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Churchscapes: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Signage in Selected Catholic Churches in Rinconada

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abstract

This study analyzed the different signage in selected churches of Rinconada using the Theory of Public Signage by Bernard Spolsky. Its purpose is to explore the language choices, functional aspects, and communicative effectiveness of the public signage found within these religious institutions. Through rigorous review of related literature, it was found that there is a limited study of churchscapes in the local context which is the gap that this research aims to address. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative data to be collected and analyzed. The results indicated a significant amount of Informative signage in every selected church in Rinconada. This reflects the rules, expected behavior of parishioners, and a reminder of the sanctity of the religious spaces. Furthermore, thematic analysis of the gathered data revealed that church sign-makers in Rinconada often use the English language and Rinconada dialect variants as the language medium of their signage. The findings suggest that using English, Tagalog, and Rinconada language in the public signage that were identified helped parishioners to comply with the rules and regulations in the church's premises. The study's results have implications for the comprehension of public signage in religious establishments.

1. Introduction

Signage can be seen everywhere. These are used to provide directions, control traffic, give warnings, and inform people to do specific behavior. Generally, it plays an important role in society as a means of transmitting a message, attempting to persuade people what to do and what not to do, thus, acting as stationary persuasive communication (Meis & Kashima, 2017, cited by Brown et.al., 2020). The signage practice is commonly seen in areas where communication of information, direction, safety, and rules are essential such as in Government and Public Offices, Educational Institutions, and Religious Sites it ensures that individuals are guided appropriately.

According to Zelensky (2001) cited in Hronček et. al., (2022), churchscape is used to describe an assemblage of objects in the visible landscapes while focusing on houses of worship and other buildings and enterprises, as well as their signage in local settings. Despite the study, Esteron (2021) investigated the linguistic landscape of a major Catholic church compound in the Philippines, which he called the "churchscapes". He analyzed over a hundred signs and found out that English dominates as a language of communication and tourism, while local languages are used for specific purposes like prayers and hymns. Hence, additional study of Jazul and Bernardo (2017), also cited in Esteron (2021), is needed, which delved into the linguistic landscape (LL) of Binondo,

Manila's Chinatown. This study has tended to focus on English, where it holds a dominant position in Binondo's LL, overshadowing the Filipino language. It is desirable to carry out the study of Wafa & Wijayanti (2018) that analyzed the language used in the public signage at the places of worship in Surabaya, Indonesia. Out of 386 photos of signs found in 10 prominent worship places, diverse languages were used in the signage, i.e Indonesian, Balinese, Javanese, Madurese, Malay, English, Chinese, Arabic, Pāli language, Latin language, German, French, Dutch, and Japanese.

In relation to previous studies on churchscapes, linguistic landscapes, and multilingualism which focused outside the Bicol Region particularly in Rinconada area, this paper aimed to find out the existing common signage in the selected churches in Rinconada, and in which condition of language choice these signage fall. According to Bebis and Fajardo (2024), the study of multimodal texts — which combine language, visuals, and other semiotic resources — is essential in understanding how meanings are produced and interpreted within sociocultural contexts. In their critical discourse analysis of Filipino representations in social media videos, they highlighted how language choices, visual elements, and narrative structures work together to reflect ideologies, cultural values, and power relations embedded in everyday discourses. This affirms that in religious spaces such as churchscapes, signage likewise functions not only to inform but also to regulate behavior, convey authority, and reinforce cultural identities through multimodal means.

Using multimodal discourse analysis, this paper utilized the signage found in selected churches in Rinconada, namely; Parroquia y Santuario Archidiecepiano de San Antonio de Padua (Iriga City), Holy Cross Parish Church (Nabua), and Saint Francis of Assisi Parish Church (Buhi). Using Spolsky and Cooper's Theory of Public Signage, the researchers identified the eight major types of signage according to the tentative taxonomy of signs considering the three conditions of language choice in relation to sign. By applying the components of this theory, this paper had a solid and comprehensive framework for analyzing the recurring signage and the choice of language used. The purpose is to contribute a deeper understanding of how language is used in religious spaces through signage, particularly within multilingual settings like those in Rinconada.

2. Method

This section outlines the research design, place and time, population and sample, data measurement techniques, and data analysis employed in this study.

2.1 Selection Criteria

Data gathering followed the criteria used in the selection of the churches:

- The selected churches must be in Rinconada.
- The selected churches must exhibit a variety of public signage.
- The signage in the selected churches must incorporate multiple elements (color, symbol, etc)
- The signage must be located in diverse locations within the church premises.
- The signage must be legible and intact.

2.2 Kind of Research

This research employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches for data collection and analysis. The qualitative method under the descriptive design was utilized for observation and identification of the signage and the category to which it belongs. The quantitative design, specifically using observational research, is used to observe and count the frequency of signage to identify the recurring signage using percentages. According to Hassan (2024), observational research is a context-rich data gathered directly from participants or environments. By using observational research, the signage is categorized and quantified based on Spolsky's Public Signages and the medium of language used, and analyzed the elements (color, symbol, location within the church) within the signage enabling a more extensive interpretation of the meanings and functions embedded in the signage.

2.3 Data Collection

The researchers visited nine (9) churches in the 5th district of Rinconada to photograph the signage within the church landscapes. Data collection occurred on March 16, 2024 – April 10, 2024. The 5th congressional district of Camarines Sur (Rinconada District) is composed of seven (7) municipalities namely: Baao, Bula, Balatan, Buhi, Bato, Nabua, and Iriga City, all known to have numerous Roman Catholic churches. These churches serve as important religious and cultural landmarks within the communities, providing spaces for worship, gatherings, and community events. After gathering the data, the researchers manually analyzed each signage by implementing Spolsky's Theory of Public Signage framework (2008).

2.4 Data Analysis

This study focused on multimodal discourse analysis. Using the framework of Spolsky (2008), the researchers analyzed signage that are found in the nine (9) selected churches, but only three (3) churches in the Rinconada area are further analyzed based on the selection criteria. The selected churches: Parroquia y Santuario Archidiocesano de San Antonio de Padua (Iriga City), Holy Cross Parish Church (Nabua), and Saint Francis of Assisi Parish Church (Buhi), met all the criteria for analyses as stated in their respective backgrounds. The data were analyzed based on the tentative taxonomy of signs in Spolsky's Theory of Public Signage in Spolsky (2008). Each signage was categorized according to the type of signage they fall into;

- *Street Signage* - conveys information, provides direction or regulates traffic on streets and roads.
- *Advertising Signage* - promotes products, services, businesses or brands to attract attention, convey information, and persuade potential customers.
- *Warning Notices and Prohibitions* - alerts people to potential hazards, dangers or restrictions.
- *Building Names* - displays the name of a building, institution, or organization.
- *Informative Signage* - provides information, guidance, or instructions to people in a particular setting.
- *Commemorative Plaques* - commemorates a person, event, or achievement.

- *Objects* - labels of objects, products, or exhibits to provide information about them.
- *Graffiti* - writings or drawing scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place.

There is a relationship between this taxonomy and the two major functions of signs: information and symbolic assertion, with building signs and commemorative plaques on the symbolic end and warning notices and informative signs on the informative end. Street and road signs have been the focus of language activism in many countries, and are a major contribution to the perception of *paysage linguistique*. They are salient, widespread, and usually under the direct control of a political body which may be open to influence (Spolsky, 2008).

In addition, the language used for each signage was also identified, namely English, Tagalog, Taglish, and various Rindonada dialects. The researchers explored the whole area of the selected churches, observed and captured all existing signage within the churches' premises.

3. Results and Discussions

This section presents the analysis of the data gathered from three (3) selected churches in Rinconada.

3.1 Results

This study drew on multimodal analysis and employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The data used are photographs of signage found in selected churches in Rinconada, specifically in three churches from Iriga City, Nabua, and Buhi, Camarines Sur.

Legend:

AS - Advertisement Signage

BN - Building Names

CP - Commemorative Plaques

WNP - Warning Notices and Prohibitions

IS - Informative Signage

O - Objects

G - Graffiti

	A S	WNP	BN	IS	CP	O	G	TOTAL	%
<i>Saint Anthony of Padua Parish Church</i>									
English		13	1	14	9			37	90.24%
Tagalog				3				3	
Taglish				1				1	2.44 %
TOTAL		13	1	18	9			41	100%
<i>Holy Cross Parish Church</i>									
English		9	3	29				41	89.13%

Tagalog						1	1	2.17%
Taglish	2		1				3	6.52%
Rinconada-English	1						1	2.17%
TOTAL	12	3	30			1	46	100%
<i>Saint Francis of Assisi Parish Church</i>								
English	4	2	7	7			20	90.91%
Rinconada-Boinën			1		1		2	9.09%
TOTAL	4	2	8	7	1		22	100%
OVERALL TOTAL	0	29	6	56	16	1	1	109
TOTAL PERCENTAGE	0	15.26	5.50	51.38	14.68	0.91	0.91	100%

Table 1. Summary of all the signage found in the Selected Catholic Churches in Rinconada

3.2 Discussion

A. Parroquia y Santuario Archidiecésano de San Antonio de Padua

The researchers discovered a total of forty-one (41) signage, with eighteen (18) Informative Signage as the highest occurrences. This signage is composed of fourteen (14) in English, three (3) in Tagalog, and one (1) in Taglish. Following this, there are thirteen (13) Warning Notices and Prohibitions, all in English, and nine (9) Commemorative Plaques, also in English. Building names appear once in English. Other types of signage, such as street signage and advertising, were not present. This data reflects the church's emphasis on English while incorporating Taglish and Tagalog to foster a welcoming atmosphere for all parishioners.



Plate 1. Photographs of Warning Notice and Prohibitions at Saint Anthony of Padua Parish Church

“VENDORS NOT ALLOWED INSIDE THE PATIO”, “NO PARKING”, and “NO SMOKING”. All signage is capitalized, meaning that these signage connote attention or alertness and is written in huge metal, utilizing standardized fonts. Four of them used white paint for the

background and red for the letters; ensures that Warning Notice and Prohibition signage are visible but aside from that it also implies exclusivity, protection of sacred space. “*NO SMOKING*” text combined with an icon composed of a cigarette in a red circle with a diagonal line to vividly envision the prohibition of smoking. This signage occurs single time, this sign shows an image of cigarettes in a circle shape with a diagonal line, drawn in metal standee which shows that the use of cigarettes are prohibited inside and out of the church, however the images are partially faded due to the unconditional weather. “*NO PARKING*” Has four (4) occurrences, each sign is located at a different part of the church, it can be seen in the middle, corner, and front part literally in an open area. This is employed to implement a warning and shows prohibition on parking any kind of vehicles inside the area of the church itself. “*VENDORS NOT ALLOWED INSIDE THE PATIO*” appeared almost five (5) consecutive times in the different location of church, all of them are placed in an open area, written in all capital letters utilizing a color red paint which can easily catch someone’s attention employing that vendors inside the church are strictly forbidden to sell any kind of products. Each of these signage promotes authority and boundary-settings within the specific area where it's located.



Plate 2. Photograph of Building Name at Saint Anthony of Padua Parish Church

One (1) signage falls under the taxonomy, Building Names. This photograph shows that all letters indicated were capitalized. The written text “PARISH PRIEST OFFICE” contrasts colors black and yellow, which are commonly used to draw attention and emphasize an important message and caution. Both colors indicate the importance of visibility and clarity in the provided text under the signage. The placement helps individuals, especially visitors, easy navigation and reinforces the identity of the certain religious area. This signage helps individuals, especially visitors, to identify the specific area of the said building.



Plate 3. Photographs of Informative Signage at Saint Anthony of Padua Parish Church

“3 pieces for 10 pesos. Please just drop the payment in the BOX. Salamat po” This handwritten signage uses Tagalog Language and is located in the area of candle stands that demonstrate a sense of resilience where it is written in black text to ensure visibility and easy reading without adding cost for the printing, tagalog language are utilized to ensure that non-native speakers of the Rinconada Dialect can understand the message clearly, regardless of what is written. The signage is simple; it instructs to place the payment in the box and typically obey since some of the churchgoers put their donation inside the box. “EXIT ONLY”, uppercased, written in metal painted in a white and red color that indicates a sense of strictness or important notice to follow the instructions; it also consists of an arrow pointing towards a certain location that indicate a one-way exit, preventing entry through this path these are placed outside, on the right part side of the church, this sign emphasized on maintaining orders it plays a vital role to ensure audience safety, security and to an organized instructions. Additionally, “Ladies” signage are located in the restroom to clearly indicate the location, it uses common colors such as yellow and black that can be visible with bright and dim light making it universally recognizable even from a distance, helping visitors to quickly understand its purpose. The capitalization of the term LADIES and its color yellow adds sophistication and formality.



Plate 4. Photographs of Commemorative Plaques at Saint Anthony of Padua Parish Church

Nine (9) Commemorative Plaques are observed in this Church. Seven of them have a numerical number that indicates the different names of a person who gives church donations; gold and black was utilized to indicate excellence and prestige. The names of the donors in the commemorative plaques are considered as the person who has a visible testament to the contribution and legacies of elite donors, emphasizing the importance of power dynamics and social hierarchies in the community. This signage aims to remind parishioners about the kind deeds of the person who are written in these plaques.

B. Holy Cross Parish Church

The researchers discovered a diverse array of signage, with a total of forty-six (46) occurrences. The highest distribution observed is Informative Signage with thirty (30)

occurrences. Following this are twelve (12) Warning Notices and Prohibitions, three (3) Building Names, and one (1) Graffiti. Among the signage mentioned, forty-one (41) are in English. Taglish is also used in three (3) signage. On the other hand, there is also one signage found in both Tagalog and Bikol-Rinconada. The result of this data highlights the church's predominant reliance on English, with some use of Bikol-Rinconada and Tagalog to make everyone feel welcome and accommodated.



Plate 5. Photographs of Warning Notice and Prohibitions at Holy Cross Parish

All important words are written in capital letters, mostly in darker colors, in contrast to the light background used. Information about the schedule of the gate opening is observed in one of the signage. Accordingly, it says gates open at 5:00 AM and regularly closes at 7:00 PM. A “NO OVERNIGHT PARKING PLEASE” is also written in blue font color, giving off a more positive vibe of the sign. Therefore, people should no longer park on the church premises beyond the indicated time. This sign used the English language as a medium of relaying the information and is placed in the entrance way of the church. Additionally, a warning sign of not leaving things unattended is also seen at the left side of the church.. “PAGIROMDOM” is a bikol word that means “REMINDER”. The language medium of the signage is Rinconada-English for easy comprehension of the locals. The text, “DURANTE KAN MGA CELEBRACION SA SIMBAHAN, DAI MAGWALAT NIN PERSONAL NA GAMIT SA TUKAWAN O SA ARIN MAN NA LUGAR” can be translated as “DURING THE CELEBRATIONS ON THE CHURCH NEVER LEAVE YOUR THINGS ON THE CHAIR OR ANYWHERE IN THE PLACE”. This is accompanied with illustrations showing the crimes that can happen if ever the things are left unattended. A CCTV symbol is also shown on top of the signage. Basically, like what is written below the sign, this sign serves as a warning to not leave things unattended. Finally, the sign “PLEASE DO NOT STAND ON THE TOILET SEAT” with a symbol of a person squatting on a toilet bowl in black, with a red circle-backslash symbol or the general prohibition sign, indicates that people should not do what was shown in the signage. This is pasted at the door of the comfort room found on the left part of the church. The word “please” is written in blue background, implying a positive instruction in presenting the information.



Plate 6. Photographs of Building Names at Holy Cross Parish

The “HOLY CROSS PARISH” signage is embossed on the concrete archway located at the entrance of the church. All letters are capitalized and used a basic white font in contrast to the maroon background for better visibility for the churchgoers. Above the signage, there is a cross sign painted on a circular concrete plate placed on top of what seems like an angel’s wings. This symbolizes devotion and the divine presence of Jesus Christ in the place. The “ADORATION CHAPEL” signage is located on the left side of the premises of the church to direct the parishioners into the small area within the church premises where novenas are usually held. The signage used a red paint for all the letters, which are in plain font and all capital letters, contrasting with the white painted rectangular piece of wood with a bright yellow border for emphasis. The signage is hung on the dark colored concrete wall to be easily noticeable and evident. Similarly, “CONFESSION” signage used a red paint and all capital letters, contrasting with the white painted rectangular wood positioned in the entryway to direct devotees to the small confessional booth where they can confess to the priest. The signage is placed on the dark wood structure of the booth for easier recognition, even to tourists or non-locals.



Plate 7. Photographs of Informative Signage at Holy Cross Parish

Informations about the schedule of the masses are stipulated in the “SCHEDULE OF MASSES AND OTHER SACRAMENTAL ACTIVITIES” board. According to the board, the church offers daily celebrant masses in Bikol at 6:00 in the morning, and English at 5:30 in the afternoon. For baptism, there is a regular schedule every Wednesday and Saturday at 11:00 AM. Confessions are every 4:00 PM every Thursday before the 1st Friday of the month. For Sunday celebrant masses, there are six masses every morning. 6:00 AM, 8:00 AM and 10:00 AM. There are also three in the afternoon. 4:00 PM in English and Children and Youth Mass, 5:30 PM in Bikol, and another English mass at 7:00 PM. The church also schedules wedding masses every 8:00 AM, 10:00 AM, 1:00 PM everyday, and 2:30 PM (except on Sundays). Anointing masses are done upon appointment and funeral masses

are scheduled at 8:30 AM, 10:00 AM, 1:00 PM and 2:30 PM. The texts are written in yellow and white, to be easily noticed in the green-colored board. This is found at the right side of the church. Inside, one of the signage, "RESERVED ALL MASSES ANCILLA DOMUS DEI" is observed in the seats beside the main altar of the church. This sign is printed in red, contrasting the white background. "All Masses" is emphasized and uses black font, contrasting to the yellow highlight of the text. With no particular meaning, this signage relays information that the seats are reserved for ancilla domus dei during masses. There are also signs about the designated areas for different vehicles. For instance, "PARKING FOR SUV ONLY" is accompanied by an SUV illustration for easy identification. Two of this signage is seen inside the church's facade. These are written in red, capital letters to be more noticeable in the white background of the signage. All of these informative signs use English as the language medium.



Plate 8. Photograph of Graffiti at Holy Cross Parish

One Graffiti signage is observed in the church. "BAWAL UMIHI DITO PWEDE ASO" is written in capital letters for clarity and uses lighter colors so that the readers can easily see the signage. In addition, the signage uses the Tagalog language, which can be translated as "Urinating is prohibited, except for dogs". This signage is intended to inform that this area is not for people to pee in, but dogs are an exception, which implies strict prohibitions for people to follow. The use of capital letters, particularly with a lighter color and darker background, creates a sense of clarity that attracts people's attention to follow. It can also be noted that due to its location, which is outdoors, it is a direct subject of uncontrolled weather, which contributed to its faded condition.

C. Saint Francis of Assisi Parish Church

The data highlights the prevalence of English in the signage with twenty (20) occurrences and two (2) are in the Rinconada (Boïnën) dialect. In terms of the types of signage, Informative signage has eight (8) occurrences, Commemorative Plaques with seven (7) occurrences, Warning Notices and Prohibitions with four (4) occurrences, Building Names with two (2) occurrences, Graffiti with one (1) occurrence, while Street Signage, Advertising Signage, and Objects were not observed in the premises of the church. These findings suggest that there are many forms of signage found in the church, implying the importance of community engagement, as it helps visitors to keep informed and engaged with useful messages.



Plate 9. Photographs of Warning Notice and Prohibitions Signage at Saint Francis of Assisi Parish Church

"NO PARKING" and "NO LOADING NO UNLOADING," are written in all capital letters with red and white colors to indicate warnings. The "NO PARKING" sign prohibits parking at the church entrance, while the "NO LOADING AND UNLOADING" sign restricts drop-offs and pick-ups in that area. The Red color of these signage connotes that these signage should be strictly followed.



Plate 10. Photographs of Informative Signage at Saint Francis of Assisi Parish Church

The church utilizes various signage to improve navigation and effectively communicate important messages. Key signs include the directory signage of the church. "DINADANGOG NIN KAGURANGNAN AN INAGRANGAY KAN DUKHA" that is placed inside of the church near at altar expresses a hope and compassion, where it is written in all blue capital letters and white background, which contributes to the meaning and emotional tone of the message, the color blue often symbolizes peace, calm and trust and white background reinforces the purity and sincerity, making it stand out clearly for the parishioners. It reassures believers that their struggles are seen and heard by a higher power that will provide comfort and aid in times of need. Wayfinding guide is also present outside of the church where it shows directions of different halls, rooms, offices and other areas; it is placed near the entrance to assist parishioners in easily locating their desired destinations upon arrival. While respective areas are written in all capital letters with color blue to ensure visibility and clarity, aligning with the color scheme of the the signages in the area to help maintain consistency that adds calm and professionalism that influence the atmosphere and with arrows to directly show the location. Directional signs are in blue and yellow, while restroom signs like "KEEP TOILET CLEAN" and "WOMEN" use bold colors to promote cleanliness and indicate gender-specific areas. Overall, this signage enhances the visitor experience by providing essential information and fostering a welcoming environment.



Plate 11. Photographs of Commemorative Plaques at Saint Francis of Assisi Parish Church

The first, “LAY MINISTERS,” is displayed in red capital letters which implies that this seat is strictly for the mentioned individuals, on a metal sheet indicating that the area near the altar is reserved for Lay Ministers. Capitalized letter in this specific signage is Authority, since this plaque is used to reserve the seats for the respective Lay Ministers. The second plaque, “Donated by,” appears six times on bronze metal plates on the church windows to honor the donations made by parishioners. This signage is a reminder of the donation given by the kindhearted families who supported the church’s development, for them to be always recognized by their good deeds.



Plate 12. Photograph of Objects at Saint Francis of Assisi Parish Church

The signage encompasses a Boînen word “HINULID”, in English “Laid to rest”, referring to Jesus’ human body being laid in the tomb and resting for three days until his resurrection. This is written in capital letters in a decorative, banner-like style. The red font color symbolizes the blood of Christ, sacrifice and points out the importance of faith, hope, and divine intervention. It is painted directly on a wall inside the church. This signage is a reminder of how Jesus suffered for his fellowman just to save them from their sins.

4. Conclusion

This study examined 109 signage across three Catholic churches in Rinconada, revealing key insights into the intersection of language, multimodality, and religious communication. Informative signage emerged as the most prevalent, emphasizing its functional role in guiding and regulating parishioner behavior within church premises. The predominance of English, complemented by occasional uses of Tagalog, Taglish, and Rinconada dialects, reflects strategic language choices aimed at balancing universal accessibility and local relevance.

Significantly, the analysis revealed how sign features—such as capitalization, color, placement, and iconography—serve not only informational but also symbolic and affective functions. For instance, the frequent use of red to denote prohibitions and of capital letters to convey authority underscores the persuasive and regulatory power of public signage in religious contexts. Furthermore, the presence of commemorative

plaques and localized signs affirms signage's role in preserving community identity and honoring tradition. While the study offers valuable insights, limitations include the scope of church selection and the descriptive nature of the analysis. Future research should broaden the geographical scope and deepen the theoretical engagement, particularly in interrogating how signage mediates power relations, shapes religious experience, and reflects shifting linguistic ideologies in churchscapes. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing scholarship on linguistic landscapes by foregrounding the dynamic and multifaceted nature of public signage in sacred spaces.

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