

Towards the internationalization of the University of Tsukuba: analysis of monolingual signboards on the university campus

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Abstract

The aim of this fieldwork study was to analyze monolingual signboards found throughout the grounds of the University of Tsukuba campus. Based on the database of the digital images taken on campus, the signboards were divided into four categories according to their linguistic messages, location and purpose: directions; transportation; safety; and announcements/service signboards. This pilot study will be followed by a future examination of the possible effects of monolingual signboards on Western students and researchers and the concept of anxiety.

Keywords: monolingual signboards, bilingual signboards, internationalization, classification

要旨

本研究の目的は、筑波大学キャンパスにおける日本語による看板のデータベース化、および範疇化である。予備調査の結果、以下の看板カテゴリーを提唱したい：案内表示の看板、交通機関関連の看板、安全関連の看板、一般情報提供やサービスの看板。今後、日本語による看板の西洋外国人学生・研究者への影響の可能性、および「不安」との関連性を検証する予定である。

キーワード：日本語による看板、バイリンガル看板、国際化、範疇化

Introduction

This study was inspired by the Taiwanese experience of applying the principle “Think globally, act locally” in order to create a bilingual environment of Chinese and English; specifically emphasizing the importance of bilingual signs for an international environment. In October 2003 the Taiwanese government came up with a plan to create an internationalized living environment through posting bilingual public signs in Chinese and English, adopting international symbols, translating Chinese websites into English and providing international living services.

In the local context of the University of Tsukuba, which, in 2009, had 1,661 foreigners from 104 countries affiliated with the institution¹, we applied the ‘Think globally, act locally’ pattern to the study of signboards. Monolingual signboards in Japanese on the university campus were analyzed and categorized into groups according to the nature of their linguistic message, their aim and their location.

Fieldwork outline

Signboards, as bearers of linguistic messages, participate in our process of communication with our environment by helping us navigate new surroundings. In the field of applied linguistics, unfamiliar scripts and writing systems have been recognized as fostering anxiety in language learners, especially at beginner level (Saito et al. 1999: 203). Lack of bilingual signboards in both Japanese and the international language of English presupposes that foreigners who cannot speak Japanese or do not understand *kanji* might encounter problems in navigating themselves on campus. By conducting a pilot study for the purpose of classifying monolingual signboards on the campus of the University of Tsukuba, we aim to provide a basis for future research into the relation between monolingual signboards and language learning anxiety.

In this fieldwork study we identified monolingual signboards throughout the grounds of the University of Tsukuba campus and created a database of their digital images. The signboards were then analyzed and classified into the categories detailed below according to the nature of their messages, their location and their aims.

Classification of monolingual signboards

1. Signboards of direction

Signboards which provide general directions in a new environment can be divided into ‘outside directions’ and ‘inside directions’.

1.1 Outside directions

The signboard below can be seen at the entrance of the Tsukuba University Hospital of the University of Tsukuba. It bears the original emblem of the university accompanied by the university name and a message to the effect that strangers are not allowed to enter and that visitors are requested to consult the information counter.



(taken by Tsygalnitsky on March 14, 2010)

Picture 1. Tsukuba University Hospital Entrance

The outside signboards of most buildings present the following pattern: the full Japanese name followed by the number of the building and the abbreviated form of the word ‘building’ (e.g. 3B 棟システム情報工学など支援室 3B Bldg.). The full titles of the buildings are only provided in Japanese.

1.2 Inside directions

Inside the buildings there are various signboards related to garbage disposal rules, smoking regulations, classroom divisions (as in the picture below which reads ‘laboratory’), fire extinguishers, electricity equipment, information on floor structure, etc. It should be noted that such signboards were also observed in the building of International Political Economy, where nearly half of the students and researchers are foreigners and the official language of education is English.



(taken by Tsygalnitsky on March 14, 2010)

Picture 2. Laboratory, Building of International Political Economy

2. Transportation signboards

Due to the fact that the university campus is very spacious, “1 km from east to west and 4 km from north to south, and encompasses an area of 245 hectares” (*International students’ guidebook 2010: 72*), the main modes of transportation on campus are bus and bicycle. Consequently, there are many signboards on the campus which are designed to help navigate pedestrians, alongside bus and bicycle users. Interestingly, the signboards which bear linguistic messages are only available in Japanese. These signboards were sub-categorized into ‘public transportation’ and ‘cyclists/pedestrians’.

2.1 Public transportation

The university has twenty seven bus stops with signboards showing the name of the bus stop and bus schedules for the campus.



(taken by Tsygalnitsky on September 25, 2010)

Picture 3. Bus stop Tsukuba University Hospital Entrance

2.2 Cyclists/pedestrians

Given the impressive size of the campus, most students and university staff use bicycles as the main mode of transportation around the campus. Accordingly, there are many signboards throughout the grounds of the campus which deal with parking regulations for bicycle users and pedestrians.



(taken by Tsygalnitsky on March 14, 2010)

Picture 4. Bicycle parking space

Picture 4 above shows a signboard which reads: 自転車置場 自転車は区画内に並べて置いてください (Bicycle parking area. Please place your bicycles inside this area).

Other representative signboards in this category are as follows:

- この場所は通路につき駐輪禁止です、駐輪してある場合には駐輪場などに移動します (Walking passage, no bicycle parking permitted, all bicycles parked here will be removed to bicycle parking lots.)
- 自転車乗入れ禁止 (No cycling allowed)
- 駐輪場 (Bicycle parking)
- 駐輪場入り口 (Bicycle parking entrance)
- 自転車の駐輪について(注意) 最近、所定の駐輪スペース以外に駐輪し、通路の妨げになる自転車が多数見受けられます。3B棟の改修工事に伴いK棟付近は狭くなっていますので、必ず駐輪場を利用してください。(Warning: Bicycle parking. Recently, many cases of bicycles parked in prohibited areas blocking pedestrian ways have been observed. Due to construction works in 3B building, the passage of K building is narrowed, so please park in the designated areas.)

As is clear from the above list, most signboards are aimed at regulating parking on campus and assuring the campus is a comfortable environment for pedestrians. These signboards can be seen outside the buildings, attached to the walls of the buildings or on pavements.

3. Safety signboards

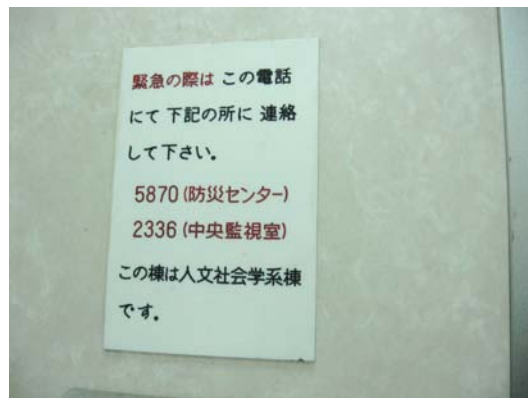
Some signboards are designed to warn pedestrians and/or bicycle users of a sudden change in surroundings in order to prevent accidents. These signboards can therefore be defined as ‘safety signboards’ (e.g. 走行注意 Cycle carefully!). The University of Tsukuba has a well known Faculty of Special Education and is considered to be a friendly environment for students with physical disabilities. One obvious representation of this is Braille blocks² on the campus pavements, and they are often accompanied by messages in Japanese. Picture 5 below shows one such message: 目の不自由な方のもので、自転車を載せないでください。(This is for visually impaired people. Please do not place your bicycles here.)



(taken by Tsygalnitsky on March 14, 2010)

Picture 5. Braille blocks

The following picture was taken in the elevator of the Building of Humanities and Social Sciences. The message of the signboard is an explanation of what to do in case of emergency, indicating the telephone apparatus installed in the elevator and phone numbers to ring. 緊急の際はこの電話にて下記のところに連絡してください。(In case of emergency, please ring the numbers below.) In other words, this message is directly related to the safety of elevator passengers in case of emergency and, as such, can be differentiated as a ‘safety message’.

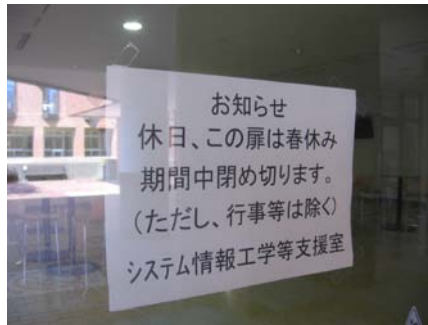


(taken by Tsygalnitsky on September 24, 2010)

Picture 6. Elevator emergency instructions

4. Announcements and service signboards

This category of signboard includes different kinds of announcements and university services. There are many announcements available in Japanese only about seasonal changes in the ways certain buildings operate and general regulations, such as information on smoking areas, rubbish disposal rules, influenza prevention measures, prohibition of cheating at exams, etc.



(taken by Tsygalnitsky on March 13, 2010)

Picture 7. Spring vacation notice

The message in Picture 7 is that the door will be locked on weekends during the spring vacation.

Cafeteria signboards, most of which are posted on the walls of the cafeteria, are also provided exclusively in Japanese (e.g. 焼き立てパン販売中! Freshly baked bread and cakes!).

Library signboards also belong in this category. Libraries represent the basic service which a university provides to its students and employees. However, the box for book returns at the library of Physical Education and Faculty of Arts and Design has no sign in English (図書返却ポスト, i.e. Book return box).

Another category of signboards provides information on job hunting in Japan. These signboards can be seen both inside and outside buildings.



(taken by Tsygalnitsky on September 25, 2010)

Picture 8. Job hunting information

Conclusion

As an international environment, the university should be foreigner friendly and people from different countries should be able to move freely and independently throughout its grounds. An insufficient number of signboards written in the international language of English, however, may imply that people who cannot speak Japanese and come from non-*kanji* countries have difficulties getting around the campus, which could lead to anxiety.

On the basis of the classification proposed in this pilot study, the possible influence of monolingual signboards on students' and researchers' anxiety will be the object of further study. Research methods such as interviews and questionnaires will be employed and international students and researchers affiliated with the University will be recruited as study participants.

¹ The data was taken in October 2009, based on the *International students' guidebook*, p.82.

² It should not be forgotten that Braille blocks, being an Asian invention, have spread to some European countries and the USA, whereas they are still hardly known in other countries. Some students from Eastern Europe and South East Asia, for example, are not necessarily familiar with the idea of Braille blocks.

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