Secrets Hidden on Commercial Signs: A Case Study of Chinese Restaurant Fronts in Prague

Tereza Slaměníková

Grapholingistics in the 21st Century, June 8-10 2022, Paris
introduction

- previous research: naming practices of Chinese restaurants in Prague (155 restaurants, August 2020)
  - outdoor signage is characterized by language and script plurality: multilingual combinations (code mixing, cf. Huebner, 2009) of the generic and specific part, e.g., Čínská restaurace Jin Man Lou 金满楼

- an extensive use of sinograms on restaurant fronts as an interesting sociolinguistic phenomenon
  - ethnically and linguistically homogenous Czechia
  - Chinese community in Prague/ Czechia: small and young in age (Sluka et al., 2018); geographically dispersed, and not very communal (Horálek et al., 2017)
    - sinograms in Czech public space

- goal: to describe the status of sinograms on the Chinese restaurant fronts
  - signs that were located on the restaurant fronts and exposed to a public (street) view (i.e., 16 restaurants in shopping centers, buildings and underground passages not included)
Chinese restaurant fronts and linguistic landscape

- one specific segment of the LL
  - (initial) classification by Barni & Barga (2009) → **external** position; location: central and peripheral **urban areas**; domain: **public**; subcategory: **catering**

- restaurant signs = icons of a commercial establishment
  - highly competitive environment
  - two basic principles that structure LL (Ben-Rafael, 2009):
    - “presentation-of-self” and “good-reasons”

- language choice
  - Spolsky (2009) defines three conditions: 1) language you know; 2) language which can be read by the people you expect to read it; 3) your own language or a language with which you wish to be identified
  - advertising: demonstrates the fine interplay of “presumed reader’s condition” and “symbolic value condition” (Spolsky, 2009)
  - “impersonal multilingualism” (Edelman, 2009), “metaphorical code-switching” (Hult, 2009)
sinograms and location

1. upper wall signs
2. overhanging signs
3. window signs
4. other big-size signs
5. Chinese entrance gates
6. menus:
   - dishes or their types/ restaurant name
7. smaller Chinese artefacts: lanterns, statues, vases, knot decorations
8. business statement on the door
1. upper wall signs
2. overhanging signs
3. window signs
4. other big-size signs
5. Chinese entrance gates
6. menus:
   - dishes or their types/ restaurant name
7. smaller Chinese artifacts: lanterns, statues, vases, knot decorations
8. business statement on the door
number of signs with sinograms

- items visible from a street vantage point
  - upper wall signs, overhanging signs, window signs, gate signs, other big-size signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>one</th>
<th>31</th>
<th>wall sign</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>overhanging sign</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>other</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>wall + overhanging sign</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>wall + window sign</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>two wall signs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>other</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three +</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>wall + overhanging sign + xxx</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>other</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

120 (139) over 85%

- two perspectives: information arrangement + graphic design

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sinograms and information arrangement

- 4 types of information
  1. restaurant name (111)
  2. (only as) a part of logo (3)
  3. description (8)
  4. wish (5)

- to what extent is the information provided in sinograms transmitted in Czech? or at least in English?

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1. restaurant names

- specific term (53), specific & generic term (50+8)

a. GENERIC TERM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Czech equivalent</th>
<th>49</th>
<th>+ attribute čínský</th>
<th>46</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no generic term</td>
<td></td>
<td>without</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English equivalent (only)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>+ attribute</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or China</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese or China</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without</td>
<td></td>
<td>without</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>no generic term</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(generics with attribute „Chinese“ in Czech/ English occur also in restaurant names without the generic term in sinograms)
### b. SPECIFIC TERM

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pinyin</strong></td>
<td><strong>67</strong></td>
<td>fully identical</td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Czech</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td>partly identical</td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td>fully identical</td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>partly identical</td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proper name</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td>Pinyin</td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>translated constituent</td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>other</td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tian Jin** 天津
New Peking 新北京
S'chuan 四川

**Fu Da** 福达

**Leknín** 蓮花
(‘lotus flower’)

**Moon** 明月樓
(‘bright’ + ‘moon’ + ‘building’)

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**b. SPECIFIC TERM**

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**“Hidden Secrets”**

places with a certain ambiance:
- ‘home, house, family’ 家: *Jia Jia Fu* 家家福 (2x 家 + ‘happiness’)

precious things: *Jin Yu Lou* 金玉楼 (‘gold’ + ‘jade’ + ‘building’)

positive expectations:
- pleasure, joy 乐: *Jia Le Yuan* 家乐园 (‘home’ + ‘pleasure’ + ‘garden’)
- happiness, good fortune: *Ke Lai Fu* 客来福 (‘guest’ + ‘come’ + ‘happiness’)
- prosperity, abundance, wealth: *Jin Xin* 金鑫 (‘gold’ + ‘prosperity’), *Ding Feng* 鼎丰 (‘tripod’ + ‘plentiful’), *Cai Shen* 财神 (‘god of wealth’),
- other: *Mei Xin* 美心 (‘beautiful’ + ‘heart’), *Li De* 利德 (‘benefit’ + ‘virtue’)

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**Transmitted ideas**

plant motifs (8)
- garden (4+1)
- nice smell, pearl, happiness, harmony

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- spatial organization
  - upper wall signs
  - vertical writing

- colour choices

- styles of Chinese writing

**WALL SIGNS LAYOUT**
- part of logo (12)
- horizontal layout (38)
- vertical layout (25)
- other (8)
WALL SIGNS LAYOUT

- part of logo (12)
- horizontal layout (38)
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- other (8)
WALL SIGNS LAYOUT
• part of logo (12)
• horizontal layout (38)
• vertical layout (25)
• other (8)
part of logo

H1-a  汉字

H1-b  汉字

H2-a  汉字
  or left-right reversed

H2-b  汉字
  or left-right reversed

V1  汉字 (汉字)

WALL SIGNS LAYOUT
  •  part of logo (12)
  •  horizontal layout (38)
  •  vertical layout (25)
  •  other (8)

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vertical writing

overhanging signs (71):
18 signs with vertical writing
   centre (14), right side (4)

window signs (26):
8 restaurants with vertical window writing
   repeated on more windows

gate signs (7)
   one couplet 对联 (a pair of lines of poetry)
colour choices

- sinograms: yellow (orange), white or red
- combinations: red + yellow and/or white
- background: red
- window: red sinograms

styles of Chinese writing

- almost 60% semi-cursive script 行书
- over 30% regular script 楷书
- clerical script (1), seal script (3)
- traditional sinograms (8); both (4)
conclusion

− sinograms and structuration principles
  − “presentation-of-self”: a very effective signal that attracts attention and, at first glance, sets the restaurant in contrast with surrounding establishments (! geographic dispersion of restaurants)
  − “good-reasons”: popularity of sinograms, occurrence on multiple signs, layout patterns, colours with positive connotations (+ menus, symbolic artifacts)

− sinograms as a language choice: “symbolic-value condition”
  − limited transmission of information
  − often easily visible and eye-catching (about 85% of restaurants)
  − decorative style of writing, “Chinese” colours

− a set of aspects how sinograms contribute to shaping the situation
  − part of the signature: restaurant specializes in ethnic Chinese food


Photo documentation: Michaela Frydrychová, Terezie Kadlecová (students at the Department of Asian studies, involved in the faculty project IGA2020)
Thank you for your attention.

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