

บทความวิจัย (Research Article)

การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดของป้ายสาธารณะในสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวของจังหวัดเชียงใหม่

Error Analysis of English Public Signs in Tourist Attractions of Chiang Mai Province

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จังหวัดเชียงใหม่เป็นศูนย์กลางการท่องเที่ยวที่สำคัญของภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย โดยมีนักท่องเที่ยวชาวไทยและชาวต่างชาติเดินทางมาเยือนหลายล้านคนในแต่ละปี ป้ายสาธารณะภาษาอังกฤษมีบทบาทสำคัญในการอำนวยความสะดวกด้านการสื่อสารแก่นักท่องเที่ยว อย่างไรก็ตาม จากการสำรวจเบื้องต้นพบว่าป้ายภาษาอังกฤษในแหล่งท่องเที่ยวของจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ยังคงมีข้อผิดพลาดทางภาษาจำนวนมาก ซึ่งอาจส่งผลกระทบต่อประสิทธิภาพในการสื่อสารและภาพลักษณ์ด้านการท่องเที่ยวของจังหวัด การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์ประเภทและสาเหตุของข้อผิดพลาดทางภาษาอังกฤษที่ปรากฏอยู่บนป้ายสาธารณะในสถานที่ท่องเที่ยว เขตอำเภอเมือง จังหวัดเชียงใหม่ และเพื่อพัฒนาคู่มือการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษสำหรับป้ายสาธารณะเพื่อใช้เป็นแนวทางปฏิบัติในการปรับปรุงและพัฒนาป้ายในอนาคต กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการศึกษา คือ ป้ายภาษาอังกฤษจำนวนทั้งสิ้น 63 ป้าย และทำการวิเคราะห์ตามหมวดหมู่ของข้อผิดพลาด 6 ด้าน ได้แก่ การสะกดคำ ไวยากรณ์ วากยสัมพันธ์ ความหมาย รูปคำ และความซ้ำซ้อน ผลการวิจัยพบว่าข้อผิดพลาดที่พบบ่อยที่สุด ได้แก่ ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ การเลือกใช้คำศัพท์ที่ไม่เหมาะสม และความไม่สอดคล้องในการแปล ซึ่งมักมีสาเหตุมาจากการแปลโดยตรงตามโครงสร้างภาษาไทย จากการวิเคราะห์ดังกล่าว ได้นำไปสู่การจัดทำคู่มือแนวทางการปรับปรุงป้ายภาษาอังกฤษสำหรับหน่วยงานภาครัฐ องค์กรท้องถิ่น และภาคเอกชน เพื่อยกระดับคุณภาพของป้ายภาษาอังกฤษในพื้นที่ ส่งเสริมความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยว สร้างภาพลักษณ์ที่ดีให้กับจังหวัดเชียงใหม่ และสนับสนุนการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวที่ยั่งยืนตามยุทธศาสตร์การท่องเที่ยวของประเทศไทย

คำสำคัญ: การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาด ป้ายภาษาอังกฤษ จังหวัดเชียงใหม่ สถานที่ท่องเที่ยว

Abstract

Chiang Mai, a major tourism hub in Northern Thailand, welcomes millions of domestic and international visitors annually. Public signs written in English play a vital role in facilitating communication for tourists. However, preliminary surveys indicate that many English public signs in Chiang Mai's tourist areas still contain linguistic errors, which may hinder effective communication and impact the province's tourism image. This study aims to analyze the types and causes of English

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language errors found on public signs in tourist attractions within Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province and to develop a comprehensive English language usage manual for public signage to serve as a practical guideline for future development. A total of 63 English public signs were collected and analyzed based on six error categories: orthography, grammar, syntax, semantics, morphology, and redundancy. The findings reveal that the most common errors involve grammar, inappropriate vocabulary choices, and inconsistencies in translation, often resulting from direct translations influenced by Thai language structures. Based on the analysis, a guideline manual was developed to assist government agencies, local organizations, and private sectors in improving the quality of English public signage. This improvement aims to enhance tourist satisfaction, promote a positive image of Chiang Mai, and support sustainable tourism development in line with Thailand's national tourism strategies.

Keywords: Error analysis, English public signs, Chiang mai province, Tourist attraction

Introduction

Chiang Mai Province, located in Northern Thailand, is one of the country's most prominent tourism destinations. Rich in natural beauty, cultural heritage, and historical significance, Chiang Mai attracts millions of domestic and international tourists each year. From January to July 2023, Chiang Mai welcomed over 6.3 million visitors, generating more than 62 billion baht in tourism revenue (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2023; Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2023). It is projected that by the end of 2023, the number of visitors would exceed 8.8 million, reflecting an 80% increase compared to pre-pandemic levels. In alignment with Thailand's national strategies for sustainable tourism development under frameworks such as the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economy Model and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), improving tourism facilities, including public signage, has become a crucial objective (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2021; United Nations, 2015).

Public signs are classified as auxiliary tourism facilities, playing an essential role in providing information, guidance, and regulation for tourists. According to Ginting et al. (2021), effective public signage not only enhances tourists' experiences but also reflects the quality of a destination's service infrastructure. In tourist cities like Chiang Mai, English-language public signs serve as a primary medium for communication with international visitors. However, preliminary field surveys reveal that many English signs in tourist areas still contain various linguistic errors, ranging from orthographic mistakes to grammatical and cultural inaccuracies.

Such errors can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunication, and, potentially, a negative impression among tourists. Inconsistent or incorrect translations may also undermine efforts to present Chiang Mai as a world-class, quality-driven, and sustainable tourism destination. Recognizing the importance of language in shaping tourist experiences, this study focuses on conducting an in-depth error analysis of English public signs found in tourist attractions in Chiang Mai's Mueang District.

By identifying common errors and their underlying causes, the research aims to propose guidelines for improving English signage quality, thereby supporting sustainable tourism development and enhancing the city's global image.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze and categorize the types of linguistic errors found in English public signs within tourist attractions in Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province.
2. To develop a practical guideline for improving the use of English in public signage, aimed at enhancing communication efficiency and promoting a positive image of Chiang Mai as an international tourism destination.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on English-language public signs located in tourist attractions within Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand. The research specifically examines signs that include English text and excludes signs that contain only images or symbols without accompanying language.

The sample consists of 63 English public signs collected from various tourism-related locations, including temples, hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, immigration checkpoints, hospitals, and directional signs. The analysis categorizes and evaluates the linguistic errors according to six key aspects: orthography, grammar, syntax, semantics, morphology, and redundancy. The scope is limited to identifying the types of errors, analyzing their causes, and proposing corrections and guidelines for future improvement. The study does not include an assessment of tourists' perceptions or a comprehensive evaluation of all public signage across the entire province.

Conceptual Framework

This research is based on two major conceptual foundations:

The Role of Public Signs in Tourism Communication Public signs serve as essential communication tools that provide information, directions, regulations, and warnings to tourists. According to Kietthong (2005), signage systems must be designed with clear symbols, proper wording, and a consistent structure to ensure accessibility and comprehension. Effective public signage enhances tourists' experiences and supports the image of the destination as a quality and sustainable tourism hub.

Error Analysis in Second Language Acquisition The theoretical framework for analyzing errors draws from the works of Richards & Schmidt (2002); Norrish (1983) and Hasyim (2002). Errors in second-language use are classified into two main types: 1) Intralingual Errors: Errors arising from incomplete learning, overgeneralization of language rules, or misapplication of target language principles and 2) Interlingual Errors: Errors resulting from the transfer of patterns from the learner's first language (in this case, Thai) into English, leading to grammatical, lexical, or pragmatic inaccuracies.

The purposes of error analysis include identifying the extent of language knowledge and learning strategies among users, diagnosing obstacles in language learning and application, and informing the development of educational or corrective strategies to improve language use. The study categorizes errors into six linguistic aspects: 1) Orthographic Errors: surface-level mistakes in writing and word formation that weaken professionalism but do not change sentence grammar. This includes spelling errors, typos, incorrect capitalization of common or proper nouns, and the misuse of punctuation marks such as commas and quotation marks. 2) Morphological Errors: faults in word structures and grammatical endings. This category focuses strictly on word form variations, such as incorrect singular or plural nouns, improper possessive forms, and the wrong use of prefixes or suffixes. 3) Grammatical Errors: violations of word connections and verb dependencies within a sentence. This includes improper verb patterns and the incorrect choice of prepositions when showing directions or spatial relationships. 4) Syntactic Errors: structural problems within sentences or phrases. This deals with incomplete sentences or fragments that lack a main subject or verb, as well as failures in parallelism, where items listed in public rules or notices do not share the same grammatical form. 5) Semantic Errors: inappropriate vocabulary choices that do not fit the intended context or meaning. This often results from literal translation from the native language, or using words with negative cultural meanings and harsh tones that lower public politeness. 6) Redundancy: the unnecessary repetition of words that add no new meaning. This includes repeating words with identical concepts, which makes the English text on public signs look awkward and unnatural. This conceptual framework guides the systematic identification, categorization, and analysis of errors found in English public signs in tourist attractions in Chiang Mai, with the goal of developing a practical guideline for improving English signage quality.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative and descriptive research approach, focusing on document analysis and linguistic error categorization. It systematically collected and examined English-language public signs from tourist-related areas to identify and analyze the types of linguistic errors.

Population and Sample

The sample consisted of 63 English public signs collected from tourist attractions and tourism-related establishments located within Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province. In order to ensure a comprehensive representation of the linguistic landscape, the sampled signs were purposively selected and categorized based on the types of establishments and locations as follows: temples and religious sites (22 signs), restaurants, cafes, and food/beverage menus (17 signs), massage shops and wellness spas (7 signs), public restroom facilities (6 signs), exhibitions and cultural information boards (5 signs), tour operators and recreational activity banners (2 signs), shopping malls

and commercial spaces (2 signs), and other public service areas—including a dental clinic and traffic safety signs (2 signs). Only signs containing English text were selected, while signs with only images or symbols were excluded.

Data Collection

Data were collected through field surveys conducted in various tourist areas. Photographs of the signs were taken using digital cameras or mobile devices. A recording form was used to document: location of the sign, purpose of the sign, context or surrounding environment. Each collected sign was cataloged systematically to ensure traceability and facilitate subsequent analysis.

Research Instruments

The research instruments included: a recording form for documenting sign details, and a categorization table to classify types of errors according to specific linguistic aspects.

Data Analysis

The collected signs were analyzed using a framework based on six linguistic aspects: Orthography (spelling, punctuation, capitalization), Grammar (tense usage, verb forms), Syntax (sentence structure accuracy), Semantics (contextually appropriate word choice), Morphology (proper use of prefixes and suffixes), Redundancy (unnecessary repetition). Each error was categorized and quantified. Frequency and percentage distributions were calculated for each error category to determine the most common types of errors.

Furthermore, corrections and suggested improvements were proposed for each erroneous sign based on standard English language usage and natural expression commonly used by native speakers.

Results and Discussion

Types and Frequency of Errors

The analysis of 63 English public signs collected from tourist attractions in Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province revealed that linguistic errors were highly prevalent. Errors were categorized into six main types, with their frequencies summarized as follows:

Table 1: Types and Frequency of Errors

Error Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grammar Errors	22	34.92%
Orthographic Errors	15	23.81%
Semantic Errors	11	17.46%
Syntax Errors	8	12.70%
Morphological Errors	4	6.35%
Redundancy Errors	3	4.76%

From this table, it was found that grammar errors were the most frequently occurring type of error, accounting for 34.92% of the total errors observed. This indicates a significant problem with the application of grammatical rules in the English translations on public signs. Common grammar mistakes included incorrect verb forms, improper use of articles, and tense inconsistencies.



Figure 1: Grammar Errors

In this picture, the preposition “in” is inappropriate in this context. When indicating motion toward the inside of something (e.g., throwing trash into a toilet), the correct preposition is “into.” Additionally, the noun “toilets” lacks a definite article. Using “the toilet” (singular with article) is more natural and grammatically correct in general warnings, unless the intention is to refer to multiple specific toilet units. The recommended revised message is “DO NOT THROW ANY TRASH INTO THE TOILET”. This correction aligns with the intended meaning in Thai, which typically uses a phrase equivalent to “into the toilet.”.

Orthographic errors ranked second, comprising 23.81% of the total errors. These errors typically involved misspellings, incorrect capitalization, and punctuation mistakes, reflecting a lack of attention to basic English writing conventions.



Figure 2: Orthographic Errors

A prominent example was observed on a beverage menu displaying the phrase “PASSION FRIUT.” This case exhibits a clear typographical and spelling error where the vowel digraph “-ui-” in the word “FRUIT” was transposed to “-iu-” (“FRIUT”). From a psycholinguistic perspective, this error can be classified as an intralingual mistake, likely caused by a lack of careful proofreading rather than first-language interference. Correcting this to “PASSION FRUIT” is critical, as spelling accuracy and precise character formation preserve linguistic professionalism, eliminate cognitive friction for international tourists, and maintain the positive image of local tourism establishments.

Semantic errors were the third most frequent type, comprising 17.46% of all identified issues. These errors typically resulted from inappropriate word choices, which often led to confusion or misinterpretation of the intended message. In comparison, syntactic errors accounted for 12.70%, and were commonly related to incorrect sentence structures, omission of necessary conjunctions, or awkward phrasing. All of which significantly impaired the clarity and fluency of the signage.



Figure 3: Semantic Errors and Syntax Errors

In the phrase “Please beware of your belongings”, the verb “beware” is inappropriate in this context. The phrase “beware of...” is typically used to warn against potential dangers or threats (e.g., “Beware of dog”). However, this sign aims to remind individuals to look after their own belongings, not to warn of imminent danger. The suggested revisions would be “Please watch your belongings.” or “Please take care of your belongings.” These alternatives are more natural and contextually appropriate, especially in public places where theft or loss of personal items is a concern. They provide a clear and polite reminder without implying danger.

In addition, the phrase “Do not kissing” is grammatically incorrect. The structure “Do not” must be followed by the base form of a verb (infinitive without to), not a gerund (-ing form). Therefore, both “kissing” and “hugging” should be revised. Corrected Versions should be “Do not kiss or hug in the temple.” or “No kissing or hugging in the temple.” Both corrected versions convey the intended meaning to prohibit intimate gestures such as kissing or hugging within temple grounds. The use of “kiss or hug” (verbs) or “kissing or hugging” (noun forms) with proper grammatical structure improves clarity and aligns with the respectful tone appropriate for religious settings.

Morphological errors (6.35%) and redundancy errors (4.76%) were less common but still significant. Morphological errors involved incorrect usage of prefixes or suffixes, while redundancy errors were characterized by unnecessary repetition of words, making the messages confusing.



Figure 4: Morphological errors



Figure 5: Redundancy errors

From figure 5, the use of the singular noun “belonging” is incorrect in this context. The intended meaning refers to multiple personal items or possessions of visitors. Therefore, the correct form should be the plural “belongings” (with an -s), which properly refers to a collection of one’s personal items. The revised message should be “Please check your belongings before leaving.” The plural form “belongings” accurately conveys the idea of various personal possessions, aligning with the Thai translation. This correction ensures both grammatical accuracy and semantic clarity.

In the phrase “Do's and Don'ts when visit a Buddhist temple”, “Do's and Don'ts” already clearly conveys a list of recommended and prohibited behaviors. Adding “when visit a Buddhist temple” introduces grammatical inaccuracy (“visit” should be “visiting” or “you visit”) and causes redundancy. The extended phrase adds unnecessary length without improving clarity, making it sound unnatural to native speakers. The suggested revisions should be “Do's and Don'ts for Visiting a Buddhist Temple.” or “Temple Etiquette”. These revised versions maintain clarity while improving grammatical correctness and eliminating redundancy. They are more natural in English and better suited for informative or instructional signage.

Overall, the analysis highlights that most errors stemmed from grammatical inaccuracies and basic orthographic mistakes, emphasizing the need for professional translation and careful proofreading to improve the quality of English public signage in tourist areas.

Sources and Causes of Errors

The findings of this study reveal several underlying causes responsible for the linguistic errors identified in English public signage within tourist attractions in Chiang Mai Province. One major source of errors is interlingual interference. According to Richards & Schmidt (2002), interlingual errors occur when linguistic patterns from a speaker's first language are transferred into the second language, often resulting in incorrect expressions. In this study, many English signs were translated directly from Thai without sufficient adjustment for structural and cultural differences, leading to unnatural phrasing and confusion among international audiences.

Another significant cause is intralingual errors, which arise from overgeneralization, incomplete learning, or incorrect rule application within the target language itself (Norrish, 1983). The sign creators often displayed limited understanding of English grammatical structures, particularly in areas such as the imperative mood, verb tense consistency, and article usage. Such errors reflect deeper challenges in second language acquisition, where learners internalize inaccurate language rules.

Lack of proofreading further exacerbates the prevalence of errors. Many signs appeared to have been finalized without review by proficient English speakers. As Hasyim (2002) notes, systematic errors can persist when feedback and corrective input are absent from the learning or production process. Without a formal editing stage, minor but noticeable mistakes such as spelling inaccuracies, punctuation errors, and improper phrasing remained uncorrected, reducing the credibility and clarity of the signage.

Finally, cultural misinterpretations also contributed to the errors observed. Literal translations of culturally specific practices, such as temple etiquette and religious customs, often failed to convey appropriate meanings to foreign tourists. Xiaoli Hu et al. (2021) emphasized that successful translation requires not only linguistic accuracy but also cultural sensitivity to ensure that messages are understandable and respectful across different cultural backgrounds.

In summary, the sources of linguistic errors identified in this study are complex, involving interlingual interference, intralingual developmental errors, lack of systematic proofreading, and insufficient cultural adaptation. Addressing these root causes is essential to improving the quality of English public signage and enhancing the overall communication experience for international visitors in Chiang Mai.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study analyzed 63 English public signs collected from tourist attractions in Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province. The findings revealed that linguistic errors were highly prevalent, with grammar errors being the most frequent, followed by orthographic and semantic errors. These errors commonly arose from direct translation from Thai, incomplete mastery of English grammar, lack of proofreading, and cultural misinterpretations. The presence of such errors not only reduces the clarity and effectiveness of communication but also weakens Chiang Mai's image as a professional, tourist-friendly destination. Improving the quality of English public signage is essential to enhance tourists' experiences, ensure effective communication, and support the city's goals of sustainable and quality-driven tourism development. Through detailed analysis, this study provided practical corrections and a categorization of common errors, forming the basis for developing a guideline manual to assist relevant stakeholders in improving English public signs.

The presence of linguistic errors in public signage can significantly impact the tourist experience by causing confusion, reducing credibility, and impairing the perceived professionalism of a destination. Inaccurate translations may lead to misunderstandings of important instructions, particularly in sensitive areas such as religious sites, health and safety warnings, and service guidelines. Improving the quality of English public signage is therefore essential for enhancing the accessibility and safety of tourist environments, promoting Chiang Mai's image as an international, high-quality, and welcoming destination, and supporting sustainable tourism by fostering better communication between local communities and international visitors.

The findings emphasize the urgent need for careful translation, cultural adaptation, and language proofreading by qualified personnel before signage is installed. Based on these results, the study proposes a guideline manual aimed at assisting governmental agencies, local authorities, and businesses in developing and maintaining high-quality English public signage.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several important recommendations are proposed to enhance the quality of English public signage in tourist attractions of Chiang Mai Province.

First and foremost, professional translation services should be employed when creating English-language signs. Translations must be handled by individuals who possess a strong command of English and a deep understanding of tourism-related contexts. Literal translations, which often result in awkward or confusing phrasing, should be strictly avoided to ensure that the intended

meaning is conveyed accurately and naturally. In addition to professional translation, proofreading by native or proficient English speakers is highly recommended. Before installation, all signs should undergo a careful review process to correct grammatical errors, improve clarity, and enhance the overall naturalness of the language. This step would significantly minimize linguistic mistakes that could otherwise impair communication with international tourists.

Another crucial recommendation is the need for cultural adaptation. Certain concepts, especially those related to religious practices, safety instructions, and local etiquette, must be appropriately adapted to the cultural expectations of international audiences. Direct translations that ignore cultural nuances can lead to misunderstandings or even disrespectful interpretations, thus highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive language.

Furthermore, standardization of English signage should be established across all tourist attractions. Government agencies and related authorities should develop comprehensive guidelines that define proper language use, stylistic conventions, spelling norms, and appropriate terminologies for tourism contexts. Standardization would promote consistency and professionalism across various locations. It is also essential to invest in training programs for local staff who are involved in signage creation and maintenance. Providing basic English writing, translation techniques, and cultural communication skills can empower local businesses, tourism organizations, and public sector employees to produce higher-quality signs independently.

In conclusion, adopting these recommendations will not only improve the accuracy and quality of English public signage in Chiang Mai but will also enhance the city's reputation as an international tourist destination, ensuring a more positive and seamless experience for visitors from around the world.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest several promising directions for future research in public language use within tourism contexts. First, investigating how tourists perceive and are affected by English signage errors could offer insights into their impact on visitor satisfaction and trust. Comparative studies across different cities or countries may reveal common patterns and highlight best practices. Research should also evaluate the effectiveness of correction and standardization efforts through longitudinal studies. Additionally, exploring signage challenges in specific sectors such as healthcare, transportation, or cultural site can provide targeted solutions. Finally, studies on training local stakeholders in English usage and cultural communication would support long-term improvement in signage quality. Collectively, these areas of inquiry would enhance international communication and promote more sustainable and inclusive tourism.

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