

## **Who has the Power? A Semiotic Analysis of Chicago's Chinatown Linguistic Landscape**

**Jonathan WuWong (PI)**<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Linguistics, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 60637*

*email: jwuwong@uchicago.edu*

Abstract: As previously demonstrated by the work of Lou (2016) and Gorter (2006), the “linguistic landscape,” the network of signage and displayed text, can give insight into the cultural dynamics within an area. From this basis, I hypothesize that Chicago's Chinatown will similarly illustrate decisions on what signs are created, who can read them, and for whom they serve, which reflects the decision making power of the presiding group. In this study, I examine the distribution and significance of the signage within Chicago's Chinatown in order to determine the dynamics between the various linguistic groups found within the area (both resident and visitor alike). I took and analyzed around 450 pictures in the fall of 2019 of the Chicago, IL Chinatown and the surrounding area for my research. Their significance was examined through a number of lenses (language, intended audience, writing system, method of production, layout, etc.) Not only was Lou and Gorter's frame of analysis found to be useful, I also found suggestions of three distinct groups that vary in linguistic accessibility: 1.) following S Archer Ave, W Cermak Road, and S Wentworth Ave, 2.) clustered around 23-25th Streets between S Archer Ave and S Wentworth Ave, and 3.) placed on 26th Street and the southern portion of Archer. With seemingly different intended audiences, each grouping of signage exposes the effects and relationships that visitors to Chinatown have on its residents. Furthermore, I attempt to draw preliminary conclusions about how the languages of Chinatown's signs suggest the varying levels of social power and sense of belonging that Chinatown's inhabitants experience. By examining language on display, I will attempt to provide a new framework for future research in analyzing linguistic dominance.

### *References*

- [1] Gorter, D. 2006. Introduction: The study of the linguistic landscape as a new approach to multilingualism. *International Journal of Multilingualism*,
- [2] Lou, J. 2016. [beginning of] Conceptualizing linguistic landscape. *The Linguistic Landscape of Chinatown: A Sociolinguistic Ethnography*. *Multilingual Matters*.