

English Teachers' Perspectives on the Linguistic Landscape: Implications for Sustainable Language Planning and Policy Making

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how English teachers in Japan perceive the linguistic landscape (LL) and its role in language learning. Utilizing questionnaires and interviews, it examined their experiences and observations. The findings revealed three key themes. Theme 1: The LL is generally monolingual but reflects other languages, Theme 2: The LL contains linguistic errors, and Theme 3: The LL is pedagogically beneficial. The participants shared insights that raise some meaningful points for both English education and language policy. The study recommends that using real-world language from public spaces in English lessons could make learning more engaging. It also highlights the need for more accurate multilingual signage to improve accessibility and support language education in Japan

INTRODUCTION

In Japan, the presence of different languages in public spaces, such as street signs, advertisements, and official notices, reflects much more than just functional communication. It provides insight into the country's language policies, cultural identity, and relationship with globalization. This visible display of language, referred to as the linguistic landscape (LL) (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). It serves as a mirror of how languages are valued and used in society (Gorter, 2013).

While English is a core subject in Japan's education system, its role in public spaces remains a subject of ongoing debate (Backhaus, 2006, 2007). Japan's public spaces are still overwhelmingly monolingual, with Japanese dominating most signs, even in places that attract international visitors. While there have been efforts to make signs more multilingual, especially in big cities and tourist areas, English remains limited and, when present, is often riddled with errors.

This can make things difficult for non-Japanese speakers, particularly when navigating public transportation, understanding safety instructions, or finding important information in an emergency (Nakamura, 2020). Many of these translation mistakes happen because signs are directly translated from Japanese without proper review, leading to awkward or confusing English (Barrs, 2015). While some of these errors might seem funny, they can also shape how English is perceived in Japan, both by learners and the general public (Seargeant, 2009). The LL extends beyond education and plays an important role in society and policy. As Japan continues to welcome more international visitors and foreign residents, the need for clear and accurate multilingual signage becomes even more important. Poorly translated signs in transportation hubs or unclear English in emergency notices can create confusion and, in some cases, even pose risks. From a policy standpoint, improving the accuracy and consistency of English signage would not only make public communication more effective but also enhance Japan's image as a globally connected nation.

Language is everywhere, shaping how people communicate, learn, and interact with the world. Some research suggests that seeing real-world English outside the classroom can make learning more practical and engaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008). When students come across English in their daily lives, it can spark curiosity, improve their language awareness, and help them connect classroom learning to real-life use (Sayer, 2010).

Assistant Language Teachers or ALTs play a key role in English education in Japan, and their perspective is essential in understanding how English is taught and used. This study explores how ALTs experience and interpret the LL in their daily lives. Since they interact with English both in and outside the classroom, they offer valuable insights into whether public English signage supports or limits language learning. Their experiences highlight both the challenges and opportunities that Japan's LL presents for English education.

This study also looks beyond the classroom to consider how language policies shape the role of English in Japan. As the country becomes more connected to the world, clear and accurate multilingual signs are becoming more important, not only for visitors and foreign residents but also for education

(Gorter, 2018). When English is unclear or inconsistent on public signs, it can confuse people who rely on them. Good language policies can improve communication and help support English teaching. The study shares ideas that may help teachers, policymakers, and local leaders improve signage, fix translations, and make English learning feel more connected to real life.

This study goes beyond simply examining signs and looks at how language is actually used in daily life. By exploring Japan's LL through the experiences of ALTs, it contributes to the conversation on how English fits into both public spaces and education. It also considers ways to make English more accessible and relevant in real-world situations, helping learners engage with the language in a way that feels natural and practical.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (Landry & Bourhis, 1997)

The languages that appear in public spaces, such as on street signs, advertisements, and government notices, provide insight into the communities that use them. A language that is commonly seen suggests strong institutional and social support for its speakers. On the other hand, when a language is rarely visible or missing entirely, it may indicate that its speakers have less influence or that the language itself is at risk of disappearing. Observing LLs in this way helps determine which languages are valued within a society. If one language dominates, others may be overlooked. However, the presence of multiple languages signals an effort to recognize and include diverse linguistic communities.

Linguistic Landscape as a Language Policy Indicator (Shohamy, 2006)

This notion argues that LL serves as an informal yet powerful mechanism for enforcing language policies, even when they are not explicitly stated. While governments establish official language policies through laws and regulations, the actual language usage in public spaces can reflect the real implementation (or lack thereof) of these policies. Public signs, official notices, and advertisements become indicators of government attitudes toward multilingualism, linguistic diversity, and internationalization. In relation to LL, this theory allows researchers to assess whether a society's language policy is inclusive or exclusive, and whether linguistic minorities have visibility in public spaces. For example, in countries with bilingual or multilingual policies, the presence (or absence) of minority languages in signage can show whether language rights are upheld or merely symbolic. It also applies to language revitalization efforts, where increased visibility of endangered languages in public spaces can help promote their use.

Semiotic Landscape Theory (Scollon & Scollon, 2003)

Public signs do more than share information. The way they look, their size, color, font, and where they are placed, affects how people notice and understand them. In the LL, it is not just about which languages are used, but also how they are shown. When a minority language appears in smaller text or lower down on a sign, it can give the impression that it matters less. English is often used in ads not necessarily to support multilingualism, but to create a modern or

international image. How language is presented visually sends messages about status, importance, and who is being included.

Spatial Theory (Lefebvre, 1991)

Language plays a big role in shaping how public spaces feel and who they seem to welcome. These places are never just neutral. The signs and messages seen in cities, towns, or small neighborhoods often reflect decisions made by those in power, whether tied to politics, economics, or cultural traditions. In large cities, the most common language often dominates busy shopping areas, while smaller or minority languages might only show up in quiet corners or specific communities. Tourist areas might have signs in several languages to make visitors feel comfortable, but government buildings often stick to just one. These patterns say a lot about which groups are being considered, and which are overlooked. Paying attention to language in public spaces can reveal how a society includes or leaves out certain voices.

Indexicality and Language Ideology (Blommaert, 2006, 2013)

Language seen in public spaces tells more than what the words say. It reveals which groups are noticed, which ones are supported, and what kind of community a place wants to be. When official signs use only the national language, it often builds a sense of unity and shared identity. However, when foreign languages are hardly used in shopping areas, it might show less interest in welcoming international guests or being part of a wider world. On the other hand, when minority languages appear across many areas of a city, not just tucked into one part, it suggests those communities are being recognized and included. These choices, whether small or big, help paint a picture of how open and welcoming a society really is.

Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995)

Language in public spaces does more than give directions or share facts. It often reflects whose voices are heard, whose presence is welcomed, and who might be overlooked. The decision to use one language instead of another is rarely random. When everything is written in just one language, it can leave others feeling like they do not belong. Foreign languages in advertisements are often chosen to catch the attention of tourists or to give a place a more modern or high-status feel. At the same time, when a less common language shows up in a poster or even in graffiti, it may be a quiet way for a community to be seen. These signs, both big and small, say a lot about who matters in a public space.

Translanguaging Theory (García & Wei, 2014)

Language does not always fit into neat categories, especially in places where more than one language is spoken. People often move between languages without thinking much about it, simply because it helps them get their message across more naturally. This blending often shows up in public signs that mix Japanese and English. Some of these signs use casual words, unusual spellings, or phrases that feel more like everyday talk than textbook English. These small details show how language works in real life, flexible, creative, and shaped by the way people actually communicate with each other day to day.

Globalization and World Englishes (Kachru, 1985)

Kachru's Three Circles of English gives a clear and down-to-earth way to understand how English is used differently around the world. In the Inner Circle are countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, where English is spoken as a first language. The Outer Circle includes countries like India or the Philippines, where English was introduced through colonization and is now widely used as a second language. Then there is the Expanding Circle, which includes countries like Japan, South Korea, or Thailand, where English is not spoken at home but is becoming more common in schools, public signs, and business. This idea helps make sense of why English shows up in places where it is not the main language. Sometimes it is used to give a modern or international feel. Other times it mixes with the local language in ways that reflect everyday life. Instead of being the same everywhere, English shifts and takes on new meaning depending on the place and the people using it.

Place Semiotics (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010)

Language contributes to shaping the identity of places. Signs, advertisements, and even graffiti help define the character of a city, neighborhood, or institution. In LLs, language choices reflect how spaces are designed and used. Tourist areas tend to display multilingual signs to accommodate visitors, while government offices often use only the national language. Bilingual signs in cultural districts, such as Chinatown, strengthen the community's identity. Over time, language use in public spaces shifts due to migration, policy changes, and evolving cultural influences. This theory provides insight into how language creates a sense of place and belonging in diverse communities.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study employed a narrative inquiry approach to gather and analyze data. The study was conducted in Kagawa prefecture which is the smallest prefecture in Japan. The research participants of the study were Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) from different English-speaking countries. They are considered English teachers who support Japanese English teachers. This study used purposive sampling for selecting participants. The final number of study participants was determined by data saturation, which occurred during the interview with the eighth participant. For research rigor purposes, the researcher deemed appropriate to add two more participants making a total of 10 participants. The study utilized two research instruments: the researcher as the instrument and an interview guide to gather data. Vignettes were produced from the interviews to provide a comprehensive analysis of the data.

The data gathered from the interviews with the study participants were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. This analysis involved a series of steps to identify patterns or themes in the data. The steps of the thematic analysis used in this study are as follows: familiarization of the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Ethical considerations were also considered.

RESULTS

The ALTs shared their experiences and narratives in navigating the LL. Thus, these constituted their overall perspective of the LL in the prefecture and even in Japan as a whole. The themes that emerged from analyzing the participants' interview responses were varied. The interpretative descriptions of the participants' perspectives were presented and discussed in the study's discussion section.

This research sheds light on the ALTs' perspectives of the LL in Kagawa, Japan, as they live, teach, interact, and navigate different places in the prefecture. These experiences were structured and described clearly and meaningfully, providing valuable insights into the study. Three essential themes emerged from participants' responses in the in-depth interviews: Theme 1: The LL is generally monolingual but reflects other languages; Theme 2: The LL contains linguistic errors; and Theme 3: The LL is pedagogically beneficial. These key themes are discussed and supported by vignettes drawn from the participants' responses. Please see the discussion below:

DISCUSSION

Theme 1: The LL is generally monolingual but reflects other languages

In Japan, daily life is shaped almost entirely by the Japanese language. For many people, English rarely appears outside of school lessons (Seargeant, 2011). Public signs, conversations, and everyday interactions are nearly all in Japanese, which is why the country is often seen as a monolingual society. This idea is rooted in Japan's long-standing focus on unity through a common language and shared identity. Still, recent studies suggest the situation is more complex than it seems (Turnbull, 2020). The image of Japan as strictly monolingual has grown out of years of policies and public attitudes that favored Japanese as the only official language. These choices have shaped how other languages are treated, especially in public spaces.

For students learning English, this can make things difficult. Once class is over, there are few chances to use English in real life. Without that real-world exposure, it becomes harder to remember lessons or build confidence in using the language (Lee et al., 2011). When English is almost invisible outside the classroom, it can affect both motivation and the ability to make language learning feel meaningful.

The statements of participants ALT2 and ALT 9 validate and support the discussion above.

"When I first arrived in Kagawa, I was struck by how little English I saw in public spaces. Street signs, menus, and even public transport information were almost exclusively in Japanese. As an ALT, I immediately noticed how this impacts my students – they rarely encounter English outside the classroom. Even those who are motivated to learn have very few opportunities to practice in real-life situations." (ALT2)

"As an ALT living and working in Kagawa, I quickly realized how monolingual the environment is. Most signs in public places – from bus stops to restaurants – are only in Japanese. This lack of visible English affects not only my students, who have limited exposure outside the classroom, but also my own daily experience. Navigating local services

can be challenging, and it reminds me just how little opportunity there is for students to see English used in real-life contexts." (ALT 9)

Contrary to the monolingual perception, research also indicates a growing presence of multiple languages in Japan's LL. Studies have found that Japan's LL includes languages other than Japanese and English. For instance, a study focusing on Tokyo revealed that Italian was the third most visible foreign language in the Ginza area (Lo Cigno, 2021). Additionally, public signage in Tokyo includes languages such as Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese, which can also be found in other parts of Japan. One example of this effort can be seen at a life safety learning center run by the Tokyo Fire Department. The center provides multilingual support, pairing Japanese with English, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese to help visitors from different backgrounds (Saito, 2019). This shows that Japan's public language landscape is not just limited to Japanese and English. Other languages are also finding space, which reflects the growing diversity of the people who live in or visit the country.

A study on multilingual signs around a university campus in Japan shows that things are starting to change, paving way to internalization (Wang, 2015). More signs now include different languages, which is a small but meaningful step toward recognizing the country's growing diversity. This shift matters, especially for English learners. When real language shows up in everyday places, not just in textbooks, it helps students see English as something useful and alive. It creates chances to connect classroom learning with the world around them in a way that feels real and relatable.

The statements of participants ALT8, ALT 3, and ALT 7 reinforce and strengthen the discussion above:

"While Japanese is the dominant language in Kagawa, I have started noticing signs in other languages, especially in areas with tourism. Some train stations have English, Korean, and Chinese translations, which was surprising to me at first. However, these signs seem to be designed for tourists rather than for language learning purposes. My students don't interact with them beyond just recognizing that they exist." (ALT8)

"I noticed several multilingual signs around Kawaramachi Station, especially on traffic and road signs. Some of them include English text for directions, as well as translations of street names and place names." (ALT 3)

"When I walk through the shopping areas in Takamatsu, I see some signs that include both Japanese and English. Although there are only a few, it shows an effort to be more accessible to non-Japanese speakers. Some stores have English translations, and there are direction signs pointing to tourist spots, even if the wording is not always clear." (ALT 7)

Japanese youths today may be more motivated to learn English than before, seeing it as a gateway to global culture, travel, and career opportunities. Studies show that many students want more practical English ability. For instance, they desire more speaking practice in class and find value in being able to communicate with foreigners (McCarthy, 2021). This finding implies that Japanese people are becoming aware of the advantages of using English, and learning is not just limited to the four walls of the classroom. It can be extended to talking to foreigners visiting the country or exploring languages, especially English, in the LL, such as those displayed in shops and street signs.

The statement of participant ALT5 support the discussion above.

"Many of my students often tell me they want to speak English more confidently, especially when they meet tourists or see English used around them. I've noticed they get excited when they recognize English words on signs or menus, even if it's just a small phrase. It shows me they are not just learning for school – they're curious about the world and see English as a tool to connect with it. As their ALT, I try to build on that interest by bringing real-world examples." (ALT5)

English text is an increasingly visible part of public spaces in Japan, especially in urban and touristic areas. Official signage in big cities is often bilingual (Japanese–English) as a matter of policy, ensuring that foreigners can navigate transportation and public facilities. For example, train stations and airports prominently display directions, warnings, and other information in both Japanese and English or including other widely spoken languages. This reflects efforts by local governments to be more inclusive and accessible.

Language usage in Japan is slowly beginning to change. These days, it is more common to see signs with more than one language, and that shift is meaningful. It is not only about helping people find their way. It is about creating spaces where more people feel like they belong. For a long time, Japan was seen as a place where only one language had space in public life. However, things are changing, and research shows that this old view no longer fits what is happening on the ground. Recognizing this shift could lead to better, more inclusive policies, ones that reflect the real diversity of voices in Japan and make room for a more connected, welcoming future.

Theme 2: The LL contains linguistic errors.

In the context of Japan's LL, the incorporation of English or even other foreign languages into public signage often results in linguistic inaccuracies. These errors, ranging from minor grammatical mistakes to entirely nonsensical phrases, have significant implications for both the perception of English and other languages and its pedagogical application.

In the context of English, it is frequently used in Japan's public spaces, not necessarily for functional communication but often for aesthetic appeal, symbolizing modernity and sophistication. However, this decorative use often leads to incorrect translations and ungrammatical expressions. For instance, signs in public facilities may display English phrases intended for hospitality purposes, but these can sometimes confuse native English speakers or induce unintended humor (ARC Communications, 2016). Here are some examples from ARC Communications' website, the first include a sign intended to direct individuals to restrooms, which reads: "化粧室は後方へ" or "*For Restrooms, Go back toward your behind,*" illustrating how literal translations can lead to confusion. Here is another example sentence, which was written next to a shoe rack at a Japanese *izakaya* (pub/restaurant), "脱いだ靴はこちらへ!" or "*The shoes which took off this place!*". These linguistic errors carry greater implications for language planning and policy making in the country.

The phenomenon of "*Engrish*" is widespread in Japan, encompassing various public domains such as signs, menus, advertisements, and product packaging. These errors often stem from direct translations that fail to consider contextual nuances, resulting in phrases that are confusing or humorous to native

English speakers. The term "*Engrish*" has been coined to describe these flawed English usages, highlighting their prevalence and the often humorous interpretations they elicit among native English speakers (Ziemba, 2004). The term originally comes from the difficulty many Japanese speakers have in clearly pronouncing the English /l/ and /r/ sounds, since the Japanese language has only one similar sound (often written as "r"). However, the meaning of the word has expanded to include a wider range of English language mistakes.

Although "*Engrish*" can refer to spoken English, it is more commonly used to describe written English. In Japan, English words are often added to products for decoration or fashion. Compared to other terms like "*Japanglish*," "*Japlish*," "*Jinglish*," or "*Janglish*," which tend to carry a more negative tone, "*Engrish*" is generally seen as more neutral. It is often used to describe amusing English mistakes in writing, and it can apply to any country, not just Japan.

Seeing incorrect English on signs all over Japan can make learning the language a lot harder for students. Instead of picking up useful or correct phrases, they often come across mistakes that confuse more than help. These errors can stick, making it tough for teachers to explain how English really works. On top of that, English is often used just for decoration, with no real meaning or purpose, which might give students the impression that the language is more for style than for actual communication (Barrs, 2015). This can shape how they feel about English and whether they see it as something worth learning seriously.

The statements of participants ALT 8, ALT 3, ALT 5, and ALT 6 shed light on this discussion.

"I think, during my first week in Kagawa, I encountered a sign at a local park that read, 'Please do not feed the birds to the children.' The intended message was clear, but the phrasing was amusingly incorrect. While we laugh about them, it also opens up discussions about the importance of accurate translation." (ALT 8)

"I noticed a café sign that said, 'Enjoy coffee with our fresh sand.' It was meant to advertise 'sandwiches,' but the abbreviation led to confusion. I can use this as a teaching moment to explain the importance of context and spelling in English." (ALT 3)

"There's a sign near my apartment that says, 'No smorking.' It's clearly meant to say 'no smoking,' but the misspelling always catches my eye." (ALT 5)

"At a shopping mall in Takamatsu, I saw a restroom sign that read, 'Toilet for invalid use only.' It was probably meant to say 'for people with disabilities,' but the phrasing came across as insensitive." (ALT 6)

Mistakes in English translations on public signs are still common in Japan, but some people are working hard to change that. One of them is Chikako Tsuruta, a translator who has made it her mission to fix these awkward or confusing messages. She believes that visitors deserve clear, accurate information, and that even small translation mistakes can make travel harder, especially for people unfamiliar with the language or place (The World, 2020).

These signs are not just about communication. They often try to give off a global or modern vibe. However, when the English is off, it can confuse rather than help. It also sends the wrong message about how seriously the country takes communication with foreigners. Fixing these errors goes beyond fixing grammar. It is about helping people feel at ease, understood, and welcome. With more careful

translation and better language education, English on public signs can actually do what it is meant to do, which is to connect people.

Theme 3: The LL is pedagogically beneficial.

The language seen in public spaces can be a powerful tool in the classroom. When teachers bring the LL into their lessons, it helps students become more aware of how language works in everyday life. It also builds cultural understanding and makes learning feel more real and meaningful. The LL is an authentic language exposure. Engaging with the LL allows students to observe and analyze language as it is used in everyday contexts, moving beyond textbook examples to real-life applications. This exposure helps learners understand the practical use of language in various settings. Integrating LL projects into English teaching can enhance learners' awareness and engagement, as they analyze real-world language use (da Silva, 2023).

The statement of ALT 4 support the discussion above:

"There is a real need to bridge the gap between English in textbooks and English in real-world settings. Some of my students get excited when they recognize English words outside of school, but they don't feel confident enough to use the language in public. If Japan wants to improve English proficiency, there should be more real-life applications – more bilingual spaces, more encouragement for casual English conversations, and not just English for exams." (ALT 4)

It can also develop multilingual awareness. Exploring the LL exposes students to the coexistence of multiple languages within a community, fostering an appreciation for linguistic diversity and the dynamics of language contact. The LL can also foster critical thinking and analytical skills. Analyzing public signage encourages learners to critically assess language use, translation accuracy, and the socio-cultural implications of language choices in public texts. It can also involve community engagement. LL projects often involve learners interacting with their communities to collect and analyze data, thereby strengthening the connection between classroom learning and the external environment.

The statements of participants ALT 1, ALT 5, ALT 6, and ALT 9 support the discussion under this theme.

"During a field trip with students, I noticed a sign that blended Japanese and English in an interesting way. It made me think about how language reflects cultural values and societal norms. This could be a great discussion topic for language teaching or shaping language policies." (ALT 1)

"I think the English signs we see around town can actually be used in our lessons. For example, during a field trip or even just in their own neighborhoods, students can take photos of English signs and bring them to class. Then we can discuss what the signs mean, if the English is correct, and how they would say it differently. It's a good way to connect the language to real life." (ALT 5)

"I've started keeping a collection of English signs I come across here in Kagawa, especially the ones with strange phrasing or grammar mistakes. Some are really funny or confusing, and I think they could be useful for future lessons or even a special presentation. I haven't used all of them yet, but I can definitely see the potential. They're great examples of how English appears in real life, and I think students would enjoy analyzing them." (ALT 6)

"I've always felt that students learn better when they can connect what we teach to their everyday surroundings. There are English signs all over town, even if just a few, and I sometimes build a lesson around them. For example, I once used signs from a local convenience store to practice imperatives and polite requests in my part-time eikaiwa class. Students found it interesting because it was something they actually see. It also helped them understand that English isn't just something in a textbook, it's part of their world, too."(ALT 9)

Integrating the LL into language education offers numerous pedagogical benefits, including authentic language exposure, heightened multilingual awareness, and improved critical thinking skills. For students in Kagawa, engaging with the LL transforms their environment into a dynamic classroom, enriching their learning experience and fostering a deeper connection to the languages that shape their community.

Over the years, teachers and researchers have started to see the LL as more than just background noise. Signs, posters, ads, these everyday texts are now being used as meaningful tools in language teaching. They bring the real world into the classroom, offering students more than textbook grammar or vocabulary. When students interact with public signs, they are exposed to real-life language that feels familiar, current, and alive (Hewitt-Bradshaw, 2014).

Simple classroom tasks, like analyzing local signage or exploring language in nearby neighborhoods, have made learning more engaging and relatable. In one study in Oaxaca, Mexico, students looked at English on signs in their community and began to see how words carry different meanings depending on where and how they are used. This helped them think more critically and creatively about English, not just as a subject, but as something meaningful in their own lives (Sayer, 2010).

Teachers and scholars like Gorter et al. (2021) have also pointed out that signs can show students how many languages exist side by side in public spaces. These signs reflect the diversity of communities and help learners understand how language works in society. Solmaz (2022) took this further by using classroom activities that focused on how signs carry meaning through grammar, tone, and even visual symbols.

Dagenais et al. (2009) found that students who take part in these kinds of lessons begin to notice language everywhere. They become curious about why certain languages show up in some places and not in others. It helps them think about language as something they live with, not just something they study. Cenoz and Gorter (2022) also emphasized that these kinds of activities not only support learning, but they also help students appreciate the different languages spoken in their communities.

In short, bringing the LL into the classroom can help make language learning more real, more inclusive, and more connected to the world outside school. It helps students see language not just as rules on a page, but as something people use every day to share ideas, express identity, and connect with others.

Implications for Sustainable Language Planning and Policy Making

National Language Policy

For a long time, Japan has focused on promoting the use of Japanese, which has made most public spaces feel almost entirely monolingual. However, with increasing globalization and tourism, there is now a greater need for multilingual signage, especially in cities like Tokyo. Government guidelines already recommend adding English to public signs to assist foreign residents and visitors (Nambu, 2024). The importance of multilingual signage became particularly evident during COVID-19, when many public notices were written only in Japanese, putting non-Japanese speakers at a disadvantage in understanding vital information (Nakamura, 2022). A monolingual LL can unintentionally exclude or confuse those who do not read Japanese, reinforcing the need for more inclusive public communication.

Errors in English translations on public signs remain a concern in Japan, even as efforts toward multilingualism grow. Teachers and researchers often point out issues like awkward phrasing and typos, commonly known as "*Engrish*." While these mistakes may seem harmless or even amusing, they can confuse visitors and harm Japan's global image. Most of these mistakes happen because of direct translations or skipped proofreading, which really shows why careful checking is important.

Small, thoughtful steps could go a long way in making public signs more helpful for everyone. Setting clear national guidelines could make sure that places like train stations, tourist areas, and emergency zones use more than one language where it matters most. Having signs reviewed by language professionals before they go up could help avoid confusing mistakes. Local governments and businesses could work together by offering tools like translation support or simple proofreading help. Just as important is helping people understand why clear and accurate signage matters. When signs are easy to understand and reflect a range of languages, public spaces feel more welcoming, more accessible, and more respectful of the people who use them.

Local Educational Policy

Japan's public spaces hold untapped potential for language learning. ALTs have pointed out that everyday signs, on shop windows, billboards, and train stations, are full of real-life English that could be used to make lessons more meaningful. These are things students see all around them. However, despite this, the education system has often treated language learning as something that happens only inside the classroom, missing the chance to use what is right outside as a teaching tool. Local education authorities have an opportunity to change this by integrating the LL into English language teaching (ELT) in a more structured way.

One easy step is to make school environments more bilingual. Many Japanese schools currently have only Japanese signage, but adding English translations to classroom doors, facilities, and notices, such as labeling a science lab as both "科学室" and "*Science Lab*", can subtly reinforce English vocabulary in daily life. This does not mean turning schools into English-speaking spaces, but rather making English more visible and familiar. A recent analysis of academic institutions in Japan suggests that providing bilingual school signage fosters a

more inclusive, globally aware atmosphere on campus (Fortuna, 2023). Not only does this approach benefit local students, but it also supports international staff and learners in navigating their environment more easily.

Using local signs, advertisements, and notices in lessons can bring language learning closer to everyday life. Activities like photographing English signs and analyzing their meaning help students build real-world language awareness and critical thinking. This method makes learning feel more useful and enjoyable. To support this, education boards can provide training and materials for teachers. Schools and local governments may also partner on projects that let students help improve public English signage, giving practical experience and community value. These efforts can turn public spaces into learning tools, helping students see English not just as a subject, but as a living part of their environment.

Considering International Visitors in Language Planning

Japan's LL plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences of tourists and foreign residents. Clear, multilingual signage can make the country feel welcoming and accessible, while the absence of translations or frequent errors can create confusion and frustration. Beyond convenience, accurate signage is essential for safety, as seen during COVID-19 when many foreign residents struggled to understand health advisories written only in Japanese (Nakamura, 2022). While Japan has made efforts to include English and other languages in public signs, mistranslations can undermine trust and even lead to misunderstandings. A poorly translated safety instruction, for instance, can cause real harm. Addressing this issue requires a more strategic approach. Integrating digital translation tools, simplifying language, and involving foreign residents in policy discussions to ensure signage is truly helpful. A well-designed LL benefits everyone, making Japan easier to navigate, enhancing its global reputation, and strengthening its appeal as a travel destination.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlighted three main insights from the participants: first, that Japan's LL is mostly monolingual but occasionally shows traces of other languages; second, that many public signs contain noticeable English errors; and third, that the LL can actually be a useful and engaging teaching tool. Based on these findings, it is recommended that English teachers consider using examples from public signs and real-world language in their lessons to make learning more meaningful and connected to students' everyday experiences. At the same time, there is a need for more accurate and thoughtful multilingual signage, not just for language learners, but also to improve accessibility and support Japan's growing international community.

FURTHER STUDY

While this study shares the thoughts and experiences of ALTs about the LL and its connection to English education and language policy, it is important to recognize a few limitations. The sample size was small, the data was gathered over a limited period, and because it used a qualitative approach, the findings may not apply to all settings. Future research could build on this by involving more participants from different areas, collecting data over a longer time, or even

trying out classroom-based activities to see how the LL can be used more effectively in real teaching situations.

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