

Constructing the Urban Place: The Linguistic Landscape of Cubao Bus Terminals

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Abstract

At the heart of the multi-centered capital of Metro Manila, Philippines is Cubao—a transport-oriented and urbanized commercial district. The heterogeneous characteristics of Cubao bus terminals (CBTs) merit a closer examination of their linguistic landscape (LL), where public signage reveals identity negotiations, language hierarchies, and uneven urban development. Hence, this study investigates the LL of CBTs to explore how language in public signage reflects and configures the identity of Cubao as a diverse yet contested urban place. The researchers conducted photographic and ethnographic fieldwork across three major bus terminals, analyzing linguistic and non-linguistic features using geosemiotics. The LL of CBTs reveals incidental multilingualism, localizations, and fluid use of English and Filipino. Despite the inclusion of different languages, the LL largely reinforces the predominance of monolingual English. Beyond language, the LL reveals distinct identities for the CBTs and indicates uneven attempts to construct images of globalization. These findings contribute to the field of English studies by investigating language use alongside non-linguistic elements in signs to examine issues of inequality in development, to urban studies by emphasizing humanistic concerns alongside infrastructure, and to policy-making by informing calls to revise monolingual public signage policies in favor of more inclusive approaches.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, geosemiotics, public transport

Introduction

The Philippines' capital region, Metro Manila, is a multi-centered urban area.¹ Among these urban areas is the district of Cubao, which has been described as a “dizzily busy commercial center,” where informal vendors compete for space alongside formal establishments.² The diverse and often contested nature of spaces like Cubao has made them a subject of inquiry across academic disciplines, including Linguistic Landscape (LL), which refers to the study of public signage. Aside from its commercial spaces, Cubao is also significant as one of Metro Manila's major transport hubs, hosting a concentration of private bus terminals.³

In light of these contexts, the present study investigates the LL of Cubao Bus Terminals (CBTs) to understand how language, in the form of public signage, both shapes and is shaped by the heterogeneous and transport-oriented character of Cubao as an urban place. Specifically, it investigates the following question: What does the LL of CBTs reveal about urbanization in Cubao? Furthermore, the following sub-questions guide the researchers in answering the main question:

What are the linguistic and non-linguistic features of the signs at CBTs?

¹Yves Boquet, “Landscapes of Mobility in Metro Manila's Business Districts,” *MUHON: A Journal of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and the Designed Environment* 6 (2019): 19–30, <https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/muhon/article/view/6700>

²Ruanni Tupas, “Unequal Englishes in the Linguistic Landscape: Tracing Desires, Ideologies and Class through Public Signs,” *Journal of Education, Language, and Ideology* 2, no. 1 (2024): 1–17.

³Glenn Orbon, “Ecosystem of a Transport Hub: Analysis on the Urban Development of Cubao, Metro Manila,” in *Great Asian Streets: Asian Urban Places*, ed. H. C. Kiang, O. C. García-Villalba, and Y. Zhang (National University of Singapore, 2014): 286–296; Boquet, “Landscapes of Mobility in Metro Manila's Business Districts.”

How do these features interact to construct meaning in/of the LL of CBTs?

How does the LL of CBTs relate to the urbanization of Cubao?

Through these inquiries, the study contributes to the field of sociolinguistics by employing linguistic frameworks to examine broader issues in urban development. It likewise contributes to urban studies and planning by highlighting that urban development requires critical engagement with humanistic concerns, including sociolinguistic exclusion. Lastly, it informs policymakers of the sociolinguistic realities of the local commuting public.

Review of Related Literature

Linguistic Landscape Studies (LLS)

Rodrigue Landry and Richard Bourhis offered the first clear conceptual starting point and a widely quoted definition of *linguistic landscape* (LL). At that time, LL functioned as a test for ethnolinguistic vitality in multilingual settings.⁴ Since then, however, LLS has expanded significantly to integrate various theoretical and methodological advancements. A key contribution to this expansion is Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon's *geosemiotics*, which considers factors beyond visibility and salience by accounting for how location, appearance, and people's reactions to a sign carry social meanings.⁵ Additionally, a growing recognition of non-traditional LL sites, such as privately owned public spaces,⁶ recognizes the social, political, and material dynamics of

⁴ Rodrigue Landry and Richard Bourhis, "Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality: An Empirical Study," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 16, no. 1 (1997): 23–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X970161002>

⁵ Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World* (Routledge, 2003).

⁶ Alex Donahue, Madlen Simon, and Madeline Brown, "The Role of Signage in Public and Private Governance of New York Interior Privately Owned Public Spaces," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Signage and Wayfinding* 7, no. 1 (2023): 21–36, <https://doi.org/10.15763/issn.2470-9670.2023.v7.i1.a135>

physical spaces that were once peripheral in LLS.⁷

In light of contemporary LL concerns, this study adopts Durk Gorter's theorization of LL: "The field of linguistic landscape attempts to understand the motives, uses, ideologies, language varieties, and contestations of multiple forms of 'languages' as they are displayed in public spaces."⁸ In this definition, LL is more interested in why certain languages in public spaces are used, how they are used, what messages or values they convey, and what effects they have on society. Lastly, the notion of contestation highlights critical issues of ownership of and control over public spaces. It positions CBTs as a relevant research site because their legal status as private entities introduces an added layer of complexity regarding their operations, policies, and production of signs.

Multilingualism in Public Spaces

Due to globalization, public spaces are becoming sites of multilingualism, as evidenced by the myriad of languages in their LL.⁹ This phenomenon has been the focus of various LL studies investigating the presence and function of signs across neighborhoods, courts, and commercial centers.¹⁰ Beyond the domain of education and at the level of individual behavior, studies have explored translanguaging as a phenomenon across public spaces, including neighborhoods, courts, and commercial centers. For instance, Durk Gorter and Jasone Cenoz observe that linguistic borders in multilingual street signs are frequently crossed by passersby in the neighborhood of Donostia-San Sebastián, Spain. They approach the LL as a hybrid repertoire of features, illustrating how multimodal elements like nearby objects, drawings, and graffiti shape

⁷Jan Blommaert, *Ethnography, Superdiversity and Linguistic Landscapes: Chronicles of Complexity* (Multilingual Matters, 2013).

⁸Durk Gorter, "Methods and Techniques for Linguistic Landscape Research: About Definitions, Core Issues and Technological Innovations," in *Expanding the Linguistic Landscape: Linguistic Diversity, Multimodality and the Use of Space as a Semiotic Resource*, ed. M. Pütz and N. Mundt (Multilingual Matters, 2019): 38–57, <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788922166-005>

⁹Durk Gorter and Jasone Cenoz, "Translanguaging and Linguistic Landscapes," *Linguistic Landscape* 1, no. 1–2. (2013): 54–74, <https://doi.org/10.1075/ll.1.1-2.04gor>

¹⁰Gorter and Cenoz, "Translanguaging and Linguistic Landscapes."

its interpretation.¹¹ Meanwhile, Jerico Esteron et al. analyzed regional court signage in Pangasinan, Philippines, asserting how signs using multiple languages—English, Filipino, Pangasinense, and Ilocano—foster accessibility and equity.¹² However, they noted the continued dominance of English through its frequency, material inscription, and spatial positioning over local languages. This tension also appears in Ruanni Tupas’ study on Cubao—this study’s focus—where localized forms of English are realized as “unequal Englishes,” marked by the unequal spread and valuation of certain English varieties and speakers.¹³ Collectively, these studies highlight how different languages interact with the visual and material dimensions of public signage, while affirming multilingualism as the norm in the LL.¹⁴ Yet, they also reveal how the multilingual LL can reproduce linguistic hierarchies, particularly favoring English. Understanding these dynamics thus requires paying attention to the dense and diverse sociopolitical and spatial contexts that shape language use, especially in urban environments.

Landscaping Urban Places

Examining the relationship between Cubao’s urban context and the LL of CBTs requires an understanding of what “urbanized” entails and its relation to language. In language studies, scholars, including Thomas Pepinsky et al. and Eliezer Ben-Rafael et al., defined urbanization as having a large, permanent, and heterogeneous population in a particular city, which also has specific administrative, legal, or historical recognition.¹⁵ Given their diversity and official status, various LL

¹¹Gorter and Cenoz, “Translanguaging and Linguistic Landscapes.”

¹² Jerico Juan Esteron, Christian Go, and Paolo Nino Valdez, “Translanguaging in Linguistic Landscapes of Philippine Regional Trial Courts: A Qualitative Inquiry,” in *Translanguaging for Empowerment and Equity: Language Practices in Philippine Education and Other Public Spaces*, eds. M. L. E. N. Canilao and R. A. De Los Reyes (Springer, 2023): 175–202.

¹³Tupas, “Unequal Englishes in Linguistic Landscape.”

¹⁴Gorter and Cenoz, “Translanguaging and Linguistic Landscapes.”

¹⁵Thomas Pepinsky, Maya Abtahian, and Abigail Cohn, “Urbanization, Ethnic

scholars have taken an interest in examining urban areas, including Elana Shohamy et al., who compiled studies from different cities around the world.¹⁶ Among the significant studies in the collection are those by Jeffrey Kallen and Esther Dhonnacha, Jennifer Leeman and Gabriella Modan, and Adam Jaworski and Simone Yeung. These studies showed that aside from the competition for space and visibility amidst social diversity, the LL of cities has an active role in heightening capitalism in urban environments—not just within full-fledged business districts but even in ethnic enclaves and the private domain of residential areas.¹⁷ The studies also emphasized the role of extralinguistic factors in interpreting the LL of urban areas. In the local context, Boris Michel has previously elaborated on the trend of *global cities* in Metro Manila, which eradicate images of poverty to justify the transfer of government responsibilities to private control.¹⁸ It is, therefore, within this context that CBTs operate. As informed by the findings of the aforementioned studies, this research examines whether—and how—the LL of CBTs is used to construct or reflect images of success and modernity.

Diversity, and Language Shift in Indonesia,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 45, no. 7 (2024): 2503–2521, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2055761>; Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Elana Shohamy, and Monica Barni, “Introduction: An Approach to an ‘Ordered Disorder’,” in *Linguistic Landscape in the City*, eds. E. Shohamy, E. Ben-Rafael, & M. Barni (Multilingual Matters, 2010): xi–xxviii.

¹⁶Elana Shohamy, Eliezer Ben-Rafael, and Monica Barni, *Linguistic Landscape in the City* (Multilingual Matters, 2010).

¹⁷Jeffrey Kallen and Esther Dhonnacha, “Language and Inter-Language in Urban Irish and Japanese Linguistic Landscapes,” in *Linguistic Landscape in the City*, eds. E. Shohamy, E. Ben-Rafael, & M. Barni (Multilingual Matters, 2010): 19–36; Jennifer Leeman and Gabriella Modan, “Selling the City: Language, Ethnicity and Commodified Space,” in *Linguistic Landscape in the City*, eds. E. Shohamy, E. Ben-Rafael, & M. Barni (Multilingual Matters, 2010): 182–198; Adam Jaworski and Simone Yeung, “Life in the Garden of Eden: The Naming and Imagery of Residential Hong Kong,” in *Linguistic Landscape in the City*, eds. E. Shohamy, E. Ben-Rafael, & M. Barni (Multilingual Matters, 2010): 153–181.

¹⁸Boris Michel, “Going Global, Veiling the Poor Global City Imaginaries in Metro Manila,” *Philippine Studies* 58, no. 3 (2010): 383–406. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42634640>

Frameworks

This study employs visual semiotics and place semiotics from Scollon and Scollon's broader framework of geosemiotics, which "makes reference to the real, physical, material world in which we live our lives."¹⁹ These two approaches enable the analysis of the non-linguistic parts of the signs, which enhances the interpretation of the social meanings conveyed by the linguistic content.²⁰

Visual semiotics is used to interpret the meanings produced by visual devices in public signs, including images, colors, and composition of information. It also considers how images interact with one another and with the viewer, constructing relational meanings. Moreover, these representations derive their meaning from where they are perceived and located within the actual space. Hence, place semiotics is simultaneously used to scrutinize the meanings brought by the arrangement of public signs in the physical space, with a focus on their material inscription, emplacement, and code preference. Scollon and Scollon argued that sign-makers follow a "choice system," where some codes occupy specific and prominent locations, while the other/s are relegated to peripheral positions.²¹ Visual and place semiotics thus allow for a deeper exploration of the diverse meanings that emerge from the intricate relationships between languages, visual modes, and the physical environment, which plays a critical role in "recontextualiz[ing] meanings fit for conditions" of communities in the LL.²² Ultimately, these theoretical frameworks enable a holistic exploration of the multilingual and multimodal discourse on urbanization in the context of the CBTs.

¹⁹Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses in Place*, 110.

²⁰Esteron, Go, and Valdez, "Translanguaging in Linguistic Landscapes of Philippine Regional Trial Courts."

²¹Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses in Place*, 120.

²²Esteron, Go, and Valdez, "Translanguaging in Linguistic Landscapes of Philippine Regional Trial Courts." 180.

Methodology

This qualitative research investigated how the LL of CBTs reveal urbanization in Cubao, a central business district in Quezon City known for hosting prominent commercial establishments such as Araneta Coliseum, Gateway Mall, and Cubao Expo, among others. It is also a busy transport hub that links various transport routes through its numerous terminals, including intercity and regional bus stations, as well as train stations like Cubao-MRT-3 and Cubao-LRT-2 that handle high passenger volume on their lines. As such, its central location within the metropolitan area not only facilitates mobility but also attracts a steady flow of social actors from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds participating in various economic and social activities. For this study, the study locales include Araneta City BusPort (ACBP), Victory Liner (VCTR), and Superlines (SPRL) as they serve a wide range of routes, making them key transport nodes that connect Cubao to various parts of the country and essentially to a sociolinguistically diverse commuter base.

The data included 236 signs collected from the three terminals. The unit of analysis is each instance of a unique written or visual text (e.g., announcement, handwritten signage). Identical signs are treated as one for methodological efficiency, while signs with the same content but different design are counted separately, as the shift in typography, for instance, indexes a difference in meaning. Field notes are also included to provide contextual information to complement photographs. Data gathering activities lasted for two days. Researchers photographed signs found in and around the terminals, starting from ACBP to VCTR and SPRL. All images were stored in a private online storage and were filtered and catalogued in a spreadsheet.

The data analysis follows a sequential, multi-level approach of Gorter and Cenoz,²³ who began with the analysis of individual signs and then broadened the scope to the neighborhood level. Similarly, this study operates across three levels to illustrate how LL functions as a “gestalt,” where meanings are understood as one whole from the aggregation of

²³ Gorter and Cenoz, “Translanguaging and Linguistic Landscapes,” 1.

different elements rather than from individual components alone.²⁴

Each level builds upon the previous one and draws from relevant frameworks throughout. At the sign level, the signs were categorized based on the languages used and communicative functions observed. Frequencies for each category were recorded and tabulated to represent the linguistic diversity and distribution of signs across the three terminals. Following this, the non-linguistic features of signs (e.g., color schemes and materiality) were examined. The goal of the sign level is to establish the multilingual and multimodal makeup of CBTs.

At the terminal level, the analysis shifted from individual signs to the wider interaction among signs within each terminal. Rather than treating signs in isolation, this level adopted a dialogic reading, interpreting how signs relate to each other through pattern, deviation, or thematic alignment. The goal of this level is to extract messages that contribute to the construction of particular social identities of CBTs. This comparative approach was applied to highlight how these social identities may differ across the three terminals.

Finally, at the district level, the analysis adopted a wider lens by situating the terminal signage within the broader context of Cubao. The goal of this level is to synthesize the semiotic data and social identities along with field notes and scholarly literature to interpret how the LL reflects larger processes of urbanization. By progressing through these three levels of analysis, the study brings multiple interpretations of how language practices in the LL of CBTs relate to urbanization of Cubao.

Discussion and Analysis

Overview of Signs in CBTs

This section presents a quantitative overview of languages used and communicative functions in CBTs. Table 1 shows the distribution of 236 signs, with ACBP having the highest number of unique sign types,

²⁴ Eliezer Ben-Rafael, "A Sociological Approach to the Study of Linguistic Landscapes," in *Linguistic Landscape in the City: Expanding the Scenery*, eds. Elana Shohamy and Durk Gorter (New York: Routledge, 2009), 43.

CUBAO BUS TERMINALS (<i>n</i> = 236)	
TERMINAL NAME	FREQUENCY (%)
Araneta City BusPort (ACBP)	65 (27.54%)
Victory Liner (VCTR)	86 (36.44%)
Superlines (SPRL)	85 (36.02%)

Table 1. Distribution of Signs in CBTs.

Table 2 summarizes the linguistic composition of CBTs, revealing a clear dominance of monolingual English. Of the 157 monolingual signs (66.53%), 149 were in English (94.90%), supporting Robin De Los Reyes and Cedrick Cabaluna's findings, who observed a similar preference in Metro Manila transport signage.²⁵ In contrast, monolingual Tagalog-based Filipino was rare, with only 8 signs (5.10%), and completely absent in ACBP. This suggests that sign-makers in these CBTs may regard English as the most effective language for public transport communication.

²⁵Robin De Los Reyes, "Language of "Order": English in the Linguistic Landscape of Two Major Train Stations in the Philippines," *Asian Journal of English Language Studies* 2 (2014): 24–49, <https://doi.org/10.59960/2.a2>; Cedrick Cabaluna, "Analysis of Bus and Utility Vehicles (UV) Express Drivers' Language Preferences Regarding Traffic Signs" (Undergraduate Thesis, University of the Philippines, 2018).

SUMMARY OF SIGNS IN CBTs (n = 236)		
TAXONOMIES	FREQUENCY (%)	SAMPLE TEXT/EXCERPTS
MONOLINGUALISM	157 (66.53%)	“ONLINE REDEMPTION LANE”
<i>English</i>	149 (94.90%)	(VCTR; <i>English</i>)
<i>Filipino</i>	8 (5.10%)	“Bawal Maghugas Ng Paa at Maligo dito. (Washing Feet and Bathing here are prohibited.)” (SPRL; <i>Filipino</i>)
MULTILINGUALISM	59 (25.00%)	“ <u>pakiusap huwag po natin gamitin ang ating mga</u> <u>paa sa pag flush</u> (please let us not use our feet to flush the toilet)” (SPRL; <i>complementary</i>)
<i>Complementary</i>	56 (94.92%)	
<i>Duplicating</i>	3 (5.08%)	
<i>Overlapping</i>		
<i>Fragmentary</i>		“TIPS SA PAGNEGOSYO (TIPS FOR DOING BUSINESS)” (ACBP; <i>complementary</i>)
OTHERS	20 (8.47%)	directional arrows, male restroom icon
FUNCTIONS		“Kids below 1.3 meters are FREE” (VCTR; <i>informational</i>)
<i>Informational</i>	149 (63.14%)	
<i>Regulatory</i>	51 (21.61%)	“ <u>Dapat po ay may Cage. (Pet bag)</u> (There should be a Cage. (Pet bag))” (SPRL; <i>regulatory</i>)
<i>Promotional</i>	36 (15.25%)	“EAT, WATCH & RELAX while waiting!” (ACBP; <i>promotional</i>)

Table 2. Linguistic Composition of CBTs.

There were 59 multilingual signs (25.00%) combining English and Filipino, likely reflecting their status as the Philippines’ official languages. The most common type was the complementary combination, where different parts of the message appear in different languages.²⁶ Since it requires readers to know both languages to fully understand the message,²⁷ sign-makers assume CBT commuters are multilingually competent.

Lastly, 20 signs (8.47%) were categorized as “others” because they featured only visuals or numbers, yet still functioned as semiotic

²⁶ Mechthild Reh, “Multilingual Writing: A Reader-Oriented Typology — with Examples from Lira Municipality (Uganda),” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2004, no. 170 (2004): 1–41.

²⁷ Reh, “Multilingual Writing: A Reader-Oriented Typology — with Examples from Lira Municipality (Uganda).”

resources conveying transport-related information.

Regarding communicative functions, informational signs were the most common across CBTs, comprising 149 signs (63.14%), compared to 51 regulatory (21.61%) and 36 promotional signs (15.25%). This contrasts with De Los Reyes and Cabaluna's findings, who observed a higher prevalence of regulatory signs.²⁸ In train stations, the complex infrastructure and potential hazards (e.g., platform gaps) require regulatory signs to coordinate movement and ensure safety. Traffic signs also face temporal constraints, necessitating clear directives to avoid accidents or penalties. In contrast, CBTs rely more on informational signs due to scattered commuter movement, a variety of destinations, and the need to manage large belongings. Alternatively, fewer regulatory signs may reflect expectations of passenger self-regulation once sufficient information is provided.

Regarding the non-linguistic features of the signs, more similarities than differences emerged across CBTs. Most signs adhere to consistent compositional conventions, particularly in logo usage and color schemes. These elements are especially important for CBTs as private entities—logos serve as the most recognizable visual expression of a brand,²⁹ while color schemes help communicate corporate identities.³⁰

At ACBP, two logos appeared on signage. The first (Figure 1) uses white text and design elements on a dark blue background. “Araneta” is rendered in a bold, sans-serif font, while “Center” is in cursive script. The letter “A” is embellished with a ring of white dots.

²⁸De Los Reyes, “Language of ‘Order’”; Cabaluna, “Analysis of Drivers’ Language Preferences Regarding Signs.”

²⁹Jana Galera Matúšová, “Logo as the Greatest Symbol of Brand,” *European Journal of Media, Art & Photography* 9, no. 2 (2021): 126–133.

³⁰Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (Routledge, 2021).

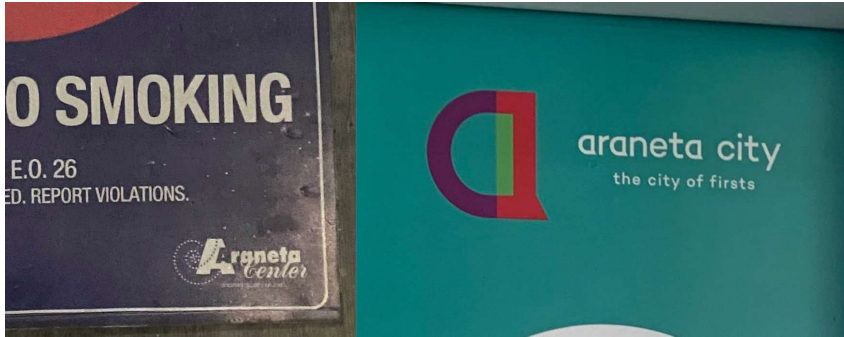


Figure 1 (left) and Figure 2 (right). ACBP's Logos.

The second logo (Figure 2) shifts to cyan, a color associated with postmodernist ideologies that embrace hybridity.³¹ This version employs minimalist elements such as lowercase letters and sans-serif typography, with only the letter “a” emphasized to signify the brand.

For VCTR (Figure 3), the color scheme features red and yellow. The logo is entirely red, ensuring high visibility against a white background. It uses a sans-serif font with thick, evenly spaced, and slightly angular letters. An emblem on the left resembles either a bird's wings or an airplane empennage. The emblem and the text are proportionally balanced, creating a professional aesthetic.



Figure 3. VCTR's Logo.

Additionally, field observations revealed that terminal staff visually reinforce this branding: female staff wore neckerchiefs and had neatly styled hair, resembling airline stewardesses, while bus drivers wore white button-down shirts with shoulder epaulettes, similar to pilot uniforms. Thus, the logo's meaning is not only constructed symbolically but also enacted by the terminal's personnel through their appearance and attire.

³¹Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*.

In Figure 4, SPRL's use of primary colors can be read as a possible visual echo of the Philippine flag, potentially signaling local relevance.



Figure 4. SPRL's Logo.

Within the terminal, many commuters are seen carrying children, large cargo, and personal belongings, while the destinations listed on signs refer to specific municipalities or barangays, unlike in ACBP and VCTR, where the routes are broader provinces. This suggests that commuters at SPRL are likely working-class or laboring populations who travel for practical, often economic, reasons rather than leisure. As a result, the experience in SPRL is more mundane, as opposed to the more sophisticated and expensive one found in ACBP and VCTR.

Regarding inscription and emplacement, ACBP and VCTR primarily use PVC foam boards alongside TV/LED, unlike SPRL, where signs are made from paint, paper, and plywood. Echoing Christopher Stroud and Sibonile Mpendukana, ACBP and VCTR exhibit semblances of “sites of luxury,” where English holds symbolic prestige and signage employs high-tech production.³² In contrast, SPRL reflects “sites of necessity,” which maximize readily available economic resources and materials to create the signs.³³

³²Christopher Stroud and Sibonile Mpendukana, “Towards a Material Ethnography of Linguistic Landscape: Multilingualism, Mobility and Space in a South African Township,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 13, no. 3 (2009): 363–386.

³³Stroud and Mpendukana, “Towards Material Ethnography of Linguistic Landscape.”

Finally, signs are “emplaced” in various terminal areas:³⁴ some hang from ceilings, many are affixed to walls. Informational signs appear near the locations they index, while regulatory signs are positioned where specific behaviors are expected. Promotional signs have more flexible placements, reflecting commercial activity’s fluid nature. Lastly, signage visibility varies with terminal layout: SPRL’s open design contrasts with the enclosed, exclusive structures of ACBP and VCTR, where one has to enter to see how the terminals look.

Translanguaging and Identity Construction in Cubao Bus Terminals

ACBP: A Globalized, Corporate Terminal

It was previously noted that two different Araneta City logos appear simultaneously in the signage across ACBP. This inconsistency is not merely a branding oversight but reflects a conscious rearticulation of the brand’s evolving aspirations. It exemplifies *resemiotization* or the recontextualization of meanings through new semiotic resources and supports Li Wei’s view of meaning-making as both creative and critical.³⁵ One clear example is the discursive shift from “Center” to “city” in Figures 1 and 2. Whereas “Center” evokes a focused area often tied to commerce, “city” indexes an integrated, multifunctional urban territory combining residential, commercial, cultural, and industrial developments. This change embodies Araneta Group’s ambition to position its brand within global urban imaginaries,³⁶ akin to Bonifacio Global City or Clark Global City—places that are self-sufficient, self-contained, and self-regulated.

Such rebranding signals more than aesthetic revision; it reveals

³⁴Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses in Place*.

³⁵Li Wei, “Translanguaging as Practical Theory of Language,” *Applied Linguistics* 39, no. 1 (2018): 9–30, <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amx039>

³⁶Michel, “Poor Global City Imaginaries in Metro Manila.”

a spatial and ideological agenda to remake ACBP as a globalized, corporate terminal. Consequently, this identity asserts Araneta Group's monopoly over Cubao's urban space—a monopoly that does more than concentrate ownership, as it also restricts public agency. Private control over transport infrastructure, real estate, and commerce not only shapes the physical environment but also defines how people move, behave, and belong in these spaces. When a single corporate entity governs all facets of public life, it evolves into a powerful ideological force. For example, the elimination of grassroots practices to promote an image of sanitized urban environment becomes more visibly amplified through the regulatory signs scattered across ACBP. These signs go beyond maintaining order; they function as mechanisms of exclusion. Drawing from Michael Kempa et al., this regulatory framework acts as a “sorting process” that distinguishes “desirables” from “undesirables.”³⁷ These signs, therefore, are not neutral; they delineate boundaries of access, legitimacy, and belonging. Tauri Tuvikene et al. noted that while public transport infrastructures can be democratic spaces of mobility, they can also become “apparatuses of segregation, elitism, and authoritarianism.”³⁸ At ACBP, these dynamics are spatially and symbolically encoded in the signage, which governs and communicates who the space is for, who must submit to its rules, and who is rendered out of place.

One emblematic example of this sorting process is the policy sign found at the terminal's main entrance (Figure 5). The use of capitalized, bold commands like “STRICTLY PROHIBITED” and limiting phrases like “ONLY” exudes an autocratic tone and reflects a visual grammar of control. These choices are not incidental, as geosemiotics posits that signs are neither arbitrary nor random but are purposefully arranged and designed based on the opportunities offered by the space.³⁹ Positioned at eye level and directly in front of the terminal's glass entrance door, the

³⁷Michael Kempa et al., quoted in Alex Donahue, Madlen Simon, and Madeline Brown, “The Role of Signage in Public and Private Governance of New York Interior Privately Owned Public Spaces.”

³⁸Tauri Tuvikene, Wladimir Sgibnev, Wojciech Kexbłowski, and Jason Finch, “Public Transport as Public Space: Introduction,” *Urban Studies* 60, no. 15 (2023): 2973, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980231203106>.

³⁹Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses in Place*.

sign does not welcome commuters—it regulates them.

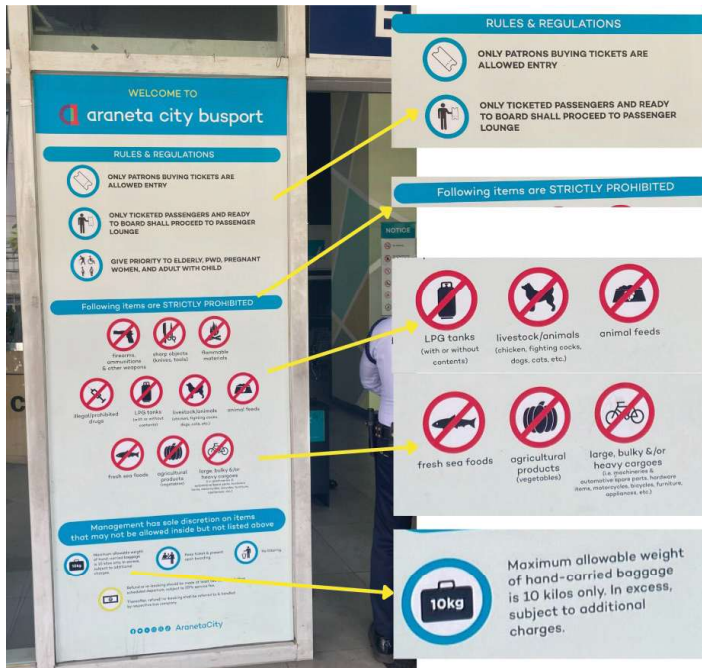


Figure 5. Policy Sign at the Entrance of ACBP.

The sign thus functions as a dual gatekeeper: visually, it obstructs the gaze of outsiders, shielding the interior from public visibility; socially, it compels those approaching ACBP to assess their desirability or compliance with the rules before entering. These architectural and semiotic barriers echo the surveillance logic of privatized infrastructures, where “[o]rderly behavior is rewarded with participation” and “[c]ontrol strategies are embedded in the design.”⁴⁰ Following this visual regulation comes a human checkpoint: a security guard stationed at the entrance, adding another layer to the sorting process. The result is a tightly controlled mobility, where access is not merely physical but ideological, linguistic, and class-based.

Compounding this spatial regulation is the signage’s monolingualism.

⁴⁰Kempa et al., quoted in Donahue et al., “The Role of Signage in Public and Private Governance of New York Interior Privately Owned Public Spaces,” 22.

Most regulatory signs at ACBP are written only in English, despite the local community's multilingual reality.⁴¹ This constructs an exclusionary LL, favoring those who are already linguistically privileged (i.e., English speakers) while marginalizing those who do not speak the displayed language (i.e., Filipino speakers). In doing so, the sign implies that access to ACBP's services and spaces depends on fluency in dominant linguistic codes.

The homogenizing language of ACBP's signage propagates values anchored on global sensibilities. Xiaofang Yao asserted that in multilingual and globalized contexts, "minority languages and cultures are often less valued compared to those with more prestige and economic advantage."⁴² ACBP materializes this devaluation, where its LL performs urban branding by perpetuating a sanitized image devoid of non-conforming identities. This exclusionary practice becomes apparent when examining Figure 5 above. The list of prohibited items—such as livestock, fresh produce, and heavy cargo—is deeply symbolic because they are tied to informal, provincial, or working-class livelihoods. Their banishment indexes a spatial sanitation, where visible traces of informality, rurality, and class struggles are erased to maintain a globalized image.

Though framed as measures for cleanliness or safety, these prohibitions serve as coded mechanisms of class exclusion. Donahue et al. argued that such policies subtly signal to some individuals that they do not belong,⁴³ that their daily practices and ways of being are incompatible with ACBP and thus cannot be accommodated. Consequently, this leaves them vulnerable to broader forces, including land commodification and the privatization of public services.⁴⁴ This analysis echoes Jeremy

⁴¹Donahue et al., "Signage in Public and Private Governance of Privately Owned Public Spaces."

⁴²Xiaofang Yao, *Power, Affect, and Identity in the Linguistic Landscape: Chinese Communities in Australia and Beyond* (Routledge 2025): 10.

⁴³Donahue et al., "Signage in Public and Private Governance of Privately Owned Public Spaces."

⁴⁴Lawrence W. C. Lai, Mark Baker, Wilson W. S. Lu, Mark H. Chua, Daniel C. W. Ho, Stephen N. G. Davies, "Out of Sight, Out of Mind: A Comparative

Nemeth and Stephan Schmidt's critique that privately owned public spaces diminish the democratic nature of public space by selectively restricting access and liberties,⁴⁵ which is counterintuitive, given that public transport is ideally a site "where one meets society in its diversity".⁴⁶

VCTR: A Stakeholder-Oriented Terminal

Informational signs in VCTR frequently resemble Figures 6 and 7 below. The consistency of their design suggests that they were produced and installed by the terminal management. Hence, commuters seeking terminal-related information know to look for signs with this appearance. In terms of linguistic features, English emerges as the preferred code. While there are a few instances of Filipino, these are limited to references to local destinations—an expected feature in a local transport terminal. As for the non-linguistic features, the overall design of the signs aligns with principles of modern aesthetics, emphasizing minimalism and functionality.⁴⁷ The color scheme is limited to pure primary and neutral tones, while the use of a sans-serif font further supports functionality by improving readability. These design choices contribute to a sense of formality, as the uniform and utilitarian signs suggest a regulated system of informational signage. In this way, VCTR aligns with the corporate identity of ACBP discussed above.

Study of Public Bus Terminals as Civic Spaces," *Cities* 43 (2014): 1–9, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2014.11.004>.

⁴⁵Jeremy Nemeth and Stephan Schmidt, "The Privatization of Public Space: Modeling and Measuring Publicness," *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 38, no. 1 (2011): 5–23, <https://doi.org/10.1068/b36057>

⁴⁶Tukivene et al., "Public Transport as Public Space," 2969.

⁴⁷Tri C. Kusumandyoko and Muhammad W. Ardani, "Aesthetic Principles in Graphic Design: A Comparative Study of Modern and Postmodern Approaches," in *Proceedings of the International Joint Conference on Arts and Humanities* 2023, no. 785 (2023): 831–839, https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-152-4_80



Figure 6 (left) and Figure 7 (right). Informational Signs at VCTR.

The signs are consistently inscribed on PVC boards that are in excellent condition and appear to have been installed only recently. One possible explanation for their pristine condition, despite VCTR's long-standing presence in Cubao, is the terminal's ongoing rehabilitation efforts. Among the stated goals of these efforts are to "provide modern facilities" and to "bridge the gap between local and international transportation standards"—thus, it aims to project both modernization and globalization processes.⁴⁸ Beyond the physical condition of the signs, these objectives are reflected in the LL's features identified above. The non-linguistic elements convey minimalism consistent with modernization, while the emphasis on globalization helps explain the predominant use of English over Filipino. While both are official languages in the country, the former is widely regarded as the global lingua franca.⁴⁹

Despite the rehabilitation efforts at VCTR, a few signs deviate from the uniform design, including Figures 8 and 9 below. Figure 8 is a missing person notice posted at the terminal's entrance, while Figure 9 is a chance passenger sign placed in front of the commuters' waiting area. Both signs retain English as their preferred code. However, in terms of non-linguistic features, these signs differ from the color scheme and inscription of the previous figures, indicating that they were produced

⁴⁸Inigo Rocas, "Victory Liner Upgrades Terminals and Cargo Services," *Manila Bulletin*, April 26, 2023, <https://mb.com.ph/2023/4/25/victory-liner-upgrades-terminals-and-cargo-services>, para. 4.

⁴⁹Ben-Rafael et al., "Introduction."

separately. The use of more readily available materials suggests that these signs were created in an improvised manner, possibly in response to urgent circumstances by the staff or the local community. The presence of these signs within the terminal indicates that, despite efforts to maintain a coherent LL aligned with the terminal's rehabilitation goals, there remains a need to accommodate the evolving demands of various stakeholders, particularly employees and the local community. Therefore, while both ACBP and VCTR reflect corporate identities, the latter's visible inclusion of improvised signs suggests greater flexibility.



Figure 8 (left) and Figure 9 (right). Improvised Signs at VCTR.

Among all sign types, VCTR's promotional signs appear to be the least regulated and most varied. Consistent with previous studies, promotional signs show the most frequent instances of multilingualism, indicating the market value of hybridity, specifically in the crossing between global and local identities.⁵⁰ To illustrate, Figures 10 and 11 below are advertisements for VCTR's insurance and bus rental service,

⁵⁰Jaworski and Yeung, "Life in Garden of Eden"; Kallen and Dhonnacha, "Language and Inter-language in Urban Linguistic Landscapes"; Leeman and Modan, "Selling the City."

respectively. One of the sign's most salient features is the insurance name, "Biyah Protect." This name combines the Filipino noun "biyahe [trip]" with the English verb "protect," invoking a hybrid local-international identity. It is worth noting that Filipino is present only in the insurance's name, while the accompanying descriptive text and coverage details are entirely in English. Thus, Filipino serves a symbolic function rather than a communicative one, as the sign conveys the substantive information in English.



Figure 10 (left) and Figure 11 (right). Promotional Signs of VCT's Services.

Meanwhile, Figure 11 shows the bus rental service name "Rent&Go." The sign features a Filipino sentence that reads: "Biyaheng pang-maramihan, CARRY namin 'yan!" This sentence may be interpreted in two ways due to the sign's manipulation of the word "carry." Taken literally, *carry* refers to transporting weight from one place to another, rendering the sentence: "A large group going for a trip? We'll carry that!" Second, within the Philippine context, "carry" has evolved into *keri*, a slang term meaning "doable."⁵¹ From this perspective, the sentence

⁵¹Mark Bedoya Ulla, Jonathan Marcos Macaraeg, and Renz E. Ferrera, "What's the Word? That's the Word!": Linguistic Features of Filipino Queer Language," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11, no. 1 (2024): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2322232>.

implies: “A trip for a large group? That’s doable for us!” The term *keri* originates from Filipino queer language, a speech variety developed as a coded form of communication among LGBTQIA+ individuals.⁵² Over time, queer language has expanded beyond its original community and is now commonly used among young women and across social media platforms.⁵³ In this context, the use of Filipino—particularly expressions rooted in queer and youth culture—functions as a deliberate strategy to foster connection and cultural relevance. Despite this incorporation of local linguistic elements, Figure 11 still maintains English as the preferred code, as seen in the larger font size and central placement of the English phrase “RENT OUR BUS NOW,” following Scollon and Scollon’s place semiotics.⁵⁴

As the advertisements above illustrate, VCTR’s signage is relatively more open to expressing local identities. This finding introduces a layer of complexity by demonstrating that local languages are also employed for symbolic purposes—specifically to resonate with and appeal to Filipino consumers. This suggests that linguistic practices in advertising are also evolving, now reflecting forms of crossing between languages and cultures aligned with the “cultural hybridity that accompanies globalization.”⁵⁵ Hence, while English maintains its position as the language of global trade, local cultures and languages can also be strategically used for commodification.

SPRL: A Community-Based Terminal

Generally, SPRL presents a non-commercial and non-institutional front, especially evident in its LL—which is characterized by low-cost materials, manual inscriptions, and fluid code-switching that invite local community participation. Unlike the standardized and durable signage found in other CBTs, the signs in SPRL are distinct in their material

⁵²Ulla et al., “‘What’s the Word? That’s the Word!’”

⁵³John Allen F. Gregorio, Sairah Mae R. Briol, Reena Marie B. Miraflores, and Ersyl T. Biray, “Swardspeak as a Communication Medium among University Students: Empirical Evidence from the Philippines,” *International Review of Social Sciences Research* 3, no. 1 (2023): 110–124, <https://doi.org/10.53378/352970>

⁵⁴Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses in Place*.

⁵⁵Kallen and Dhonnacha, “Language and Inter-Language in Urban Linguistic Landscapes,” 31.

composition as they are made of bond paper or wooden boards.

Evidenced by low economic investment and fragile materiality, the signs reflect the “circumscribed, task-oriented (production) network of necessity” observed in the peripheries of Cubao.⁵⁶ Their improvised nature further suggests practical and urgent communication, with various information about terminal services, facilities, and expected behaviors posted as the situation demands. For instance, Figure 12 draws attention to the risk of passengers being taken advantage of due to potential unawareness that the charging station is free to use. The text underscores previous incidents of fraud and loss of belongings in the terminal, so the makeshift material indicates a quick intervention.

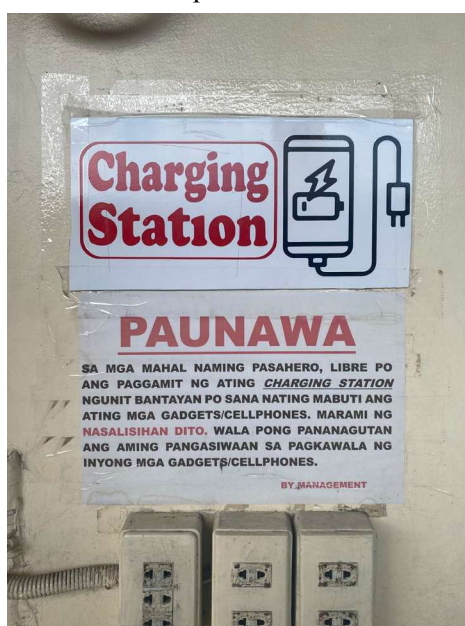


Figure 12. Charging station signs at SPRL.

Esteron et al. noted that the unequal distribution and availability of material resources across communities at varying levels of development influence their language use.⁵⁷ Thus, in the resource-limited LL of SPRL,

⁵⁶Stroud and Mpendukana, “Towards Material Ethnography of Linguistic Landscape,” 373.

⁵⁷Esteron et al., “Translanguaging in Linguistic Landscapes of Philippine Regional Trial Courts.”

the production of signage reflects these constraints by using less durable, inexpensive materials and drawing on accessible textual and spatial cues rather than on elaborate visual elements to meet communicative needs. Furthermore, the signs demonstrate a seamless integration rather than explicit differentiation of English and Filipino.

By using strategic multilingual combinations and localizations, many signs position SPRL as a “‘community’ united around particular practices.”⁵⁸ Figure 13 and Figure 14 show regulatory signs that promote cleanliness and prohibit smoking within the terminal. Both contain the familiar Filipino term “PAKIUSAP,” meaning “please” at the top center, while the rest of the messages are written in English. Given the prefix *paki-*, which implies a polite request, this word choice integrates the Filipino value of *pakikisama* or the ideal of “getting along ‘well’ with others.”⁵⁹ Further reinforcing this dynamic is the use of the plural pronoun in “OUR SURROUNDINGS” in Figure 13, which reframes the terminal as a shared environment where passengers have a collective responsibility for its maintenance. In line with the culture of *pakikisama*, Figure 14 communicates an indirect demand regarding passenger behavior in the form of a description about the terminal. Despite its seemingly informational tone, the salience of the English phrase “NO SMOKING” through text size and central placement reinforces the sign’s regulatory function. The closing note not only expresses appreciation but presumes passenger compliance with the policy.

⁵⁸Yaron Matras and Leonie Gaiser, “Signage as Event: Deriving ‘Community’ from Language Practice,” *Linguistic Landscape* 6, no. 2 (2020): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1075/ll.19029.mat>.

⁵⁹Rafael I. Santos, “(Re)Examining Politeness Concepts and Contentions: Implications on Filipino Brand of Politeness,” *International Journal of Humanity Studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 58, <https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v6il.4723>

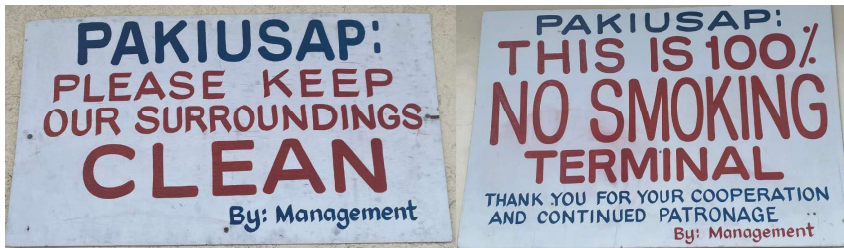


Figure 13 (left) and Figure 14 (right). Regulatory Signs at SPRL.

Figure 14 also exhibits the omission of an indefinite article in the text “THIS IS 100% NO SMOKING TERMINAL,” suggesting a departure from English grammatical conventions. This can be treated as an instance of “grassroots literacy,” where localized linguistic practices are reflected in the written signage.⁶⁰ It illustrates the attempt of the management to assert authority while simultaneously drawing from community language norms. In this context, English appears to be employed less for grammatical precision and more for its “connotational value,” capitalizing on its associations with enforcement and institutional legitimacy.⁶¹ This example nuances Tupas’ notion of *Authorized English*, or the formal, standardized English found in the strictly regulated alleyways of Cubao,⁶² by highlighting a more community-facing and non-hierarchical form of language in the public space.

Lastly, SPRL stands out among the CBTs for its inclusion of signage that engages the terminal in broader societal and gender discourses. This is seen in Figure 15, which shows a set of signs that depict various forms of gender-based sexual harassment, such as catcalling, online harassment, and homophobic remarks. They all reference the Safe Spaces Act, also known as the “Bawal Bastos Law” or Republic Act 11313.⁶³

⁶⁰Matras and Gaiser, “Signage as Event,” 20.

⁶¹Mannix Foster and Alistair Welsh, “English Usage in the Linguistic Landscape of Balikpapan’s Main Thoroughfares,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 49, no. 145 (2021): 451, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2021.1959162>.

⁶²Tupas, “Unequal Englishes in Linguistic Landscape.”

⁶³Rio N. Araja, “PUV Operators Told: Follow Gender Laws,” *Manila Standard*, March 27, 2023, <https://manilastandard.net/news/national/314317778/puv-operators-told-follow-gender-laws/>.



Figure 15. *Safe Spaces Act* Signs at SPRL.

One sign features the Filipino slang “TSANSING?,” a localized adaptation of the English word “chance,” connoting inappropriate physical contact.⁶⁴ This unique recombination of English and Filipino semiotic fragments invites readers to draw on their linguistic and sociocultural knowledge for creative interpretation of the sign.⁶⁵ Compared to earlier examples of text-heavy signage, these signs mobilize rich multimodal resources such as images and illustrations.

All the Safe Spaces Act signs are observed to be covered with pen scribbles, indicating modifications to their original inscription and thus rendering their meanings “available for social actors to appropriate.”⁶⁶ Their visible wear and tear not only compromises the clarity of the signage but also appears to index social attitudes toward gender-based violence. While the signs are affixed, their relative lack of maintenance compared to other signs in the terminal suggest disregard for the messages being communicated, or perhaps a passive approach to law enforcement. As mandated by legal guidelines, PUV operators must post

[tors-told-follow-gender- laws.html](https://opinion.inquirer.net/52183/body-ethics)

⁶⁴Michael L. Tan, “Body Ethics,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 7, 2013, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/52183/body-ethics>

⁶⁵Foster and Welsh, “English Usage in Linguistic Landscape of Main Thoroughfares.”

⁶⁶Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses in Place*, 139.

signage indicating government contact information and clear reporting procedures.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, their presence in the LL allows local actors in SPRL to confront broader issues of gender advocacy. In doing so, they become engaged in conversations that generate awareness and action, shaping meanings not only around the issue itself but also around the terminal as a socially constructed public space.

The LL of CBTs in Cubao's Urban Context

The previous section showed that each terminal's LL exhibits varying levels of aspiration toward a global identity. This projection of a global identity reflects the rise of global cities in Metro Manila, as briefly discussed in the review of literature. Global cities are privately planned urban centers with a concentration of office towers, shopping malls, and headquarters of local and multinational corporations.⁶⁸ Michel explained that global cities involve urban landscapes that deliberately exclude visible signs of poverty and marginalization to align with the idealized image of global economic hubs as "successful, modern, progressive, clean, and orderly global metropolises, which Manila is not."⁶⁹ These efforts help justify the government's economic agenda and increase its appeal to tourists and investors.

As urban scholars have noted, such urban projects tend to obscure the persistent realities of poverty and inequality that exist beyond the curated spaces of global cities.⁷⁰ In the case of Cubao, for example, Glenn Orbon observed that, unlike Araneta City—which is "privately owned and relies on its own pace of development"—the adjacent residential

⁶⁷Araja, "PUV Operators Told."

⁶⁸Boquet, "Landscapes of Mobility in Metro Manila's Business Districts"; Michel, "Poor Global City Imaginaries in Metro Manila."

⁶⁹Michel, "Poor Global City Imaginaries in Metro Manila," 386–387.

⁷⁰Boquet, "Landscapes of Mobility in Metro Manila's Business Districts"; Michel, "Poor Global City Imaginaries in Metro Manila"; Glenn Orbon, "Ecosystem of a Transport Hub: Analysis on the Urban Development of Cubao, Metro Manila," in *Great Asian Streets: Asian Urban Places*, eds. H. C. Kiang, O. C. García-Villalba, and Y. Zhang (National University of Singapore, 2014): 286–296.

areas “usually have a hard time keeping up with the rapid growth of the commercial center.”⁷¹ This developmental gap is made evident by the presence of informal settlements, heavy vehicular and pedestrian traffic, higher levels of pollution, and unsafe sidewalks and thoroughfares in areas outside Araneta City.⁷²

Among the implications of aspiring for a global identity is the tendency to exclude local identities. For instance, the relative absence of local languages in the LL is particularly striking given that CBTs serve Filipinos from various regions with diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Previous scholars have noted that urban development often aims to “whiten” spaces by eliminating markers of local identity—including those associated with “indigenous” peoples, who are frequently perceived as impure or backward.⁷³ As a result, such spaces are frequently constructed as “non-places,” which are devoid of relations, history, and identity.⁷⁴ Despite this orientation, traces of local representation persist within CBTs, but are often limited to commercial purposes. Thus, the selective display of local identity ultimately serves profit-driven interests, exemplifying the commodification of local culture within an otherwise culturally sanitized environment.⁷⁵

Besides the erasure of local identities, another implication of global aspirations is the exclusion of particular groups. Following Donahue et al.’s argument that signs indicate the allowed and prohibited activities,

⁷¹Orbon, “Ecosystem of a Transport Hub,” 292.

⁷²Boquet, “Landscapes of Mobility in Metro Manila’s Business Districts.”

⁷³Michel, “Poor Global City Imaginaries in Metro Manila”; Kate Swanson, “Revanchist Urbanism Heads South: The Regulation of Indigenous Beggars and Street Vendors in Ecuador,” *Antipode* 39, no. 4 (2007): 708–728. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2007.00548.x>

⁷⁴Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (Verso, 1995).

⁷⁵Leeman and Modan, “Selling the City.”

behaviors, and objects in a particular area,⁷⁶ the prevalence of English in the LL of CBTs “implicitly excludes non-English speakers because communication is restricted to the English language in a city characterized by linguistic diversity among residents and visitors.”⁷⁷ Consequently, non-English speakers are more likely to encounter barriers in accessing transport-related information. Aside from linguistic exclusion, the CBTs exhibited varying levels of security. ACBP emerges as the most restrictive space, with tight regulations created through its architectural layout and prohibitory signage. The terminal prohibits the transportation of livestock and agricultural products, which excludes individuals who rely on these goods for their livelihood.

Taken together, these restrictions reveal class-based exclusion. In the Philippine context, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have limited proficiency in English as they lack access to quality education. Similarly, those transporting agricultural goods typically come from economically disadvantaged sectors. The construction of ACBP’s LL, therefore, tends to exclude members of the lower class, which then aligns with global cities’ principle to sanitize urban spaces by erasing visible markers of poverty.

Meanwhile, in VCTR, class stratification also manifests through its facility known as The Lounge—an exclusive area that offers more comfortable amenities (see Figure 16 below). Access to this space is restricted to passengers holding “First Class” or “Royal Class” tickets, which are significantly more expensive than standard fares and therefore not accessible to all commuters. This practice reveals social stratification within the terminal, and its visibility in the LL formalizes exclusion based on economic status.

⁷⁶Donahue et al., “Signage in Public and Private Governance of Privately Owned Public Spaces.”

⁷⁷Donahue et al., “Signage in Public and Private Governance of Privately Owned Public Spaces,” 33.

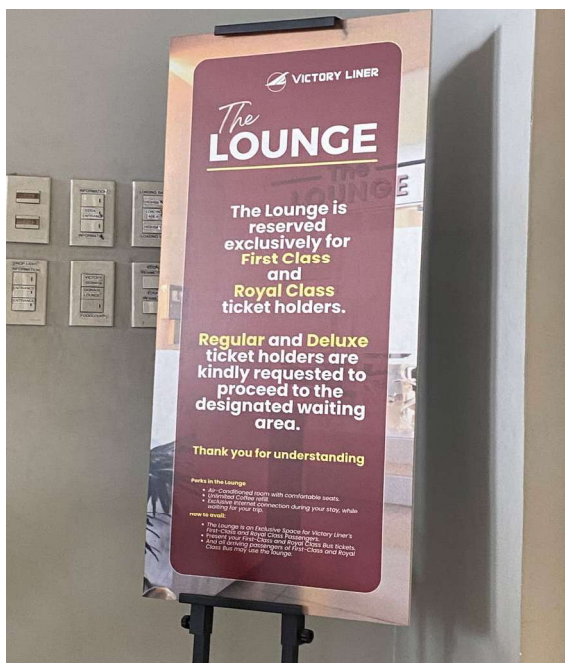


Figure 16. The Lounge at VCTR

In stark contrast to ACBP and VCTR, SPRL adopts a more open and accessible spatial configuration. Upon entry, commuters are subject to security inspection. Beyond this initial checkpoint, the terminal space expands considerably without rigid spatial demarcations. While SPRL imposes fewer restrictions, it nonetheless enforces a different form of exclusion—the prohibition of unauthorized vendors (see Figure 27 below). On the one hand, such regulation may be intended to protect commuters from the risks associated with unregulated goods; on the other hand, it also restricts access to more affordable products, as informal or ambulant vendors often offer lower-priced alternatives.



Figure 17. Exclusionary Sign at SPRL.

While security measures differ across the CBTs, they collectively reflect the privatization of spaces that are supposed to be for the public. These terminals engage in sorting and filtering individuals based on the image they seek to project, a practice that threatens both inclusivity and democratic access.⁷⁸ As William Whyte noted, “[p]rioritizing security over inclusion or publicness is potentially problematic” because “attempts to attract a more ‘appropriate’ population are often dependent on excluding those deemed less desirable.”⁷⁹ Such observations raise critical questions about the forces shaping commuters’ mobility and conduct—namely the private entities. Filipino commuters’ access to the LL of CBTs is uneven precisely because the private companies that operate these terminals are able to implement their own rules and regulations. This dynamic exemplifies a broader consequence of neoliberalism, which has facilitated privately planned urban development and public-private

⁷⁸Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space* (Routledge, 2004).

⁷⁹William Whyte, quoted in Jeremy Németh and Stephen Schmidt, “The Privatization of Public Space: Modeling and Measuring Publicness,” *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 38, no. 1 (2011): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1068/b36057>.

partnerships in infrastructure projects, including transportation. As a result, urban spaces are no longer designed primarily to improve the lives of the Filipino public; instead, they are increasingly shaped by the profit-oriented interests of both local and international private stakeholders.

Conclusion

A multi-level analysis of the LL of the CBTs reveals various insights about language in urban spaces. The majority of the signs are monolingual, with English as the dominant language, while multilingual signs present the use of English and Filipino in a complementary fashion.

The CBTs communicate distinct values: ACBP asserts a corporate voice, VCTR accommodates diverse stakeholders, and SPRL represents the local community. They vary in their alignment with the “global city,” which “offers an authorized image of city success (so people can buy into it).”⁸⁰ ACBP and VCTR are more inclined towards the global city status, with SPRL showing the least engagement. Despite access to local linguistic resources in their repertoires, sign-makers continue to mobilize English. This underscores “unequal translingual Englishes,” where the use of multiple languages remains to privilege English.⁸¹ Consequently, the LL of CBTs reinforces language inequalities and marginalizes certain groups from supposedly public spaces.

Future studies could explore LLs in bus terminals over time, expand the dataset, and adopt ethnographic methods. They may also consider a wider range of multimodal analysis, such as soundscapes and smellscape, in the study of the LL.

⁸⁰Jennifer Robinson, “Global and World Cities: A View from Off the Map,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26, no. 3 (2002): 546.

⁸¹Sender Dovchin, Alastair Pennycook, and Shaila Sultana, “Unequal Translingual Englishes in the Asian Peripheries,” *Asian Englishes* 18, no. 2 (2016): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2016.1171673>

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