

Negotiating Power through Bilingual Signs: English and Filipino in the Linguistic Landscape of Divisoria

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ABSTRACT

Public signs function as semiotic resources through which multilingual communities organize communication and negotiate linguistic authority. Although Philippine linguistic landscape research has documented language distribution and code preference, less attention has been paid to how bilingual signs allocate communicative and symbolic functions across languages. This study examined power relations in 42 bilingual signs photographed along Ylaya Street, Divisoria, Manila. It identified the language combinations represented, determined preferred codes, and classified multilingual information using Ben-Rafael et al.'s (2006) distinction between top-down and bottom-up signs, Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotics, and Reh's (2004) typology of multilingual writing. English Filipino signs comprised 98% of the corpus, and bottom-up signs accounted for 36 of the 42 items. Although English appeared in every sign, Filipino was visually preferred in 62% of cases. Fragmentary multilingual information represented 95% of the corpus. Qualitative analysis showed that English indexed promotion, commercial legitimacy, standardized business practices, and institutional authority, whereas Filipino supported product identification, interpersonal engagement, and public regulation. The findings indicate that bilingual signage in Divisoria does not reproduce a simple hierarchy in which one language consistently dominates. Instead, sign producers distribute languages strategically to balance local accessibility with commercial and institutional authority. The study extends Philippine linguistic landscape scholarship by showing how functional specialization, visual salience, and sign provenance jointly construct power in a multilingual marketplace.

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INTRODUCTION

Public signs are among the most visible features of urban spaces, serving not only as practical sources of information but also as reflections of the linguistic, cultural, and social realities of the communities in which they are situated. Whether displayed as shop signs, advertisements, traffic directions, or official notices, signs guide everyday activities while simultaneously revealing how languages are used, valued, and negotiated in public space. Beyond their communicative function, signs provide valuable insights into language practices, identity

construction, and sociocultural relationships, making them important objects of inquiry in sociolinguistics and cultural studies.

The systematic study of public signs is known as the linguistic landscape (LL), which refers to the visible display of language in public spaces such as road signs, billboards, shop signs, and official notices (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Since its introduction, linguistic landscape research has expanded beyond documenting language distribution to examining how languages construct identities, reflect multilingualism, and reproduce social relationships within public space (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Gorter, 2013). Consequently, linguistic landscapes are increasingly recognized as valuable sites for understanding how multilingual communities negotiate communication, identity, and social interaction.

In the Philippines, multilingualism is a defining characteristic of public life. Filipino and English coexist as official languages and are widely used alongside numerous Philippine languages in education, governance, commerce, and everyday communication. This linguistic diversity is especially visible in urban commercial districts, where public signs serve not only to convey information but also to attract consumers, establish commercial identity, and facilitate interaction among linguistically diverse populations. The coexistence of multiple languages within these spaces raises important questions about how linguistic choices reflect broader social, cultural, and economic processes.

Previous Philippine linguistic landscape studies have documented language distribution, multilingual patterns, and code preference in transportation systems, educational institutions, government agencies, and commercial districts. While these studies have consistently demonstrated the widespread use of English and Filipino in public signage, they have focused primarily on describing language occurrence and communicative functions. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to examining how bilingual signs negotiate power through the strategic allocation of linguistic resources, particularly within highly commercial environments where language simultaneously functions as a communicative, economic, and symbolic resource.

Divisoria, one of Manila's largest and most economically vibrant commercial districts, provides an ideal setting for examining these linguistic negotiations. As a multilingual marketplace where commercial competition, consumer interaction, and cultural diversity converge, its public signs offer valuable insights into how languages perform distinct communicative and symbolic roles. Despite its economic significance and linguistic diversity, Divisoria remains relatively underexplored in Philippine linguistic landscape research.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the power dynamics embedded in the bilingual signs of Ylaya Street, Divisoria. Specifically, it identifies the languages present in bilingual signs, determines the predominant language through code preference, and analyzes the types of multilingual information conveyed. By examining how English and Filipino are strategically distributed across commercial and institutional signs, the study contributes to linguistic landscape scholarship by demonstrating how bilingual signage functions as a semiotic resource through which communicative accessibility and symbolic authority are negotiated within a Philippine commercial setting. To address this aim, the study answered the following questions:

1. What languages are present in the bilingual signs of the linguistic landscape of Divisoria?
2. Which language is predominantly used in the bilingual signs found in the linguistic landscape of Divisoria?
3. What types of multilingual information are conveyed through these bilingual signs?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on three complementary frameworks in linguistic landscape research: Ben-Rafael et al.'s (2006) notion of top-down and bottom-up signs, Scollon and Scollon's (2003) Geosemiotics, and Reh's (2004) typology of multilingual writing. Together, these frameworks explain how bilingual signs reflect the interaction of institutional authority, commercial practices, and multilingual communication in public space.

Ben-Rafael et al.'s (2006) framework distinguishes signs according to their producers, allowing the study to examine how different social actors participate in constructing the linguistic landscape. Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotic approach explains how the placement and material features of signs shape meaning and reveal language preference. Finally, Reh's (2004) typology identifies how multilingual information is distributed across languages, providing insights into the communicative functions performed by English and Filipino. Collectively, these frameworks enable the examination of how bilingual signs negotiate power through language choice, visual organization, and multilingual communication.

Ben-Rafael et al.'s (2006) distinction between top-down and bottom-up signs provides the initial framework for categorizing the bilingual signs documented in Ylaya Street. This classification has been widely adopted in Philippine linguistic landscape studies (Astillero, 2017; De Los Reyes, 2014; Jazul & Bernardo, 2017) because it distinguishes the linguistic practices of institutional authorities from those of private individuals and commercial establishments.

Top-down signs are produced by government agencies, public institutions, and other official organizations. As manifestations of institutional authority, they often reflect official language policies, dominant ideologies, and state-sanctioned linguistic practices. In contrast, bottom-up signs are created by private individuals, business owners, and commercial establishments. These signs are generally less constrained by formal language policies and instead reflect market demands, commercial interests, and the linguistic preferences of sign producers.

The distinction between these two categories provides insight into how institutional authority and commercial practices influence language choice within the linguistic landscape. In this study, top-down signs include warning signs, traffic signs, and public announcements, whereas bottom-up signs consist primarily of advertisements, commercial posters, and shop names.

To examine how bilingual signs construct meaning, this study adopts Scollon and Scollon's (2003) geosemiotics, which explains how the social meaning of signs is shaped by their physical placement, visual organization, and material characteristics. Rather than treating language as isolated text, geosemiotics considers signs as situated semiotic resources whose meanings emerge from their spatial and material contexts.

One of the central concepts of geosemiotics is code preference, which refers to the visual hierarchy established when two or more languages appear within the same sign. The spatial arrangement of languages itself communicates meaning by signaling which language receives greater prominence. Scollon and Scollon (2003) argue that preferred codes generally occupy visually dominant positions, such as the top rather than the bottom, the left rather than the right, or the center rather than the margins. Consequently, the placement of English or Filipino within bilingual signs may indicate which language is intended to attract greater attention or convey greater symbolic importance.

Code preference is closely associated with the concepts of indexicality and symbolism. Indexicality refers to meanings derived from the relationship between a sign and its social or physical context. For example, the use of English may index membership in a global or educated community. Symbolism, on the other hand, refers to meanings that extend beyond immediate communication, such as the association of English with prestige, modernity, or product quality. Examining code preference therefore enables the study to investigate how bilingual signs visually negotiate linguistic authority and symbolic value.

Geosemiotics also emphasizes the importance of inscription, or the physical materiality of signs. According to Scollon and Scollon (2003), meaning is influenced not only by language choice but also by material characteristics such as font style, size, color, medium, layering, and permanence. The material features of signs may indicate durability, authority, or temporality. Permanent materials such as metal or acrylic often suggest institutional legitimacy, whereas temporary materials such as tarpaulins or cloth reflect changing commercial activities. Likewise, larger fonts, boldface text, contrasting colors, and layered inscriptions may indicate linguistic

emphasis or visual dominance. Contemporary linguistic landscapes also include electronic displays, LED signboards, and digital screens, whose changing states contribute additional layers of meaning. Through inscription, the study examines how the physical presentation of English and Filipino reinforces their communicative and symbolic functions within Divisoria's commercial environment.

To examine how information is distributed across languages, this study adopts Reh's (2004) typology of multilingual information. Rather than focusing solely on language presence, this framework explains how multilingual signs organize and allocate information among different languages. Reh (2004) identifies four types of multilingual information. Duplicating multilingual information presents the same message in two or more languages, thereby ensuring accessibility to multilingual audiences. Fragmentary multilingual information occurs when the complete message is expressed primarily in one language while selected words or phrases appear in another language. Overlapping multilingual information refers to partially repeated information across languages, where the overall meaning remains similar although some details differ. Finally, complementary multilingual information distributes different pieces of information across languages, requiring readers to understand both languages in order to fully comprehend the sign. This typology provides a systematic framework for examining how English and Filipino divide communicative responsibilities within bilingual signs and how multilingual information contributes to the negotiation of meaning and linguistic power in Divisoria's linguistic landscape.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Linguistic Landscape as Power, Ideology, and Language Policy

Contemporary linguistic landscape scholarship treats public signs as sites where power, ideology, and language policy are negotiated. The presence, absence, and visual prominence of languages communicate authority, legitimacy, and accessibility (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Shohamy, 2006). Institutional and commercial signs therefore do more than reflect multilingualism: they can normalize linguistic hierarchies by assigning different languages unequal degrees of visibility and functional scope (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006).

Language Ideologies in Tourist, Educational, and Commercial Landscapes

Studies of tourist and commercial landscapes demonstrate that language choice is closely tied to globalization, mobility, and audience design. In Beijing tourist sites, English was used to support the commodification and international orientation of tourism (Rong, 2018). In Ubud, English dominated outdoor commercial signs, while Indonesian and Balinese retained more localized functions (Mulyawan, 2019). Research in George Town likewise found English to be both an informational resource and a symbol of modernity within a multilingual postcolonial setting (Jiao & Singh, 2024).

Language Prestige and Symbolic Power in Commercial Landscapes

Commercial linguistic landscapes also reveal how languages acquire different forms of social and economic value. In Yemen, English in Arabic–English signs was associated with advertising, modernity, and commercial success, whereas Arabic retained broad communicative reach and national-symbolic functions (Al-Athwary, 2017). These patterns are consistent with accounts of indexical order and global English, which explain how linguistic forms acquire prestige through wider historical, political, and economic structures (Blommaert, 2010; Pennycook, 2007).

Philippine Linguistic Landscape Studies

Philippine studies reveal comparable patterns. De Los Reyes (2014) documented the dominance of English in the top-down signs of Manila's Light Rail Transit (LRT) and Metro Rail Transit (MRT) stations, where Filipino appeared only minimally. Astillero (2017) similarly

observed a strong institutional preference for English in both official and unofficial signs within a secondary school in Irosin, Sorsogon, suggesting that English continues to be associated with prestige and historical influence. Eclipse and Tenedero (2018) likewise found that English overwhelmingly dominated the linguistic landscape of the Manila Central Post Office despite existing government policies promoting Filipino in official communication.

Research in commercial districts has likewise demonstrated that language choice extends beyond communication to symbolic representation. Jazul and Bernardo (2017), in their study of Binondo's linguistic landscape, found that English primarily served informational functions, whereas Chinese indexed ethnic identity and cultural authenticity. Together, these studies suggest that multilingual signs not only communicate information but also assign distinct social, economic, and symbolic values to different languages.

Although previous studies have established the dominance of English in Philippine linguistic landscapes and documented patterns of multilingual language use, they have primarily focused on language distribution, code preference, and communicative functions. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining how bilingual signs negotiate power through the strategic allocation of linguistic resources, particularly in commercial marketplaces where language simultaneously functions as a communicative, economic, and symbolic resource. By focusing on the bilingual signs of Ylaya Street, Divisoria, the present study addresses this gap and extends Philippine linguistic landscape research from describing multilingual patterns to explaining how languages negotiate communicative and symbolic power within everyday commercial interactions.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative linguistic landscape approach to examine bilingual signs displayed along Ylaya Street, Divisoria, Manila. Linguistic landscape research investigates visible language in public space to understand how language choice reflects sociolinguistic, cultural, institutional, and commercial practices (Gorter, 2013; Landry & Bourhis, 1997). The analysis focused on bilingual signs because they make the allocation of communicative and symbolic functions across languages directly observable.

Divisoria is one of the largest and busiest commercial districts in Manila, Philippines, widely recognized for its affordable wholesale and retail markets that attract consumers from various socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds. Located near the Pasig River and North Harbor, the district is characterized by diverse commercial activities, ranging from wet markets and food vendors in its northern section to textile stores, garment suppliers, accessory shops, hardware stores, and school supply retailers in its southern section. The study specifically focused on Ylaya Street, commonly referred to as the "Textile Capital" of Divisoria (Pedrajas, 2020). As one of the district's busiest commercial streets, Ylaya contains a high concentration of multilingual commercial signage produced by diverse business establishments. The density and diversity of public signs make the area an appropriate site for investigating bilingual language use and power relations within a commercial linguistic landscape. The dataset consisted of publicly visible bilingual signs documented through photographic observation along Ylaya Street. Permanently and semi-permanently displayed signs were eligible for inclusion.

Three inclusion criteria were applied: (a) the sign had to be publicly visible and accessible; (b) duplicate signs with identical content in different locations were counted as one unit; and (c) only one representative sign was selected from each establishment. The third criterion followed the unit-of-analysis principle used in linguistic landscape research, whereby an establishment may be treated as a single analytical unit (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006). After applying these criteria, the collected signs were categorized according to Ben-Rafael et al.'s (2006) distinction between top-down and bottom-up signs. Top-down signs consisted of official notices, traffic signs, warning signs, and other institutional signage, whereas bottom-up signs included advertisements, promotional materials, business names, and other commercially produced signs. The signs were

initially classified by language composition as (a) English monolingual, (b) Filipino monolingual, (c) English Filipino bilingual, or (d) English Chinese bilingual. Because the study focused on bilingual language use, only English Filipino and English Chinese signs were included in the detailed analysis. Each item was entered into an analytical matrix recording sign provenance, language combination, preferred code, inscriptional features, and multilingual information type.

First, Ben-Rafael et al.'s (2006) notion of top-down and bottom-up signs was employed to identify the source of the signage and distinguish between institutional and commercial language practices. Second, Scollon and Scollon's (2003) Geosemiotics was used to analyze the visual organization and material characteristics of the signs. Specifically, the concepts of code preference and inscription were applied to determine the preferred language through spatial positioning, typography, and material presentation. Finally, Reh's (2004) typology of multilingual information was utilized to classify how information was distributed across languages into duplicating, fragmentary, overlapping, or complementary multilingual information. The combined framework enabled the study to examine not only which languages appeared but also how sign provenance, visual organization, and information distribution jointly negotiated communicative accessibility and symbolic authority. Because the data consisted solely of publicly displayed signs and the study did not collect personal information or involve human participants, the analysis was limited to the semiotic features visible in the photographed materials.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Languages Used in the Bilingual Signs

Table 1. Languages Used in Bilingual Signs in Divisoria

Language Used	Top-down	Bottom-up	f	%
English Filipino	6	35	41	98%
English Chinese	0	1	1	2%
Total	6	36	42	100%

Table 1 presents the language combinations observed in the 42 bilingual signs documented along Ylaya Street. English appeared in every sign: 41 signs (98%) combined English and Filipino, while one sign (2%) combined English and Chinese. English was therefore highly visible across the corpus, but its presence should not be equated automatically with visual or communicative dominance.

The predominance of English Filipino bilingualism reflects the sociolinguistic conditions of Divisoria, where Filipino supports everyday marketplace interaction and English contributes commercial and institutional associations. This pattern is consistent with Philippine linguistic landscape studies reporting the strong public visibility of English alongside local languages (Astillero, 2017; De Los Reyes, 2014; Eclipse & Tenedero, 2018; Jazul & Bernardo, 2017).

The provenance analysis shows that 36 of the 42 signs (86%) were bottom-up, whereas six (14%) were top-down. Following Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), this distribution indicates that Ylaya Street's bilingual landscape is shaped primarily by commercial actors, although institutional authorities remain visibly present. The dominance of bottom-up signs is consistent with the street's function as a dense retail and wholesale marketplace.

Although top-down signs constituted a minority of the corpus, the six institutional items performed important regulatory and public-information functions. Their smaller numerical share suggests that commercial signage is more visually abundant, not that institutional authority is absent from the streetscape.

Another important pattern is the universal presence of English in all bottom-up bilingual signs. The inclusion of English across every commercial sign suggests that business owners perceive the language as an important marketing resource rather than merely a medium of communication. Consistent with Jazul and Bernardo (2017), English appears to function as a

language of commercial legitimacy, professionalism, and product value. Its strategic use reflects broader language ideologies that associate English with quality, credibility, and modernity. Within Divisoria's marketplace, therefore, English extends beyond its communicative function to become a symbolic resource that enhances the attractiveness and perceived value of products and businesses.

Overall, bilingual signage in Divisoria represents a strategic distribution of linguistic resources. Filipino commonly supports direct communication with local customers, while English contributes specialized commercial terminology, institutional framing, and symbolic value. The relationship is therefore better described as functional specialization than as simple competition between languages.

Table 2. Preferred Codes in Bilingual Signs in Divisoria

	English as Preferred Code	Filipino as Preferred Code	Chinese as Preferred Code	Total
Bilingual signs	15	26	1	42
%	36%	62%	2%	100%

Table 2 presents the predominant language in the bilingual signs based on Scollon and Scollon's (2003) concept of code preference. Of the 42 bilingual signs analyzed, 26 (62%) visually prioritize Filipino, 15 (36%) foreground English, and only one sign (2%) assigns visual prominence to Chinese. These findings indicate that although English appears in every bilingual sign documented in the corpus, Filipino more frequently occupies the preferred visual position. This distinction demonstrates that language presence does not necessarily correspond to language prominence, suggesting that multilingual signs assign different communicative values to each language.

According to Scollon and Scollon (2003), code preference is established through the spatial organization of languages within a sign. Languages occupying the upper, left, or central positions are generally interpreted as the preferred code because these locations naturally attract readers' attention. In the bilingual signs documented along Ylaya Street, Filipino consistently occupies these visually dominant positions, indicating that sign producers deliberately foreground the language most familiar to their intended audience.

The predominance of Filipino reflects the communicative realities of Divisoria as a marketplace that primarily serves local consumers. Product descriptions, promotional messages, reminders, and regulatory notices are presented first in Filipino to ensure immediate comprehension. At the same time, English remains highly visible throughout the linguistic landscape, performing specialized functions related to commerce, institutional communication, and professional identity. Thus, the visual hierarchy observed in the bilingual signs does not diminish the importance of English but instead demonstrates a functional distribution of linguistic resources, whereby Filipino performs the principal communicative role while English contributes symbolic and commercial value.

Interestingly, these findings complement those presented in Table 1. Whereas English appeared in all bilingual signs, Filipino emerged as the preferred visual code in the majority of cases. This apparent contrast illustrates that visibility and prominence represent different dimensions of multilingual communication. English enjoys widespread presence because of its symbolic associations with commerce, professionalism, and institutional legitimacy, yet Filipino receives greater visual emphasis because it ensures communicative accessibility within the marketplace. Rather than competing for dominance, the two languages perform complementary roles that allow businesses and institutions to communicate effectively while simultaneously projecting commercial credibility.

More broadly, the findings suggest that code preference is shaped not merely by linguistic

competence but by the communicative objectives of sign producers. Businesses, government agencies, and commercial establishments strategically organize languages according to the intended audience and communicative purpose of each sign. Consequently, the visual hierarchy observed in Divisoria's bilingual signage reflects the negotiation of communicative power, represented by Filipino, and symbolic power, represented by English.

The quantitative pattern becomes clearer when the signs are examined qualitatively through Scollon and Scollon's (2003) concepts of code preference and inscription. The following figures illustrate three recurring contexts: (1) commercial identification, (2) institutional regulation, and (3) public-health communication.

Commercial Identification

The first manifestation of code preference appears in commercial establishments, where Filipino consistently occupies the most visually prominent position while English performs supporting commercial or administrative functions. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate how business owners prioritize communicative accessibility without entirely excluding English from the linguistic landscape.



Figure 1. Filipino Code Preference in a Money-Changing Advertisement

Figure 1 illustrates Filipino as the preferred code through its placement at the uppermost portion of the sign. Following Scollon and Scollon's (2003) concept of code preference, the word "BUMIBILI" immediately captures the attention of passersby, signaling the principal commercial activity of the establishment. The succeeding Filipino terms, "ginto," "pilak," and "relo," identify the items accepted for exchange, ensuring that the message is immediately comprehensible to the predominantly Filipino-speaking clientele of Divisoria.

In contrast, the English expression "FOREIGN MONEY" occupies the lower portion of the sign and performs a more specialized commercial function. Rather than translating the phrase into Filipino, the establishment retains the English terminology because it has become widely recognized within the discourse of foreign exchange and financial transactions. The use of English therefore extends beyond communicative convenience; it indexes expertise, professionalism, and participation in international commerce. This finding supports Jazul and Bernardo's (2017) observation that English frequently functions as a symbolic resource that enhances commercial legitimacy within Philippine linguistic landscapes.

The bilingual arrangement demonstrates that code preference is strategically organized according to communicative purpose. Filipino facilitates immediate understanding by presenting the establishment's primary service in the language most familiar to local consumers, whereas English contributes symbolic capital by referring to specialized financial terminology. Viewed through the lens of power dynamics, the sign illustrates how communicative accessibility and commercial prestige coexist within a single advertisement, enabling the establishment to appeal simultaneously to local customers and to broader commercial practices.



Figure 2. Filipino Commercial Identity in a Retail Establishment

Figure 2 likewise demonstrates Filipino as the preferred code through the establishment name "Tindahan Ko To," which occupies the upper and central portion of the façade in large, bold lettering. Its prominent placement establishes Filipino as the principal language through which the store introduces itself to prospective customers. Rather than adopting a formal commercial name, the establishment uses an everyday conversational expression that evokes familiarity, ownership, and community identity. This linguistic choice reflects a deliberate strategy of positioning the business as approachable and closely connected to the everyday experiences of local consumers.

Unlike the establishment name, the English inscription "Outlet Owner: JBS" appears beneath the primary message in a noticeably smaller font. Here, English performs an administrative rather than promotional function by identifying the ownership of the establishment. The visual hierarchy therefore distinguishes between the language used to engage customers and the language employed for documentary or organizational purposes. Such differentiation demonstrates that code preference is not merely determined by the prestige of a language but by its communicative function within the sign.

From the perspective of linguistic power, the sign demonstrates that Filipino exercises communicative authority by establishing direct interaction with customers, whereas English contributes institutional credibility through ownership identification. The sign therefore reflects a negotiated distribution of linguistic functions in which communicative effectiveness takes precedence over symbolic prestige without excluding the commercial value associated with English.

Taken together, Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate that Filipino occupies the preferred visual position because it functions as the principal language of marketplace interaction. The signs prioritize Filipino to ensure that their commercial messages are immediately understood by local consumers, while English performs specialized functions related to financial terminology, ownership, and commercial identity. Rather than competing for visual dominance, the two languages complement one another by balancing communicative accessibility with symbolic commercial value. This pattern illustrates how businesses negotiate linguistic power through strategic visual organization, assigning each language a distinct yet mutually reinforcing role within commercial discourse.

Institutional Regulation through Inscription

Beyond commercial identification, visual hierarchy is further reinforced through inscription, whereby typography, color, font size, and spatial organization contribute to the prominence of linguistic elements. As argued by Scollon and Scollon (2003), inscription extends beyond language placement by using material features to direct readers toward the most important components of a sign. Figure 3 provides a contextual comparison from the wider streetscape, whereas Figure 4 illustrates how inscription and code preference operate within a bilingual regulatory notice.



Figure 3. Inscriptional Saliency in a Predominantly Filipino Barangay Regulatory Sign

Figure 3 provides a contextual example of how inscription creates visual saliency in a predominantly Filipino regulatory sign. The word "BAWAL" is displayed in large, bold, uppercase red letters, making it the most visually dominant element. According to Scollon and Scollon (2003), variations in font size, color, and typographic emphasis contribute to a sign's semiotic meaning by directing readers' attention to its most important message. Here, the striking presentation of BAWAL communicates prohibition before the remaining text is read.

The succeeding Filipino statement, "UMIHI AT MAG-IWAN NG BASURA DITO!", specifies the prohibited behaviors, while the sign relies exclusively on Filipino to convey the regulatory message. The use of Filipino reflects the expectation that the intended audience consists primarily of residents and marketgoers who can readily understand the instruction. By foregrounding Filipino through both spatial placement and inscription, the sign maximizes communicative effectiveness and encourages immediate compliance.

The official seal of Barangay 269 and the name of the barangay captain positioned at the top of the sign further reinforce the authority of the message. Consequently, the sign derives its regulatory force from two complementary sources: institutional legitimacy, represented by the issuing government office, and linguistic accessibility, achieved through the visual dominance of Filipino. Although this predominantly Filipino sign was not included in the 42-item bilingual corpus, it provides a useful contextual comparison showing how typography, color, and official identity can produce authority even without bilingual allocation.

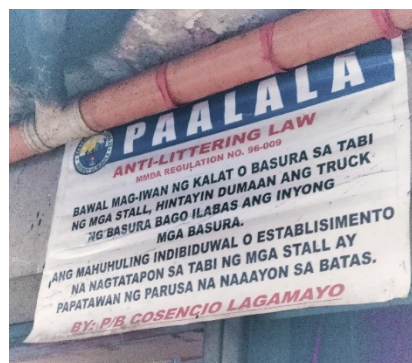


Figure 4. Filipino Code Preference in a Bilingual Anti-Littering Notice

Figure 4 demonstrates how inscription reinforces Filipino as the preferred code through typography, color, and spatial organization. The Filipino word "PAALALA" ("Reminder") occupies the uppermost portion of the sign and is presented in large, bold, white uppercase letters against a dark blue background, making it the most visually salient element. According to Scollon and Scollon (2003), such inscriptional features establish a visual hierarchy that guides readers toward the most important information before they process the remaining text. In this case, the prominence of PAALALA immediately signals that the sign conveys an official public advisory.

Interestingly, the English phrase "ANTI-LITTERING LAW" appears directly beneath PAALALA in a smaller font and contrasting red color. Rather than functioning as the primary message, English serves as a technical or legal label that identifies the nature of the regulation. The detailed instructions that follow are written almost entirely in Filipino, ensuring that the substantive content of the ordinance is easily understood by the predominantly Filipino-speaking public. This bilingual arrangement demonstrates a complementary distribution of linguistic functions: Filipino provides the primary communicative message, whereas English indexes legal formality and institutional legitimacy.

The sign's institutional identity further strengthens this interpretation. The presence of the barangay seal and the attribution to the barangay official reinforce the authority of the regulation, while the visual prominence of Filipino reflects the government's recognition that effective public communication depends on the language most familiar to the community. Rather than relying on English as the language of authority, the sign constructs authority through institutional endorsement while using Filipino as the principal medium for ensuring compliance.

Viewed through the lens of power dynamics, the sign illustrates that communicative power is negotiated through both language choice and visual design. Although English retains symbolic value by framing the regulation within a legal discourse, Filipino dominates the sign's communicative space because it is the language through which public authority is most effectively exercised. The interaction of inscription, code preference, and institutional identity demonstrates that linguistic power in Divisoria's public signage is achieved not by privileging English alone but by strategically combining the accessibility of Filipino with the symbolic authority associated with English.

Figures 3 and 4 collectively show that visual authority is produced through both inscription and language allocation. Figure 3 demonstrates the inscriptional prominence of Filipino in a predominantly Filipino sign, while Figure 4 shows how Filipino remains visually dominant within a bilingual notice and English supplies legal terminology. The comparison clarifies that typography, color, capitalization, spatial position, and language choice jointly shape regulatory authority in Divisoria's public signage.

Public Health Communication

The final manifestation of code preference differs from the previous examples because it relies less on institutional authority and more on interpersonal communication. Rather than issuing formal prohibitions, commercial establishments encourage voluntary compliance through familiar and conversational language. Figure 5 illustrates how inscription and code preference operate within this context.



Figure 5. Informal Inscription in a Customer Health Reminder

Figure 5 instructs customers to sanitize their hands before entering the establishment through the message, "SPRAY MUNA NG KAMAY BAGO PUMASOK. TANX!!" Although

the sign is produced using simple handwritten text, the Filipino word "KAMAY" ("hand") is deliberately underlined, making it the most visually salient lexical item within the message. According to Scollon and Scollon (2003), inscription extends beyond typography and printed materials to include visual devices such as underlining, capitalization, and spatial emphasis, all of which contribute to the interpretation of a sign.

The predominance of Filipino reflects the sign producer's intention to communicate health instructions clearly and immediately to local customers. Expressions such as "muna" ("first") and "bago pumasok" ("before entering") employ everyday conversational Filipino, creating an informal and approachable tone that encourages voluntary compliance rather than imposing institutional authority. This demonstrates that commercial establishments often rely on linguistic familiarity to foster cooperation with customers.

Interestingly, the sign also incorporates English through the abbreviated expression "TANX" ("Thanks"), illustrating a localized form of English that has become integrated into everyday Filipino written communication. Rather than serving as a marker of prestige or global orientation, English in this context functions as a friendly closing expression that softens the directive and promotes positive customer relations. This contrasts with earlier signs in which English indexed commercial credibility or institutional legitimacy, suggesting that the symbolic value of English varies according to the communicative context.

From the perspective of power dynamics, the sign demonstrates that linguistic authority can be negotiated through interpersonal rapport rather than formal regulation. Unlike government-issued prohibitory signs that rely on institutional power, this handwritten reminder encourages compliance by using accessible Filipino, visual emphasis, and polite language. The underlining of KAMAY directs attention to the required action, while the informal mixture of Filipino and English creates a conversational tone that is appropriate for a customer-oriented commercial setting. Consequently, the sign illustrates how inscription, language choice, and informality work together to achieve communicative effectiveness within Divisoria's commercial linguistic landscape.

Unlike the previous institutional signs, Figure 5 demonstrates that linguistic authority may also be negotiated through interpersonal rapport. Filipino dominates the sign because it facilitates direct communication with customers, while the localized English expression "TANX" softens the directive and creates a friendlier interaction. Rather than relying on bureaucratic authority, the sign employs familiarity, politeness, and visual emphasis to encourage voluntary compliance. The figure therefore illustrates that code preference is adaptable to communicative context while consistently maintaining Filipino as the principal language of interaction.

Types of Information Conveyed in the Signs

Table 3. Multilingual Information Types in Bilingual Signs in Divisoria

	Duplicating Multilingual Information	Fragmentary Multilingual Information	Overlapping Multilingual Information	Complementary Multilingual Information	Total
Bilingual signs	2	40	0	0	42
%	5%	95%	0%	0%	100%

Table 3 presents the distribution of multilingual information types based on Reh's (2004) typology. Forty signs (95%) displayed fragmentary multilingual information, while two signs (5%) displayed duplicating information. No signs were classified as overlapping or complementary multilingual information. The corpus therefore rarely provided complete cross-

language translation; instead, most signs embedded selected words or phrases from one language within a message primarily structured in another.

The predominance of fragmentary multilingual information indicates that bilingualism in Divisoria is functionally differentiated rather than fully translational. Sign producers selectively deploy English, Filipino, or Chinese according to the commercial, interpersonal, or institutional purpose of elements.

From the perspective of language ideology, fragmentary multilingualism demonstrates that English and Filipino are not treated as interchangeable codes. Rather, each language contributes distinct communicative and symbolic functions within the same sign. Filipino frequently carries the core informational content because it ensures immediate comprehension among local consumers, whereas English is selectively employed to highlight concepts associated with commerce, professionalism, quality, measurement, or regulation. This strategic distribution of linguistic resources illustrates how bilingual signs negotiate power by assigning different social values to each language.

The absence of overlapping and complementary multilingual information further reflects the communicative priorities of a commercial marketplace. Unlike multilingual environments such as tourist destinations or international institutions, where complete bilingual information may be necessary for diverse audiences, Divisoria primarily serves Filipino-speaking consumers. Consequently, sign producers do not perceive the need to duplicate or divide complete information across languages. Instead, they maximize efficiency by combining the communicative accessibility of Filipino with the symbolic prestige associated with English.

Overall, fragmentary multilingual information operates as a systematic semiotic strategy. By combining English and Filipino selectively, sign producers maintain accessibility for local audiences while drawing on the specialized commercial and institutional associations of English.

Fragmentary Multilingual Information

Among the four types of multilingual information identified by Reh (2004), fragmentary multilingual information overwhelmingly dominates the bilingual signs of Divisoria. In these signs, the complete message is expressed primarily in one language while selected lexical items or phrases are strategically presented in another. Rather than functioning as complete translations, English and Filipino are assigned complementary communicative roles according to the purpose of the sign. The following figures illustrate three recurring patterns: (1) promotional discourse, (2) product identification and commercial pricing, and (3) institutional and regulatory communication.

Fragmentary Multilingual Information in Promotional Discourse

The first manifestation of fragmentary multilingual information appears in promotional advertisements, where English is consistently employed to enhance the commercial appeal of products while Filipino establishes rapport with local consumers. Figures 6–8 illustrate how bilingual signs strategically combine the symbolic value of English with the communicative accessibility of Filipino.



Figure 6. English Promotional Vocabulary and Filipino Price Negotiation in a Textile Advertisement

Figure 6 exemplifies fragmentary multilingual information, wherein English and Filipino perform complementary communicative functions. The English lexical item "BARGAIN" immediately frames the product as a valuable purchase, while "10 PER YARD" utilizes standardized English measurement terminology commonly employed in the textile trade. In contrast, the Filipino expression "TAPAT NA POH!!!" communicates that the displayed price is already final, discouraging further bargaining while maintaining politeness through the honorific *po*. Rather than merely combining two languages, the sign strategically allocates English to promotional and commercial terminology while Filipino performs the interpersonal function of negotiating with customers. Consequently, English contributes symbolic commercial value, whereas Filipino strengthens trust and customer engagement.



Figure 7. Fragmentary Multilingualism in a Promotional Price Advertisement

Figure 7 reinforces this pattern. The English word "BARGAIN" serves as the primary promotional marker, whereas the Filipino phrase "NA LANG..." emphasizes affordability by indicating that the displayed amount is already reduced. The oversized numerals occupy the center of the sign, while English and Filipino jointly frame the commercial message. English projects value and promotional appeal, whereas Filipino appeals to local buying practices by expressing price reduction in a familiar conversational form.



Figure 8. Filipino Product Identification and English Promotional Labeling

Figure 8 demonstrates another variation of fragmentary multilingualism. The Filipino word "Pambata" identifies the intended users of the product, allowing immediate recognition among local consumers. In contrast, the English lexical item "SALE" functions solely as a promotional marker. Despite the handwritten and temporary nature of the sign, English retains its symbolic value as the language of retail promotion, illustrating that its commercial prestige extends even to informal marketplace transactions.

Taken together, Figures 6–8 demonstrate that fragmentary multilingualism functions as a persuasive marketing strategy rather than simple code-mixing. English consistently indexes promotion, commercial value, and product desirability, whereas Filipino reinforces affordability, familiarity, and interpersonal communication. The two languages therefore negotiate complementary forms of symbolic and communicative power within Divisoria's commercial landscape.

Fragmentary Multilingual Information in Product Identification and Commercial Pricing

Beyond promotional language, fragmentary multilingual information is likewise evident in product labels and pricing conventions. Figures 9 and 10 show that Filipino identifies products while English introduces standardized commercial terminology associated with measurement and pricing.



Figure 9. Filipino Product Naming and English Measurement Terminology

Figure 9 illustrates fragmentary multilingual information through the Filipino product label "Itlog" and the English measurement expression "Per Tray." Filipino facilitates immediate product recognition among the predominantly local clientele, whereas English supplies standardized commercial terminology for pricing. Rather than translating information, the sign assigns distinct communicative functions to each language. English reflects established retail practices, while Filipino strengthens accessibility and product familiarity.



Figure 10. English Pricing Convention in a Commercial Advertisement

Figure 10 presents the Filipino product name "Medyas" together with the English pricing expression "3 pairs for 50." While Filipino identifies the merchandise, English structures the promotional pricing scheme using terminology widely recognized in Philippine retail discourse. The large numerals visually dominate the sign, emphasizing the promotional offer, while English provides the conventional commercial framework through which the transaction is communicated.

Collectively, Figures 9 and 10 demonstrate that fragmentary multilingualism is governed by functional specialization rather than random code-mixing. Filipino consistently performs the communicative function of identifying products, whereas English has become the conventional language of commercial measurement and pricing. This linguistic distribution reflects the coexistence of communicative accessibility and symbolic commercial authority within marketplace interactions.

Fragmentary Multilingual Information in Institutional and Regulatory Communication

A third manifestation of fragmentary multilingual information appears in institutional and regulatory notices. Unlike promotional advertisements, where English indexes commercial value, English in these signs is associated with surveillance, management, and institutional authority. Figures 11 and 12 illustrate this linguistic pattern.

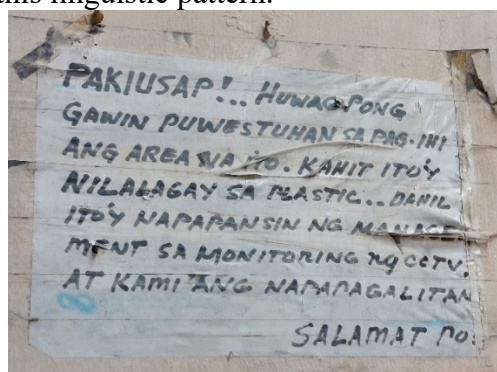


Figure 11. English Institutional Terminology in a Public Reminder

Figure 11 presents a public reminder written predominantly in Filipino, ensuring that the instructions are immediately comprehensible to the local community. Embedded within the Filipino message, however, are the English lexical items "monitoring" and "CCTV." These terms belong to the discourse of surveillance and institutional management and therefore convey authority beyond their literal meanings. Although the sign is handwritten and temporary, the insertion of English strengthens its perceived legitimacy by invoking modern monitoring systems.



Figure 12. Institutional Authority through English Regulatory Terms

Figure 12 similarly conveys its principal prohibition in Filipino while reserving English for the expressions "CCTV Operation" and "MGT Office." These terms function as institutional markers associated with surveillance and organizational control. Filipino ensures that the prohibition is immediately understood, whereas English reinforces the authority of the regulation by drawing upon the language of administration and governance.

Taken together, Figures 11 and 12 reveal that English assumes a different symbolic function within regulatory discourse. Unlike commercial advertisements, where English promotes

products, institutional signs employ English to index surveillance, management, and organizational authority. Filipino, meanwhile, continues to perform the principal communicative function by ensuring that directives remain readily comprehensible to the local community.

Overall, the fragmentary multilingual signs demonstrate that bilingual communication in Divisoria is systematic rather than arbitrary. Rather than mixing languages indiscriminately, sign producers strategically distribute English and Filipino according to communicative purpose. English functions as the language of promotion, standardized commercial practice, and institutional authority, whereas Filipino serves as the primary language of product identification, interpersonal interaction, and public communication. This functional specialization reveals that bilingual signage in Divisoria is a deliberate linguistic strategy through which commercial and institutional actors negotiate different forms of symbolic and communicative power.

Duplicating Multilingual Information

Unlike fragmentary multilingual information, duplicating multilingual information presents substantially equivalent content in two languages, thereby extending access across linguistic groups (Reh, 2004). Only two signs (5%) displayed this pattern, indicating that full bilingual equivalence was reserved for contexts in which regulatory clarity or institutional identification was particularly important.

The limited occurrence of duplicated messages suggests that complete translation is employed only when broad accessibility is necessary. In Divisoria's predominantly Filipino-speaking marketplace, selective multilingualism is generally sufficient for commercial communication. However, when signs address linguistically diverse audiences or convey information of institutional importance, duplication becomes a strategic means of ensuring that identical messages are accessible across language groups.



Figure 13. Duplicating Multilingual Information in an Institutional Regulatory Sign

Figure 13 illustrates duplicating multilingual information through the presentation of the prohibition "Bawal Magtinda Dito" and its English equivalent "No Vendors Allowed." Rather than assigning distinct communicative functions to Filipino and English, the sign provides an equivalent message in both languages, thereby broadening its accessibility to readers with different linguistic backgrounds. Consistent with Reh's (2004) typology, the bilingual presentation acknowledges the linguistic diversity of the institution's stakeholders by ensuring that the same directive is conveyed regardless of language preference.

The duplication is appropriate in an institutional regulatory context, where a prohibition must be communicated consistently to varied readers. Unlike promotional signs, which use functional specialization to persuade or attract customers, the notice prioritizes clarity and broad comprehension.

Although the semantic content is identical, the visual organization of the sign continues to reveal a linguistic hierarchy. Following Scollon and Scollon's (2003) concept of code preference, the Filipino version occupies the upper position, while the English translation appears beneath it. This arrangement indicates that Filipino remains the institution's principal communicative code, whereas English functions as an additional language that extends the reach of the message without displacing Filipino as the primary medium of communication.

Viewed through the lens of power dynamics, the sign demonstrates that duplicating multilingual information promotes inclusivity while preserving communicative hierarchy. Filipino occupies the preferred position because it serves the immediate linguistic community, whereas English broadens accessibility to bilingual and international readers. Rather than competing for authority, the two languages cooperate to ensure that institutional regulations are widely understood while maintaining the primacy of the local language.



Figure 14. Duplicating Multilingual Information in a Commercial Banking Sign

Figure 14 likewise exemplifies duplicating multilingual information, presenting the name of the financial institution in both Chinese and English. The Chinese characters identify the bank for Chinese-speaking clients, while the English version, "Philippine Savings Bank," communicates the same institutional identity to English-speaking readers. As in Figure 13, both languages convey equivalent semantic content, illustrating Reh's (2004) notion of duplicating multilingual information.

Unlike the fragmentary multilingual signs observed throughout Divisoria, where languages are assigned specialized communicative functions, this banking sign adopts complete duplication to accommodate a multilingual clientele. Financial institutions require consistent and accurate identification across diverse linguistic communities; consequently, bilingual presentation enhances accessibility while preserving institutional clarity. The duplicated information reflects the bank's recognition of the linguistic diversity characterizing the commercial environment surrounding Divisoria and neighboring Binondo.

The visual arrangement of the sign nevertheless establishes a subtle hierarchy. Consistent with Scollon and Scollon's (2003) concept of code preference, the Chinese characters occupy the upper position and appear first in the reading sequence, suggesting that Chinese functions as the preferred code. This arrangement likely reflects the historical and commercial influence of the Chinese community within the district and acknowledges the bank's intended clientele. English, meanwhile, broadens accessibility by serving as an internationally recognizable language associated with finance and professional communication.

From the perspective of power dynamics, the sign illustrates that linguistic authority is negotiated according to audience orientation rather than the symbolic prestige of English alone. Although English frequently functions as the language of commerce and institutional legitimacy elsewhere in Divisoria's linguistic landscape, the present sign accords visual priority to Chinese because of the sociolinguistic context in which it operates. This finding demonstrates that code preference is shaped not only by global language hierarchies but also by the demographic and commercial realities of the local community.

Therefore, Figures 13 and 14 show that duplication occurs in contexts requiring broad recognition or unambiguous communication, including institutional regulation and commercial banking. Even when semantic content is equivalent, spatial organization continues to establish code preference: Filipino is foregrounded in Figure 13, whereas Chinese is foregrounded in Figure 14. Duplication therefore promotes accessibility without eliminating context-specific visual hierarchies.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined power relations in the bilingual signs of Ylaya Street, Divisoria, by identifying language combinations, determining preferred codes, and classifying multilingual information. English–Filipino signs comprised 98% of the corpus, while bottom-up signs accounted for 36 of the 42 items. Although English appeared in every sign, Filipino was visually preferred in 62% of cases. Fragmentary multilingual information was the dominant pattern, showing that languages were assigned differentiated functions rather than used as complete equivalents. Across the qualitative examples, English indexed promotion, standardized commercial practice, professionalism, and institutional authority, whereas Filipino supported product identification, interpersonal engagement, and public regulation. The two duplicating signs occurred in regulatory and banking contexts in which broad recognition or semantic equivalence was especially useful.

These findings demonstrate that bilingual signage in Divisoria is a deliberate semiotic practice through which commercial and institutional actors negotiate accessibility and authority. Power is not produced solely through the numerical dominance of one language; it also emerges from visual salience, sign provenance, and the functional allocation of linguistic resources. The study therefore extends Philippine linguistic landscape research by integrating quantitative distribution with close analysis of code preference, inscription, and multilingual-information type.

The study is limited by its focus on a small, purposively bounded corpus from one street and by its reliance on researcher-led visual interpretation without interviews with sign producers or readers. The findings should therefore be understood as patterns within the sampled signs rather than as a complete account of Divisoria. Future research could compare multiple commercial districts, incorporate stakeholder interviews and reader-response data, and use independent coding to strengthen interpretive reliability. For practice, local authorities and businesses should consider signage that preserves immediate accessibility while representing the linguistic and cultural diversity of the communities they serve.

DECLARATION OF AI ASSISTANCE

This manuscript was prepared with the assistance of an AI language model for translation support, language editing, and structural reorganisation. The literature search, source selection, critical analysis, interpretation, and final verification of the content and references remain the author's responsibility.

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