

## Multilingual Linguistic Landscape on the Platform of Rinku Town Station: A Comparative Study of JR West and Nankai

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**ABSTRAK:** Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi bahasa dan strategi penyampaian informasi multibahasa pada papan informasi dan papan penunjuk informasi di peron Stasiun Rinku Town, Osaka, yang digunakan bersama oleh operator kereta JR West dan Nankai. Dengan latar belakang area Rinku Town di Izumisano sebagai kawasan wisata dan titik transit utama bagi penumpang pesawat dari Bandara Kansai, studi ini membandingkan penggunaan bahasa dan cara penyajian informasi oleh kedua operator. Melalui metode observasi dan analisis linguistik lanskap secara kualitatif, penelitian menemukan bahwa meskipun bahasa Jepang tetap menjadi bahasa utama, terdapat perbedaan signifikan dalam bagaimana informasi ditampilkan dalam bahasa asing. Sisi Nankai cenderung menyajikan informasi dalam empat bahasa (Jepang, Inggris, Mandarin, dan Korea) secara menyeluruh dan lebih rinci, sementara sisi JR lebih terbatas dalam jumlah bahasa dan detail informasinya. Perbedaan ini mencerminkan strategi komunikasi dan pelayanan masing-masing operator dalam menarik penumpang, khususnya wisatawan asing, serta menunjukkan bagaimana penyajian informasi multibahasa di ruang transportasi publik memainkan peran penting dalam mendukung aksesibilitas dan pengalaman pengguna.

**Kata kunci:** Linguistik Lanskap, Multibahasa, Penyampaian Informasi, Ruang Publik, Transportasi Publik

**ABSTRACT:** This study examines the representation of language and multilingual information delivery strategies on signage and information boards at the platform of Rinku Town Station in Osaka, jointly used by two railway operators: JR West and Nankai. Situated in Izumisano, Rinku Town serves as a major tourist area and a key transit point for air travelers from Kansai International Airport. This research compares the language use and methods of information presentation by the two operators. Through qualitative observation and linguistic landscape analysis, the study finds that while Japanese remains the primary language, there are significant differences in the way foreign language information is presented. The Nankai side tends to provide more comprehensive and detailed information in four languages—Japanese, English, Mandarin, and Korean—whereas the JR side uses fewer languages and provides less detail. These differences reflect each operator's communication strategy and approach to service, particularly in attracting foreign tourists, and highlight how multilingual information presentation in public transport spaces plays a crucial role in enhancing accessibility and user experience.

**Kata kunci:** Linguistic Landscape, Multilingualism, Information Delivery, Public Space, Public Transportation

### INTRODUCTION

Public transportation plays a central role in the development of modern cities and serves as a key enabler of people's mobility. In the

context of globalization, transportation is not merely a means of moving from one place to another with a specific purpose—it is also a site of communication used by a wide range of

individuals, representing the social, cultural, and political identities of a given region (Fishman & Coulmas, 2007). Japan, widely known for its highly efficient railway system, has long been considered a global benchmark in railway-based transportation management. This system not only serves local residents but also accommodates millions of tourists and foreign workers each year. As the need for accessibility among linguistically diverse users continues to grow, there is increasing demand for providing comprehensible information for passengers from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds (Creese & Blackledge, 2018).

The need for multilingual information in public transportation systems is not simply a matter of convenience; it is also a vital aspect of inclusive policies and a reflection of openness toward global communities. This issue is particularly crucial in strategic locations such as airports and major transit hubs. One of the primary challenges in delivering multilingual services lies in how to effectively communicate essential information within the constraints of visual space and limited time—a challenge that remains unresolved in many areas, especially in societies like Japan where the population is relatively homogeneous and generally monolingual. For this reason, language representation in visual forms—such as signage, digital screens, and station announcements—has become increasingly critical.

To understand how different languages are presented in public spaces, the Linguistic Landscape (LL) approach offers a relevant analytical framework. Landry and Bourhis (1997) define linguistic landscape as the display of written languages in public spaces, particularly in the form of signs, nameplates, and symbols that are visible to the general public. Since the early 2000s, linguistic landscape studies have expanded rapidly and are now widely applied to analyze language practices in the contexts of public policy, tourism, education, and transportation (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

Moreover, the linguistic landscape of public transportation presents a particular complexity due to the diverse groups of users it must serve—local residents, international tourists, students, migrant workers, and others. Public transport spaces embody the dynamics of both global and local mobility simultaneously

(Barni & Bagna, 2015). The choice of language in these public spaces forms part of ideological and economic strategies that reflect the image a city or nation wishes to convey (Lanza & Woldemariam, 2014). In this context, the presence of foreign languages such as English, Mandarin, or Korean in Japan's public spaces serves not only as a communicative tool but also as a symbolic indicator of openness and hospitality toward international visitors and foreign workers (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006).

Rinku Town Station, located in Izumisano City, Osaka Prefecture, is a particularly interesting case that illustrates this phenomenon. Situated very close to Kansai International Airport (KIX), the station acts as a major entry point for many foreign visitors arriving in Japan. The Rinku Town area itself can be considered a “hotspot” for tourists, due to the large number of hotels, shopping centers, and retail outlets that are perceived as affordable by many foreign travelers. In addition, its convenient location—not far from Osaka City—adds to its appeal, requiring only about 40 minutes from Namba via the Nankai Line Airport Express and about 1 hour from Osaka Station via the Kansai Airport Rapid Service. What makes Rinku Town Station unique is its unusual operational structure: it is jointly used by two different railway companies—West Japan Railway Company (commonly known as JR West) and Nankai Electric Railway (known as Nankai)—yet they share the same platform space without any physical separation. This creates a unique linguistic landscape in which two different entities convey their respective systems of information within a shared visual space.

The coexistence of two operators within the same public space—namely the platforms of Rinku Town Station—offers a unique context for examining the dynamics of language representation in a multimodal environment. Such a situation allows for the emergence of non-uniform strategies of information delivery, in terms of language selection, the order of presentation, visual formatting, as well as the use of symbols and colors. These differences are not merely technical or aesthetic variations, but can also be interpreted as reflections of each operator's internal policies, target audience orientation, and broader meanings assigned to the role of language in public service. In other

words, although the physical space of the platform is integrated, it is institutionally managed by two different authorities, making it a site of negotiated meaning and visual communication strategy.

From the perspective of linguistic landscape (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), public space is not a neutral entity; rather, it is a site where languages are selected, displayed, organized, and given meaning. The language that appears in this landscape does not simply transmit information—it also communicates social values and institutional ideologies. The linguistic landscape reflects a symbolic struggle between various actors—official authorities, economic agents, and members of the public—in determining which languages are worthy of being displayed in the public sphere (Shohamy et.al., 2010). In this context, the visual strategies employed by JR West and Nankai are not value-free decisions; rather, they express the corporate visions of each company regarding linguistic diversity, accessibility, and their identity within an increasingly globalized society.

This study aims to examine the differences in visual and linguistic strategies employed by JR West and Nankai in producing multilingual information within the platform space at Rinku Town Station. By combining the linguistic landscape approach with a sociolinguistic perspective on language policy, this research will explore how language choices, visual formats, and the placement of information reflect each operator's orientation toward both local and international users. Furthermore, the study also seeks to understand how language representation in this specific context shapes different user experiences, and how this affects perceptions of navigation, comfort, and accessibility, particularly for foreign passengers who are using the Japanese railway system for the first time.

Methodologically, the study will focus on key visual elements found in the platform area of Rinku Town Station. These elements include platform signs, directional signage, railway route maps, digital information displays (LED screens), and floor markings. All of these elements will be analyzed as components of the linguistic landscape—that is, as means through which language and visual symbols are used to communicate information to users. Beyond delivering immediate information (such as train

directions or platform numbers), these elements also reflect how each operator prioritizes certain user groups and how they interpret the role of language in the public space.

Through visual and linguistic analysis of these elements, this research aims to gain deeper insight into the implicit (de facto) policies adopted by each operator. Moreover, the study also seeks to observe how language is used to shape user experience, particularly for foreign tourists accessing Japanese train services for the first time. Thus, this research is expected to contribute not only to the field of linguistic landscape studies but also to the broader understanding of public information access and the role of language in supporting mobility in multilingual urban environments.

## DISCUSSION THEORY

Within the framework of linguistic landscape studies, one of the most influential early contributions is the research conducted by Backhaus (2006), which examined the multilingual nature of signage in the central areas of Tokyo. In this seminal study, Backhaus analyzed over 1,000 signs across 28 different locations, systematically distinguishing between official signs—those installed by government institutions or public authorities—and private signs, which are put up by individuals or business entities. The main finding of the study emphasized that language choices in public spaces are far from neutral. Rather, they reflect underlying power relations, prevailing social norms, and the degree of orientation toward foreign visitors. Specifically, official signs were more likely to incorporate English alongside Japanese, indicating a deliberate strategy to accommodate international audiences. In contrast, private signs tended to use foreign languages less frequently, reflecting different priorities or constraints. This study underscores the importance of considering both the social context and the actors responsible for sign production when analyzing linguistic representation in public space.

In addition, a study by Jing-jing (2015), conducted within the campus environment of Kyushu University in Japan, sheds light on the use of three principal languages—Japanese, English, and Mandarin—on directional signs

and informational displays throughout the university. The research explores how the presence of an international community at the university shapes more inclusive strategies in the presentation of campus information. Jing-jing demonstrates that multilingual usage serves not only to provide practical assistance but also functions symbolically, signaling the institution's recognition of diversity and its openness to non-Japanese individuals. This dual function aligns with one of the central tenets of linguistic landscape theory: that language use in public signage carries not only literal meanings but also ideological and social messages embedded in the spatial design of public environments.

Another relevant contribution is Backhaus's later study (2015), which explores both the linguistic soundscape and visual landscape within the context of Tokyo's public transportation system, focusing in particular on the use of English as a lingua franca. This research examines how information is delivered in a bilingual format—through both visual signage and audible announcements—to improve comfort and accessibility for foreign passengers. Backhaus argues that the integration of visual and auditory elements in transportation spaces creates a multimodal linguistic experience, in which passengers interact with multiple channels of communication simultaneously. This multimodality, in turn, serves as a reflection of Japan's *de facto* language policies in public spaces. The study is especially significant for understanding the dynamics of multilingual information provision within transport systems that must cater to a linguistically heterogeneous population, highlighting how language planning and public communication intersect in real-world settings.

## METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing the framework of Linguistic Landscape (LL) analysis to observe and compare the multilingual information presentation strategies employed by JR West and Nankai on the platforms of Rinku Town Station. This approach is particularly well-suited for investigating how languages are represented in public spaces, and how these representations reflect *de facto* language policies, institutional ideologies, and

orientations toward target audiences (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009).

Data for this research were collected through direct observation and visual documentation of informational elements found in the platform area. These elements include platform signs, directional signage, railway route maps, digital information displays (LED screens), and floor indicators. Each element is analyzed as a semiotic practice—that is, as a form of visual communication that conveys not only explicit information (such as platform numbers or route directions), but also implicit messages regarding the institutional values and priorities of each operator (Shohamy et al., 2010).

The analysis involves a comparative examination of visual elements between the JR West and Nankai sections of the station. This includes identifying differences in language selection, order of presentation, graphical visualization, as well as the use of colors and symbols. Within this analytical framework, Shohamy's (2006) theory of Linguistic Landscape is employed to interpret language representations as a form of implicit language policy. Such policies may not be formally articulated, yet can be observed in the ways languages are displayed and utilized within public space.

Importantly, this study does not only focus on the content of the information provided. It also pays close attention to layout, visual aesthetics, and the specific communication strategies adopted by each operator. By doing so, the research aims to better understand how users—particularly foreign tourists—perceive and interpret the information conveyed in a platform environment that is physically integrated but institutionally managed by two separate railway companies.

## RESULT

### 1. Visual and Functional Context of Rinku Town Station Platform

Rinku Town Station is a unique example in Japan where two railway operators, JR West and Nankai, share the same physical platform space while maintaining their own distinct visual identities. The platform is divided according to travel direction: Tracks 1 and 2 lead to Kansai Airport, while Tracks 3 and 4

lead to Osaka (JR West) and Namba (Nankai). Tracks 1 and 4 are used by Nankai, whereas Tracks 2 and 3 are used by JR West.

The station is served by four types of trains: JR West operates the Kansai Airport Rapid Service (Kyobashi–Osaka–Kansai Airport round trip) and the Shuttle (Hineno–Kansai Airport round trip), while Nankai operates the Airport Express and the limited express *rapi:t* (Namba–Kansai Airport round trip). Additionally, the Haruka limited express (Kyoto–Kansai Airport round trip) passes through the station but does not stop.

Visually, Nankai employs a more colorful and varied design in its signage, creating a striking impression and using large, modern digital information displays. In contrast, the JR West side adopts a more minimalist approach, dominated by its corporate blue color, with simpler digital displays. Although the platform space is not physically divided, the arrangement of visual elements creates a clear boundary between the two operators. The coexistence of these two systems forms a parallel semiotic landscape within a single space, making this station an ideal site for linguistic landscape studies.

## **2. Language Usage Comparison Based on Information Type and Platform Direction**

### **a. Track Number and Line Name Signage**

In this category, JR West and Nankai show no significant differences in either content type or format for both directions. Both use a pair of square signs side-by-side: the side facing the tracks shows the track number and train destination, while the side facing the platform shows the operator's logo and line name. All information is presented in Japanese and English.

However, Nankai differs slightly in that its central platform signage includes three square signs. On the platform-facing side, additional information is provided about where to purchase supplementary tickets for the limited express *rapi:t* service.

### **b. Station Name Signage**

This section displays more noticeable differences. Generally, both operators provide station names along with the previous and next

stations in Japanese and English. However, the divergence begins with the inclusion of additional information. On the JR West side, only Japanese furigana (phonetic guides) are provided. In contrast, Nankai also includes station names in Mandarin and Korean. Furthermore, station numbers are listed for the current, previous, and next stations. This numbering system greatly aids foreign passengers unfamiliar with Japanese script. While JR West also employs station numbering, it is not reflected on their station name signs.

### **c. Rail Line Information Signage**

Located beneath the station name signs, this signage reveals significant differences between operators. JR West provides a comprehensive overview, including a route map, departure timetable, and a QR code linking to more railway information accessible via smartphones.

On the other hand, Nankai only displays the route map and a similar QR code for accessing timetables and additional service information.

### **d. Digital Information Displays (*LED Screens*)**

Both JR West and Nankai have digital displays that show train arrival schedules, stop information, and announcements. However, there are stark differences between the two.

JR West uses small screens capable of displaying only two lines of text. The upper line shows the next train's details—train name, departure time, destination, and track number. The lower line displays stop information and announcements such as no-smoking policies. This scrolling text is provided in Japanese and English.

Nankai, in contrast, uses large television-like displays capable of showing much more information. The screen is divided into two sections: the upper part shows the next departing train, while the lower section shows the following train's schedule. These details include time, train name, destination, and stop stations. Train names and destinations are accompanied by station numbers and displayed in English, Mandarin, and Korean. Stop information is provided only for the nearest departing train.

Scrolling text at the top of the display adds further information such as car numbers,



reserved seating locations (particularly for rapid), and station stops with station numbers in English, Mandarin, and Korean. The bottom scroll shows general advisories such as no smoking, cleanliness reminders, and priority seating information.

Moreover, there is a difference in the quantity of information based on platform direction. Tracks 3 and 4, heading toward Namba and Osaka, offer detailed departure information. In contrast, Tracks 1 and 2, heading toward Kansai Airport, omit stop information since all trains terminate at the next station—Kansai Airport Station.

#### **e. Floor Information Markings**

These floor signs assist passengers in boarding the correct train cars. Both JR West and Nankai use them, but their design and implementation differ.

JR West uses two types of floor markings: directional signs for platform guidance and boarding positions indicating queue lines. The track direction signs have a gray background for the track number and blue for additional information, with “JR” and the train destination listed (e.g., Tennoji, Osaka, Wakayama via Hineno on Track 3). These are presented in Japanese, English, Korean, and Mandarin.

Boarding position signs list train names such as Kansai Airport Rapid or Shuttle, followed by two triangles indicating queue locations. Below are notes on car count and a warning not to place luggage on the signs, also provided in four languages. Priority seat locations are also marked nearby.

### **3. Visual Strategy and Typography**

The visual and typographic strategies employed by JR West and Nankai at Rinku Town Station reflect their corporate identities and targeted user segments. JR West adopts a minimalist approach, dominated by corporate blue, with clean sans-serif typography and a simple, consistent layout. This is evident in the large but visually restrained track and station name signage, and in the smaller digital displays with two-line text formats. Information is delivered succinctly and functionally, avoiding visual clutter.

In contrast, Nankai’s approach is more dynamic and linguistically inclusive. It uses more diverse colors, higher-contrast

typography, and layouts designed to attract users from various backgrounds, including international travelers. Nankai’s large digital displays show simultaneous multilingual content in Japanese, English, Mandarin, and Korean—underscoring its commitment to accessibility and user comfort for foreign passengers.

These differing strategies are also seen in the floor signage. JR West opts for a more formal and technical design, while Nankai emphasizes visual clarity and user-friendliness with expressive segmentation. The combination of colors, font sizes, and icons demonstrates how typography and visual design serve not only as information tools but also as instruments for shaping operator identity and user experience.

### **4. Symbolic Interpretation and Sociolinguistic Implications**

The coexistence of two operators sharing the same platform while delivering information with distinct visual and linguistic approaches creates a parallel semiotic landscape at Rinku Town Station. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this reflects differing language ideologies and audience segmentation strategies.

JR West, as the major operator with extensive regional coverage, tends to maintain a domestic and technocratic visual format. The predominant use of Japanese and English, and the absence of Mandarin and Korean on station name signs, indicates a focus on domestic passengers or foreign travelers with basic language skills. The minimal symbols and uniform design reinforce its image as a stable and efficient national operator. This strategy may also be based on the assumption that foreign tourists traveling to areas like Osaka, Kyoto, or Kobe via Kansai Airport will eventually transfer to JR services such as the Shinkansen, where multilingual information is more thoroughly provided. Hence, there is no urgent need to include extensive multilingual content at intermediary stations like Rinku Town.

Conversely, Nankai—which operates the primary line to central Osaka and is frequently used by foreign tourists heading to Kansai Airport—demonstrates linguistic inclusivity by including Mandarin and Korean, and by using

more expressive visualizations. This strategy reflects an understanding of global mobility needs and positions Nankai as a competitive transport provider in the era of international tourism.

Symbolism such as station numbering, colorful route maps, and reserved car position information for the rapid train shows how language and visual symbols are used to assert identity and ease of access. Therefore, these differences reflect not only communication styles but also illustrate how Japan's public spaces are undergoing a directed linguistic transformation in response to globalization and cross-border mobility.

## 5. Impact on User

The differences in visual strategy, typography, and information presentation ultimately have direct implications for the user experience and understanding at Rinku Town Station. For local passengers, JR West's simpler and more concise system can be considered sufficiently functional, as they are already familiar with the railway system and basic symbols commonly used in Japan. The minimalistic design supports efficiency and clarity, particularly for daily commuters who prioritize speed and straightforward access to information.

However, for international passengers—especially tourists unfamiliar with Japanese railway systems—the rich and multilingual information provided by Nankai offers a more accessible and user-friendly environment. The inclusion of English, Mandarin, and Korean, along with visual aids such as station numbering and colorful route maps, helps reduce the cognitive load and potential confusion for those unfamiliar with Japanese scripts or geography. Moreover, the large digital screens and comprehensive visual displays improve wayfinding, which is essential in a fast-paced transit environment.

The physical proximity of the two operators within a shared space creates a juxtaposition of user experiences, where passengers may feel either supported or disoriented depending on which side of the platform they are on. This highlights the importance of considering linguistic diversity and design inclusivity in public transportation settings, especially in locations serving

international gateways such as Kansai International Airport.

In sum, Rinku Town Station exemplifies how multimodal communication strategies shape the perception of space and influence user behavior. The station serves not only as a transit hub but also as a microcosm of Japan's broader sociolinguistic dynamics—balancing domestic efficiency with global accessibility. The insights gained from this site suggest that future transportation infrastructure, particularly in multilingual and multicultural contexts, should prioritize harmonized and user-centered information design to meet the needs of increasingly diverse passengers.

## CONCLUSION

Rinku Town Station represents a unique case of two railway operators—JR West and Nankai—sharing the same physical platform space while maintaining distinct visual and linguistic identities. These differences are reflected in the design of signage, the languages used, digital information displays, and the overall typographic and visual strategies employed. JR West adopts a minimalist approach, dominated by blue tones and limited to Japanese and English, whereas Nankai employs a more dynamic, multilingual visual strategy (Japanese, English, Mandarin, Korean) aimed at reaching a broader audience, particularly international travelers.

These distinctions create a parallel semiotic landscape that reveals differing language ideologies and audience segmentation strategies. JR West appears to prioritize domestic passengers and a technocratic, efficient delivery of information, while Nankai emphasizes linguistic inclusivity and accessibility for a global user base. The sociolinguistic implications suggest that Japan's railway public spaces are undergoing a strategic linguistic transformation in response to globalization and increasing international mobility.

Ultimately, these contrasting visual and linguistic communication strategies shape the user experience at the station. JR West's system tends to suit local passengers who are already familiar with railway norms, whereas Nankai's system provides greater ease and comfort for

foreign users through more comprehensive and multilingual information presentation.

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