Discourses of tourism in Thailand: The nexus of religion, commodification, tourism, and "other-ness"

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Abstract

This paper reports on an on-going study of the discourse(s) of tourism in Thailand, focusing upon the linguistic landscapes present heritage sites in Thailand. The study focuses upon the geosemiotic nature of signage in Thai heritage sites specifically drawing attention to interactivity, prayer, ephemerality, ethnicities, and a discussion of the notion of boundary objects in Thai heritage sites. The discourses in place that makeup the tourist landscape of Thailand comprise a variety of complex semiotic aggregates: signs indexing a foreign other, signs regulating tourist behavior, and signs that request donations. Of particular interest is the makeup of the linguistic landscape within Buddhist temples where tourists (both Asian and Farang) are asked to make donations. Another issue immanent in Thai tourism is how elements of everyday Thai Buddhist religious practice (attending temple, prayer, making merit) become commodified in the tourist gaze.

Keywords: discourse analysis, geosemiotics, discourse of tourism, boundary objects

บทคัดย่อ

วิจัยฉบับนี้นำเสนอการศึกษาระบบข้อความที่ใช้ในบริบทการท่องเที่ยวในประเทศไทย โดยมุ่งเน้นที่การศึกษาภูมิทัศนภาษาศาสตร์ตามสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวทางวัฒนธรรม วิจัยฉบับนี้เน้นการศึกษาภูมิสัญศาสตร์ของป้ายข้อความในสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวทางวัฒนธรรมไทย โดยเฉพาะป้ายดึงความสนใจให้เกิดการกระทำต่าง ๆ บทสวดมนต์ ป้ายหมุนเวียนชั่วคราว ป้ายเจาะจงการแจ้งบอกเฉพาะกลุ่มเชื้อชาติ และการอภิปรายถึงการใช้ป้ายข้อความในบริบทต่าง ๆ ระบบข้อความที่ก่อให้เกิดภูมิทัศนภาษาศาสตร์ในประเทศไทยดังกล่าวประกอบไปด้วยกลุ่มความหลากหลายทางสัญศาสตร์: ป้ายคำสั่งผู้ที่เป็นชาวต่างชาติ ป้ายแจ้งระเบียบสำหรับชาวต่างชาติ และป้ายขอความอนุเคราะห์บริจาคทรัพย์ สิ่งที่วิจัยฉบับนี้ให้ความสนใจเป็นอย่างมากคือภูมิทัศนภาษาศาสตร์ที่เกิดขึ้นในวัดไทยซึ่งเป็นสถานที่ที่นักท่องเที่ยว (ทั้งชาวไทยและชาวต่างประเทศ) ได้รับการร้องขอให้บริจาคทรัพย์ อีกประเด็นที่อยู่ภายในขอบเขตของการศึกษาการท่องเที่ยวไทยคือการประกอบพุทธศาสนกิจของไทยในชีวิตประจำวัน (การเข้าวัด สวดมนต์ ทำบุญ) ได้เข้ามาอยู่ในความสนใจของนักท่องเที่ยวได้อย่างไร

1. Introduction

From the Vatican in Rome to Notre-Dame in Paris, or Borobudur on the island of Java, Indonesia, religious places and architecture have been a significant part of tourist experience the world over, transcending religious experience as well. As Berger notes, where tourism in Europe could be said to hinge on visiting Cathedrals, shrines and religious sites, tourism in Thailand, both local and global, focuses upon visiting temples (Berger, 2007). As an example of kind, the Tourist Authority of Thailand has promoted the nine temple tour, a tour usually conducted among friends and family whose purpose is to visit nine temples in one day, a number also supposed to bring good luck in Thai culture Heritage sites in Thailand[1] (Peleggi, 1996) are also places where the religious, the historical and the secular intermesh.

This paper examines discourse and tourism in Thailand by focusing upon some aspects of the geosemiotic (Scollon & Suzanne, 2003) design of some Thai temples and tourist sites. The aim and scope of this study is to illustrate the uniqueness of the geosemiotic landscape of Thai temples, explain some of its features, and discuss the presence of signs which could be said to construct a foreign other, and as such, operate as boundary objects amidst the backdrop of the Thai tourist landscape. In what follows I discuss tourism studies in Thailand, the research object of discourse analysis in Tourism, linguistic landscapes and geosemiotics in Thailand, the methods that were used to collect the data discussed here, and I suggest that analytically Thai Buddhist temples, as a part of the geosemiotic tourist landscape of Thailand, function as a boundary object between tourists and Thai adherents of Buddhism.

If we look at research on Tourism in Thailand we notice that a few areas have particularly captured the attention of researchers. Research on tourism in Thailand has focused on specific aspects of the tourist trade for example back-packing culture, and how the interaction between tourists “trekkers” has had an effect up on local indigenous communities, in addition that often tourist industries or economies are not often developed for the benefit of local communities (Dearden, 1991). Considering the fact that Thailand currently exists, persists, and endures under military rule, it is equally important to

[1] http://www.mybuddha108.com/article_and_tips/9wats_visit.html
http://www.orientalescape.com/thailand/sightseeing/bangkok/nine-temples.html

mention the work of other researchers who have examined the influence of this geopolitical context on Tourism, especially considering that the state of the tourist industry is such an important marker of economic prosperity in Thailand. Hudson's (2007) study in Burma is worth noting especially in that it discusses and problematizes the tourist trade in a country under military rule, indicating that tourists were in favor of visiting the country but were unsure of the implications of their visit (ethical and economic). Presently it is not abundantly clear the effects of military rule on Thailand's tourist economy. Tourism in Thailand also contains many heritage sites and such heritage tourist sites tend to attract a local Thai audience (Peleggi, 1996), and this is in part indexed by the fact that many of the temples and heritage sites are actually directed toward a seemingly Thai audience. Another growth industry in Thailand's tourist economy has been ecotourism, and as noted by Kontogeorgopoulso (2004), such practices in Thailand (in his case Phuket) also include a 'communicative staging' whereby a sense of remoteness is created next to mass tourist sites. In addition studies of the ubiquitous backpacker and trekking culture where tourists are trying to experience cultures that have never seen a white person before, as well as research on beach tourism have also been examined in terms of Thailand's tourist trade (Cohen, 1982, 1989, 1996, 2000). In sum there is a rich research tradition on tourism in Thailand and this project adds just a small piece to this ever-growing body of research.

2. Linguistic landscape studies in Thailand

One of the classic studies of linguistic landscapes, not to mention linguistic landscapes in Thailand, is Huebner's (2006) study of Bangkok which examined the multilingual makeup of signs in the linguistic landscape of 15 neighborhoods in the city. Huebner's findings are interesting in that they emphasize the emergence of a developing form of Thai English (which some have referred to as ThaiE, Tinglish, or Thailish) and that English itself appeared to be replacing Chinese as a language of wider communication. In a similar vein Hoy's (2011) analysis of the use of English on the signs of redshirt protestors indicates the ubiquity of English in Thailand as well as how it can also index political, cultural, and class identity. Huebner's study is a classic not just in Thai studies but also linguistic landscape studies, as a whole and has been replicated methodologically in other contexts, for example Troyer's (2012) study of the

Thai netscape. Many studies of linguistic landscapes have used a quantitative methodology where signs are not just counted but rather the also languages that such signs represent are quantified. One of the issues with examining the linguistic landscape in Thailand from such a purely linguistic ecological perspective, is that it misses out on an important feature of this landscape, specifically that the linguistic landscape in Thailand is in some cases both an interactive space, and an ephemeral one especially in relation animistic aspects of Thai religious practice.

3. Discourse and Tourism

Discourse and tourism is a vast field and has examined the varied discourses that emerge in and through tourist experience multimodally. The sounds of tourist experience in addition to blogs, post cards, and advertisements for tourism are among the vast subjects that makeup the discursive analysis of tourism and tourist experience (Jaworski, et al., 2003; Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005). Here I focus solely upon one feature of tourist experience, the discourses in place that make up the linguistic landscape of parts of the tourist industry in Thailand. In addition I add to this a discussion on how we might consider some features of the geosemiotic zone of Thai heritage temple sites a boundary object (Star & Griesemer, 1989).

One of the continuous analytical threads in tourism research and discourse and tourism has been the role of the ‘tourist gaze’ in tourist experience (Urry & Larsen, 2011). This notion refers to the fact that tourists place a set of expectations upon locals, particularly when they participate in heritage tourism, in their quest for an authentic local experience, at the same time locals react to this set of expectations through a set of their own, hence reflecting back a gaze with the hopes of benefitting financially (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In addition, Urry argues elsewhere that places are visually consumed in part through our experience with them and also through the practice of picture taking which often nowadays results in another form of instantaneous consumption when such pictures are immediately uploaded to social media (Urry, 2005). One is quickly reminded of the ubiquitous ethnographic “I was there snapshots” that made up ethnographic texts, hence we might consider how such “I was there-ness” has be transformed through social media. The consumption of place in the context of tourism in Thai temples and

heritage sites thus could be understood in terms of several overlapping characteristics: the makeup of the geosemiotic landscape, the linguascape (referring to the languages present in space), and how the sites are consumed through the tourist gaze. While the tourist gaze is an interesting concept to consider in this context another notion that I find equally worthwhile to consider in the context of tourism in Thailand is the notion of boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989) and has recently been introduced to the literature of tourism studies through the guise of Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory (2005) (Ryan & Trauer, 2011; van der Duim, Ren, & Johannesson, 2012, 2013).

The notion of the boundary object was first introduced by Star and Griesemer (1989). Boundary objects were defined as "an object which lives in multiple social worlds and which has different identities in each" (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 409). Because such boundary objects exist in two social worlds simultaneously they thus act as entities which establish a shared context between the inhabitants of such worlds. The notion of boundary objects has had a profound impact on studies of science education and as well citizen science, but has also had extended implications and applications to a variety of unexpected fields to include tourism and business research. Here we can suggest that perhaps temple tourism at heritage sites in Thailand can serve as a boundary object between foreign tourists and Thai adherents of Buddhism in a general sense, in a more specific sense the linguistic landscape that makes up such heritage sites serves as a boundary between locals and tourists. As Star and Griesemer note boundary objects can take on four types:

1) *Repositories* which are compilations of objects which would include museums, heritage sites, or libraries.
2) *Ideal types* which are symbolic abstractions which would include maps or diagrams;
3) *Coincident boundaries* or geographic spaces are items which effectively share the same content across boundaries but contain different content meanings across boundaries. For example one may find similar objects that exist in different sites, however their content and place differ in each location thereby creating a different meaning. This would include such spaces as Catholic churches which the world over would contain similar

items, however, their contents and localized meanings may differ, e.g. a church named after a particular saint.

4) *Standardized forms* are the fourth type of boundary object which are, "boundary objects defined as common communication methods across dispersed work groups" (page 411). Examples of standardized forms would be fill-in questionnaires about user experience that one may encounter in Thai heritage sites.

4. Research Questions & Methodology

This research project was situated at the intersection of communicative practices and the geosemiotics of Thai heritage sites and sought to answer the following questions:

- What types of Discourses circulate in Thai Heritage Sites?
- What languages are used at those sites?
- What tourists identities and sets of practices are indexed through touristic signage in Heritage sites?
- And what boundaries between Eastern and Western Tourists are constructed through signage?

This project began as a workshop in July 2014. As a part of that project graduate students from Thammasat University's linguistic department embarked on a short field trip in order to engage in some of the methods for studying what Scollon and Scollon (2003) refer to as geosemiotics. Due to time constraints we did not accomplish a complete and thorough analysis and collection of the data including interviews and focus groups to triangulate the data and findings. Rather we decided to focus exclusively on a textual analysis as well as a thorough examination of the geosemiotics of the sites that we examined. To emphasize, the research endeavor that we embarked upon was ethnographic in nature and occurred over three days in July 2014. Because of the make-up of the research team we found ourselves engaging in a single ethnographic enterprise but one which involved a variety of personal with differing relational perspectives to include: Thai, European, Buddhist, American, and to a degree Catholic. To that end the research group consulted the work of Desmond and his notions pertaining to what he refers to as relational ethnography (Desmond, 2014) where each member brings to the fold their own collective experiences and perspectives which are unique yet contribute to a

diverse and hence relational ethnographic research project. As a result, our multilingual repertoires also made us reflect upon how Thai tourist and farang (or white occidental tourists) were represented in the geosemiotic landscape of Thai heritage sites. Was it in the same way? Was it different? What moral and practical discourses and identities did language use index? Because of the variety of experience and linguistic repertoires of the research team, when we came to the sites, we each saw different things in the ecology of the space and we engaged in different practices. For example, the Thai students as adherents of Thai Buddhism, would start every site visit by making offerings and donation to Buddha. One of the graduate students had previously conducted research on the discourse of donation became an opportunity conducting a relational ethnography: we were led to discuss how one does an offering, the role of prayer in everyone's life or its absence of role, the concept of making good merit, the role of religion in our respective societies.

5. Data Collection

As mentioned in the previous section the data itself were collected over a period of 3 days in July 2014. The data itself consisted of primarily of pictures of signs in the tradition of linguistic landscape studies. Yet following the tradition of geosemiotics outlined in Scollon and Scollon (2003), we were not just interested in textual signs, or just the many languages that make up those signs. Geosemiotics is the study of the material placement of signs in the world, the discourses that emerge as a part of that emplacement, and the social actions that social actors perform in the material world. The approach that Scollon and Scollon maintain is that social action is the convergence of three aspects of social action: the makeup of the interaction order (how is the interaction arranged), the semiotic construction of those signs (or visual semiotics) and the discourses in place that materialize through a particular social action. Scollon and Scollon also refer to geosemiotic zones which are places in the world where there is an explicit or tacit agreement about how signs and messages will be represented within such spaces. Geosemiotic zones can include neighborhoods, parks, urban or suburban landscapes, for the purposes of this discussion we focus upon Thai heritage sites as their own semiotic zone. Our collection procedures were not solely involved in merely documenting signage, but also how we interacted with such signage in the tourist sites

that we visited. For this study we went to several sites in the Ayutthaya heritage temple complex, several temples in the vicinity of Amphawa floating market. In addition we visited temples in Bangkok to include: Wat Arun, The Grand Palace, Wat Saket The temple of the Golden Mount, Wat Phrakaew, and Wat Rakang. In all we collected over 300 signs. Our collection activities also involved taking field notes which were later used to as a means of comparison and contrast between researcher's experiences.

6. Data Analysis

The analysis that we conducted was largely textual in nature. As mentioned above traditionally many studies of linguistic landscape research tend to focus upon the quantitative presence of languages upon signs in a given place. Our focus is also on the interaction between social actors and signs. In addition a geosemiotic analysis will also include examining aspects of the built environment, hence the architectural make-up of a physical place also influences how it is that we interact with it. Though derived from studies of human computer interaction, the term interactivity is one way that we can describe the relationship between humans and artifacts in the material world. As such our analysis drew attention to the notion of interactivity in the Thai geosemiotic landscape. What makes the built environment in Thailand unique in the context of linguistic landscape and geosemiotic analysis is that it is at times an interactive environment. This is due in part to the fact that aspects of animistic religious practice are still engaged in. What emerges in the landscape are complex semiotic aggregates that might pertain to history, a place where accidents have occurred in the past, or places where ghosts might be said to inhabit.

Despite the fact that our interest was in complex semiotic relationships in the Thai geosemiotic landscape, we did attempt to see what we could find by counting languages on signs. This was done with the intention of trying to determine if the English we encountered on such signs was creating a sense of other-ness. The quantitative findings were inconclusive to this end. We analyzed the text on signs to examine the presence of other languages as well as their semantic grammaticality. Were they balanced in the sense that when we observed multilingual or bilingual signs did they represent the same semantic meanings? At the sites that we examined we noted that most multilingual or bilingual signage could be described as "balanced", they indexed

the same semantic meanings. We were anticipating finding numerically more signs in the geosemiotic landscape that had non-grammatical English, yet our quantitative analysis did not reveal that. We noted signs that were in a variety of other languages to include: English, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Bahasa Malaysia/ Indonesia[2].

While the quantitative analysis was inclusive we should also add that our experience in trying to conduct such an analysis, directed our attention to several problems in attempting to do so while doing linguistic landscape or geosemiotic research. One such problem involves the nature of the quantitative data, what exactly do we count and why? Were we counting signs, languages, the signs in a particular place, grammaticality or indexicality? Scollon and Scollon (2003) note that no two people will take a picture in the same manner and, as a result an attempt to count pictures and signage immediately poses a problem. Also without a doubt I am sure that we missed signs that could have been added as data. This is due in part to the size of many of these temples as well as time constraints, for example in Amphawa we took a boat which led us out to temples but as we disembarked from the vessel the driver would say 20 minutes. So we did not have equal time in each place visited. Lastly, and as I will discuss below, one of the features of any geosemiotic landscape, not just in Thailand, has to do with ephemerality. Some signs are constructed to be permanent, their material make-up insures that they will be a part of the geosemiotic landscape for a longer duration than others. Yet other signs are physically constructed with materials which will not last long. As such how should a quantitative study of geosemiotics or linguistic landscapes, handle such signage?

Instead of relying solely upon a quantitative endeavor to examine the variety of signs that we encountered we focused upon text. In so doing our analysis brought us to examine the physical wording of discourses in place and the identities that they index. That is to say, some signs because they were written solely in Thai, were clearly meant for a Thai audience. In addition, where some signs were bilingual in English and

[2] We noted this sign as Malaysian/Indonesian because the similarity between these languages does not allow us to affirm to which tourist audience, Malaysian or Indonesian, the sign in question (figure below) was intended for.

Thai, it is not necessarily the case they were directed to a bilingual audience. As Huebner's study found of Bangkok, and Troyer found of the Thai netscape, English is present in the Thai geosemiotic landscape. That is to say some of the English that one sees in the geosemiotic makeup of Thailand should not be assumed to be directed solely towards an English-speaking audience, but could be directed towards a Thai audience.

7. Findings

Elsewhere the work from this ethnographic project has examined the variety of texts that one identifies within the geosemiotic landscape of Thai temples (Jocuns, de Saint-Georges, Chonmahatrakul, & Angkapanichkit, 2015). That work categorized signs within Thai temples to include: discourses of donations, discourse of information, and discourses of regulation. Here my analysis focuses upon some features that have to do with Thai religious practice, and how we might consider signage and other objects within Thai Buddhist Temples to be boundary objects between tourists and Thai adherents of Buddhism. In what follows I discuss some of the discourses that are present within Thai temples: prayer texts, other ethnicities, the notion of ephemerality in the geosemiotic landscape of Thai Buddhist temples, the multilingual landscape, and the notion that Thai temples as tourist sites can emerge as boundary objects.

Another sort of signage that produces the same effect are 'prayer texts'. The picture in figure 1 below indicates the prayer one should say to the Buddha image. In order to make this prayer, the Buddhist adherent must also pay respect to the Buddha through the sequence of action that were initially described: make a donation, receive lotus flowers, incense and candle, position lotus flower, incense and candle in the appropriate place next to the text after saying the prayer.

Figure 1 prayer for a Buddha image from a temple in Chiang Mai

In this image we note that the majority of the text is written in Thai but two words appear in English (“silver bell”). The text is the prayer song for paying respect to the Buddha image in this temple and the name of the donors.

Thailand has a large population of ethnic Chinese and is also a very popular tourist destination for mainland Chinese. It should come as no surprise to see some indexes of Chinese ethnic heritage in Thai temples, not to mention the fact that some Thai temples have a very distinctive Chinese character to them. The images in figures 2 and 3 below are examples of this Chinese influence in local Thai traditions.

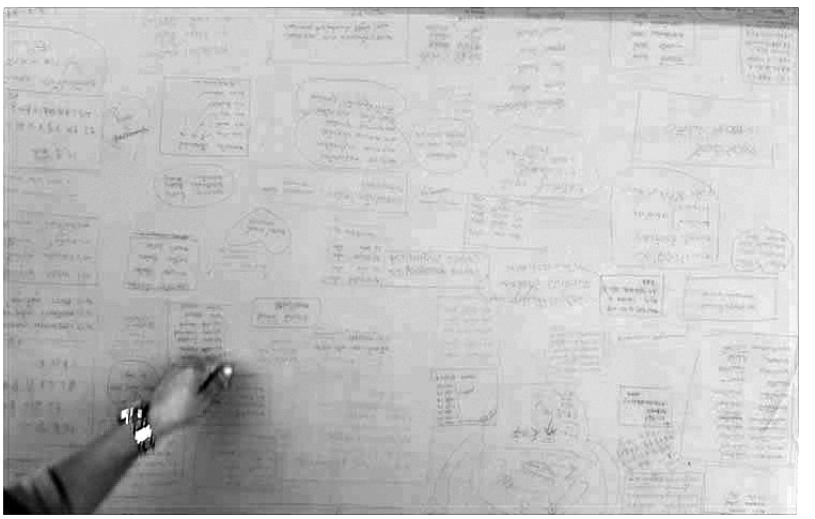
Figure 2 Cai Shen, the Chinese God of wealth & prosperity

Figure 3 leave donations for year of the rat, rabbit, horse or chicken

The image in figure 2 above is a shrine and donation box for the God *Cai Shen*, the Chinese god of wealth and prosperity. The image in figure 3 is another Chinese shrine but for donations for the year of the rat, year of the rabbit, year of the horse,

and year of the chicken (according to Chinese zodiac). The issue here illustrates how signage in Thai temples also indexes elements of Chinese ethnicity, even though one could argue that Chinese influence and ethnicity is ubiquitous throughout mainland and insular Southeast Asia. While the above ensemble constitutes a complex 'sign', mixing elements of text, built architecture, specific colors, statuary to creating a stable 'Chinese' presence in the temple, other signs are much more ephemeral. The image in figure 4 below is an example of this type of ephemerality that one sees in the built environment of Thai temples (from Wat in Chiang Mai).

Figure 4 names left on a cloth in a wat in Chiang Mai



The action involves writing the names of family members, friends, enemies, or anyone who is an adherent of Thai Buddhism wishes to mention specific merit for. One writes the names on a cloth and they are left for all to see. This is an additional action of merit making, you can make merit on behalf of people who are not there with you at these temples. At the same time, such textual behavior is ephemeral, they have a limited presence on the geosemiotic landscape, but are still an integral aspect of it. Sometimes at temples these clothes become a part of the landscape, for they can be draped around Buddha images.

If we have described at length the various visual calls for donation that are present in the sites we visited, it is because these sites are ubiquitous, making the

religious dimension extremely present in those touristic sites. In addition, as most of the signs are in Thai, they signal that the anticipated patrons of the temples are on the whole Thai tourist adherents of the Buddhism. Only a few instances appeared where requests for donation seemed to address possible other visitors. The following was found in Wat Arun, Bangkok:

Figure 5 merit making donation boxes in 5 languages at Wat Arun

The visual design on each donation box in figure 5 is effectively the same: Thai (on top), followed by an iconic representation of what form of merit the donation will offer, for example the donation box on the left is intended for repair of Wat Arun, the second for religious merit, and the third is intended to help the clergy at the temple (food, etc.) The signs are then translated into four other languages, English, Korean, Bahasa Malay/Indonesian, and Japanese. The sign on the left is interesting because the English is a bit off ('Merit repair Prang,') Prang here is a Latin text representation of ปรางค์, which is Thai for the word stupa. The word for *prang* in English and Malaysian, is stupa. The English in the second one uses the preposition *for*, missing from both of the other donation boxes. That is to say that the English text in two of the three boxes in the image uses Thai syntax. This is not to make a statement about the quality of English displayed, but rather the variation with which one sees, and experiences, multilingual texts in the tourist landscape of Thailand. As Huebner (2006) found in his study of signs in Bangkok, English signs written with Thai syntax are a significant

feature of the linguistic landscape. The main point though is that one sees very few donation boxes translated into other languages. Also what is interesting about the text translations in figure 5 is the presence of Malaysian/Indonesian - the text written is the same in both languages. While Malaysia is Thailand's Southern neighbor, and certainly there a significant number of tourists who visit Thailand from there, both Malaysia and Indonesia are demographically Muslim countries.

What does this section tell us about tourist gaze and identities? We could say that a majority of signs present on the sites visited have to do with making merit in Thai Buddhism. They are not just text, but impetus for actions (if we thought about them as forms of speech acts, their illocutionary force would be that of a directive). They are moreover caught within an economic discourse of sustainability of Buddhist temples, a sacred discourse of religion and an aesthetic discourse of tourism. The audience for such signs is not just Thai people, but Thai tourists, because traveling to temples and visiting temples is a long practiced tradition in Thai culture and is also promoted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand. That is to say, a mostly local Thai audience is indexed through the use of Thai script in these signs. One of the issues with the status of English in Thailand is that while many Thai people argue that English is a lingua franca, there is not complete agreement as to whether the English spoken locally by Thai has enough distinctive features as one may find in such varieties of English as Singlish or Hong Kong English, such that we could refer to it as a global world English. However, Huebner (2006) did find that English signs in the linguistic landscape do index a local Thai audience as well, and that from his analysis of the linguistic landscape of Bangkok an emerging Thai version of English seemed to be developing. So while English might at first glance be directed to address a foreign audience, it does not mean that it does not also index the local Thai community. It is also possible, as one of the reviewer's suggested, that the presence of English in signage at Thai heritage sites also indexes some sense of commodification in relation to a Thai audience. In this sense the Thai audience is asked to be a good host, thereby reminding local Thais of the importance of tourism in Thailand. While this indexical relation is possible, English still exists outside of tourist sites. Yet for a local Thai audience it might index both religion on the one hand, and commodification on the other, serving to promote the Thai tourist industry. This latter meaning will certainly

require more data than was presented here, including interviews with the local Thai audience.

8. Discussion & Conclusion

Earlier work from this study identified the variety of signs within the linguistic landscape of Thai heritage sites (Jocuns, de Saint-Georges, Chonmahatrakul, & Angkapanichkit, 2015), here I suggest how some signs that make up the discourses in place at Thai heritage sites act as boundary objects for non-Thai (farang) tourists. As a part of the presentation of that earlier paper at the International Pragmatics Association Conference in Antwerp, Belgium in July 2015 members of this research project also explored the tourist landscape of a Catholic Church in Antwerp. In that site we noted that, similar to donation boxes at Thai temples, one can also find donation boxes in Catholic churches. At the Catholic Church in question, Our Lady of Antwerp, we identified a similar practice of making donation at a church where one may also light a candle and say a prayer. Our initial analysis and discussion led us to believe that some of the signs that the geosemiotics of Thai temples create a foreign, “occidental other”, due in part to the presence of a series of signs which could be described as traffic regulations asking foreigners to behave in certain ways. To return then to Star and Griesemer’s (1989) notion of boundary objects we might place such similarities in the linguistic landscape between Catholic churches and Thai heritages temples within the context of such boundary objects. There are several aspects of the geosemiotic make-up of Thai temples and heritage sites that might index some relationships that could be boundary objects. In terms of the former discussion on donation practices in Thai temples, we might say that the practice itself falls within the confines of the notion of *coincident boundaries* discussed above, since the practice of donation in a religious place can be found in the West. Yet the practice takes on different meanings for the both groups of people. For Thai adherents of Buddhism this practice is a part of *tham bun*, whereas for the farang tourist, the practice falls closer to the understanding from one’s own religion or even broader, making a donation as a sign of appreciation for “place”.

Another image that was captured during this study highlights another way in which Thai Buddhist temples can be perceived as boundary objects between tourists

and Thai adherents. The image in question contains two people, one a tourist, the other a Buddhist adherent. The tourist captured within the frame of the picture I took is taking a picture, and perhaps 12 feet or so away a Buddhist adherent is praying to the Buddha image in the foreground of the frame with the prayer text found in Figure 1 above. Again we might consider the actions captured in such an image as a boundary object within the category of coincident boundaries whereby the image of the Buddha is taking on different meanings to both groups of people. The farang tourist capturing the image to add to the “I was there-ness” of tourism, capturing images to illustrate that one was there and indexing also a practice that (Urry, 2005) refers to as consuming place. As Urry notes the taking of images is a part of the consumption of place, for tourist destinations such as Paris or New York City, iconic images such as the Eifel tower, more generally the New York City skyline are consumed via such images. What then can we say about consuming place in a tourist destination such as Thailand? The Buddha image becomes such an iconic representation of such consumption for the farang tourist. Yet we cannot leave out the practice of tham bun as a part of the discussion of coincident boundaries and the consumption of place. As noted earlier Thai heritage sites and Thai Buddhist temples are a part of the local domestic Thai tourist industry and practice (Berger, 2007). Hence we could suggest that part of this coincident boundary object is the Thai practice of tham bun, and additionally argue that the practice of tham bun in such places as Thai temples and heritage sites, is the local domestic Thai equivalent of the consumption of such places.

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