Sign-genres, authentication, and emplacement: The signage of Thai restaurants in Hamburg, Germany

Jannis Androutsopoulos (Universität Hamburg & MultiLing, University of Oslo)

Akra Chowchong (Universität Hamburg & Chulalongkorn University)

ABSTRACT

This paper asks how language and other semiotic resources are deployed in the semiotic landscape of Thai restaurants in the city of Hamburg, Germany. Based on detailed multimodal analysis of signage in twelve restaurants, this study draws on both established and under-explored topics in Linguistic Landscape scholarship, including the analysis of sign-genres, the distinction between communicative and symbolic functions of signs, the role of language choice in authenticating place, and the emplacement of signs in the semiotic landscape. A scheme for the classification of restaurant signs by discourse function and emplacement is proposed. The findings suggest that the analytical distinctions between inside and outside space as well as primary and secondary signs are useful for the study of restaurants and other commercial semiotic spaces.

1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

Most restaurants in Germany are associated with a particular national or regional cuisine. Based on detailed, multimodal analysis of signage in twelve Thai restaurants in the city of Hamburg, this paper examines how semiotic resources are deployed and distributed outside and inside restaurants in order to authenticate their national origin. This study proposes an analysis of sign-genres as a point of entry into a contextualized, multimodal analysis of authentication and emplacement of a minority language on restaurant signs. In particular, it aims to answer two research questions: first, how are linguistic and pictorial signs deployed to authenticate a restaurant's provenience? Second, how is the display of minority language affected by the emplacement of signs outside or inside a commercial establishment? In engaging with these questions, this paper draws on both established and emergent topics in linguistic and semiotic landscape research, notably the concept of sign-genre, the notions of

authenticity and commodification, the distinction between outside and inside space, and between communicative and symbolic functions of signs in the semiotic landscape.

The paper is organized as follows: in the remainder of this section a theoretical backdrop is created in four steps. We first review how the concept of genre has been taken up and how restaurants signs have been studied so far in Linguistic Landscape (henceforth LL) research. We then introduce 'ethnic' or 'foreign' restaurants as a site of research and discuss the relationship between authentication, commodification, and emplacement of signs. The next section outlines the research procedure and introduces a classification of restaurant signs, whose distinctions – primary and secondary, storefront and instore signs – inform the subsequent presentation of analysis and findings. The concluding discussion returns to the paper's research questions and its case for sign-genre and emplacement as important categories in LL research.

1.1 Sign-genres

Genre is an aspect of the LL that has received relatively little research attention so far (cf. Huebner, 2009; Järlehed, 2018; Reershemius, 2018; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2012). Previous discussions draw on genre approaches from ethnography of communication, systemic functional linguistics (SFL), and linguistic anthropology. Huebner (2009) draws on Hymes's 'SPEAKING' classification scheme to propose a genre classification framework for LL research that comprises a variety of analytical dimensions, such as the typical setting of an LL genre, the spatial organisation of elements in the sign layout, the speech acts accomplished in the sign, the semantic relationship between verbal elements on a sign, and the code-preferences that characterise a LL genre. Some of these are similar to the analysis scheme for primary storefront signs proposed in this paper. Stroud and Mpendukana (2012: 152) follow Briggs and Bauman (1992) in emphasizing that genres "organise multilingual (and multimodal) resources into complexes of functions and forms that encode communicative events recognisable by community members as conventional performances of a particular type of communicative act". In their ethnographic study of signage in a South African township, they distinguish subgenres, e.g. corporate billboards as a subgenre of advertising. Reershemius (2018) examines stickers as a genre in the urban semiotic landscape. Stickers are short, multimodal texts that are displayed in urban space to draw viewers' attention to various discourses and areas of cultural activity (e.g. business interests, music events, or football clubs). In his genre analysis of street-name signs in Spanish towns, Järlehed (2018) emphasizes the interdependence between genre and discourse (understood as a system of

social knowledge), the dynamics of continuity and innovation in sign-genres, and their recontextualization, as when for example street-name plates are turned into store-signs or imitated on advertising billboards.

Against this backdrop, this study adopts a working understanding of a 'sign-genre' as a socially recognizable class of signs in the LL. Sign-genres draw on more or less stable configurations of semiotic resources to accomplish a particular communicative act, such as, in our case, to designate a restaurant, present the food and drinks on offer, orient customers to restaurant space, and so on. A sign-genre serves as an often implicit blueprint for the material realization of concrete signs, thereby providing orientation to social actors who produce and/or read these signs. We contextualize this understanding of sign-genre within a geosemiotic approach to the semiotic landscape (Scollon & Scollon 2003), in which signs and sign-genres are understood in relation to broader discourses (commercial, regulatory, infrastructural, transgressive ones). For example, street names are a specific sign-genre (Järlehed, 2018) that materializes an infrastructural discourse. In analogy, main restaurant signs (which we term 'primary storefront signs' in analysis) can be considered a specific sign-genre within commercial discourse. In this light, we follow Huebner (2009: 72) and Järlehed (2018: 286) in arguing that the concept of genre can enable a much finer granularity in LL analysis and serve as a common denominator to enable comparability across LL studies. Compared to a lumping-together of commercial signs, as was common in earlier distributive LL research, an analysis of sign-genres departs not from a specific named language, but from a sign's communicative purpose. It therefore affords "more detailed social semiotic examination" (Huebner 2009: 72) and allows to explain the emergence of semiotic conventions for specific classes of public signs, on the one hand, and the deliberate distancing from such conventions (by sign producers), on the other. In line with geosemiotics and semiotic landscape analysis (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2011) we also adopt a multimodal understanding of sign-genres and thereby emphasize the role of semiotic resources such as colour, layout, typography, and material in the configuration of a sign-genre.

As the following discussion explains, we consider a restaurant's identification with a national or regional cuisine an emic delimitation of a particular sign-genre. Thus primary storefront signs for, say, Thai, Italian, and Turkish restaurants each constitute a different subgenre of commercial restaurant signs. This low-level of granularity in identifying a sign-genre is not trivial, as other researchers define sign-genres at higher levels of abstraction. For example, Reershemius (2018) seems to assume a generalized 'sticker' genre, with e.g. stickers for a football club and a vegan community being instances of the same sign-genre, even

though they differ considerably in the discourses they orient to and their stylistic choices for imagery, colour, and register of language. However, we argue it is precisely a restaurant's identification with a particular national or regional origin that motivates the selection of particular semiotic resources for its signage and thereby gives rise to generic similarities across sign-tokens, for example across the main signs of different Italian or Thai restaurants. Our analysis offers empirical evidence for such generic similarities on Thai restaurant signs and menu cards.

1.2 Restaurant signs

Being part of a commercial discourse in a geosemiotic sense (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), restaurant signs, especially the ones we term 'primary storefront signs' below, position their viewer as a potential customer and aim to draw their attention to a particular service, i.e. food and drinks of a particular kind as well as a space to consume them. As we argue in this paper, a restaurant is always a restaurant of a particular kind, branded and socially recognized in a particular way (Maegaard & Karrebæk, 2019). In Germany, the most common definition of a restaurant in everyday discourse is in terms of its national or regional cuisine: people go out for dinner to an Italian, Greek, Thai, Bavarian, etc. restaurant. We assume in this study that a restaurant's self-claimed affiliation to a specific cuisine and its country or region of origin motivates the semiotic design of its signage, especially its primary storefront signs.

Restaurant signs are regularly mentioned in LL literature, though mostly so in passing. Quantitative studies have examined the use of proper names on restaurant signs and the popularity of foreign languages in the linguistic landscape. In a large-scale LL study of Germany's Ruhr metropolitan area, Ziegler et al. (2018) discuss restaurant signs as a typical site of foreign proper names. The percentage of German proper names is considerably lower on restaurant signs compared to signs in other business sectors, a finding the authors explain with the "popularity and spread of restaurants with foreign cuisine" in Germany (p. 202, our translation). In a study of multilingual shop signs in Athens, Greece, Nikolaou (2017: 169) finds "English is the preferred language of retail shops and food and drink establishments", and Italian, too "has a significant presence in food and drinks shops". These languages are motivated not forcibly by the shop owners' origin (which must be established independently), but rather by gastronomic traditions and semiotic conventions in the urban landscape of Athens, where especially English is by no means limited to signs that orient to tourists and international visitors.

Ethnographic research has examined restaurant signs with regard to their producers' semiotic awareness, the historicity of the LL, and as part of complex material aggregates. Malinowski (2009) interviewed owners of Korean restaurants in Oakland, Bay Area, to tease out their awareness of semiotic emblems of Korean identity on their storefront signs. Language and visual emblems are important resources to store owners when it comes to indexing their restaurant's Korean identity. As one restaurant owner puts it, the 'Taeguk' pattern and the acronym 'BBQ' are "good for us to represent what's Korean" (pp. 121-2), and recognizable signifiers of a restaurant's Korean identity to non-Korean customers. In an ethnographic reading of a menu card, Blommaert (2013: 108*ff.*) narrates the story of *Bellefleur*, an old neighbourhood tavern in Antwerp, whose ownership shifted from earlier Flemish owners to new managers of Indian descent. These kept the old menu with traditional dishes and added a few Indian/Asian dishes in an attempt to both maintain the tavern's old clientele and extend it to new patrons with different origin and taste, e.g. young trendy families or migrants from the area. This menu card is read as an index of the interplay between continuity and change in the neighbourhood's social structure. In an ethnography of 'ethnic' restaurants in Bloomington, Abas (2019) embeds storefront signs and indoors literacy artefacts (including menu cards) within a geo-semiotic analysis of visual communication and social interaction in restaurant spaces, and explores the multiple roles of literacy in the construction of 'ethnic foodscapes'.

In the sign-genre analysis proposed in this article, we think of the semiotic space of a restaurant as composed of a cluster of sign-genres with different communicative functions, which realize discourses in a geosemiotic sense. It seems important to clarify that we do not consider all restaurant signs as belonging to the same genre. Rather, restaurant signs orient to various sign-genres, which realize commercial, infrastructural, and regulatory discourses. The two sign-genres we focus on in analysis, main storefront signs and menu cards, are both part of commercial discourse and may be considered obligatory in a restaurant context. Other signs, such as pointers to wardrobe and toilets, are part of infrastructural discourse, while still others, such as 'no smoking' signs, are regulative ones; and so on.

1.3 Ethnic restaurants in Germany

The history of 'ethnic' (Möhring, 2008) or 'foreign' (Waldfogel, 2019) gastronomy in Germany is closely tied to post-war migration in the twentieth century (Möhring, 2008, 2012). The first Italian restaurant opened in 1952, followed first by more Italian restaurants after the first immigration agreement between Germany and Italy in 1955, and later on by

restaurants and snack bars managed by immigrants from South-Eastern Europe and many other countries. In the early twenty-first century, ethnic restaurants in Germany are immensely diversified (Möhring, 2008). Recent statistical data (Waldfogel, 2019) suggest that Thai restaurants in Germany rank tenth among foreign cuisine establishments, preceded by Italian, US (specifically, fast food chains), Turkish, Chinese, French, Spanish, Greek, Indian, and Japanese. According to data for the European Union (Statista, 2018), Thai cuisine ranks sixth in the restaurants that German customers visit on a regular basis, preceded by Italian, German, Chinese, Greek, and American. Waldfogel's (2019) statistical findings suggest that the percentage of national cuisine restaurants in German cities is the lowest in Europe, with 35.5% of restaurants featuring German cuisine, as opposed to e.g. 77.3% of Italian cuisine restaurants in Italy.

In her cultural anthropology of ethnic cuisine in Germany, Möhring (2008, 2012) suggests that dining in an ethnic restaurant is not just a matter of food taste. Möhring compares dining out to a theatrical performance, in which music, furniture, decoration, and the appearance and conduct of staff all underscore the 'authenticity' of the food on offer (Möhring, 2008: 12–13; see also Abas, 2019; Maegaard & Karrebæk, 2019). Möhring (2008) even compares eating in an ethnic restaurant to a minimal cultural (and, we would add, language) lesson. In a striking parallel to sociolinguistic scholarship, discussed below, 'ethnic authenticity' is thus viewed as the outcome of a multi-dimensional performance that also involves spatial decoration and, ultimately, linguistic resources as well. Even though Möhring (2008) does not draw on LL scholarship, some of her points on the aesthetic dimensions of ethnic restaurants are applicable to our observations on the distribution of Thai linguistic items outside and especially inside the restaurants we studied.

1.4 Authentication, commodification, and emplacement in the restaurant landscape

It follows from this discussion that a restaurant's self-identification with a particular national or regional origin is accomplished discursively and performatively, and that linguistic and pictorial signs are important resources in this process (Abas, 2019). By drawing here on the notion of 'authentication' (Bucholtz, 2003), we align with sociolinguistic critique of earlier understandings of 'authentic' speech and speakers, originally inherited from dialectology. This critique has led to a revised conception of authenticity, which crystallizes in two main points (cf. Bucholtz, 2003; Coupland, 2003; 2014; Lacoste et al., 2014; Maegaard & Karrebæk, 2019). First, authenticity is now understood as a discursive achievement, the outcome of a process of authentication, in which social actors draw on language and other

resources to claim or contest the relationship of an artefact, practice, or space to a particular origin. Second, a pursuit for authenticity is closely linked to late-modern capitalism and globalization, especially to the development of niche markets, in which culture, including language, is framed as an 'authentic' commodity.

Both points fit well restaurants (of Thai or other origin) and related urban spaces such as street markets (Baro 2019) or ethnic neighborhoods (e.g. Chinatowns, cf. Leeman & Modan, 2009; Wu, Techasan & Huebner, 2020), where linguistic and pictorial resources are strategically deployed to index ethnic and social identities associated with these spaces. On this backdrop, we argue that authenticity is closely linked to spatial practice (cf. Lou, 2016: 126; Abas, 2019; Barro, 2019). It calls for a thorough description of spatial arrangements and decorations, including not just language, but also fabrics, furniture, and wall decorations of all kinds (see here Pennycook's 2018 notion of spatial and distributed repertoires).

Authentication by means of language is closely linked to commodification of language (cf. Coupland, 2003; Coupland, 2014; Heller, 2010; Järlehed, 2018; Leeman & Modan, 2009). Restaurant signage is a site for the commodification of the language(s) associated with a particular cuisine (in our case Thai language and script), in the sense that those who produce the signage draw on this language as a resource for added value within their respective niche market. In our case, this is supported by the observation that even self-labelled Thai restaurants in Hamburg, which are not managed by ethnically Thai owners, display Thai names, and other indexicals of Thainess, on their storefronts.

The link of authentication and commodification is, in turn, closely related to the distinction between communicative and symbolic functions of language on signs. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Chinatown of Washington, DC, Leeman and Modan (2009) discuss the commodification of language as a process in which signs in a minority language gradually shift from a 'communicative' to a 'symbolic' function. Here, 'communicative' (or 'informational') is understood as the transmission of propositional content that is necessary to accomplish a transaction, while 'symbolic' (or 'emblematic') is understood as indexing a social group identity.[1] The commodification of minority languages is a diachronic process, in which not just the semantic content, but also the design and emplacement of verbal signs play an important role. Leeman and Modan (2009) found that Chinese signs were progressively detached from interactions and transactions among members of the Chinese minority and progressively adopted by establishments situated in Chinatown, but from a different ethnolinguistic background (such as a Spanish tapas bar or a Starbucks café), so that eventually, Chinese characters were used to sell 'anything at all' (p.354). In analysis, we show

that this distinction between symbolic and communicative use of a minority language is relevant to Thai language and script in our data.

Another finding by Leeman and Modan (2009: 351–2) with relevance to this study is that the use and commodification of Chinese linguistic signs is closely linked to their emplacement, i.e. their spatial position in the material world (Scollon & Scollon, 2003: Ch. 8), and in particular their distribution to outside and inside spaces of restaurants and other business types. While in the past storefront signs were cast in English, Chinese language signs occurred inside the store in order to support participation in the service encounter on the part of Chinese-reading customers, so their purpose was clearly a communicative one. After gentrification, Chinese became much more prominent in the outside space, with a shift from communicative to symbolic function.

Spatial emplacement, in particular the distinction between outside and inside space, is not much investigated in LL studies – understandably so, since LL has generally been understood as a public space whose boundaries are practically equated to open-air space. The still limited research on indoor spaces examines public institutional buildings, such as museums, schools, or religious institutions (cf. Abas, 2019; Brown, 2012; Matras, Gaiser & Reershemius, 2018). The rationale to extend this approach to restaurants, we suggest, is grounded in the semiotic construction of restaurant space as a site of 'authentic' experience, as discussed above.

In the remainder of this article, we draw on these theory impulses to understand how a minoritized language in Germany, Thai, works as a resource for commercial authentication, cast in specific material emplacements, and in the frame of particular sign-genres (such as menu cards and main outside signs). We explore whether, and how, instances of Thai script in Hamburg's Thai restaurants are more likely to occur out- or inside a restaurant, i.e. after a customer has taken the decision to engage more extensively with the semiotic space that forms part of gastronomic experience.

2. Research Design

This section discusses our research procedure, including the selection of a restaurant sample, a working classification of sign types in terms of their spatial emplacement, and coding categories.

2.1 Sampling and data collection

To create a sample for this study, the second author – a native Thai, Hamburg-based academic – first consulted members of Hamburg's Thai community for information about Thai restaurants in the city. A Google Maps search for keywords 'Thai restaurants' yielded approximately 30 establishments, which included all restaurants mentioned by community members. To delimit this sample, establishments with Thai owners were selected by either looking up the owner's name on the restaurant's website (Thai family names are morphologically quite distinctive) or by calling up the location and inquiring in the Thai language.[2] The resulting sample includes twelve restaurants in three out of Hamburg's seven districts, i.e. *Mitte* (central Hamburg), *Hamburg-Nord* (an area north of the city centre with both middle- and working-class areas), and *Eimsbüttel* (a trendy student and middle-class area west of the centre). These districts are high-traffic areas, with most of Hamburg's commercial and business areas and tourist attractions (e.g. Reeperbahn) located here. The overview on Table 1 includes price range indications from the restaurants' Google Maps entries, when available, with the symbol '€' indicating low-price and '€€' middle-price ones. As discussed in analysis, the design of restaurants signs varies in certain respects by price range, though not consistently by district, the reason being that affordable Thai restaurants that take to-go orders or allow for a quick eat-in are spread out throughout the city.

	Name	District	Neighbourhood	Price
1.	Sala Thai Restaurant	Mitte	Jungfernstieg	€€
2.	Saymai Thai Restaurant	Mitte	Gänsemarkt	€€
3.	Thai Food	Mitte	Neustadt	€
4.	Nakorn Luang Thai Restaurant	Mitte	St. Pauli	€€
5.	Charm Thai Street Kitchen	Eimsbüttel	Eimsbüttel	--
6.	EaThai	Eimsbüttel	Rotherbaum	--
7.	Khao San Thai Thai	Eimsbüttel	Eimsbüttel	€€
8.	Qur Thai Drei Jai	Eimsbüttel	Schnelsen	€€
9.	Blooming Thai Restaurant	Nord	Uhlenhorst	€€
10.	Laan Thai	Nord	Winterhude	€
11.	Sabai Jai	Nord	Dulsberg	--
12.	Samui Thai Cuisine	Nord	Barmbek	€€

Table 1. List of Thai restaurants in the data

A total of n=266 photographs were collected, covering both storefront and in-store signs as well as menu cards of all twelve restaurants. All photographic documentation was done with the smartphone app LinguaSnappHamburg, which is based on the LinguaSnapp application (Gaiser & Matras, 2016) and has been localized for LL research in Hamburg (Androutsopoulos, in press). LinguaSnapp features a 14-category coding scheme that integrates various LL classifications (including Reh, 2004; Blommaert, 2013). Even though the app was originally developed for the coding of multilingual signs, almost all of its categories can be applied to any kind of sign.[3]

2.2 A classification of sign genres by spatial emplacement

The data collection strategy developed during fieldwork is based on two intertwined distinctions, i.e. between outside and inside space on the one hand, and primary and secondary signs on the other (Figure 1).
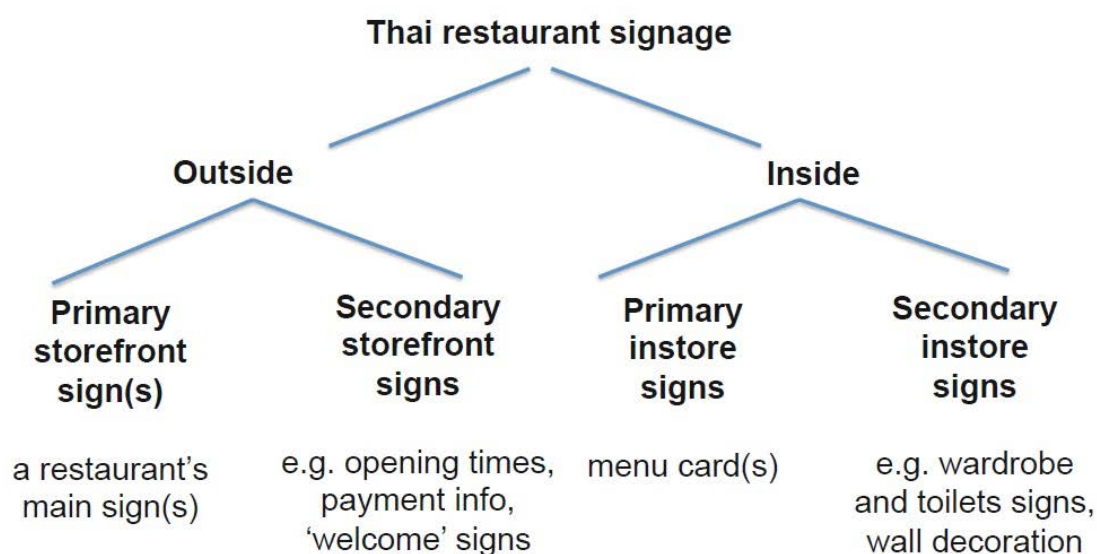

Figure 1. Classification of restaurant signage

In this classification, the term 'primary storefront signs' designates a classic object of LL analysis: a restaurant's largest sign, usually placed high above the entrance, which names the restaurant and its cuisine. By virtue of their prominent size and placement, these signs arguably constitute "the most salient point" of the entire storefront, "from where the reading starts" (Scollon & Scollon, 2003: 153). The term 'secondary storefront signs' points to a variety of signs that are smaller in size, less prominently placed, often glued or attached to the store window at eye level, and often transient, such as e.g. 'welcome' signs, information on

opening hours or recommendation stickers. As will be shown, secondary signs differ from primary ones also in terms of their fabrication history and transnational trajectory. Moving instore, the category of 'primary instore signs' is limited to menu cards, and the term 'secondary instore signs' again comprises a variety of signs, e.g. notices, pointers, and warnings to the customers, which can vary across restaurants. Overall, primary signs can be said to realize two genres, i.e. storefront signs and menu cards which are constitutive for a gastronomic establishment, while secondary signs realize genres that are not obligatory to a restaurant business, though some might be strongly expected.

2.3 Coverage and coding

Primary storefront signs are analysed by means of an inductively assembled coding scheme, which is roughly similar to the analytical categories Järlehed (2018) identifies for street-name signs. Each sign is coded for the following eight features:

1) **Languages**: number of distinct languages on the sign (the word *Thai* itself was excluded from coding);

2) **Scripts**: number of distinct scripts on the sign, including the choice of Thai or Roman script for Thai lexical items;

3) **Semantics**: meaning of the restaurant name and other lexical items on the sign;

4) **Arrangement**: semantic relationship between linguistic items in different languages (Reh, 2004);

5) **Visual prominence**: visual relations among items, as determined by differences in size, colour, and/or placement on the sign (Scollon & Scollon, 2003);

6) **Typography**: fonts used for different linguistic items on the sign;

7) **Pictorial elements** (e.g. flag of Thailand, Siam pagoda, lotus flowers);

8) **Colour**: dominant colour(s) or colour combinations on the sign.

Primary instore signs (menu cards) were photographically documented in their entirety. Their analysis in this paper is limited to their choice and arrangement of languages for each menu item.[4] As will be shown, these menus are almost always multilingual, though the selection and order of languages vary across restaurants.

Secondary signs (storefront and instore) are covered only selectively, since our main interest is not to describe all infrastructural or regulative sign-genres in these restaurants, but specifically to chart the distribution of Thai inside and outside the restaurants. We therefore focused on whether secondary signs bring up linguistic or pictorial indexicals of Thainess,

which may (or may not) also appear in the respective restaurant's primary signs. We also examine the emplacement of secondary signs, their production trajectory (e.g. whether they are manually crafted or mass fabricated in Thailand, Germany or elsewhere), and the communicative or symbolic function of Thai language, if used on these signs.

2.4 Thai restaurants in a diaspora context

To contextualize the text-based analysis, interviews with owners or staff members of Sabai Jai, Samui, and Nakorn Luang were carried out in an informal manner during or after photographic documentation. The interviews cover background information on the establishments and the use of Thai language and script on their restaurant signs. These interviews, together with second author's ethnographic observations, suggest that Thai restaurants fulfill a range of social functions for the Thai diaspora in Hamburg, which officially amounts to n=1,491 individuals registered in Hamburg in 2019.[5] None of these restaurants is part of a chain; most are family-run and the main source of these families' income. In addition, many Thai restaurants offer casual job opportunities to other Thai people in the city, including students. As a side-effect, having a space filled with as many as Thai people as possible also contributes to an expression of ethnic authenticity of the place.[6] For many members of the Thai diaspora, Thai restaurants are a favorite meeting place. In fact, for some customers, getting to converse with other Thais, be it other customers or the restaurant workers, is as important as having authentic Thai food. We discuss below how this community dimension of Thai restaurants is indexed in their LL.

3. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

3.1 Primary storefront signs

Primary storefront signs draw on features of three languages: English, German, and Thai. As shown in Table 1, all restaurant names have in common the word Thai, which has the same form in all three languages and was therefore excluded from coding. Ten out of twelve restaurants feature some English lexis, followed by eight that feature Thai, and three that feature German. From these, Thai and German have a clear distribution of labour, in that Thai is only used for restaurant names (e.g. *Laan Thai, Samui, Sabai Jai*), while German is selected for a brief specification subline that is placed below the name (e.g. *Thailändische Spezialitäten* 'Thai specialties'). Some restaurants have English names (e.g. *EaThai, Thai Food, Blooming Thai*), and others use English for the subline, e.g. *exotic Asian food, authentic street food*. The semantic distinction between restaurant name and specification is

indexed in visual design, with the name (in Thai or English) being the visually most prominent element, while the specification subline, in English or German, is cast less prominently in terms of size and/or placement. In Figure 2, the restaurant has a Thai name (*Laan* means 'square' or 'place') accompanied by a specification in German right below the name and a visually more prominent English specification to its right.

Figure 2. Primary storefront sign of *Laan Thai*

Some Thai restaurant names in our data are quite simple and straightforward, e.g. *Charm* or *Thai Food.* Others draw on wordplay, as in *EaThai*. Several names include a Thai word or expression (e.g. *Nakorn Luang* '*capital city*', *Saymai* '*silk*', *Sabai Jai* '*light-hearted*') or a place-name from Thailand (e.g. *Samui*). In most cases, the name structure features a Thai noun followed by the attribute *Thai, as in Sala Thai* ('Thai pavilion'), *Khao San Thai Thai* ('Thai milled rice'). The most complex restaurant name in the data takes up a feature of the owner's family: *Qur Thai Drei Jai*, meaning 'Thai kitchen of/with three sons'. Regarding script choice, eleven out of twelve restaurants use only the Roman script on their primary sign. The exception is *Nakorn Luang*, which features a separate sign with the same name in Thai script above the entrance (Figure 3). This restaurant is situated in a small alley, and its sign on the main street (a busy pedestrian street in Hamburg's entertainment district), which directs the customers towards the alley, features only the lower part of Figure 3, without the Thai script.

As for typography, eight out of twelve primary signs choose a curvy calligraphy font for the restaurant name and sometimes for the sideline. Examples are the Thai font in Figure 3 and the font used for *Sabai Jai* and its sideline, *Thai take away*, in Figure 4.[7]

Frequent pictorial elements on primary storefront signs are Thai flag stripes in three restaurants (*Laan Thai:* Figure 2, *Nakorn Luang:* Figure 3, and *Qur Thai Drei Jai*) and traditional Thai decorative patterns such as an arch/pagoda form (featured in the primary signs of *Saymai* and *Sala Thai*) and a decorative curve under the restaurant name (as in the sign of *Thai Food*, not depicted in the examples). Another recurring pictorial element is the lotus flower, found on the primary signs of *Sabai Jai* (Figure 4) and *Samui*. In colour choice,

five signs feature warm colours such as red, yellow, brown, and gold (*Sabai Jai*, *Samui*, *Thai Food*, *Sala Thai* and *Khao San Thai Thai*), while two restaurants use a combination of red, white and blue, which are the colours of the Thai national flag (cf. Figure 3).

Figure 3. Primary storefront sign of *Nakorn Luang*

Figure 4. Primary storefront sign of *Sabai Jai*

Overall, primary storefront signs are characterized by strong orientation to English and erasure of Thai script. The amount of English is not really surprising. As elsewhere (cf. Nikolaou, 2017 for Greece; Ziegler et al., 2018 for Germany's Ruhr area), English in Germany carries a high symbolic value, and its choice does not presuppose an international audience. An additional motivation for the choice of English might be that most restaurants in the sample are located in central Hamburg districts, where international guests are likely expected. Thai script is almost entirely absent from primary storefront signs in our sample. Arguably, any inscription in a script other than Roman at a commercial storefront in Germany is quite salient, but at the same time indecipherable from the viewpoint of average German customers. So while the display of Thai script might have high symbolic value in terms of

indexing the restaurant's origin – and by extension, authenticating its claim to a gastronomic tradition – its practical, communicative value in a dominantly German environment is quite low. Instead, the restaurants' Thai identity is indexed by Romanized Thai, including the word *Thai* itself, and by pictorial resources, including the lotus flower, which has various symbolic meanings in Buddhism. The association between the lotus flower and Buddhism, Thailand's most common religion, seems to be well known in Germany (Blümel, 2018). Thus, the lotus flower comes to symbolize Thailand in the storefront signs and menu cards of some Thai restaurants.

3.2 Secondary storefront signs

Secondary signs outside the restaurants fall into two subgroups, which tie in well with the distinction between communicative and symbolic signs, introduced above. To offer an example, Figure 5 shows an ensemble of secondary signs on the facade of *Thai Food*. The top left sign informs the viewer that a toilet fee is charged for non-patrons. The bottom left sign lists accepted payment methods. The large right sign features the opening times, and the bottom right stickers are by security companies. All this information is considered important to local customers (hence, the signs have a specific communicative function) and is written in German, with payment information provided also in English and pictograms. Signs of this kind are found in front of all restaurants in the sample and always come in German or a German/English combination, but never in Thai.

Compare this to Figure 6, which shows part of the façade of *Laan Thai*. To the bottom, a home-printed sheet of paper points to the entrance and names opening hours. Above we see a cartoon figure that does the *Wai*, a polite Thai greeting that involves the entire body posture, with the caption 'welcome' in Thai script only. We classify this sign as a primarily symbolic one, in that its linguistic part is neither essential to the restaurant transaction nor propositionally understood by the majority of potential customers. Another example for a symbolic sign in our data is a bright and colourful LED panel on the façade of *Sabai Jai*, which displays the word 'welcome' in Thai script and in English. What these two signs have in common is that they are mass-produced and widely available in Thailand, and were probably imported by the restaurant owners or their suppliers (a similar case is discussed by Leeman & Modan, 2009: 335–6).

Figure 5. Secondary storefront sign of *Thai Food*

Figure 6. Secondary storefront sign of *Laan Thai*

Figure 7. Chalkboard with Thai-German food glossary

As these examples show, we find that secondary signs that are deemed relevant to anticipated transactions in the restaurant (the interaction order, cf. Leeman & Modan, 2009) are all in German, and occasionally also in English. By contrast, signs whose main aim is to construe a friendly, polite, and welcoming atmosphere may also feature Thai. From the viewpoint of German-speaking patrons, Thai is thus reduced to its aesthetic value in a multimodal sign, such as the *Wai* cartoon (Figure 6), where meaning is construed primarily by the visual shape rather than the verbal caption. Secondary signs that integrate communicative and symbolic aspects are an exception in our data. An example is a chalkboard in front of the restaurant *Thai Food*, shown in Figure 7. This is a hand-made glossary of basic food vocabulary in Romanized Thai, with German translations to the right.

3.3 Primary instore signs

Our analysis of menu cards takes the menu entry as a basic unit of analysis, which we segment into two semantic sub-units: dish name (which is usually consistent across restaurants for a given dish) and a brief dish description (which varies in wording and information detail).[8] For example, a menu entry in the restaurant *Sala Thai* consists of dish name in Latinized Thai, *Som Tam*, and description in German, *Pikanter Karottensalat nach thailändischer Zubereitung* ('spicy carrot salad in Thai preparation') followed by the dish name in Thai script, ส้มตำแครอท. As this example shows, language and script choices of menu entries range from one to three languages, with German and Thai (both in Thai and Roman script) being the most frequent ones. Expectedly, all twelve menu cards feature German for dish names and descriptions. Eight out of twelve menus feature dish names in Thai, but none includes dish descriptions in Thai. English, on the other hand, comes only in five menus for dish descriptions and always implies a dish name in German and/or Thai.

Turning now to the placement of languages in menu entries, we distinguish twelve arrangement patterns, displayed in Table 2. As indicated in the outmost right column, some restaurants design their menu cards consistently on one pattern, others draw on several arrangements in different sections of their menu card. All patterns but one (P1) feature German. Ten out of twelve patterns include Thai script, six Romanized Thai, and five English.

The almost categorical occurrence of Thai script on menu cards is remarkable, even considering it is limited to dish names and sometimes visually downplayed, for example by being cast in smaller print or placed in brackets (cf. menu cards by *Saymai* and *Blooming Thai*). However, the most common arrangement patterns (P2 and P3 in Table 2) do not include any Thai script. In P2, the German name offers a rough description of the dish, and the German description adds a brief elaboration. Here we find dish names such as *Gebratene Nudeln* ('fried noodles') or *Frühlingsrollen* ('spring rolls'), which frame the dish as generic 'Asian food'. In P3, the dish name comes in Romanized Thai (which German customers can read and perhaps also pronounce), followed by a description in German. In this arrangement, Romanized Thai is used for famous Thai dishes. These two patterns occur in the menu cards of four different restaurants, which are not the most expensive ones in the sample (see Table 1).[9]

	Structure	Example	Restaurants
P1	Thai script NAME	ไส้กรอกอีสาน	Sabai Jai, Nakorn Luang
P2	German NAME	Gebratene Nudeln	EaThai, Laan Thai, Charm, Thai Food
	German DESCR	Mit Rindfleisch, Ei und Gemüse	
P3	Rom. Thai NAME	Gaeng Kiaw Whan Moo	EaThai, Laan Thai, Charm, Thai Food
	German DESCR	Grünes Curry mit Schweinefleisch […]	
P4	German NAME	Süß-saures Schweinefleisch mit Gemüse	Sala Thai
	Thai script NAME	หมูเปรี้ยวหวาน	
P5	German NAME	Rotes Curry mit Huhn	Sabai Jai, Khao San
	Thai script NAME	แกงเผ็ดแดงไก่	
	German DESCR	Kokosmilch Curry mit Bambus, Paprika […]	
P6	Rom. Thai NAME	Giaw Nam	Sabai Jai, Khao San
	Thai script NAME	เกี๊ยวน้ำ	
	German DESCR	Wan Tan Suppe	
P7	Rom. Thai NAME	Som Tam	Sala Thai
	German DESCR	Pikanter Karottensalat […]	
	Thai script NAME	ส้มตำแครอท	
P8	German NAME	Gebratenes Hühnerfleisch mit Chili und Basilikum	Samui
	English DESCR	Stir-fried chicken with chili and basil leaves	
	Thai script NAME	ผัดกะเพราไก่	
P9	German NAME	Frühlingsrollen mit Gemüse	Nakorn Luang, Say Mai. Qur Thai Drei Jai
	Thai script NAME	ปอเปี๊ยะทอด	
	German DESCR	dazu Sweet-Chili-Dip	
	English DESCR	Spring rolls with vegetables and sweet-chili-dip	
P10	Rom. Thai NAME	Por Pia	Nakorn Luang, Say

	Thai script NAME	ปอเปี๊ยะ	Mai, Qur Thai Drei Jai
	German DESCR	Selbst gemachte frittierte […] Frühlingsrollen […]	
	English DESCR	Homemade fried Thai spring rolls filled with meat	
P11	Rom. Thai NAME	Panang Gai	Samui
	German NAME	Pikantes rotes Hühnerfleischcurry […]	
	English DESCR	Spicy red chicken curry with coconut milk […]	
	Thai script NAME	พะแนงไก่	
P12	German NAME	Thailändische Frühlingsrollen	Blooming Thai
	English DESCR	Thai Spring Roll	
	Rom. Thai NAME	Po-Pia	
	Thai script NAME	ปอเปี๊ยะ	
	German DESCR	Thailändische Frühlingsrollen […]	

Table 2: Language arrangement patterns in menu entries

The opposite direction, i.e. a consistent use of Thai script, is illustrated by another two patterns (P9 and P10), which appear in the menu cards of the same three restaurants. Here the dish name comes in German (P9) or Romanized Thai (P10), followed by original Thai script and a dish description in German and English. Similar are the patterns P11 and P12, which only occur in the menu cards of *Samui* (P11) and *Blooming Thai* (P12), the two most expensive restaurants in our sample. The *Samui* menu entries (P11) have the dish name in Romanized Thai, followed by descriptions in German and English, and the original Thai name at the end of the entry. *Blooming Thai* (P12) features the dish name in German and English, then in Thai (both scripts), followed by a German description.

To sum up this leg of analysis, the language arrangement of menu entries shows a lot of variation, with Thai script being part of the repertoire in the majority of cases, though hardly ever as a stand-alone for a dish entry (except for pattern P1, to which we return in Discussion below).[10] Since Thai script is almost always complemented by information in German and sometimes English, its meaning potential on menu cards is both symbolic (for German and other customers without knowledge of Thai) and communicative (for those who know Thai).

3.4 Secondary instore signs

Just like their storefront counterparts, secondary signs inside the restaurants have various discourse functions and genre orientations, which include warnings to customers as well as more decorative or commemorative purposes (Figures 8-11). German is generally preferred for signs that refer to the commercial transaction (e.g. information about payment methods) or orient the customers to the store space, e.g. signpost the tray-return station (*EaThai*), or a warning that the restaurant will not take responsibility for any loss of personal items (Figure 8). However, the choice of German is not categorical. In *Laan Thai*, the toilet signs feature drawings of a man and a woman in traditional Thai costume and come in Thai and English.

Figure 8. Sign in German at *Samui*

The instore display of Thai script seems variably occasioned and distributed. In *EaThai*, we found a photo of King Rama V and a sign with the restaurant's former name (Figure 9). In *Nakorn Luang*, chalkboards on the walls display friendly messages in Thai, e.g. welcome, expressing thankfulness, or presenting available services (Figure 10).

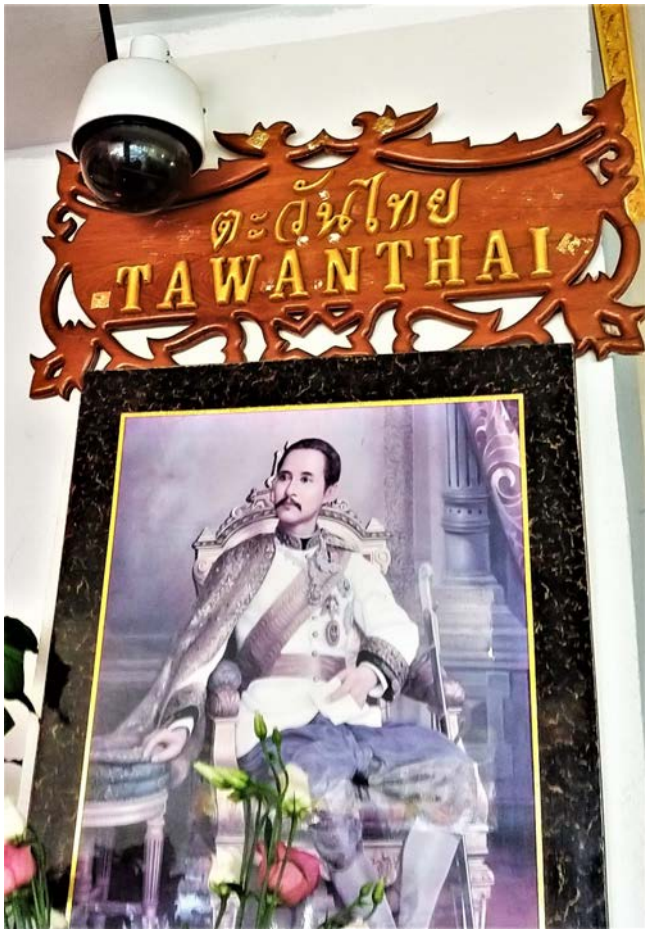Figure 10. Chalkboards with handwritten Thai in *Nakorn Luang*

Figure 9. Wooden sign with restaurant's former name and picture of King Rama V in *EaThai*

Figure 11. Wooden sign with anointed wishes in Thai in *Samui*

In *Samui*, the sign in Figure 11 is attached above the restaurant counter where the staff prepares drinks for the customers, i.e. is positioned in a niche of the instore space that is understood as 'belonging' to staff rather than to patrons. This sign displays good wishes for and from the restaurant itself (it reads, '*May we be blessed with fortune and happiness*'), and traces of a Buddhist anointment ceremony. According to Thai Buddhist belief, a house should be anointed before moving in, in order to be protected by holy spirits. In the same vein, Thai store signs are anointed to be blessed with success. Monks are normally invited to a store's opening ceremony to anoint signs using white clay filler. In the opening ceremony of this restaurant, *Samui*, the upper part of the counter and two signs attached to the upper counter were anointed. According to the restaurant manager, the thin and light-coloured anointment traces are there for religious purposes. They are therefore irrelevant (and most likely invisible) to customers, but have a special symbolic meaning for the owner (and for much of the Thai diaspora). Similar ceremonial traces can be found on a 'welcome' sign in the same restaurant, the primary storefront sign of *Nakorn Luang* (see Figure 3) and the sign in the centre of *EaThai* (Figure 9). All of these signs are anointed and covered with tiny gold leaves.

These anointed signs have several characteristics in common: they are made of wood, feature Thai script, are placed in specific positions instore, and orient to a different genre and discourse (cf. Reershemius, 2018; Järlehed, 2018) than all other signs discussed so far. These signs are placed close to the bar or cashier area, that is, to the partition of instore space reserved for owners and staff rather than customers. Rather than evoking ethno-cultural stereotypes, they form part of a religious discourse that is meaningful to the owners and staff. Romanized Thai is not part of this discourse.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper started out by proposing a multimodal genre analysis of signs in the LL of restaurants. Informed by the recent turn to genre analysis in LL research, our study of sign-genres is part of the overall shift from distributive to contextual approaches, theoretically contextualized in geosemiotics and other qualitative and ethnographic approaches to the semiotic landscape. A sign-genre analysis starts with a sign's communicative purpose rather than language choice, and takes a sign's discourse function, materiality, and spatial placement centre stage. We contribute to this line of work with a sign-genre classification scheme, and demonstrate its usefulness for a spatial analysis of minority language use that reveals how the distinction between various sign-genres and their emplacement ties in with a predominantly symbolic or communicative function of Thai.

This study asks how Thai restaurants use Thai language and script, among other resources, to authenticate their origin, and how the emplacement of signs in the restaurant landscape affects their display. Linguistic and semiotic signs that index Thainess include Thai, in original and Roman script, and a small number of iconographic and typographic choices. Together with other facets of the material, social and aural environment, these signs contribute to authenticating a space that might be imagined and experienced as 'originally Thai'. Clearly, not all Thai restaurants achieve a level of discursive and performative authentication at which resources of various sorts are orchestrated to offer a quasi-synesthetic experience of sitting, hearing, and tasting. Still, some linguistic signs are widely used on restaurant signage and constitute, in this sense, core resources for spatial practices of authentication.

Thai language and script are used in strikingly different ways outside and inside restaurants. At the storefront, primary signs construct a Thai identity through Romanized Thai, semantics (naming), typography, and colour and pictorial elements, while Thai script is almost entirely erased. Indeed, the presence of Thai script in the restaurants' landscape would have been overlooked if the sample were limited to primary signs. Secondary storefront signs that communicate information to customers come in German, whereas Thai script is reduced to aesthetic (therefore, symbolic) purposes. Primary storefront signs follow a maxim of inclusiveness, while secondary ones add to the construction of Thainess with connotative rather than denotative meanings (from the viewpoint of mainstream German customers). By contrast, instore space affords customers more opportunities to engage with Thai language and script on menu cards and decorative wall signs. Taking cues from cultural anthropology research (Möhring, 2008), we assume indoor space affords customers who decide to spend time (and money) there small encounters with the ethnic identity constructed by material signs, and perhaps also performed by staff, and might even bring up opportunities for impromptu 'language lessons'. Even though our small sample did not reveal a correlation between restaurant location and spatial density of Thainess indexicals in the restaurant landscape, we find that the two most expensive restaurants, *Blooming Thai* and *Samui*, make extensive use of Thai script in their elegant, well-crafted menu cards. However, separate research is needed to find out whether these opportunities to engage with the Thai language are taken up at all, by which customers, and under which circumstances.

Our analysis confirms Huebner (2009), Järlehed (2018), and Reershemius (2018) regarding the importance of spatial emplacement in sign-genre analysis, on the one hand, and the display of minority languages in the semiotic landscape, on the other. The distribution of

Thai language and script outside and inside the restaurants may be viewed as the outcome of an attempt to strike a balance between the priorities of language choice faced by sign producers in the LL (first established by Spolsky & Cooper, 1991), i.e. to use language(s) they themselves speak and wish to be identified with, on the one hand, and language(s) their audience is assumed to understand, on the other. In our study, this tension is resolved by an orientation to a majority audience that is conceived as non-competent in Thai. Restaurant owners (and the graphic designers they commission) thus mainly use German and English for communicative and transactional purposes. Signs that orient customers to the store space or the service encounter are with no exception in German and English. Even though the increased visibility of Thai language and script indoors creates opportunities for its communicative use, Thai (in original or Roman script) is overwhelmingly used in a symbolic way. On menu cards, it is almost always joined by semantic equivalents in German (or English). On wooden panels and chalkboards, it might be perceived and experienced as authenticating decoration (regardless of its propositional meaning), and the same goes for secondary storefront signs such as *Wai* greetings (Figure 6). In the few cases where Thai is meant to be understood by non-Thai customers, as in the hand-crafted glossary in Figure 7, it comes in Romanized form not in original script.

Still, the motivation for minority language signs can only be fully understood if sign-genre and emplacement are taken into consideration. Even though the orientation of restaurant signs to a Thai-speaking audience may be secondary from a purely economic point of view (i.e. in terms of transaction volume), it is nonetheless part of the perceived and experienced landscape (cf. Wu, Techasan & Huebner, 2020). In particular, certain instore signs that are probably just emblematic of Thainess (i.e. symbolic) to the average customer, if they are noticed at all, have specific referential and non-referential (cultural, religious) meanings to Thai-speaking staff and customers. In this respect, our findings support Leeman & Modan (2009: 351) who conclude that the distinction between a sign's communicative or symbolic function "depends in part on the viewer".

Several indicators for Thai-speaking 'viewers' are borne out by this study. The most conspicuous one is a menu card arrangement (pattern P1 on Table 2), which features only dish names in Thai script. This was found in two restaurants. The owner of one of them, *Sabai Jai*, explained that this menu page is mainly intended for newcomers from Thailand who cannot read German or English. Some of the same dishes are also listed in German and English elsewhere in the menu, but others are exclusive to the Thai menu page, and so in effect only offered to Thai people (or those with competence in Thai language), because, as this owner

explained, these are regional specialities and German customers are not expected to order them. This clearly reflects how some restaurant owners linguistically accommodate the Thai diaspora in Hamburg. The use of Thai script in most other menus may also work to the same effect. Other indicators of orientation to a Thai-speaking audience (essentially, a transnational Thai community) include some secondary storefront signs, e.g. the *Wai* sticker in Figure 6. Having been imported from Thailand, stickers of this kind are traces of transnational mobility among restaurant owners and staff. The same holds for the large laminated photo of King Rama V (Figure 9) and wooden wall signs in *Nakorn Luang* (Figure 10) and *Samui* (Figure 11), which are manufactured and available only in Thailand and purchased there by restaurant owners. Likewise, the religious anointments by Buddhist monks (see Figure 9 and 11) index a connection between the restaurant owner and the Thai temple in Hamburg, since the marks were done locally on the restaurant's very first business day.

To conclude, the sign-genre analysis developed in this paper approaches restaurants as clusters of signs with different genre orientations. While this study is limited to signs of restaurants of one particular origin, our approach can be applied to restaurants of any other origin. It will be interesting to see whether in restaurants of different national/regional origin similar resources and practices of cultural authentication can be found, whether the distinction between inside and outside space is linked to the distribution of the respective minority language, and whether the commodification and symbolic deployment of minority languages is valid for 'ethnic' restaurants generally. More generally, a sign-genre analysis offers a window on the dynamics of creativity and convention in the semiotic landscape. Convention can be thought of in terms of following already-established strategies of sign production, which may entail the exploitation of ethno-stereotypical imagery in verbal and pictorial modes. Such similarities in patterns of naming and visual design are, in turn, a backdrop against which producers of signs may attempt to differentiate their signage from that of their competitors, for example in order to index their restaurant's novelty, its socio-economic status, or its self-claimed authenticity with regard to a particular gastronomic tradition.

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ENDNOTES

[1] This binary distinction also occurs in LL literature with the terms 'informational / symbolic' (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 24 et passim) and 'communicative / emblematic' (Gaiser & Matras 2016: 21), though without significant difference in meaning.

[2] As one reviewer pointed out, it would be interesting to compare the signage of Thai-owned Thai restaurants to those owned and managed by other nationals. However, such comparison gets complicated due to the fact that changes of ownership may blur the relationship between current owner and original commissioner or designer of the signage, as shown by Malinowski (2009).

[3] The storefront signs of all restaurants can be retrieved on the *LinguaSnappHamburg* online map (see http://map.linguasnapp.uni-hamburg.de) by selecting the search options 'Thai' (subgroup *Sprache* 'language') and 'Restaurant' (subgroup *Geschäftstyp* 'type of establishment').

[4] For reasons of space we exclude from this analysis any separate menu cards for beverages and special offers as well as all pictorial elements and typographic make-up in the main menu cards.

[5] This figure is based on official statistical information on foreign population in Hamburg at the end of 2019. The large majority of Thai nationals in Hamburg are females in the 30-45 and 45-60 age groups. See: https://www.statistik-nord.de/zahlen-fakten/hamburger-melderegister/dokumentenansicht/auslaendische-bevoelkerung-in-hamburg-am-31122019-62204 (last visited 10 September 2020).

[6] Incidentally, this point is also emphasized by Möhring (2008: 13): "An ethnic restaurant is viewed as authentic, offering 'genuine' dishes, when it is not only frequented by Germans, but also by co-nationals of the restaurateur. Together with the staff and the decoration and furniture, these guests are considered as guaranty for the authenticity of the food served."

[7] This font resembles the widely used computer font *DSN MonTaNa,* which aims to represent traditional Thai handwriting.

[8] Providing a dish description is the norm on Thai menu cards in our sample, where only two out of twelve menus feature entries without description. However, the difference between dish name and description is not entirely a semantic one, but rather the outcome of the semantics, placement, and graphic design of menu items. For example, some restaurants set as dish name the same information that serves as dish description on other menu cards.

[9] Two of these, *EaThai* and *Charm*, have the same owner, possibly resulting in similar menu structures.

[10] Five different patterns (P4, P7, P8, P11, P12), all of which include Thai script, only appear in one restaurant each (*Sala Thai*, *Samui* or *Blooming Thai*). *Blooming Thai* is the only restaurant with a consistent arrangement pattern, which avoids alternating between dish names in Romanized Thai and German.

POSTAL AND EMAIL ADDRESSES OF AUTHORS

Jannis Androutsopoulos

Universität Hamburg

Institut für Germanistik & Institut für Medien und Kommunikation

Überseering 35, Postfach #15

22297 Hamburg, Germany

jannis.androutsopoulos@uni-hamburg.de

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5837-1312

Akra Chowchong

Chulalongkorn University

Department of Western Languages

254 Phayathai Wangmai

Patumwan, Bangkok 10330, Thailand

akra.c@chula.ac.th

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7666-6648