This paper examines ways in which the creative employment of language scripts and typographic designs in the linguistic landscape (LL) of Taipei serves as a key semiotic resource in indexing various frames of identity in Taiwan including sociocultural, ethnolinguistic, and geopolitical identities. Additionally, it is noted that multilingual, polyscriptal and typographic play in Taipei’s LL meshes with a rich history of homophonic wordplay, aesthetic calligraphy, and display typography in Chinese cultures wherein both the aural and visual forms of language are key in constructing meaning. As argued by Tam (2012), typography is a metalanguage, a visual language that encodes verbal language, and is ”already bilingual.” Multilingual and polyscriptal typographies, therefore amplify the interaction between the verbal and the visual.

Borrowing from Thurlow’s (2012) ’three P’s of creativity in new media,’ I observe that polyscriptal typographies in Taipei’s LL involve a visual ”vernacular literacy” that is ”often poetic, usually playful and always pragmatic” (2012, p. 169). Moreover, these practices are ideologically informed and embedded within economic and sociopolitical hierarchies which are locally situated, yet regionally and globally informed. Thus, the vernacular literacy of polyscriptal/typographic creativity in the LL frequently entails ’a fourth P,’ power relations. Examining the significations of polyscriptal typographies thereby underscores the importance of LL practices in the creation of a unique, yet multi-local and multi-vocal, sense of place (cf. Rodman, 1992). Such research also reveals that processes of identification and the production of place are both emergent, relational, and highly contextual.


Keywords: linguistic landscape, display typography, polyscriptal creativity.