

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY, OR CHINESE DOMINANCE? LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS ON SHOP SIGNS IN CLAYTON SUBURB, MELBOURNE

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ABSTRACT

In multicultural communities, multilingual shop signs serve as visible representations of diversity and markers of community presence. At the same time, they reflect underlying power relations and broader sociocultural dynamics. The purpose of this study is to uncover the sociolinguistic realities in an Australian suburban context using linguistic landscape analysis (LLA). The study analyses 70 shop signs located in the suburb of Clayton, Melbourne, Australia and was conducted in three steps. The first step is to codify each data based on its language use, whether it is mono-or multilingual, and what languages are used in each shop sign. The second step was to analyse the data using systemic functional linguistics principles, focusing on multimodal detail including texts, images, and colours. The final analysis was to relate the data to the current Australian suburban socio-cultural and linguistic contexts. The main hypothesis of this study concerns the sociolinguistic prominence of the Chinese community in Clayton, evidenced by the prevalence of Chinese-dominant shop signage. The salience of Chinese-language signage not only fosters familiarity and a sense of belonging among Chinese residents but also functions as an index of community presence and symbolic power. Overall, the findings suggest that linguistic landscapes function as meaningful indicators of community composition and social presence in multicultural urban spaces. The prominence of Chinese-language signage in Clayton demonstrates how language use in public space both reflects demographic realities and contributes to the construction of belonging, accessibility, and community identity within the suburb's sociolinguistic environment.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, linguistic landscape, shop signs, Australian suburb

ABSTRAK

Dalam komunitas multikultural, papan tanda toko multibahasa berfungsi sebagai representasi yang terlihat dari keberagaman sekaligus penanda keberadaan suatu komunitas. Pada saat yang sama, tanda-tanda tersebut juga merefleksikan relasi kuasa yang mendasari serta dinamika sosiokultural yang lebih luas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap realitas sosiolinguistik dalam konteks pinggiran kota di Australia melalui pendekatan analisis lanskap linguistik (LLA). Studi ini menganalisis 70 papan tanda toko yang berlokasi di kawasan Clayton, Melbourne, Australia, dan dilakukan melalui tiga tahapan. Tahap pertama adalah pengodean data berdasarkan penggunaan bahasa, yaitu mengklasifikasikan apakah tanda tersebut bersifat monolingual atau multibahasa serta mengidentifikasi bahasa-bahasa yang digunakan. Tahap kedua adalah analisis data dengan menggunakan prinsip-prinsip linguistik fungsional sistemik, dengan fokus pada aspek multimodal seperti teks, gambar, dan warna. Tahap terakhir adalah mengaitkan temuan dengan konteks sosiokultural dan linguistik pinggiran kota di Australia saat ini. Hipotesis utama penelitian ini berkaitan dengan menonjolnya peran sosiolinguistik komunitas Tionghoa di Clayton, yang ditunjukkan melalui dominasi papan tanda toko berbahasa Tionghoa. Keberadaan yang menonjol dari tanda berbahasa Tionghoa tidak hanya menumbuhkan rasa familiaritas dan keterikatan bagi penduduk Tionghoa, tetapi juga berfungsi sebagai indeks keberadaan komunitas serta kekuatan simbolik. Secara keseluruhan, temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa lanskap linguistik berfungsi sebagai indikator yang bermakna terhadap komposisi komunitas dan kehadiran sosial dalam ruang urban multikultural. Dominasi papan tanda berbahasa Tionghoa di Clayton menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan bahasa dalam ruang publik tidak hanya mencerminkan realitas demografis, tetapi juga berkontribusi dalam membentuk rasa memiliki, aksesibilitas, dan identitas komunitas dalam lingkungan sosiolinguistik setempat.

Kata kunci: sosiolinguistik, lanskap linguistik, papan toko, daerah pinggiran Australia

INTRODUCTION

The study of the linguistic landscape (LL), broadly defined as the presence and use of language in public signage, has gained increasing attention in sociolinguistics as it offers insights into how languages interact, coexist, and compete in multilingual settings (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Rungswang, 2018). Gorter (2013) defined LL within the scope of observing and analysing signage in public areas, including shop signs, advertisements, street signs, and official notices. Not only do these signs serve a purpose to aid locals in navigating their way in the areas, but these public signs also reflect identity, power relations, and socio-economic structures within a community. In multilingual and multicultural societies, LL often reveal the extent to which different linguistic groups are represented and recognised in public space

(Gorter & Cenoz, 2025). The visibility of certain languages over others may indicate patterns of dominance, marginalisation, or accommodation, shaped by factors such as migration, economic influence, and government policy (Sarot & Kraisame, 2025; Zoumpalidis & Şimşek, 2025). In a multicultural and multilingual environment, LL studies provide a valuable lens through which broader social phenomena, including globalisation, mobility, and cultural negotiation, can be examined. This paper explores the linguistic landscape of Clayton, Melbourne, Australia, with particular attention to the distribution and functions of languages displayed in public signage. The study aims to uncover the underlying sociolinguistic patterns and power dynamics that shape the area by observing the LL. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how language in public space reflects and constructs the social realities of contemporary communities.

The literature review of the current study focuses on previous studies that discuss two themes, which are multiculturalism and ethnolinguistics. Studies from the multiculturalism strand identified how multicultural and multilingual societies shape the LL dynamic. Rohmah and Wijayanti (2023) analysed the LL in Kupang and identified how LL reflects the complex interplay between tradition and globalisation, as while Indonesian is prevalent in the LL due to its significance as the *lingua franca* in a multicultural setting, other languages like Javanese, Timorese, and English reflect how these different cultures commodify their languages in bottom-up signs to nurture their traditional flair and attract potential customers. A comparative study on Koreatown and Islamic Street in Shin-Okubo, Tokyo, suggested that while the dominance of Korean in Koreatown signs is a staple of language commodification related to the Korean culture boom in Japan, and the use of English, accompanied with a wide array of languages in Islamic Street as a showcase of a diverse Islamic community in the region, indicates the shift from ethnolinguistic homogeneity to a more multicultural and diverse multilingual landscape in Japan due to the rise of foreign immigrants arriving in the country (Nambu & Ono, 2025).

Scholarships on the ethnolinguistic landscape concluded that LL serves multiple functions that facilitate the ethnolinguistic landscape in the area. Qulub et al. (2026), who analysed the LL of worship places in Lamongan, suggested that the three languages observed in worship places, which are Indonesian, Javanese, and Arabic, serve different informative functions, which are the symbol of unity, identity, modernity, and preservation of traditional values of these places. In a linguistically and ethnically diverse environment, the commodification of a language can serve as a constructive strategy for promoting and showcasing its cultural values. A study that analyses the multilingual LL in Badung Smart Heritage Market, Bali, concluded that the use of English, Indonesian, and Balinese script is an ideal endeavour to boost its cultural awareness and helps introduce Balinese culture to both local and foreign tourists of different cultures (Purnawati et al., 2025). From an ethnolinguistic perspective, LL can also serve to assert identity representation of its respective culture. An analysis of the LL of shop signs in Haldon Street of Sydney, Australia, argued that while English remained the predominant language used in the area, Arabic is used solely in religious domains, which acts as a showcase of Islamic identity amidst the complex ethnolinguistic landscape of Australia.

While much of the existing literature has focused on issues such as multilingual representation and cultural visibility, there remains a gap in examining how LL operates as a site where economic, political, and sociocultural power is negotiated and displayed. This includes, for instance, how dominant groups may leverage language to assert influence or shape the identity of a given space. Hence, the current study aims to fill in the gap of the previous studies using the LL situation in Clayton, by answering the following research questions:

1. What languages are represented in the linguistic landscape of street signage in Clayton?
2. What social, power-related, and ethnolinguistic dynamics are indexed by the languages present in Clayton's street signage?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a linguistic landscape approach to analyse 70 public signs located alongside Clayton Road. The location was chosen due to its strategic and economic value, as the road consists of a train station and numerous businesses. The data were collected from commercial establishments, including shops, restaurants, and service businesses such as hair salons, internet cafes, and health services. All the data were publicly available and personally documented. The initial stage of analysis involved classifying the signs according to the languages used, distinguishing between monolingual and multilingual signage. This categorisation allows observable patterns of language usage to emerge within the dataset. To further refine the analysis, selected signs were examined through the framework of systemic functional

linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Webster, 2009), with particular attention to micro-level semiotic features such as texts, images, font style, size, and colours and its meaning. These elements were analysed to explore their potential communicative effects on readers. Finally, the findings were contextualised within the broader Australian sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic landscape, enabling the study to reveal underlying dynamics of multiculturalism, linguistic diversity, and power relations present in Australian society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 70 signages identified, a total of eight languages is represented in Clayton, Melbourne, Australia: Chinese, English, Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. Most of the signage is multilingual, comprising 58 multilingual signs and 12 monolingual signs. The multilingual signage featured the following language combinations: Chinese–English, Greek–Italian–English, Indonesian–English, Japanese–English, Korean–English, and Vietnamese–English. Out of the 58 multilingual signs identified, Chinese–English combinations were the most prevalent, accounting for 40 instances. Korean–English ranked second with 9 signs, while both Indonesian–English and Japanese–English appeared in 3 cases each. Additionally, 2 Vietnamese–English signs were recorded, along with a single trilingual sign combining Greek, Italian, and English. The monolingual signs consisted of monolingual English and Chinese, with 11 signs in English and one sign in Chinese. With the majority of the signs being multilingual, this finding indicates the diversity of the people living in the Clayton suburb. From an LL point of view, multilingual signs reflect the languages' respective cultures (Yavuz et al., 2024). For example, Chinese – English multilingual signs using Chinese characters, or Indonesian – English signs mixing Indonesian words with English, signify the authenticity of the business place they are operating. Additionally, multilingual signage is often strategically used by businesses to appeal to specific ethnolinguistic groups and increase accessibility, thereby attracting customers from those communities (Sarot & Kraisame, 2025). The analysis focuses on three main LLs used in Clayton, which are the Chinese – English language pair, followed by the other language pairs and the monolingual signs used in Clayton.

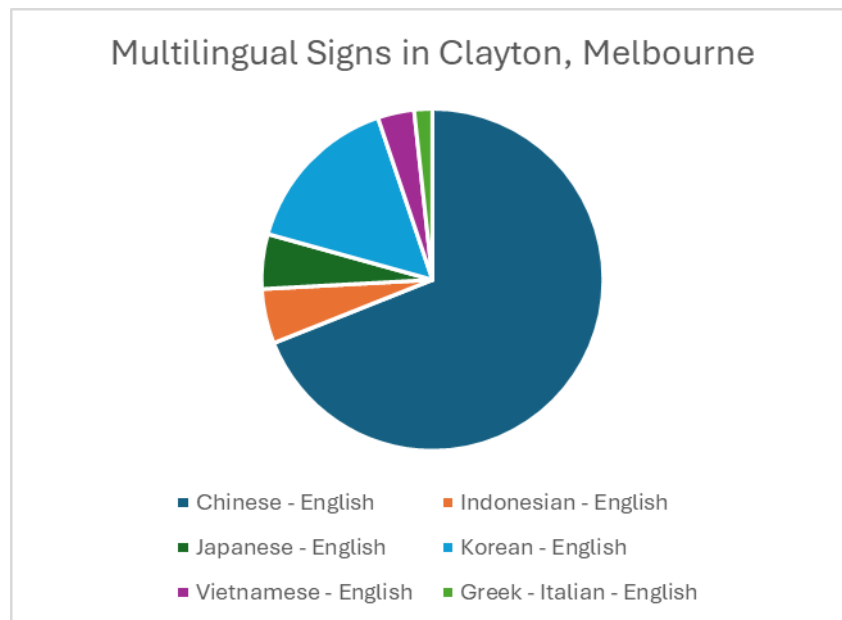


Fig. 1. An overview of multilingual signs in Clayton, Melbourne

a. Chinese dominance in the Chinese – English language pair

Type of sign	Quantity
Shops	8
Restaurants	15
Services	7
Food vendors	10

The Chinese–English signs are the most dominant language pair used in Clayton, Melbourne, with a total of 40 signs identified. All of these signs are found in the bottom-up sector, particularly in restaurants, food vendors, local retail shops, and service establishments. The strong presence of Chinese–English signage in restaurants and food-related businesses reflects the significant participation of the Chinese community in Clayton’s commercial landscape. This prevalence suggests that many business owners intentionally employ bilingual signage to cater to both Chinese-speaking customers and the broader English-speaking population, thereby enhancing accessibility and market reach.



Fig. 2. Restaurant signs in red and yellow



Fig. 3. Services sign in blue, yellow, and white

Chinese – English signs in Clayton predominantly use red, yellow, and white as the primary colour palette. Additionally, alternatives towards these colours, such as orange or gold, are also used in the signs. Other kinds of colours, such as blue, as observed in this study, are also used in some of the signs. These colours are deliberately chosen based on two things, which are their relationship with Chinese culture and as a business strategy. From a cultural perspective, these specific colour palettes symbolise good luck, prosperity, and vitality (Qiang, 2011). These colour palettes appeal to both the Chinese and non-Chinese population residing in Clayton. The vibrant red, yellow, and white combination brings a sense of familiarity towards the Chinese population. In a similar vein, the cultural semiotic resources employed by the signs utilising these colour combinations facilitate the non-Chinese populations to associate both the Chinese characters and the colour palettes present in the signs with Chinese-owned enterprises, thereby operating as a strategic mechanism for attracting prospective customers. This way, Chinese-owned businesses employing the cultural semiotic strategy within the colour palettes will be able to expand their business beyond the Chinese population and reach out to more people.



Fig. 4. A balanced Chinese – English bilingual sign

Based on the language integration, the Chinese – English signs are divided into three categories, which are balanced, Chinese-dominant, and English-dominant signs. Each strategy differs depending on the function and the target demographic of each sign. The balanced signs are bilingual signs in which both languages can be read clearly by the readers. Figure 5 is an example of a balanced Chinese – English sign, with the Chinese name of the store juxtaposed with its translation. This strategy is often employed by services, general stores and supermarkets. Based on its composition, the Chinese orthography is larger than the English translation and uses the colour combinations prevalent in Chinese signs. Since this is a balanced sign, the English translation has a large font size, albeit smaller than its Chinese counterpart, and utilises the white and blue colour combination to contrast with each other. This strategy assists both Chinese and non-Chinese speakers in locating and accessing the store.



Fig. 5. A Chinese – dominant bilingual sign

The Chinese-dominant signs emphasise the Chinese language rather than English. This is typically achieved through the use of larger Chinese characters, strategic colour contrasts, prominent placement, and disproportionate sizing that prioritises Chinese orthography over its English translation. In many cases, the English text functions only as supplementary information, while the Chinese script serves as the primary communicative element. The example below illustrates a Chinese-dominant sign in which the Chinese characters are displayed in large, highly visible fonts that can be recognised from a considerable distance, whereas the English translation appears in a smaller size beneath the main text while retaining the same colour scheme. This visual hierarchy reflects the intended target audience of the business. By foregrounding Chinese characters, business owners signal that Chinese-speaking customers constitute a significant portion of their clientele. At the same time, the inclusion of English translations ensures that non-Chinese speakers can still identify the nature of the establishment and access its services. Such a strategy allows businesses to balance commercial inclusivity with the preservation of their linguistic and cultural identity.

Furthermore, the predominance of Chinese in these signs serves a symbolic function beyond communication. The use of Chinese characters evokes cultural authenticity and reinforces associations with traditional Chinese cuisine, products, and services. For restaurants in particular, Chinese-dominant signage can act as a marker of genuineness, suggesting that the food and dining experience offered are closely connected to Chinese culinary traditions. This visual representation of authenticity may enhance customer trust and attract both Chinese patrons seeking familiar cultural experiences and non-Chinese customers interested in experiencing “authentic” Chinese products and services.



Fig. 6. English-dominant bilingual sign

In contrast to Chinese-dominant signs, the English-dominant signs emphasise the English translation or transliteration, usually written in Latin letters with a small Chinese translation. The example below illustrates an English-dominant sign with its large English brand juxtaposed with its small Chinese counterpart. As opposed to Chinese-dominant signs that flaunt cultural identity, the English-dominant signs are common in food vendors, as English tends to be more commercially appealing than other languages and tends to dominate the linguistic landscape (Kaharuddin, 2019; Maghfiroh et al., 2025). The strategy is also in line with the practice of glocalisation in the food industry to increase market outreach and popularity when opening branches of operations in different regions across the world (Bruckermann & Feuchtwang, 2016).

b. Ethnolinguistic diversity in other language pairs

Shops	1
Restaurants	14
Services	4
Food Vendors	2

Alongside the 70% of Chinese – English signs. Around 30% of the LL identified in Clayton in this study consisted of various other languages spoken in Australia other than English, which are Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese. In the Clayton LL, all the languages are paired with English, which are most prominent in restaurants compared to other types of businesses. These findings correlate with the diverse ethnolinguistic nature of the overall Australian linguistic makeup, with over 400 languages spoken in Australia (Department of Home Affairs, 2023). In addition, most of the signs are restaurants, due to the popularity of Asian cuisine, namely Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, in Australia (Baudinette, 2020).



Fig. 7. Japanese restaurant sign



Fig. 8. Korean food vendor sign

The multilingual LL found in restaurants employed a similar strategy of Chinese-dominant signs, which emphasises the original language alongside a small translation or transliteration of the restaurant. Similar to the previous examples, the strategy was to show the authenticity of the restaurants through cultural

identity, as seen from the example above, where the Japanese kanji was printed in a larger font, accompanied by its small transliteration below it. In addition to the Chinese restaurants, this strategy is common in Japanese and Korean restaurants, as Asian orthography tends to appeal more to potential customers in the context of Asian cuisine (Song et al., 2022). A similar strategy of English-dominant signs is also seen in food vendors, which emphasises the English brand juxtaposed with its small Hangul counterpart as an effort to glocalize the brand and reach a broader audience.



Fig. 9. Indonesian restaurant menu



Fig. 10. Japanese restaurant menu in Latin

Another identified strategy to amalgamate both English and non-English words can be seen in restaurant menus. At times, it is difficult to gloss or entirely translate specific menu items from a certain country, as cultural elements embedded in them are particular to that country or region (Al-Batineh, 2024; Qiufen et al., 2025). To address this challenge, restaurants often preserve the original names of menu items while providing supplementary descriptions in English that explain the ingredients, preparation methods, flavours, or appearance of the dishes. This strategy allows restaurants to maintain the cultural authenticity of their cuisine while ensuring accessibility for customers who may not be familiar with the source language. By retaining the original terminology, restaurants preserve the cultural significance associated with the dish and avoid reducing culturally specific concepts into approximate English equivalents. Meanwhile, the accompanying English descriptions function as explanatory tools that help customers understand what the dish contains and make informed dining choices.

This practice is particularly common among Asian restaurants whose languages are less familiar to the broader Australian public. Indonesian restaurants, for example, often retain names such as *ayam penyet*, or *sambal matah*, while providing English explanations of the dishes. In these cases, the original names act as cultural markers that distinguish the cuisine from other culinary traditions and reinforce its authenticity. A similar strategy can also be observed in Japanese restaurants. However, due to the global popularity of Japanese cuisine and the widespread recognition of Japanese culinary terms such as *udon*, *ramen*, and *soba*, many Japanese menus rely primarily on transliteration with minimal explanatory descriptions. This suggests that the degree of translation and explanation employed in multilingual menus is influenced not only by linguistic considerations but also by the level of cultural familiarity that the target audience has with the cuisine being presented. As a result, menu design reflects an ongoing negotiation between cultural preservation, customer accessibility, and commercial effectiveness in multicultural settings.



Fig. 11. Trilingual sign of a service provider

Some multilingual LL found in Clayton has the function to communicate with the customer rather than to promote their business names. This practice is motivated solely to convey information to customers that speaks that specific language. This practice is quite common in services, such as hairdressers and alternative medicine businesses, where clear communication is needed to ensure the quality of the services being provided. The example above illustrates a service provider that accommodates Greek- and Italian-speaking customers by explicitly stating that its employees speak Greek and Italian, with the information presented in the respective languages. By doing so, the sign directly addresses members of these linguistic communities and assures them that communication can take place in a language with which they are comfortable. This strategy not only facilitates the practical exchange of information but also helps establish trust between the service provider and potential customers. For individuals who may feel hesitant about accessing services due to language difficulties, the sign serves as an indication that their linguistic needs will be recognised and accommodated.

c. Monolingual signs



Fig. 12. English sign of a hospital



Fig. 13. English sign of an alternative medicine provider

While multilingual signs make up most of the linguistic landscape in Clayton, English monolingual signs are still prevalent in public services like bus stops, train stations, and banks, due to the employed language policy in Australia that designates English as the official and working language. The monolingual signs observed in this study are mostly in general shops and health services, to reach a broader audience that speaks multiple languages, and build a sense of familiarity towards English speakers living in the area. The examples below show two English signs in hospitals and clinics, targeting the general population in Clayton, as health services are among the most important infrastructure in the region.



Fig. 14. Chinese monolingual restaurant sign

Apart from English, there is one monolingual sign in Chinese observed in Clayton, which is illustrated in the figure below: a sign used in a restaurant that reads “we sell homemade food with local tastes”. In addition, the unique orthography of the restaurant’s name indicates cultural elements that are specific to

Chinese culture. This sign is one of the unique signs observed in Clayton, as there is only one identified in the area, and it serves a particular purpose that targets the Chinese population living in the area, unlike the English monolingual signs observed in the study that target the general population. While insignificant, the presence of a monolingual sign, in addition to Chinese-dominant bilingual signs, might indicate a sociolinguistic phenomenon unique to Clayton that facilitates the Chinese population living in the area.

The prevalence of multilingual signs compared to the monolingual signs observed in this study is an indicator of the multilingual and multicultural diversity of the people living in the area. These findings are in line with the aspects of multilingualism, which is the contact and the co-existence of different languages in an area (Cenoz, 2013; Mekt, 2023). The findings are a direct reflection of the diverse community living in Clayton, which consists mostly of people originating from Asia (ABS, 2021), which explains the common occurrence of signs in Asian languages in the region. Previous studies agreed that the prominence of multilingual signs in bottom-up signs adds towards the specific cultural identities of the particular languages, and the feel of foreignness within the region (Pereira, 2023; Siziba & Maseko, 2024). However, these findings only apply when the multilingual makeup of the region is sparse, as multilingual signs could only be felt as foreign when their quantity is low, and the demographic makeup is less diverse. The huge volume of multilingual signs observed in this study gives a sense of familiarity for the diverse community living in Clayton. For example, the Indonesian community longing for Indonesian food would easily recognise Indonesian cuisine after reading the Indonesian – English signs, or the Vietnamese community in navigating the Vietnamese massage parlours or alternative medicines. The findings also observed the abundance of multilingual signs in restaurants and food vendors compared to general stores and services, as cuisine is one of the ways to promote one's cultural identity (Benu et al., 2025; Reddy & Van Dam, 2020). This strategy is prominent in Chinese and Japanese restaurants by employing bilingual menus and street signs, or simply by transliterating their menu, e.g., sushi, ramen, to preserve their cultural elements and introduce them to the foreign region. Overall, the findings suggest that the predominance of multilingual signage in Clayton reflects a diverse ethnolinguistic environment. In addition, it also serves as a functional and symbolic resource as a medium to express cultural identity. Moreover, the high density of multilingual signs contributes to a normalised and familiar linguistic environment for its diverse residents. Therefore, multilingual signage in this context operates at the intersection of practicality and identity, reinforcing the multicultural diversity and inclusivity in the region.

Despite the multicultural and diverse community in Clayton, reflected through the prominence of multilingual signage compared to the monolingual ones, the LL situation in Clayton becomes even more complex when a single minority group predominates in shaping the LL in the region. These complexities can be explained by taking a closer look at the current sociolinguistic landscape and power dynamics that are happening in the region. Building on these findings, the 3:7 disparity between other languages and Chinese in the multilingual signage observed in the study highlights the pronounced visibility of Chinese. This imbalance underscores the extent of Chinese influence—particularly from a socio-economic perspective—in shaping the development of the Clayton suburb, as well as its broader implications for Australia as a whole.

Cultural diversity

Ancestry, top responses	Clayton	%	Victoria	%	Australia	%
All people						
Chinese	4,667	24.6	427,467	6.6	1,390,639	5.5
Indian	2,556	13.5	276,770	4.3	783,953	3.1
English	2,065	10.9	1,900,089	29.2	8,385,928	33.0
Australian	1,823	9.6	1,770,726	27.2	7,596,753	29.9
Greek	996	5.2	181,184	2.8	424,744	1.7

Note 1: Respondents had the option of reporting up to two ancestries on their Census form, and this is captured by the Ancestry multi response (ANCP) variable used in this table. Therefore, the sum of all ancestry responses for an area will not equal the total number of people in the area.

Note 2: Calculated percentages represent a proportion of the number of people in the area (including those who did not state an ancestry). In 2016 QuickStats percentages were based on total number of responses and will not be comparable to this table.

More information on [Ancestry multi response \(ANCP\)](#)

Table based on place of usual residence

Fig. 15. A chart of cultural diversity in Clayton, Melbourne (ABS, 2021)

The dominance of Chinese signs in Clayton LL suggests the marked prominence and expansion of Chinese-owned businesses in the area, which can be largely attributed to the significant concentration of

Chinese residents within the local population (ABS, 2021). Moreover, these findings also correlate with the growth of Asian-owned SMEs in Australia (University of Sydney, 2022). Many Chinese migrants, whether arriving directly from China or remaining in Australia after completing their studies, have chosen to establish businesses, thereby contributing to the prominence of the Chinese–English bilingual bottom-up signage in the suburb. This is because Chinese entrepreneurs and business owners are supported by the Australian government, media, and industries as a way to foster development and innovation and strengthen the Sino – Australian bilateral relationship (KPMG Australia, 2026). While in line with the previous statement on the relationship between food and cultural identity, Chinese restaurants and food vendors tend to dominate the Australian market (Ma & Hsiao, 2020), which explains the high number of Chinese restaurants in Clayton.

Language used at home, top responses (other than English) <i>All people</i>	Clayton	%	Victoria	%	Australia	%
Mandarin	3,313	17.4	221,798	3.4	685,274	2.7
Greek	868	4.6	107,158	1.6	229,643	0.9
Hindi	659	3.5	66,930	1.0	197,132	0.8
Gujarati	580	3.1	24,181	0.4	81,334	0.3
Cantonese	562	3.0	82,432	1.3	295,281	1.2
English only used at home	5,379	28.3	4,369,804	67.2	18,303,662	72.0
Households where a non-English language is used	4,548	74.2	722,004	30.2	2,295,688	24.8

More information on [Language used at home \(LANP\)](#)
 Languages used at home data is based on place of usual residence
 Households where a non-English language is used is based on place of enumeration

Source: A chart of languages used at home other than English in Clayton, Melbourne (ABS, 2021)

The findings also discovered a unique sociolinguistic phenomenon, particularly within the sphere of language use in Australia. The ABS data on the language used at home other than English in Clayton highlights Mandarin as the most used language. Not only does the significant proportion of Mandarin speakers demonstrate the strong cultural presence of the Chinese community in Clayton, but it also reshapes the sociolinguistic reality in the region. The prominence of the Chinese – English signage in Clayton facilitates the Chinese population that speaks Mandarin in fulfilling their daily needs, such as eating out or grocery shopping, without having the need to speak English. Past studies confirmed that Chinese populations, namely the older generations and international students, have a low proficiency in English due to culture shock and foreign anxiety (Chen et al., 2021; Zhang & Tan, 2024). The LL situations in Clayton are directly assisting the Chinese population with these constraints, as the Chinese migrants have historically used the Chinese language as a way to mitigate their difficulties and to adjust to new environments upon moving to Australia (Wang & Hamid, 2025). The dominance of Chinese signs observed in Clayton serves as an indicator towards the Chinese population that these are Chinese-owned businesses, and the staff inside speaks Mandarin, which adds the feeling of familiarity and eliminates the foreign anxiety that the Chinese population must deal with when speaking English. This sociolinguistic phenomenon stems from the Australian national language policy that emphasises multiculturalism, which states that Australians have the right to employ English, bilingualism, and all immigrant and Aboriginal languages are a part of the unique Australian heritage (Bianco, 1987).

In sum, the findings point to a distinctive sociolinguistic dynamic in which the linguistic landscape of Clayton not only reflects demographic realities but actively shapes everyday language practices and experiences. The prominence of Chinese–English signage does more than signal cultural presence—it functions as a practical resource that enables Mandarin-speaking residents to navigate daily life with reduced reliance on English. In doing so, the LL becomes a mediating space where issues of language proficiency, identity, and belonging are negotiated. At the same time, this phenomenon illustrates how broader ideological frameworks, particularly Australia’s commitment to multiculturalism, are materialised at the local level. Ultimately, the case of Clayton demonstrates that LL is not merely a passive reflection of diversity but an active agent in reinforcing community networks, mitigating linguistic barriers, and reshaping the sociolinguistic landscape in meaningful ways. Therefore, while multiculturalism continues to define the linguistic landscape of Clayton, the prominence of the Chinese community is evident, as they can capitalise their distinctive status and socio-economic advantages to dominate the business sector and generate new sociolinguistic dynamics in the area.

CONCLUSION

The present study adds to the body of linguistic landscape (LL) research by highlighting the central role of multiculturalism, while also demonstrating how intricate power dynamics shape and influence the development of LL within a given region. The current study demonstrates that the linguistic landscape of Clayton encapsulates both the ideals and the complexities of multiculturalism in practice. On the one hand, the widespread presence of multilingual signage reflects a highly diverse ethnolinguistic environment, where languages function as both practical tools for communication and symbolic markers of cultural identity. The high density of such signage not only facilitates everyday interactions for different communities but also normalises linguistic diversity, fostering a sense of familiarity and inclusivity among residents from varied backgrounds.

On the other hand, the findings reveal that this diversity does not exist in a purely balanced form. Instead, the noticeable predominance of Chinese–English signage highlights how specific communities, particularly the Chinese population, can exert significant influence over the linguistic landscape. This influence is closely tied to demographic concentration and socio-economic participation, illustrating how power dynamics are embedded within the LL. As a result, the linguistic landscape becomes a site where inclusion and dominance coexist, where multiple languages are visible, yet certain ones achieve greater prominence and functional reach. Ultimately, the case of Clayton underscores that linguistic landscapes are not merely descriptive of social diversity but are actively shaped by economic forces, migration patterns, and policy frameworks. They simultaneously enable cultural expression, support community needs, and reflect underlying hierarchies of power. Therefore, understanding LL requires moving beyond surface-level diversity to critically engage with the socio-economic and political factors that determine which languages are seen, used, and valued in public space.

A key limitation of this study is its narrow focus on a single area in Melbourne. Future research could address this constraint by broadening the scope to include multiple locations across Melbourne and performing a comparative analysis between regions to put greater emphasis on the relationship between power dynamics and LL.

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