



# Linguistic Landscapes of Commercial Buildings in College District: A Case Study of Hong Street

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**Abstract:** The study of linguistic landscapes is one of the hot topics in the interdisciplinary research of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. It focuses on the visual language phenomenon in public space, reflecting the local language policy and regional cultural characteristics. With the acceleration of urbanization and popularization of higher education in China, the demand for the development of college district is growing. The construction of linguistic landscapes in its commercial space is extremely important. Based on the special geographical location of college district, questionnaire survey and field investigation are used to collect data in this project. It analyzes and studies the usage rules and characteristics of linguistic landscapes in Hefei Hong Street, aiming to reveal its existing problems and put forward suggestions for improvement. The findings indicate that the linguistic landscapes on Hong Street exhibit diverse types and forms of different languages, alongside a pronounced commercial character. However, several problems have been identified, including physical damage to official signage, non-standard language use, spelling errors, etc. This study advocates for enhanced standardization in language use along Hong Street while emphasizing clarity in information presentation. It is positive to improve language governance ability of commercial buildings in college district.

**Keywords:** Hefei Hong Street, College District, Linguistic Landscape

## I. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Context

In 1997, Landry and Bourish first introduced the concept of “Linguistic Landscape” in *Journal of Social Psychology and Languages*. They defined it as “The language that appears on public street signs, billboards, place names, shop signs, and public signs on government buildings, which constitute the linguistic landscape of a territory, region, or city group<sup>[1]</sup>”. With the development of society and the progress of science and technology, the concept is constantly enriched, and the academic community has different opinions. Shohamy viewed the linguistic landscape as a medium for reconceptualizing public space and language policies within social systems, encompassing multidimensional elements such as language, image, sound, and their interactions with humans<sup>[2]</sup>. This broadens the original scope and deepens its essence. However, the concept of the linguistic landscape has been extensively studied and applied globally, its manifestations in specific regions and environments vary widely. This paper will take Hong Street in Hefei as an example to explore the unique linguistic landscape of this college district.

### 1.2 Significance of the Study

The commercial street is located at the intersection of Mengxi Road and Xuefu Road in the Modian Vocational Education City, Xinzhan District, Hefei, which is supported by several higher education institutions in the area. The street is adjacent to student dormitories and teaching areas, catering to the consumption needs of students. Moreover, Hong Street has tapped into the regional historical and cultural heritage to create a commercial district with a vintage charm. In March 2022, it was awarded the title of one of the third batch of Anhui's Characteristic Commercial Streets. As the sociolinguistic environment evolves, the types and connotations of linguistic landscapes are becoming increasingly diverse. In response to this, our project focuses on the study of the language landscape of Hongjie street. A detailed analysis of the official language landscape and the unofficial (private) language landscape reveals the diversity of language use and the rich level of cultural expression. Compared with previous studies, this study innovatively combined field investigation and questionnaire survey to deeply analyze the development status and actual application of the official and unofficial language landscape in school streets. The public (especially college students) are widely consulted on the cognition and impact evaluation of the school street language landscape. These research results not only provide valuable reference for the language landscape design of commercial buildings in other university parks, but also strongly promote the continuous optimization and development of the language landscape of the school area. It further enriches the connotation and extension of the sociolinguistic environment.

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1 Domestic Research Status

#### 2.1.1 Domestic Research Scope and Methodological Techniques

The field of linguistic landscape research in China is primarily on foreign language and Chinese language studies, with a more prominent number of research outcomes in the field of foreign language studies. Yu Weiqi (2016) concentrated on multilingual landscape research within the domain of foreign language studies, taking the



linguistic landscapes of Beijing's Wangjing and Shanghai's Gubei, two international metropolitan areas with a significant expatriate population, as the research subjects. The study emphasized the importance of language management and services, providing references for the current language planning in Korean expatriate communities, and indirectly reflecting the focus on improving the acceptability of linguistic landscapes<sup>[3]</sup>.

Field investigation methods are more common in early linguistic landscape research. Wang Mengjie (2020) ingeniously used digital imaging to empower field investigations, delving into Hefei's characteristic cultural blocks, focusing on the interaction between linguistic landscapes and communities. By capturing the dynamic evolution of language in space with intuitive images, she injected vitality into the study of regional cultural heritage<sup>[4]</sup>. Dai Zhaohui (2024) used borrowing methods at the lexical and syntactic levels to achieve cross-linguistic combinations, breaking traditional boundaries in the study of Shanghai's tourist landscape translation, and promoting multicultural exchange and mutual learning<sup>[5]</sup>. Wang Yali (2023) combined literature research with questionnaire surveys, anchoring the linguistic landscape of northern cities in the context of the Yangtze River Delta integration, reviewing historical documents and listening to public voices to analyze the internal relationship between regional development and language changes<sup>[6]</sup>.

### 2.1.2 Domestic Research Trends and Development

In recent years, domestic linguistic landscape research has shown a trend of diversification. Through research by Xiong Zhiyuan (2020), it was found that there is a relatively high amount of linguistic landscape research in Hefei's Gubei Street<sup>[7]</sup>. The number of documents is in a steady growth phase, with a sharp increase in 2020, and a second research boom in 2022, with a 69.23% increase in the number of publications compared to 2021. The theoretical foundation mainly includes place semiotics theory, cultural capital theory, and multimodal theory proposed by Xia Le (2020), and it shows a trend of multi-angle cross-research<sup>[8]</sup>, involving urban image, language services, and education. However, the current theories used in linguistic landscape research are mostly migrated from interdisciplinary perspectives, lacking representative theories specifically applicable to linguistic landscapes. The research focus is gradually shifting from micro-level language features to macro-level issues, such as multilingual rights, ethnic language vitality, and spatial dimensions. Overall, the number of related studies is still insufficient, and a systematic and coherent research system has not yet been formed. In the future, linguistic landscape research will further conduct interdisciplinary theoretical research and use computer communication technology to monitor and mine a large amount of linguistic landscape data in real-time, achieving long-term development.

## 2.2 Foreign Research Status

### 2.2.1 Foreign Research Scope, Methods and Technologies

Tong(2020) highlighted the official characteristics of Singapore's linguistic landscape, emphasizing the quadrilingual formula as a reflection of the country's official multilingualism. This formula, while promoting the four official languages, also excludes non-official languages, mirroring the social context of Singapore's linguistic policy<sup>[9]</sup>.

The relationship between space environment and language landscape is a key area of interest for experts and scholars. Iye et al.(2023) conducted a study in Maluku Province using participant observation and in-depth interviews. They found that language use in the province is highly diverse which was influenced by location, environment, and religious culture. This diversity demonstrates a strong correlation between community identity and language use<sup>[10]</sup>.

Wroblewski (2020) used linguistic anthropology to analyze the multilingual phenomenon in the language landscape of the Amazon city of Turner, and found that language landscapes such as public signs reflect ideology, identity construction, group identity and the rights represented by them. There is a close relationship between language landscape and language policy, and language landscape can reflect the specific situation of language policy implementation to a large extent<sup>[11]</sup>.

Among the main analysis methods, quantitative analysis is mostly seen in the early language landscape research. It calculates the sign language of each region, records the frequency of use of various languages, and analyzes it according to the population distribution to infer the vitality of regional language groups. The main problem of this quantitative research method is that it is difficult to define the scope of investigation, the unit of analysis and the type of label. Ben-Rafael proposed to conduct a study by sampling representative areas and signs, and roughly divide these signs into official and private categories<sup>[12]</sup> according to their owners.

The main feature of qualitative analysis is to explore and understand the deep meaning of non-quantitative human behaviors, such as experience and emotion, based on non-statistical data, such as words, images, sounds, etc. Coluzzi (2017) focused on the use of Italian in shopping centers. After a simple statistical analysis, random interviews were conducted to analyze the reasons for customer preference by means of qualitative analysis<sup>[13]</sup>.

Ethnographic methods are derived from anthropology, which means that researchers use observation, recording and interview to collect all the information about the subject as comprehensively as possible. This underlying social stratification is mainly due to increased social mobility and the prevalence of consumerism.

### 2.2.2 Foreign Research and Development Trend

Compared with China, the development history of foreign language landscape is longer, mainly divided into three stages: early germination stage (1997-2011), stable growth stage (2012-2018), and rapid development stage (2019-2021). In terms of international research achievements, its research theoretical perspectives are relatively diverse. These include, but are not limited to, place semiotics theory and the language choice theory of public signs. Additionally, it encompasses the SPEAKING communication model and the principles of language landscape construction. The development of research perspective is similar to that of China, and it opens up new research perspectives with the changes of The Times. The research topics are relatively broad, with high attention paid to multilingualism and multiculturalism, identity

construction and cultural identity, language landscape and language teaching, virtual space language landscape and other research hotspots. However, there are still few emerging research fields such as the influence of language landscape on second language acquisition, layering phenomenon, and rural language landscape.

The development of research methods is more difficult. Researchers concerned with how individuals experience and interact with linguistic landscapes have added a temporal dimension to “visual” data by, for example, taking manual photographs (Troyer&Szabo 2017), leaving the ability to collect and analyze data largely limited by available resources. However, after the improvement of the current use of views and GPS positioning technology, the development trend is good. The study argues that more attention should be paid to sampling (Soukup 2020) and the use of demographic data and geographic information systems (Lu, Martens & Sayer 2022) when selecting study sites.

The uneven development of digitalization affects the digital transmission of some languages, leading to the risk of losing their platforms. The international language landscape, while well developed, faces challenges and requires multi-faceted cooperation to maintain linguistic diversity and global equality.

### **III. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research objects**

Hong street is named after the Chinese character “黄”. In the cultural context, its environmental relationship, spatial boundary and architectural space design show the relationship of mutual dependence, symbiosis and mutual within the university park<sup>[14]</sup>. This feature sets up an ideal platform for the study of linguistic landscapes of commercial buildings in Hong street.

This paper takes the linguistic landscapes of Hong street as the research object. It mainly focuses on the official linguistic landscapes and the unofficial (private) linguistic landscapes. The official linguistic landscapes mainly include public road signs, signs on official buildings, bulletin boards, and the publicity boards of Hong street, while the private linguistic landscapes mainly include shop signs, billboards, graffiti and other publicity signs.

#### **3.2 Data Collection Methods**

This paper primarily employs field investigation and questionnaire survey methods. Field investigation allows for an in-depth study of the social context of the research subject. It provides a detailed understanding of the specific multi-modal linguistic landscapes in the college district at a micro level. Additionally, this method enables continuous observation of changes in the research subjects over an extended period. This helps to track the evolution of representative language landscapes in the typical Hong Street college district. The questionnaire survey method is also utilized in this paper, complementing the field investigation. It efficiently gathers a large volume of data, offering a macro view of the interaction between linguistic landscapes and the social environment. The broad coverage of the research data ensures that the findings are highly representative.

The study was conducted from October to November 2024, using a field investigation method to photograph and categorize the street. The contents of the photographs were classified based on two aspects: language and character. The objective was to analyze and examine the development and utilization of the linguistic landscapes in Hong Street through the collection, organization, and analysis of the photographic content.

Additionally, from September to November, the study utilized a questionnaire approach to gain insights into the public’s (primarily college students’) perceptions and understanding of the linguistic landscapes of Hong Street, along with their views on its role, impact, and surrounding measures. Based on the collected data, suggestions were proposed for modifying the utilization of the linguistic landscape in Hong Street. A total of 1,063 photographs were taken during the photography session, of which 897 were valid samples in different languages.

### **IV. Results and Discussion**

#### **4.1 The Impact of Surrounding Environment on the Linguistic Landscapes of Hong Street**

Hong Street is located at the intersection of Mengxi Road and Xuefu Road, Xinzhan District, Hefei. It is surrounded by several universities. According to the results of the survey, the respondent group is very representative. The sample comprised 354 respondents from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, including the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and overseas regions. In Chinese questionnaire, 90.35% of respondents aged 18-30 and 92.86% of the same age group in the English questionnaire were relatively similar. According to Table 1, the overall impression of these respondents on the official and unofficial linguistic landscapes is that they are “Rich Cultural Heritage”, “Modern Fashion”, and “Clear Information”. According to Table 2, Respondents generally believe that the official linguistic landscape focuses on “students’ cultural background and social status” (78.95%) and “Language Demand in Social Sectors and Job Market” (70.76%), while the non-official linguistic landscape pays more attention to “students’ cultural background and social status” (79.82%) and “Language Demand in Social Sectors and Job Market” (71.93%). All these reflect that the linguistic landscape of Hong Street is greatly influenced by the surrounding environment. Due to the differences in cultural backgrounds of students in different regions, these linguistic landscapes focus more on student preferences to maintain sufficient benefits and good impressions. Finally, the survey results show that “self-created creative expression” (such as graffiti) is considered to be the place that best reflects linguistic diversity (81.29%) followed by “public art installation and sculpture” (73.68%). All these reflect the characteristics of the Hong Street linguistic landscapes catering to the development of the surrounding university park and the innovation of the linguistic landscapes.

Table 1 the Impression of Official and Non-Official linguistic landscapes in Hong Street ( characteristics )

	Chinese% Questionnaire	English% Questionnaire
Rich Cultural Heritage	19/15.87	23/16
Modern Fashion	19.38/17.13	16/16
Clear Information	15.44/16.93	18/22
Multilingual Friendly	11.28/13.35	23/18
Unique Creativity	13.59/15.67	12/13
Well-Maintained	12.32/13.15	2/11
Unified Style	8.31/7.44	6/2
Other	0.68/0.46	0/2

Table2 Emphasis table of official/non-official linguistic landscapes of Hong Street (impact of the social environment)

	Chinese% Questionnaire	English% Questionnaire
Allocation of Educational Resources and Teacher Training.	13/13	14/12
Language Standard in Social Sectors and Job Market.	17/18	16/21
Students' Cultural Background and Social Status.	19/20	16/21
Language Requirements for International Cooperation and Exchange.	14/15	16/20
Political Factors and National Ideology.	10/9	12/6
Local Acceptance of Multilingual Education.	14/13	16/12
Innovation and Development Needs in Language Education.	12/9	10/6
Other	1/18	0/2

#### 4.2 The Influence of Hong Street's Linguistic Landscape on its Surrounding Environment

According to Table 3, the Chinese questionnaire displays that “Promoting the teaching and transmission of specific languages in the local area” was considered by the respondents to be the most important development measure (3.6 points, ranked first). Then “Development of laws and policies for the protection and promotion of minority or regional languages” (3.26 points, ranked second) and “Promotion of local regional languages in public places and in the media” (3.16 points, ranked third). Furthermore, it shows that the first is “the promotion of local regional languages in public places and the media” (3.57, ranking first), followed by “the development of laws and policies for the protection and promotion of minority or regional languages” and “the promotion of multilingualism in the business sector” (both 2.24 points). It can be seen that no matter which survey results are, the respondents emphasize the protection and promotion of multilingualism. The promotion of multilingualism will definitely have a greater impact on the surrounding environment if the street can achieve the above improvements. According to the question, “What are the benefits of the linguistic landscapes of Hong Street for the development of surrounding universities?” This result shows that the proportion of the three options of “cultural bridge”, “innovation platform” and “social space” is basically the same. It can be seen that the impact of the linguistic landscapes of Hong Street on the surrounding environment is multifaceted. Based on the aforementioned two aspects, it can be concluded that the characteristics of the linguistic landscape architecture in Hong Street are situated within the college district.

Table3 the development of the linguistic landscapes in Hong Street (suggestions for the development)

	Chinese% Questionnaire	English% Questionnaire
Promote the teaching and transmission of local languages.	3.63	1.42
Formulate laws and policies to protect and promote minority or regional languages.	3.26	2.14
Promote local languages in public places and media.	3.16	3.57
Encourage the use of multiple languages in the commercial sector.	2.24	2.14

Increase the course time for local languages in the school education system.	1.85	0.71
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### 4.3 Linguistic Landscapes in Hong Street: Word Usage

The construction of linguistic landscapes is an important part of social public space. It reflects a city's cultural exchange, mutual learning, regional connotations, and language management capabilities<sup>[15]</sup>. Table 4 indicates that Chinese characters predominate. Firstly, Pure Chinese character usage is 57.14%. Secondly, the most common are the combination of “Chinese characters + letters” at 31.25%, predominantly English and most of the letters come from English words. Lastly, the usage of simple letters and the combination of “Chinese characters + special symbols” accounted for a relatively low proportion. They accounted for 0.89% and 1.79% respectively. To sum up, the usage of texts in this Street is more concentrated. It is mainly characterized by Chinese characters and “Chinese characters + letters” character combination. This carries forward the dominant position of Chinese, enhances the self-confidence of national culture, and reflects the high level of internationalization of Hong Street business district.

As shown in Table 5, there are many types of text used in the private linguistic landscapes. The main form of writing is Chinese characters. Pure Chinese characters were used as frequent as 51.83%, assisted by other characters. For example, Korean, Japanese, alphabet and other forms of language. Additionally, numbers, symbols, icons, and other forms of expression are also included. These present the phenomenon of innovation and trend among college students. Among the combination forms, the combination of “Chinese characters + letters” accounted for the highest proportion of 12.70%. The letters are partly from English brand names and partly from pop culture terms like ‘DIY and APP’. It is beneficial to the international image of Hong Street and attract consumers. Overall, Hong Street shops’ marketing strategies favor personalized and differentiated consumer experiences. It is more consistent with the consumption concept of young groups.

On the whole, official linguistic landscapes in Hong Street emphasize standardization. The combination of private linguistic landscapes is relatively diversified. Both sides are dominated by Chinese characters, which promotes the inheritance and development of local culture. But there are problems found during the field trip. Many official linguistic landscape elements in Hong Street show signs of wear and require timely repair. In the private linguistic landscape, a notable issue arises from the amalgamation of Chinese characters, pinyin (used for transcribing Mandarin), and the English alphabet. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of Chinese characters with Roman script and English text is particularly problematic. These may cause some confusion in the understanding of foreign tourists<sup>[7]</sup>.

Table 4 Official Linguistic Landscapes in Hong Street: Word Usage Proportions (diversification and Internationalization)

Category	Type	Frequency	Valid %
Single	Chinese	64	57.14
	Pinyin	1	0.89
	Special Symbols	3	2.68
	Letters	1	0.89
Double	Chinese + Pinyin	3	2.68
	Chinese + Special Symbol	2	1.79

Table 5 Private Linguistic Landscapes in Hong Street: Word Usage (commercialization)

Category	Type	Frequency	Valid %	
Single	Korean	6	1.69	
	Chinese	184	51.83	
	Japanese	1	0.28	
	Special Symbol	1	0.28	
	Self-created Symbol	2	0.56	
	Letters/English Words	11	3.10	
Double	Chinese + Korean	3	0.85	
	Chinese + Pinyin	22	6.20	
	Chinese + Japanese	1	0.28	
	Chinese + Numbers	34	9.58	
	Chinese + Icons	8	2.25	
	Chinese + Self-created Symbol	6	1.69	
	Chinese + Letters	44	12.39	
	English Words + Icons	2	0.56	
	Triple	Chinese + Numbers + QR Code	1	0.28
		Chinese + Korean + Pinyin	1	0.28
Chinese + Numbers + Special		8	2.25	
Chinese + Numbers + Letters		9	2.54	

Quadruple	Chinese + Letters + Pinyin	3	0.85
	Chinese + Korean + Letters + Numbers	1	0.28
	Chinese + Numbers + Pinyin + Special Symbol	1	0.28
	Chinese + Numbers + Self-created + Letters	1	0.28
	Chinese + Numbers + Letters + Special Symbol	4	1.13
	Chinese + Letters + Pinyin + Japanese Romaji	1	0.28

#### 4.4 Linguistic Landscapes in Hong Street: Language Usage

Table 6 indicates that the official linguistic landscapes of Hong Street are categorized into four types: monolingual, bilingual, trilingual, and multilingual. Chinese is the dominant language, constituting 64.60% of the language use. The content is divided into three main categories: core socialist values, education and humanities related topics and public safety tips. This highlights the official language policy's emphasis on cultural heritage and mainstream views.

In terms of bilingual combination, "Chinese + English" is the most common, accounting for 30.09%. It mainly contains safety reminder information to ensure clear communication of information and reduce safety accidents caused by language barriers. Trilingual and multilingual usage accounts for 4.42%, which are mostly used on official signs such as guide signs. This provides information and guidance to foreign visitors and helps people with different language backgrounds to understand the layout of Hong Street, facilitating their travel and activities.

Table 7 indicates that in private linguistic landscapes, Chinese accounts for 79.82% of the main language advantage. It mainly appears on the plaque of snack shops, mostly reflecting new media or traditional culture. There are many combinations of bilingualism, such as "Chinese + Japanese", "Chinese + Korean", and "Chinese + English". The semantic information of these combinations is not strictly corresponding, but mainly serves to highlight the goods fit with the shop. The main reason is that most "designers" will make their signs more humanized and personalized to make the goods more attractive<sup>[16]</sup>. Its core purpose is to attract young consumers and show the fashion and vitality of the brand.

Among these combinations, the "Chinese + English" combination is used more frequently, at 11.8%, while the "Chinese + Japanese" combination is used the least, at 0.59%. Overall, in terms of language use, the linguistic landscapes of Hong Street show a certain trend of multilingualism, aligning with the trend of globalization and cultural integration. This is conducive to language learning and communication, and fully embodies the vitality of Hong Street language. However, there are still some non-standard language usage phenomena in private linguistic landscapes, such as spelling errors of English words and semantic information asymmetry, which may cause foreign tourists to misinterpret the semantics.

Table 6 Official Linguistic Landscapes(Word Usage)

Table 7 Private Linguistic Landscapes(Information and Interaction)

Language	Category	Frequency	Valid %
Monolingual	Chinese	73	64.60
	English	1	0.88
Bilingual	Chinese + English	34	30.09
	Chinese + English + Korean	1	0.88
Trilingual	Chinese + English + Korean	1	0.88
	Chinese + English + Japanese + Korean	4	3.54

Language	Category	Frequency	Valid %
Monolingual	Korean	6	1.78
	Chinese	269	79.82
	Japanese	1	0.30
Bilingual	English	13	3.86
	Chinese + Japanese	2	0.59
	Chinese + English	40	11.87
Trilingual	Chinese + Korean	6	1.78

## V. Conclusion

Hong Street is located in the center of each university. As the cohesion point of the language and culture of the surrounding universities. Through a comprehensive understanding of diverse cultures, it becomes possible to effectively integrate cultural essences from around the globe into the linguistic landscape of it. Furthermore, by fully leveraging the cultural diversity present within university parks, we can significantly enrich the cultural fabric of Hong Street.

By investigating the linguistic landscapes of Hong Street, this paper aims to explore the rules and characteristics of the use of them in the commercial clusters of college district. The research shows that the Hong Street linguistic landscapes play a positive role in promoting regional cultural heritage and meeting the needs of people with different cultural backgrounds. However, there are also some other problems. For example, the non-standardized language use in private linguistic landscapes may create obstacles for foreign tourists' understanding. This conclusion is combined with the results of the

questionnaire and field observation. (1) It is suggested that the optimization of the linguistic landscapes of the Hong Street should attach importance to both the clarity and diversity of information as well as the accuracy and standardization of language expression. (2) The construction and development of the linguistic landscapes should fully consider the characteristics of the high college district. On one hand, it should show and carry forward Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture. On the other hand, it should meet the needs of young students. Because the design of them should not be confined merely to the functionality of information transmission. It should be aimed at its role in social interaction as well<sup>[4]</sup>. (3) It is suggested that the planning and management of Hong Street should attach importance to the functions of cultural exchange and social integration. (4) The future development strategy should be centered on strengthening the standardization of language use. It should constantly explore and innovate the linguistic landscapes design. This will help better serve the teachers, students and tourists in the college district and promote the further development of language diversity and cultural inclusiveness.

**Acknowledgments:** We acknowledge the support of our various colleagues of the Anhui University of Chinese Medicine, for their grateful comments and insights in improving the paper. This research work was supported by the Major social science projects of College Students' Innovative Entrepreneurial Training Plan Program (Grant No.: S202410369158).

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