



Linguistic Uniscapes in Thailand: Tension between Thai and English

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to examine the affective stances of Thai and international students toward the linguistic landscapes on university campuses and to explore their lived experiences of signage at both public universities (PUUs) and private universities (PRUs) in Thailand from a multimodal perspective. Three PUUs and three PRUs were investigated, yielding a total of 1,613 signs across six campuses. In addition, 30 participants (15 Thai and 15 international students) engaged in place talk on the campuses. A nexus analysis was applied for both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The findings revealed that both groups expressed positive affective stances toward signs featuring English, images, and colors. Well-designed signs conveyed social meanings to students and enhanced their enjoyment of campus life. By contrast, tensions surrounding the use of Thai and English on signage were highlighted through place talk with participants from PUUs. The findings of this research suggested that bilingual signage that includes both Thai and English in LUs should be prioritized to serve both local and international students. The use of English on campus signage should match the quality of Thai. University authorities need to reconsider the design of top-down signs. Collaboration between university administrations and those involved in signage design is essential for effective management. Finally, awareness of the increasing presence of international students in higher education in Thailand—and in other countries with similar trends toward internationalization—should be raised among university administrations and local students.

KEYWORDS

Linguistic uniscapes; linguistic schoolscape; linguistic landscapes; Thailand; internationalization; affective stance.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, linguistic landscapes (LLs) have been used to examine the affective regimes of signage (Lang & Numtong, 2024), as “different types of signage can influence the public display or materialization of affect” (Wee & Goh, 2019, p. 8). However, the affective regimes intended by sign makers may not always be interpreted in the same way by the social actors who encounter the signage in lived spaces (Jocuns, 2021). This is because social actors may hold their own affective stances toward different types of signage (Scollon & Scollon, 2007). It is therefore essential to examine social actors’ affective stances toward signage.

With the internationalization of higher education, Thailand has introduced more international programs for both Thai and international students (Crocco & Chaemchoy, 2024). As a result, signage on university campuses is designed to serve both groups. Pan (2024a, p. 4) introduced the term *linguistic uniscape[s]* (LUs) to describe “the LL[s] on university campuses where the written text constitutes, reproduces, and transforms language ideologies.” Yet limited research has focused on Thai and international students’ affective stances toward LUs in Thailand, leaving a gap in understanding whether campus signage provides sufficient affective regimes.

To address this, the present study examined the affective stances and lived experiences of Thai and international students toward the LUs of public universities (PUUs) and private universities (PRUs) in Thailand. The findings provide insights into important language issues concerning LUs in Thailand from both perspectives. The research questions (RQs) are as follows: **RQ1:** What are Thai and international students’ affective stances toward the LUs of PUUs and PRUs in Thailand?

RQ2: What are Thai and international students’ lived experiences of the LUs of PUUs and PRUs in Thailand?

Linguistic Schoolscapes and Linguistic Uniscapes

School areas and campuses are geophysical spaces that warrant investigation of their LLs, as they are places “for learners of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds” and “can perpetuate language ideologies” (Bernardo-Hinesley, 2020, p. 15). Linguistic schoolscapes (LSs) have examined how “linguistic and symbolic resources [that] are mobilized for educational purposes,” such as images, operate in these contexts (Krompák et al., 2022, p. 2). Multimodal analyses show that different types of visual representations—including languages, images, shapes, and colors—resonate with the social actors who view the signage and convey a range of social meanings within geophysical spaces (Andriyanti, 2021; Pan, 2025; Perales et al., 2025). LSs have primarily focused on the languages used in campus signage, distinguishing between top-down signs produced by officials, bottom-up signs produced by individuals and private enterprises, fixed signs that are permanent, and non-fixed signs that can be moved after use over a given period. Many LS studies have reported that monolingual signs in the Thai language predominate (Ayaé & Savski, 2024; Savski, 2021).

The proposed term “LUs” is deliberately used to distinguish campus signage from signage in school areas (Pan, 2024a). Unlike school areas, where monolingualism often prevails under national language policy, campus signage typically incorporates multiple languages to accommodate visitors from diverse linguacultural backgrounds (Wu et al., 2023). English is used more frequently in LUs than in LSs, as shown in previous research (Im, 2020; Pan, 2025). In addition, bottom-up signs are more pervasive on campuses due to the greater number of social activities and private enterprises compared with school areas (Pan, 2024b). Campus signage also reflects broader social meanings related to nationalism, politics, institutional policies, and students’ attitudinal orientations toward the campus and wider society (Huang, 2022). Previous studies show that LS signage primarily serves educational purposes, whereas LU signage conveys a broader range of social meanings, such as reflecting Thai history and politics through particular building shapes and the use of colors on signage (Jocuns, 2021). Therefore, the study of LUs should prioritize the social meanings of languages combined with other semiotic resources, particularly in relation to students who have lived experiences on campuses.

Affect, affective regimes, and affective stances

In recent years, affective regimes—developed from the concept of affect—have been examined in relation to the presentation of signage. Affect refers to “people’s collective-evaluative orientations” and encompasses both positive and negative associations (Lang & Numtong, 2024, p. 6). Unlike emotion, which generally refers to an individual’s feelings, affect denotes the shared attitudinal orientations of a group and carries broader connotations (Wee & Goh, 2019). As signage contributes to different “experiences qua affect” (Wee & Goh, 2019, p. 8), various types of signage produce distinct affective regimes that evoke different responses among social actors (Zhou, 2023). For example, language displayed in modern fonts accompanied by playful images on different signs in China creates a convivial affective regime aimed at younger customers (Zhou, 2023), while the use of red in Chinese-language signage and product displays in Bangkok during the Chinese New Year demonstrates festive commodification through urban affective economies (Lang & Numtong, 2024). Beyond affective regimes, social actors themselves also take affective stances toward signage.

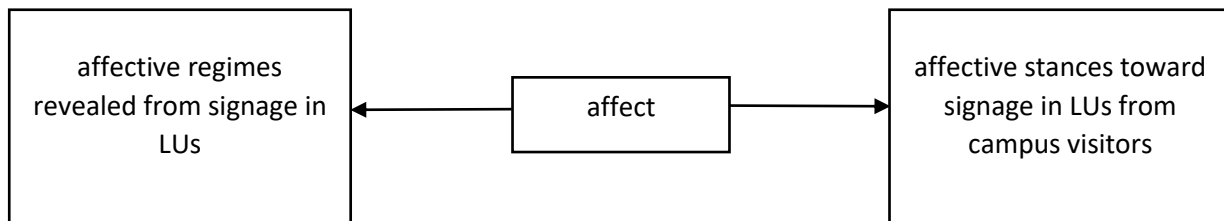
Stance refers to an individual’s attitudinal orientation toward an object (Bohmann & Ahlers, 2022). Affective stance is a type of stance that reflects someone’s evaluative orientation toward an object in relation to affect (Bohmann & Ahlers, 2022). In alignment with the concept of affect within affective regimes, this research defines affective stance as the collective affective stance of Thai and international university students in Thailand toward campus signage. Figure 1 illustrates the interrelationship among affect, affective regimes, and affective stances in LUs.

A few studies have examined the collective affective stances of groups. For example, Pan (2024b) reported that international students in Thailand were not fully satisfied with monolingual signage on campuses, while Biri (2023) showed that online fandom members exhibited shared affective stances due to common interests. As an affective stance is often

expressed through verbal interaction (Biri, 2023), social actors' affective stances may not always align with the affective regimes intended by signage. Zhao and Lou (2023) reported that Shanghai citizens perceived signage as both globalized and localized, even though it primarily conveyed an internationalized affective regime. Similarly, Xia and Xia (2024) reported that ethnic students in a Chinese primary school held different affective stances toward the dominant use of standard Chinese on signage, highlighting that local social actors' stances may diverge from the policy orientations of sign makers.

Figure 1.

Interrelationship among affect, affective regimes, and affective stances in LUs.



Thus far, the affective stances and lived experiences of Thai and international university students in the context of internationalization in higher education remain under-researched from the perspective of LUs. Therefore, it is essential to examine in greater detail the differences in affective stances and lived experiences of both Thai and international students at PUUs and PRUs in Thailand.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

To address both research questions, data were collected from six university campuses, where signage was systematically documented. In addition, 30 student participants (15 Thai and 15 international) were engaged to elicit their affective stances and lived experiences toward the campus signage. Data collection employed the place talk method (Zhao & Lou, 2023), which allowed participants to discuss their perceptions in the context of physical signage on campus. A mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses, was applied to ensure a comprehensive examination of the data. The following sections provide a detailed account of the research design.

Research sites

The campuses of three PUUs and three PRUs, totaling six campuses, were purposively selected for this research. The selection was guided by three main criteria. First, an examination of each university's official website confirmed that they had enrolled international students over the past three years following Thailand's post-Covid reopening in 2022. The number of international students in English-medium programs at these universities indicated their suitability as research sites and their ability to provide diverse participants. Second, these institutions were consistently ranked among the top five PUUs and PRUs in Thailand in the Quacquarelli Symonds

(QS) World University Rankings between 2021 and 2025. Given the return of both Thai and international students since 2022, these universities have actively sought to expand their international student body (Pongsin et al., 2023). Third, these universities have been the focus of prior studies regarding their institutional visions, sustainable development policies, and approaches to internationalization (Jampaklay et al., 2022; Pan, 2024b).

Participants

This research was approved by the author's affiliated institution. All participants provided written consent before data collection and voluntarily took part in the study. Five student participants were recruited from each of the six universities, resulting in a total of 30 participants (Table 1). Among them, 15 (50%) were Thai nationals with Thai as their first language, while the remaining 15 (50%) were international students: five Chinese (Chinese as their first language), three Burmese (Burmese), three Indonesian (Indonesian), two Cambodian (Khmer), one Indian (Hindi), and one Vietnamese (Vietnamese). The participants were in their second or third year of study during data collection, and students from the same university already knew each other. English served as the lingua franca during group interactions. None of the international students could read or write Thai, a common situation for non-Thai individuals studying or working in Thailand (Pongsin et al., 2023). All participants had an intermediate level of English proficiency, consistent with the requirements of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2020) and Thailand's higher education policy (Pongsin et al., 2023). Finally, 12 participants (40%) were male and 18 (60%) were female, though sex was not considered a research variable.

Table 1.

Information about the participants.

Campus	Thai	International	Total
PUU 1	3	Burmese (1); Chinese (1)	5
PUU 2	2	Burmese (1); Chinese (1); Indonesian (1)	5
PUU 3	3	Chinese (1); Cambodian (1)	5
PRU 1	2	Indonesian (2); Vietnamese (1)	5
PRU 2	2	Burmese (1); Chinese (1); Indian (1)	5
PRU 3	3	Cambodian (1); Chinese (1)	5

Data collection

The researcher gathered groups of five participants from the same university for each recording session. Each group conducted a campus walk around their own university, during which the researcher used an iPhone camera to visually document each sign encountered. The signage included both top-down and bottom-up signs, as well as fixed and non-fixed signs located outside buildings and within commonly visited campus facilities. Allowing participants to walk around familiar spaces was intended to elicit their affective stances and lived experiences in a

natural and contextually grounded manner. During the campus walks, the researcher asked participants about their perceptions of different signs to capture their affective stances, as place talks involve interactions with and within specific spaces (Zhao & Lou, 2023). These discussions also incorporated the participants' lived experiences and reflections from their broader campus life, consistent with the concept of the historical body in nexus analysis (Jocuns, 2021). To guide the conversations, the researcher prepared five semi-structured questions that participants were encouraged to ask each other during the place talk (see Appendix). In total, the researcher collected 16.6 hours of audio recordings across all participant groups.

Research instruments

Regarding data collection, two instruments were used. First, the camera on the researcher's iPhone was used to visually document the signage that each group encountered during the campus walk. Following previous research, one sign was considered one unit of analysis (Pan, 2024a). Second, to gather participants' affective stances and lived experiences toward the signage on campus, place talk was conducted using the prepared questions listed in the appendix. These questions were designed only to facilitate the smooth flow of the place talk, and participants were also given complete freedom to ask other questions related to the signage to elicit relevant information.

Regarding data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative methods based on nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2007) were employed. Nexus analysis is commonly used in LL studies, focusing on both the multimodal aspects of signage and the interaction order. The lived experiences of social actors in relation to a place are central to nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2007). In this research, affective stances and lived experiences related to the LUs of Thai and international university students were elicited through place talk conducted on site.

Data analysis

Since the signage on each campus was visually collected during the campus walk, the statistical results pertaining to the sign types and code preference were analyzed first using quantitative analysis. Following the coding scheme for LLs (Andriyanti, 2021), the signage was classified as monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, and further divided into top-down signs, bottom-up signs, fixed signs, and non-fixed signs. Place semiotics in geosemiotics was applied to decode code preference on each sign, with the language presented in the largest size and positioned at the top or center considered the code preference (Pan, 2024a).

The nexus analysis was used for qualitative analysis and was conducted through three stages. In the engaging stage, the researcher participated in the data collection with participants to elicit their affective stances and lived experiences in relation to the LUs. In the navigating stage, content analysis was employed to identify affective stances and lived experiences related to campus signage. Keywords were decoded using an inductive approach, without predetermined categories. Through recurrent readings, keywords were identified and assigned codes to capture core concepts. The codes were then categorized to identify patterns, which were conceptualized and developed into a conceptual model. Two coders with expertise in LSs

independently completed the coding process to ensure comprehensive inclusion and understanding for validity. In addition, inter-coder reliability was calculated at 0.937, indicating high reliability. Both coders provided rationales for their coding decisions and resolved discrepancies through discussion until final agreement was reached. In the changing stage, participants' affective stances and lived experiences regarding campus signage were interpreted as reflections of signage-related issues from both Thai and international students' perspectives. Based on the content analysis, meaningful recommendations were developed to address these issues.

RESULTS

Statistical results

Table 2 presents the quantitative data on the signage collected from each group during the campus walks, with the number (N) of signs in each category and their corresponding proportions (P in %) shown in parentheses.

Table 2.

Number of signs collected with each group.

Campus	N. in Total	Top-down	Bottom-up	Fixed	Non-fixed
PUU 1	327 (100)	253 (77)	74 (23)	198 (61)	129 (39)
PUU 2	271 (100)	164 (61)	107 (39)	112 (41)	159 (59)
PUU 3	248 (100)	147 (59)	101 (41)	107 (43)	141 (57)
Total of PUU	846 (100)	564 (67)	282 (33)	417 (49)	429 (51)
PRU 1	257 (100)	116 (45)	141 (55)	96 (37)	161 (63)
PRU 2	293 (100)	148 (51)	145 (49)	115 (39)	178 (61)
PRU 3	217 (100)	103 (47)	114 (53)	99 (46)	118 (54)
Total of PRU	767 (100)	367 (48)	400 (52)	310 (40)	457 (60)
Total	1,613 (100)	931 (58)	682 (42)	727 (45)	886 (55)

Table 2 shows that the three PUUs in Thailand used more top-down signs than bottom-up ones, while the three PRUs used more bottom-up signs than top-down ones. In addition, both types of universities had more non-fixed signs than fixed ones. Table 3 presents the number of monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual signs, along with the different code preferences on each campus.

Table 3 shows that the three PUUs in Thailand mainly used Thai as the code preference on campus signage, whereas the three PRUs mainly used English as the code preference. The PUUs followed the national language policy, while the PRUs attempted to attract more students from other countries.

Table 3.*Descriptive data regarding code preferences on different types of signs.*

Campus	Code preference								
	Thai			English			Others		
	mono	bi	multi	mono	bi	multi	mono	bi	multi
PUU 1	83	61	49	22	65	15	12	18	2
Total	193 (59)			102 (31)			32 (10)		
PUU 2	89	53	25	18	48	14	11	12	1
Total	167 (62)			80 (30)			24 (9)		
PUU 3	95	49	27	15	36	8	7	7	4
Total	171 (69)			59 (24)			18 (7)		
PRU 1	2	1	3	108	42	16	35	38	12
Total	6 (2)			166 (65)			85 (33)		
PRU 2	27	46	17	63	95	37	2	5	1
Total	90 (31)			195 (67)			8 (3)		
PRU 3	9	10	5	98	56	28	5	4	2
Total	24 (11)			182 (84)			11 (5)		

Affective stances toward the LUs of PUUs

Both positive and negative affective stances toward campus signage were elicited. Thai and international student participants expressed positive stances toward bottom-up signs that included the English language, as illustrated in example (1) and Figure 2.

(1)

P02: I really like these posters. They are fun and using English.

P04: Yeah, I agree. I think they are so well-designed, and English is good for us.

(PUU 1)

Two key strengths of the bottom-up signs on the PUU campuses in Thailand contributed to these positive stances. The use of English made the signs convenient for international students, enabling them to understand the content, while the well-designed images captured students' attention. In Figure 2, the two signs at the top, from PUU 1, used English content alongside modern and attractive images, with appealing fonts that drew attention. The two signs at the bottom, from PUU 3, helped students understand the menu and promoted social connections through shared interests, while the beverage images and cartoon drawings were viewed as engaging and appealing. By contrast, the monolingual use of Thai on PUU campus signs elicited negative affective stances from international student participants and some Thai student participants, as shown in example (2) and Figure 3.

Figure 2.

Bottom-up signs including the English language at PUU 1 (top) and PUU 3 (bottom).



(2)

P08: We can't really understand Thai signs.

P09: Actually, maybe they can use Thai and English.

(PUU 2)

Figure 3.

Monolingual Thai signs at PUU 1 (top) and PUU 2 (bottom).



The place talk revealed that international student participants struggled to read the Thai, which led to negative affective stances toward the monolingual Thai signs. As illustrated in Figure 3, the top-down signs on PUU campuses primarily used Thai for different purposes: introducing a service (top right), presenting the history of a building (top left), and displaying academic information (bottom images). As this content was directly related to students' campus life and academic activities, the monolingual format made the signs inaccessible for international students who could not read Thai. In addition, both Thai and international student participants expressed negative affective stances toward top-down signs that lacked the visual appeal of bottom-up signs, as illustrated in example (3).

(3)

P12: I don't like this because they have too many words.

P11: You only see pictures?

P12: No, I mean they should make it more noticeable.

P14: Like more interesting graphic design.

P12: Yes.

(PUU 3)

As example (3) shows, signs with too many words were often ignored. By contrast, diverse bottom-up signs created by students, clubs, and private shops were more effective, as they used fewer words and incorporated vivid images and appealing graphic design elements (Figure 2). Compared to these, the top-down signs in Figure 3 contained more text and lacked striking visuals, making them less engaging for students. This highlights the importance of multimodality in LUs in shaping students' affective stances on campuses.

Affective stances toward the LUs of PRUs

Both Thai and international student participants from the PRUs expressed positive affective stances toward the widespread use of English on campus signage, as example (4) and Figure 4 illustrate.

(4)

P17: I think we all know we have more English than Thai on sign.

P18: Yeah. I think our university know we have many non-Thai students.

P17: Of course. That's why everywhere is English and some other language.

(PRU 1)

Figure 4 shows that English served as the code preference across various types of signage, including top-down signs such as academic posters and bus stop boards, as well as bottom-up signs like student activity posters. In (4), P17, a Thai student, explicitly acknowledged the extensive use of English, while P18, an international student, noted that PRU 1 had many international students, which explained the reliance on English signage to support a diverse student body. The place talk also revealed that many Thai participants did not mind reading English, as it created an international atmosphere on campus and the English used was

accessible despite their Thai linguacultural background. In addition, both Thai and international student participants from the PRUs expressed positive affective stances toward the appealing design of many types of signs on PRU campuses, as example (5) and Figure 5 illustrate.

Figure 4.

English used on signs at PRU 1 (top), PRU 2 (middle) and PRU 3 (bottom).



(5)

P23: OK I have to say I love our university's sign here. It's so fashion.

P25: Agree.

P22: It's a showoff about our university and it's impressive.

(PRU 2)

Similar to the participants from the PUUs, the student participants from the PRUs preferred signage that was interesting, attractive, and well designed. The interaction in (5) revealed the students' positive affective stances toward the university logo displayed at the top left of Figure 5. This logo combined the initial capital English letters of the university's name with a three-dimensional silver diamond, positioned prominently in front of the main campus lake and opposite the central building along the main road. Unlike several PUUs that used the Thai or the full English names of their universities, the use of an abbreviation alongside a symbolic graphic contributed to the students' positive perceptions. PRU 2 also demonstrated effective graphic design, as shown in the top middle photograph of Figure 5, where the venue's name was clearly presented. The top right photograph in Figure 5 illustrates the use of "SAC,"

referring to the Student Activity Center, inscribed in large capital English letters on a specially designed architectural structure, with an arrow beneath the text, fostering a convivial campus atmosphere (Wee & Goh, 2019). At PRU 3, additional creative signage was noted. In the bottom left photograph of Figure 5, the English language was paired with a red heart symbolizing love to introduce the faculty's name. The bottom middle photograph showed each letter of the word "welcome" displayed individually along the main road, ensuring visitors repeatedly encountered the message as they walked. Finally, the bottom right photograph in Figure 5 depicted a sign incorporating animal images, such as turtles and snakes, which captured students' attention through its playful design.

Figure 5.

Well-designed signs at PRU 2 (top) and PRU 3 (bottom).



One negative affective stance expressed by a few Thai student participants from the PRUs concerned the limited use of the Thai language on signage. As their English proficiency was at an intermediate level, some Thai students found it difficult to fully understand monolingual English signs (Pan, 2024b). However, this concern was raised by only three Thai student participants from the PRUs, suggesting that it was not a widespread issue among Thai students in these institutions.

Lived experiences of participants regarding signage on campuses

The first type of lived experience reported by participants from the PUUs concerned the usefulness of different signs in presenting academic work and campus activities, as example (6) illustrates.

(6)

P01: Oh, I remember at the first semester, I always try to see the information. I really want to involve different activities in university.

P03: Well, they are helping now as well. I always notice many meetings or activity from these signs too.

P02: Yeah. I feel if it's not about today's walking, I didn't even realize that we actually see these signs very often.

(PUU 1)

Three key points emerged in (6) and were echoed by other participants. First, freshmen unfamiliar with the new campus environment often relied on campus signs for guidance. Second, the content of various signs helped students attend different campus activities. Third, the place talk used in this research enabled participants to recognize the importance of signage. Thus, the signage on PUU campuses contributed to enriching students' campus life. Conversely, the extensive use of the English language on signage at PRU campuses also proved beneficial to PRU participants, as example (7) demonstrates.

(7)

P19: I actually sometime read English slowly. I remember one day I wait my friend. I sit on the campus and read some English on some sign to learn English. It's interesting.

P16: You do that? I sometime just feel I never being in Thailand to see so many English, except tourist place like Phuket. So, I really feel we are very international.

P18: Our university is definitely quite international. It's nice to know our university care about our students don't know Thai.

P19: Yes. I love this from our university very much. If I am in Bangkok not in our university and everywhere is Thai, I don't know what to do.

(PRU 1)

In (7), the use of English on signage had a potential pedagogical effect by allowing students to learn and practice English. It also reinforced the internationalization of the campus. Students interpreted the English signage at PRUs as evidence that the university administration valued international students' presence, viewing it as a caring gesture. P19 even compared campus signage to that in parts of Bangkok, emphasizing the importance of English for non-Thai people in Thailand (Bennui, 2023). Thus, the extensive use of English signage at PRUs benefited both Thai and international students. However, at PUUs, tensions between the use of Thai and English on signage were noted, as example (8) illustrates.

(8)

P08: I wish more English can be on signs. It is better for us to understand.

P06: So, you all really don't understand any Thai here?

P08: No. Are you kidding? No one read Thai. Some of us only speak little Thai.

P06: But you should know this is Thailand. So, it must use Thai.

P10: But nobody can read Thai. I mean most of the foreign students. You know that.

P06: Don't you have any plan to learn Thai?

P10: What do you mean? It's not like we don't respect Thai or Thailand, but foreigners here mostly speak English or Chinese or maybe a little Thai. Do you know any foreigner who can read and write Thai?

P06: I'm just saying maybe you should know it's normal to use Thai everywhere because it's Thailand.

P08: OK let me ask you, are you going to learn Burmese if you go study in Myanmar or learn Chinese if you study in China in an international program. They only use English?

P06: I'm not going there.

P10: Wow! Oh my god! Are you serious right now?

P09: Hey! It's rude.

P08: What? I'm just saying you should know Thai language is everywhere, and maybe you should learn some easy Thai if you stay here.

P08: But English is what we use not Thai.

(PUU 2)

A negative atmosphere emerged in the interactions among the participants from all three PUUs, with the exchange in (8) being the most serious as the tone grew increasingly tense. In (8), P06 was a Thai participant, while the others were international students. Most international students in Thailand attend international programs where English is the medium of instruction (Pongsin et al., 2023). As P08 and P10 indicated, English was the primary language they used daily in Thailand, even though Thai is the national language. By contrast, P06 appeared to have limited awareness of this, questioning why the international students could not understand any Thai on the signage. As the discussion escalated, P06 repeatedly emphasized that it was natural for Thai to be used on signage in Thailand and suggested that international students should learn to read Thai if they intended to stay. However, P06's remark "I'm not going there" in response to P08's question intensified the conflict. The interaction ended in prolonged silence as the group continued walking, with P08's final statement reiterating that English, rather than Thai, had been used. This example illustrates the divergent language ideologies of Thai and international participants: Thai students expected signage in Thai, while international students requested English signage, as they did not use Thai in their daily lives despite residing in Thailand.

DISCUSSION

This research examined the LUs of PUUs and PRUs in Thailand by analyzing not only the languages used on signage but also how Thai and international students, as social actors, interpreted the signs in their daily lives. The design of campus signage was a central theme in the discussions among participants from both PUUs and PRUs. Students highlighted the design of language on signage, noting that interesting and modern fonts elicited positive affective stances (Xia & Xia, 2024). They also emphasized that flexible designs with fewer words were more effective than rigid, text-heavy formats. From a multimodal perspective, visual

representations were crucial in encouraging students to engage with signage. The combination of language, images, and vibrant colors on posters, announcements, and banners generated more positive affect compared to word-only signs (Huang, 2022; Pan, 2025). Therefore, certain top-down signs, such as those at PUUs shown in Figure 3, may need redesigning to incorporate modern design elements that better capture students' attention (Wu & Huang, 2024).

Furthermore, the use of Thai and English on signage was a central focus in the place talk of each group. Compared to the participants from PUUs, the Thai and international student participants from PRUs rarely expressed issues with English being the code preference on campus signage. PRUs rely heavily on financial support through the enrollment of both Thai and international students (Pan, 2024b). As shown in Tables 2 and 3, signage at PRUs was often multilingual to create an internationalized atmosphere (Pan, 2024b). Thai students benefited from greater opportunities to learn English through signage, while international students could fully understand the content. The place talk among PRU participants revealed that the use of English on campus signage promoted self-learning in English for Thai students and simultaneously supported international students (Crocco & Chaemchoy, 2024; Krompák et al., 2022).

By contrast, the participants from PUUs in Thailand encountered issues regarding the use of languages on campus signage. Although the number of signs at PUUs was similar to that at PRUs, as Table 2 illustrates, Thai was more frequently used as the code preference than English, as shown in Table 3. Many international students could not understand the monolingual Thai signs because they were unable to read Thai. This situation stemmed mainly from the Thai government's language policy, which designates Thai as the official and only legal language for documents (Savski, 2021). Moreover, Thai participants from the PUUs may have lacked awareness of English as the main foreign language in Thailand (Bennui, 2023). As example (8) demonstrates, they appeared to assume that students who came to Thailand should already know how to speak and read Thai.

In this regard, the tension between the use of Thai and English has escalated in Thailand from the perspectives of both sign makers and social actors. On one hand, Thailand's language policy has had a tremendous impact on Thai students, who have consistently been exposed to the national education policy within the Thai context (Crocco & Chaemchoy, 2024), reinforcing the predominant position of the Thai in their minds. On the other hand, the emerging policy of internationalization in higher education has necessitated the use of English for the sustainable development of Thai higher education, the personal development of students, and the future economy of Thailand (Jampaklay et al., 2022; Pongsin et al., 2023). Consequently, Thai has not been promoted as a lingua franca for any form of interaction in Thailand (Crocco & Chaemchoy, 2024), creating an awkward situation between the expectation that international students should treat Thai as the main foreign language and the broader internationalization agenda of the country.

Under these circumstances, there needs to be a balance between the national language and English in LUs, as the national policy is monolingual while higher education is increasingly internationalized. This discussion can be divided into five categories based on the results of this research. First, bilingual signage that includes both Thai and English in LUs should be prioritized to serve both local and international students. Second, in line with the findings of previous studies (Pan, 2024b; Wu & Huang, 2024), the use of English on campus signage should match the quality of Thai, as its purpose is to improve international students' lived experiences on campus rather than serving as symbolic decoration (Ayae & Savski, 2024).

Apart from the issue of language use on signage, university authorities need to reconsider the design of top-down signs. As revealed in this research, signage related to academia does not need to be unattractive or overly text-heavy. As university campuses host both academic and non-academic activities, a balance between top-down and bottom-up signs is necessary to reflect both academic and social aspects of campus life. Therefore, collaboration between university administrations and those involved in signage design is essential for effective management. Finally, based on the affective stances and lived experiences of Thai and international student participants in this research, awareness of the increasing presence of international students in higher education in Thailand—and in other countries with similar trends toward internationalization—should be raised among university administrations and local students. Despite the constraints of a monolingual national language policy, university administrations and stakeholders can exercise flexibility in adapting signage to suit the realities of diverse campus environments (Wu et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

The examination of Thai and international university students' affective stances and lived experiences of campus signage in Thailand highlights key issues concerning both design and language use. Students emphasized the need for attractive signage that incorporates diverse semiotic resources, with positive stances toward well-designed signs suggesting that university administrations should reconsider the design of top-down signage such as academic posters and announcements. Language use, however, emerged as the primary concern. Bilingual signage containing both Thai and English was viewed as the most effective solution for accommodating both Thai and international students. Several international participants stressed that English translations should convey the same content as the Thai text to avoid tokenistic use of English. Moreover, the explicit tension surrounding Thai and English language use on signage reflects broader challenges of balancing national language policy with the demands of internationalization in higher education.

This tension regarding language use on campus signage cannot be resolved solely by sign makers but also depends on students' stances toward multilingualism. For Thai students, the use of English on campus signage may need to be integrated into English language pedagogy to improve their awareness of its broader use in Thai society. For international students, training

in the important role of the Thai as the host country's national language is important. The findings of this research also have implications for other countries facing similar situations in LUs. While preserving the national language remains vital, greater attention should be given to balancing the maintenance of national language and culture with sustainable development that takes globalization and internationalization into account.

This research was limited to campuses in Thailand. Future research should further examine local and international students' affective stances toward campus signage. On one hand, such research can validate the findings of this study; on the other hand, it will expand the scope of LUs by incorporating campus visitors' perspectives on signage.

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Appendix

Prepared questions

1. How do you feel about this sign?
2. Do you have positive or negative feelings toward this sign? Why?
3. Have you ever noticed this type of sign on campus before?
4. What is the problem with this sign?
5. Have you had any difficulty understanding this type of sign? How did you solve the problem?