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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Multilingualisation of Kamakura: Functions, Materials and Discourses of Shrine and Temple Signs

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ABSTRACT - Research on written signs in public spaces provides useful insights into Japan's rapidly increasing linguistic diversity. In this linguistic landscape study, we aim to understand how historical shrines and temples in Kamakura, Japan, accommodate non-Japanese visitors through the multilingualisation of their public signs. Our findings reveal that nearly half of the public signs are multilingual, with many being bilingual in Japanese and English. The multilingualisation of Kamakura's public signs relates to their function and materiality. Signs that explain the significance of structures in the shrines, temple as well as those that mark specific locations tend to be multilingual. Many multilingual signs also display rules against inappropriate behaviour. Languages other than Japanese are more commonly displayed on metal and paper signs than on wood and stone. Not all bilingual signs share the same discursive features; in some cases, variations between messages in different languages reveal differences in communicative intent and target audiences. These results showed a highly multilingualised landscape driven by tourism. However, we argue that there is a threshold for multilingualisation, as Kamakura navigates the balance between providing multilingual signs and preserving its traditional aesthetics.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Linguistic landscape is an expanding subfield of sociolinguistics that examines "all the visual forms of language present in the public space of a pre-determined geographical area" (Lou, 2016, p. 2). This approach effectively reveals a territory's linguistic repertoire and language policy. Since the early 2000s, linguistic landscape research has grown significantly, with landmark studies conducted in Israel, Belgium, Canada, Spain, and Japan establishing it as a distinct discipline. Language variation is a central theme in many of these studies, as researchers explore how globalisation, migration, tourism, technological innovations, language policy, and minority language revitalisation influence the languages displayed in public spaces (Gorter & Cenoz, 2024).

As a multidisciplinary field, linguistic landscape research employs various theoretical perspectives, including history, semiotics, economics, and cultural geography (Gorter & Cenoz, 2024). Many studies adopt a pragmatic approach, viewing public signs as a form of discourse that conveys the author's communicative intent to passers-by. For instance, numerous shop signs that emerged during the pandemic in Japan served as directives for preventive measures, compelling patrons to wear masks, maintain social distance, and sanitise their hands (Nakamura, 2022).

Linguistic landscape research primarily focuses on written language, but it also examines multimodal aspects such as colour, imagery, font, and material. The material of the signs can indicate their quality, permanence, and function. Cook (2014) found that stone and metal street signs in the UK that featured capital letters and archaic fonts conveyed a sense of permanence and quality. In contrast, handwritten or printed paper signs, which also used capital letters, signaled a temporary status and novelty, and primarily served informational purposes. Painted signs typically aimed to inform as well, but they often employed lowercase letters and unique letter forms to express identity.

Japan has long been perceived as a monolingual society with the Japanese language dominating all aspects of life. However, it is also home to a small but growing foreign population. Generations of Chinese and Korean "oldcomers" have resided in Japan, while an increasing influx of "newcomers" from Asia and Latin America in recent decades has made the country more culturally and linguistically diverse. The surge in international tourists leading up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and in the post-COVID period has further contributed to this diversity. In this study, we surveyed Kamakura, a popular tourist destination in Japan's Kanto region famous for its shrines and temples, to examine how the country's increasing diversity is reflected in its linguistic landscape.

1.1 Linguistic Landscape Research in Japan

Japan is an intriguing site for studying linguistic landscape. Its sprawling urban areas are especially rich with public signs displaying the Japanese language in its various scripts: logographic kanji, syllabic katakana and hiragana scripts, and romaji (Roman) letters. The prevalence of monolingual Japanese signs reflects the dominance of the Japanese language in most aspects of society, but Japan is not as monolingual as one might assume. Signs in English or other European languages have been used for its status-enhancing effects on Japanese readers (Jiang, 2009; MacGregor, 2003; Tanaka et al., 2007). However, multilingual signs increasingly serve the

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growing numbers of inbound tourists, foreign workers, and students in Japan. Already in 2003, about 20% of Tokyo signs were bilingual or multilingual with as many as 14 languages displayed (Backhaus, 2007).

However, most multilingual signs are limited to Japanese and English, largely due to language policy. The updated guidelines of the Japan Tourism Agency (2024) stipulate that English should be the primary language for multilingual signage. Numerous other government agencies also have similar guidelines. For example, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games organisers used only Japanese, English, and pictograms on their signs (Inoue, 2016). Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward (2025) mandates the bilingual display of Japanese and English, with Chinese and Korean included when deemed necessary. Local governments in regional areas, such as the Wakayama Prefectural Government, also emphasise English in public signage (Doering & Kishi, 2022). These top-down guidelines have made English the most visible foreign language in Japan's linguistic landscape.

Public signs displaying foreign languages other than English are relatively rare in Japan. They typically appear in specific areas, such as Tokyo's Shin-Okubo or Yokohama's Chinatown, where local and foreign tourists visit to experience Korean or Chinese culture. In these locations, signs often carry symbolic value, with Korean or Chinese languages and cultures commodified to create an authentic atmosphere (Nambu & Ono, 2024; Suzuki, 2022). Foreign languages other than English are also more visible in ethnic enclaves such as Oizumi town in Gunma, Homigaoka town in Aichi, Hamamatsu city in Shizuoka, and Suzuka city in Mie, where there is a large Japanese-Brazilian population. In these areas, many shops display Portuguese and Japanese-Portuguese bilingual signs (Nambu, 2021).

Outside of tourist destinations and ethnic enclaves, multilingual signs in foreign languages other than English are scarce. Many foreign residents in Japan originate from Asian or Latin American countries, but the languages they speak, such as Korean, Vietnamese, Spanish, Portuguese, and Nepali, are notably underrepresented in Japan's linguistic landscape. The lack of a visual presence can place foreign residents at a disadvantage during a natural disaster or pandemic. For instance, many post-disaster evacuation signs in Miyagi, an area severely affected by the 2011 Great Eastern Japan Earthquake, still display only Japanese and English (Tan & Ben-Said, 2015). Non-Japanese residents faced significant linguistic challenges during the 2011 disaster and would likely encounter similar difficulties if another disaster were to occur. Similarly, Nakamura's (2022) survey of COVID-19 signs in Tokyo and Kanagawa during the pandemic revealed that 74.1% were monolingual Japanese. While about a quarter were bilingual signs, most of them included only Japanese and English. Due to the strict border controls from 2020 to 2022, which resulted in very few foreign tourists entering Japan, authorities and businesses likely deemed multilingual COVID-19 signs unnecessary. However, many non-Japanese residents were living in Japan during the pandemic. Those who did not read Japanese or English had to rely on the images and placement of signs to understand their messages. The scarcity of multilingual COVID-19 signs showed a lack of attention paid to the needs of long-term foreign residents in Japan.

1.2 Linguistic Landscape Research at Places of Religious Worship

Places of religious worship are fascinating sites for linguistic landscape research. Signs displayed at sacred sites often reflect broader patterns of societal language use and represent diverse identities and ethnicities. In Malaysia, a country characterised by significant ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, the linguistic landscape of places of worship reveals the intricate relationships between religion and ethnicity. Coluzzi and Kitade (2015) conducted a qualitative study of seven places of worship in the diverse urban areas of Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya. They found that, while Malay is Malaysia's official language, it was prominently featured only in mosques, reflecting its close association with Islam and the Malay community. In contrast, English served as the primary language in Sikh gurdwaras, Catholic churches and Buddhist temples. Bilingual signs often included English alongside ethnic languages; for example, Buddhist temples displayed both Chinese and English, while Hindu temples featured Tamil and English. These findings underscore the high prestige of English in Malaysia, highlighting its status as a preferred language among Malaysians from various ethnic backgrounds. The status of English is also evident in the churches of the Philippines. Esteron's (2021) survey of Manaoag Church in Pangasinan revealed a prevalence of English monolingual signs, reinforcing the position of English as the preferred language for both churchgoers and tourists. While Latin and Spanish carry religious and historical importance, their presence was minimal. Likewise, signs in local languages such as Filipino and Pangasinan were notably sparse.

Linguistic landscape research offers valuable insights into the relationship between religion and national identity. Yusuf and Putrie (2022) examined the linguistic landscape of 31 community mosques in Indonesia and found that signs were predominantly monolingual or bilingual, featuring Indonesian, Arabic, or both. Aside from Arabic, no foreign languages were present, highlighting the role of Indonesian as a medium of instruction and a representation of national identity. While Arabic was primarily used for religious purposes, it also signified religious identity and affiliations within Indonesia. In Africa, the urban linguistic landscape offers insights into religious affiliations and rivalries. In an early study, Woldemariam and Lanza (2012) examined religious signs displayed by various Christian groups in downtown Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. They found that visible signs such as posters, banners, stickers, and advertisements for religious CDs were used to exert influence, recruit new believers, and reinforce the faith of existing devotees. These findings illustrate how the urban linguistic landscape can serve as a dynamic space for evangelisation, contestation and religious commodification.

Tourism has become a driver of change in the linguistic landscape of religious sites, as these locations are popular destinations for those interested in their spiritual, cultural, and historical significance. For many, visiting sacred sites often transcends mere tourism, evolving into a form of pilgrimage (Tufi, 2017). Such travel is motivated by spiritual rather than religious reasons as people seek enlightenment, knowledge, and improved spiritual and physical well-being (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). Thus, one does not necessarily need to practice Zen Buddhism to visit a Zen temple. Public signs at sacred sites likely influence the modern pilgrim's journey for spiritual growth and personal transformation. Hence, it is necessary to understand how the linguistic landscape at these places helps shape their experiences.

In Japan, an increase in multilingual signs at religious sites is aimed at accommodating foreign visitors. For example, at Kumano Hongu Taisha, a renowned shrine in Wakayama, nearly 70% of all signs were in English or bilingual Japanese-English (Doering & Kishida, 2022). Many of these English signs describe the different types of *omamori*—lucky charms or religious amulets available for purchase. The prominent use of English for selling *omamori* highlights the commodification of religion at Japanese shrines and temples.

Surprisingly, Tokyo's iconic Meiji Shrine features a relatively lower proportion of multilingual signs. Saruhashi (2016) found that 65.5% of the signs were monolingual Japanese, with the rest comprising bilingual Japanese-English signs (23%) and monolingual English signs (11.5%), and no additional foreign languages. While English text often overlapped with Japanese text in bilingual signs, the Japanese content conveyed more nuanced meanings. Japanese signs provided details on religious services, such as opening hours and rites, whereas English signs primarily identified locations and objects, and outlined offering procedures. Saruhashi's findings suggest that English signs cater to one-time foreign visitors by explaining the shrine's religious and cultural significance, whereas Japanese signs aim to encourage local visitors to return for ceremonies like christenings and weddings. Thus, the linguistic landscape of the Meiji Shrine reflected a distinction between two groups of visitors and an assumption about their purposes for visiting.

1.3 The Present Study

"Linguistic landscape quo vadis?"— this guiding question in linguistic landscape research examines what public signs reveal about the diachronic evolution of a region's linguistic landscape (Backhaus, 2007). More than two decades have passed since Backhaus' pioneering survey of Tokyo's linguistic landscape in 2003 (published in 2007). At that time, he concluded that Tokyo was not multilingual, with about 80% of signs along the Yamanote train line being monolingual Japanese. Since then, Japan has seen rapid diversification due to an influx of people for work, study, and tourism. Between 2023 and 2024, the number of foreign residents increased by 11.01% (Inoue, 2024). Although inbound tourism was halted from 2020 to 2022, recent foreign tourist numbers have surpassed pre-pandemic levels (Pipkin, 2024). The question "Linguistic landscape quo vadis?" is highly relevant in the light of these recent trends.

This paper aims to address this question by exploring how the increasing influx of non-Japanese individuals into the country is reflected in a more multilingual linguistic landscape. Specifically, we investigate the degree to which public spaces in Japan are undergoing "multilingualisation," a term we use to describe the inclusion of languages other than the dominant societal language, Japanese, in public signage.

We surveyed Kamakura, a city in Kanagawa Prefecture near Tokyo, which served as the capital of the Kamakura Shogunate from the 12th to the 14th century. Once a center of trade and culture, the city boasts many shrines and temples from its prosperous Kamakura period. Today, both Japanese and international visitors flock to its traditional places of worship, illustrating the popularity of modern pilgrimages (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). Kamakura's popularity makes it an ideal site to investigate Japan's increasing linguistic diversity. Our study examines the presence of multilingual signs at Kamakura's various shrines and temples and their linguistic features to understand the extent to which its linguistic landscape is changing. The following are our research questions:

1. To what extent are public signs in Kamakura's shrines and temples multilingual?
2. How do the function and materiality of the signs relate to the languages displayed?
3. What are the discursive differences between messages written in Japanese and those in other languages?

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data Collection

Linguistic landscape research can utilise either quantitative or qualitative approaches, but a combination of both methods often yields the most comprehensive results (Backhaus, 2019; Blackwood, 2015). In this study, we employed a mixed-method approach, supplementing quantitative data with qualitative data. We surveyed 13 shrines and 29 temples, recording 554 signs during three fieldwork trips in May and June 2023 (see Table 1). The signs were photographed using a mobile device and documented in an Excel spreadsheet for analysis.

Table 1

List of shrines and temples surveyed in alphabetical order (*N*=42)

Shrines (*n*=13)		**Temples (*n*=29)**			
Amanawa Shinmei-gū	Tsurugaoka Hachiman-gū	Anyo-in	Hongaku-ji	Kencho-ji	Myohon-ji
Egara Tenjin	Yakumo	Betsugan-ji	Honko-ji	Kokuzodo	Myoryu-ji
Goryo	Yasaka Okami	Daigyo-ji	Jochi-ji	Kosho-ji	Raiko-ji
Hiruko	Yuinowakamiya	Eishō-ji	Joei-ji	Kosoku-ji	Shugen-ji
Kamakura-gū	Zeniarai Benten	Engaku-ji	Jōgyō-ji	Kotoku-in	Tokei-ji
Kuzuharaoka		Enmei-ji	Joju-in	Kyōon-ji	
Sasuke Inari		Gokuraku-ji	Jufuku-ji	Meigetsu-in	
Shirahata		Hokai-ji	Kamakura Hasedera	Myocho-ji	

2.2 Data Analysis

The data were analysed according to the following categories:

2.2.1 Languages

Signs were analysed according to the languages displayed to understand the extent to which Kamakura's linguistic landscape is becoming multilingual. The languages displayed are further analysed according to language order. We classified signs as monolingual if they contained only Japanese and as multilingual if they included other languages, with or without Japanese. For analytical purposes, monolingual foreign language signs, such as those in English, were also categorised as multilingual.

2.2.2 Function

We adopted a pragmatic approach in examining the languages displayed and the types of messages conveyed by the signs. We categorised the signs into nine pragmatic functions, using Saruhashi's (2016) five categories—*guide, explanation, request, rule,* and *works*—and adding four additional categories, i.e., *indication, caution, wishes,* and *hybrid*, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Categories of temple and shrine signs according to function

Function	Description
Guide	Provides essential information about the facility, such as maps, opening/closing times and admission prices
Explanation	Describes a particular structure and its history, or explains the procedures for offering prayers
Request	Requests visitors to comply with manners such as masking or observing silence
Rule	Warns visitors of improper conduct in the facility, e.g., prohibition of photography or smoking
Works	Indicates an important cultural property, e.g., *waka* or *haiku* (Japanese poetry)
Indication	Functions as a location marker by displaying the name of a structure or place
Caution	Cautions visitors of potential danger, e.g., a low ceiling or slippery floor
Wishes	Expresses gratitude to visitors who visit (e.g., Thank you for coming) or offers a prayer or wish (e.g., May peace prevail on earth)
Hybrid	Combines two or more functions, e.g., a *guide* and *rule* sign or an *indication* and *request* sign

2.2.3 Materials

We analysed the signs based on the materials from which they were made, i.e., metal, wood, paper, stone, and others (e.g., cloth, glass and plastic) and examined how these materials relate to the messages they convey.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Language(s) Displayed on Signs

Table 3 categorises the signs based on the order of languages displayed. The left column lists Japanese monolingual signs and multilingual signs where Japanese is prominently positioned at the top. The results show that Japanese appears on most signs (N=526, 94.9% of the 554 signs we surveyed). More than half are monolingual Japanese signs (N=297, 53.6%), highlighting the language's dominance in public spaces in Kamakura. Conversely, the right column lists the few English-only and bilingual/multilingual signs where English or another foreign language is placed at the top (N=28, 5.1%), with Japanese appearing in the second, third, or fourth position in those instances.

Multilingual signs make up nearly half of the total signs (*N*=257, 46.4%). The most common multilingual sign features Japanese and English (JE) (*N*=177, 32.0%), followed by signs displaying Japanese, English, Simplified Chinese, and Korean (JESCK) (*N*=36, 6.5%). While Kamakura's linguistic landscape primarily features Japanese and some English, with Simplified Chinese and Korean appearing less frequently, we also identified other foreign languages, including Thai, French, Spanish, German, Sanskrit, and Tibetan. This diverse range reflects Kamakura's multilingualism, although signs in these languages are still relatively few.

Interestingly, signs featuring Tibetan and Sanskrit scripts can be found at Jōju-in, a well-known Shingon Buddhist temple. As part of the practice of Japanese Esoteric Buddhism, the temple incorporates the chanting of mantras in these sacred languages, which also appear in its linguistic landscape. Figure 1 shows a Japanese-Tibetan bilingual sign that provides instructions for offering a prayer. The lower half of the sign features a Tibetan mantra, while *hiragana* characters above the Tibetan text help Japanese devotees recite the prayer phonetically. The Tibetan script serves both religious and aesthetic purposes. It is symbolic, as most Japanese people would read the *hiragana* gloss, not the Tibetan script. Such signs are rare; we identified only two bilingual signs featuring Tibetan or Sanskrit, both displayed exclusively at Jōju-in and not at any other temples. In comparison to the Japanese-Tibetan sign in Figure 1,

the Sanskrit sign only displays a *hiragana* gloss, omitting the Sanskrit script entirely. This is likely due to pragmatic reasons, as the gloss alone would suffice for recitation. Signs containing mantras in their original or Japanese form likely serve to disseminate Buddhist worship among Japanese visitors, as no other foreign languages are displayed.

Table 3

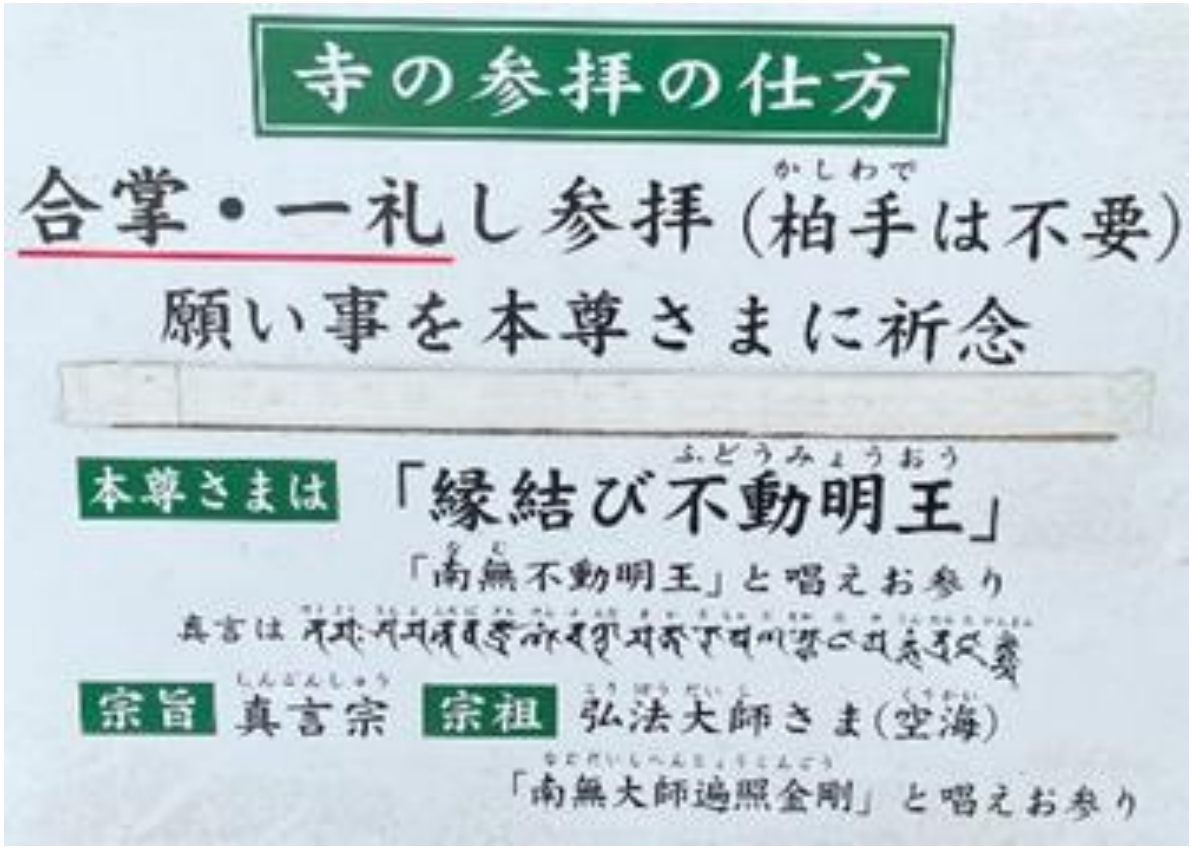
Signs according to languages and their order of display

Signs with Japanese at the top		No.	Signs with other languages at the top		No.
1.	J	297	1.	E	14
2.	J, E	177	2.	E, J, SC, K	1
3.	J, E, F, S, G, SC, TC, K	1	3.	E, SC, J	1
4.	J, E, K, SC	3	4.	E, SC, K	2
5.	J, E, K, SC, TC	1	5.	E, SC, K, J	1
6.	J, E, SC	2	6.	E, SC, TC	1
7.	J, E, SC, K	36	7.	CJ	5
8.	J, E, SC, TC, K	2	8.	CJ, E	1
9.	J, K, SC	1	9.	Th, E, J	2
10.	J, R	2			
11.	J, R, E	1			
12.	J, Sa	1			
13.	J, SC, E	1			
14.	J, Ti	1			
	Total	526			28

Abbreviations: Japanese (J), English (E), Simplified Chinese (SC), Traditional Chinese (TC), Korean (K), Classical Japanese (CJ), Roman alphabet (R), French (F), Spanish (S), German (G), Thai (Th), Sanskrit (Sa), Tibetan (Ti)

Figure 1

A bilingual Japanese-Tibetan sign



3.2 Function of Signs

Table 4 shows that the most common function of signs is to indicate place names (*N*=153). Given the numerous structures within Kamakura's shrine and temple complexes, these *indication* signs are essential for guiding visitors. The second most common type of sign is the *rule* sign (*N*=111), which primarily prohibits activities like trespassing and smoking, as many of these sites are made from wood and are vulnerable to fire risks. *Explanation* signs come next (*N*=104), followed by *guide* signs (*N*=87). The remaining functions, i.e., *request, hybrid, caution, wishes,* and *works*, constitute a minority within Kamakura's linguistic landscape.

However, the proportion of signs for each pragmatic function varies according to the type of sign. Many monolingual signs perform the *indication* function. They account for a third of all monolingual signs (*N*=96, 32.3%). This is followed by *rule* (*N*=62, 20.9%) and *guide* (*N*=47, 15.8%). In contrast, the most common function of multilingual signs is *explanation* (*N*=65, 25.3%), followed by *indication* (*N*=57, 22.2%) and *rule* (*N*=49, 19.1%). *Explanation* is proportionately lower in monolingual signs compared to multilingual signs, with only 13.1% (*N*=39) representing this function. Many multilingual signs perform the *explanation* function by offering brief insights into the buildings and rituals at the shrine, such as how to make an offering. These signs are displayed for foreign visitors to understand the shrine or temple's significance and its associated rituals, highlighting how the multilingualisation of Kamakura's public signs is closely tied to their pragmatic functions.

Table 4

Signs according to type and function

Type of sign	*Guide*	*Explanation*	*Request*	*Rule*	*Works*	*Indication*	*Caution*	*Wishes*	*Hybrid*	*Total*
Multilingual signs	40	65	16	49	3	57	5	5	17	257
(%)	(15.6)	(25.3)	(6.2)	(19.1)	(1.2)	(22.2)	(1.9)	(1.9)	(6.6)	100
Monolingual signs	47	39	25	62	2	96	7	1	18	297
(%)	(15.8)	(13.1)	(8.4)	(20.9)	(0.7)	(32.3)	(2.4)	(0.3)	(6.1)	100
Total	87	104	41	111	5	153	12	6	35	554

3.3 Materiality of Signs

We examined the signs' materiality and their relation to the displayed languages. Table 5 summarises monolingual and multilingual signs across five different material categories. The results reveal that most signs are made of wood (*N*=211), followed by metal (*N*=153) and paper (*N*=148). While wooden signs are the most common, there are more monolingual wooden signs (*N*=141, 66.8%) compared to multilingual ones (*N*=70, 33.2%). The prominent display of monolingual wooden signs, which blend into the surrounding structures made from the same material, shows a greater emphasis on tradition and aesthetic over multilingualisation.

Table 5

Type of materials used for signs

Material	Monolingual signs		Multilingual signs		Total
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.
Metal	60	(39.2%)	93	(60.8%)	153
Paper	65	(43.9%)	83	(56.1%)	148
Stone	28	(87.5%)	4	(12.5%)	32
Wood	141	(66.8%)	70	(33.2%)	211
Others	3	(30%)	7	(70%)	10
	297	(53.6%)	257	(46.4%)	554

Wooden signs are generally older and have undergone little multilingualisation, presumably because the messages they display are not considered critical for non-Japanese readers to understand. For example, the wooden Japanese sign on the top left of Figure 2 indicates that the stone structure behind it is the *hondō* (main hall). Both the wooden sign and the stone structure next to it make a harmonious aesthetic that is part of Kamakura's charm. In contrast, new multilingual signs made from contemporary materials lack the same aesthetic appeal. Thus, the prevalence of Japanese monolingual wooden signs reflects their dual role in maintaining the traditional surroundings and conveying information deemed less essential for non-Japanese visitors.

Metal signs are the most likely to display languages other than Japanese, with multilingual metal signs (*N*=93, 60.8%) outnumbering monolingual metal signs (*N*=60, 39.2%). For instance, the metal explanation sign at the bottom left of Figure 2 provides

background information on the Great Buddha statue in both Japanese and English. Similarly, paper signs also show a preference for multilingualism, with 56.1% being multilingual (*N*=83) compared to 43.9% monolingual (*N*=65). Paper signs can be quickly and easily printed, making them more likely to display additional languages for essential information aimed at non-Japanese visitors. An example is the prohibition sign at the bottom right of Figure 2, which was exclusively written in English.

Figure 2

Signs made from wood, stone, paper and metal (clockwise from top left)

Interestingly, there are very few multilingual signs made of stone. Stone signs mostly display Japanese (*N*=28, 87.5%). For example, the stone sign shown at the top right of Figure 2 bears the name of the shrine, *Shichifuku Jinja*, in *kanji* characters. Such symbolic stone signs are unlikely to be replaced with multilingual versions due to their historical and symbolic significance. These observations suggest a relationship between materiality and the extent of multilingualisation in Kamakura's signage, with metal and paper signs being more likely to feature additional languages compared to wooden or stone signs.

This relationship can be further explored by examining the function of each type of sign. As shown in Table 6, a significant number of wooden signs (*N*=73, 34.6% of all wooden signs) and stone signs (*N*=28, 87.5% of all stone signs) perform the *indication* function. Many of these are monolingual Japanese signs, as noted earlier in Table 5. The two signs at the top of Figure 2 exemplify this trend, as they display the names of specific shrines or temple structures. In contrast, metal and paper signs serve a broader range of functions. Many metal signs have the *explanation* (*N*=55, 36.0%), *guide* (*N*=27, 17.6%), or *indication* (*N*=25, 16.3%) functions. Similarly, paper signs predominantly function as a *guide* (*N*=42, 28.4%) or *rule* (*N*=32, 21.6%).

Table 6

Materiality of signs according to function

Material	Guide	Explanation	Request	Rule	Works	Indication	Caution	Wishes	Hybrid	Total
Metal	27	55	11	18	2	25	5	4	6	153
Paper	42	14	13	32	1	22	4	2	18	148
Stone	1	1			1	28			1	32
Wood	15	33	17	59	1	73	3		10	211
Others	2	1		2		5				10
Total	87	104	41	111	5	153	12	6	35	554

Metal signs generally contain more permanent information than paper signs. Many *explanation* signs made from metal provide an overview of the shrine or temple structures such as their historical background. In contrast, the many paper-based *guide* and *rule* signs tend to convey information that is susceptible to change (as illustrated in the example at the bottom right of Figure 2). These signs are

quickly printed and laminated for display and exhibit a high level of multilingualisation. Overall, these findings on materiality suggest that metal and paper signs are more likely to feature multiple languages, conveying essential information to accommodate the growing number of international visitors.

3.4 Discursive Features of Signs

We took a qualitative approach in our discursive analysis, focusing on signs that reveal discursive differences. Adopting this approach precludes generalisation but offers valuable insights into how and why some differences may emerge. In this section, we provide some examples of multilingual signs where the discourse of the English or Simplified Chinese text does not fully align with the original Japanese text. While such discrepancies do not represent the majority of our sample, they demonstrate how messages may shift between languages, reflecting the different communicative intent and assumptions about the target audiences.

Take the sign in Figure 3 that outlines COVID-19 preventive measures at a shrine, for example - the first request in Japanese translates to “Please wear a mask when visiting the shrine,” while the English version elaborates, stating, “For your health and the health of shrine staff, please wear a mask in the shrine precinct.” This English translation is lengthier and more explicit. Similarly, the second request in Japanese advises visitors to “keep a social distance and avoid crowding when visiting,” but the English translation adds the rationale: “to avoid the risk of infection.” These additional phrases suggest that shrine administrators felt compelled to provide justifications for non-Japanese visitors to adhere to COVID-19 measures. This finding aligns with Nakamura (2022), which also noted the explicitness of English translations on COVID-19 signs in Japan.

Figure 3

A Japanese-English sign on COVID-19 preventive measures

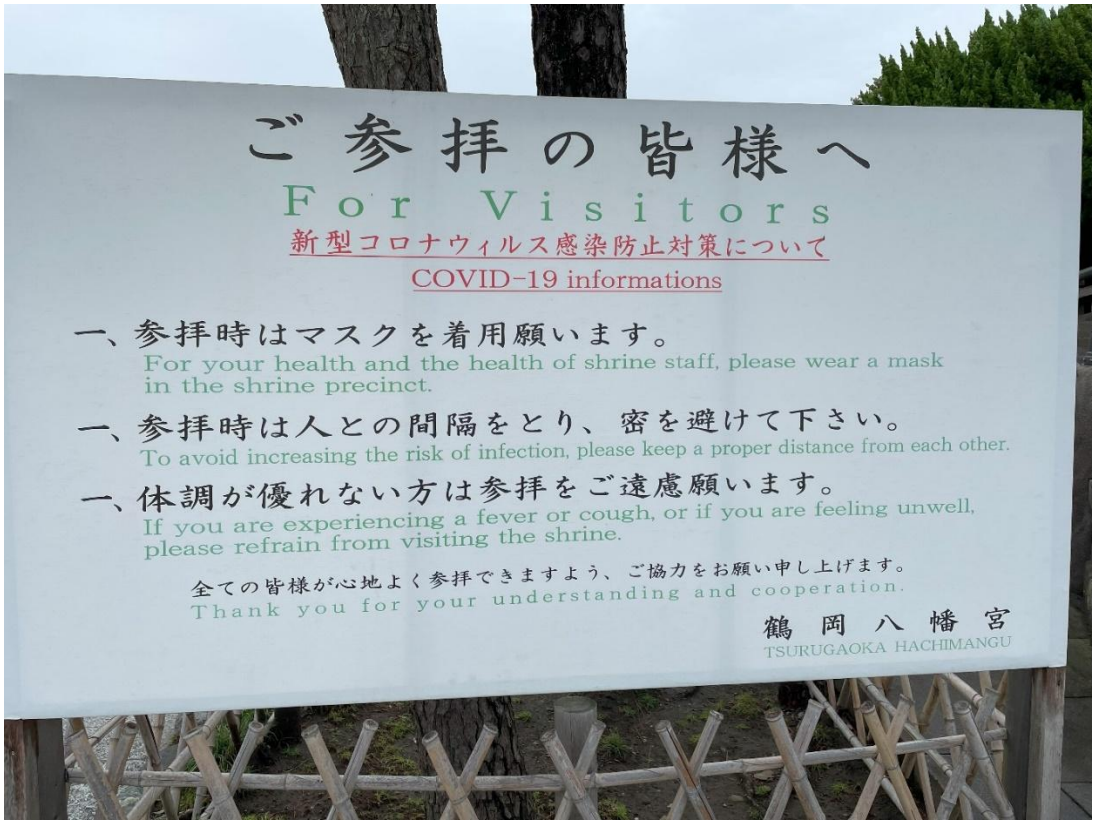
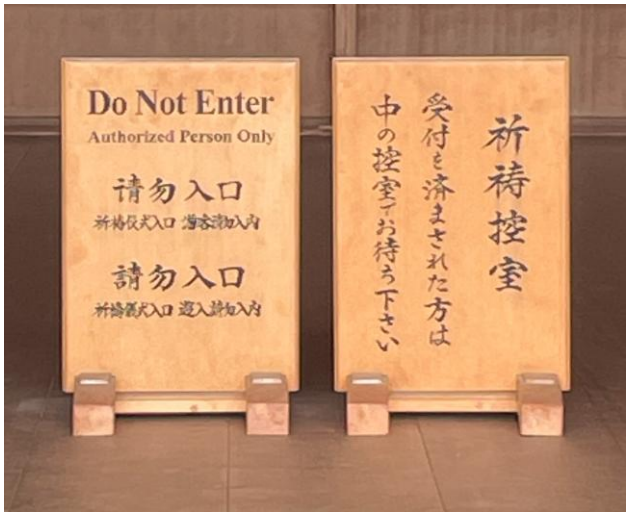


Figure 4 is another example of the discursive differences between messages written in Japanese and other languages. The sign on the left is a multilingual rule sign, prominently displaying “Do not enter” and “Authorized person only” in English with similar messages in Simplified and Traditional Chinese at the bottom. In contrast, the monolingual Japanese sign on the right indicates that it is the *kitō hikaeshitsu* (waiting room for prayers). It invites devotees who have registered for a prayer ritual to enter inside. Thus, while the English-Chinese multilingual sign serves a regulatory purpose, the Japanese sign performs *indication* and *request* functions.

The functional and discursive differences between the Japanese sign and its English-Chinese multilingual equivalent reflect the assumptions made by shrine administrators about visitors to the shrine. Japanese visitors are regarded as devotees who participate in rituals and ceremonies and are therefore asked to wait in designated areas. In contrast, English and Chinese readers are perceived as tourists who do not partake in these special rites. As a result, the multilingual sign focuses on prohibiting entry rather than explaining the purpose of the space.

Figure 4

A monolingual Japanese sign and its equivalent in English, Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese



This finding aligns with Saruhashi (2016), who noted that Japanese signs at the Meiji Shrine are intended for regular Japanese visitors who return for events and ceremonies, while English signs cater to one-time foreign visitors. While these assumptions generally hold true, exceptions may arise. For instance, English-speaking guests attending a wedding ceremony at the shrine might hesitate to enter the waiting area upon seeing the 'Do not enter' sign in Figure 4. Signs with contrasting messages, as shown in Figure 4, reflect the guidelines of the Japan Tourism Agency (2014), which suggest that bilingual Japanese-English signage can be omitted for non-essential information. The agency cites the example of a sign indicating the stationmaster's office at a train station, which can remain monolingual. Similarly, the sign marking a prayer waiting room in Figure 4 may have been considered non-essential for foreign visitors, who are assumed not to be worshippers, so it was displayed only in Japanese and accompanied by an English-Chinese prohibition sign.

4.0 DISCUSSION

The linguistic landscape of Japan's traditional shrines and temples plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences of the many international travelers who flock there. Multilingual signs help them to understand the spiritual, cultural, and historical significance of these places and enhance their experience. Our study reveals that the linguistic landscape of Kamakura's temples and shrines is highly multilingual, with 46.4% (*N*=257) of public signs containing an additional language (cf. Tables 4 and 5). This is higher than what Saruhashi (2016) found at the iconic Meiji Shrine in Tokyo where slightly over a third of the signs were in English or bilingual in Japanese and English. However, the degree of multilingualisation in Kamakura is not as high as the famous Kumano Hongu Taisha shrine in Wakayama where nearly 70% of public signs were either in English or bilingual Japanese-English (Doering & Kishi, 2022). A likely explanation is that our results are an average from 42 shrines and temples in Kamakura. Larger and more popular sites, such as Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine and Kotoku-in Temple (home to the bronze Great Buddha statue), have a higher number of multilingual signs. Like many previous studies, we found that multilingual signs often contain Japanese and English (*N*=177, 32.0%). The underlying assumption that non-Japanese visitors read Japanese or English indicates that those who do not understand either language would face some difficulty in navigating Kamakura's shrines and temples.

Nevertheless, the high degree of multilingualisation involving English that is found in Kamakura highlights the growth of mass international tourism in Japan. *Explanation* is the most common function of multilingual signs. These signs reflect the Japanese concept of hospitality, or *omotenashi*, as shrines and temples "host" foreign visitors by offering cultural, historical, or even spiritual explanations of the various sites on their sacred grounds (Doering & Kishi, 2022). *Indication* signs and *rule* signs are also prominently displayed to help non-Japanese visitors navigate their visit and respect the rules and traditions of the shrine or temple. Analysis of the materiality of the signs also highlighted how Kamakura's linguistic landscape has been altered by tourism. Metal and paper signs are more likely to feature English and other foreign languages compared to wood or stone signs, with multilingual metal and paper signs already outnumbering their monolingual counterparts (cf. Table 5). The choice of materials, particularly paper, reflects the recent and temporary nature of the messages they convey. These signs can be easily printed and are used to communicate information that may change, such as rules and admission fees.

These results raise the question of whether Kamakura's linguistic landscape will become increasingly multilingual as inbound tourism continues to expand. Will multilingual signs exceed monolingual signs in the future? And will English dominate the linguistic landscape instead of the Japanese? Linguistic deterritorialisation due to overtourism has been observed in Venice, one of the most visited cities in the world. Tufi (2017) found that written Italian plays a limited role in Venice with approximately 50% of publicly visible signage displaying various tourist languages, particularly English, often with or without Italian. Due to its linguistic deterritorialisation, Tufi regards Venice as a heterotopia, i.e., a different place that exists in parallel to the real world. However, we contend that, while the proportion of multilingual signs in Kamakura is also high, as in Venice, a threshold for multilingualisation of signs exists even as inbound

tourism accelerates. Currently, monolingual Japanese signs in Kamakura still constitute the majority, and most multilingual signs prominently feature Japanese at the top.

The permanence of the public signs in Kamakura, as reflected in their materiality, suggests the continued visual presence of the Japanese language. Many older Japanese monolingual signs contain information that remains stable over time, such as the name of a shrine (cf. Figure 5). They are usually made from high-quality wood and stone by skilled craftsman (e.g., top half of Figure 2), so they would not be easily replaced by newer multilingual versions unless they convey highly critical information for non-Japanese visitors, such as exit locations. Discursive features that exist in some messages written in Japanese and other languages also indicate that monolingual and multilingual signs will continue to co-exist in Kamakura's linguistic landscape. As Saruhashi (2016) observed in her study of signs at the Meiji Shrine, contrasting messages in Japanese and other languages reveal underlying assumptions about the target audience and their reasons for visiting. Although signs like those in Figure 4 are rare, they demonstrate how Japanese readers are positioned as religious pilgrims participating in prayers and rituals, while non-Japanese readers are regarded as sightseeing tourists. This differentiation suggests that monolingual Japanese signs will likely continue to serve purposes distinct from multilingual ones.

Moreover, linguistic landscape has informational and symbolic functions (Matwick & Matwick, 2019). In Kamakura, traditional Japanese monolingual signs made from wood and stone will likely remain in place because they hold symbolic value and contribute to the aesthetic appeal of the shrines and temples, which attracted non-Japanese tourists in the first place. Particularly, many stone signs may be as old as the shrines and temples, and possess significant historical and cultural value. Non-Japanese visitors may not be able to understand what the messages on Japanese monolingual signs mean, but they may "read" the written Japanese scripts as "spiritual", "mysterious" or "exotic". The visual presence of Japanese enhances the authenticity of their modern pilgrimage and allows them to connect with the spiritual, cultural, and historical elements of the shrine or temple. The Japan Tourism Agency (2024) also recognises the importance of maintaining Japanese monolingual signs by waiving the need for multilingual signage that might impact the aesthetics of a place. Thus, a threshold for the display of multilingual signs arguably exists as Kamakura strikes a balance between providing information for foreign visitors and preserving the authenticity and tradition of its places of worship.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Despite its long-standing image as a monolingual society, Japan has become linguistically more diverse in recent years. Our survey of Kamakura revealed a highly multilingualised landscape in its many shrines and temples, with nearly as many multilingual signs as monolingual ones. The multilingualisation of Kamakura's public signs is closely linked to their pragmatic function and materiality. Signs that explain the significance of structures and mark specific locations tend to be multilingual, and many also outline rules against inappropriate behavior. Multilingual signs are more commonly found on metal and paper signs, while wood and stone signs typically feature Japanese only. Some signs in our sample also exhibited discursive differences between the messages written in Japanese and those in other languages, reflecting assumptions about the intended readers and the presumed purpose of their visit. These findings highlight a highly multilingual landscape driven by tourism and the needs of foreign visitors. Nevertheless, we argue that a threshold for multilingualisation likely exists, as Kamakura seeks to balance the provision of multilingual information with the preservation of its traditional aesthetic. As the next step in our research, we will interview temple and shrine administrators to explore how they navigate this balance. As Japan continues to progress into the 21st century with rapid diversification, the question "Linguistic landscape quo vadis?" becomes increasingly relevant. Further research on its linguistic landscape would further capture the country's ongoing transition to a multilingual and multicultural society.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ryo Tanabe (Conceptualisation; Methodology; Validation; Formal analysis; Data curation; Investigation; Visualisation; Writing - original draft)

Janice Nakamura (Conceptualisation; Methodology; Validation; Resources; Visualisation; Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing; Project administration; Supervision)

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