Tourism for a Sustainable Future?
A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Public Signs in Japan

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Abstract: This article points out that what have become conventional, 'standard', multilingual, public signs do not seem to be appropriate for establishing Japan as a tourism nation in the long run, as the current model indicates a preference for visitors from specific countries – namely China and South Korea, which could make visitors from other countries feel put off. Instead, we propose a simplified and more neutral example of multilingual public signs, for which only English as a lingua franca is used in addition to Japanese. However, problems with the English translations used in such signs are also discussed. English translations need to be carefully considered not only from a systemic linguistic perspective, such as grammar and vocabulary, but also from cognitive and sociolinguistic perspectives, to avoid misleading foreign visitors.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca, linguistic landscape, multilingual public signs, tourism

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in late 2019 seemed to finally approach its end in the summer of 2022, at the time of writing. Before the pandemic, Japan had just started to strongly expand its tourism industry as a way of achieving an economically sustainable future for Japan. However, during the pandemic period, Japan was forced to restrict travel within, to and from the country. It is then clear that if the restrictions continue, Japan will be economically crippled. With the lifting of movement restrictions, an increasing number of foreigners are expected to visit Japan again in the future. But are public signs, public announcements, and other forms of public communication in Japan, which has declared itself a "Kanko Rikkoku" ('Tourism Nation')[1], friendly to foreigners? It is true that the number of multilingual public signs is increasing. However, multilingual signs, as they exist in Japan now, do not seem appropriate, in relation to Japan's aims for a sustainable society. According to a dictionary, "sustainable" is generally used in relation to the global

[1] https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/kankorikkoku/index.html

environment in the sense of not exhausting natural energy or natural products[2]. In this chapter, however, from a sociolinguistic perspective or from a point of view of "welfare linguistics"[3], it is used to mean fairness, justice and equality for all. Many of the current signs can sometimes confuse foreigners and, in some cases, convey the wrong message. Moreover, even the English expressions, which have become the de facto international language as a lingua franca, are not without their problems. The aim of this article is threefold: 1) to examine the kind of public signs that are desirable in Japan, which has declared itself a 'Tourism Nation'; 2) to propose a desirable, multilingual, public sign model that will fit Japan's vision of becoming a sustainable society; and 3) to examine the problems related to the English expressions used in these signs from linguistic, cognitive linguistic, and sociolinguistic viewpoints. By way of discussing these three points, the problems associated with the multilingual notation of public signs are clarified. The structure of the article is as follows: Section 2 presents the evolution of public signs in Japan as a tourism nation. Section 3 points out questions about multilingualised public signs and presents a proposal for sustainable, multilingual signage and its problems. In Section 4, the problems of English translation are then discussed from linguistic, cognitive linguistic, and sociolinguistic perspectives.

2. What Are Public Signs?

When one walks through Japanese cities, one can see various public signs. Public signs provide useful information for both the Japanese and foreigners, who use public transport and visit tourist attractions. Yokohama (2008) states that public signs are "a generic term for signs, maps, information and guidance boards of a public nature that are used by an unspecified number of people and are installed in public spaces by public authorities as the installation body." They can be divided into the following six types (cf. Honda, 2019): (1) 'guide signs' that provide information on the location of facilities by means of maps, etc.; (2) 'guidance signs' that indicate the directions of and routes to facilities by means of arrows, etc.; (3) 'location signs' that announce the locations of facilities by names, etc.; (4) 'explanation signs' that explain the contents and usage of facilities; (5) 'regulation signs' that regulate the behavior of pedestrians and other visitors; and (6) 'publicity signs' to announce events and other activities. Such signs can be divided into three types in

[2] *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. 10th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 1581.
[3] https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jajls/2/1/2_KJ00008439740/_pdf, http://eaje.eu/pdfdownload/pdfdownload.php?index=48-57&filename=kicho-heinrich.pdf&p=venezia

terms of the languages used to describe them, as follows.

TYPE 1 is written in Japanese only (Figure 3 with *furigana*, pronunciation notation in Japanese).

[TYPE 1] Signs Written in Japanese Only

Figure 1. Danger[4] (Matsuyama Castle)

Figure 2. Don't rush onto the train (Shin-Osaka Railway Station)

Figure 3. Please dismount from your bicycle (Kanazawa Railway Station)

Figure 1 is written in Japanese only and means 'Danger. Please do not venture beyond this point.' Figure 2 comprises a Japanese sentence and a pictogram. The Japanese expression means, 'Please do not rush onto the train.' Moreover, interestingly, the same sign is posted in several places on the staircase. Figure 3 is written in Japanese expressions with *furigana* ('attached kana') and a pictogram. According to Irwin and Zisk (2019, 122), *furigana* is defined as "a type of phonetic guide in which kana are added to the top (or in vertical script, the right side) of kanji indicating the Japanese reading", where kana and kanji means 'the Japanese syllabary' and 'Chinese characters', respectively. The Japanese sentences mean, 'Please dismount your bicycle when passing through. The station concourse is not to pass through. Kanazawa City.'

TYPE 2 is written in Japanese and English (Figure 5 with a pictogram).

[TYPE 2] Signs Written in Two Languages

[4] The images and linguistic expressions on signs presented in this article have been collected by the author unless otherwise stated.

Figure 4. Keep out (Matsuyama Castle)

Figure 5. Observation deck (Komatsu Airport)

Figure 4 shows a Japanese expression and its English translation. Figure 5 features a Japanese expression, its English translation, as well as a pictogram.

TYPE 3 is written in Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean (with pictograms).

[TYPE 3] Signs Written in Four Languages

Figure 6. Arrival, Baggage Claim (Narita Airport)

Figure 7. Tickets (Kanazawa Railway Station)

Figure 8. Gate Lounge (Komatsu Airport)

Figure 6 shows an example of a sign that displays a Japanese expression and its English, Chinese, and Korean translations as well as a pictogram. Figure 7 presents an example of a Japanese expression and its English, Korean, and Chinese versions, as well as a pictogram. It is interesting to note here that the orders in which Chinese and Korean translations appear in Figures 6 and 7 are different (This difference is discussed below in 2.5). In addition, as in Figure 7, Figure 8 depicts Japanese, English, Korean, and Chinese versions and a pictogram, but with two types of Chinese characters. Both the simplified Chinese characters used on the Chinese mainland and the traditional Chinese characters used in Taiwan and Hong Kong are carefully differentiated.

Such public signs have recently attracted attention and research as linguistic landscapes in the field of sociolinguistics. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 23), linguistic landscape refers to "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region". Linguistic landscape studies, particularly those on public signs, have identified the characteristics of territories or districts in which signs are located in terms of their assumed target audiences. However, linguistic landscapes are not limited to fixed signs in public spaces. In Japan, textual information can be found in various places throughout a city. For example, textual information may also be expressed on cars driving through a city. Such textual information may be characteristic of a particular society. In that case, the textual information on such running vehicles also forms part of a particular linguistic landscape, and unless this is included in linguistic landscape studies, it will not be possible to obtain a correct picture of the overall linguistic landscape found in that society (Nishijima, 2022a, b).

3. Japan as a "Tourism Nation"

The number of foreign visitors to Japan has been gradually increasing (Figure 9). Specifically, numbers started to steadily increase from 2003 to 2004. The declines in 2009 and 2011 can be attributed to the Lehman Shock and Great East Japan Earthquake, respectively. The sharpest increase, however, can be observed since 2013.

This increase is related to changes in Japan's tourism policy. In 2003, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi declared that Japan would aim to become a 'Tourism Nation', and, consequently, efforts to become a tourism nation began. 2003 saw the number of foreign visitors to Japan exceed five million, at 5,211,725. In 2006, based on Koizumi's 'Tourism Nation' declaration, the government adopted a 'Tourism Nation' policy, which clearly positions tourism as an important economic policy pillar for Japan in the 21st century. In 2008, the Japan Tourism Agency was established to strengthen the system for promoting a 'tourism-oriented country', and in 2013, a new Basic Plan for the Promotion of a Tourism-oriented Country was formulated, which spelled out various measures which were to be put into action to make Japan a country that is attractive to foreign visitors. As a result, the number of foreign visitors to Japan reached 31,882,049 in 2019, exceeding 31 million for the first time. This is six times the number observed in 2003, when the country was first declared to be a Tourism Nation. The COVID-19 pandemic, which broke out in 2019, restricted foreign visitors to Japan; but this ban on foreign visitors slowly started to be lifted in 2022. In the future, it can be expected that Japan's tourism policy will continue.

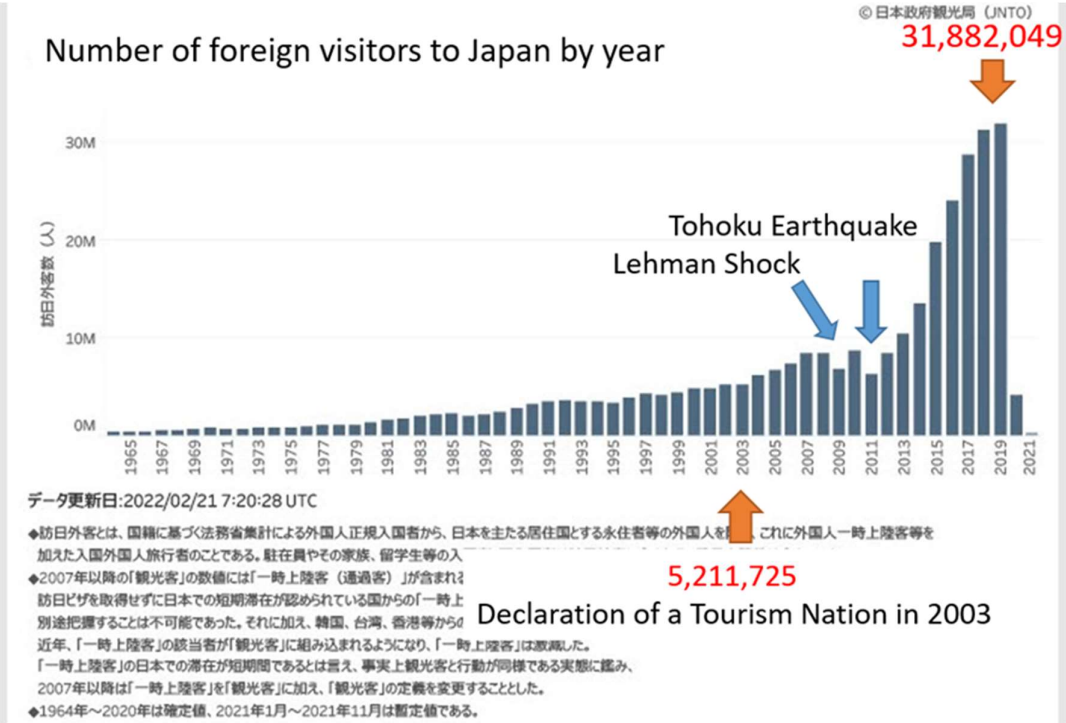
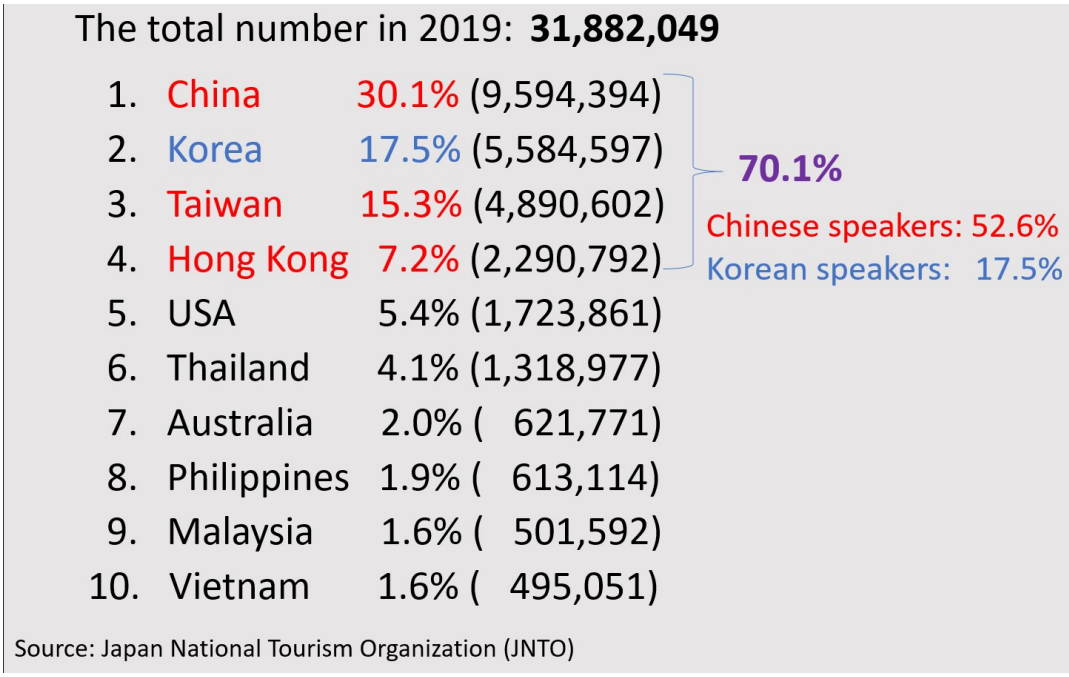


Figure 9. Number of foreign visitors to Japan by year

4. Impact of Foreign Visitors on Public Signs in Japan

Looking at the ranking of countries from which foreign visitors to Japan come, it becomes clear that in 2019 over 70% of visitors came from East Asia. Since the number of foreign visitors declined sharply after 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the data used here are limited to 2019, the year before that. In terms of language, more than half (52.6%) were Chinese speakers, while Korean speakers accounted for 17.5%.

Table 2. Ranking of Foreign Visitors in 2019 by Country



In 2003, when Prime Minister Koizumi declared Tokyo a tourism nation, only 20.7% of public signs in Tokyo were multilingual, while approximately 80% were still written in Japanese only (Backhaus 2007, 71). Of those 20.7% multilingual public signs, 92.7% were written in English, while those written in Chinese and Korean accounted for only 2.5% and 1.6%, respectively.

However, in 2005, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism published 'Signage Guidelines for Tourism Revitalisation', recommending the use of Korean and Chinese in addition to Japanese, English, and pictograms. In 2014, the Japan Tourism Agency similarly published *Guidelines for improving and strengthening multilingual support towards realizing a tourism-oriented country*, both with the goal of making Japan an even more attractive travel destination for Asian tourists. Based on these guidelines, the Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, to name an example on the local level, revised the Guidelines for the Standardization of Easy-to-understand Information Signs for Domestic and Foreign Tourists, providing specific instructions on the use of four languages and pictograms. As a result of all these efforts, multilingual signs in four languages (Japanese, English, Korean, and Chinese) are now widely used in Japan. These signs have become the 'standard' model for public signs since the mid-2010s. A survey by the Japan Tourism Agency on the current state of multilingual signage on public transport in 2019 confirms

that where there is Japanese signage, it is also in English, and at junctions where foreign tourists are particularly likely to get lost, it is in Chinese and Korean as well as English. Thus, it can be said that public transport is basically marked in four languages[5]. Such multilingual signs are especially seen in tourist areas, as for example airports, train stations or popular sightseeing spots.

However, is the multilingualisation of public signs (including two neighboring languages) really appropriate and functional as a tool to increase Japan's attractiveness to foreign tourists, thereby contributing to sustainable economic growth (not necessarily in an environmentally friendly way)? Hereafter, three points regarding this question are discussed:

1. Does the government's policy of making multilingual public signs the new 'standard' in Japan play a role in making Japan more attractive to foreign visitors, or are there also negative aspects that need to be discussed?
2. Are multilingual public signs as they can be found in Japan functional and, as a result, desirable?
3. What are the problems with English translations appearing on desirable multilingual public signs?

Establishing multilingual public signs as the new standard in Japan is seen by the government as playing an important role in making Japan more attractive to foreign visitors. This, as a result, is supposed to boost the tourism industry, which is expected to help Japan achieve a sustainable economic outlook. In the next section, it will be discussed whether the usage of multilingual signs in Japan is implemented in a fair and appropriate manner. This includes an evaluation of other remaining problems, i.e., problematic translations.

4.1 What Is a Desirable Multilingual Public Sign?

As Takiura and Ohashi (2015, p. 206) point out, multilingual public signs can be said to show that a society with such signs is prepared to accept people who do not understand the language used in that society – in the present case, Japanese. Such positive aspects may of course be present. However, what about those who do not understand the additional language used, i.e., English? Chinese and Korean speakers accounted for more than 70% of foreign tourists in 2019. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why multilingual signs are not only written in Japanese and English, but also in Chinese,

[5] https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/news08_000275.html

Korean, and other languages.

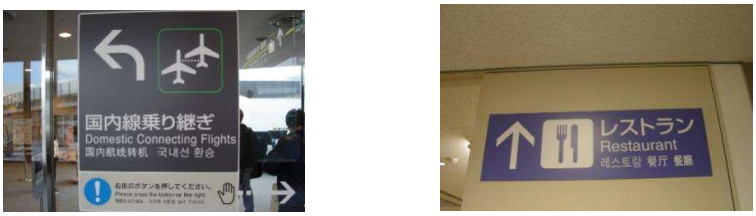


Figure 10. Signs in four languages (Narita Airport right, and Komatsu Airport, left)

Here, the order in which Chinese and Korean versions are written should be explained. It is assumed that the difference in the order of appearance of Chinese and Korean versions is related to the characteristics of the area where the signs are located. If the Chinese version appears first like in Figure 10, it is likely that Chinese visitors outnumber Korean visitors, and vice versa if the Korean version appears first, like in Figure 11. There are more Chinese speakers than Korean speakers at Narita Airport.[6] These show that priority is given to catering for people from certain countries based on the economic gain that is assumed to be expected from them.

While it is true that there are currently many visitors from East Asia, is the number of Chinese and Korean speakers coming to Japan likely to remain constant in the future? A parallel trend to increasing inbound tourism in recent years, has been an increase in the influx of foreign workers from South-East Asia, especially from Vietnam and Indonesia. According to 2020 data on the situation of foreign workers from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the top three countries in terms of the number of workers are Vietnam (443,998, or 25.7% of the total) [401,326 in the previous year], China (419,431, or 24.3% of the total) [418,327 in the previous year], and the Philippines (184,750, or 10.7%) [179,685 in the previous year]. In addition, the top three countries in terms of the rate of increase are Vietnam (443,998, or 10.6% increase on previous year) [401,326 in previous year], Nepal (99,628, or +8.6%) [+91,770], and Indonesia (53,395, or +4.0%) [+51,337].[7] This raises the question, whether it will be sustainable to include only Chinese and Korean in addition to English, or whether even more languages would have to be added to cater to these developments. However, it is not possible to include an abundant number of languages on a sign.

Furthermore, the implications of appending English are different from those of appending any other language. English is no longer associated only with native speakers

[6] https://honichi.com/data/immigration/naritaairport/
[7] https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11655000/000728546.pdf (accessed on 27. 06. 2022)

from a particular country but has become a common means of communication between speakers of different native languages. It is well known that English can be divided into three categories: inner circle, outer circle and extended circle (Kachru, 1985). The Inner Circle belongs to English as a mother tongue, the Outer Circle to English as a second language and the Extended Circle belongs to English learned as a foreign language. This last-learned English is currently used as a Lingua Franca in non-English-speaking countries. In contrast, Chinese and Korean are associated with speakers from specific countries. It can, therefore, be argued, that including only English in addition to Japanese should be enough.

4.2 Wrong Message to Visitors?

Standard multilingual information boards, which in addition to Japanese and English include Chinese and Korean, may be sending the following wrong message that only Chinese and Korean speakers are welcome. If this is the case, it favors and benefits Chinese and Korean speakers, while other foreigners may feel unwelcome, unequal, and in some cases discriminated against.

'Standard' multilingual public signs appear complex. If Japan truly aims for a sustainable society that is open to the world, then simpler public signs may be preferable.

Problems of discriminatory labelling have similar implications. There are some signs in Japan, such as *keisatsukan tachiyorisho* ('Policemen's Police Station') and *bōhan kamera sadōchū* ('Security Cameras in operation'), which are not marked in English, but only in particular other languages, such as Korean and Chinese. Such signs can lead to certain foreigners as being singled out as potential criminals (Sato et al., 2006; Honda et al., 2017). According to Shiga Prefecture's guidelines on public signs, it is pointed out that foreigners feel uncomfortable whether foreign languages are only put forward in situations where a prohibition or warning is issued, as the following signs. Based on these observations, when creating public signs, some local authorities provide specific examples and remind people to take care not to offend anyone in particular, for example by using pictograms instead of letters in signs related to crime prevention and prohibition (Shiga, 2018).

Figure 11. Unfavourable Signs to Foreigners

When one thinks about the meaning of 'public' in the context of public signs, then this kind of discrimination should not be happening. The Cambridge Dictionary[8] defines 'public' as, "relating to or involving people in general, rather than being limited to a particular group of people". Thus, what is meant by 'public' is the general public, not just a specific group of people. This also means that languages other than English, which as explained above has become somewhat detached from its connection to populations of specific countries and has become a lingua franca of international communication, are associated with specific language-groups. As such, it seems to indicate giving preference to certain groups, when these languages are used in public signs. Among foreigners from Asian countries coming to Japan, this could create an unintended hierarchy of who is more or less welcome to the country. For example, a survey of residents by Saitama Prefecture highlighted such views.[9]

4.3 Suggestions for a Sustainable Vision of Japan as a "Tourism Nation"

Based on the above, it can be argued that signposting that favors persons from certain countries, such as China and South Korea, is inappropriate from the perspective of equality and fairness. If the aim is to turn tourism into a core area of Japan's economy to ensure sustainable economic development, then simpler signs should be installed instead of those that favor certain countries. In the first place, that relying mainly on foreign visitors to Japan for tourism is not a sustainable solution has been shown by the devastating effects of the international travel restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Only a tourism industry that is self-sustaining within the country can really be sustainable – also from an ecological point of view. Simpler signs would be signs that include Japanese with pronunciations in *furigana* (notation for pronunciation) as well as romanised *furigana*, pictograms, and English. The first reason is that Japanese kanji characters are not that difficult for Chinese native speakers. For example, Hu (2016) reports that native Chinese-speaking learners of Japanese do not face much difficulty in understanding the meaning of Chinese characters used in Japanese. This means that for Chinese-speakers, it is relatively easy to understand signs in Japanese also without translation. Second, English is now basically accepted as a lingua franca. According to a survey of multilingual displays around Osaka by Sato et al. (2006, p. 123), of the foreigners (approximately two-thirds living in Japan and one-third tourists and others), "more than three quarters of respondents said they could 'understand' the signs if English

[8] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/public
[9] https://www.pref.saitama.lg.jp/documents/187638/172_iken.pdf

was used. If those who did not respond are included because the 8 non-respondents answered in another question that they could speak Japanese, it is clear that approximately 92% of respondents 'could understand' the signs if they were in Japanese and English", the report states.

Furthermore, it also seems too cumbersome to have four languages on one sign. It is often difficult to know where to focus attention. Public signs should convey information to the public quickly and concisely, instead of confusing them.

Considering the above, I would like to propose a multilingual sign that is desirable for a sustainable society.

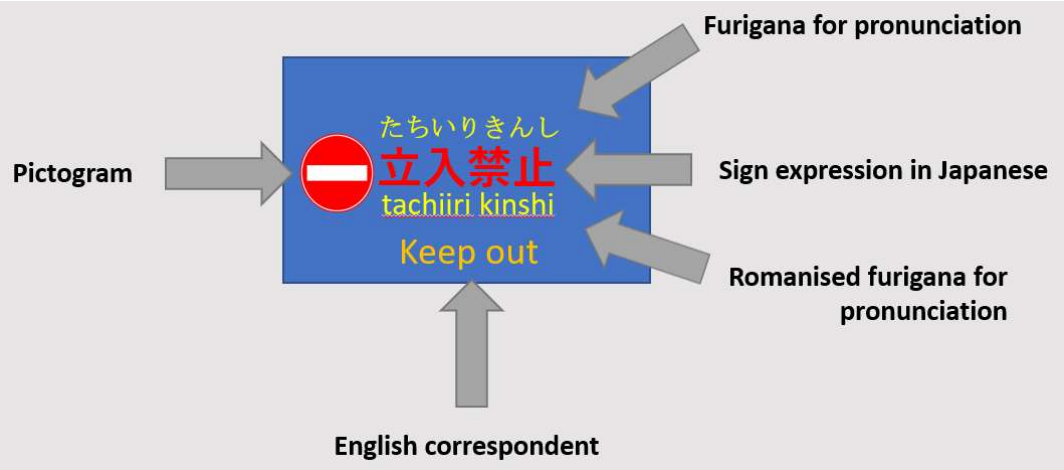


Figure 12. An example multilingual sign

The Japanese kanji characters, *tachiiri kinshi*, in the centre have *furigana* (phonetic notation in *hiragana*) above them and romanised *furigana* below them; an English version follows below that, while a pictogram appears to the left of the sign. The Japanese *furigana* is the phonetic representation of this sign's expression. This makes it possible for native Japanese speakers to pronounce it even at a younger age and for foreigners who are beginning to learn Japanese to read it. The romanised *furigana* is also provided for foreigners who do not speak or read Japanese to understand how to pronounce this sign, while also providing an English translation. As Iwata (2021) points out, there is a lack of uniformity in both the English and the romanisation of the Japanese expressions. For example, it is reported that there are five different English versions or romanisations of *Kokusai Ōdōri* in Yokohama: *Kokusai Boulevard*, *KOKUSAI-ŌDŌRI*, *Kokusai-odori Ave.*, *Kokusai-Ōdōri Boulevard*, and *Kokusai-Ōdōri Blvd*.

5. Problems with English Sign Expressions

However, while I have suggested a sign above that I consider ideal and appropriate for a sustainable, i.e., fair to everyone, in Japanese society, things are not that simple. This is because, in multilingual public signs, one often sees errors in the English translations: hard-to-notice errors in the corresponding English expressions. Especially, errors in conventional behavior and the sociolinguistic aspects of communicative behavior are harder to notice than lexical and grammatical errors. These kind of translation problems will hereafter be discussed from a linguistic perspective with respective examples (Kurabayashi 2018; Nishijima 2018).

From an analysis of the correspondence between the Japanese and English versions, it is possible to point out examples of inappropriate translations from at least three perspectives. There are several types of 'inappropriateness'. Here, they are analyzed from the perspectives of understanding the situation and lexical and information selections: (1) simple grammatical errors, (2) cognitive linguistic errors, and (3) sociolinguistic errors. Examples of each will be discussed in the following.

5.1 Simple Grammatical Errors

Figure 13. Beware of bees

(1a) *hachi-ni go-chūi kudasai*[10]
bee-DAT HON.beware.POL
(1b) 'Be careful of the bee'

Japanese nouns basically have no plural forms, nor do they have definite or indefinite articles. Therefore, the Japanese word, *hachi*, in example (1a) is incorrectly translated into English. The underlined words, 'the bee', in the English sentence (1b) seem to refer

[10] Photo taken in Kyoto by Mark Hammond, Associate Professor, Kanazawa University.

to a particular bee, rather than bees in general due to the definite article. This is a simple grammatical error, which is easily noticeable.

5.2 Cognitive Linguistic Errors

Figure 14. Keep behind the Boundary Fences (Unzen, Nagasaki)

(2a) *hodō gai tachiiri kinishi*
footpass outside entrance forbidden
(2b) *Keep within the boundary fences*
This sentence can convey a meaning of ‘dangerous’.

The two sentences are expected to be semantically and functionally equivalent, although the English and Japanese sentences are formally positively and negatively formulated, respectively. However, the English sentence (2b) can be misunderstood and is dangerous. The expression on the sign, *Keep within the boundary fences*, was inappropriately translated because of Japanese transfer. Different languages have different perspectives when linguistically perceiving a situation. These different perspectives can cause transferences. This point, how transfer can misconstrue the intended meaning of a Japanese sentence, is illustrated by the following different construals of the situation.

5.2.1 Causes of Misinterpretation: Difference in Construals

(3a) *Keep within the boundary fences*
(3a) can possibly be translated from the following Japanese sentence (3b):

(3b) *saku-no uchigawa-ni ite-kudasai*
fence-GEN inside-DAT keep.POL

Cf. (4a) *hakusen-no uchigawa-made sagatte o-machi-kudasai*
white line-GEN within[inside].to get.back HON.wait.POL
(4a) can be literally translated into (4b).
(4b) *Wait within [inside] the white line.*
Where is the place to which the preposition, *within*, in (4b) refers?
(4c) *Wait behind the white line.*

The English expression (3a) can be translated into Japanese, such as (3b) *saku-no uchigawa-ni itekudasai* ['boundary.fences-within keep']. Here, the Japanese spatial expression, *uchigawa-ni* ['in.side-at'], is translated to the English preposition, *within*, although the Japanese expression, *uchigawa-ni*, actually refers to the side where the visitors stand in front of the sign, i.e. from the viewpoint of the visitors inside the situation. The English preposition, *within*, however, is usually used from a perspective outside the situation, that is, from a bird's eye view. The space on which the preposition, *within*, focuses will be a dangerous, hot, steaming place. Note: One native speaker I asked about this usage said that, in addition to this understanding, it can also be interpreted as within the width of the narrow strip of white paint represented by the 'white line'. Therefore, the correct word, *behind,* should be used instead of *within* to appropriately convey the intention of the sign, such as, *Keep behind the boundary fences*.

Example (4a) *hakusen-no uchigwa-de omachikudasai* is translated word to word into (4b) *Wait within/inside the white line*. The correct translation should be (4c) *Wait behind the white line*.

5.3 Sociolinguistic Errors

The expressions were printed on a sign posted on the on doors of the JR Utsunomiya Line. They are its memorandum, which was not photographed.
(5a) *Yubihasami chūi doa-no sukima-ni te-ya-yubi-o irenai-de-kudasai*
finger.get.caught caution door-GEN space.DAT hand.or.finger-ACC insert.not.POL
(5b) *Watch your fingers*.
This sentence conveys the obvious. Such signs can be seen everywhere in Japan, but not as often in other countries. In Japan, public signs often convey various requests to the public to prevent accidents and problems or to avoid administrators' responsibility. However, this may seem strange to foreigners, although it is commonplace in Japan. For example, no such signs can be found on German train doors, although there are signs about door opening and closing, as in the following image.

Figure 15. Sign on the Door of a Train in Germany

There seems to be no need to translate the sign in example (5a). House (2018) divides translation into two types: 'overt translation' and 'covert translation'. The English translation of the sign presented here is 'overt translation' which relates to the original Japanese context rather than the English target audience. In order to make the English translation understandable to foreigners, cultural filters need to be used to manipulate the expression to suit the context of the target audience.

5.3.1 Differences in Relevant Information

The expressions below were also observed on a sign posted on the on doors of the JR Utsunomiya Line. They are its memorandum, which was not photographed.

(6a) *densha-wa jikobōshi-notame kyūteishasurukoto-ga arimasunode* (on a door of JR)

Train-TOP accident.protect.for sudden.stop-NML-NOM COP.POL.because

go-chui-kudasai

HON.beware.POL

(6b) *Caution, train may stop suddenly in case of emergency.*

This is also obvious, because in public transport, emergency braking is to be expected. What this means in this case is discussed below.

To be written, for example, the following sign would be understandable:

'Please hold on to the strap as the train may stop suddenly.'

(7a) *Kyūteisha-ni go-chūi* (on a door of JR Utsunomiya Line)

sudden.stop HON.caution

'Beware of sudden stops'

Its literal meaning (=intended message) is a warning that the train may stop suddenly. However, the corresponding English translation accompanying this is (7b).

(7b) Watch for sudden stops.

(7b) is a grammatically correct English sentence. Its literal meaning, which is unlike the communicative intent, is being prepared for sudden stops. There is a decisive difference. 'Watch for' is used in situations where one is waiting and preparing for a dangerous situation to happen at any time. For example, the following example refers to a situation in which one is driving one's car and is prepared for an eventuality. The following is an example of usage in this regard.

(7c) "A snowplough operator's field of vision is restricted. You may see them, but they don't always see you. Keep your distance and watch for sudden stops or turns."

(https://ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/site/residents/resources/winter-driving-safety)

The example of "watch for" in (7c) shows a situation where the danger of a sudden stop or turn is anticipated and prepared for in advance. On the other hand, (7b) is not in such a situation. In this sense, (7b) is unnatural, as one is not always prepared when travelling on a JR line. Then, what kind of English would be appropriate in this case? In the case of the Japanese sign example in (7a), the expression (7d) below is probably the most natural as a reminder to be careful.

(7d) Be careful of sudden stops.

5.3.2 What Kind of Information Is Relevant to Foreign Visitors?

There can be cultural differences in what is said or not said, and how what should be mentioned is expressed. For example, when entering a convenience store in Japan, the greeting 'irasshaimase' is heard from inside the shop. Such greetings are not expected to be answered. In other words, the customer can enter the shop without saying a word. In Germany, on the other hand, this is not the case (cf. Nishijima, 2020). While expressions in a familiar culture may not be uncomfortable, how the same contents should or should not be expressed is a matter of intercultural communication. There are many translations in which this is not considered.

This discussion suggests that if you use English, check how it is expressed in English-speaking countries. Alternatively, it may be possible to obtain the services of a bilingual or trilingual speaker; however, that person would need to have empirical knowledge of the actual corresponding language signs. In this way, it is expected that some of the above-mentioned problems with English translations can be solved if the specific situations to be addressed are taken into account (Nishijima, 2018). It would not be necessary to accurately translate all the information on Japanese signs into English. It is required to select information relevant to foreign visitors and provide the necessary information in English on multilingual public signs using the appropriate form of expression (cf.

Kurabayashi, 2018).

6. Concluding Remarks

The following three research questions were formulated for this article. I will try to answer all of them.

1. Does the 'standard' model of multilingual public signage play a sustainable role in Japan as a tourist destination?
2. If the standard model is problematic, what kind of multilingual public signs are desirable?
3. What are the problems associated with English translations on desirable multilingual signs?

Regarding Question 1, in view of the increase in the number of foreigners visiting Japan from various countries in the future, the current multilingual signs in four languages are not appropriate as they may cause misunderstanding.

For Question 2, Japanese, *furigana* indicating pronunciation, its alphabetical notation, English, and pictograms are considered appropriate, including for Japanese and foreigners, and are presented as a model.

Regarding Question 3, there are many direct translations from Japanese which are not appropriate. Therefore, we investigated the expressions that are used in corresponding situations in the English-speaking world, and proposed that Japanese signs should be written in accordance with that style of writing.

Abbreviations

ACC: Accusative
COP: Copula
DAT: Dative
HON: Honorifics
GEN: Genitive
NOM: Nominative
NML: Nominaliser
POL: Polite form
TOP: Topic

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