

Error Investigation of Public Signs and Foreigners' Perceptions of Business Signs in Bangkok: A Case Study of Sathorn and Sukhumvit Areas

การสำรวจความผิดพลาดของป้ายสาธารณะและความเข้าใจของชาวต่างชาติ
ที่มีต่อป้ายย่านธุรกิจในกรุงเทพฯ: กรณีศึกษาพื้นที่บริเวณสาทรและสุขุมวิท

Received: September 14, 2024 Revised: November 8, 2024 Accepted: December 13, 2024

Siraprapa Kongkaew¹

ศิริประภา กองแก้ว

Siriporn Lerdpaisalwong²

ศิริพร เลิศไพศาลวงศ์

Abstract

Although news reports reveal grammatically incorrect signs in Thailand, many studies have overlooked the impact of these errors. Mistakes on public signs could confuse foreigners and reflect negatively on the nation's language proficiency. Addressing these errors is essential, as they affect readers' comprehension and the country's image. These errors should be investigated for grammatical mistakes that impact foreigners' understanding of English-language signs. The study began with a questionnaire distributed to 30 foreigners to understand their viewpoints on error signs, focusing on 40 signs with grammatical errors. The findings highlighted two main points. Firstly, 17% of the total error signs received low scores in the survey. The English on these public signs was unclear and grammatically incorrect, making it difficult for foreigners to understand. Secondly, error signs involved selection (30%) and omission (28%) strategies based on Corder's (1973) theory. Errors such as inappropriate vocabulary, misspellings, and word omissions led to unintelligibility. This study is critical for stakeholders, including travelers in the Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations, as it aims to improve and produce effective public signs. The recommendation of the study includes replacing governmental and non-governmental signs with linguistically accurate and appropriate versions. Ultimately, this will benefit our country by boosting investor confidence, promoting a positive national image, and attracting more tourists.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscape, Linguistic Landscape in Thailand, Language Policy, Intelligibility on Signs, Grammatical Errors

¹⁻²**Affiliation:** Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University, Thailand

หน่วยงาน: คณะมนุษยศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยเกษตรศาสตร์ ประเทศไทย

Corresponding Author: Siraprapa Kongkaew

E-mail: Siraprapa.kongk@ku.th

บทคัดย่อ

ถึงแม้รายงานข่าวหลายฉบับนำเสนอความผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ของป้ายในประเทศไทย แต่งานวิจัยส่วนใหญ่กลับมองข้ามผลกระทบของข้อผิดพลาดเหล่านี้ ความผิดพลาดบนป้ายสาธารณะในประเทศทำให้ชาวต่างชาติเกิดความสับสนและส่งผลถึงการมองความสามารถทางภาษาของประเทศในเชิงลบ การกล่าวถึงความผิดพลาดเหล่านี้จึงมีความจำเป็นอย่างยิ่ง เพราะข้อผิดพลาดต่าง ๆ ส่งผลต่อความรู้ความเข้าใจของผู้อ่านและภาพลักษณ์ของประเทศ ควรที่จะมีการพิจารณาในเรื่องของความผิดพลาดโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งทางไวยากรณ์ที่ส่งผลต่อความเข้าใจป้ายภาษาอังกฤษของชาวต่างชาติ การศึกษาครั้งนี้เริ่มจากการแจกแบบสอบถามให้ชาวต่างชาติ 30 คน เพื่อที่จะทำความเข้าใจถึงมุมมองของผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามเกี่ยวกับป้ายต่าง ๆ ที่มีความผิดพลาด โดยมุ่งเน้นไปที่ป้ายที่มีความผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์จำนวน 40 ป้าย ผลการสำรวจชี้ให้เห็นประเด็นหลักๆ อยู่สองประเด็น 1.) 17% ของป้ายที่ผิดพลาดทั้งหมดได้คะแนนในระดับต่ำในแบบสอบถามนี้ พบปัญหาภาษาอังกฤษที่อยู่บนป้ายเหล่านี้ไม่ชัดเจนและมีข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ส่งผลให้ชาวต่างชาติเข้าใจยาก 2.) ป้ายที่ผิดพลาดทั้งหมดในแบบสอบถามนี้มีความผิดพลาดที่เกี่ยวข้องในเรื่องของการเลือกใช้คำ (30%) และการเรียงเว้นคำ (28%) โดยอ้างอิงจากทฤษฎีของ คอร์ดเดอร์ (1973) ข้อผิดพลาดอันประกอบไปด้วย คำศัพท์ที่ไม่เหมาะสม การสะกดคำผิด และการเรียงเว้นคำ ล้วนส่งผลให้เกิดความไม่เข้าใจ การศึกษานี้จึงมีความสำคัญต่อผู้ที่เกี่ยวข้องซึ่งประกอบไปด้วย ผู้เดินทางในพื้นที่สาทรและสุขุมวิทรวมถึงหน่วยงานภาครัฐและเอกชนที่มุ่งพัฒนาและสร้างป้ายสาธารณะที่มีประสิทธิภาพ งานวิจัยนี้เสนอแนะให้มีการแทนที่ป้ายของหน่วยงานภาครัฐและเอกชนด้วยป้ายที่เหมาะสมและถูกต้อง และในท้ายที่สุดงานวิจัยนี้จะมีประโยชน์ต่อประเทศของเราโดยการเสริมสร้างภาพลักษณ์ที่ดีของประเทศ ดึงดูดนักท่องเที่ยวและสร้างความเชื่อมั่นให้แก่นักลงทุนมากยิ่งขึ้น

คำสำคัญ: ภูมิทัศน์ทางภาษา ภูมิทัศน์ทางภาษาในประเทศไทย นโยบายทางภาษา ความเข้าใจในป้าย ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์

Introduction

Thairath News (2017) reported that there remained errors in public signs on tourist spots in Chiang Rai that caused confusion among tourists since the errors were noted several years ago. It took many years to rewrite the English translation into proper English. On the first sign, “Wiang Kaen” (เวียงแก่น), was misspelled into “Wiang Kaem.” On the second sign, “Thoeng” (เทิง) was written as “Thoen.” Thai Post (2022) additionally stated that social media had been discussing the indiscreetness of Thai authorities regarding the errors on digital signs as they made a public sign “Welcom to APEC 2022” without “e” to greet international guests to the country. There have evidently been no perfect public signs in the country; the error could be in terms of translation or grammatical errors that cause trouble of understanding to foreigners and lower positive first impressions, including trust (Guo, 2012). Apparently, these small mistakes showed the language proficiency of Thai people that needs to be addressed, especially on public signs.

Bangkok Post (2021) reported that the 2019 English Proficiency Index (EF) of Thailand was ranked 74th. By 2020, it had fallen to 89th, and 97th by 2022. In the current year, Thailand's English proficiency in 2023 as a non-native English nation was ranked pitifully 101st out of 112 countries and territories. Wang (2022) reported that Thailand's English proficiency ranked 97th in 2022, indicating very low proficiency, and it ranked second to last among its ASEAN neighbors in an assessment that examined average English proficiency across 111 different countries and regions. He also explained that Thailand has to consider the advantages of English proficiency since tourism accounts for 18% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) after the COVID-19 pandemic. Thailand is a top tourist destination, attracting considerable interest from international travelers. The significant opportunity for the Thai government to enhance people's knowledge and strengthen the country's economic system is presented. Wang's (2022) statistics and reports also confirm that the English proficiency of Thai people is decreasing annually. Lately, Thailand's EF score for 2023 is 101st, as published by the Bangkok Post in 2023. However, statistics from 2019 to 2023 not only highlight the low English proficiency among Thai people but also reflect its impact on the English usage seen on public signs, as noted in *Thairath News* and *Thai Post*. These news sources underscore the issues in English language use, consistent with the statistics, becoming evidence for the need of improvement in English language teaching in Thailand. Enhancing language proficiency should be a priority, as well as encouraging everyone to recognize and improve their language skills for greater opportunities in various fields, such as business and education.

Linguistic landscapes are a significant element in representing culture, languages, and civilization. Public signs could be literature or photographs to inform or persuade people about important information; these signs are good advisers for foreigners who cannot understand the native language of the country (Guo, 2012). Backhaus (2007) stated that public signs appeared in cities to provide different information, such as directions, advertisements, and quotes. They explained the meaning of linguistic landscape as advertisements, street signs, place names, and governmental and non-governmental signs that contained linguistic terms and regional culture (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Overall, communication in public could take many forms, such as ads, speeches, newspapers, books, or public signs. The reports show that sign makers lack language awareness on public signs, an important issue that needs to be addressed. This could partially reflect the low English language proficiency of Thai people as reported since 2019.

Previous studies have largely overlooked the systematic analysis of grammatical errors in public signage, particularly in high-traffic business districts. For example, studies have primarily focused on identifying translation errors without delving deeply into the broader impacts of these errors. Notable examples include Netthanyakonwong's (2023) analysis of Chinese translations of airport public signs in Thailand, Ariani and Artawa's (2021) examination of grammatical errors in English translations of public signs in Ubud, Bali, and Ngampramuan's (2019) study on the intelligibility of English on signs at tourist attractions in Thailand. For this study, these minor errors on the signs may indicate the English proficiency of Thai people, which in turn reflects the ineffectiveness of the country's English language teaching policy. As Corder (1967) argued that errors are not simply "annoying, distracting...by-products of the process of learning", they could "provide evidence of the

system of the language that [a learner] is using at a particular point in the course” (p. 162-167). Making public signs with language accuracy becomes a crucial concern.

Moreover, the location of signs such as public signs in the Sathorn and Sukhumvit business areas, is also another major factor in this study. Kermel-Torrès (2004) explained that Sathorn and Sukhumvit avenues began to be central business districts (CBDs) with high populations in the 1970s. This study aims to investigate the grammatical errors that impact foreigners' comprehension of English signs in Bangkok's Central Business Districts, as well as to explore how these errors are perceived by foreigners. The study primarily uses questionnaires and adapted frameworks from Corder (1973) to address the research questions. As the study progresses, the study's findings will be beneficial to 1. stakeholders who travel in the Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas; 2. government and non-governmental organizations responsible for creating public signs in the future; and 3. The English proficiency of our nation in the future.

Objectives

1. To identify and categorize specific types of grammatical errors on English signs in the Central Business Districts (CBDs) of Bangkok, including Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas.
2. To assess the perceptions of foreigners regarding the clarity and accuracy of these English signs with grammatical errors in the CBDs.

Research Questions

1. What specific types of grammatical errors are presented on English signs in the Central Business Districts (CBDs) of Bangkok, including Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas?
2. What are the attitudes and perceptions of foreigners towards the clarity and accuracy of these English signs with grammatical errors in the CBDs?

Literature Review

In a world that is becoming more interconnected, an estimated 1.46 billion people worldwide spoke English in 2023 (Talbot, 2023). English plays an important role in communication, including in Thailand. Despite the growing popularity of English, many public signs in Thailand still contain grammatical errors, which cause confusion and miscommunication, especially among foreigners. The study includes multiple resources to understand and explore how these errors affect intelligibility, interpretability, and comprehensibility of public signs in Bangkok's business districts.

1. Theoretical Framework: Intelligibility, Interpretability, Comprehensibility

There are three levels of understanding a language: intelligibility, interpretability, and comprehensibility. Intelligibility is concerned with basic understanding of words and sounds, including pronunciation and intonation. Rhekhalilit (2022) distinguished two levels of understanding a language: surface (recognizing and repeating words; Intelligibility) and deep (understanding words in more context, Interpretability). Rhekhalilit (2022) and Derwing and Munro (2015) defined comprehension as the ability to understand meaning, which is often achieved by paraphrasing and exploring specifics. Understanding culture is also important for effective communication, particularly among non-native English speakers (Kachru & Smith,

2008; Park & Nakano, 2003). Nonetheless, grammatical errors on signage across the country, including misspellings and wrong English words, as expressed by Thairath News, Thai Post, and different academic papers could lead to misunderstandings among foreigners in Thailand. Errors on signs may damage the degree of intelligibility, interpretability, and comprehensibility for everyone, especially foreigners, causing them to have difficulty interpreting the intended meaning of signs and lacking understanding of English language on signs.

2. Language Policy in Thailand and Its Impact on Public Signage

In Thailand, language policy has been imposed by the Thai government to prioritize Thai as the only national language for over 100 years. Smalley (1994) stated that Thailand has linguistic varieties spoken by several ethnicities. As a result, some Thais recognize the importance of English and encourage the new generation to pay more attention to English language. English continues to exist as a foreign language in Thailand, with prevalence in social media, music, news, public signs, and education. English is one of multiple languages spoken in many Thai provinces, and it has become more important as it has in other countries. As the main world language for communication, English is connected to economics, trade, and education, as well as nearly all aspects of human relations, as stated by Huebner (2006). Notably, in Thailand, Thai serves as the official language, while English is widely used as a foreign language across various domains, including education and entertainment. In the Thai context, English errors on public signs occur frequently, as Thai remains the primary language spoken by the majority of the population. Furthermore, studies such as Guo's (2012) analysis of English translation errors on public signs and Vivas-Peraza's (2020) examination of the linguistic landscape in Hat Yai, Thailand, along with statistics showing low English proficiency among Thai people, suggest that the use of English increases the possibility of such errors. The error signs could impact economic factors such as tourism and foreign investment, as well as affecting the nation's image and reflecting the quality of the English language learning system.

3. Linguistic Landscape Studies: Global and Thai Context

According to Ariani and Artawa (2021), the translations on public signs in Ubud and Bali, Indonesia, contained a number of grammatical errors, including problems with the construction of noun phrases, use of auxiliary verbs, verbal phrase structure, spelling, prepositional phrase construction, and application of tenses. Moreover, inappropriate translation practices, a lack of knowledge about the target language's (TL) grammar, and translators' propensity to give priority to the source language's (SL) syntactic structures were all contributing factors.

The recent language learning study by Chaudary and Moya (2019) could be used to increase learners' language awareness and teaching methods. Having applied Corder's (1967) error analysis framework to Abisamra (2003), which investigated English errors in Arabic speakers, the findings indicated that negative language interference is the major cause of errors. The findings also implied that several errors were found mostly in syntax, grammaticality, and lexicon order. Errors of omission could be avoided by delivering words in sequences that assist learners in understanding the sentence structures. The key result highlighted the importance of errors in the learning process and emphasized the value of feedback for both learners and instructors.

Ngampramuan (2019) also investigated the use of English on signs at 40 tourist locations throughout the country. Ngampramuan's (2019) study tried to determine how understandable Thai-English signs are to non-Thai speakers. 30 signs were carefully chosen with 456 participants. In conclusion, the Thai-English signs are relatively understandable to non-Thai speakers. To gain a better understanding, tourists must consider the context around the messages rather than focusing mainly on their literal meanings.

Likewise, Netthanyakonwong (2023) analyzed the translation errors of Chinese public signs that appeared in 16 airports in Thailand between 2019 and 2022 by random sampling. The results of the descriptive analysis were presented. The 159 Chinese public signs with translation errors were analyzed, and a total of 257 errors were found. 62% of lexical errors were found to be the most common type of error, followed by grammatical problems (23%), Chinese character errors (9%), punctuation errors (4%) and the remaining 2% being errors caused by ignoring cultural factors.

Although grammatical error analysis on public signs has not been done broadly, multiple articles have been published about grammatical errors on signs in Thailand and globally. Consequently, these errors often lead to misunderstandings for tourists. Simple mistakes could indicate Thai people's lack of English proficiency, highlighting weak English language teaching methods. Improving linguistic accuracy in public signage has been a major target. Therefore, this study focused on grammatical errors and foreigners' perceptions to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives on these issues. Attention to foreigners' perspectives on public signage is critical, as clear and accurate signs not only help stakeholders but also influence a positive image of the nation.

Research Methodology

Sathorn and Sukhumvit are two main areas driving the economy of Thailand, as Kermel-Torrès (2004) explained that since the 1970s, Sathorn and Sukhumvit avenues have become Central Business Districts (CBDs) with a large population. Given their prominence in the heart of Bangkok, where foreigners, tourists, and businessmen frequently travel, public signs in these areas should maintain a high standard of language accuracy. However, many public signs currently contain grammatical errors, causing confusion and impacting the nation's image. These problems led to this study as it aimed to identify grammatical error types on public signs based on Corder's framework (1973) and investigate foreigner perceptions toward error signs in the areas.

1. Conceptual Framework

The framework proposed by Corder (1973) is the most suitable theory for identifying errors on public signs, as it aligns closely with the research objectives and provides a reliable basis for supporting the findings. Also, the theory classified the linguistic level of the errors under the sub-areas of morphology, syntax, and lexicon. This categorization could be exemplified into four types, as follows:

- Omission: reduction of morphological or syntax
Example: "This my routine" (Chaudary & Moya, 2019)
- Addition: adding unnecessary morphology or lexicon
Example: "Thank you for you read about my day" (Chaudary & Moya, 2019)

- Selection: wrong choice on morphology or syntax
Example: “Then go to *the* English institute” (Chaudary & Moya, 2019)
- Ordering: placing the wrong position of morphology or syntax
Example: “It is a *mall* very big” (Chaudary & Moya, 2019)

2. Public signs

Public signs in the Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas were analyzed to identify types of grammatical errors and how foreigners perceived these signs. A total of 40 signs with grammatical errors were chosen from 324 signs along specified routes. Public signs had to contain the following criteria: (1) Signs were in Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas, both permanently and temporarily. (2) All governmental or non-governmental signs, like ads, information signs, and traffic signs, were analyzed. (3) All English signs focused on; bilingual and multilingual signs that included English were also considered.

3. Participants

The convenient sampling on this survey was 30 foreigners with 3 criteria: (1) no specific gender, age, or educational background; (2) any foreigner in Thailand including travelers, employees, and students; (3) non-Thai native speakers including Asians and Europeans. Initially, Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas were popular among tourists, and researchers assumed that the signs in these zones might attract foreign visitors. Additionally, all participants voluntarily provided their consent before completing the questionnaire. Their viewpoints on grammatically incorrect signs determined how participants felt about these error signs. All important information reflected their perspectives based on various cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds.

Questionnaires

In terms of foreigners' perceptions of the investigation, the researchers used a Likert scale on a Google Form, link: <https://forms.gle/mcZPTvshwKb7RnnFA>. The questionnaires were separated into 3 sections: the first section described the research aims and purposes, which clarified the study's research goal, explained the study's advantages to stakeholders, and requested voluntary confirmation from participants. The second section included demographic information that categorized participants based on gender, country, purpose of stay in Thailand, length of stay, list of all languages spoken, including native tongue, educational level, and contact information (email). Finally, the third section inquired the participants how they would rate their understanding of the error signs shown in the questionnaire on Likert scale and the reasons for misunderstanding the signs in the Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas. There were 40 signs with grammatical problems. The participants rated these signs to determine how well or poorly they understood the grammatically incorrect signs. The scale was divided into 5 categories: (1) very poor, (2) poor, (3) acceptable, (4) good, and (5) excellent. Furthermore, each sign required rating reasons, which were divided into 6 options: (1) Misspelling or reducing a part of a word, phrase, and sentence, (2) placing the wrong position of word, phrase or sentence, (3) wrong choice of vocabulary, phrase, and sentence, (4) adding on a part of a word, phrase or sentence unnecessarily, (5) none-no grammatical error on the sign or

(6) other reason. Examples of the rate of understanding and reason for misunderstanding are presented below.

Figure 1

Sample of Likert Scale on the Google Form

Figure 2

Sample of Reasons for Misunderstanding Signs from the Survey

Please provide reasons why you cannot understand the sign (image 39) well. Select all that apply *

- Misspelling or reducing a part of word, phrase and sentence
- Adding on a part of word, phrase and sentence unnecessarily
- Wrong choice of vocabulary, phrase and sentence
- Placing the wrong position of word, phrase and sentence
- None – no grammatical error on the sign
- อื่นๆ...

Questionnaire Validation

To ensure reliability, a survey's questions had been validated before its distribution. Validation was completed in two steps. Step 1: Receive face validity of the questionnaire from two linguistic expert groups. The first group examined topic relevancy, whereas the second group thoroughly searched for problems such as leading or repeated inquiries that may be presented in the questionnaire. This pilot phase required the form to be modified and improved its clarity by linguistic professors. Step 2: Make final modifications based on tester's comments. Researchers made essential improvements and conducted an extra pilot test in accordance with the comments of linguistic experts if significant changes were required, ensuring a trustworthy final questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Data for this study were collected through a questionnaire administered to 40 foreigners who volunteered to assess public signage in urban locations. To address study question 2, the survey asked participants about their perceptions of language efficiency and overall comprehensibility of error signs. Prior to analysis, the data were filtered by removing missing responses and responses in which the participants tried to correct the error. For quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics were applied to calculate the number and percentage of errors in public signage. A Likert scale (1-5) was used to assess participants' opinions on sign quality, and the results were examined both descriptively and statistically. For qualitative data, participant comments were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify prevalent themes related to sign clarity and grammatical accuracy in order to answer research question 1. The investigation aimed to identify commonly occurring types of errors in public signage and examine how these errors affected sign comprehension, particularly among foreign participants. It was predicted that grammatical errors, especially those in English, would cause greater confusion for non-native speakers.

Findings

The study aimed to identify and categorize specific types of grammatical errors on English signs in the Central Business Districts (CBDs) of Bangkok and assess the perceptions of foreigners regarding the clarity and accuracy of these English signs with grammatical errors in the CBDs. The Google form was examined with 30 convenient foreigners. The questionnaire, link: <https://forms.gle/mcZPTvshwKb7RnnFA>, was divided into 3 parts: research aims and purposes, demographic information, and foreigners' understanding towards 40 specific routes covered signs and their perception towards those errors. The survey was completed by participants and presented in *Figure 3* and *Figure 4*, including the grammatical errors analyzed following Corder's (1973) theory in *Table 1*.

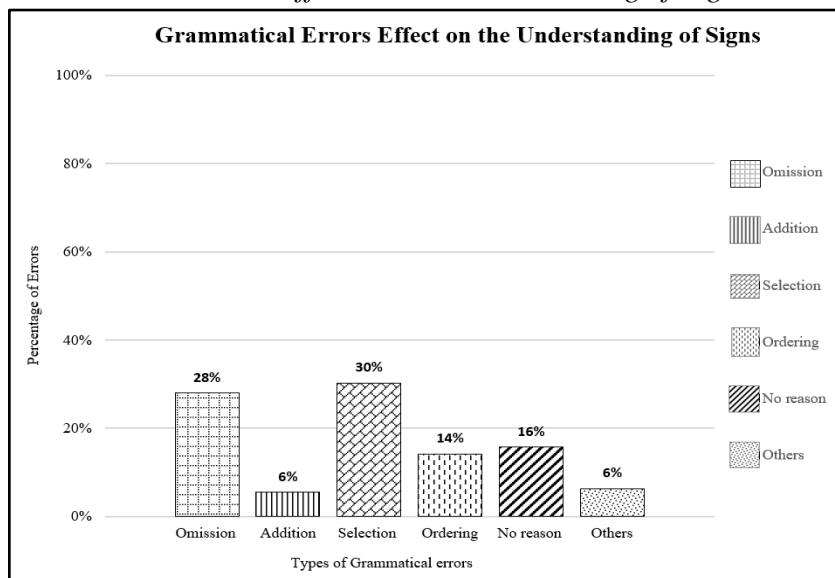
For demographic information, the analysis started with the stay purposes and the length of residency in Thailand, 33% of workers had been here over 12 months, 10% for 6 -12 months, and 7% for less than 6 months. Among travelers, 30% had stayed under 6 months, 10% for 6 -12 months, and 7% for over 12 months. Students made up 3% of the participants. The length of residency and purposes of the stay also indicated that staying in Thailand for a long period could help them get used to errors on signs. An interesting insight came from a participant (March 3, 2024), who remarked, "I think I have lived in Thailand too long to struggle with Thai English." Also, some foreigners mentioned their basic command of Thai and familiarity with Thai language from their daily lives in the country. In fact, the common in Thai helped them understand errors on public signs better. These opinions reflected those foreigners became accustomed to errors on public signs due to language familiarity and exposure to Thai culture.

Research Question 1

What specific types of grammatical errors are presented on English signs in the Central Business Districts (CBDs) of Bangkok, including Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas?

Figure 3

Grammatical Errors Effect on the Understanding of Signs

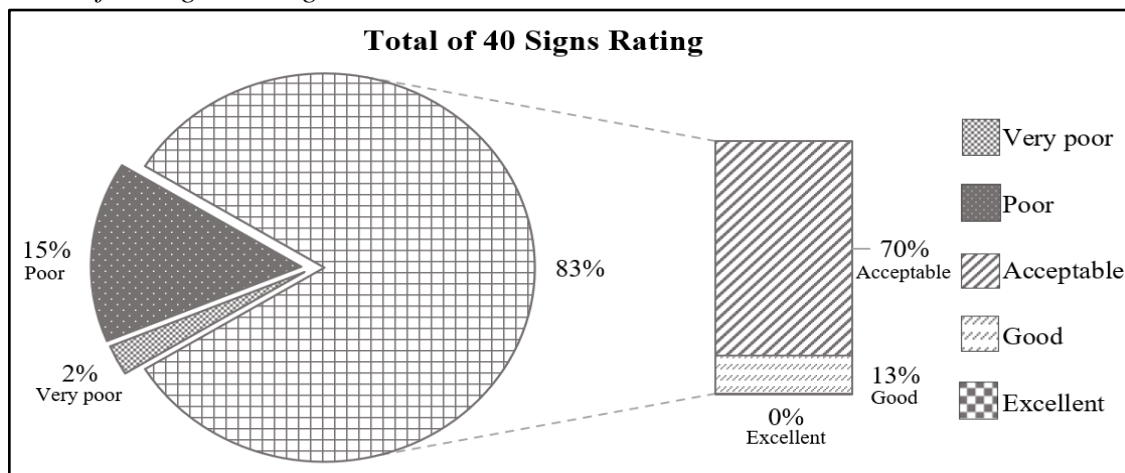


According to the results presented in the study, the types of errors that most confused foreigners are as follows: 30% selection errors, 28% omission errors, 14% ordering errors, and 6% addition errors. Additionally, 16% of signs had no reason due to no grammatical error on the sign, and 6% had other issues such as individual comments for improvement out of other classifications. The most common errors were incorrect vocabulary choices (selection errors) and misspellings or missing parts of words (omission errors). These errors hindered understanding, as incorrect or inappropriate English was often used on signs, as well as suggestions of participants provided in the questionnaire to correct the English on signs. Despite these issues, foreigners often recognized the errors and suggested corrections, supporting the findings that many participants noticed and intended to fix the grammatical errors on signs.

Research Question 2: What are the attitudes and perceptions of foreigners towards the clarity and accuracy of these English signs with grammatical errors in the CBDs?

Figure 4

Total of 40 Signs Rating



The data in *Figure 4* showed the satisfaction levels, including the understanding level of signs, from 30 participants. The satisfactions were divided into 5 levels: very poor (disappointing), poor (quite low quality or lacking sufficient detail), acceptable (meets minimum understanding or satisfaction), good (clear or well understood), and excellent (perfect, very clear, or of outstanding quality). Grammatical error signs contained 70% (28 public signs) with mostly acceptable scores, 15% (6 public signs) with poor scores, 13% (5 public signs) with good scores, 2% (1 public sign) with very poor scores, and 0% of public signs with excellent scores, respectively. However, low-rated scores meant poor or very poor rating scores. To summarize, 17% of public signs in total received low-rated scores of which 15% (6 public signs) were rated poor scores and 2% (1 public sign) were rated very poor scores. These signs were particularly confusing and revealed grammatical errors, thus foreigners struggled more to understand the unclear and incorrect English used.

Interestingly, many foreigners still considered the error signs acceptable and shared their thoughts openly. One participant noted, “I think most images are understandable. However, it’s not proper English and some could be confusing especially to tourists. And there are (a) few signs that I don’t know what the business does.” This comment highlighted the confusion caused by unclear language. In addition, other participants expressed frustration, with one stating “Some signs look unprofessional, especially for promotion information.” Another remarked “The sign insinuates that the reader should regret the inconvenience caused. It would be more fitting if the sign said, ‘We regret the inconvenience (caused)’.” These comments not only reflected their feelings about the errors but also hinted at broader concerns about English proficiency in Thailand.

Group 1: Examples of Grammatically Incorrect Sign with a Good Rating



Figure 5

Example of the Sign “เฮอร์ แอน ฮิม เนลท์ เธอราพี (hoe aen him nen thoeraphi) HER & HIM NAIL THERAPHY KOREA NAIL ART SPA EYELASHES WAXING,” containing English and Thai to Present Available Services in this Business

Group 2: Examples of Grammatically Incorrect Sign with an Acceptable Rating



Figure 6

Example of the Sign “WALL STREET INN BODIE CARE,” Utilizing the English Language to Convey the Services Offered by this Establishment

Group 3: Examples of Grammatically Incorrect Sign with a Poor Rating



Figure 7

Example of the Sign “SAFETY FIRST สถิติความปลอดภัย (sa thi ti kwam plot phai),” Containing English and Thai to Convey Statistics Regarding the Frequency of Safety Updates in Construction Areas

Group 4: Examples of Grammatically Incorrect Sign with a Very Poor Rating



Figure 8

Example of the Sign “SATHORN CARRENT สาทรคาร์เร็นท์ (sa thon kha ren) 02-633-8888 รถเช่า (rot chao),” Containing English and Thai to Inform the Public about the Car Rental Business


Analysis of the Data on Grammatically Incorrect Signs





Table 1 shows the analysis of signs from the questionnaire, with the majority focused on grammatically incorrect signs related to the survey results (Figure 4). The signs are examined for grammatical errors by applying Corder's (1973) theory, and suitable comments are made.



1. Omission: reduction of morphology or syntax.
2. Addition: adding unnecessary morphology or syntax.
3. Selection: wrong choice on morphology or syntax.
4. Ordering: placing the wrong morphology or syntax.

Table 1

The Analysis Data of Grammatically Incorrect Signs

No.	Data	Type of error by Corder (1973)	Remark
1		Omission	The sign shows “Speial”, this word is written without C. The correct word is special. The sign is classified as omission.

No.	Data	Type of error by Corder (1973)	Remark
2		Selection	The phrase has an incomplete meaning. There are several ways to write the signs, like sorry for the inconvenience. Additionally, ‘regret’ is a transitive verb that has a subject and an object, and the word could be replaced by another word in a formal way to apologize.
3		Omission	There is no meaning for “Carrent” in the English dictionary. The word could be written as Car Rent by adding a space. The sign is an example of omission.
4		Selection	The word “vehicle high > 4.10M” is incorrect grammatical usage. High is an adjective that could not be modified by the noun “vehicle”. The word could be replaced with ‘height’ or ‘higher than’ to modify ‘vehicle’ as a noun. This sign could select proper word choices.
5		Selection and Omission	The word ‘currency’ as a noun has the wrong meaning in this context. The context should explain about working hours so it should be replaced by “Current” as an adjective to modify the word “record” as a noun. This word is related to the error on selection word choices. Moreover, the phrase “record of week” is missing the article ‘the’ which is a grammatical error of omission.

No.	Data	Type of error by Corder (1973)	Remark
6		Selection and Addition	The word “24 hrs.” written incorrectly. The correct abbreviation for “hour” is “hr” because abbreviation is a singular form. It is an error of wrong selection by using an incorrect abbreviation by adding unnecessary ‘s’.
7		Selection	The word ‘S’ should be capitalized as the initial letter of the phrase. Moreover, the word “limits” is written as a verb, but “limit” is a noun to modify speed without a plural form. The correct version is “Speed limit 30 km/hr”.

The analysis of *Table 1* applied Corder's framework (1973), which includes: (1) Omission: reduction of morphological or syntax; (2) Addition: adding unnecessary morphology or lexicon; (3) Selection: wrong choice on morphology or syntax; (4) Ordering: placing the wrong morphology or syntax. The analysis table evidently demonstrated that signs 1, 3, and 5 were grammatical errors of omission. Sign 6 was categorized as the addition strategy, while signs 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 were characterized by the selection strategy. Notably, none of the signs analyzed contained grammatical errors related to word order. The results of this analysis, as detailed in *Table 1*, confirmed the presence of several types of errors. These included omissions, where parts of words or phrases such as articles, spaces, or letters were missing, as well as misspellings. In terms of word selection, inappropriate vocabulary was frequently used, with certain words being contextually out of place or chosen without regard to their grammatical function, such as using adjectives to modify nouns and adverbs to modify verbs. These errors, which notably occurred in English signs, had a significant impact on non-native Thai speakers. Not only did they create confusion, but they also required foreigners to spend additional time trying to interpret the meaning. This reduced the effectiveness of the wording on signs, which was supposed to be clear and easy to comprehend, but instead led to misinterpretation or misunderstanding of a business's goals.

Discussion and Limitations of the Study

The study's outcomes examine the perception of foreigners towards those error signs. These signs contained grammatical errors on selection (30%) and omission (28%) which also show that they recognize type of errors on signs containing wrong choice of vocabulary, phrase and sentence, and misspelling or reducing a part of word. Also, the viewpoint of foreigners provided an understanding level as acceptable. Many comments from foreigners in this study address to correct errors on signs, express confusion or raise questions, suggest alternative for more suitable language, advice on improving clarity or accuracy to write public signs. Likewise, the finding of Ariani and Artawa (2021) is also similar to the outcomes of the current study. Their outcomes showed that the translations contained a number of grammatical errors, including problems with the construction of noun phrases, the use of auxiliary verbs, verbal phrase structure, spelling, prepositional phrase construction, and the application of tenses.

Secondly, Chamninok and Jitbanjong (2023) explained that the use of both Thai and English on signs not only enhanced understanding between residents and foreigners but also conveyed a sense of status and modernity. By incorporating English alongside Thai, signs reflected a feeling of globalization and advancement, which was seen as an advantage, particularly for businesses. A significant proportion of foreigners (70%) rated the Likert scale as acceptable, citing their ability to predict the meaning of the language on signs as well as their basic proficiency in Thai. This suggests that grammatical errors on signs create ambiguity for foreigners, and participants' perceptions indicate that the language on signs is critical for understanding them. Many signs were noted to lack consistency, which in turn affects their reliability. Importantly, these findings align with the research aims such as Ngampramuan (2019), illustrating both the positive and negative perceptions of foreigners regarding grammatically incorrect signs. These perceptions supported the investigation into the impact of grammatical errors on understanding and became a good example to improve English proficiency of Thai people in a modern world. Furthermore, the results also advised stakeholders to be mindful when selecting or omitting vocabulary, as such decisions could significantly influence foreigners' perceptions and, by extension, the image of the nation.

On the other hand, the three factors of understanding; intelligibility, interpretability, and comprehensibility shared similar characteristics with understanding language on signs. As Rhekhalilit (2022) stated when learning language on signs, the first stage of reading signs is to understand new words or phrases related to intelligibility. Interpretability develops after understanding deepens and is integrated into one's own' knowledge. This idea can be used to describe the process of interpreting signs' meaning to foreigners and how deep they could understand grammatical error signs (Rhekhalilit, 2022). Finally, comprehension represents the highest degree of understanding, in which gained knowledge allows for successful communication with others based on the information obtained. Kachru & Smith (2008) also supported that to achieve a deep understanding level, culture is also a feature for effective communication. Similarly, many foreigners stated on the questionnaire that they had been familiar with the Thai language and culture. They had experienced errors and discovered that accepting them was usual, therefore foreigners could predict its meaning despite frequent English errors, as they had lived and worked in the nation.

The study of Ngampramuan (2019) on the intelligibility of English on signs at tourist attractions in Thailand explained that interviews with both native and non-native English speakers demonstrated that “they valued message meaning over form. As long as they understood the intended meaning, they did not consider sign errors to be important or in need of quick correction (Ngampramuan, 2019, p. 115).” In contrast, the current study demonstrated that participants had difficulty interpreting messages affected by Thai-English language errors. All signs in the survey are not grammatically valid, and participants also struggled to interpret these messages. As one participant (March 13, 2024) noted, “I think most signs are understandable. However, they are not in proper English and could be confusing, especially for tourists. There are a few signs where I don’t understand what the business does.” Researchers found that most participants prioritized the meaning of signs over their form and provided an acceptable rating score of 70%. However, the study by Ngampramuan (2019) largely focused on viewpoints from diverse locations and used a different process for sign selection, number of participants (456 participants), and grouping error signs into three classes, whereas the current study categorized them into a single group for 30 foreigners. Furthermore, changes in outcomes could be attributable to other factors, such as variations in the theoretical framework used.

Nevertheless, the study had limitations that should be considered for future research. (1) The study was conducted only in Sathorn and Sukhumvit; future studies might include other Central Business District (CBD) areas. (2) Data collection was limited by timing, as some areas transformed into nightclubs after 3 p.m., which affected the quality of images taken during that period. (3) The study focused mostly on grammatical errors on public signs in Thailand; therefore, it was suggested that future studies be focused on analyzing phonological, semantic, and pragmatic errors on public signs in Thailand.

Conclusion

The procedures for analyzing the data began with collecting 40 public signs in the Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas, constructing a Likert-scale questionnaire, and distributing it to 30 foreigners. The survey results were then analyzed, and grammatical errors were identified using Corder’s theory (1973). The purpose was divided into (1) to identify and categorize specific types of grammatical errors on English signs in the Central Business Districts (CBDs) of Bangkok, including Sathorn and Sukhumvit areas. The results indicated that 30% of the public signs contained selection errors, while 28% exhibited omission errors. These findings suggested that grammatical errors contributed to ambiguity on signs, particularly for foreigners. Upon closer examination of the signs with the lowest scores, 17% of the signs were the most confusing and incomprehensible to non-native speakers. The analysis further confirmed that the errors observed primarily involved omissions (e.g., missing articles, spaces, or misspellings), the use of inappropriate vocabulary, and incorrect grammatical functions. Previous opinions and analysis data, as shown in *Figure 4* indicated that the English language on signs was critical, and many signs were inconsistent, which reflected the quality of English teaching to be improved in the future; (2) to assess the perceptions of foreigners regarding the clarity and accuracy of these English signs with grammatical errors in the CBDs. 70% of the total signs received an acceptable rating, while none achieved an excellent rating. These results

reflected that the overall English language signs with errors were acceptable, meanwhile, none of the signs reached a high standard of English. Given the range of both positive and negative viewpoints expressed by participants, some comments raised questions about the meaning of the signs. For example, some participants noted, “I do not know what the business does’ or ‘is it a scam?” While others pointed out specific errors, such as “I understand, but ‘Special’ is misspelled.” To summarize, errors on signs reflected English proficiency, which required more attention to improve teaching methods and encourage Thai people to read and learn deeper English. Once the use of the English language improves, signs with accuracy and proper English can additionally boost the nation’s image in a more significant way.

References

- Abisamra, N. (2003). *An analysis of errors in Arabic speakers’ English writings*. Retrieved November 26, 2024, from <https://abisamra03.tripod.com/nada/languageacq-erroranalysis.htm>
- Ariani, N. M., & Artawa, K. (2022). Analysis of the grammatical errors of English public signs translations in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 18(2), 809-909. <https://www.jlls.org/index.php/jlls/article/view/2974>
- Backhaus, P. (2007). A comparative study of urban multilingualism in Tokyo. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 3(1), 52-66. <http://doi.org/10.21832/9781853599484>
- Bangkokpost. (2021, November). *English gets raw deal*. Bangkokpost. Retrieved February 9, 2024, from <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2219235/english-gets-raw-deal>
- Chaudary, F., & Moya, M. (2019). *An examination and analysis of a learner’s errors from the perspective of a pedagogical grammar* [Proceedings Conference]. Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching Conference Proceedings. <https://repository.uel.ac.uk/item/8452v>
- Corder, S., P., M. (1973). *Introducing applied linguistics* (n.d.). Penguin.
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M., J. (2015). *Pronunciation fundamentals*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/llt.42>
- Guo, M. (2012). Analysis on the English-translation errors of public signs. *Academy Publisher*, 2(6), 1214-1219. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.6>.
- Huebner, T. (2006). Bangkok’s linguistic landscapes: Environmental print, code mixing and language change. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 3(1), 31-51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790710608668384>
- Kachru, Y., & Smith, L., E. (2008). *Cultures, contexts, and world Englishes*. *World Englishes*, 28(1), 136-138. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2008.01574_3.x
- Landry, R., & Bourhis, R., Y. (1997). Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16(1), 23-49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927x970161002>

- Netthanyakonwong, A. (2023). The error analysis of Chinese translation of airport public signs in Thailand. *Journal of Studies in the field of Humanities*, 31(1), 147-169. <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/abc/article/view/261623>
- Ngampramuan, W. (2019). Intelligibility of English on signs in tourist attractions in Thailand. *ASIA journal*, 12(1), 95-121. http://www.asiajournal.ru.ac.th/pdfjs/web/viewer.html?file=http://www.asiajournal.ru.ac.th/journals/1580367435_a4.pdf
- Park, K., J., & Nakano, M. (2003). *Interlanguage and its role in English education: in cross-cultural distance learning and language acquisition* (n.d.). Hankook Publishing Company.
- Rhekhallilit, K. (n.d.). *Unit 1 intelligibility* [Paper presentation]. The English and Globalization course, Kasetsart University, Thailand.
- Smalley, W., A. (1994). *Linguistic diversity and national unity: Language ecology in Thailand* (n.d.). University of Chicago Press.
- Thaipost. (2022, November). *Kho a phai phitphlat "ko tho pho" chaeng kae khai pai APEC 2022 sakot phit laeo.* (in Thai) [EXAT Apologizes for Misspelled APEC 2022 Sign]. Thaipost. Retrieved February 9, 2024, from <https://www.thaipost.net/general-news/263245/>
- Thairath. (2017, March). *Rong sue pai bok sathan thong thiao 'doi phatang-wiangkaen' khian phit won hai kae.* (in Thai) [Locals Appeal Media as Their 'Doi Phatung - Wiangkaen' Tourist Sites Signs Misspelled]. Thairath. Retrieved February 9, 2024, from <https://www.thairath.co.th/news/local/873321>
- Thairath. (2017, September). *Chao wiang kaen rong sue pai bok thang khian phit klua khon sap son khwam mai plian.* (in Thai) [Wiangkaen Residents Plead Media as Their Direction Signs Baffles]. Thairath. Retrieved February 9, 2024, from <https://www.thairath.co.th/news/local/north/1059430>
- Talbot, D. (2023, December). *How many people speak English.* Wordsrated. Retrieved February 9, 2024, from <https://wordsrated.com/how-many-people-speak-english>
- Wang, Y., H. (2022, December). *Low English proficiency in Thailand could hinder the country's development prospects.* Thailand Business News. Retrieved February 22, 2024, from <https://www.thailand-business-news.com/business/94596-low-english-proficiency-in-thailand-could-hinder-the-countrys-development-prospects>