

Language of “Order”: English in the Linguistic Landscape of Two Major Train Stations in the Philippines

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This paper examines the linguistic landscape of two main train stations in Metro Manila, Philippines. Using Ben-Rafael et al.’s (2006) notion of top-down and bottom-up signs and Scollon and Scollon’s (2003) concept of place semiotics, the paper seeks to determine the languages used, the ways these languages are used, and the possible explanations to the ways these languages are used in the 76 signs found in the two stations. The paper shows that English and Filipino languages are mainly used in the signs; however, between the two languages, English dominates as there are overwhelmingly more signs in English only than in Filipino only. In signs where both languages (English-Filipino) are used, English is found to be more preferred than Filipino. The preferential use of English is indicated by writing the English versions either in the center, on top, or on the left of the English-Filipino signs, having more English words than Filipino ones; and emphasizing English words either by highlighting, underlining, circling, or capitalizing in English-Filipino Codemixing signs. Given that the analyzed signs are found in the train stations, the paper concludes that English is used to exact two forms of “order”: one that makes readers “follow order” such as proper behaviors in train stations, and another that encourages readers to “make order” like buying of food in commercial establishments in the areas. The effectiveness of English in purporting these “orders” among Filipinos may be explained by the positive attitude of Filipinos toward Americans. The use of English has not only been associated with the “progressive” American ideals of “enlightenment,” “democracy,” and “self-governance” (Lorente, 2007, p. 90) but also with anything that is “good” for the Filipino people. Thus, the dominant use of English in the signs in the train stations supposes that passengers will obey these signs or “orders” as doing so is beneficial not only for the self but also for all.

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