sampling* was frequently employed to guarantee a diverse representation of visitors across different demographics, visitation frequencies, and durations (Cui et al., 2025; Dai et al., 2024; Nenotek et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024; Zhang & Xie, 2025), a number of studies utilized random on-site invitations where researchers directly approached tourists who were actively navigating the destination (Cui et al., 2025; Pan, 2025). In terms of *format*, the majority of interviews are semi-structured (He & Chen, 2024; Nenotek et al., 2025; Wang & Gao, 2025; Wang et al., 2024; Zhang & Xie, 2025), with pre-determined questions and frameworks to ensure focus and consistency, while utilizing open-ended questions in flexible orders, allowing for nuanced exploration of tourists' complex, subjective perspectives

and experiences. While the vast majority of the studies rely on in-depth, extensive formats to gather rich narrative data, Xiao et al. (2025) adopt brief, short interviews averaging three minutes to capture the tourists' immediate reactions to signs and "minimize the disruption to the participants' travel or work". While most of the interviews were conducted directly onsite, three papers employed indirect or online methods, utilizing phone calls or social media to reach participants or conduct follow-up conversations to overcome geographical constraints and reach specific participant demographics (Dai et al., 2024; Zhang & Xie, 2025).

Participant observation: To supplement interviews, participant observations were utilized to directly evaluate how tourists dynamically interact with and navigate the physical space in natural real-world settings. In their role as observers, Cui et al. (2025), Li et al. (2023) conducted static on-site observations of the interactive actions occurring between tourists and the resort environment. Gravitating toward a more mobile observation approach, Pan (2025) conducts walking tours (Garvin, 2010) by physically accompanying the tourist participants through the urban environment to observe what visual signs captured their attention. Instead of remaining passive observers, Zhang and Xie (2025) blurred the researcher-participant boundary by employing a participatory approach similar to Pennycook and Otsuji (2015), actively immersing themselves in the local commercial environment through simulating the creation and commissioning translation practices of a new shop sign for a boutique hostel.

Discourse analysis: Unlike other research, Burdin (2021) collected secondary data of online reviews of tourist destinations from blog posts, newspaper articles, and social media platforms. The study interprets the discourse markers in these reviews to reveal the power dynamics of competing ideologies of authenticity inherent in the Linguistic Landscape of Jewishness.

4.3. Recurrent Themes in Findings

From a comprehensive review of the 19 articles' findings, three themes regarding tourist readership of the Linguistic Landscape emerge. Overall, they indicate that the way tourists experience the Linguistic Landscape is highly symbolic, visual, multimodal, holistic, active and subjective, rather than literal, textual and passive.

4.3.1. Visual and Symbolic Consumption

Tourists' readership in the Linguistic Landscape is characterized by a transition from informational to symbolic consumption. Rather than reading for literal comprehension, tourists have the tendency to consume the Linguistic Landscape as a visual spectacle, where the inability to comprehend a language does not prevent them from actively consuming it. Instead, unintelligible local scripts function as markers of exoticism or cultural authenticity. Urry (2002)'s concept of the "tourist gaze" provides a framework for this phenomenon, positing that tourism is a fundamental act of visually consuming local languages as a way for tourists to perform and validate their travel experience, irrespective of their linguistic comprehension.

This can be seen in Zhang and Xie (2025), where the Indigenous Dongba script in Lijiang is intentionally designed and received as a "pseudo-language" and "linguistic spectacle", fascinated purely for its "visual primitiveness" and "Oriental" appearance. Cui et al. (2025) demonstrate how the unfamiliar and intelligible Tibetan' script assumes symbolic significance that signifies emotional and cultural resonance. Similarly, Lang and Numtong (2025) show signage featuring Chinese characters and calligraphy successfully fulfills the tourists' psychological desire for exoticism and "distinct foreignness" although not serving literal informational values. Likewise, Chang et al. (2025) eye-tracking experiment proves

unreadable scripts (such as Arabic or Thai for Chinese tourists) successfully captures "visual attention", paradoxically due to their "semantic distinctiveness" and "unfamiliarity" requiring higher cognitive effort for decoding.

On the contrary, Wang and Gao (2025) indicate that an inability to comprehend the linguistic landscape actively hindered the tourist experience, with non-English-speaking tourists finding navigating commercial areas with only Lao and English signs to be highly "challenging", leaving them feeling alienated and excluded.

4.3.2. Active Co-Construction of Space Though Subjective Human Experience

There is a strong consensus among the studies that authenticity in the context of tourism and Linguistic Landscape is a socially constructed, negotiable, subjective concept, rather than a fixed or objective attribute of a destination, which tourists actively filter through their own personal experiences and prior cultural expectations.

In line with the concept of "the hermeneutic cycle" by Urry (2002), Xiao et al. (2025) find that tourists use the Linguistic Landscape to subjectively validate their pre-existing knowledge, confirming their internal cognitive maps. Similarly, Pan (2025) demonstrates that tourists evaluate the Linguistic Landscape based on matching mental prototypes. When the signage confirms their prior knowledge and matches tourists' expectations, it is considered authentic (Lu et al., 2020). Conversely, when the objective reality fails to match these mental frameworks of expectations, tourists express strong negative stances and reject the space as inauthentic (Lu et al., 2020; Pan, 2025; Xiao et al., 2025). In Burdin's (2021) study, visitors' reactions to the Linguistic Landscape align with their either "mission" or "quest" tourism narratives. In Krakow's Jewish Quarter, "mission" tourists seeking historical tragedy expressed skepticism at the commercialized landscape and rendering them extremely inauthentic, while "quest" tourists reacted with pleasant surprise at finding a vibrant, contemporary community. This divergent interpretation also aligns with Scollon and Scollon's concept of "the historical body" as noted by Hult (2008) that proves two separate individuals' personal past experiences, internalized habits and beliefs can make them interpret the exact same Linguistic Landscape aspects in entirely distinct ways.

Other variables such as visiting frequency and familiarity with the destination can have an impact on how tourists perceive the helpfulness of the informational Linguistic Landscape, as tourists' dependence on informational signage declines as their history with the destination increases (Yan & Lee, 2014). Moreover, tourists' linguistic expectation shifts drastically based on their positional relationship to the Linguistic Landscape, depending on whether they assume the role of the Addressee, Audience or Eavesdropper. Bruyèl-Olmedo and Juan-Garau (2009) find that while a vast majority of tourists expected English signage in hotels and restaurants, their assumption that government and transport signs address the local population causes their expectations for English signage to drop accordingly when encountering such signs. Wang and Gao (2025) demonstrate how tourists rely heavily on bilingual Lao-English signage at historical sites and in retail shops because these sectors prioritize accessibility for global audiences.

Studies also reveal a discrepancy between the objective, physical reality of the signs and how tourist readers actually perceive them. Bruyèl-Olmedo and Juan-Garau (2009) reveal a considerable gap between the objective quality of the English language on physical signs and tourists' psychological perception of them. While the signs featured significant, detectable linguistic errors including spelling and grammar, inquired tourists perceive the English linguistic landscape very positively and are extremely tolerant of these errors. Zhang and Xie

(2025) highlights how tourists mistakenly perceive the "pseudo-language" functioning merely as a visual simulation to meet government policy requirements as a genuine, authentic, widely understood language that is actively used by the local people. In accordance, Xiao and Lee (2022) demonstrate a gap where the actual presence of the English language is drastically underperceived by international tourists compared to the actual documented reality.

4.3.3. Holistic Consumption of Non-Textual Elements

How tourists recognize and consume the entire semiotic systems of a destination, through a holistic combination of materials, colors, fonts, and images is a recurrent theme across the studies. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2020), meaning is inherently multi-semiotic. Therefore, analyzing language in isolation cannot adequately capture the overall meaning of a message. In the context of the public space, meaning is constructed through language in combination with visual and spatial features including typography, colors, and spatial arrangements.

Several studies align with this by indicating how non-textual elements of the Linguistic Landscape serve as essential stimuli for the overall tourist experience. Lu et al. (2020) highlight the importance of physical materiality of signage, revealing that tourists expect the combination of material, color, and position of signs to work collaboratively to create an ancient atmosphere. Pan (2025) demonstrates that tourists process destinations as complete semiotic environments, evaluating combined features of languages, colors, decorations, and images to convey a sense of celebration, positivity, and a distinct "cultural atmosphere". Similarly, Li et al. (2023) show how tourists show strong appreciation for how signage is physically embedded into the natural landscape, with interesting and novel linguistic landscapes stimulating tourists' curiosity and exploration. He and Chen (2024) show the physical location (emplacement) of a sign fundamentally shapes its salience, revealing how signboards in different displays garnered varied amounts of attention and engagement due to their prominent positioning in the café setting. Similarly, Linguistic Landscape items with more complex, attractive and artistic font configurations result in an increase of engagement from the tourists (Chang et al., 2025). Ultimately, Lang and Numtong (2025) captures how multisensory elements combine into a single semiotic assemblage to trigger tourists' immersion and engagement with the historical Linguistic Landscape.

5. Discussion

This study centers on conceptualizing tourist readership as a multimodal, subjective, and negotiated meaning-making process within the semiotic space. The review categorizes tourist readership across four dimensions, five prominent methodological approaches and three core themes.

There is a broad consensus in the literature that meaning in the linguistic landscape is inherently multi-semiotic and consumed holistically; and that authenticity in the Linguistic Landscape is a socially constructed and subjective concept. While symbolic consumption is common in the Linguistic Landscape of tourism, partly as a result of linguistic commodification, an absolute inability to comprehend the entire Linguistic Landscape can negatively affect the tourist experience. To address the issue, one of the prominent strategies which destinations can employ is to strike a balance between the familiar and unfamiliar, elements of globalization and localization, a concept that aligns with Safe Exoticism by Kallen (2008). Studies have highlighted tourists' preferences for the implementation of multilingual signs that include English alongside local and national language codes (Lu et al., 2020; Wang

et al., 2024; Yan & Lee, 2014). To accommodate non-English speaking tourists, alongside specifically catering to high-volume demographics from particular regions, integrating digital technologies such as mobile apps and QR codes to provide interactive, multilingual information without overcrowding the physical signboard, and relying on universal visual symbols can be efficient resolutions (Cui et al., 2025; Li et al., 2023; Nenotek et al., 2025).

The paper indicates that while existing literature has extensively examined the Linguistic Landscape (LL) across varied contexts, ranging from urban commercial districts to ecological and rural destinations, notable geographic and temporal limitations persist. Current research is disproportionately concentrated in East Asia, with China representing the majority of the literature, while Southeast Asian and European contexts remain underrepresented. There is an absence of empirical data from Africa, the Americas, and Australia. Methodologically, researchers explicitly advocate for future cross-cultural and longitudinal research to capture dynamic changes and determine the chronological impacts on tourist readership of the Linguistic Landscape alongside tourism and economic development, modified policies and shifting cultural patterns (Li et al., 2024; Nenotek et al., 2025; Zhang & Xie, 2025).

The study helps narrow the interdisciplinary gap between Linguistic Landscape studies and Tourism Discourse by shifting the analytical focus from the static production of signs and the perspective of the authors to the dynamic reception by readers, thereby providing a comprehensive, synthesized framework for understanding how tourists actively consume, interpret, and experience the Linguistic Landscape of tourism. It further solidifies pre-existing theories of the distribution of meaning through complex combination of textual and non-textual visual features (Kress & Leeuwen, 2020; Scollon & Scollon, 2003), the lack of full authorial control, an excess of meaning as a result of the different readers' ideological and cognitive variances (Malinowski, 2008), the psychological and semiotic necessity of providing Safe Exoticism (Kallen, 2008), the subjective and diverse individual interpretation of the same linguistic landscape (Hult, 2008), the commodification of language into a commodity (Heller et al., 2014). In the context of tourism, the paper challenges the views that the primary function of the Linguistic Landscape is informational, and the notion that authenticity is intrinsic and objective. The paper highlights the Linguistic Landscape as a highly subjective, negotiated arena and emphasizes the need to ground theoretical models within specific social and environmental contexts to address the fundamental tension between language as an authentic marker and language as a commodified, commercial tool, as well as signage informational and symbolic functions as markers of authenticity and comprehension.

6. Conclusion

The paper conceptualizes tourists' readership as an intersecting psychological, sociological, spatial and ideological construct. The paper indicates that the reviewed studies employ diverse methodological approaches, ranging from exclusively quantitative innovative physiological experiments and quantitative questionnaires to qualitative investigations relying on participant observations and interviews. The review highlights a fundamental shift from informational reading to symbolic consumption while maintaining the importance of balancing the two, the nature of authenticity as a socially constructed and subjective concept, and the holistic consumption of complete semiotic environments that combine language with non-textual elements. The paper proposes that research in the future could examine the misalignment between production and readership by simultaneously investigating both the creators and the consumers of the Linguistic Landscape within a specific tourist area and over different periods of time.

The paper offers valuable insights for policymakers on language policies and tourism management to enhance the overall tourist experience and underpin tourism development. To optimize tourist experience, destination practitioners could implement strategic targeted multilingualism that utilizes clear typography and universal pictograms to balance comprehensibility with aesthetic appeal. Digital solutions, such as QR codes and mobile applications could efficiently and practically offer comprehensive information in multiple languages while minimizing visual clutter. Furthermore, destinations could adopt a glocalization strategy that combines global languages with local artistic forms to create a simultaneously distinct and accessible identity. Finally, policymakers could protect localized residential environments and ensure heritage preservation by maintaining localized language environments in residential zones.

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APPENDIX

Please access the Appendix: Summary of the articles using the QR code provided, or by visiting the repository link at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.32819135>

