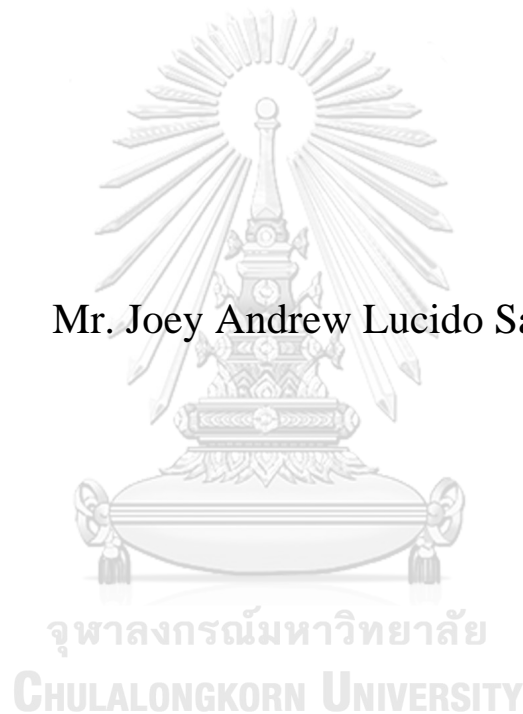


# SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPE OF BANGKOK SEX TOURISM SPACES

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English as an International  
Language

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ภูมิทัศน์สัญณะของพื้นที่ท่องเที่ยวทางเพศในกรุงเทพมหานคร



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โจอี้ แอนด์รู ลูซิโด ซานโตส : ภูมิทัศน์สัญญาของพื้นที่ท่องเที่ยวทางเพศในกรุงเทพมหานคร. ( SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPE OF BANGKOK SEX TOURISM SPACES) อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก : ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร.ภาวดี สายสุวรรณ

การท่องเที่ยวทางเพศได้รับความสนใจจากแวดวงวิชาการทางภูมิทัศน์สัญญาที่ค่อนข้างจำกัดตลอดช่วงสองทศวรรษที่ผ่านมา แม้ว่าจะเป็นพื้นที่ที่สำคัญอย่างมากในการศึกษาวิจัยก็ตาม ด้วยเหตุนี้ ผู้วิจัยจึงศึกษาการประกอบสร้างทางวาทกรรมของพื้นที่ท่องเที่ยวทางเพศในกรุงเทพมหานคร บริเวณสีลม ซอยดาวบอย และนานาพลาซ่า งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อระบุรูปแบบของการเลือกภาษา และสัญญาในป้ายทางเพศ วิเคราะห์บทบาทของทรัพยากรทางภาษาและสัญญาในการบ่งชี้เพศสภาพและเพศวิถี และศึกษาการประกอบสร้างทางวาทกรรมของพื้นที่ท่องเที่ยวทางเพศในกรุงเทพมหานคร ข้อมูลในการศึกษาประกอบด้วยรูปถ่ายของป้ายทางเพศจำนวน 122 ป้ายนอกจากนี้ผู้วิจัยยังได้สังเกตการณ์แบบไม่มีส่วนร่วมในบริเวณพื้นที่ของการศึกษาเป็นระยะเวลาประมาณ 5 เดือน การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลดังกล่าวมุ่งเน้นที่ป้ายร้านและป้ายส่งเสริมการขายที่พบในสถานบันเทิง ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้กรอบการศึกษาแบบผสมผสานในการศึกษาป้ายทางเพศดังกล่าว รูปแบบการเลือกภาษาในป้ายที่พบจากผลการศึกษา ได้แก่ การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเท่านั้น การใช้ภาษาอังกฤษกับภาษาไทย และการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษกับภาษาอื่น ๆ โดยป้ายที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเท่านั้นมีความสำคัญมากที่สุดทั้งในเชิงความถี่ของการปรากฏและความเด่น รูปแบบทางสัญญาที่พบมีทั้งการใช้เรือนร่างของคน อวัยวะ สัตว์ และสิ่งของ เรือนร่างของผู้ชาย ผู้หญิง และผู้หญิงข้ามเพศ ปรากฏเป็นรูปเงาในป้ายร้าน ในขณะที่ปรากฏเป็นรูปถ่ายในป้ายส่งเสริมการขาย ทั้งทรัพยากรทางภาษาและสัญญาต่างทำให้เกิดการประกอบสร้างอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศสภาพและเพศวิถี กระบวนการกลายเป็นคำศัพท์ที่พบจากข้อมูล ได้แก่ การทำให้เป็นส่วนบุคคล การสร้างลักษณะเฉพาะ การทำให้เป็นวัตถุทางเพศ การทำให้เป็นรักต่างเพศ การทำให้เป็นความหลากหลายทางเพศ และการสร้างจินตนาการ คำศัพท์บางคำเป็นเครื่องบ่งชี้สำคัญของอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศสภาพและเพศวิถี โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่ง “boy” และ “male” สำหรับชายรักเพศเดียวกัน “ladies” และ “girls” สำหรับหญิงรักต่างเพศ และ “ladyboy” สำหรับผู้หญิงข้ามเพศ เรือนร่างของผู้หญิงถูกบ่งชี้ด้วยนมล่อน รองเท้าส้นสูง และการเปลือยกายในรูปเงา ในขณะที่เรือนร่างของผู้หญิงข้ามเพศถูกบ่งชี้ด้วยชุดบิกินี ลักษณะดังกล่าวพบได้ในป้ายบริเวณซอยดาวบอย นานาพลาซ่า และพัฒนาพงศ์ 1 ซึ่งเป็นบริเวณที่ทราบกันว่ามีความหลากหลายทางเพศ ในขณะที่เรือนร่างของผู้ชายที่มีกล้ามเนื้อพบได้ในป้ายบริเวณพัฒนาพงศ์ 2 และสีลม 4 ซึ่งเป็นบริเวณที่มีฐานลูกค้าเป็นกลุ่มผู้มีความหลากหลายทางเพศ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งชายรักเพศเดียวกัน ผลการศึกษาชี้ว่าพื้นที่ท่องเที่ยวทางเพศในกรุงเทพมหานครประกอบสร้างขึ้นผ่านวิถีปฏิบัติทางวาทกรรม ซึ่งทับซ้อนกันอยู่ในทรัพยากรทางภาษาและสัญญาบนป้ายต่าง ๆ ผู้วิจัยพบว่าป้ายทางเพศถือเป็นผลรวมทางสัญญาซึ่งแสดงให้เห็นถึงภาษา เพศสภาพ เพศวิถี อัตลักษณ์ และอำนาจ ซึ่งอยู่ในพื้นที่ และยังแสดงให้เห็นถึงคุณค่าเชิงสัญลักษณ์และเชิงเศรษฐกิจของภาษาด้วย นอกจากนี้ทั้งภาษาและสัญญาต่างก็มีส่วนในการประกอบสร้างพื้นที่ของความปรารถนาด้วย ผลการศึกษาของงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มีความสำคัญต่อการทำความเข้าใจพื้นที่ท่องเที่ยวทางเพศในประเทศไทยและต่อแวดวงภาษาศาสตร์สังคมในสังคมไทย งานวิจัยนี้แสดงให้เห็นโครงสร้างทางวาทกรรมของพื้นที่ท่องเที่ยวทางเพศโดยทั่วไป มีส่วนเติมเต็มองค์ความรู้เกี่ยวกับด้านเพศสภาพและเพศวิถีในการศึกษาด้านภูมิทัศน์สัญญา และเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของภาษาศาสตร์สังคมในบริบทของงานบริการทางเพศ ซึ่งเป็นสาขาที่กำลังได้รับความสนใจเพิ่มขึ้นอย่างต่อเนื่อง

สาขาวิชา ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษานานาชาติ  
ปีการศึกษา 2563

ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....  
ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก .....

## 6187760420 : MAJOR ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

KEYWORD: SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPE, SEX TOURISM, MULTIMODALITY

Joey Andrew Lucido Santos : SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPE OF BANGKOK SEX TOURISM SPACES. Advisor: Asst. Prof. PAVADEE SAISUWAN, Ph.D.

Sex tourism, though a potentially significant site of investigation, has received limited scholarly attention in the semiotic landscape research in the past two decades. Addressing this gap, I interrogate the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces focusing on Silom areas, Cowboy alley, Nana Plaza. The study aims to identify the patterns of linguistic and semiotic choices in sexed signs, analyze the role of linguistic and semiotic resources in indexing gender and sexuality, and investigate the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces. The data comprised 122 photographed sexed signs. I also did the non-participant observation in the areas investigated for approximately five months. The analysis focused on the shop signs and promotional signs appearing in bars. An integrated framework from code preference, visual social semiotics, lexicalization, linguistic fetish, language and desire was used to examine the sexed signs. Findings reveal that English-only, English-Thai, and English and other languages are the linguistic patterns in the sexed signs where English-only emerges to be prominent both in terms of its frequency and its salience. The semiotic patterns include the use of the human body, body part, animal, and object. The male body, the female body and the trans woman body appear in shadow figures in shop signs while appear as photographic images in promotional signs. Linguistic and semiotic resources both contribute to the construction of gender and sexual identities. Lexicalization processes emerging from the data include personalizing, characterizing, fetishizing, heterosexualizing, queering and fantasizing. Certain lexical items are significant indexes of gender and sexual identities, particularly “boy” and “male” for male homosexuals, “ladies” and “girls” for female heterosexuals and “ladyboy” for trans women. The female body is indexed by wavy hair, heels and shadow nudity while the trans woman body by bikinis. This is the case in signs located in Cowboy alley, Nana Plaza and Phatphong 1, the areas known to be dedicated to male heterosexual audiences. The muscular male body is displayed in signs located in Phatphong 2 and Silom 4, the areas targeting queer audiences and particularly male homosexuals. Findings have illustrated that Bangkok sex tourism spaces are constructed through the discursive practices imbricated in linguistic and semiotic resources in signs. I argue that sexed signs are semiotic aggregates that reveal language, gender and sexuality, identity and power situated in spaces. Likewise, I argue that linguistic fetish unveils the symbolic and economic value in the use of linguistic practices. Erotic desire, erotic intimacy through transgression and power embedded in language, and visual elements construct sites of desires. The study is significant in understanding sex tourism spaces in Thailand and in contributing to Thai sociolinguistics. The study has mapped the discursive structure of sex tourism spaces more generally. It also adds to the gender and sexuality scholarship in semiotic landscape and participates in the growing field of the sociolinguistics of sex work.

Field of Study:	English as an International Language	Student's Signature .....
Academic Year:	2020	Advisor's Signature .....

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“You aren’t good enough.”

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“I am good enough.”

Joey Andrew Lucido Santos



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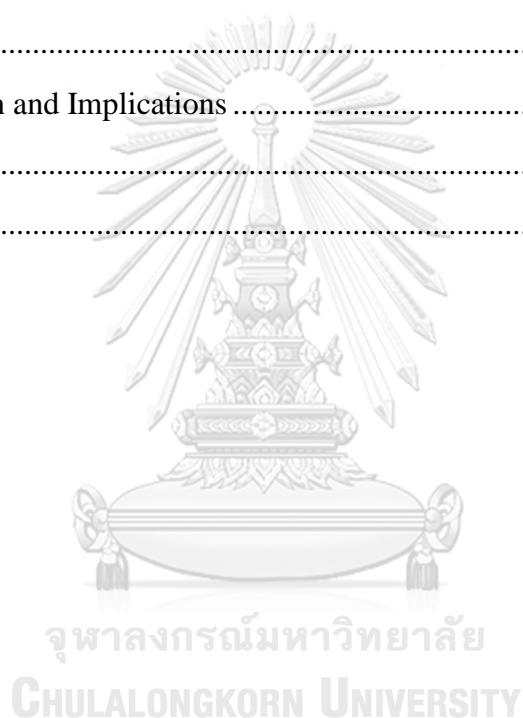


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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Linguistic landscape and space are investigated through the prominence of language choices and their patterns of appearance in the public sphere which index power, identity, and solidarity. Recent development shows the complexity of linguistic landscape studies due to other semiotic resources that appear alongside linguistic elements. This leads to a shift from linguistic to semiotic landscape to encompass other affordances that play significant roles in understanding space. This change also opens an avenue to include other issues such as gender and sexuality.

Gender and sexuality were in the backseat of linguistic landscape and semiotic landscape research before receiving the attention in the past several years. They are considered two significant axes of power that are embedded in space and should not be neglected. Due to this academic imperative, a flurry of research activities reveals discourses relating to sexual and gender politics, and gender identities which are imbricated in the physical landscape, either in private or public spheres. However, few literatures are found in the context of sex tourism as it was once considered a non-sociolinguistic topic. Aiming to fill this research gap, this thesis investigates the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces through a semiotic landscape inquiry. It explores the intersection of language, semiotic resources, gender and sexuality, and space through a multimodal approach. It examines linguistic and semiotic resources in sexed signs and analyzes their roles in constructing Bangkok sex tourism spaces in the physical landscape.

## 1.1 Rationale

Language choice and identity construction have become central in the study of public signs, which Landry and Bourhis (1997) call Linguistic Landscape (henceforth, LL). LL is defined as the “language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combined to form the LL of a given territory” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). Following this work, several research activities (Backhaus, 2006; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Huebner, 2006) have explored patterns of language appearance and translation on signs in multilingual contexts. However, this definition is criticized as it does not define but rather describes what LL is. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006, p. 8), for example, assert that LL goes beyond the given definition as it is “a collection of approaches to understanding how the material world is symbolically constructed through visual language use.” Similarly, Shohamy (2011) contends that LL is not limited to written language as it also contains images, sounds, drawings and movement. Hewitt-Bradshaw (2014) shares the same stand as he considers LL as a multimodal text displayed in public places and spaces. Pennycook (2010) stresses that language and spaces must be looked at in its dynamism as to how meaning has been created along its various resources. Because of these varying positions, proposals on the alternative term have been offered by Gorter (2006) who calls it Linguistic Situation or Linguistic Mosaic, and Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) refer to it as Semiotic Landscape (hereafter, SL). Of these two, SL has gained prominence. SL is concerned with “the interplay between language, visual discourse, and the spatial practices and dimensions of culture, especially the textual mediation or discursive

construction of place and the use of space as a semiotic resource in its own right” (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p. 1).

SL expands the investigation beyond language. It covers multimodal features, including nonlinguistic and semiotic affordances where integration of key analytical tools such as visual grammar (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001; 2006), geosemiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) and multimodality (Kress, 2010). Visual grammar provided tools to systematically analyze the structure of visual design focusing on color, perspective, framing and composition (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996, 2006). Such analytical framework reveals significant insights from the non-linguistic elements appearing in signs. Multimodality (Kress, 2010) focuses on the relationship of semiotic systems through semiotic resources, modal affordances, and multimodal ensemble. Semiotic resources have “a meaning potential, based on their past uses, and a set of affordances based on their possible uses, and these will be actualized in concrete social contexts where their use is subject to some form of semiotic regime” (Kress, 2010, p. 25). Modal Affordances refers to the “potentialities and constraints of different modes” (Kress, 2010, p. 80). Multimodal ensemble refers to “representations or communications that consist of more than one mode, brought together not randomly but with a view to collective and interrelated meaning” (Kress, 2010, p. 162). These multimodal tools are used to establish the semiotic properties and their relationship that contribute to the identity of the place. With these analytical frameworks, multimodality places a significant role in SL studies as it participates in unravelling discourses in places.

The scope of SL is broadened to include two areas that have been placed in the backseat, gender and sexuality. Such academic neglect is what Milani (2013) calls out

for as he argues that gender and sexuality are crucial in the understanding of the public sphere. In concretizing the place of these dimensions in LL discussion, he offers another type of sign—sexed signs—which is inspired by the initial work of Baker (2008). Sharing the same observation, (Baker, 2008) discusses a similar academic dilemma which he addresses through his integration of the dimensions of gender and sexuality through the notion of text which he termed ‘banal sexed texts’—the intersection of gender and sexuality as manifested in text. Putting such a concept in the public space, (Milani, 2014) replaces text with sign to encompass the public sphere, hence sexed signs. As defined, banal sexed signs are “those mundane semiotic aggregates, which, precisely because of their fleeting and unassuming character, can easily be ignored, but nonetheless (in)form our understandings and experiences of [gender,] sexuality and subjectivity” (Milani, 2014, p. 204). Despite being perceived as normal and mundane, sexed signs and their placement contribute to the understanding of public spaces and indicate a gender division as a particular space is allocated to its target audience.

The aforementioned studies open ways in incorporating gender and sexuality in the SL map which results in a flurry of research activities, particularly in the physical landscape. For example, Milani and Levon (2016) investigate the process of marketing Israel as a progressive state through its homonationalism and gay tourism discourse of pinkwashing—campaign using LL approaches through the lens of gender and sexuality. In their study, promotional junkets for architecture and food writers and marketing campaigns which aim at attracting males and the LGBT market are used as data. Their findings indicate that pride events symbolically signify sexual equality and construct Israel as a safe place for both heterosexual and homosexual tourists.

Kerry (2016) examines various signs in CrossFit “Cave” gym facility, a branded fitness program situated in Auckland, New Zealand. Findings reveal that hegemonic masculinity is well-established in the Cave. Textual and visual resources used on signages not only construct the stereotypical masculinity associated with strength and success, but also create the space as a male-dominated place where men are higher in the heteronormative hierarchy.

While SL/LL studies have touched on various issues on gender and sexuality, few researches look at sex tourism, which is an important area for investigation. Traditionally, sex tourism is defined by several scholars (Blackburn et al., 2010; Clift & Carter, 2000; Wonders & Michalowski, 2001) as a place for tourists who are seeking sex. However, this definition has been considered too limited as not all people who visit sex tourist places seek sexual service. Hence, I define sex tourism as a tourist place that travelers visit for entertainment and for any commercial sex-related shows and services.

Sex tourism, as claimed by Pritchard and Morgan (2000), is considered a gendered space. It can cater to specific and/or eclectic audiences but, according to Enloe (1989), is often indexed to masculinity. Sex tourism is a source of economic gains. Though not entirely legalized in some contexts, it has become one of the sources of living among economically challenged individuals that have undeniably contributed to the economic development of a country (Bunn, 2011). It also participates in the construction of a place’s identity. Sex tourism activity affects the image of the place whereby services and practices in certain areas contribute to branding of places (Nuttavuthisit, 2006).

The limited studies of SL/LL in sex tourism espouse significant concepts in understanding the sexualization of tourism spaces and construction of gender identities in places. An inaugural work in this area is Piller's (2010) research on the sexualization of tourist spaces. Particularly, she examines the red-light district in the context of Switzerland where identity and space—specifically the sexualization of space—are made and constructed, focusing on a sex tourism industry. She also looks at both the linguistic and semiotic affordances of the sex industry and Swiss tourism. Her findings reveal that multilingual signs are often eroticized/fetishized. Further, English as the language for advertising sex workers indicate quality sex workers. Baudinette's (2018) paper demonstrates how language used in signs can provide insights on gender identities. He shows that language choice on signages in Tokyo's gay district constructs queer spaces of different types; those English indexes modernity and trendiness, while Japanese indexes traditional and old-fashioned space is examined. These studies jumpstarted examining the participation of linguistic choices in carving gender identities in places and in the eroticization of spaces.

Sex tourism has been one of the attractions in Thailand among Western tourists, specifically for males but recently for females, too (Sanders, 2011). It has become a contributory factor to Thai tourism. Sex tourism in Thailand started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when an influx of male Chinese immigrants moved to Thailand (Lim, 1998). It has had its second wave of popularity right after the Vietnam war when majority of American tourists flocked to Thailand for recreation (Peltonen, 2016). Since then, Thailand has been known as a country of choice in Southeast Asia for sex tourism. Although sex tourism is rampant in Thailand, its meaning is not

straightforward. It is not practiced the way the name suggests either, as sex workers use their body to entice foreign customers to purchase more products, specifically beer, and not sexual services (Sanders, 2011). Among the most famous sex tourism areas in Bangkok are Silom, Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza. These are located in business districts in central Bangkok which turn into sex tourism spaces at night.

While several studies examine Thai's sex tourism in various fields such as anthropology and sociology, there seems to be little to none conducted in the lens of linguistics, specifically semiotic landscape. Furthermore, earlier studies of the sex tourism industry in semiotic landscape focus on a single gendered space. An examination of physical landscapes with different gender and sexuality identity may shed light on their interaction in creating a discursive space for consumption, representation, and production of sex tourism. This is particularly interesting because it may offer insights on how sex tourism in Thailand is discursively constructed in virtual spaces and realized in physical spaces through linguistic choices and semiotic resources. Hence, this thesis is directed towards investigating the discursive construction of sex tourism spaces of Bangkok across landscapes through multimodal discourse analysis. It aims to resolve the following questions.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

1. What are the patterns of appearance of linguistic and semiotic resources used in sexed signs investigated in Bangkok sex tourism spaces?
2. How do these linguistic and semiotic resources used in sexed signs investigated construct gender and sexuality in Bangkok sex tourism spaces?

3. How do the sexed signs investigated participate in the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces?

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

1. Examine the patterns of appearance of linguistic and semiotic resources used in sexed signs investigated in Bangkok sex tourism spaces.
2. Analyze the role of linguistic and semiotic resources used in sexed signs in the construction of gender and sexuality in Bangkok sex tourism spaces.
3. Investigate the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces.

### **1.4 Research Assumptions**

1. English appears with the highest frequency compared to other languages in sexed signs. The rainbow color and the human body are visual tools prevalent in the sexed signs investigated.
2. The social meanings indexed by English on the sexed signs investigated include modernity and internationalization of the space. The human body is used to eroticize space and represent their target audiences in Bangkok sex tourism landscapes. The use of rainbow flags in the sexed signs is used to mark a place as LGBTQ-friendly establishments. Linguistic and semiotic resources used serve to construct Bangkok sex tourism spaces as gendered and sexual entertainment spaces.
3. Linguistic and semiotic resources participate in the construction of international sex tourism places. They also serve as markers in discursively constructing the gender and sexuality identities imbricated in sex tourism spaces.



### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

The study focuses on the sexed signs of Bangkok's sex tourism. The physical landscape concentrates on the three major sex tourism areas in Bangkok – Silom, Cowboy alley, Nana Plaza. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was not able to include other sex tourism areas such as RCA and Thaniya alley in the study as bars in these areas were required to be closed. This also means that an extensive ethnographic fieldwork was not possible, which becomes the limitation of the study. In my fieldwork, I collected shop signs and promotional signs located in the areas. The signs were then subjected to analysis. I also conducted a non-participant observation. However, the observation was limited to bars with outdoor set up. I did not enter any of the bars to conduct a thorough investigation.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

In pursuing this study, findings may offer significance to interaction of linguistic resources and semiotic resources in sex tourism spaces, the intersection of semiotic landscapes and gender/sexuality in the Thai context, and the role of the English language as an international language for wider communication, specifically in sex tourism. This thesis presents a way of understanding the process of sexualization of tourism spaces and the discursive construction of gender and sexuality through linguistic elements and semiotic choices. It also shows how banal sexed signs in sexed tourism are not “banal” or unassuming; rather, it reveals how sexed signs serve as a salient semiotic aggregate. Through an integrated theoretical framework, this thesis may offer an alternative way in investigating sex tourism spaces. Findings of the study may be of interest and contribute largely to sociolinguistics, particularly the

growing field of the sociolinguistics of sex work/tourism, tourism studies, anthropology, and English as an International Language

### **1.7 Outline of the Thesis**

In the chapters that follow, I provide a review of linguistic/semiotic landscape scholarship, description of the methods used to carry out the study and discuss the findings of the study. Chapter 2 presents the previous work on linguistic/semiotic landscape, including its theoretical development and analytical tools. It contains studies that present the relationship of linguistic resources and space and place making, multimodal approaches and gender and sexuality in semiotic landscape. Also included in this chapter is a background of sex tourism in Thailand. Finally, the gap and the integrated framework are discussed.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology employed in the present study. I start with a description of the research setting which includes Silom areas, Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza. I provide details concerning the data collected and the techniques used in obtaining them. The positionality and reflexivity, method of analysis and methodological challenges are likewise explained.

Chapter 4 presents the patterns of appearance of the linguistic and semiotic choices in sexed signs. This chapter feeds into the first objective of the study. I discuss the different patterns of language choices including an explanation of the preferred codes and salience. I provide a description of the patterns of semiotic choices. I find that semiotic choices operate in constructing gender identity and creating distinct features that index a particular gendered body.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the role of linguistic and semiotic resources in constructing gender and sexuality. These chapters address the second objective of the study. In Chapter 5, I discuss Silom areas which include Phatphong 1, Phatphong 2 and Silom 4. Phatphong 2 employs the female heterosexual body which is found in both linguistic and semiotic elements. This indicates that Phatphong 1 is a space dedicated to male/female heterosexuals. Phatphong 2 illustrates the mixed use of linguistic and semiotic elements attributing to the masculine body and female heterosexual body. It suggests that Phatphong 2 is a heterogenous space, but more generally for queer audiences. Silom 4 demonstrates the use of queer semiotic elements such as the rainbow colors and the visibility of performers belonging to the community such as the trans women. The masculine body and the linguistic elements attributing to it indicates sexual activity. I interpret Silom 4 as a space dedicated to male homosexual audiences. Towards the end, I argue that the Silom areas are heterogeneous spaces. Chapter 6 covers the Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza. I discuss how the semiotic elements are used in iconizing female heterosexuals and trans women. The presence and absence of certain clothing material work in creating the identity of the other. I also cover how the degree of nudity contributes to the sexualization and objectification of the body. At the end of the chapter, I argue that Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza are feminine spaces allotted to male heterosexual tourists.

Chapter 7 discusses the construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces. This answers the third objective of the study. I cover how the constellation of various linguistic and semiotic resources make up the discursive practices embedded in sexed signs. They work together in commodifying languages and creating sites of desire. I

argue that the linguistic resources and semiotic resources dialogically build the sex tourism spaces of Bangkok. In this chapter, I present the discursive construction of the three sex tourism areas investigated.

In the final chapter, Chapter 8, I provide the conclusion by giving the summary of the key findings. I discuss the sociocultural dimension of Bangkok sex tourism spaces and compared them with their international counterparts. Towards the end, I offer the contributions and implications of the study and the recommendation for future research.



## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

Over the years, linguistic landscape has thrived as an area of scholarly interest in the study of languages in the public space. It has undergone several theoretical and methodological advances and has expanded across fields. Because of these milestones, the linguistic landscape has established itself as a field of serious scholarly investigation. In this Chapter, I review the development of linguistic landscape and semiotic landscape, the multimodal approach to semiotic landscape, lexicalization and its relationship in space and place making, and gender and sexuality in semiotic landscape. I also present the sex tourism industry in Thailand. Towards the end, I present the synthesis and gap of the previous study and the position of the present study which includes an integrated analytical framework adopted from the former.

#### 2.1 Linguistic Landscape and Semiotic Landscape

Linguistic Landscape (henceforth LL) is first formally introduced as an area of scholarly inquiry through Landry and Bourhis' (1997) seminal work. Although their work is not officially the first study that examined language in the public space, Landry and Bourhis (1997) coined the term Linguistic Landscape which is defined as the “language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combined to form the LL of a given territory” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). They investigate the occurrence of languages and their prominence in particular places which serve as “a

marker of geographical territory occupied by distinctive language communities within multilingual states” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 24).

Landry and Bourhis (1997) put forward two significant contributions – functions of signs and categories of signs – which were anchored on the premises of language policy and planning. Based on their study, signs have two functions – the informational function and symbolic function. The informational function is defined as “a distinctive marker of the geographical territory inhabited by a given language community which also serves to delineate the territorial limits of the language groups it harbors relative to other linguistic communities...” (Bourhis, 1992 as cited in Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). It represents linguistic diversity through language choices and their competing roles against the other languages existing in certain regions. The pervasiveness of the native language in a particular place may represent the services that are afforded to the target audience. Relatively few signs containing a specific language may show its somewhat weak position, hence lesser power in a community. Thus, the informational function exhibits the mark of boundary and power. On the other hand, the symbolic function refers to the role of signs in indicating the ethnic identity of people in a community (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). It shapes the affective value of a particular language, meaning how people feel about the presence or absence of their language. Prevalence of one’s language on signages contributes to the positive social identity of one’s ethnolinguistic group.

Another contribution put forward by Landry and Bourhis (1997) was the distinction between government and private signs. Government signs are “used by national, regional, or municipal governments in the following domains: road signs,

places names, street names, and inscriptions such as ministries, hospitals, universities, town halls, schools, metro stations, and public parks” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 26). On the other hand, private signs include commercial signs on storefronts and business institutions, and advertising signs. These functions and types of signs have been central to various studies which served as the starting point of LL analysis.

Grounded on these foundations, Landry and Bourhis (1997) investigate how LL can maintain the ethnolinguistic vitality of language groups. They particularly look at whether LL, as an individual factor, constitutes any importance to the Individual Network of Linguistic Contacts (henceforth, INLC), the degree of linguistic contact among linguistic groups which serves as the basis of the socialization process in view of language development. They use questionnaires and tests as instruments for collecting data from 2,010 French-speaking/francophone students in different provinces in Canada. The results reveal that LL emerges as a separate and independent factor relative to the other factors constituting the INLC. Further, LL is observed to be far less related to French-speaking respondents’ personal desire/goal to become part of the francophone community. The study concludes that the informational and symbolic functions of LL constitute an important factor in the process of language maintenance.

Through the work of Landry and Bourhis (1997), theoretical and methodological perspectives were laid down. As for the theoretical perspective, later studies have been into the investigation of the informational function that not only shows the boundaries of the language but also exhibits the multilingual environment of a territory. Such works have also been instrumental in uncovering the roles that

each language plays in a multilingual space which were carried out through the symbolic function. Further, categories of signs offer means of understanding the different roles and sources (i.e., authorship) of signs. On top of these functions and categories, procedures and data analysis have likewise been offered. These include taking photographs and quantifying the languages present in a place through frequency counts. Their seminal work has attracted many scholars and commenced the first wave of LL research.

Identity, power, and solidarity are the main issues explored by the so-called first wave LL research which mainly uses the quantitative approach. A plethora of investigations has been recorded in examining the language choices and their patterns of appearance in LL signs.

Contestation, in addition to power and identity of place, illuminates from the examination of the symbolic construction of public places in Israel. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) analyze the presence of Hebrew, Arabic and English in local signages. The study involves 1007 signs in three localities associated with Jews, Palestinian-Israelis and non-Israeli Palestinians. The study indicates the prevalence of Hebrew in two localities of Israel despite the tension among groups which painted Israel as a contested place. The study also shows that language choice in the public space is influenced by the strong political forces as to which groups desired to be identified as part of the community and those who did not as reflected by the absence of some languages in signs. One interesting finding was the presence of English in the three localities, whether pervasive or less, as a neutralized linguistic resource. The study



contributed to the significance of language choices as it could symbolically demonstrate power, contestation, and identity.

In Thailand, Huebner (2006) investigated Bangkok's environmental print. He described the degree of linguistic variation as well as highlighted sample selection in the linguistic landscape. The research sites were identified in 15 neighborhoods which reflected the linguistic diversity of central and suburban places in Bangkok. A total of 613 signs were collected and analyzed by looking at the languages used and the dominant language in multilingual signs. The results revealed the relationship between places and language prominence, i.e., areas that are heavily flocked by tourists showed the preference of Thai-English or Roman script while Thai is pervasive in areas that are frequented by Thai people.

While the focus on power and solidarity remains, translation issues and typology of signs surface in the investigations of LL signs. Backhaus (2006) introduces official and nonofficial signs through the lenses of power and solidarity in his investigation of multilingualism in Japan, a famously known 'monolingual country.' He also offers a working definition of what a sign is, i.e., "any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame" (Backhaus, 2006: 55). Through this definition, an understanding of what constitutes a multilingual sign is provided where a sign has to contain language/s in addition to or instead of the official language. The study examines 11,834 signs from 28 stations of the Yamanote train loop in central Tokyo. Findings reveal that language choices in official signs are governed by power relations while nonofficial signs are governed by solidarity. This is manifested by the asserted presence of the Japanese language, the national language, on official signs

while the use of foreign languages is prevalent in nonofficial signs serving to create solidarity in an overseas space. The analysis also puts forward significant tools in analyzing signs by looking at the translation. Languages appearing on signs can be translated totally or partially. The direction of translation suggests linguistic preferences of a community. The language appearing at the top of a sign serves as the source language and is regarded as the preferred one.

The early works mentioned address several issues in investigating the types of signs, language, identity, power, solidarity, and public space. The classification of signs offered by the aforementioned scholars (Backhaus, 2006; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Huebner, 2006; Landry & Bourhis, 1997), despite giving different names, indicates that public/government/official signs use official/dominant/national languages predominantly, reflecting language policies of a particular context, while private/nongovernment/nonofficial signs reveal more about linguistic diversity of the area. Private signs allow people to linguistically identify themselves with a particular group and align or disalign themselves with the authority's language policy. These signs offer insights on identity, power and solidarity in public space.

SL allows studies to cover diverse types of space and data not limited to language choice and signs in their original sense. This means SL paves the way in investigating other multimodal elements which contribute to the construction of identity and discourses in place (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). It is in this take that the public space is observed to have a rich non-linguistic and multisensory resource as it is inherently compounded by rich multimodal codes. In this view, a theoretical turn in the study of LL includes the incorporation of non-linguistic elements into LL, hence

Semiotic Landscape aiming to investigate “any space (public) with visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making” (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p. 2).

Semiotic resources provide a snapshot of the cultures embedded in place. These cultures are either local or foreign. For example, (Lock, 2003) investigates the semiotic resources of advertisements on mass transit which reveal the overlapping identity of Hong Kong. Through visual analysis, he finds that the use of white models and their seductive gaze in the advertisement is not a Chinese or local practice. It is rather attributed to a more international practice. On the contrary, the use of a frozen Hong Kong harbor indexes the Hong Kong identity. This provides a clear symbolic association with Hong Kong alone. Beyond these two identities, Chineseness is manifested in the advertisements that make use of Chinese models and Chinese characters. These visual resources put forward the imbricated identities and ideologies in the advertisements in Hong Kong.

Goncalves (2012) examines the signs in the marketplace in the Ferry Street in Newark, New Jersey focusing on place of semiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). He finds that most LL signs displayed iconic images that index the international and ethnic cuisine and the vibrant cultural diversity in the city. In terms of indexicality, participants use personal pronouns to indicate social distance between interlocutors. Personal pronouns along with inclusive pronouns and spatial deictic adverbial markers were evident showing the juxtaposition of culture of peoples. The display of Brazilian goods and national flags show a sense of cultural identity and a home. Further, the use of Portuguese indicates that it is the preferred language as it

characterizes the community's identity. As regards linguistic features, it is mentioned that the use of deictic adverbial markers, personal pronouns, demonstratives, and reference to the diverse ethnic immigrants serve to mark the distinction that can be used to various communicative activities. These studies show that other non-linguistic elements in the public space contribute to the meaning-making process and add to the construction of spaces.

Lou (2009) employs geosemiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) in her study on Washington D.C.'s Chinatown. The study finds that Chinese signage appears in vertical text vectors, transgressive placement and symmetrical layout. Vertical text vector is illustrated through the bottom-up position which is less frequently used though not uncommon in China. Transgressive placement, the appearance of signs in the wrong place, is observed in the Chinese signs which are placed in front of brick houses, an uncommon placement of signs. Furthermore, Chinese signs have symmetrical compositions which are achieved in various ways. For example, English names are placed at the center while Chinese names appear on each side. Hence, it reveals that Chinese is systematically minimized in LL signs.

The above studies present the theoretical development of linguistic landscape and its shift to semiotic landscape. In this study, I adopt semiotic landscape to encompass both linguistic and non-linguistic resources in the signs to unpack the discourses in place (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). I also employ multimodal tools in examining the signs under study. The following section discusses the multimodal tools employed in semiotic landscape.

## 2.2 Multimodal Approaches to Semiotic Landscape

The innovations in the SL studies include incorporating diverse analytical tools. This brings the multimodality aspect into SL. Multimodal approaches to LL/SL emerge as a viable tool in unveiling visual designs' participation in the understanding of spaces. Two of the major approaches put forward in the area of LL/SL research are multimodality (Kress, 2010; Kress & Leeuwen, 1996; 2001) and geosemiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996; 2001; 2006) work on multimodality stems from social semiotics. Social semiotics is anchored on the work of Halliday (1978) which espouses the theoretical idea that language is a semiotic system. It uses various resources in order to make meaning. This leads to the three metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Ideational metafunction informs the experience of the speaker of the world. Interpersonal function refers to the identities and relationships of people and how they interact in social actions. Textual function glues different linguistic elements to create one whole meaning. These metafunctions have been glossed into Kress and Leeuwen (1996; 2001; 2006) multimodality to account for the semiotic resources in visual design where ideational is representational dimension, interpersonal is interactional dimension and textual is compositional dimension.

Representational dimension is used to uncover the representation of the things around us and understand their relationships. Represented participants, as defined by Kress and Leeuwen (2006, p. 48), are those “who constitute the subject matter of communication; that is, the people places and things.” They are depicted through

narrative and conceptual structures. Narrative structures are used to present ongoing/unfolding events using vectors, “a depicted element which forms an oblique line and indicates directionality” (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006, p. 59). There are five different types of narrative processes, namely action, reactional, speech, mental and conversion. Action process involves a depicted element representing a departure from the participant. It has two kinds of actions: non-transaction involves the actor only; and transactional involves the actor and the goal where it is the participant into which the vector is directed. In a similar vein, reactional process is where the vector is depicted to one or more participants. The process can also be non-transactional and transactional. Speech process is when a communication through dialogue balloons is used which is synonymous to mental process which employs thought balloons. Conversion is the last process which make use of a transactional process involving a third participant who serves as a relay. In addition, narrative structures contain a secondary participant. It is called circumstances which are connected to the main participants. They can be visually represented through locative (i.e., participants relationship or connected with the setting), means (the elements serving as tools in the action process), and accompaniment (two participants are represented as not connected by any vector). These analytical tools indicate the way process changes and events connect.

Also within the representational dimension is conceptual structures, “representing participants in terms of their class, structure or meaning” (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006, p. 59). They are classified into three processes: classificational, analytical and symbolic. The classificational process refers to the relationship between participants. It indicates a kind of relationship that exemplifies taxonomy.

The analytical process links participants through part-whole structures where the parts/possessive attributes belong to the whole/carrier which represents the totality. The symbolic process shows the meaning of the participant or reveal what it is which can be attributive (two participants are involved: carrier and a symbolic attribute) and suggestive (carrier only). Though different structures, narrative and conceptual may appear together or on its own. Nonetheless, they are essential in unpacking what is happening in the visual representations.

Interactive dimension is used to determine the interaction between the viewers and producers of the image (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996, 2006). It has three dimensions, namely image act, social distance, and point of view. The image act involves the way the gaze is directed to or away from the represented participant. For a demand, the represented participant looks directly to the viewers. For an offer, there is only interaction is indirect as the represented participant looks away and becomes the focus of the viewers' gaze. Social distance is concerned with the sizes of frame. Size of frame concerns choice in presenting the represented participants which includes close-up shot, medium shot, and long shot. Close-up shot, capturing the face of a person, suggests a closer social distance between the represented participant and the viewer. Medium shot, covering from head to waist, suggests personal distance. Long shot, showing the whole body, indicates far distance. Point of view, focusing on angles from which the represented participant is presented, indicates their attachment to or detachment from the viewers. Horizontal angle can be depicted from a frontal angle, suggesting involvement, or an oblique angle, suggesting disinvolvement. Vertical angle reveals power relations. This is shown through low, high and eye level angles. A low angle suggests superiority; that is, the represented participant has power over

the viewers. In contrast, a high angle means that the viewers have power over the represented participant. Eye level is interpreted as both represented participants and the viewers are equal and have no difference in power. These analytical tools unveil the interaction of the represented participants and the viewers.

Compositional dimension is how representational and interactive dimensions are combined and together contribute to the meaning making process of a whole image. It is the “way in which representations and communicative acts cohere into the kind of meaningful whole we call ‘text’” (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996, p. 181). They are shown through three systems, namely, informational value, salience, and framing. Informational value contains three main areas of visual representation: left and right, top and bottom, and center and margin. The left and right or the given-new information is presented through a horizontal axis where the given information already known by the viewer is placed on the left while the right is dedicated to the new information that needs the viewer’s attention. Top and bottom follows a vertical axis. The top position serves as the ideal information presenting what is being promised while the bottom is real indicating the actual product or information. The center and margin area is interpreted through the nucleus of information which is taken by the center position while the margin is subservient to the center. Another system of visual meaning is salience which can be interpreted through the size, sharpness of focus, tonal and color contrast, placement, and perspective. Lastly, framing indicates the relationship of the representational meaning and the interactive meaning in terms of connection or disconnection. These dimensions have been widely used in examining visual design.



A move from semiotic system to semiotic resources has been advanced by Kress (2010) to examine other meaning-making tools such as semiotic resources, modal affordances and multimodal ensemble. Semiotic resources have “a meaning potential, based on their past uses, and a set of affordances based on their possible uses, and these will be actualized in concrete social contexts where their use is subject to some form of semiotic regime” (Kress, 2010, p. 25). Modal affordances are “the potentialities and constraints of different modes” (Kress, 2010, p. 80) whereas multimodal ensemble are the “representations or communications that consist of more than one mode, brought together not randomly but with a view to collective and interrelated meaning” (Kress, 2010, p. 162). These analytical tools have been used by various researchers to investigate advertising images, protest signs, outdoor signs and sexed signs.

Semiotic resources reveal not only their visual structure but also carry meanings on their own. Ly and Jung (2015) examine the semiotic resources of two advertising images which are taken from CeCi, a Korean fashion magazine. Drawing on representational and interactive dimensions, the analysis shows that advertising images have inherent visual grammar. The participants are presented as desirable young idols in two ways: reactionary and conceptual process. The participants’ identities are represented as god/goddess through the moon background which indexes lunar deity. The participants’ interaction process indicates that their relationship with the viewers are far distance and close distance. The far distance is seen through indirect gaze as an offer image which suggests detachment. The angle is a side oblique horizontal position which disengages the viewers, and the world only belongs to the participants. The close distance is observed through direct gaze as a

demand image which shows vulnerability and inferiority that seeks empathy from the viewers, hence adding up to the goddess-like identity. This is furthered by the frontal angle where the viewer is involved. The higher modality used in the participants indexes realism so they can connect with the viewers.

Mulyawan (2020) explores the outdoor signs, including traffic signs, billboards, site names and advertisements, in Kuta, an international village in Bandung Regency Bali. The analysis shows that outdoor signs function not only as icons which represents human but also as symbols suggesting a way to depict a callout statement. The representational process found in the outdoor signs indicate that both verbal signs and symbols are used as indexes of statements. They use size to demonstrate salience and colors such as red to mean seriousness and blue and white as brand identity. Interactional processes in outdoor signs reveal that human icons are used to show demand and close social distance, while the absence of such icons functions as informational point with public distance. The compositional process follows an ideal to real with non-linear framing, which allows to send the message directly. These studies demonstrate how semiotic resources and visual design work together in understanding the meaning behind signs.

Multimodality works well in unravelling political discourses and participating in the construction of ideologies. Ademilokun and Olateju (2015) study the visual images of political rallies in Southwestern Nigeria. The data include photographs from six Southwestern states namely Osun, Oyo, Ondo Ekiti, Ogun and Lagos. The analysis reveals that the use of semiotic artifacts and visibility helps politicians inscribe their vision and imprint their ideologies to the electorate. The semiotic

artifacts used are vests and headwears which index intelligence and sophistication. They are used to construct smart people who choose the right politicians. The orange color of the vest signifies energy which is consistent to the wearer who are the youth. Ankara, a popular textile that has been known to be of class, is used as a tool for political communication. With the face of a politician imprinted, it sends a message to the public on who has to be put in power. These semiotic codes participate in the construction of political discourse.

Al-Naimat (2020) looks at the visual elements of online protest in Jordan. He finds that the use of images and color contributes to the political expressions of protesters. The most prominent image used is a cow which captures the current situation of Jordan where its people are being milked. In addition, the use of black represents the economic standing of Jordan which is dying. The use of the multimodal elements widens the protestors' readership and serves as references of the messages they are sending.

Multimodal tools are likewise useful in unravelling gender identity in public spaces. Motschenbacher (2020) investigates the discursive construction of sexual identities in the linguistic landscape of Wilton Manors, Florida. He analyzes 300 photos comprising a wide range of signs including restaurants, storefronts, advertisements and road signs. The findings show various semiotic resources such as rainbow flags, hearts and ribbons all throughout the area which index gay culture. Some significant signs participate in the political discourse of gay culture where people who support it (e.g., male. Mermaid doll for Ru Paul) and are against it (troll dolls for President Trump) is displayed. In addition to these visual signs, verbal signs

that are often used to LGBT movements like pride, equality contribute to the sexual identity of the place. Storefront signs carry both visual and verbal elements that send a message that their shops are LGBT friendly. The Wilson Drive is found to be a gay male space as observed from the predominance of man-to-man couples in the area and the prominence of male icons in advertisements which indicate two type of masculinity: the typical manly guy as a protector and the other as the guy that needs protecting. The visual elements also show the gender identities of male homosexuals who are white, middle-class and domestic. These multimodal features reveal the sexual practices in place through the eroticization/fetishization process. This is done through the use of athletic male bodies, sexual metaphors and sexual icons. The study demonstrates that gay homosexuality is normalized and is used to target gay men customers.

Another theoretical framework used in the study of semiotic landscape is geosemiotics. Geosemiotics is the study of the “social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world” (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 4). The main assumption of this framework is to understand the placement of signs as it is assumed that signs are objects that are indexable. It is drawn from three systems of social semiotics namely the interaction order, visual semiotics and place semiotics. These three systems were anchored on former works of Goffman (1981) and Kress and Leeuwen (1996). Putting these systems together indicate the social action performed by a social actor. For instance, a research presentation in a forum (interaction order) is conducted in a conference room (place semiotics) with a research presenter using a PowerPoint presentation projected on a

glass board (visual semiotics). In this sense, social action is observed in the nature of the interaction of the interlocutors, the communication setting, and the visualizer.

Geosemiotics has become a core theoretical framework which is instrumental in understanding the materials in place. Its semiotic systems allow it to dig into the discourses in place. Lou (2009) employs geosemiotics in her study on Washington D.C.'s Chinatown which indicates Chinese signage features in vertical text vector, transgressive placement and symmetrical layout, hence revealing Chinese was systematically minimized in the LL signs. With these analytical frameworks, multimodality places a significant role in LL studies as it participates in unravelling discourses in places.

In her work on three markets in Hong Kong, Lou (2017) examines how the spaces of consumption and sense of place are understood in the rich material resources and varied semiotic properties as used by different people through a geosemiotic analysis. Her study reveals the interaction of people with the diverse visual modes in the three markets indexing the place as modernized, international and local. For instance, Taipo, a two-storey and air-conditioned wet market, is considered a modernized market where rhythm or interactions between seller and buyer are fast and employ economical expressions. The visual elements show minimal use of written language and display of commodities is prominent. In conclusion, it is found that the linguistic and cultural repertoires used in the three markets are aligned in Hong Kong's geosemiotic aggregate.

The use of multimodal analysis in examining signs demonstrates how it can reveal multilayers of meaning-making processes as it accounts to not only linguistic

elements but also non-linguistic features. It describes the visual design of signs and the meanings behind them, uncovers crucial discourses that rest in mundane artifacts, and provides insights of the people in spaces. Hence, it is a useful analytical tool in examining signs.

### **2.3 Linguistic Resources and its Relation to Space and Place Making**

Linguistic resources play an important role in constructing spaces and places. They do not only indicate languages used in places but also reveal the identity they bring. Beyond language choices, lexical items and multilingualism indicate that the use of language is not limited to the communicative but also included the symbolic. In the discussion that follows, I explain works that concern place and space making through lexicalization, linguistic fetish, and language desire.

The investigation of space and place has been ubiquitous in the field of geography, urban studies and, recently, in sociolinguistics, specifically in semiotic landscape. Space, as defined by Certeau (1984), is a plethora of geographic activities laid in places. It is the “effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities” (Certeau, 1984, p. 117). This means that in a given space, there are several establishments that have different activities situated in places. In other words, “space is a practiced place” (Certeau, 1984, p. 117). Place is slightly different. As Certeau (1984, p. 117) defines it, it is “the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence”. Thus, place is the physical realization of space.

The theory of space has been applied closely with language through Lefebvre's (1991) production of space which Trumper-Hecht (2010) adapted in her linguistic landscape study. Anchored on sociologically constructed space, Lefebvre's (1991) triadic model of space is composed of spatial practice, representation of space, and representation space. Spatial practice, as defined by Lefebvre (1991, p. 31), is "a projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice." Trumper-Hecht (2010, p. 237) renamed it as perceived space which she defines as "the physical dimension that can be observed and documented". In other words, it is about the activities that people do in a given space. Representations of space is "the conceptualized space constructed out of symbol, codifications and abstract representations" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39) or what Trumper-Hecht (2010, p. 237) calls conceived space which is "the political dimension of the LL as it is represented by views and ideologies held by different policy makers whose policies mold". This means that those material products of powerful social group which can be seen in signs. Lastly, representational space is a space "as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of inhabitants and users" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). Trumper-Hecht (2010, p. 27) refers to this as lived space where "the space is experienced by the people who live their everyday life in it." This suggests that this is the dimension which people experienced in their day-to-day life. This theoretical lens provides understanding as to how spaces are produced based on the events situated in a given place, the materially produced identities influenced by groups and the experience lived by people.

Linguistic resources have been integral in the study of linguistic/semiotic landscape as they aid in understanding the linguistic situation of a particular place. They

provide insights on the languages spoken in a given place and the people who live and visit there. In investigating their occurrence, several scholars have employed various ways such as connecting language with space and place (Higgins, 2017; Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Discussed in 2.1 of this chapter, (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) seminal work maps linguistic vitality through an examination of signs. The relative appearance of languages in signs emplaced in places participates in the identity of the place. Higgins (2017) discusses how language, space and place are linked in view of *spatial turn*. She premises her work on migration where human mobility contributes to the constant reconfiguration of places. While they have yielded rich insights, there lacks the focus of the lexicalization process (Jones, 2013) except for the work of Buckingham (2015).

Lexicalization is “the process through which things are labeled and the world is divided up and epistemologically structured” (Jones, 2013, p. 36). It leads to how a particular classification links to a ‘larger linguistic structuring’ (Berger & Luckman, 1967). This means that naming shops is part of a bigger linguistic activity. Lexicalization, as discussed by Jones (2013), has three processes, namely naming and classification, metaphORIZATION and quantification. Naming and classification refer to the way labelling and categorization are done. They contribute to the expectations and constructions of social identities. MetaphORIZATION is a way to put certain labels into certain molds that emphasize their features. Quantification is a process where objects are linked through numbers. Aside from these processes, other researchers concentrate on the influence of English in signs.



Buckingham (2015), for instance, examined the multilingual commercial signage in Oman. In her study, she explores the lexical features of the signs by integrating Schneider (2003) dynamic model of language contact, focusing on the nativization stage where local patterns emerge. The findings reveal lexicalization of cultural concepts, lexical innovations, lexical borrowing, foreign cultural referents to promote goods and services, attributes, generalizations, repetitions, and hyponymy. This study demonstrates one approach in conducting a lexical analysis.

Another way in pursuing a lexical analysis is by following the critical discourse analysis tradition (Dijk, 2001). Machin and Mayr (2012) offer ways in investigating lexical choices which include word connotations, overlexicalization, suppression or lexical absence, and structural oppositions. Word connotation is the analysis of the basic word choices. Overlexicalization is the excessive repetition of words. Suppression or lexical absence is the opposite of overlexicalization where certain words that are expected to appear are not apparent. Structural opposition is a process where words used exhibit distinctions which by nature oppose each other.

Beyond lexicalization, another important work in view of language choices is about linguistic fetish (Kelly-Holmes, 2015). Linguistic fetish refers to “to the phenomenon of using languages for symbolic (fetishized) rather than utility (instrumental-communicative) purposes in commercial texts” (Kelly-Holmes, 2015, p. 135). This suggests that language choices are intended for a particular goal. Argued as a sociolinguistic practice, Kelly-Holmes (2015) discusses visual multilingualism which leads to three linguistic fetishes, namely, foreign language as visual, visual English, and minority languages as visual. Foreign language as visual is understood

by looking at the perspective of an image of a language from another language where certain cultural norms are embedded (Bakhtin, 1981). This means that the use of a foreign language contains cultural practices that add authentic appeal and economic value to a product/place. Visual English is viewed as the melting point of boundaries situated within cultural, political, and semiotic fences. It is highly influenced by the global identity of English which has decentralized its ownership making it available for use by any community. This then suggests that English becomes a neutral language that can be used to reach wider audiences, hence expanding its symbolic value. Minority languages as visuals are primarily used to keep a certain degree of authenticity where cultural membership is still attached. It operates in fetish culture through language which creates organic identity. In her work, Kelly-Holmes (2015), through linguistic fetish, finds that exploitation of languages, specifically English and minority languages, is deliberately used to differentiate products. When these linguistic fetish tools are used in signs, they participate in constructing spaces and depict the dynamics of power imbricated in them. They also provide material evidence of a fetishized commodity and becomes the marker of people's lived space, thus espousing a commodified place.

Linguistic resources also create desires. In the conceptual definition of language and desire (Cameron & Kulick, 2003), they frame language desire into three dimensions, namely erotic desire, erotic intimacy, and transgression. Erotic desire is defined as “a paradigm insofar as the relevant groups as defined by the nature of their desires (most commonly, for someone of the same/the other gender, but is rarely an erotic presence in the interactions researchers analyze)” (Cameron & Kulick, 2003, p. 106). This is realized through the use of language which indicates the relationship of

the subject of desire and the imagined object of desire. The next dimension lies in erotic intimacy which is mediated by the production of sexual images. It is where power is used to legitimize certain sexual practices which could be influenced by institutions. Transgression is the use of prohibited words and images in a given space. When these dimensions are used, they map the construction of desire.

Lexicalization of shop and promotional signs is one of the few analytical perspectives that is less explored. Investigating the naming process is significant in understanding the identity constructed in one establishment. It also provides a snapshot of the discourses resting in each shop name. For instance, Buckingham (2015) focuses her attention on the influence of English in commercial signs in Oman. Her study reveals the rich language contact in place and its development. Besides language contact, a salient issue that needs scholarly discussion is how shop signs create gender identities.

The studies mentioned map the relationships of the construction of space and place through language choices, multilingual visuals, language desire and lexicalization. They demonstrate how the circuit of linguistic practices works in tandem to produce power-loaded spaces that are imprinted in materials influenced by people in power. This affects the lived experiences of the people around. Likewise, they indicate the physical make-up of the place and the discourses that are imbricated through the complex meaning-making process in signs.

#### **2.4 Gender and Sexuality in Semiotic Landscape**

Since the recognition of gender and sexuality as equally significant areas of investigation, a surge of research activities, which discuss salient issues that have

been overlooked, has been recorded. These studies include ideologies and representations in gender and sexuality (Baudinette, 2018; Piller, 2010), sexual and gender politics (Milani & Levon, 2016; Milani et al., 2018), masculinity (Kerry, 2016), and eroticization of spaces (Correa & Shohamy, 2018; Hiramoto & Lai, 2017). Though limited in number, they assert that sexed signs are not mundane and should not be neglected as they participate in uncovering the dynamics of both public and private spaces and physical and virtual landscapes.

Gender and sexuality reveal their complex processes, ideologies and representations in both physical—public and private, and virtual spaces. Piller (2010) and Baudinette (2018) center their investigation on sex tourism industries which unveil how sexualization of places and queer's identity formation are embedded in public spaces. Piller (2010) examined Basel, a sex tourism place in Switzerland, by analyzing shop fronts; advertising in local newspapers; prostitutes', nightclubs, and agencies' website; and client's blog which contribute to the sexualization process of spaces due to their varying degree of visibility. These data provide sex tourist places in Basel which are inherently eroticized. However, travel spaces such as the airport, checkpoints, central stations, and public transport play a significant role in creating fetishized and seductive environments through signs containing sex. Graffiti, with its sexually explicit signs, also emerges as an instrument in magnifying the sexualized space. Interestingly enough, multilingual signs in both virtual and physical spaces serve as quality indicators which equate with high-class sex services.

Baudinette (2018) investigates queer sex tourism places in Shinjuku Ni-Chome, Tokyo's premier red-light district. He focuses on how traditional, typically older gay

men, and modern, young gay Japanese men, construct their self-identities through their reading of the LL signs. The findings indicate that two identities are embedded in Ni-Chome, the cosmopolitan and sophisticated gay men and the old-fashioned and unsophisticated gay men which are indexed from English and Japanese languages, respectively. These identities are influenced by different interlocutors' desires whereas one who fetishes a foreign partner who has a closer tie with English will have positive view and preference for English signs while those who desire to be with a Japanese lover will be positive towards and have preference for Japanese signs. These two studies present complex processes of sexualization of space through the normalization of eroticized environment through the pervasiveness of sex-related signs in non-tourist places, and the identity construction of gay men through their sexual motivation which affect their choices of signs.

Along with the sexualization process, gender and sexuality are salient tools in disentangling complexities of the ideological infrastructures of spaces and the power imbricated in them. As stressed by Milani (2014, p. 201), they are “two important axes of power along which public spaces are structured, understood, negotiated and contested”.

Milani and Levon (2016) investigate sexual and gender diversity through pinkwashing—a public make up representing the sexually-liberal place to attract people from the LGBT community—and homonationalism—a state and non-state movement for sexual tolerance of the LGBT community, marketing campaign of Israel which aim to paint it as a gay-friendly place. Through a big set of data comprising newspaper articles, photos, webpages, interviews and material artifacts,

the study shows how Tel Aviv serves as the metonymy of Israel where the commodification of gay men is foregrounded and participates in the construction of imagined gay haven (e.g., Tel Aviv Gay Vibe). This is manifested through the linguistic descriptions of Tel Aviv as the most gay-friendly city, the commercialization of idealized gay men (i.e., muscled, slim, toned and drag men), and the objectification of Israeli gay men. While the spotlight is directed to gay men, other members of the LGBT community, despite a few mentions of lesbians, are rather left underrepresented. While this study purports the exploitation of gay men as tools to rebrand Tel Aviv as a space for the LGBT community, Milani et al. (2018) demonstrate how bodies perform competing ideologies through the official Tel Aviv Pride 2013 promotional video and the protest of Palestine which performed at the Tel Aviv Pride 2017. Tel Aviv Pride is a major event where queerness is celebrated through the commercialization of Tel Aviv as a gay paradise. The study indicates how non-mainstream gay, *Arisa*, the maker of the promotional video, affirms the mainstream sexual politics of Tel Aviv Pride by incorporating an orientalist vision, i.e. the showcase of desire for exotic Middle East men, while maintaining a commercialized same-sex haven through desire. However, the analysis of the protest communicates the resistance and shaming of the pink occupation through affect. While these studies are situated in the same context, they reveal culturally rooted ideological structures which are unveiled and even teased out to illustrate the complexities of power, gender and sexuality in the politics of homonationalism.

Just like the public space, gender and sexuality posit gender and power in a private space. Kerry (2016) explores the hegemonic masculinity in CrossFit ‘Cave’ gym facility in Auckland, New Zealand, a semi-private physical space. Different

types of signs are analyzed and are found to be complying with the heteronormative norms where men are typically stronger than women as realized through various resources from the Work Out of the Day board, quotations, cave rules, to posters. Militaristic discipline, materiality of the body, and swear words, often alluded to men, construct a hegemonic structure where men emerge to be powerful and thus conforming to the heteronormative order.

These studies unravel issues that illustrate the role of gender and sexuality as significant axes of power that put forward critical discourses such as sexual politics and gender identity in the public space.

## **2.5 Sex Tourism in Thailand**

Thailand has had a long history of its sex tourism industry (Kempadoo, 1999). Its origin can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the mass immigration of male Chinese individuals in Thailand. At that time, Sampeng, a place that has now become a Chinese neighborhood, was the center of prostitution (Lim, 1998). This has been recorded as the start of sex tourism popularity of Thailand. However, it has received its second wave of abundance after the Vietnam war where Thailand became American's famous sex tourism destination (Peltonen, 2016). This historical background though does not affect sex tourism in Thailand as it had then been illegal since 1960. A law has also been placed through the Suppression of Prostitution Act. It is the law that criminalizes prostitutes and puts them behind bars for three-to-six months with a fine of 1,000-2,000 Thai Baht (Khruakham & Lawton, 2010). Significant changes have been observed through a law that shifted its aims to the rehabilitation of arrested prostitutes. They are sent to different joint vocational

programs to learn new skills that they can use in other work opportunities. This revised law is the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act of 1996. Despite such changes, sex tourism remains illegal and is punishable by the law.

With the popularity of sex tourism in Thailand, a rebranding of the country has been initiated to eradicate the negative image that sex tourism brings (Åsvik & Åsvik, 2004). The negative image has been considered not beneficial to the country (Nuttavuthisit, 2006). In effect, projects that aim to develop local hospitality and capitalize more on the natural beauty of the country have been put in place. Although such attempts were made, sex tourism remains a key contributor to Thai economy as foreigners come to Thailand for such reason. This is observed in the change of tourists' demographics when sex tourism became popular among heterosexual and homosexual tourists. In particular, female tourists have started to pay interest in sex tourism in Thailand (Sanders, 2011).

Being considered as one of the main sex tourism places in Southeast Asia, Thailand boasts of a number of places to visit, mainly in Bangkok and the main cities. In Bangkok alone, there are three famous places known to be for men seeking women--Phatphong 1, Nana Plaza, and Soi Cowboy (Peltonen, 2016). Phatphong 1 is an alley in Silom frequented by tourists visiting the night market and bars. Soi Cowboy, literally 'alley Cowboy,' is a small alley situated in the Asoke area, a business district where famous malls, such as Terminal 21, and restaurants are located. Nana plaza is a three-storey building designed as a more adult area. It is located on Sukhumvit Road, alongside many other business establishments. Both of these areas are surrounded by street vendors and other attractions visited by both local



and non-local people. Beyond these places, there are also areas for men seeking men, including Silom 4 and Phatphong 2, the focus of this paper. Both areas are alleys located in Silom, a financial and business district covered by various establishments.

## **2.6 Synthesis and Gap**

This chapter has presented the literatures covering the theoretical development, analytical traditions and key themes concerning linguistic and semiotic landscape studies. The theoretical developments discussed the elements, i.e. linguistic and nonlinguistic, that stir the shift from linguistic to semiotic landscape, a move that welcomes a much richer investigation. This leads to the combination of different tools to account for the abundant resources and even the creation of analytical tools that unpack the discourses in place (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). Because of such analytical innovation, the research activities within the semiotic landscape have expanded to different fields that were once less paid attention to, such as gender and sexuality.

While a considerable amount of work has been carried out, recent literatures have concentrated on gender and sexual politics (Milani & Levon, 2016) (Milani and Levon, 2016) in tourism sites, gender identities of public spaces (Motschenbacher, 2020) and private spaces (Kerry, 2016), and the sexualization of sex tourism spaces (Baudinette, 2018; Piller, 2010). They have touched key issues that inform us how discourses are embedded in signs. Signs in the context of gender and sexuality or what Milani (2014) labels as banal sexed signs are considered unassuming more generally. However, I argue that they take on an important role in sex tourism spaces. This means that a study dedicated to unpacking the meaning-making process and the complex structure of sex tourism spaces remains limited, hence the gap. This gap is

considered significant as the understanding of the discursive practices of sex tourism plays an important role in differentiating it from other tourism contexts. Such view needs explicating to unpack the linguistic and semiotic systems that make up the semiotic aggregates (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) of sex tourism. Furthermore, sex tourism areas have been depicted in Thai society as negative. They have been seen as obscene places that house sexual activities. However, I argue that much has been changed since Thailand's establishment as a prostitution hub in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Lim, 1998). This requires empirical investigation to provide evidence on the development it has undergone over the years.

Treating the gap as an academic imperative, this thesis aims to interrogate the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism through a semiotic landscape perspective. In particular, the study examines the patterns of linguistic and semiotic resources in sexed signs. This is essential in fleshing out the elements used in sexed signs and identifying their meaning and roles in creating sexualized spaces. Another aim is to examine their interaction in the construction of gender and sexual identity of place. Finally, the study establishes the role of sexed signs in creating Bangkok sex tourism spaces. It provides a sociolinguistic discussion of sexed signs which contributes to the understanding of sex tourism spaces in Thai society. It also pushes for a promiscuous analytical practice which involves the integration of tools stemming from a wide array of theoretical traditions.

Based on the discussion above, the present study employs an integrated framework which is drawn from different theoretical traditions. This approach of analysis allows a richer exploration of the network of linguistic and semiotic

resources which function on multiple layers. This means that an in-depth data analysis is needed to map the layers of meaning that offer understanding on the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces. I begin with the identification of the patterns of appearance of linguistic and semiotic elements in the signs. I analyze them by looking into the placement of the languages to determine the preferred code through code preference (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) and the salience placed in the languages through compositional meaning (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). These analytical tools are necessary to examine the preference of languages based on their placement and ways in which they are made prominent. Such an approach offers two things: first, it serves as premise that makes up the context of the study through counting of their appearance; and second, it works as a lens to determine which linguistic and semiotic elements are given more importance.

Once the premise is established, a qualitative approach is needed to unpack the different meaning-making processes. This is mapped into the investigation on the role of linguistic and semiotic resources in constructing gender and sexuality through lexicalization (Jones, 2013) and visual social semiotics (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). Lexicalization is taken because it reveals the meaning of the words used in signs which serve as shop names. They are important as they contribute to the identity construction of the place and that the meaning can be arbitrary, thus suggesting its relevance as an analytical apparatus.

Finally, the interaction of linguistic and semiotic resources in the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism is analyzed by looking at the commodification of languages through linguistic fetish (Kelly-Holmes, 2015) and language and desire

(Cameron & Kulick, 2003) to investigate how linguistic and semiotic resources create desire. Linguistic fetish as an analytical tool is useful in explicating the symbolic value of language choices. The concept is essential in situating linguistic resources in the discourse of tourism where the appearance of different languages in signs may carry different economic values. The concept of language and desire describes the sexual practices embedded in sex tourism spaces. As desire is placed under the premise of erotic desire, the analytical tool offers ways to explain the modifier 'sex' in sex tourism and to elucidate what sex tourism is.

Adopting the analytical tools mentioned above, the present study can disentangle the systems that make up sex tourism. These systems are etched to reveal the role sexed signs take as semiotic aggregates of sex tourism. This is requisite in understanding the discourses embedded in sex tourism spaces.

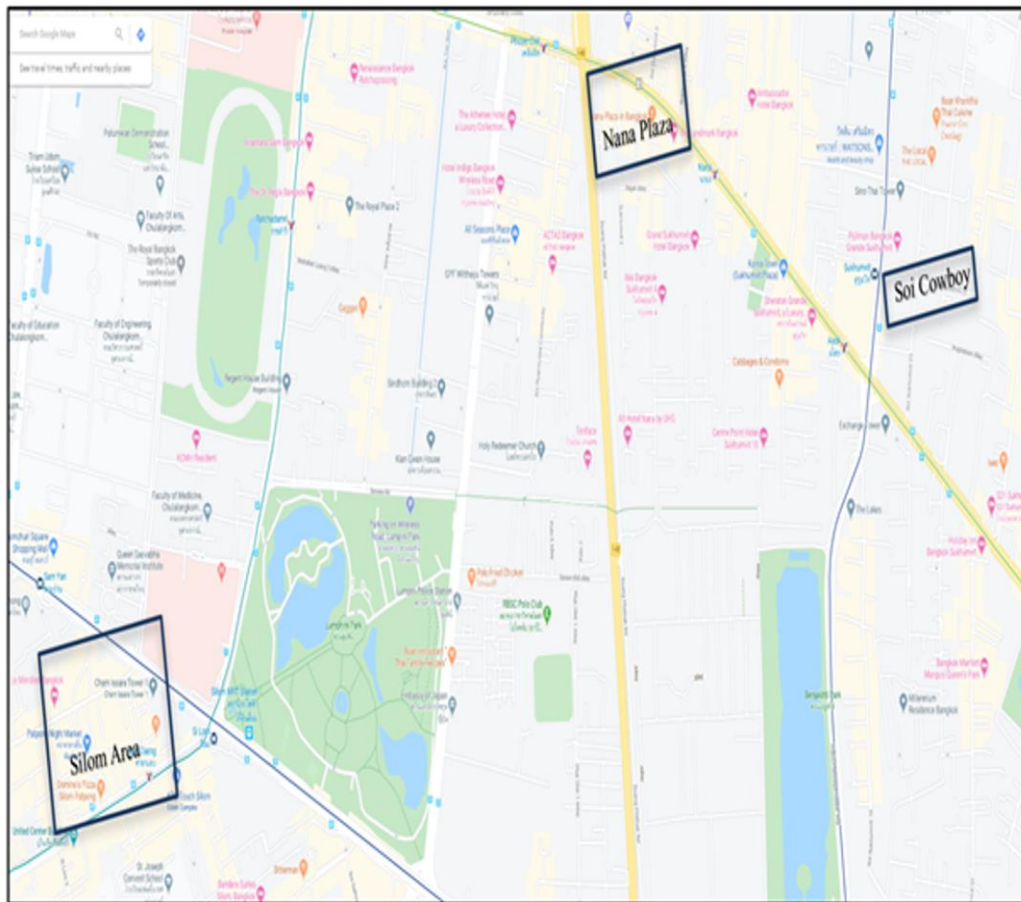
## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

In this chapter, I present the research methodology of the study. I describe the research setting, the data and its types, and the data collection process. I also discuss my position and reflection as a researcher. Finally, I explain the method of data analysis and the methodological challenges of the study.

#### 3.1 Research Setting

The present study explored the three main sex tourism spaces in Bangkok, namely Silom, Soi Cowboy and Nana Plaza (see Figure 1). These are located in non-residential areas in central Bangkok where a lot of business establishments and tourist destinations are. Despite being sex tourism spaces at night, these places function differently during the day. Silom is a financial and business district covered by various establishments. Cowboy alley is a small alley situated in the Asoke area, a business district where famous malls such as Terminal 21 and restaurants are located. Both of these areas are surrounded by street vendors and other attractions visited by both local and non-local people. Nana Plaza is a three-storey building which is designed as a more adult structure. It is located on Sukhumvit Road, where a lot of business establishments are. To visually present these areas, I marked them in Figure 1.



*Figure 1 Map of Bangkok Sex Tourism Spaces investigated in the Study (Google, n.d.-a)*

Silom (Thai: สีลม) is a sub-district and road in Bang Rak district (Silom-Guide, 2015) in the central part of Bangkok. Formerly part of a dike and an irrigation system, Silom has turned into a cosmopolitan environment where various business establishments are installed around its vicinity and different types of entertainment facilities have mushroomed. This has led to Silom's transformation as "Thailand's major financial center" (Silom-Guide, 2015) with the number of bank offices around the area. Although this appears as a commercial site, it transforms to a different mood during night-time. In other words, according to (Silom-Guide, 2015) the area has two

characteristics, i.e., a business district in the daytime and “red light district at night, particularly due to its small *soi* ‘alley.’

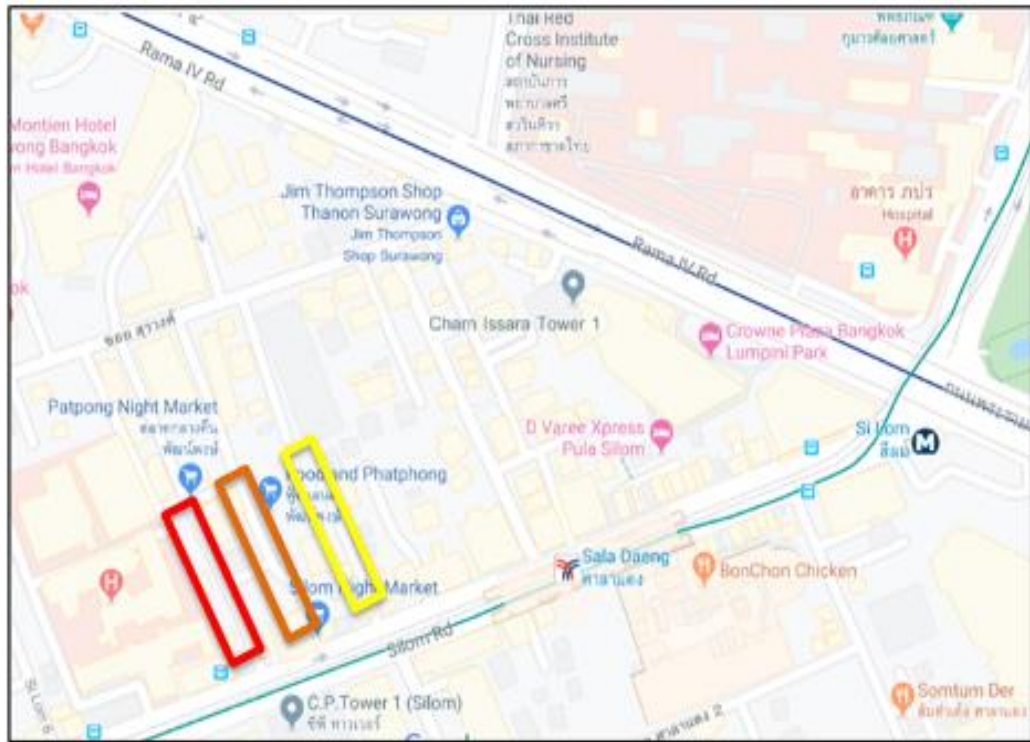


Figure 2 Map of Silom (Google, n.d.-d)

Silom, sometimes called the “Wall Street of Thailand” (Yusuf et al., 2000), is one of the most famous tourist destinations in Bangkok due to its rich nightlife activities. It is famously known for sex tourism at night-time. It has several areas dedicated to different groups of customers. This thesis focuses on three alleys as shown in Figure 2 – *Phatphong 1* alley (red), *Phatphong 2* alley (orange) and *Silom 4* alley (yellow). Situated in these areas are bars, restaurants, massage salons, and street vendors selling clothes. However, the three areas differ in the type of entertainment and services offered. Phatphong (Thai: พัฒน์พงษ์) is considered an entertainment district and one of the three oldest “red light districts” in Bangkok (Thai-LT, 2021). It

is considered as a naughty area where a more revealing sex-industry is practiced (Bangkok.com, 2019). It has two different sub-areas that target different customers. Phatphong 1 alley, the area where the night market is situated, is for heterosexual men. It is surrounded by bars that feature working women in revealing attires. In contrast, Phatphong 2 alley is an area designed for foreign and local gay men (Bangkokeyes, 2019). It is heavily flooded with bars that foreground bodies of men in signs and semi-naked working men. Silom 4 alley, formerly known as *Phatphong 3*, is also referred to as *Soi Kathoey* ‘kathoey alley.’ It is located at the opposite end of Convent Road. Available in the alley are drag queen shows and outdoor drinking bars. It is an alley that is famously known as the area for gay audience (The-Gay-Passport, 2019). However, it has recently been visited by heterosexuals who go as couples, making it a space for diverse audiences.

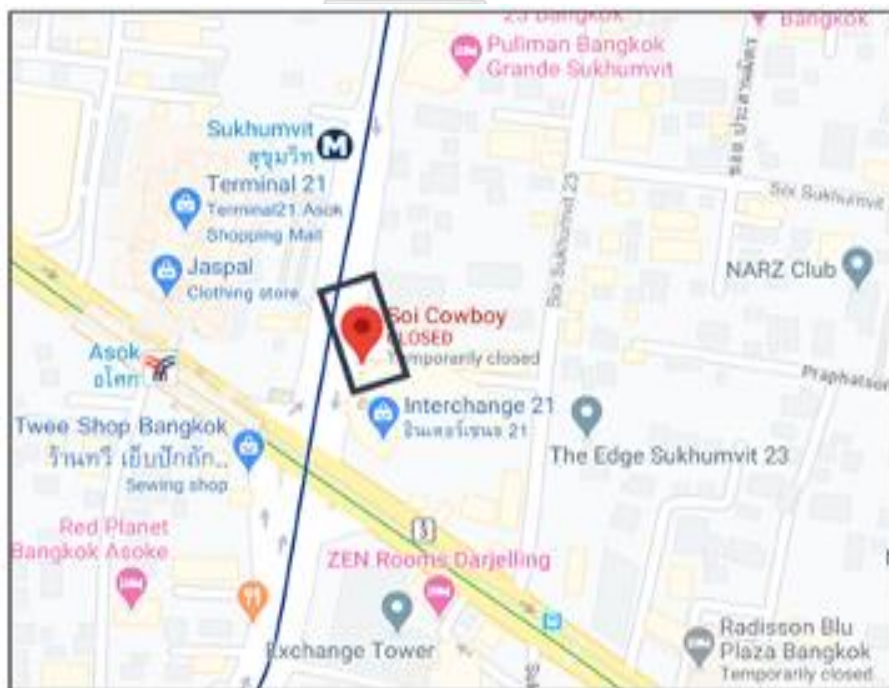


Figure 3 Map of Cowboy Alley (Google, n.d.-b)



Cowboy Alley is one of the most frequently visited red-light districts in Thailand (Cowboy, 2009-2019; Culture-Trip, 2019). It is a 150-meter street along the Sukhumvit area in Bangkok, Thailand. It is famously known for its vibrant night-life activities. It is named after TG Edwards, a retired military officer who often had a cowboy hat (Culture-Trip, 2019). This became the alley's trademark after being dubbed by a newspaper columnist, Bernard Trink (Cowboy, 2009-2019). It has enjoyed an influx of people since it opened and gradually gained popularity among Japanese visitors and expatriates in the 90s, making it the top sex tourism choice among foreign visitors. However, Cowboy Alley has been going through a challenging time as the advent of competitors in sex tourism business put Cowboy Alley behind other sex tourism places (i.e., Silom and Nana Plaza) in Bangkok. Despite this setback, it remains in operation until now. It caters predominantly to western male tourists and has been considered as the place where men could meet women for pick up (Redeye, 2015-2018).

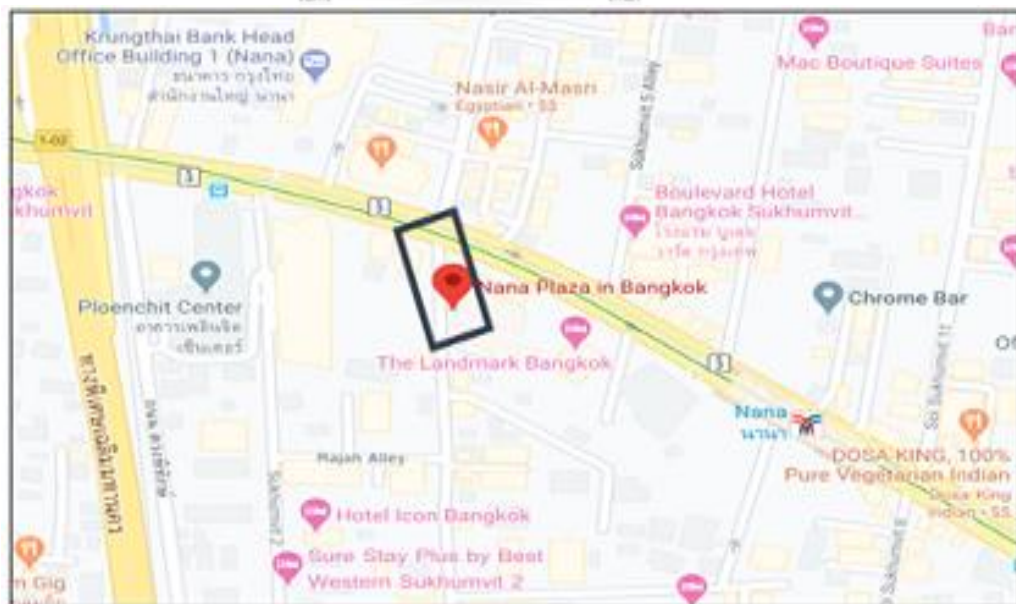


Figure 4 Map of Nana Plaza (Google, n.d.-c)

Unlike the other sex tourism areas which occupy alleys, Nana Plaza, formerly known as Nana Entertainment Plaza, is a 3-storey entertainment building which features a square-like atrium surrounded by neon lights. It is located in Sukhumvit 4 alley in Khlong Toei District which is 300 meters away from the sky train's Nana station. It is famously known as red-light district for heterosexual men who seek women. Unlike Cowboy Alley and Silom areas, Nana Plaza has a more mature scene. This is due to a little to no family visitors and vendors around. It is self-dubbed as "world's largest adult playground" (Radu, 2018) and is frequently flocked by foreign tourists.

### **3.2 Description of Data and its Types**

From these three sex tourism places, the signs under investigation were shop signs and promotional signs. Although there were other establishments (e.g., massage parlors, restaurants) in the areas, the study focused on shop signs and promotional signs of bars as these are places particularly advertised as sex tourism spaces. This is also consistent with previous research on sex tourism signs (Baudinette, 2018; Piller, 2010). In particular, I set three criteria that were used in guiding the selection of signs. These signs should have elements relating to gender and sexuality; signs should be shop signs and promotional signs of bars; and signs should contain any sexual reference. Shop signs are those that carry the name of the establishments (see Figure 5). They are usually placed in front of the establishments and appear in various ways such as painted, printed, or LED display. They contain the shops' logo and color brand. Their main purpose is to attract customers.



*Figure 5 Example of a Shop Sign (Cowboy Alley)*

Promotional signs contain more information including photos, schedule of shows, list/types of services, and advertisements. They may appear in the forms of cardboard, poster/tarpaulin and wall sticker/painting. For example, Figure 6 is a promotional sign that promoters carry when they invite tourists to enter the bar. It contains images of the type of shows and the promotional drinks that the bar offers. Figure 8 is a tarpaulin type of promotional material that is displayed in front of the bar. It shows the schedule of the show and images of the performers. In general, promotional signs carry more information and are semiotically more complex compared to shop signs.



Figure 6 Example of a promotional sign (Silom 4)

### 3.3 Data Collection จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

In collecting the data, the study employed two techniques: photography and non-participant observation. Photography is the main data collection technique that I used. It has become the common data collection technique in linguistic landscape research. I used a smartphone device in taking a photo of the signs. In this study, a sign, as defined by Backhaus (2006), is any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame. Hence, each sign is counted. However, the signs collected were limited to shop signs and promotional signs that fit the description of sexed signs. This meant I did not include any promotional signs that contained drinks only. In total I collected 122 sexed signs which were subjected to analysis.

Another data collection technique followed is non-participant observation. The use of non-participant observation is often used along with other data to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the field (Liu & Maitlis, 2010). This is found significant in understanding the discourse of the discursive practice of sex tourism from an outsider perspective. Non-participant observation involved three different stages: general descriptive observation, focused observation and selected observation (Liu & Maitlis, 2010). The general descriptive observation which provides an overview of the field was done on the first visit. I spent approximately 1-1.5 hours in each location. However, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, there were only few to no tourists at all. I constantly visited the place even in the morning to have a general grasp of the practices in a particular area. I did this for most of the areas except for Nana Plaza as it was closed during daytime. After the general observation, I conducted a focused observation. The time spent varied due to the very limited tourists in the area. I spent approximately an hour in Silom 4, Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza but no more than half an hour in Phatphong 1 and Phatphong 2 as most of the bars were closed. Then, a selected observation followed. This lasted for approximately half an hour for Phatphong 2, Silom 4 and Cowboy Alley but only 10 minutes for Phatphong 1 as there were only two bars open. I was not able to return to Nana Plaza as it remained closed. Because of the unexpected outpour plus the COVID-19 pandemic, I visited the sites more often than I initially planned to but still arrived with very limited observation notes because all the tourist places were closed. The observation ran for five months from August to December. I started in the second week of August but was halted in between due to the curfew set by the government. Overall, I managed to collect 12 observation notes

In conducting my observation, I focused on four points which emerged from the initial stage of my fieldwork. These include the general description of the place, description of workers, description of tourists, and the interaction between the workers and tourists. In the general description of the place, I focused on the landscape, particularly on the bar set up and the make-up of the place. I concentrated on bars that had outdoor set up as I did not enter the establishments. As for the description of the workers and tourists, I investigated what they wore, their expression and their self-presentation. This enabled me to infer tourists' interests and inclination in terms of the bars they went to. This also allowed me to understand the gender formation of the place as the tourists and the workers contribute to it. The last stage was the interaction of the workers and the tourists. I took note of how a transaction and an offer of goods, in this case the drinks, were done. From my fieldwork, I faced several challenges due to the different landscapes of the tourism places. It must be noted that the study was conducted in the time of COVID-19 pandemic which affected the rhythm of interaction between the tourists and workers. In view of this challenge, I collected COVID-19 related signs to demonstrate their impact in the interaction.

The presence of COVID-19 signs was a regulatory instrument to enforce the safety protocol of the country. This includes a temperature check and a monitoring of human activities. Figure 7 shows the use of thermal scan, alcohol/alcogel, QR code for entrance and exit, and log sheet. The thermal scan is used to monitor people's temperature. This becomes a gatekeeper for those entering a bar. If the temperature is high, they are not permitted to enter the bar. Once they are allowed, they need to use alcohol/alcogel to sanitize their hands. They are also asked to scan the QR code to



monitor those entering the bar. This is done through smart phones; however, based on my fieldwork, I observed that some tourists were not comfortable doing it due to some privacy concerns. This is why some opt to sign up in the log-in sheet instead. This gatekeeping monitoring has changed the way people got to tourism spaces as they need to be free from any symptoms to avoid spreading the virus.



*Figure 7 COVID-19 Sign: Balcony (Silom 4)*

The current practice is not only monitoring individuals but also surveilling their movements. Sex tourism spaces are quasi-legal spaces and are not often the mainstream entertainment. This means that some people try to be someone else to keep a somewhat anonymous identity. But having such measures severely affects tourists who are not comfortable being identified as frequenters of such places. This I observed when some tourists pretend to scan the QR code to just get away with it.

As tourism spaces are known to be crowded, signs have been emplaced in different spots to enforce distance. Social distancing is one of the safety measures imposed to prevent the spread of COVID. Signs appear on every wall to ensure that tourists are made aware of the protocol. It can be seen in Figure 8 how the visual elements are used to communicate the severity of the health problem. Red is used in the information that needs serious attention and black is for illustrating such warnings.



Figure 8 Social Distancing COVID Sign (Phatphong 2)

Social distancing signs affect the interaction order (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) in sex tourism space, particularly the units of interaction order. My pre-COVID-19 fieldwork shows the number of people visiting sex tourism spaces. It is normally crowded, and tourists are very much intimate with each other. They come in groups and sometimes on their own. This has changed as tourists cannot be close to each other to avoid any contact which may lead to the spread of the virus.



Another way to enforce social distancing is the placement of signs on each table and chair. The signs serve as restricted spaces to maintain people's distance. Figure 9 shows the use of a sticker placed on the table. The linguistic elements contain "DO NOT SIT SOCIAL DISTANCING". The use of capital letters communicates how serious the measure is. It is comparable to shouting in speaking. In addition, the use of red "X" sends a message of warning. Sharing tables is also a common practice in my pre-COVID fieldwork. But by the appearance of these signs, tourists have been encouraged to use separate tables and maintain a seat a part. This affects the rhythm of interaction that was then intimate but now distant.



*Figure 9 Social Distancing Sign 2 (Silom 4)*

Although the COVID-19 signs do not participate in the gender and sexuality construction of sex tourism spaces, they are materially emplaced in places which affect the activities most tourists engage in. It is also noticeable that most of the contents of the signs and their visual representation are identical: they serve as COVID regulatory signs. They serve as a warning to ensure that tourists will practice

the protocols that the government has issued. Thus, COVID-19 signs disrupt the known vibrant and intimate discursive practices situated in sex tourism spaces.

Aside from the presence of COVID-19 signs, I was also challenged by the unique practices in the different sex tourism areas I visited, which forced me to behave differently. I discuss them in the next section from my position as a researcher, role in the field, and my reflection.

### **3.4 Positionality and Reflexivity**

One salient consideration in this study was my positionality and reflexivity as a researcher. In this section, I begin with positionality and its impact towards the conduct of research. As England (1994) points out, research is a space that is shared by the researcher and the participants whose experiences shape the process. This suggests that the identity and the experiences of the researcher influence the analysis and interpretation of the data. (Bourke, 2014) notes that researchers' biases can potentially impact the process of conducting the research. This means that my background and lived experiences are significant in the research process and interpretation of the data. To position myself in the study, I discuss my background, my lived experiences and how they affected my dissertation project.

I am a 30-year-old openly gay Filipino who has had five years of teaching and research experience but admittedly a neophyte in the field I am entering. I have lived in Thailand since July of 2017. I am also a competent bilingual who is proficient in English, Filipino and Tagalog. However, my Thai language proficiency is very low as it is only limited to survival Thai which I use in everyday transaction. This means that I am not able to read signs and understand conversations in Thai. I often sought

assistance from my native Thai students who are also pursuing graduate degree in linguistics and from my adviser who is a native Thai speaker. Additional information was obtained from various online resources.

Since I moved to Thailand, I have not been a club-goer myself. The only time I went to such establishments was when my Filipino friends visited me and asked me to tour them around. Being less knowledgeable about the place, I relied on the recommendations of my Thai friends who pointed me to the sites I investigated. This meant that the sex tourism places I went to were originally a place where I brought friends seeking what they termed “real gay experience.” From then on, I frequented the place for informal observation. I formally visited the places I investigated in this study in the second quarter of 2018.

Given my background, my approaches in conducting my fieldwork in the three areas were varied. Silom areas are mixed. This means that the area has different spaces for different audiences which required me to behave accordingly to the surroundings. When I went to Phatphong 1 which is known to be a place where heterosexual men visit, I wore micro-shorts and t-shirt to keep myself unnoticeable in the field. This allowed me to conduct my observation effectively. I still wore ordinary clothing such as shorts and t-shirt when I visited Phatphong 2 and Silom 4 as they are known to be party spots where majority of the tourists are well-clothed. I kept my style as ordinary as possible for the workers to not notice me which eventually led me to documenting my observation. Silom 4 though had a better set up for observation as it is an alley filled with outdoor tables and chairs where I could comfortably sit. Occasionally, I needed to order beer to be treated as a tourist and hide my identity as a

researcher so as to not affect my data collection. I maintained that I only drink very minimally so I could focus on my observation. In Cowboy Alley and Nana Plaza, I had to be overtly gay as these places are frequented by heterosexual men. This means I wore my micro-shorts so the workers would not pay attention to me. In these places, I went by myself to Cowboy alley the first time but on the succeeding visits, I needed to invite my fellow Filipino gay friends as the place required full consciousness when conducting the observation. Similarly, I brought my friends, particularly the discreet looking gays who can stay at our table while I did my observation. Their company gave me peace of mind that my belongings and the table we were using were attended to; thus, enabling me to smoothly document my observation.

My position as foreign researcher gave me both advantages and disadvantages. As for advantages, it allowed me to have an outsider perspective on how the discursive interaction and practice were situated in sex tourism spaces. My lived experiences as openly gay researcher also gave me tools to understand the landscape of a queer space and interpret the interaction of elements relating to the LGBTQIA+. The disadvantages were my inability to read, write, listen to, and speak competent Thai. Also, as a foreign researcher, I was only limited to the research articles written in English.

Another dimension worth discussing is reflexivity, the area in which the researcher scrutinizes their experience in the conduct of the study and relationship with the research (Pillow, 2003). Generally, reflexivity is viewed as “the attention to the complex relationship between processes of knowledge production and the various contexts of such processes, as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer”

(Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018, p. 8). This means that our conscious quest in understanding our role in the research we are involved in is significant. Callaway (1992, p. 33) puts it simply as “a continuing mode of self-analysis.”

My reflexivity as a researcher pursuing a somewhat taboo or perhaps less regarded sociolinguistic topic (Borba, 2016) is confronted by many obstacles. The conceptualization stage was undeniably challenging as resources in sociolinguistics were limited. Even fewer are the experts I am acquainted with and could seek assistance from. This added a burden in conducting such kind of study; however, my constant field visitation and the approval of my adviser allowed me to reconcile my conflicts and decided to pursue it as my dissertation project. I must admit that I faced several discouragements due to the nature of the field. It was my curiosity that pushed me to argue for the significance of sex tourism spaces as significant sites of sociolinguistic investigation. This then led me to seek answers to my understanding of reality (Alvesson et al., 2008), in this case, of sex tourism; ask my relationship with my research contexts and validate (Corlett & Mavin, 2018) that the area of my study is truly significant and deserve scholarly attention. These capture the essence of reflexivity by examining our ways of thinking, doing and evaluating in the kind of research being pursued (Day, 2012).

As a neophyte researcher, I needed to excavate a rich literature of sex tourism from anthropology, sociology, geography and tourism studies. The knowledge I gained from the vast information in these fields made me aware of salient aspects that needed much attention. In particular, I echoed Pritchard and Morgan’s (2000) position where they noted that sex tourism spaces are complex places due to the constant

negotiation and renegotiation of power and identity that is influenced by gender and sexuality. As a sociolinguistics student, I explored how this position was concretized on the ground and sought linguistic evidence to understand the reality that sex tourism has through linguistics. This was found in the signs emplaced in the bars I investigated.

I believe as an openly gay person who is attracted to men, I was stereotyped that the research may be a self-serving move. However, I disagreed and positioned myself as an early career researcher who is in search of a niche and a place in the already crowded scholarly spaces. My relationship with my research context, though, has a rather interesting points of origin. I did not often visit clubs and bars in Bangkok, but because I need to entertain Filipino gay friends, I adjusted. This was the start of my visits in different bars. But my linguistics training led me to questioning the functions of language and semiotic elements in the places I went to. Thus, the relationship was not limited to the professional setting but also a personal one.

Perhaps the most challenging question I often ask is, “what is the significance of your work?” And probably the most difficult one to answer is, “Is that even an academic or PhD worthy research? These questions occupied my mind until today but my experience in the field and the actual writing of this dissertation has helped me come to terms with these questions and offer answers from research. One is that sex tourism is a place consisting of people of different backgrounds and various semiotic systems. This helped me argue that there are discourses in place (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) that need unpacking. I followed Borba (2016) who mentioned that a linguistic investigation of sex tourism is significant, and that language use is a salient tool to

access and understand the discourses embedded in it. I stand that the interaction of different resources is significant in the construction of identity and places. Rowlett (2019) argued that sex tourism is a place where language, gender, sexuality, place, and agency meet and participate in the discursive formation of identities. Therefore, I assert that my work is significant in understanding the complex layers of meaning in the construction of sex tourism spaces where language, semiotics and people play essential roles. Likewise, my work contributes to the emerging area of sociolinguistics which Borba (2016) refers to as the sociolinguistics of sex work.

### **3.5 Methods of Analysis**

The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative aspect of the analysis involved frequency counting of linguistic and semiotic elements. This method of analysis has been used in various linguistic/semiotic landscape studies (Backhaus, 2006; Landry & Bourhis, 1997) to serve as the baseline and premise of the study. The quantitative and qualitative aspects are employed in addressing objectives 1 and 2. For objective 1, I used frequency counting in identifying the patterns of linguistic and semiotic choices in sexed signs. I applied code preference (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) and compositional meaning (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996) to qualitatively analyze the linguistic and semiotic choices. The code preference is examined by looking at placement of languages based on the horizontal structure where the preferred code is on the left, and vertical structure where the preferred code is at the top. Compositional meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) was applied by examining salience which was observed through size of the text and the color selection.

In addressing objective 2, I employed two methods: a data-driven analysis for lexicalization and visual social semiotics for the visual analysis. For lexicalization, I focused on the characteristics of the shop signs. I grouped the shop names that share the same characteristics and created categories which made up the lexicalization processes (Jones, 2013) of signs. I interpreted the visual elements in the signs through visual social semiotics (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996) focusing on the representational, interactive and compositional meanings. Finally, I brought the lexicalization processes and visual social semiotics in examining the promotional signs.

In discussing objective 3, I employed a qualitative analysis through linguistic fetish (Kelly-Holmes, 2015) and language and desire (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). Linguistic fetish was used to interpret the use of languages in signs through foreign language as visuals (foreign language fetish), visual English (English fetish) and minority language/s as visual (minority language fetish). Language and desire (Cameron & Kulick, 2003) was utilized to examine the role of language in creating erotic desire. I followed the dimensions that map desire classified as erotic desire, erotic intimacy, and transgression.

### **3.6 Methodological Challenges**

Echoing the limitations of the study, the methodological undertakings in the conduct of fieldwork faced several challenges. These challenges affected my decision in choosing the data collection techniques and the method of analysis presented in the earlier sections. I discussed two major obstacles, namely, access and nature of the field, and COVID-19 related restrictions.



The access and nature of the field were mainly public and outdoor set up. My observations were limited to the number of people who opted to stay at the tents and tables set up outside the bars. Because of such set up, I had to face unforeseen events. I conducted the fieldwork in the months of August until December when rain is frequent. This affected data collection as tourists staying outdoors needed to move indoors. By the time the rain stopped, and I visited a bar again, the place was left wet and empty.

At the time of the fieldwork, COVID-19 restrictions enforcing social distancing, lockdowns, curfew hours, and health protocols were in place. These restrictions led me to avoid using a full ethnographic approach including interviews and participant observation, techniques that could have offered much richer insights into the make-up of sex tourism spaces. In lieu of these techniques, I had to stick with photographs, which was a traditional approach in conducting semiotic landscape study, and non-participant observation which kept my distance from people. These did not only enable me to keep myself safe from the virus but also allowed me to be compliant with government protocols.

Despite these methodological challenges, the techniques helped me address the objectives of the study and answer the research questions posted. It is also significant to stress that the findings of the study cannot serve as a representative of Bangkok sex tourism spaces. However, they provide evidence of the discursive practices of particular sex tourism spaces in Bangkok included in this study from a semiotic landscape perspective.

## CHAPTER 4

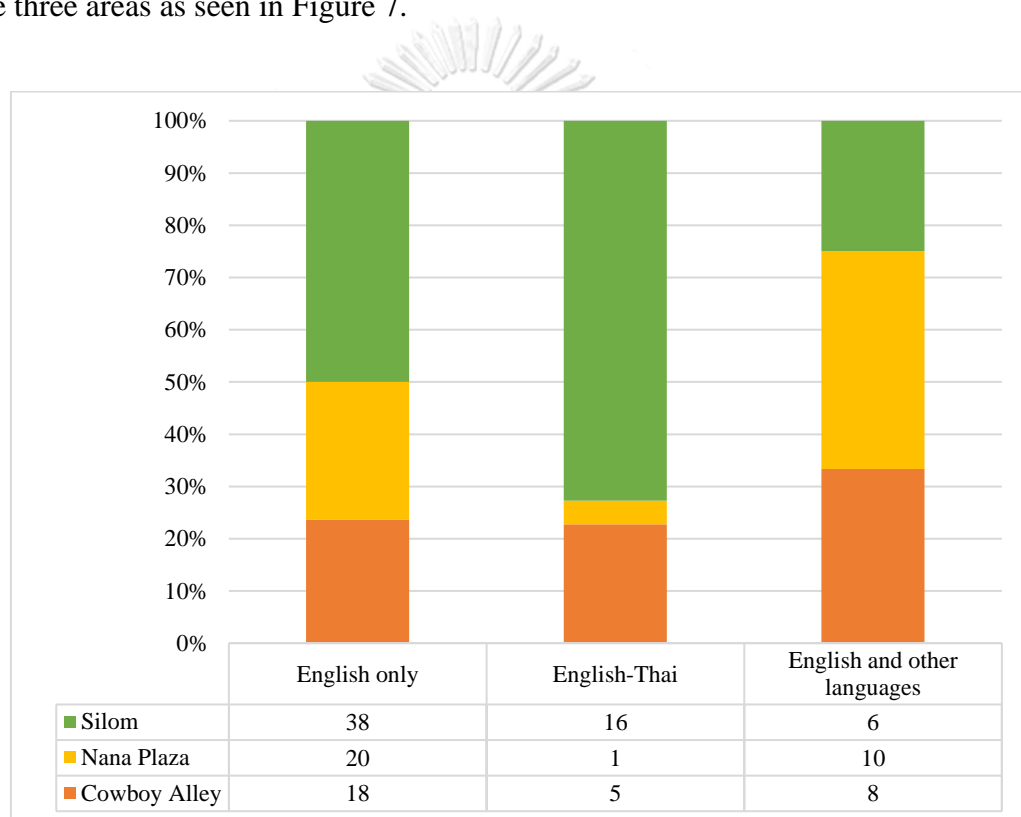
### **Linguistic and Semiotic Sources in Bangkok Sex Tourism Spaces**

In this chapter, I present the analysis of sexed signs—shop signs and promotional signs—in three sex tourism places in Bangkok, namely, Silom, Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley. I particularly examine the linguistic and semiotic resources found in the sexed signs. The linguistic resources are analyzed in two ways. First, the patterns of language choice are identified based on scripts. The patterns established are English only, English-Thai, and English and other languages. Second, the code preference (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) is identified. The first part of the analysis reveals which languages appear on the signs in the areas investigated while the second part illustrates which language is more prominent in a particular sign. This is applied to the entire Bangkok sex tourism spaces and to the individual areas. The semiotic resources are investigated through the identification of their occurrence and positioning. The analysis in this chapter feeds into Objective 1 of the study. The linguistic resources indicate the prominence of English in every sign. Though different in the preferred code, English is given more salience. The semiotic resources demonstrate the prevalence of the human body in sexed signs. Some semiotic elements are used to reveal the gender of the body.

#### **4.1 Linguistic Resources in Bangkok Sex Tourism Spaces**

Over the past years, language choice has been found salient in semiotic landscape study. It does not only inform the languages used in place but also captures the identity of people and that of the place. In this section, I concentrate on linguistic

resources used in the sexed signs collected from the three sex tourism areas in Bangkok, namely Silom, Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley. I identify the patterns of language choice in the shop signs and promotional signs. I then look further into each pattern of language choice through Scollon and Scollon's (2003) code preference in tandem with Kress and Leeuwen's (1996) compositional meaning. I begin my analysis by looking at the distribution of language choices across the sexed signs in the three areas as seen in Figure 7.



*Figure 10 Language Choice in Bangkok Sex Tourism Spaces*

As can be seen in Figure 10, English turns out to be selected in every single sign. English may appear by itself or with Thai or other languages, but it is always there no matter which pattern of language choice we see. Thus, English is the most prevalent language in Bangkok sex tourism signs. In Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley, the appearance of English with other languages such as Japanese, Chinese and Korean

is more common than the English-Thai pattern. This is because these two areas are frequented by foreign tourists, mostly western with few east Asian. In my observation, I only find little to none Thai tourists in these areas. Silom, in contrast, shows a different pattern where the English-Thai pattern appears more often followed by the English-only pattern and the English-with-other-languages pattern. This could be due to the number of Thai tourists visiting the area. Unlike Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley, Silom has many spaces and establishments catering to a wider audience including both Thai and non-Thai tourists. With the prominence of English across signs and sex tourism areas, I will provide the analysis of all areas together. I will begin with signs containing English only, followed by signs using the English-Thai pattern, and finally signs having other languages.



*Figure 11 Shop Sign: London Calling (Nana Plaza)*



Figure 12 Promotional Sign: The Stranger Bar and Lounge (Silom 4)

Figure 11 shows the use of English only in the shop sign *London Calling*. The place's name is positioned at the center of the sign. It is written in white in capitalized letters. Another example of English-only sign is Figure 12 which is a promotional sign. In this sign, different types of drinks are listed all in English. The name of the bar *The Stranger Bar and Lounge* is placed at the top right and is written against a black backdrop. Towards its left and at the bottom is an imperative invitation and its font has a glowing background. The list of drinks is in different colors and in boldface.

The prominence of English is not a new phenomenon in the Thai context. Several investigations have been conducted on the visibility of English in the Thai

semiotic landscape. One of the first works is Huebner's (2006) examination of LL signs in Bangkok where he finds the greater number of English (including roman scripts) signs in commercial areas frequented by both local and foreign tourists. Similarly, the appearance of English signs—most commonly in combination with Thai—is found in Prapobratanakul's (2016) study of a market where the majority of the businesses are locally owned and cater to local customers. In addition, English likewise pervades in public transportation such as in sky train stations (Sutthinaraphan, 2016). The use of English in the Thai semiotic landscape seems to suggest the move towards internationalism and stylishness (Sutthinaraphan, 2016).

The predominance of English is well-recorded around the world. It has been linked to the Englishization (Kachru, 1994) phenomenon which contributes to the creation of multilingual spaces (Bolton, 2012). English mainly operates instrumentally to communicate with foreign tourists. Symbolically, English adds a trendy and cosmopolitan appeal (Baudinette, 2018) to the places. Although these have been posited by various scholars, it is important to determine whether their appearance is depicted as the preferred code.



*Figure 13 Shop Sign: Rose (Phatphong 2)*





*Figure 14 Shop Sign: TavernTwo (Phatphong 2)*

Another common language pattern in all of the areas investigated is the English-Thai pattern. The analysis reveals that English, despite appearing with Thai, is usually the most prominent language and the preferred code. Figure 13 is an example of this pattern. The shop sign contains a single word in English *Rose* which appears in the center. Below in the bottom right corner is *โรส*, the Thai transliteration of *Rose*. English is the preferred code which is more salient than Thai based on the size and color of text. It is bigger and is in yellow which gives more visual weight as compared to its Thai equivalent which is smaller in size and in white. However, the preferred code is not always the most salient language. Figure 14 is an example of an English-Thai pattern where Thai emerges as the preferred code. The Thai transliteration of the place's name *แทอร์เวิร์นทู* is placed on top of its English counterpart *TavernTwo*. Such vertical alignment suggests Thai as the preferred code. However, Thai is not the most salient language. It is English which is given more visual weight due to its bigger size. The use of Thai transliteration of shop names is common in the investigated signs where both English and Thai appear. Though the use of English has already been established as a technique to internationalize places, the Thai transliteration is claimed by Kanchanawan (2006) as a way to globalize the

Thai Language. This suggests that the goal to globalize Bangkok tourism spaces is jointly performed by employing English and the Thai transliteration.

Apart from the English-Thai pattern, English co-occurs with other languages including Thai. Figure 15 is an example of this pattern. As can be seen, three languages are used in the sign. The English name *Lucky Boys Bangkok* is placed at the top alongside the Chinese name 好运男孩 ‘lucky boy’. On the other hand, the Thai transliteration of the English name ลักกี้ บอยส์ แบงค็อก is at the bottom. This makes English and Chinese as the preferred code. In terms of salience, it is evident that varying visual weight is given to Chinese and English through the color red and bigger size, respectively. It is worth mentioning that the translation, specifically the Chinese name does not have “Bangkok.” This translation technique is what Reh (2004) categorizes as fragmentary – only selected part of information is translated and displayed in another language. I interpret this as a technique that brings the attention of the viewer to the name “Lucky Boys” instead of focusing on its origin.



Figure 15 Shop Sign: Lucky Boys Bangkok (Phatphong 2)



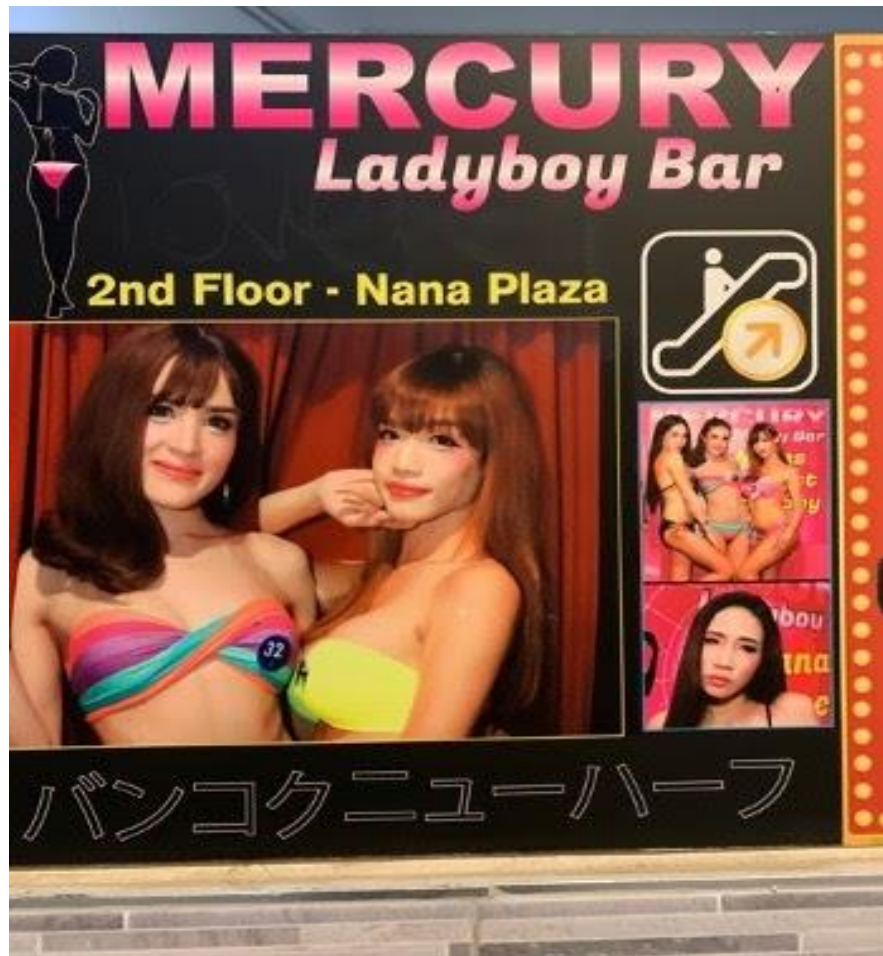


Figure 16 Promotional Sign: Mercury Ladyboy Bar (Nana Plaza)

There are also signs that contain English and other languages which excludes Thai. Figure 16 is an example of this where English appears with Japanese. As seen in the figure, English *Mercury Ladyboy Bar* appears above and Japanese バンコクニューハーフ ‘Ladyboy Bar’, making English the preferred code. It is important to note that the name of the bar is not completely translated into Japanese. It only includes “ladyboy bar” without “Mercury”. In addition, English is also given salience through size and color compared to Japanese which is smaller and in white and black.

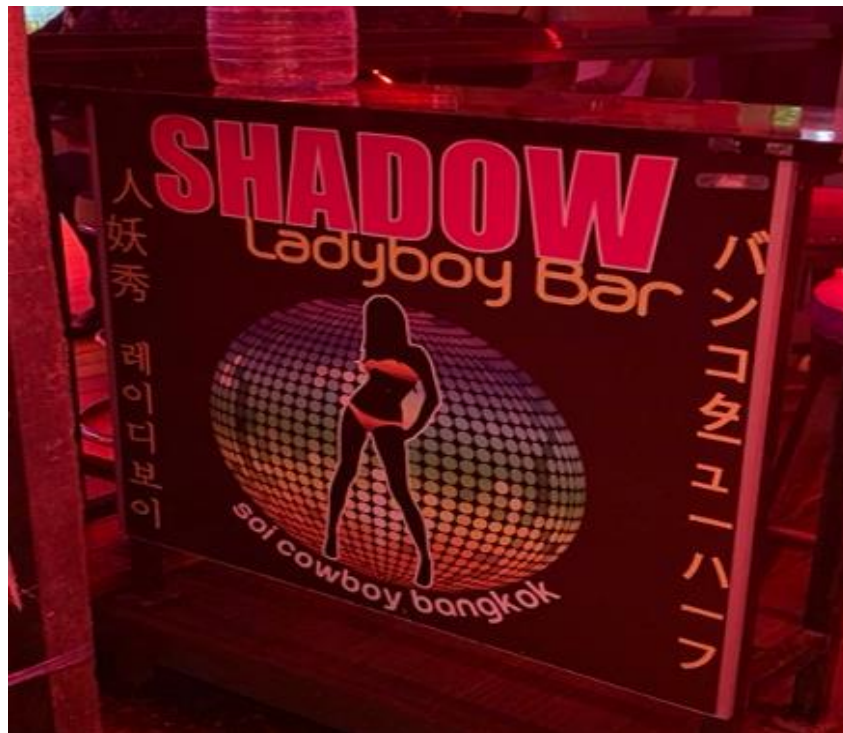


Figure 17 Promotional Sign: Shadow Ladyboy Bar (Cowboy Alley)

Figure 17 demonstrates a complex multilingual sign. Like Figure 16, Figure 17 illustrates the English-with-other-languages pattern. It has a center-periphery code preference structure. The center position is occupied by English which serves as the preferred code. The periphery is taken by Japanese, Chinese and Korea. On the left periphery are Chinese 人妖秀 ‘Ladyboy’ and Korean 레이디보이 ‘Ladyboy,’ while on the right is periphery is Japanese バンコターユーフ ‘Bangkok Ladyboy’. Aside from its position, English is given more salience through size and varying colors.

The name of the bar *Shadow* is in pink and has a bigger font size. The yellow text *Ladyboy Bar* beneath the name of the bar is strategically used as the source text of the translations into Japanese, Chinese and Korean. I base this interpretation on the

choice of yellow for *Ladyboy Bar* and the texts in the other three languages on both sides of the sign. The Chinese and Korean translations do not include the meaning of *bar*. The absence of *bar* in Chinese 人妖秀 ‘Ladyboy’ and Korean 레이디보이 ‘Ladyboy’ demonstrates a fragmentary translation pattern (Reh, 2004) where only certain fragments of information are translated. This strategy is used to focus on the ladyboys rather than highlighting the kind of place. I interpret this translation practice as a deliberate advertising strategy focusing on trans women who are the subjects of the bar.

Similarly, the Japanese translation バンコターユーフ ‘Bangkok Ladyboy’ does not include the meaning of *bar*. In addition to that, the translation mentions ‘Bangkok.’ As Cowboy alley is known to be famous among Japanese audiences, the inclusion of ‘Bangkok’ may be a way to depict the area’s authenticity. Bangkok serves as the origin of the trans woman which Japanese customers seek. The translation pattern follows what Reh (2004) refers to as overlapping pattern. This means that the source text and its translation share some parts of the information while at the same time contain additional information that is not translated into another language. English is used as a neutral language that is intended to communicate general information to wider audiences. Thus, the different translation techniques are ways to emphasize the roles of different languages in adding value and identity to the palace and the people who work in it.

Although the use of different languages reveals translation patterns, they do not represent translation practice per se. Rather, they are strategically used to indicate

that the presence of trans women who may be of interest by other tourists. I argue that multilingualism is used as a marketing technique to give prominence to trans women by indicating them in different languages.

The presence, absence, and co-occurrence and absence of Thai with other languages are regulated by the government under the Signboard Tax Act of 1967. The law stipulates that shop owners who use Thai only in their signs get incentivized through a lower tax rate. This is a similar case to those who include Thai translation in signs containing foreign languages, especially when Thai is positioned on top of the foreign languages. On the contrary, shop owners who use English only in their shop signs get penalized through a high tax rate. Despite this penalty, the absence of Thai is permitted under certain circumstances, particularly when the signs that appear inside private buildings.

In this section, it is found that the case of Englishization (Bolton, 2012; Kachru, 1994) is evident as English appears predominantly across areas and signs. It is also revealed that such phenomenon is supported by the code preference in the signs in which English remains the preferred code despite appearing with Thai and other languages, English remains the preferred code. Moreover, the positionality of language in signs does not automatically place its language as the preferred code as varying salient properties such as the size and color of font demonstrates the visual weight given to a particular language which makes it more salient.

## 4.2 The Semiotic Resources in Bangkok Sex Tourism Spaces

In the previous section, I discuss the language choices and their patterns of appearance which reveal English as the prominent language and preferred code. In the ensuing discussion, I present my analysis on the rich semiotic resources employed in sexed signs. I also show the patterns in which they appear. I first present the categories in which the semiotic elements are grouped according to their similarities. I then show the different semiotic choices employed in both shop signs and promotional signs.

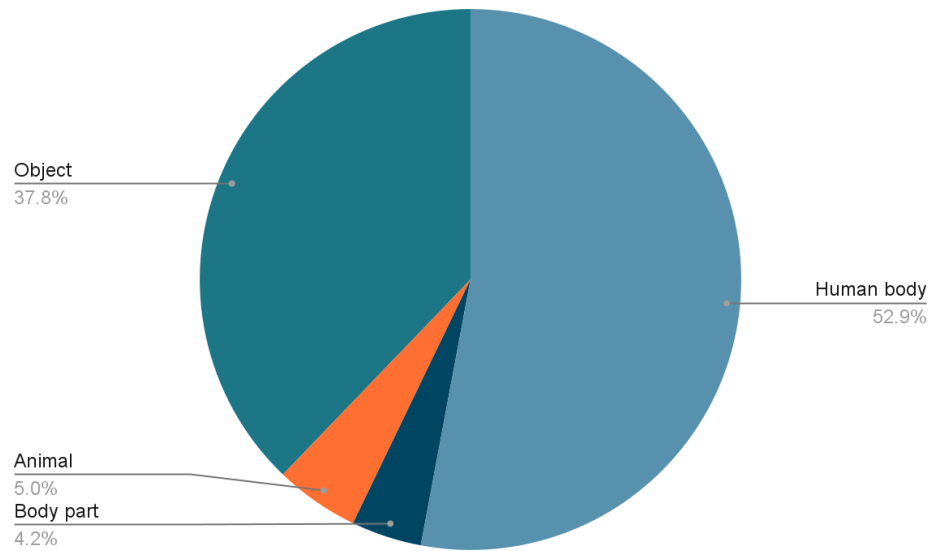
In analyzing the data systematically, I organize the semiotic elements appearing in sexed signs by collapsing them into categories. The analysis of semiotic elements is conducted by identifying their occurrence in each sign. That means if, for example, a sign illustrates a woman doing pole dancing, the semiotic elements are singled out into two different categories. The categories established from the data include human body, body part, animal and object. Human body is the category assigned to those semiotic elements that employ the body, be it male, female and trans woman. I discuss their distinguishing traits in the following sections. Body part includes lips and legs. Animals refer to the use of animals as semiotic elements appearing in signs. Object is a rather broad category. It has three subcategories namely, sexual objects, gender and sexuality related and mythical objects. Sexual objects are those objects that are sexually loaded like poles. Gender and sexuality related objects are those that are linked to a particular gender and sexual groups such as rainbows. Mythical objects are those that are normally connected with non-humans such as witches and cupids. These objects may appear individually or along with other objects. They appear in both shop signs and promotional signs. This object category is

discussed in more detailed in the next chapter where I expand this rather *ad hoc* category. The categories are established based on the features shared among semiotic elements. They appear alongside their tokens in Table 1.

*Table 1 Categories of Semiotic Elements in Sexed Signs*

Categories	Tokens
Human body	Male/Female/Trans woman body Male/Female/Trans woman shadow figure
Body part	Lips Legs
Animal	Bulldog icon Bear arms
Object	Lighthouse Poles
Gender and Sexuality	Rainbow colors
Mythical	Cupid Witch

Semiotic choices found in the signs are visually rich. They function indexically or symbolically. Just like language choices, semiotic elements may reveal the identity of people and place. Figure 18 illustrates the different semiotic choices found in Bangkok sex tourism areas.



*Figure 18 Semiotic Choices in Bangkok Sex Tourism Spaces*

*Table 2 Distribution of Semiotic Elements in Bangkok Sex Tourism Spaces*

	<b>Human body</b>	<b>Body part</b>	<b>Animal</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Total</b>
Silom	37	3	2	26	77
Nana Plaza	14	2	1	4	22
Cowboy alley	12	0	3	15	30

As seen in Figure 18, human body appears to be a salient semiotic element in sex tourism spaces. It is even more commonly occurring in all of the sex tourism areas as illustrated in Table 2. The use of the human body has been found to be significant in sex tourism spaces explored in other studies (Baudinette, 2017; Piller, 2010). Objects are quite diverse across the areas investigated. I discuss the different types of objects in the later section. It is also important to note that the counting of the objects

is based on their occurrence. Body parts and animals are those elements that are not much employed. I discuss their use and patterns in the following sections.

#### 4.2.1 Human Body

The human body emerges to be the most prominent semiotic element across Bangkok sex tourism areas. It reveals three different gender groups: male body, female and trans woman bodies. The male body is found to be more common in Silom 4 and Phatphong 2. The male body appears predominantly in Phatphong 1, Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley. These bodies come in two particular ways: shadow figures and photographic images. The human shadow figure emerges in all the signs collected and is found to be the outstanding characteristic in the data. It depicts a human body with lesser visual details. Photographic images are also commonly found in the data. They are images that show a greater detail. In the following sections, I discuss each category of the semiotic elements derived from the data.

##### 4.2.1.1 *The Male Body*

The male body is used in both shop signs and promotional signs in Silom 4 and Phatphong 2. In this study, I interpret the male body as one having muscular built, broad shoulders and defined abs. As observed, the male body is used differently particularly in terms of their presentation and position. It appears as a shadow figure in the shop signs while it is a photographic image in promotional signs. Figure 19 is an example of a male shadow figure. The male shadow figure shows the entire body. Its placement on the right side seems to be a common pattern in shop signs.

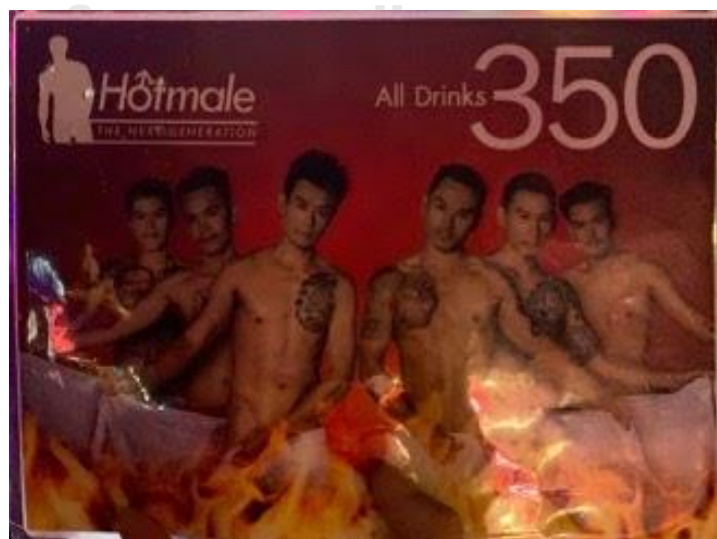




*Figure 19 Shop Sign: Fresh Boys (Phatphong 2)*

Another interesting observation is that only a single male body shadow figure appears in the entire shop signs collected. In contrast, male bodies in promotional signs come in groups which can be groups of men (see Figure 20) or those including trans women (see Figure 21). I discuss the use of trans women in the following section.

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย



*Figure 20 Promotional sign: Hotmale (Phatphong 2)*



*Figure 21 Promotional Sign: Banana Boys (Silom 4)*

The masculine body is also shown with more details through photographic images. There are promotional signs containing male bodies only. This appears in some small-sized promotional materials. Figure 20 is an example of this type. The male bodies in this sign are almost completely nude. The other semiotic elements noted here are the towels and flames which are used to cover the male body. Comparing it with Figure 20, Figure 21 demonstrates male bodies joined by a trans woman body. This is a practice in signs that are placed on tarpaulins, wall stickers and small-sized promotional materials which indicate the variety of

performers in a place. In this sign, men are wearing costumes. Some are half-naked.

#### 4.2.1.2 *The Female Body*

The female body is the use of a body that has slim waist, prominent breast. In my observation, I find that these characteristics are shared by both female and trans women. However, their distinct features are quite difficult to tell. That means, the difference between a “real” woman and trans woman is not clear. The only indicator I find is the use of linguistic descriptions such as the term “ladyboy,” a term used to refer to trans women in Thailand. Although a linguistic description like “100% real ladies” is used for “real” women/cis women, particularly in Nana Plaza, it is not the case for the majority of signs in the other areas. I discuss this in more detail in the following chapters. In addition, semiotic choices are also used differently which serve as my cue in determining the female body and trans woman bodies. In particular, I observe that the use of bikini on feminine body shadow figures appears to index trans women while the absence of such means real women. These all mean that my interpretation of cis women and trans women depend on the absence and presence of linguistic description and bikinis. I elaborate these observations in the following sections.

As observed, the female body is found prevalent in almost all areas in Bangkok sex tourism places. In particular, it appears in Phatpong 2, Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley. The female body can be displayed as

shadow figures or photographic images. Figure 22 and Figure 23 are examples of shadow figures. Shop signs involving the female body may appear as one icon or two which is relatively more than the single male shadow figure placed at the right section in a shop sign. Figure 22 shows two women shadow figures placed on both sides and are in a bend over position with their hands touching their knees. Pole dancing motion seems a common semiotic choice in signs. This is first seen in the male shape sign (see Figure 18). Figure 23 illustrates two women shadow figures dancing, with one on the right cradling the pole and the other on the left dancing with her hands on her head and bottom. The use of the human body and pole dancing appear more prominent in the signs. This suggests the expected services in such bars and the type of entertainment it offers. It is also important to note that there is no visible clothing in the shadows for both men and women shadow bodies which is a different case for the trans women's bodies. I discuss this in the section dedicated for trans woman body signs.



*Figure 22 Shop Sign: Thigh Bar (Phatphong 1)*





*Figure 23 Promotional Sign: Five Star (Cowboy Alley)*

Photographic images are used to display female bodies in some promotional signs. They appear in different signs and forms. Figure 24 is an example of a promotional sign displaying a female body in LCD. As can be seen, the woman's body is dressed but its back is more directed towards the audience while the front is reflected on the mirror in the sign. Another promotional sign showing the cis woman body through photographic images is Figure 25. In this sign, the woman model is placed underneath the texts. She is wearing a red bikini and black heels. It is noticeable that she is in the act of crawling.



Figure 24 Promotional Sign: XXX Lounge (Phatphong 2)



Figure 25 Promotional Sign: Lollipop (Nana Plaza)

As can be seen from the data, all of them only show females. They are not joined by any other gender group such as a male body. This is not the case in the trans woman body which I discuss later in the next section.

#### *4.2.1.3 Trans Woman Body*

The trans woman body is likewise prominent in sexed signs in Bangkok sex tourism places. In particular, it is prominent in Phatphong 2, Silom 4, Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley. Just like male and female bodies, shadow figures are used to depict trans women's bodies. However, the common pattern is that signs attributing to trans women require a linguistic description. "Ladyboy" is often used as a linguistic descriptor. In addition, the shadow figures have bikinis as seen in Figure 26. The appearance of bikinis is observed across all the signs displaying a woman's body. What is also common is that it is employed in the signs containing a linguistic descriptor such as "Ladyboy". This means that the linguistic descriptor "ladyboy" and the appearance of bikinis, when used together, are tools which differentiate trans women from cis women.



*Figure 26 Promotional Sign: Shadow Ladyboy Bar (Cowboy Alley)*

Bikinis in photographic images seems to be mostly used for trans women's bodies rather than in female bodies. Figure 27 shows that transgenders are in bikinis. The three trans women on the leftmost are holding the pole and projecting a sexy image. This is the same case for the trans woman on the right. The trans woman at the center is in a sitting position which exposes her body to the gaze of the audience. The presence of bikinis seems to be salient to the trans woman body as it is more apparent both in shadow figures and in photographic images. Although the sign projects a



degree of sexiness, it seems to find a way out from being considered obscene. The presentation of the female body with sexual body parts being properly covered and invisible is not considered obscenity (Jaiharn, 1988). Therefore, the sexy presentation in Figure 27 could be the closest reference to eroticity/eroticism without being considered obscene.



*Figure 27 Promotional Sign: Temptations Ladyboy Bar (Nana Plaza)*

The trans woman body is also shown in photographic images which are used in promotional signs. Based on the data, the trans woman body is displayed in different ways which are influenced by the services/shows offered by the bars. The trans woman's body is in costumes. They are used in bars that offer drag shows and performances.

Figure 28 illustrates this type where the trans women are wearing headdresses and colorful costumes.



Figure 28 Promotional Sign: Angie's Angels Cabaret Show (Cowboy Alley)

While the trans woman bodies share similar traits with female bodies, it is interesting to observe they differ in another way. I observe that the trans woman body appears alongside the male body. This is apparent in promotional signs. Figure 29 indicates that trans woman models are joined by male bodies. This may suggest that the bar is dedicated to queer audiences or queer space which I elaborate in the other chapters.



mythical objects. In the sections that follow, I demonstrate their occurrence in the signs investigated.

#### 4.2.2.1 Sexual Object

Sexual objects are those objects that are sexually loaded like poles. These objects may appear individually or along with other objects. They appear in both shop signs and promotional signs. I begin with the use of pole as a sexual object in Figure 30. Generally, poles are tools used for sexual erotic performance.



Figure 30 Shop Sign: Banana Club (Silom 4)

#### 4.2.2.2 Gender and Sexuality Object

Gender and sexuality related objects are those that are linked to a particular gender and sexual groups such as rainbows. They may co-occur with other objects like Figure 30 and appear on its own (see Figure 31). Figure 30 and 31 uses rainbow colors as a background. Rainbow colors represent the LGBTQ community and often refer to queerness. Interestingly, rainbow colors are not only used in signs showing the male body but also appear in the signs



of the cis woman body and trans woman body. Figure 31 is an example of a sign indicating the female body. It is interpreted as the female body as in the sex tourism area where it was captured, i.e., Cowboy alley, and is depicted through naked shadow figures. As can be seen, the rainbow colors are used differently. They appear at the margins of the sign and seems to serve as a layer of design. In terms of trans woman signs, Figure 32 shows the rainbow colors as the color of the disco ball. Instead of serving as margin and a background, it is used as an object.



*Figure 31 Shop Sign: The Peep by dundee (Cowboy Alley)*



Figure 32 Promotional Sign: Cockatoo Ladyboy Bar (Cowboy Alley)

#### 4.2.2.3 Mythical Object

Objects not related to gender and sexuality include those objects that represent mythical beings such as a cupid and a witch. Figure 33 shows the use of cupid in a shadow figure. It appears not only in the bar's shop sign but also in some of its promotional signs. Figure 34 illustrates the use of a witch in a shadow figure. It only appears in the shop sign.



Figure 33 Shop Sign: Dream Boy Bangkok (Phatphong 2)



*Figure 34 Shop Sign: Angelwitch Rock Dancers (Nana Plaza)*

#### 4.2.3 Body Part

Body parts are those elements relating to the part of the body which are used in signs. One example is Figure 35 where the legs are used as the one of the semiotic elements. In this sign, the female legs resemble a shadow-like figure with a glowy background. This appears to be an aesthetic to the sign. In contrast, the use of body parts in Figure 36 seems to be more than an aesthetic tool. Looking closely at Figure 36, one sees the lips with a heart. I find this commonly appearing in the different signs of the bar which made me infer that it must be used as the bar's trademark/logo.



*Figure 35 Promotional Sign: The Stranger Bar (Silom 4)*



*Figure 36 Shop Sign: Kiss (Phatphong 1)*

### **4.3 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I examine the linguistic and semiotic resources of sexed signs in Bangkok sex tourism spaces. It reveals the important role of linguistic resources in both creating an international space through the prevalence of English in every sign. Although the patterns of appearance of language choices suggest different preferred codes, it is observed that English is given more visual weight, making it salient.



Semiotic resources demonstrate the use of the human body, body part, objects, and animals in sexed signs. It is found that the human body is depicted through shadow figures which are common in shop signs and photographic images which are apparent in promotional signs. Although females and trans women share most of the traits indicating a female body, some salient semiotic elements such as the use of bikinis is used to create a distinct characteristic which is attributed to trans women.



## CHAPTER 5

### Heterogeneous Spaces in Silom

In this chapter, I examine the role of linguistic and semiotic resources in constructing gender and sexuality in the three Silom areas, namely Phatphong 1, Phatphong 2 and Silom 4. In particular, I investigate the linguistic resources used by looking closely at the meaning-making process embedded in shop names through lexicalization (Jones, 2013). I likewise employ lexicalization in combination with visual social semiotics (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996) to interrogate the semiotic resources which alongside linguistic resources participate in the construction of gender and identity. This chapter feeds the second objective of the study.

First, I begin with the analysis of shop signs by giving a general description of the lexicalization process emerging from the sexed signs across Silom areas. Then, I continue with construction of gender and sexuality in the three sex tourism areas in Silom.

#### 5.1 Lexicalization

Naming shop signs is significant in understanding how the identity of a place is constructed. It provides snippets of the discourses imbricated in the place. I unpack this identity construction by looking at the shared lexical meanings among the shop signs investigated. I follow a data-driven approach to determine the shared meanings and establish the five categories of lexicalization processes. These lexical processes are personalizing, characterizing, fetishizing, heterosexualizing and fantasizing. They are presented along with their descriptions and tokens in the three areas investigated (see Table 3).

*Table 3 Lexicalization Processes in Shop Signs in Silom Areas*

<b>Lexicalization Process</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Token</b>	
<b>Personalizing</b>	the process where signs are named after a person, place or thing	<b>Phatphong 1</b> Rose  <b>Silom 4</b> Bas Living Room	<b>Phatphong 2</b> Vinai's Cosmos Club Crown Royal
<b>Characterizing</b>	the process of naming that describes/relates to activities or entertainment offered	<b>Phatphong 1</b> Safari	<b>Silom 4</b> The Stranger Bar Funny Bar Connections Showtime The Balcony Bar
<b>Fetishizing</b>	the process of naming the signs based on sexually enticing names and displaying nude parts of the body	<b>Phatphong 1</b> Kiss Bar Thigh bar  <b>Silom 4</b> Hugs Bar Banana Room Club Banana Boys	<b>Phatphong 2</b> The Strip 2.0 Dream Boy Dream Boy Bangkok Topless Pool Bar Lucky Boys Triple X Bar Fresh Boys Hot Male Screw Boy Barbar Fetish Club Top Light Bar Star of Light Bar Tavern Two Tavern Three Bada Ding

<b>Lexicalization Process</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Token</b>	
<b>Heterosexualizing</b>	the process of naming practice on heterosexual relationship.	<b>Phatphong 1</b> Queen's II King's Caste I King's Castle King's Group	<b>Phatphong 2</b> The King's Club  <b>Silom 4</b> The Adam
<b>Fantasizing</b>	the process of naming signs after fictional characters such as people from mythology and children's literature.	<b>Phatphong 1</b> Superstar  <b>Silom 4</b> Jupiter	<b>Phatphong 2</b> Black Pagoda The Pink Panther Pinocchio's Club

Personalizing as a lexicalization process takes two different ways. One is the use of the name of a person. For example, *Bas* in the *Bas Living Room bar* is a common Thai masculine nickname. Similarly, *Vinai's Cosmos Club* is an example of the use of name but is slightly different in terms of form. In this case, *Vinai* is a Thai masculine name and is in the possessive construction suggesting ownership of the *Cosmos Club*. Another example is the use of the name of a flower which can also be a name of a person as in *Rose*.

Characterizing creates ways in giving bars descriptions. It functions to invoke curiosity and depict activities which can be expected in a bar. This leads to the three groups of bars that offer different activities. The first group includes those bars catering specifically to those who wish to have spaces for interactions. *Funny Bar*, *Safari* and *Connections* are some examples. In particular, *Connections* as used as the

shop name suggests the activity of mingling with others which is made possible through the small space (Gay-Bangkok-4-U, n.d.). The second group is composed of entertainment bars which involve performances. For instance, *The Stranger* in *The Strange Bar* serves as a modifier to describe the bar. *Stranger Bar* claims itself to be a straight-friendly place and a place where strangers meet and become friends. As a bar, it mainly caters to people who enjoy watching drag shows (The-Stranger-Bar, n.d.).

Fetishizing is employed in different ways. First, it is done through the use of names with sexualized connotations such as *Triple X Bar*. *Triple X*, another form for X-rated, is linked to any pornographic content. This denotes that a bar may contain any extreme sexually related contents. Second it is used to describe workers and serve as an eroticizing tool. This is observed in the shop name *Fresh Boys* where the modifier says something about the quality of the boys. This operates in a way of erotically describing the boys who are, as I interpret it as, young boys. Third is the use of an intimacy-related activity like *Kiss Bar*. *Kiss* is an activity relating to the contact of lips to another person. This works in creating that fetishized practice. Fantasy is also used to fetishize people such as in *Dream Boy*. *Dream* in the shop name suggests that the man that one desires can be found in the bar.

Use of *King* and *Queen* falls under the heterosexualizing lexicalization process. This refers to names associated with heterosexuals where *King* is for man and *Queen* is for woman. They appear in possessive constructions such as *Queen's II* and *King's Castle* which suggest ownership of the place. For example, *Queen's II* may suggest that the place is the second ownership of the Queen. Likewise, *King's Castle* is interpreted as the castle being owned by the King. As can be seen in table 5.1, there

are more tokens on the signs using *King*. Another reference to heterosexual male is The Adam. Adam is widely known to be linked with its biblical origin as the partner of Eve.

Fantasizing is employed through the incorporation of description and celestial bodies suggesting popularity and the inclusion of a fictional character or a Roman mythology character. *Superstar*, for example, is a shop name which is defined as someone who is extremely famous. The use of a fictional character is seen in the sign *Pinocchio's Club*. Pinocchio is a character in children's literature whose nose grows every time he lies. The adoption of his name as a modifier of the head noun *Club* suggests that Pinocchio owns the club. Besides characters from children's literature, there are also signs that employ characters from mythology. One example is *Jupiter*, known to be the greatest God in Roman mythology and is said to be a womanizer.

The lexicalization processes found in Silom areas generally provide diverse practices. They function to give the tip of the iceberg on what is to be expected in the said areas. Though not quantifiably significant, I interpret the use of heterosexualizing in Phatphong 1 as its main naming strategy to indicate that the place is a heterosexual space. This means that the place houses heterosexual workers who may be fancied by heterosexual audiences. Phatphong 2 has shown a preference for fantasizing and fetishizing in naming the bars. The processes create a space that is erotically fantasized by a wider group of clients not exclusive to heterosexual people. This is supported by the appearance of an heterosexualizing process in Phatphong 2 which means that there is a particular space for heterosexual customers and workers within a

heterogeneous area. Silom 4, having all the lexicalization processes, is potentially a general space for eclectic clients who seek a wide array of entertainment services.

Generally, the different lexicalization processes demonstrate the lexical choices and the combinations used that make up the shop names in Silom areas. In the following section, I pay attention to how these lexicalization processes work together with other semiotic elements such as the semiotic choices and structures. I particularly bring these tools in examining shop signs and promotional signs.

## 5.2 Phatphong 1

In Silom Areas, Phatphong 1 is the area that has fewer bars than Phatphong 2. It is known to be a place where people go for street shopping. In the time of my observation, I noticed that the famous street market had already been emptied and few bars had been closed but I managed to collect signs from bars that remain open. These were the signs subjected to analysis. In this section, I look closely how shop names interact with the semiotic elements and visual structures

Sexed signs indicate heterosexual identities through the use of King and Queen as part of shop names as seen in Figures 37 and 38. Such naming processes fall under heterosexualizing. Their employment in signs come in the form of possessive constructions with varying modifiers. Figure 37, for example, includes *II* as the modifier that may suggest the second area owned by the Queen. This is somewhat different from its Thai translation below *ควีน II* 'Queen II' which is a non-possessive construction, suggesting a second queen. Visually, it is presented as a blue script on a white background. There is also another layering which is written in both English and Thai. Figure 38 is a sign carrying *King's Castle*. In this sign, the head noun *castle* is

owned by the King. This comes in other tokens such as *King's Castle II* and *King's Group*. Looking closely, the visual structure of Figure 38 is also simple with its black background and white scripts. It is important to note that *King's Castle* and other places in Phatphong 1 including *Queen's II* and *King's Castle I* are among the bars owned and managed by the *King's Group*. These establishments run by the King's Group in Phatphong 1, particularly those 'King' bars, dubbed the area as "Soi King" (Bangkok-info-guide, 2007).



Figure 37 Shop Signs: *Queen's II* รัชมหาวิทยาลัย

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Figure 38 Shop Signs: *King's Castle*



Apart from the use of King and Queen as part of shop names, another significant element is the female body in neon light. Figure 39 shows the shop sign of *Thigh Bar*. Linguistically, the shop name *Thigh Bar* is an example of the fetishizing process. The use of body attributes creates a fetishized gaze on the woman's thigh or legs. This is semiotically complementing through the women bending over with their hands touching their thighs. Visually, the sign follows a margin-center-margin layout where the two women neon lights are placed at both ends while the shop name *Thigh Bar* is placed at the center.



Figure 39 Shop Signs: *Thigh Bar*

The female body is made significant through the combination of shadow figures and neon light as seen in *Superstar bar*. Figure 40 shows the use of *Superstar* as a shop name. Lexically, it is defined as someone who is extremely famous. This is commonly used by people in sports and performing arts. This definition is similarly used similarly in this context where the two shadow woman figures represent the stars of the show.



*Figure 40 Shop Sign: Superstar*

Represented through neon lights, the woman's body is visually depicted through shadow figures. Figure 40 illustrates the shadow female figures placed at the entrance of the bar. They are identical in the way they are represented. This representation suggests an analytical process of conceptual structures which indicates the type of workers in the bar. It is interesting though how the woman is depicted. Motion is suggested as the woman figure's other foot is raised, the body is bent with the upper part directed forward while the bottom is accentuated at the back, and the hair seems to be waving. The heels worn by the woman are also noticeable. This act of performing is emphasized by the neon light which represents the reflection of spotlights while performing. Through such light, the body and its shadow are discursively projected through the color selection. This is done through the use of blue to depict the shadow while performing and pink as the main body that is performing. Furthermore, the motion of the shadow figures demonstrates the act of performing, too.

Compositionally, Figure 40 demonstrates a margin-center-margin structure where the bar name *Superstar* is placed in the center while the two women's shadow bodies are on each side. The frame of the sign is presented through a long shot which reveals the whole body of the woman models in a vertical axis. Another important structure is the color choices. The shadow figure has a pink neon light at the edges of her upper body, from buttocks up to the hair. The blue hue is used from the hair to the toe, representing the shadow. The pink hue is centered on the body, accentuating its forms.



*Figure 41 Promotional Sign: Superstar*

The shadow female figure is also used in a promotional sign. Figure 41 is an example of the use of shadow female figures in a wall sticker/painting promotional sign. It shows a woman lying with her upper body partly elevated. Her edges are in darker shade while the body which seems to be given more visual focus is in lighter

color, allowing the viewers to see. It is also observed that the name of the bar, *Superstar*, is placed underneath the woman model. This indicates a conceptual structure which suggests an analytical process that reveals the identity of the worker in the bar. Also notable are the different stickers such as bank logo (i.e., JCB), warning signs (e.g., “no smoking” sign, “beware of your belongings” sign which are translated in Chinese and Japanese), and other unreadable signs on the wall that serve as what Scollon and Scollon (2003) refer to as layering. Compositionally, Figure 41 shows a complex structure where the woman model is placed on top of the bar name. The woman’s body is also long-shot, though showing the entire body in a horizontal axis. This angle makes the woman’s body prominent and visible to the viewers’ gaze.

Another important structure is the modality structure. The image shows high contrast as the edges of the body and the hair cast a shadow in a pink shade while the body is in white, thus showing the details such as the breast and the curves of the body. This high contrast may project a suspenseful and mysterious vibe. In addition, there is no gaze appearing in the sign which suggests an offer, i.e., the absence of eye contact which indicates an indirect interaction between the viewers and the represented participants (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996) and depicts the woman as an object of display. The use of this representation leads to the exposure of the body, suggesting the objectification of the woman’s body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The objectification of the woman occurs when something that is not typically classified as an object is considered one. In the context of the body, objectification works when the body is treated as an object that can be manipulated and/or be considered as something that is commodified.

In the sexed signs examined, it is revealed that objectification and sexualization of the woman's body is semiotically constructed through neon lights and shadow images. In *Thigh Bar*, the neon light is used to create a woman's figure and emphasizes body attributes, particularly the legs and buttocks. Such positioning directs the viewer's gaze to the body parts, making the woman's body an object open for manipulation. Through shadow figures, the woman's body is also subjected to the viewers' gaze. Besides objectification, the woman's body is also sexualized. The woman's body depicts body display, i.e., "the high degree of nudity" (Kang, 1997, p. 985), which is presented through shadow figures. This is apparent in the semiotic choices shown in the sexed signs investigated. Another sexualization process is through ritualization of subordination (Goffman, 1979) where the woman is lying down, subjecting herself to domination. This is seen in *Superstar* bar signs. These sexualization processes are intensified through the modality structure, primarily by high contrast. The edges of the body such as the back and the hair are illustrated through a darker pink and red combination to indicate the shadow. A lighter color such as cream is centered on the body, specifically revealing the breast. These visual structures allow the viewer, generally attributed as men, to direct their gaze at the woman's body.

Based on the analysis, linguistic resources operate in creating heterosexual identities through the tokens representing the use of *King* and *Queen*. The male heterosexual space is constructed through the tokens alluding to *King* and the female heterosexual space is through the use of *Queen*. These spaces are discursively produced differently. The construction of female heterosexual space is done through the creation of the female body which is realized by the shadow figures and neon

lights. Moreover, the female heterosexuals are produced as objects of desires through the eroticization of women. I observed in my fieldwork that the majority of workers are female heterosexuals. They often wear skimpy dresses when they stand in front of the shops. Semiotically, the objectification of the female body creates the male gaze which participates in the construction of male heterosexuality. However, it is important to mention that this representation resides in the context of sex tourism where both genders take the role of a worker, particularly sex worker. Therefore, while there are distinctive features differentiating men and women, they remain of equal footing as they are both workers whose services are availed by their clients. They are the main tourists in the area. Hence, this section argues that Phatphong 1 is depicted as a male/female heterosexual space.

### **5.3 Phatphong 2**

Phatphong 2, compared to Phatphong 1, has a more heterogeneous identity. It is a place where various spaces are allocated to diverse workers and audiences. Typically though, it is known to be frequented by male homosexuals; however, there appear bars displaying images that may index heterosexuals tourists. I explore this empirically by discussing my analysis of the sexed signs found in the area. At the time of my fieldwork, I managed to collect several signs. I particularly have different types of promotional signs which include wall stickers, tarpaulins, and carry-on signs. These are in addition to the shop signs I gathered. I begin with the analysis of sexed signs showing the male body, particularly on ways they construct queer space linguistically and semiotically. I continue with the examination of the female and trans woman bodies and how linguistic and semiotic resources create the female heterosexual identities as workers and the trans women identities as entertainers in the area. Towards the end, I

make my argument on the construction of male heterosexual space and queer space of Phatphong 2.

Sexed signs in Phatphong 2 show the masculine body which is portrayed in different ways. Linguistically, the use of the English words *Boy* and *Male* are significant in Phatphong 2 sexed signs. They appear in both shop signs and promotional signs. Semiotically, shadow figures and photographic images are used in sexed signs. The shadow figures are apparent in shop signs while the photographic images are used in promotional signs. I discuss this in my analysis of the three shops namely *Dream Boy*, *Fresh Boys* and *Hotmale*, focusing on their shop signs and promotional signs.

Linguistic and semiotic elements demonstrate both the idealized sexual object and the glocalized identity of the place. Figure 42 shows the use of the cupid shadow figure in *Dream Boy* bar. *Dream Boy* is an example of a fetishizing lexicalization process where *Dream* is a modifier to the head noun *Boy*. This process is furthered by the semiotic structure, i.e., given-new, where the *Dream Boy Bangkok* and its Thai transliteration *ดรีมบอยแบงค็อก* on the left side of the sign is the given while the cupid shadow figure on the right is new. The cupid shadow figure embodies the masculine body and suggests the idealized man who is attractive and only exists dreams. Linguistically, Figure 42 illustrates a blend of authenticity and globality. The authentic aspect of the sign lies in the use of *Bangkok* which maps the origin of the place and creates a local identity. This is combined with the attempt to globalize the place through the use of English and Cupid, a figure more associated with Western culture. In addition, the transliteration of the Thai language is said to be a tool in



globalizing the language (Kanchanawan, 2006). Thus, when used together, they dialogically link local and global culture and bring a glocalized identity. Glocalization, as defined by (Robertson, 1995, p. 40) is the “creation and the incorporation of locality, processes which themselves largely shape, in turn, the compression of the world as a whole.” The glocalized identity does not only map the location of the place but also interacts with the discourse of queerness in place, hence creating a glocalized queer space.



Figure 42 Shop Sign: Dream Boy Bangkok (previously Figure 33)

Figure 43 is a promotional sign in the form of a wall sticker which belongs to *Dream Boy*. The sign indicates an Ideal-Real structure where the logo provided in the top position serves as the Ideal, and the description and the images of performers in the bar in the bottom position is the Real. The logo at the top is consistent with the cupid in Figure 43 which implies an association with dreams. The wall sticker contains both texts and visuals. The text provides the schedule of the show and the description of the workers as in 男, 直男, 同志 ‘man, straight, gay.’ However, the texts in both languages only refer to men and guys – 帅哥 ‘handsome man’ in



Chinese and *Handsome Man & Good looking Guys* in English. In addition to the main text, there are two pieces of paper adhered next to the English text. The small one mentions the allowable person in the bar. It states that the place has 40-person capacity of the place. The bigger one includes the laws regarding opening time, the age restriction for visitors, and the prohibition of drugs and weapons. In addition, menus and drinks are also provided on a wooden board placed in front of the wall. These are layerings (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) providing additional information to the promotional sign itself.



Figure 43 Promotional Sign: Dream Boy (previously Figure 29)

The image on Figure 43 illustrates an analytical structure which allows the viewer to see the possessive attributes of the performers. Most of the performers are presented with a medium shot showing their body from head to waist, representing the far personal distance which enables the viewer to be far enough to see the bodies of performers, particularly the topless male ones. The use of topless muscular bodies is an example of what (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) call as the objectification of the body. These masculine bodies are jointly sexualized through body displays (Kang, 1997). The man on the left is sexualized through feminine touch (Goffman, 1979), a technique typically associated with women. The two topless muscular men in the sign look straight at the viewer, illustrating a demand (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). It is also observed that the masculine body is joined by trans women. I discuss the appearance of trans women in the analysis of the feminine body later.

Figure 44 shows the use of the shadow masculine figures along with the use of *Boys*. The sign indicates a given-new structure where the shop name *Fresh Boys* is given, and the shadow masculine figure is the new. Linguistically, *Fresh Boys* or ใหม่ชายน้อย in Thai falls under fetishizing where *Fresh* is a modifier used to fetishize the head noun *Boys*. Lexically, ‘fresh boy’ in English is a derogatory term for someone who is effeminate (Kralia, 2006). This seems unlikely in sex tourism spaces as it may not work in the sexualization of men as masculine and tough. Visually, the shadow masculine figure is depicted as someone who is pole dancing. This suggests an analytic structure which informs the kind of entertainment offered in the bar. The male shadow figure shows an absence of gaze and is portrayed as touching the pole, a sexualization process linked with feminine touch (Goffman, 1979). The indirect

action with the participants through offer (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996) and feminine touch brings the masculine body to an object. Semiotically, the rainbow colors, associated with the LGBTQI+ community, is used as the background of the shop sign. The rainbow's appearance in signs functions to mark queer space (Motschenbacher, 2020).



Figure 44 Shop Signs: *Fresh Boys* (previously Figure 19)

Figure 45 shows the different performances in *Fresh Boys*. This sign suggests an analytical structure which indicates the different kinds of bar workers, who are predominantly men. It is an ideal-real structure where the shop name *Fresh Boys* is placed at the top, serving as ideal, and the images of the workers are presented below, demonstrating the real. However, it is noticeable that there are visual layerings as shown by the price '350' and the schedule of the performance '22.10' printed on slips of paper stuck on the tarpaulin. In the sign, the topless muscular bodies are apparent in the different photographic images that indicate the sexualization of men though

body displays (Kang, 1997), and suggest an objectification of the man's body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

It is also important to highlight the descriptions that are included in the signs such as *Show Time*, *Sexy Boys Show* and *Cabaret Show*. These descriptions are realized by the images seen in the sign. In particular, the image at the left underneath the *Show Time* appears to be men posing for a photograph. The images after *Sexy Boys Show* illustrate images of those who may have concluded their performances on stage. The image below shows the man standing, depicting male dominance and superiority. Being touched by the woman is an example of an actual performance that is taken by the camera. The photograph underneath the *Sexy Bow Shows* and the image next to *Cabaret Show* exemplify images taken after the men's performances. The showing of the men's body is similar to what I have observed in which a handful of men who invite customers to visit the shop are topless.

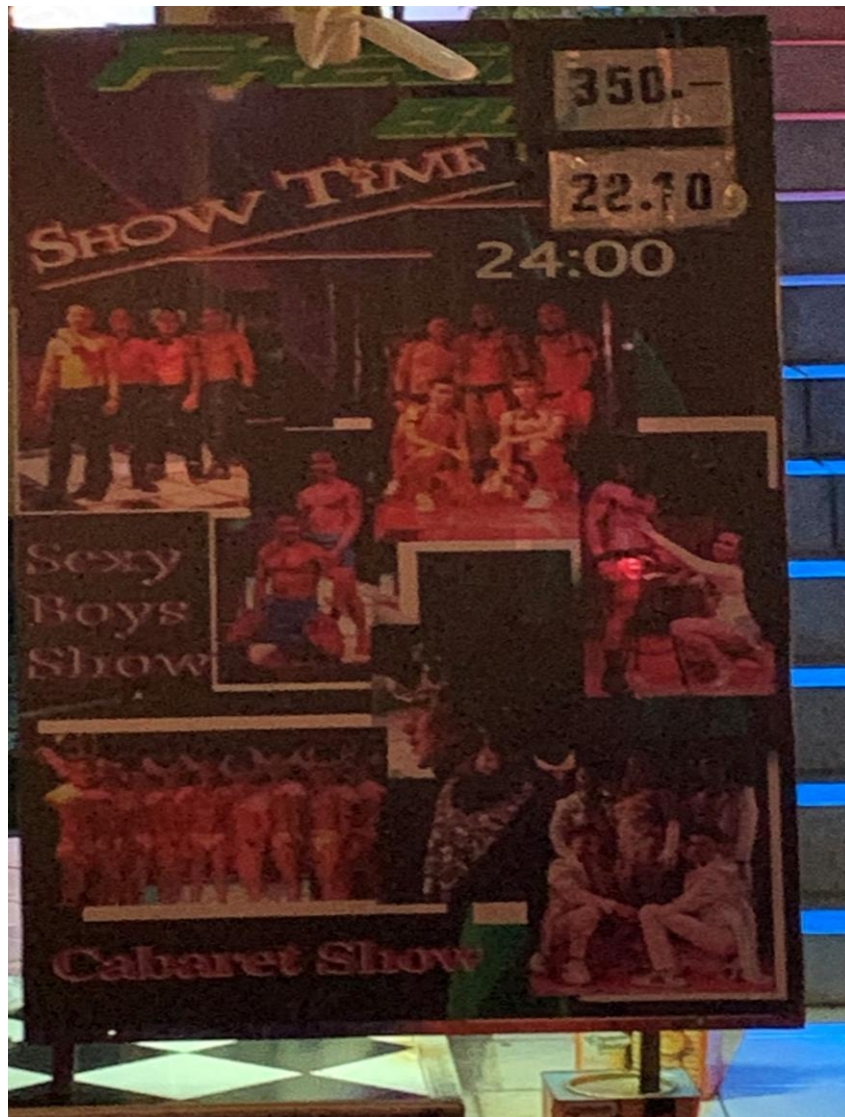


Figure 45 Promotional Sign: Fresh Boys

In addition to the use of *Boy*, the word *Male* and the gender symbol are employed to construct the masculine identity. Figure 46 shows the shop name *H♂male* ‘热男’. The male symbol “♂” is used in lieu of the o letter in *hot*. This combination already depicts ‘male’ and the shop name itself *Hotmale*. The sign indicates a given-new structure where the shadow masculine figure on the left is given while the shop name *Hotmale* in the right is new. Like Figure 43, the use of rainbow colors on the background marks queer space (Motschenbacher, 2020). These semiotic



and linguistic resources suggest that the place is for queer audiences seeking male performers.



*Figure 46 Shop Sign: Hotmale*

Looking at the promotional sign, the masculine body is made more prominent through the photographic images. Figure 47 takes a complex structure where the top section illustrates a Given-New structure, while from top to bottom order indicates an Ideal-Real structure. Focusing on the top section, the logo and the shop name towards the left take the Given position while the price on the right occupies the New position. The shop sign in Figure 46 appears in the promotional sign in Figure 47, as it serves as the bar's logo. The logo signifies the kind of body available in the bar. From top to bottom, the shop name serves the ideal while the men below are real. Most of the men displayed below show a high degree of nudity, revealing their muscular bodies and tattoos. Such technique is attributed to body display (Kang, 1997). The male models also demonstrate a demand for direct interaction with their viewers through a seductive stare which serves to create contact with the viewer. Furthermore, Figure 47 shows a narrative process which indicates the act of "doing something". The male

models illustrate a motion of enticement with the use of towels by holding them with one of their hands and their other end is away from their bodies. Such a gesture potentially serves as a vector as the towel symbolically suggests sexual activities. The association is also accentuated by the fire depicting strong sexual desire.



*Figure 47 Promotional Sign: Hotmale (previously Figure 20)*

Based on the analysis, the use of English terms “boy” and “Male” along with the objectification and sexualization of the masculine body work together in creating a space of desire for men. The rainbow colors are noticeably employed in different ways: one as a background and another as layering. Their appearance with the masculine body suggests a queer space where queer people particularly those who seek men as in male homosexuals come to visit. This analysis is consistent with my observation where the masculine body is rendered to the queer gaze as most tourists visiting the area are male homosexuals.

Aside from the masculine body, the feminine body is significant for the construction of the female heterosexual identity in Phatphong 2. Figure 48 shows the face of a woman underneath the shop names *Vinai's Cosmos Club*. *Vinai's Cosmos club* is an example of a personalizing process where *Vinai*, a Thai name associated with men, serves as a modifier of the head noun *Cosmos Club*. Using a male name and incorporating a woman's face suggest that the bar which is owned by a man aims at male customers who are served by women. Semiotically, the sign indicates an analytical structure which represents the kind of workers in the bar. The sign also shows an Ideal-Real structure where the shop name *Vinai's Cosmos Club* is the ideal and the woman's face is real. Moreover, the woman's image is sexualized through feminine touch (Goffman, 1979), i.e., the use of hands that trace the lines of the body.



Figure 48 Shop Sign: *Vina's Cosmos Club*

Besides the use of the woman's face, the feminine body is also depicted through a shadow figure. Figure 49 shows the promotional sign of *Bada Bing* which uses woman shadow figures. *Bada Bing* comes from a fictional strip club. It is originally used as an expression from an American film *The Godfather*. As a club, *Bada Ding* is known as an aberrant club which does not follow certain rules such as



nudity and nude-dancing. Thus, such an expression is used as an exclamation. As can be seen, the woman is partially lying down with her bust elevated and both hands lean towards the ground. The head is also slightly elevated which suggests uninhibitedness and the acceptance of domination. This representation falls under ritualization of subordination (Goffman, 1979). In addition, the woman also does not show any gaze which indicates an offer (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). This makes the woman an object for the viewers to manipulate, leaving her body sexualized and objectified.



*Figure 49 Promotional Sign: Bada Bing*

The female heterosexual identity is jointly created by job advertisements and the feminine body. Figure 50 shows a job advertisement of *Triple X bar*, as translated into English below.



Figure 50 Promotional Sign: XXX Lounge [Job Advertisements]

รับสมัคร	Recruit
สาว สวย น่ารัก จำนวนมาก	Many (young) women, beautiful, pretty
- พนักงานเต้นและโคโยตี้ 700, 1,000/วัน	- Dancers and coyotes 700, 1,000/day
- พนักงานเต้น ลงแทค 12,000/10 วัน	- Dancers, track 12,000/10 days
- พนักงานต้อนรับ P.R. 500/วัน	- Reception, P.R. 500/day
- พนักงานเสิร์ฟ	- Waitress
ฟรี!! ยูนิฟอร์ม เหล้า อาหาร	Free!! Uniform, liquor, food

The advertisement indicates the exclusive preference for female workers. Such preference is made on women's physical attributes, particularly youth and beauty. โคโยตี้ 'coyote' in Thai context refers to female erotic. แทค 'track' refers to those who can work in 10 days without any day off in between. The advertisement also includes the

salary and the inclusion of the benefits. The job advertisement is created from a hard material that is considered permanent. This means that the job needs constant recruitment. Furthermore, the language used is mainly Thai and some are in-group language. This is in stark contrast to other signs in the area, and, more generally, in sex tourism spaces which mainly use English to target non-local customers. The use of the Thai language suggests that the sign is directed toward Thai females who may be interested.

Complimenting on the advertisement, we see in Figure 51 the image of a woman who embodies the physical attributes mentioned above. It indicates a Given-New information where the shop name *Triple XXX Lounge* is given, and the woman's body is new. As can be observed, the woman is facing the mirror where her reflection is visible to the tourists' eyes and her back is directed to the viewer's gaze. The sign follows an analytical structure where the woman represents the kind of worker in the bar. Moreover, the woman model is wearing a green top and denim short shorts. Her eyes are directed to the floor, suggesting an offer (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). It can also be seen that her hands are touching the mirror, a display related to feminine touch (Goffman, 1979).



*Figure 51 Promotional Sign: XXX Lounge (previously Figure 24)*

The signs analyzed above reveals the female heterosexual identity jointly formed by the use of the feminine body and textual descriptions. Based on my observation, this is validated by the women who are seen standing in front of the mirror and wearing revealing clothing, if not bikinis.

The feminine body is also significant for the construction of trans women's identity. The trans women often appear alongside male models on signs in Phatphong 2. Figure 52 presents the trans woman's feminine body slightly differently. It shows the tarpaulin promotional sign of *Screw Boys* bar. *Screw Boy* is an example of fetishizing lexicalization where the modifier *Screw* operates to tell something about the head noun *Boys*. The signs illustrate the different trans women workers dressed in different costumes which are placed below the descriptions *Sexy Boys Show*, *Madam Jojo*, *Cabaret*, *Coyote Dance Factory*. In these descriptions, *Madam Jojo Cabaret*

indicates feminine trans women workers. They also have direct interaction with the viewers through a demand gaze (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). While they are linguistically and semiotically visible here, it is not always the case. In the following sections, I discuss how the feminine trans women are invisible and semiotically less interactive.



Figure 52 Promotional Sign: Screw Boy

Figure 53 is an example of a carry-on sign containing the feminine body of trans women. The bar's name *Fresh Boys* falls under fetishizing lexicalization process where the modifier *Fresh* is used to describe the head noun *Boys*. Though constructing the male body, the trans woman's body is visibly indicated through the use of a female body wearing a costume with a feather-like back resembling a



peacock. This goes to show that the trans woman's feminine body is limited to visual information. Such is observed as there is an absence of linguistic description attributing to trans women. Semiotically, the sign indicates an analytical structure (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). This means that the bar is not limited to boys only but also includes trans women (or 'ladyboy' in the Thai context) entertainers. The indirect gaze where the eyes of the trans woman model is closed is also noticeable, attributing to what (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996) call offer. This visual structure may inform the linguistic invisibility of trans women and the weakening of the image representation of her.



*Figure 53 Promotional Sign: Fresh Boy*

The erasure, at a linguistic level, of trans woman workers appears to be a common representation in sexed signs in the bars at Phatphong 2. I expound this

argument by subjecting the wall sticker into analysis. Looking closely at Figure 54 (previously Figure 43 but is shown here again for convenience), we see that the description of the workers, particularly the Chinese text provide the sexualities of male performers – 男, 直男, 同志 ‘man, straight, gay.’ However, the texts in both languages only refer to men and guys – 帅哥 ‘handsome man’ in Chinese and *Handsome Man & Good looking Guys* in English - minus the descriptions for trans women despite being visually represented. This visual presentation shows an analytical process which allows the possessive attributes visible to the viewers. It is also noticeable that the trans women are placed in the margin structure and their gaze indicating an offer.



Figure 54 Promotional Sign: Dreamboy (previously Figure 29 and 43)

The analysis of the signs using the feminine body reveals two identities. One is the female heterosexual while the other is male-to-female transgender or which I refer to as trans women in this study. The female heterosexual body is constructed jointly by semiotic and linguistic processes. Typically, it appears alone in the sign. They are usually in body display (Kang, 1997) where a high degree of nudity is visible. The feminine body of a trans woman is presented in images accompanied by men. The feminine body of trans women contributes to the construction of a queer space. While visually represented, trans women are not linguistically described. They are often in costumes indicating the kind of performances delivered in the bars.

Examination of the masculine and feminine body renders Phatphong 2 as a predominantly queer space with a space for male heterosexuals. The queer space is constructed through the use of linguistic resources such as the English terms “boy” and “male”, and semiotic resources like shadow figures and photographic images of men. In particular, the objectification and sexualization of the masculine body are discursively employed to favor the queer gaze, particularly the male homosexual gaze. It is also stretched through the appearance of the feminine body of trans women which is used in creating entertainment spaces where queer people perform. Furthermore, the construction of the male heterosexual space is observed through the appearance of the female heterosexual body. The female heterosexual body is objectified and sexualized as it serves the male gaze. Thus, I argue that Phatphong 2 is a heterogenous space, more generally for queer audiences and also for some male heterosexual audience.



#### 5.4 Silom 4

Silom 4 is an alley famously known among queer people. It is due to the different entertainment spaces. Although it may be similar to the landscape of Phatphong 2 where spaces for queer audiences are allocated, I find that Silom 4 is particularly different as it does not have any space allotted to heterosexuals, hence making Silom 4 a place for queer individuals. In my fieldwork, I observed the abundance of queer audiences in the area. I have likewise seen several heterosexual audiences who flock the Silom 4. This is due to the allocated spaces for food establishments such as restaurants. In spite of heterogeneous audiences, I argue that Silom 4 remains to be a queer space particularly targeting male homosexuals. I demonstrate this by looking at the shop signs and promotional signs in the four bars namely *Banana Room Club*, *Jupiter*, *The Stranger Bar*, and *Balcony Bar*.

Rainbow colors, masculine body and English words attributing to male body parts are employed in the sexed signs in Silom 4. Figure 55 illustrates a shop sign carrying these linguistic and semiotic resources. The rainbow colors, associated with the LGBTQI+ community, is used as the background of the sign. The colors in the rainbow are also utilized in the fonts of the shop name *Banana Room Club*. The shop name *Banana Room Club* is an example of fetishizing lexicalization process where *banana*, which is a reference to the male sex organ, is used as a modifier to fetishize the name of the bar. The man on the right is a shadow masculine figure who is in the act of pole dancing. Such a shadow masculine figure is used to eroticize men who provide daring performances and is sexualized through feminine touch (Goffman, 1979).



*Figure 55 Shop Sign: Banana Room Club*

The promotional sign of *Banana Room Club* makes use of different descriptions such as *Banana boys*, *Sexy Boys Show* and *Cabaret Show* to sexualize men. In Figure 56, the top section serves as the ideal where general information is provided. It mainly concentrates on the name of the bar and the title of the entertainment programs. The real section, in contrast, displays the images of men and the descriptions of shows. The photographic images of men in line with *Sexy Boys Show* exhibit the sexualization process of body display (Kang, 1997) where there is a high degree of nudity shown. They seem to be taken during a performance as in the photo on the left and in a still pose as in the photo on the right. Underneath them are the photographic images following the *Cabaret Show*. The two images show feminine trans women bodies. The photo on the left is one trans woman who is performing in a sitting position which can be considered a ritualization of subordination (Goffman, 1979), while the photo beside shows a trans woman in the center with two men on the margins. The last images below are of groups of men performing. As can be noted, the photos associated with the Cabaret show have performers in full clothing, signifying their costumes in the show. To capture these

images concretely, they exhibit Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) analytical structure of conceptual process where the models represent the kind of workers and the entertainers in the bar. It is also worth mentioning the visible direct interaction of men towards the viewers, displaying demand (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996), while the trans women models are not looking directly at the viewers, hence an indirect interaction or offer (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). The relationship of these semiotic elements and the linguistic choices demonstrate that *Banana Room Club* is a queer space with trans women and men performers who are sought by male homosexuals.



Figure 56 Promotional Sign: *Banana Room Club* (previously Figure 21)

Linguistic resources such as those associated with sexual activities are used in promotional signs. Figure 57 is the drink menu offered by *The Stranger Bar*. *The*

*Stranger Bar* falls under the lexicalization process of characterizing. The shop name suggests that the bar is a place where strangers can be friends. This is also known to be frequented by queer audiences. Looking into the sign, we can note that it follows an Ideal-Real structure where the shop name *The Stranger Bar*, which also represents the logo, is placed on top, thus serving as the ideal while the menu placed below is real. The menu depicts the male organ and other sexual activities creating a sexualized environment. The term *blow job*, which attributes to a sexual activity involving a contact with the male sex organ, is also known to be a name of an alcoholic drink. Similarly, *golden shower* is considered a sexual activity which involves urination as an act of foreplay (Urban-Dictionary, 2018). *Stranger Slut* is more of a label to describe someone who may have gotten into a sexual activity with a stranger. *Blue Ball* is another sexual activity which means an interrupted orgasm which is usually associated with men (Urban-Dictionary, 2017). The use of *So Hard* is associated with a characteristic of the male organ, which is erection (Urban-Dictionary, 2005). These drink names, being associated with sexual activity, are linked to men whose images are displayed below. The masculine bodies both display high nudity or body display (Kang, 1997). The men are also touching their bodies which can suggest a feminine touch (Goffman, 1979), a sexualization technique to invite viewers to touch his body. Another interesting element to mention is the use of the rainbow color placed as the background of the wall where the drink menu is posted. This element and the drink menu jointly create an eroticized space dedicated to queer audiences.

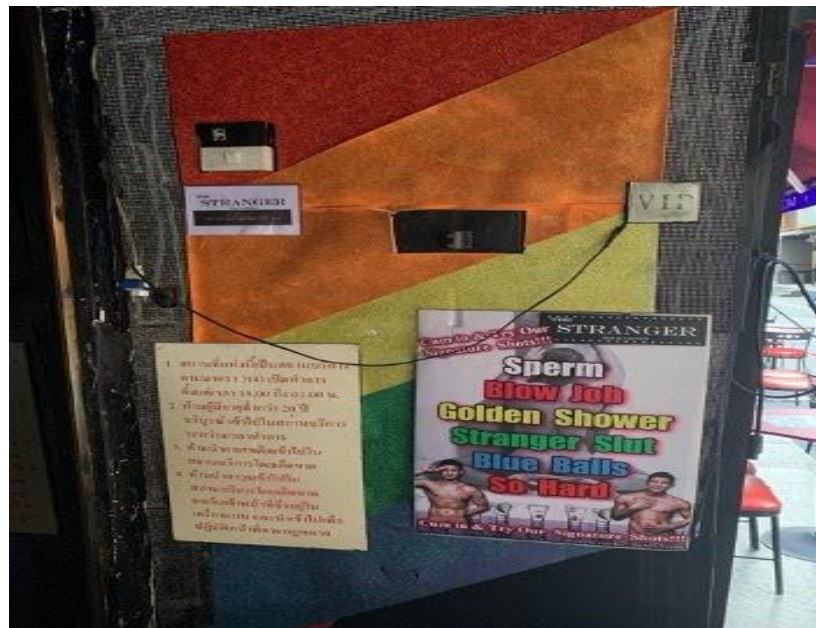


Figure 57 Promotional Sign: The Stranger Bar

The masculine body is constructed in shadow figures and attributed to a god. Figure 58 shows the shop sign of *Jupiter*. *Jupiter* is the famous and powerful god in Roman mythology. Apart from this general description, Jupiter is also known as a promiscuous god who has had children from different women. Its use to name a bar is considered as a fantasizing lexicalization process.



Figure 58 Shop Sign: Jupiter 2018



Figure 59 is an example of a wall sticker promotional sign of *Jupiter*. As can be seen, it contains fewer visual elements and only has linguistic resources. These are *Live Show*, *Men Model*, *Singer Entertainers*, *Man Power*, and *Special Power*. Their placement suggests a Given-New structure where *Live Show* being placed on the left door is the given and the *Men Model*, *Singer Entertainers*, *Man Power*, and *Special Power* are placed on the right hand side of the door serve as new. These are repeated in different colors and sizes; the texts are smaller, written in red, and placed on top. Their repetitions appear in green color, are bigger and placed underneath. Jupiter, compared to the other bars, is known to be a space targeting not only queer audiences but also female heterosexuals. My observation reveals that the audiences that visit the place are mostly Chinese women mainly dressed in seemingly classy attire. In terms of the workers, I noticed that men were wearing semi-formal attire. They are standing in front of the bars. They wear different pins which contains their name and apparently their sexual preference, that is if they are into female heterosexuals or queer people.



Figure 59 Promotional Sign: Jupiter

Furthermore, Silom 4 indicates the significance of the trans woman's body. This is done through their visual presentation in sexed signs, particularly in Figure 60 and Figure 61, which contributes to the queering of space. Figure 60 is the promotional sign of *The Stranger Bar* which advertises drag shows. The sign indicates an Idea-Real structure where the ideal is the schedule appearing on top and the real is the draft shown below. The salience given to the drag show is also noticeable as it is rendered in bigger fonts and with a red glow. The feminine part of the body, specifically the legs, is used to create a feminine trans space which is complemented by the red heels placed at both margins below. The appearance of the trans woman's legs suggests the objectification of the feminine body.



Figure 60 Promotional Sign: The Stranger Bar (appeared previously Figure 35)

Similarly, entertainment shows are offered in the *Balcony Bar*. As a shop name, *Balcony Bar* is an example of a characterizing lexicalization process. Figure 61, as a promotional sign, demonstrates the different shows available at the bar. It indicates an analytic structure which provides information on the different workers in the bar. Examining closely, we can see that the sign illustrates a complex structure. The models on top indicate an interesting visual structure. The trans women models, along with the male models, are at the center and showing a direct interaction with the viewer as they exhibit a demand gaze. However, the men sitting below show a licensed withdrawal (Goffman, 1979). This is uncommon as the previously analyzed sexed signs, particularly in Phatphong 2 area, reveal the marginal presentation of trans women. Although still appearing with male figures, trans women are given more emphasis and presented in a more fronted manner from their positioning to their direct interaction. I likewise observed the significance of trans women in my fieldwork as they actively invite tourists while wearing their drag suits. The images in the grid



display the different performances which are captured. The first grid shows performances by trans women similar to a drag show while the second grid displays men showing their bodies. Such degree of nudity is attributed to body display (Kang, 1997).



*Figure 61 Promotional Sign: Balcony Bar*

The analysis above demonstrates that Silom 4 is a queer space. Semiotic elements such as the rainbow colors are discursively used as layering and background which participate in indexing the place to the LGBTQI+ community. This is complimented by the visibility of performers belonging to the community such as the trans women. The appearance of the masculine body and the linguistic elements

attributing to the masculine body and sexual activity suggest that Silom is particularly for male homosexual audiences.

### **5.5 Silom as a Heterogenous Space**

The sections above discuss the interaction of linguistic and semiotic resources and their role in constructing gendered spaces. It is observed that the linguistic and semiotic elements create a multimodal ensemble (Kress, 2010) in solidifying the identity of the places. In this section I discuss how the gender identities are contextualized in Bangkok sex tourism spaces.

Phatphong 1, as mentioned in the previous section, is known as an area that is shared by both sex tourism bars, and a market referred to as Phatphong Market. This is what I witnessed in the pre-COVID-19 times. However, at the time of the fieldwork, the market had been emptied and the only remaining occupied space is the bars. My observation in this area makes me interpret the space mainly for heterosexual individuals which has been supported by the heterosexualizing process of shop signs. The analysis also demonstrates the use of the female body which is objectified and sexualized. Though signs referring to men have more varieties, they are not visually presented. While the names of the bars are linked with heterosexual men, they are not explicitly advertised as workers. This suggests that those bars are places for them as customers. In contrast, signs associated with heterosexual women have fewer varieties and tend to be sexualized. Therefore, I argue that women are treated as objects dedicated to the male heterosexual gaze.

Phatphong 2 is found to be created mainly for queer audiences but with spaces for heterosexuals. I find this consistent with my observation where most tourists are

male homosexuals seeking men. This is realized in the sexed signs through the fetishizing and fantasizing processes that aim at activating erotic desires. Although the mention of “boys” and “male” is used to linguistically construct men, the visual depiction of men concretizes the kind of men that is fancied and constructed. The lean muscular young body which is apparently common among Southeast Asian males is revealed as the preferred male construct in Phatphong sex tourism space. While there are some bars allocated for men seeking female heterosexuals, they are limited and thus, I interpret Phatphong 2 as generally a male homosexual space.

Silom 4, though found to be a changing sex tourism space from queer space to heterogenous one, is observed to carry more affordances linked with the LGBTQIA+ community. The symbolic meaning of the rainbow flags and rainbow colors that serve as background marks the place as queer. The linguistic resources, including lexicalization of signs and linguistic elements, reveal the presence of words attributing to mainly men activity. In addition, the availability of various queer-related activities such as drag shows and men erotic dancing operate as resources concur that Silom 4 is a queer space.

Hence, Silom area is a larger area that contains diverse gender footprint and practices. It is the place where tourists can enjoy a wide array of entertainment choices.

## **5.6 Chapter Conclusion**

Silom, as a general sex tourism place, is a heterogenous entertainment space dedicated to eclectic audiences. The gendered spaces are marked through the use of linguistic resources that fetishize and characterize the bars and semiotic resources that

function to sexualize and eroticize the human bodies. In particular, the creation of male heterosexual spaces is done by the use of lexical items attributing to man such as *King* and visual element such as the objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) of the feminine body. The objectification of the feminine body is strategically used to make the female heterosexual bodies objects of desire. Besides male heterosexual space, queer space is also evident. They are constructed through English words like *male* and *boy* which mainly operate to linguistically fetishize the masculine body. The muscular bodies are also discursively used to establish the typical masculine attribute desired by male homosexuals. Trans women bodies and rainbow colors work significantly in indexing the place as queer space for audiences seeking queer entertainment. The trans women bodies are visually presented marginally and prominently. These visual structures participate in the construction of spaces. Appearing alongside the masculine body, the trans woman identity is linguistically invisible and semiotically straightened. Such presentation is chosen due to the audiences targeted by specific bars where the masculine body is fronted to target male homosexual customers, making the trans women secondary in entertainment value. When prominently presented, the trans woman body is used to capitalize on the performances they offer. This means the construction of space leans towards entertainment for diverse audiences seeking queer entertainers. Finally, the use of rainbow colors both as layering and background participate in the marking of queer spatiality and indexicality of queerness of place.

## CHAPTER 6

### **The Construction of Femininity in Cowboy Alley and Nana Plaza**

In this chapter, I explore the ways the linguistic and semiotic resources construct femininity in Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza. Unlike the sex tourism areas in Silom, Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza share similarities in terms of the representation of femininity through linguistic and semiotic resources. Hence, I discuss these areas in one chapter to demonstrate how they construct the female and trans woman bodies. This chapter feeds into the second objective of the study. I follow Jones' (2013) lexicalization and Kress and Leeuwen (1996) visual social semiotics to investigate how the linguistic and semiotic resources in sexed signs work together in constructing Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza as gendered spaces. I begin with the lexical analysis of the shop signs followed by the analysis of semiotic resources. In discussing the semiotic resources, I start with the examination of visual elements used in creating the female and the trans woman body.

Cowboy alley is a known public sex tourism place in Bangkok. It has a long-standing history for being a space for male heterosexual customers. It is particularly popular for being a place where female entertainers are found. On the contrary, Nana Plaza is a semi-private space. It is a conjoining building where several bars are situated. It has a gate/portal that serves as the main entrance to the plaza. Nana Plaza is also famously known for its adult entertainment, mainly for having heterosexual entertainers. Although these two sex tourism areas are different in terms of access, that is being public and private, I found that they both have spaces dedicated to trans women entertainers. In my fieldwork, I noticed how the signs are marked which

attribute to the kind of workers being advertised. In examining the resources found in Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza, I analyze the sexed signs in shop names through lexicalization process. I, likewise, explore the semiotic resources found in both the shop signs and promotional signs. Towards the end, I argue that Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza are male heterosexual space where construction of femininity in sexed signs are marked for those seeking female heterosexual and trans women entertainers.

### 6.1 Lexicalization Process of Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza Sexed Signs

Shop names are significant in not only in creating a place but also in constructing gendered space. To unpack the potential meaning behind the shop names, I analyze the lexicalization processes in the shop signs in Cowboy alley. The analysis revealed the presence of personalizing, characterizing, fetishizing, heterosexualizing and queering. These processes are outlined in Table 4.

*Table 4 Lexicalization Processes in Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza*

<b>Lexicalization Process</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Token</b>
<b>Personalizing</b>	the process	<b>Cowboy alley</b>
	where signs are	Rio Club
	named after a	Fanny's
	person, place,	Baccara
	animals or	Shark
	thing	Sahara
		Sam's 2000
		Rawhide
		Tilac
		Suzie Wong
	Spice Girls	
		<b>Nana Plaza</b>
		Mercury Ladyboy Bar
		Big Dogs Nana
		Lucky Lukes Tiki Bar
		Nana Beer Garden
		London Calling

<b>Lexicalization Process</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Token</b>	
<b>Characterizing</b>	the process of naming signs that describe the activities in bars and/or the entertainment they offer.	<b>Cowboy alley</b> Kazy Kozy Shadow Ladyboy Bar Crazy Cat The Dollhouse Afterskool Bar Lighthouse Toy Bar Lucky Star Five Star The Oasis Soi Cowboy	<b>Nana Plaza</b> Twister BKK Playskool Shooter bar Spankys Angelwitch Rock Dancers
<b>Fetishizing</b>	the process of naming the signs based on sexually enticing names and parts of the body	<b>Cowboy alley</b> The Peep Cockatoo Midnite	<b>Nana Plaza</b> Sexy Night Obsession Cockatoo Lollipop Temptations Ladyboy Bar
<b>Heterosexualizing</b>	the process of naming based on heterosexual relationship.		<b>Nana Plaza</b> Geisha
<b>Queering</b>	the process of naming the signs. Related to the LGBTQIA+ community		<b>Nana Plaza</b> Rainbow-5 Rainbow-2

Personalizing is observed through the use of a name of a person, animal, adoption of a character in a novel, place, and thing. *Fanny's*, *Rio Club*, *Geisha* and *Angelwitch* are examples of the use of people's names. *Fanny's*, through its

possessive construction, suggests that the bar is owned by *Fanny*. *Rio Club* makes use of the name *Rio* as a modifier to the head noun *Club* which stands as the name of the bar. *Angelwitch* as a modifier to *Rock Dancers* is a name taken from a British heavy metal band. This means that the performances in the bar include rock music and its performers are in metallic costumes such as leather shoes (Thaigogobar, 2019). Animal's name is also used as bar's name such as *Shark*. Furthermore, the name of a character in a novel is also employed. For example, *Suzie Wong* is the name of the lead role character in the novel *The World of Suzie Wong* which was later turned into a movie. *Spice Girls*, the name of a British girl group, is also employed as a name of the bar. Some names of places used as sex signs include *Nana Beer Garden* and *London Calling*. These bars used 'Nana' which is the name of a place in Bangkok and 'London' which is the capital city of Britain. Interestingly, there is also a bar that makes use of an animal name. For example, *Big Dogs Nana* employed 'Big Dogs' to modify the place 'Nana.'

Characterizing is used to tell something about a bar. There are three main techniques in using characterizing as a lexicalization process. These are stylized names, modifier constructions and gender marked signs. *Kazy kozy*, for example, is used to describe the bar. *Kazy Kozy* is a stylized form of the words 'crazy' and 'cozy' (StickboyBKK, 2019) and employed to say that the bar is a cozy place with some crazy entertainment. *Playskool* is a shop name that may have been taken from an American toy company where two words such as "Play", and "School" are put together. In this case though, school is sensationalized and is written as 'Skool', hence *Playskool*. *Crazy Cat*, *Shooter bar* and *Twister BKK* are examples of modifier construction shop names. *Crazy* as a modifier of *Cat*. The use of 'crazy' in the two



bars means naughty as in erotic performances. There is also a shop name that provides information about the workers in the bar. *Shooter Bar* and *Twister BKK* are other shop names that contain modifiers such as ‘Shooter’ and ‘Twister’ which means playing pool and twisting bodies, respectively. These modifiers provide descriptions of the kind of entertainment offered, such as a bar that has a pool table which is *Shooter Bar* and a bar with dance performances which is *Twister BKK*. *Shadow Lady Bar* includes *Ladyboy* which refers to male-to-female transgender in the Thai context.

Fetishizing as a lexicalization process is applied through the use of words suggesting sexual overtones. For example, *The Peep* takes from the act of sneaking a look at somebody. This suggests that someone is to secretly look at a person who is naked. *Cockatoo* is a kind of parrot. However, it takes a different meaning when used in sex tourism for it can refer to the male sex orgasm (Urban-Dictionary, 2009a). Some make use of modifiers such as ‘Sexy’ in *Sexy Night* and ‘Temptations’ in *Temptations Ladyboy Bar*. These modifiers are used to sexualize the head nouns ‘Night’ and ‘Bar.’ Beside this technique, there are also single word shop names which are sufficient to eroticize the bar. These include *Obsession*, *Cockatoo* and *Lollipop*. While *Obsession* may be explicitly understood as a term to sexualize the place, the other two have interesting meanings. *Cockatoo*, for example, is a sexually loaded term. For one, it is a kind of a parrot. Sexually, it also refers to the male sex organ, sometimes those with a tattoo (Urban-Dictionary, 2009a). *Lollipop* also suggests a male sex organ (Urban-Dictionary, 2009b).

Heterosexualizing is used through names associated with women. *Geisha* is the name for a person who, in the Japan context, is an entertainer who can dance, sing

and talk to men. She is considered a Japanese hostess. This means that the use of such name attempts to replicate a Japanese sex tourism practice.

The last lexicalization process is queering which involves the use of names related to LGBTQIA+. In the data, there is only one that emerged to fit this category, *Rainbow*. While it does not explicitly mean gay, it is culturally linked with the LGBTQIA+ community.

The lexicalization process reveals a slight difference between Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza. Cowboy alley practices characterizing, personalizing and fetishizing lexicalization process which apparently are common tools to describe and eroticize the place. On the contrary, Nana Plaza, in addition to the three lexicalization processes used in Cowboy alley, has some shop names that fall in the categories of queering and heterosexualizing. These two processes function to linguistically mark gender and sexuality. This means signs using queering lexicalization process links with trans women workers while heterosexualizing is for female heterosexual workers. Although these are very minimal, they inform a subtle difference between the two places.

The shop names described above demonstrate the techniques in assigning names in the shop signs. Such techniques participate in constructing the activity and the identity of the place. In the following sections, I delve into the semiotic resources used in both shop signs and promotional signs.

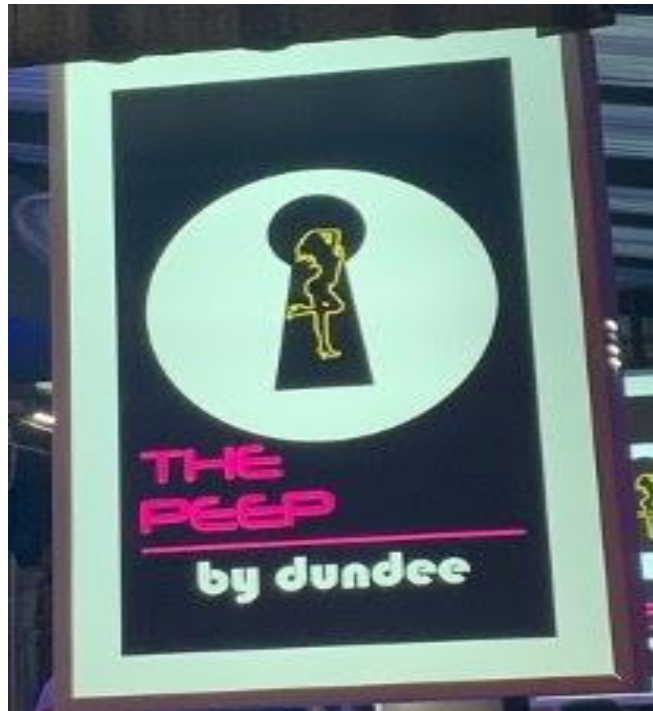
## **6.2 The Female Body**

The construction of the female body in Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza is varied. While several semiotic elements are shared, the female body is represented

differently in terms of semiotic representation and linguistic marking. I explore these similarities and dissimilarities in the following section.

The female body is discursively created through the use of the shadow figures in both Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza. They are found consistent in all of the signs collected. The shadow figures observed in the signs are mostly without any clothing details, especially in Cowboy alley. Besides the shadow figures, there are other semiotic elements which include the presence of the shape of a woman, heels, and wavy hair. These semiotic elements are commonly appearing in the signs showcasing the female body; thus, they participate in constructing femininity. To analyze how these elements index the female body, I employ Irvin and Gal's (2000) Iconization to discuss the role of shadow figures and the semiotic elements mentioned in representing the female body.

Figure 62 is an example of a shop sign using the female shadow figure and the presence of heels. The female shadow figure indicates an analytical structure which gives information about the type of workers in the bar. It can also be noticed that the woman is being sneaked upon through the keyhole which is complemented by the shop name *The Peep* that qualifies as a fetishizing lexicalization process.



*Figure 62 Shop Sign: The Peep by Dundee (Cowboy Alley)*

It is important to mention here that there are variations among the shop signs of *The Peep* as shown in Figure 63. The sign with the rainbow margin is placed above the other signs with the white margin, as seen in Figure 62. Such placement allows the viewers to focus on the woman's body and allows the bar to identify as a space for heterosexual men seeking a female body. Together with the fetishizing lexicalization process of the shop name, the sign turns the woman's body into an object that can be eroticized and manipulated, hence an objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) of the woman's body.



Figure 63 Shop Signs: *The Peep by Dundee* (Cowboy Alley)

Figure 64 shows the use of the female body in the *Five Star* shop sign. *Five Star* is an example of characterizing, the lexicalization process which informs the kind of bar it is. There are two shadow figures indicating a classification process of conceptual structure which shows the relationship of the woman models who are performing an erotic dance routine. While the data I have from my fieldwork indicates this in Figure 64, I take a similar image with the lights on from the internet (StickboyBKK, 2018) presented as Figure 65. The sign with the lights on demonstrates much detailed representation of the erotic dance performed by the two women models. It is exemplified through the act of pole dancing and the other is dancing while touching her body. Compositionally, it shows an Ideal-Real structure which shows text-image relations. "Five Star " on the top position is the ideal while the two shadow women models are the real. Their relationship may be explained by

considering “Five Star” as the rating or quality of the female performers and the women below reflect the kind of performance that has been rated as such.



*Figure 64 Shop Sign: Five Star (Cowboy Alley) (previously Figure 23)*





Figure 65 Shop Sign: Five Star (photo taken from Stickboy, 2018)

Shadow figures appearing in the portal gate of Nana Plaza are used to represent the female body. Figure 66 shows two female shadow figures placed on each side of the name 'Nana Plaza'. Such a structure falls under Center-Margin where the name of the place 'Nana Plaza' is at the center and the two female models depicting a pole dancing performance are the margins. The presence of the two female shadow figures suggests an analytic process which demonstrates that the place houses women entertainers. Furthermore, the tagline below saying, "The World's Largest Adult Playground" suggests mature entertainment.



Figure 66 Shop Sign: Nana Plaza (Nana Plaza)

While most of the shadow figures presented above do not have clothing materials, one of the exemptions is Figure 67. The sign shows a woman riding a broomstick depicting the stereotypical witch. However, it may not seem as it is because the shop name has a much more interesting background. Instead of naming the place after a witch, the bar name *Angelwitch Rock Dancers* might have been adopted from a British heavy metal band in England in 1976. *Angelwitch* was the name of its first album (Larkin, 1999) which later became the band's name. The band is well known for their metallic attire which is probably supported by 'Rock' in *Rock Dancers*. This is followed by the dancers as they wear leather and metallic costumes. Looking closely at the sign, the woman is positioned inside the red circle which functions as the center of the sign and the name of shop *Angelwitch Rock Dancers*



along with the blurry image of the woman serves as the margin. The sign also depicts a narrative structure where the broomstick serves as the vector which showing where the woman is going.



Figure 67 Shop sign: *AngelWitch Rock Dancers* (previously Figure 33)

Part of the female body is also employed to represent the feminine body. Figure 68 shows the use of a woman's face in *The Dollhouse* shop sign. *The Dollhouse* is a characterizing lexicalization process. The shop name is adapted from a similar club in Florida, USA (Stickman Bangkok, 1998-2021). The sign demonstrates an Ideal-Real structure where the top position contains the name of the bar serving as ideal and the information below including the woman's face and the description

*Bangkok, Cold Beer, Good Music, Hassle Free* which functions as the real. The sign also shows the use of wavy hair which is found to be indexing the female body.



Figure 68 Shop Sign: *The Doll House (Cowboy Alley)*

The use of shadow figures along with other visual elements such as the stiletto heels, body figure and wavy hair participates in creating the female body. They are shared by the sexed signs in both Cowboy Alley and Nana Plaza. Besides shadow figures, another semiotic element is used in one particular area, Nana Plaza. In my fieldwork, I noticed that it is the only sign that makes use of the animated figure.

An animated image is also used to construct the woman's body in the promotional sign of *London Calling*. *London Calling* is a shop name that falls under the personalizing where its name is taken from the capital of Britain. The logo is

iconic as it is the logo of London's train station. Looking closely at the sign, Figure 69 shows an animated woman's body in the sign with an analytic structure that informs about the kind of workers in the bar. The woman model is noticeably under the logo and the Japanese *ロンドン* 'London' and Chinese *伦敦* 'London' characters. This suggests an Ideal-Real structure where the logo above is the ideal and the woman model is the real.



*Figure 69 Promotional Signs: London Calling (Nana Plaza)*

The female body is sexualized through various elements. One is the absence of clothing which I classify as manifestation of nudity. To put an analytical lens to this observation, I attempt to operationalize Kang's (1997) body display to encompass the

absence of clothing details such as a bikini to situate it in analyzing shadow figures. Another element is pole dancing. Pole dancing is a significant erotic symbol in the sexed signs. This representation of sexualized entertainers is consistent in the data discussed across sex tourism areas.

Figure 70 illustrates the absence of clothing details in the female shadow figures. This qualifies to Kang's (1997) body display which exhibits a high degree of nudity. This is exemplified by the prominence of the body figures showing the bust and the bottom. In addition, the pole is also used in Figure 70. The use of the pole is an example of feminine touch (Goffman, 1979) which is observed through one woman's leg being curling around the pole and her hands is gripping it, too. The other woman is touching her head which is slightly bent.



*Figure 70 Shop Sign: Five Star (Cowboy Alley) (previously Figure 23 and 64)*



Similarly, Figure 71 represents the act of pole dancing but makes use of the lighthouse in lieu of an actual pole. The woman's body is wrapped around the lighthouse. This sexualization technique falls under feminine touch (Goffman, 1979). The woman model does not have any clothing element which suggests a high degree of nudity referred to as body display (Kang, 1997). Compositionally, the sign indicates an Ideal-Real structure where the shop name *Lighthouse* is placed on top being the ideal and the woman body with the actual lighthouse is situated below demonstrating the real. Figure 71 also shows an analytical structure which reflects the kind of entertainment in the bar.



*Figure 71 Promotional Sign: Lighthouse (Cowboy Alley)*

The only photographic image used in sexed signs is found in Nana Plaza. Figure 72 shows the sexualization of the woman's body through the photographic image of a woman in a bikini. The sign is an example of a promotional sign of the bar

*Lollipop*, a fetishizing lexicalization process alluding to the male sex organ. It indicates an Ideal-Real structure where the shop name and descriptions are placed on top making them the ideal while the woman model placed at the bottom of the sign is real. The woman is in the act of crawling, which qualifies the sign under Goffman's (1979) ritualization of subordination. The woman model's gaze is directed to the audience, suggesting a demand (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). Compositionally, the sign is classified as a narrative process, the act of doing. The woman crawling shows the direction she is heading which functions as the vector. Besides the photographic image, the element that sets Nana Plaza distinct from Cowboy alley is that the female body is linguistically marked. Figure 72 is an example of a linguistically marked sign representing the female body. The use of 'girls' as a lexical element depicting the female body is only one of the two markers found in Nana Plaza. I present the other variant of such marking in Figure 73 and 74.



Figure 72 Promotional Sign: Lollipop (Nana Plaza) (previously Figure 25)

Linguistic marking is significant in the sexed signs in Nana Plaza which represent the female. Figure 73 shows a sign containing, *100% Real Ladies Only* which declares that the workers in the bar are all female heterosexuals as indicated by the modifiers “100”, “Real” and “Only”. In my fieldwork, I find this salient as its use is sufficient to identify the bar as a bar one where female heterosexuals work without representing them visually. This is consistent in other bars, one of which I present in Figure 74.



Figure 73 Promotional Sign: 100% Real Ladies Only (Nana Plaza)

Figure 74 is another example of the existence of the female linguistic marker. The shop name *Sexy Night* which falls under characterizing through the modifier “Sexy” does not contain any visual element attributing to the female identity. This is something I observed in the field where most of the bars have a disclaimer that do not have any images containing women's bodies.



Figure 74 Shop Sign: Sexy Night (Nana Plaza)

Although there are elements distinguishing the female bodies, there is a semiotic element that operates to create a shared space. The most obvious is the use of



rainbow colors. Figure 75 shows the use of rainbow colors on the margins of the shop sign. They are placed directly at the very edges of the sign serving as a glowing element and background.



*Figure 75 Shop Signs: The Peep (appeared previously as Figure 31)*

The analysis of sexed signs reveals that the construction of the female body in Cowboy alley is created through the use of the female figure, but it is not linguistically marked. In contrast, the female body in Nana Plaza employs both the female body and linguistic markings. This is because Cowboy alley has been known as female heterosexual space which remains dominant over trans women bars, while Nana Plaza, based on the data and my observation, has almost similar number of bars dedicated to both female and trans woman workers. Therefore, Nana Plaza needs

explicit markings to create a boundary between the two groups of workers to serve its patrons.

Semiotic elements in the signs are abundant. Based on the discussion of the sexed signs, several semiotic elements which include shadow figures, bikini, clothes, hair, heels, and curly hair are used in indexing femininity. These semiotic elements, as used in the signs, undergo a semiotic process which Irvine and Gal (2000) call iconization. Iconization involves “a transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and the social images in which they are linked” (Irvine & Gal, 2000, p. 37). Placing in the semiotic landscape study of gender and sexuality, the semiotic elements become icons attributing to a female identity. This means that the use of the woman’s body presented as shadow figures creates a feminine identity. Other icons which become apparent in signs depicting the woman’s body include heels and long wavy hair. A distinct element observed in the sexed signs is the use of clothing details on the female body in Nana Plaza. When put together, they establish an interaction with linguistic resources such as the shop names which construct a social image associated with a gendered identity, in this case, the female heterosexuals.

The sexualization of the female body is observed to be done through the absence of other semiotic elements relating to clothing details. The absence of clothing detail is an example of a body display (Kang, 1997) which is the display of a higher degree of nudity, and the employment of an object depicting a pole that operates as an extension of sexual material. Besides a pole, another object is used to depict pole dancing. This is particularly evident in Figure 71 which clearly shows how

a lighthouse is sexualized to become part of an erotic display of a woman performing pole dancing. These semiotic resources work in concert to form a multimodal ensemble (Kress, 2010) suggesting an eroticized tourism space.

### 6.3 Trans Woman Body

The representation of the trans woman body has less variation. The signs collected in Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza show similarities. This includes the linguistic marking attributing to the trans woman body and the presence of clothing materials. The trans woman body is linguistically marked through the gender label 'ladyboy' a word that refers to male-to-female transgender in the Thai context and semiotically marked by the employment of clothing details such as bikini and full costumes. These distinct features are explained through Irvin and Gal's (2000) fractal recursivity. Fractal recursivity (Irvine & Gal, 2000) is the presence of a certain elements that create the other. In the context of the study, it is demonstrated through the employment of linguistic marker in conjunction with semiotic elements like the bikini and full costume. They appear a common pattern on signs containing trans women. The difference observed between the two areas is the use of shadow figures, rainbow colors and photographic images in Cowboy alley and the use of photographic images only in Nana Plaza. I discuss this in the following section.

Figure 76 shows the use of "ladyboy" which indicates an analytical process which reveals that the type of workers in the bar are trans women. The sign follows an Ideal-real structure where the bar name on top serves as the ideal and the information on the bar including the shadow figure is the real. Furthermore, the visual presentation of the trans women demonstrates self-assertiveness (Kang, 1997) as the left portion of

the body is fronted which may exhibit independence. The bar name *Shadow Ladyboy Bar* is an example of characterizing lexicalization. “Ladyboy” serves as a linguistic marking while the bikini serves as a semiotic marking. The shadow figure wears a pink bikini which is used to create the trans woman's body.



Figure 76 Promotional Sign: Shadow Lady Bar (Cowboy alley)

Figure 77 also uses “ladyboy” and the pink bikini. The sign is a promotional sign of *Cockatoo* which could refer to the male sex organ, thus the name falls under fetishizing. It also illustrates an Ideal-Real structure where the Japanese characters バンコクニューハーフ ‘Ladyboy Bar’ is ideal while the disco ball, the trans woman shadow figure, and other information encompass the real. Consistent to Figure 76, the sign in Figure 77 makes use of the pink bikini which serves as a semiotic element indexing the trans woman body. The pink bikini, being constantly used in the trans

woman body, is an element that participates in the iconization of the trans woman identity.



Figure 77 Promotional Sign: Cockatoo (Cowboy alley) (previously Figure 32)

Trans women are presented in photographic images. Figure 78 is an example of the analytical structure of conceptual process. It is presented in a way where the viewers are able to see the possessive attributes of the performers serving as carriers in the process. The sign demonstrates an Ideal-Real structure where the entire top portion containing the angel figure and the title “Angie’s Angels Cabaret Show” serves as the ideal and the entire bottom portion displaying the performers and the schedule of shows is the real. This information structure suggests the kinds of

entertainment that trans women offer. The four performers are sandwiched by two animated images. The depiction of trans women allows a direct interaction with the audience and is more visually detailed.



Figure 78 Promotional Sign: Cockatoo Ladyboy Bar (Cowboy alley) (previously Figure 28)

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While shadow figures are less used to index the trans woman body, different semiotic elements are used to represent them. Photographic images are found to be used for are visually rich. They also sexualize the trans woman's body in different ways. They vary in the use of daring bikinis, demand relations, and sexualization techniques.

Figure 79 indicates an analytical structure which presents the workers in the bar. They reveal the salience of the bikini in sexualizing the trans woman's body.



Compositionally, the sign demonstrates a complex structure. The topmost part shows a Given-new structure. The shadow figure with pink bikini on the left side serves as the given while the shop name *Mercury Ladyboy Bar* is new. Looking from top to bottom, the sign follows an Ideal-Real structure. The name of the bar is placed on top, thus the ideal, and the images of the trans women workers are at the bottom serving as the real.



Figure 79 Promotional Sign: Mercury Ladyboy Bar (Nana Plaza) (previously Figure 16)

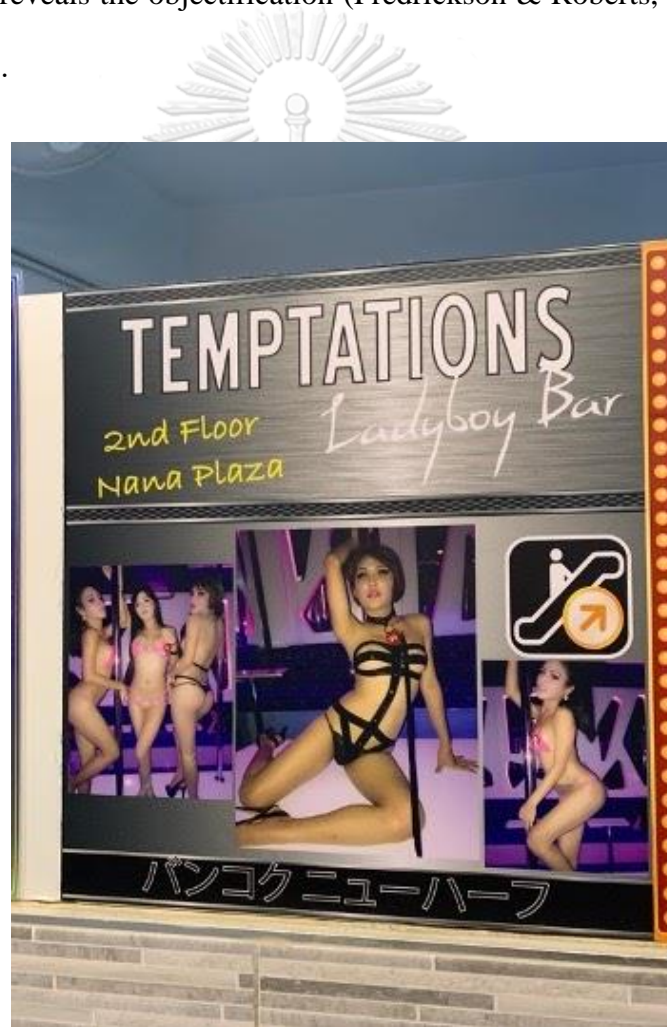
The eroticization of trans women's bodies is done through the clothing material, sexualization process, distance and relationship, and demand relations. First, the use of bikini as the only clothing material shows a certain degree of nudity which Kang (1997) calls body display. Another is the trans woman on the left is seen to be touching her face, an element classified as feminine touch (Goffman, 1979). These

sexualization techniques are used to create an eroticized image of the trans woman models. While all trans woman models show a direct interaction which suggests a demand gaze (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996), it is important to mention the types of demand relations and examine the distance depicted by the represented participants. The two models on the left are posing together and smiling, an act suggesting the creation of a social connection with the viewers (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). The image covers the face down to the shoulders which means a close personal distance and intimate relationship (Hall, 1964). On the right side, two trans woman images are vertically positioned. The images above show three trans women in bikinis. They show a cold stare which aims to make the viewers feel inferior (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). They are also taken from a far personal distance which covers from head to waist, demonstrating personal relationship (Hall, 1964). The trans woman underneath shows a looking up stare which can be interpreted as asking for pity (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996) and the focus on the face desires for intimate relations. Finally, the visibility of the body shows a certain degree of nudity which Kang (1997) calls body display.

Figure 80 reveals a more eroticized construction of trans women. The modifier *Temptations* is observed in the visual representation of trans women. The sign shows an Ideal-Real structure where the shop name on top is ideal and the images of the trans women below are real. From the left, there are three trans women in one photographic image. The model on the left is holding the pole and so is the one in the middle while the next is accentuating her bust and touching her thighs. Similarly, the trans woman model on the right is holding on the pole with her bottom accentuated. These sexualization techniques fall under feminine touch (Goffman, 1979). The trans



woman in the middle is sitting with her bust and upper body projected forward with her right hand touching her hair and her legs bent to an L-shape. This strategy depicts a ritualization of subordination and feminine touch (Goffman, 1979). All the represented participants show a direct interaction with the participants depicting a demand gaze (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996), and display a certain degree of nudity by only wearing only bikinis indicating body display (Kang, 1997). The interaction of these processes reveals the objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) of the trans women's bodies.



*Figure 80 Promotional Sign: Temptation Ladyboy Bar (previously Figure 27)*

Besides the use of shadow figures and photographic images, rainbow colors are observed to be essential in the signs depicting the trans woman body specifically

in Cowboy alle. Figure 81 shows the use of rainbow colors in the disco ball. The disco ball, being an object, which is salient in bars, functions as a symbol of queer space. The use of rainbow colors in both cis women and trans women signs seem to indicate a shared space. Rainbow colors generally indicate the gay culture (Motschenbacher, 2020). It is often linked to the LGBTQI+ community. In previous studies, the use of rainbow colors does not only indicate as a place for gay people but also a shop that is LGBTQI+ friendly. It is also used to mark queer spatiality (Ghaziani, 2014), i.e., marking the boundary of queer spaces.



*Figure 81 Shop Sign: Shadow Ladyboy Bar (Cowboy Alley) (previously Figure 26)*

Although they appear mostly in signs in Cowboy alley, the use of pink bikini in shadow figures and its interaction with the linguistic element ‘ladyboy’ operate in

the creation of the other. This is different in the way shadow figures are used in the female body where the bikini is not used. This difference falls under fractal recursivity which is the “projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationships onto other levels” Irvine and Gal (2000, p. 38). Andronis and Shimi (2004, p. 264) puts it simply as “the differences which are made to be iconic are used in the creation of ‘other’.”

The analysis of the trans women’s bodies shows the use of linguistic and semiotic markings such as “ladyboy” and pink bikini, respectively. These are discursively used to construct the trans woman body. Besides these elements, a trans woman's body is also represented through a photographic image which allows an interaction with the audiences. This is found exclusively used in bars advertising trans woman workers. The semiotic representation of trans women reveal various degrees of sexualization such as body display (Kang, 1997), ritualization of subordination and feminine touch (Goffman, 1979). It is also observed how both signs analyzed show the demand gaze which allows a direct interaction with the viewers.

#### **6.4 Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza as Feminine Space**

Based on the discussion in the previous sections, linguistic and semiotic resources work in tandem to create a feminine space. They operate as aggregates to form a space dedicated to male heterosexual patrons who fancy both female heterosexual and trans woman workers. Despite both being feminine space, there are certain differences between the two areas differ based on linguistic and semiotic elements used in signs. I discuss them in this section.

Cowboy alley, based on my fieldwork, has more bars dedicated to female heterosexuals. Although they are not fully supported by the tokens of signs attributed to heterosexualizing lexicalization process, the visual elements seem to push the argument further as female heterosexuals are visually prominent. This is observed through the number of signs containing female body. It is also important to note that despite having more bars for female heterosexuals, Cowboy alley demonstrates a safe space for trans women workers through the use of rainbow colors.

In contrast, Nana Plaza has an almost equal number of bars advertising female heterosexuals and trans women. This is observed through the articulation of gender markings which are found salient for both gender groups. This is a distinct feature that Nana Plaza has compared to Cowboy alley. In addition, the visual depiction of both gender groups is more seductive compared to that in Cowboy alley. Such semiotic practice is possible arguable because Nana Plaza is a semi-private space.

Thus, femininity in Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza is constructed through the flaunting of seductive, slim bodies. This provides evidence on the preferred 'feminine body' in these sex tourism spaces.

## **6.5 Chapter Conclusion**

Based on the analysis, Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza are found to construct femininity through the use of the female and trans woman bodies. They are strategically used to establish an erotic space where bars advertising female heterosexuals employ shadow figure, photographic and animated images while bars commercializing trans women make use of both shadow figures and photographic

images. Linguistic resources are also used to mark the female and trans woman bodies.

Semiotic resources do not only reveal the feminine body but also the sexualization process involved. Visually, the female body displays a high degree of nudity through the absence of clothing materials in most of the signs investigated. Since several shadow figures are used to represent the female body, the absence of direct interaction with the viewers which suggests an offer (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996) makes them objects of desire. On the contrary, the trans woman is presented both in shadow figures and photographic images and wears costumes. The trans woman's body is visually sexual because of the photographic images which make the details of the body more visible and detailed. The varying demand relations also exhibit a more intimate and personal relationship with the viewers. Bikini is significant in representing trans women as they appear frequently. Furthermore, trans women bodies are also more visually represented, with different kinds of entertainment offered by the bars are shown to the viewers. Other semiotic elements include the rainbow colors which are discursively used to create a shared space by females and trans women.

Linguistically, the construction of the trans woman body is more marked through the incorporation of “ladyboy” in signs. This is consistent in both Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza. In contrast, the female body is only linguistically marked in the Nana Plaza area where lexical elements such as “100% Real Ladies Only” and “Beautiful Girls” are used. The absence of such linguistic marking in Cowboy alley serves as a gender identity linked to the female body. These linguistic markers operate

as gender boundaries that signal the spaces are constructed by female heterosexuals and trans women. The semiotic and linguistic resources used in sexed signs in Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza work in concert to construct femininity that is dedicated to male heterosexual audiences.



## CHAPTER 7

### **The Discursive Construction of Bangkok Sex Tourism Spaces**

In the previous chapters, I examined the different linguistic and semiotic resources in sexed signs (Chapter 4) and explored how they participate in constructing heterogenous spaces (Chapter 5) and femininity (Chapter 6). In this chapter, I interrogate the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces which feeds into the third objective of the study. Following Kelly-Holmes (2005), I employ linguistic fetishization to unpack the functions of languages used in sex tourism. To organize this chapter, I divide it into three sections, namely, linguistic fetish of sexed signs, Bangkok sex tourism as sites of desire, and the spatialization of Bangkok sex tourism. Towards the end, I discuss the way the sex tourism areas in Bangkok are discursively constructed. Finally, I argue that the linguistic resources and semiotic resources dialogically build the sex tourism spaces of Bangkok.

Bangkok sex tourism, as found in the previous chapters, is an aggregate of different gendered and sexual spaces which are built for specific audiences. These spaces, namely, the heterogeneous spaces (Chapter 5, Silom areas) and feminine spaces (Chapter 6, Cowboy alley and Nana Plaza), are constructed through linguistic and semiotic resources that demonstrate masculine body, female body and trans woman body. Objectification and commodification, which I link to erotic desires, emerge as issues that require discussion. To frame them in this chapter, I look at the processes of linguistic commodification through the lens of linguistic fetish. I also delve into how objectification of the body is done by analyzing the desire imbricated



in signs. Finally, I discuss how these elements work together in constructing the spaces of Bangkok sex tourism.

### **7.1 Linguistic Fetish of Sexed Signs**

Linguistic fetish is a concept that explicates the use of languages beyond communication. Kelly-Holmes (2015, p. 135) defines it as the “phenomenon of using languages symbolic (fetishized) rather than utility (Instrumental-Communicative) purposes in commercial texts.” This means that the meaning of a language differs depending on the person reading it. A language may serve as an instrumental tool in communicating for audiences whose native language is the one displayed while it can be symbolic to those who are foreign to that language and thus serves as a fetishizing tool. In other words, in the eyes of a foreign language user, the foreign language serves as aesthetics as it adds value to the bar for having that international appeal. Moreover, she notes that “the visibility and visual positioning of a particular language could be used as a way of revealing common-sense ideologies about language(s) that are prevalent in a particular society” Kelly-Holmes (2015, p. 136). This means appearances of languages, which is not limited to foreign languages but also to languages appearing as minority or marginalized, in commercial signs may construct a different meaning based on their visual placement. In this section, I explore the possible meanings by looking at two of the three linguistic fetish described by Kelly-Holmes (2015) namely, visual English and foreign language fetish. I also discuss the marginalization of the Thai Language in the sexed signs despite being the national and official language of Thailand.

English is the most predominant language appearing on signs in all of the areas investigated and this aligns with the way the use of English has become a trend in tourism spaces. English's global status mainly stems from the widespread use of the English language around the world. This means that English is no longer owned by a specific country. As Kelly-Holmes (2015) notes, English now earns a status of neutrality. Its symbolic meaning, particularly in its use in tourism spaces, has been indexed by internationalism and cosmopolitanism. This also has become an entry point to globalization. Hence, the presence of English has become a "global" fetish of visual English (Kelly-Holmes, 2015).

Multilingual signs have also become a trend in tourism spaces which carry symbolic meanings. As previously discussed in Chapter 4, the placement of a particular language demonstrates the preferred code in the sign. Beyond the placement, the very presence of languages suggests another meaning in the lens of linguistic fetishization. Taking Figure 82 as an example, the use of Thai, Chinese, and English in the shop sign may mean value placed in the foreign languages. The Chinese characters and the English words are relatively bigger and visually appealing. This suggests that aside from its utilitarian purpose, their use as display demonstrates the premium allotted to international audiences.

In addition, the color selections and symbols can also contribute to the fetishization process as they add aesthetic value which can be cultural in a certain sense. For example, the use of red may not only mean "passion, hot or desire" as it may also carry some cultural meaning linked to Chinese. Similarly, the use of blue for males may also be construed as the indexical property of blue with men. In addition,

the use of the rainbow flag which is a symbol of LGBTQIA+ and queer culture (Motschenbacher, 2020) adds another layer of aesthetics that attracts queer audiences. This visual meaning along with the use of foreign languages participate in the fetishization of foreign languages, making them as Kelly-Holmes (2015) puts it a “decoration” and qualifies as what she calls foreign language fetish.



*Figure 82 Shop Sign: Hotmale (Phatphong 2) (previously Figure 46)*

Besides Chinese, there are other foreign languages used in shop signs which function to fetishize languages at different levels. These levels are viewed as instrumental and symbolic. First, their appearance works for their instrumental value to communicate with their target audiences. Second, the symbolic value of their use is attributed to the creation of global identity. Their employment in signs can also serve as displays where they add visual aesthetics to multilingualism.

Figure 83 exhibits the use of Japanese, Chinese, Korean and English. The Japanese translation is placed at the top of the sign. It mirrors its English counterpart which has similar size and visual weight, making them more salient than other languages. This suggests that the bar gives more value to Japanese customers who

seem to be seeking a particular entertainer, i.e., ladyboys in Bangkok. Note that the translations are not completely equal. The Korean and Chinese translations are different. Both languages translate “Ladyboy” while the Japanese is “Bangkok Ladyboy” or “Bangkok Male-to-Female Transgender”. This could be attributed to the historical body of Cowboy alley, the place in which the sign appears, which has gained popularity among East Asian audiences, particularly Japanese. The visibility of Chinese and Korean serves as aesthetics and adds to the creation of the East Asian market. English, as discussed earlier, operates as a neutral language. It is important to note that the “ladyboy” or male-to-female transgender written in Chinese, Japanese and Korean is not a case of translation per se but rather it is transliteration. This means that they are transliterated to fetishize trans women workers. Thus, I interpret the combination of Japanese, Chinese, Korean and English as the meeting point of globalization and orientalism.



Figure 83 Promotional Sign: Cockatoo (Cowboy Alley) (previously Figure 78)

Thai Language as observed in Figure 84 (also in Figure 82) appears to be given less visual attention. Figure 86 demonstrates that the Thai language, which is in red neon light, is less visible compared to its English and Chinese counterparts. Though placed on top serving as the preferred code (discussed in Chapter 4), it is nearly erased in the sign. Such appearance of Thai is very common in the sexed signs I investigated. Thai shop names are highly marginal and unintelligible. As I discussed earlier, according to the Thai Signboard Tax Act ("Signboard Tax Act," 1967) and the revised Thai Signboard Tax Act ("Revised Signboard Tax Act," 1991) the inclusion of Thai Language and its placement, particularly at the top position, means lower tax for business owners. I interpret the presence of the Thai language on sexed signs is of legal or logistical value.



*Figure 84 Shop Sign: The Pink Panther (Phatphong 2)*

The appearance of different languages serves as a linguistic fetish and a strategic sense. In particular, the use of the English language and foreign languages

participate in the construction of Bangkok as an international sex tourism space. The English language, as observed in different tourism spaces in Asia, serves as a symbolic tool to create an international appeal (Sutthinaraphan, 2016) and global image (Selvi, 2016). In addition, the use of foreign languages serves as a way to commodify social groups, including their culture and languages (Heller, 2008). The inclusion of the Thai language is not solely based on legal adherence but more of a strategic sense as its presence means lowering the tax that business owners need to pay.

## **7.2 Bangkok Sex Tourism Spaces as Sites of Desire**

Language and desire (Cameron & Kulick, 2003) is conceptually premised in erotic desire, erotic intimacy, and transgression. These are the three dimensions used in exploring desire and they are embedded in linguistic and semiotic practices which construct sites of desires. In the data, sexual human bodies and erotic linguistic elements are embedded in sex tourism spaces. The sexual human bodies are depicted mainly by a certain degree of nudity that is visible to tourist gaze. Erotic linguistic elements serve as tools in creating sexual expectations among the viewers. Joined together, they create sites of linguistic fetish and the role of English in the sexualization process in sexed signs which participate in establishing Bangkok sex tourism spaces as sites of desire. In this section I discuss the construction of sites of heterosexual desire and sites of homosexual desire.

The site of heterosexual desire is formed through the construction of the female body, in the context of sex tourism, as a subject of desire. The female body is positioned as the main advertising tool of bars. This is realized by the incorporation of



linguistic and semiotic resources in sexed signs. For example, Figure 85 shows the use of Triple XXX as a linguistic element serving as the bar's name. Triple XXX is often used in pornography. This term creates a social expectation that establishments which employ such sign involve practices relating to sex. In this expectation, the people who practice such work are known to be attractive and possess an erotic body. This means that they are expected to show a high degree of nudity. The visual depiction of the female body is an example of such expectation, that is, the woman who is beautiful and seductive.



*Figure 85 Promotional Sign: Triple XXX (Phatphong 2) (previously Figure 51)*

The female heterosexual desire is amplified by erotic intimacy that involves a degree of transgression. The transgression is used to explicate the signs, or in this case, the images for public consumption. Figure 85 exhibits nudity to create an erotic environment to be fantasized by heterosexual men. This depiction operates more in the objectification of the body which works alongside power. In this sign, I

operationally use power as a social construct in which the woman is expected to be inferior to men. The woman model showing her back with her face reflecting in the periphery is a depiction of subservience to the viewer, making her an imagined object of the viewer's desire.

Similarly, Figure 86 reflects the use of erotic intimacy and power to desire women. The sign is situated in Nana Plaza, a semi-private sex tourism space. Linguistically, the use of "beautiful girls" captures the identity of the workers and feeds the social expectation that women working in such bars are beautiful. This creates a linguistic desire for the audiences. The woman model in the image becomes a realization of the linguistic description, making her the model of the bar. The visual representation magnifies this desire by showing a female model wearing a red bikini and crawling with her face directed towards the viewers. The image suggests an invitation to be dominated, as the power resting on the viewer.





*Figure 86 Promotional Sign: Lollipop (Nana Plaza) (previously Figure 72)*

Subject of desires, erotic intimacy, and power are tools used in creating a site of heterosexual desire. The linguistic elements are used to spark desire and create expectation while the semiotic element becomes their realization. Erotic intimacy is formed through transgression where images that are not expected to appear in public are made. It is also practiced through degrees of nudity depicted in the images. Finally, power functions as a tool to heighten male heterosexual desire since males are socially constructed as domineering. Thus, the female body becomes an imagined object of desire by the viewer.

Compared to heterosexual desire, the construction of homosexual desire operates on different levels of subject desires, erotic intimacy, and power. In the data, the trans woman body and masculine body are used as subjects of desire. They are

represented in various ways. In the discussion that follows, I explicate the sites of trans woman desires and those of male homosexuals.

The site of trans woman desire is partly similar to that of female heterosexuals. It carries a similar level of erotic of intimacy and dynamics of power. However, the difference lies in the use of linguistic elements. As seen in Figure 87, *Temptations Ladyboy Bar* is used as the name of the bar. The use of “Temptations” creates sexual expectations which add to the space of desire. It provides the viewers with different ways temptations can be perceived. The semiotic elements illustrate the visual depiction of the varying kinds of temptations. All trans woman models show a high degree of nudity by wearing just the bikini. From the left, it shows group temptation as three trans women are about to perform erotic dances. This feeds the interest of those who seek erotic group performances. The second trans woman model that follows exhibits a more intimate sexualization process which indicates submission to dominance and places the power on its viewers. This is done through the seductive kneel and accentuation of the bust, signaling an offer of herself. The trans woman at the right is shown holding the pole and is about to perform pole dancing. These visual depictions work in revealing the inferiority of trans women which is inherited from the patriarchal expectation of being a woman.



Figure 87 Promotional Sign: Temptations Ladyboy Bar (Nana Plaza) (previously Figure 27 and 80)

The site of male homosexual desire is constructed through associations with sexually explicit. It is configured linguistically by using terms relating to sexual activities and semiotically by illustrating toughness and muscular bodies. One prominent use of the sexually loaded word is *Cum in* which is associated with orgasm as seen in Figure 88. This is even more embellished through linguistic elements describing sexual practices. Figure 88 lists names of drinks that are associated with men's sexual practices such as *Sperm*, *Blow Job*, *Golden Shower*, *Stranger Slut*, *Blue Balls* and *So Hard*. These linguistic elements not only create sexual expectation but also spark sexual men's desires, especially since the elements are intensified. They serve as a realization of the linguistic description and as subjects of desire. A case in particular is *Blow Job*, which appears to be depicted visually by the two male bodies

in grayscale. The photo in grayscale exhibits a sexual activity where the male body, visible from the lower chest below, is in a standing position while the other model is kneeling in front with his hands caressing the body as his face is directed to the standing man's sexual organ. This erotic depiction of intimacy is stretched by transgression. The sign is emplaced in a public space which may not be found appropriate. This adds sexual appeal and creates an eroticized space.



*Figure 88 Promotional Sign: The Stranger Bar & Lounge (Silom 4) (previously Figure 12)*

In addition, the male homosexual is linked with the patriarchal construction of man. Figure 90 indicates one noticeable dimension is the depiction of dignity as seen in the male model on the left which is inherently constructed among men. The male on the right is demonstrating a sexual tease through winking and touching his body.

The touching of the body suggests his position as a worker who is available for anyone to touch. Furthermore, the two male bodies below exemplify tough and domineering images which can be attributed to hypermasculinity. The degree of nudity is strikingly high as their sexual organs are only covered only by the text. Hence, sexually loaded words, hypermasculinity, and high degree of nudity work in concert to create a site of male homosexual desire.

The sites of desire are networks of different discursive practices that are imbricated in linguistic and semiotic elements. The linguistic elements function to spark sexual curiosity leading to expectation. This is realized by semiotic elements which concretized the desire that enables bodies to be represented as imagined objects of desires.

### **7.3 Spatialization of Bangkok Sex Tourism Spaces**

The sections discussed above present the different linguistic and semiotic practices situated in spaces. The concept of space has been defined by various scholars. Space, as defined by Certeau (1984), is a plethora of geographic activities laid in places. Lefebvre (1991) views space as an avenue of production. As for Tuan (1977), space is a mere location that humans do not have direct interaction with. In other words, space is an avenue configured by various activities situated in different areas and is free from human influence. To put it simply, “space is a practiced place” (Certeau, 1984, p. 117). In this section, I bring all the linguistic and semiotic resources discussed both in the previous sections. I put together the linguistic and semiotic practices that participate in the spatialization of Bangkok sex tourism spaces.

Linguistic practices are key elements in understanding and creating gender and sexuality identity of spaces. As Higgins (2017, p. 103) mentions, spaces are constructed through “multilinguals’ language practices”. In the context of the study, the linguistic practices are materialized through the incorporation of different languages in sexed signs. The language choices in sexed signs generally make up Bangkok sex tourism spaces as an international sex tourism space. However, the ‘internationalness’ of these spaces require unpacking as they comprise various elements. To capture this aptly, I deviate partly from the notion of internationalization. The use of English in shop signs in Bangkok, indeed, adds an international appeal (Sutthinaraphan, 2016) which involves mainly its use in wider communication (Huebner, 2006). I operationalize internationalization of spaces as a strategic use of languages to attract both wider tourists or patrons in the context of sex tourism, and specific patrons who are both foreign to the place they are visiting.

Following Lefebvre’s (1991) Spatial Practice, the appearance of English, Thai, Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages in the sexed signs collected represents the linguistic elements practiced in Bangkok sex tourism spaces. These languages are used strategically in different areas to represent the identity of the place and the patrons that visit the area. For example, Silom areas, based on their linguistic practices, are frequented by diverse patrons, mainly non-locals. To be specific, the signs using English-only outweigh signs with other patterns such as English-Thai, and English and other languages (or multilingual signs). The salience of English suggests that Silom areas are configured directly for foreign patrons who may have come from different countries. The English-Thai pattern in signs has a considerable number. This indicates that while the place is designed for foreign tourists, there are spaces

dedicated to local tourists. Similarly, Cowboy alley has more signs using English which informs that the area is for foreign tourists and less for the locals, since there are English-Thai signs.

It is also observed that there are a good number of signs using English and other languages. These languages include Chinese, Japanese and Korean. This suggests that the area is of interest among East Asians who are mainly Japanese and Korean. This is probably due to the accessibility of Cowboy alley to Thong Lo, where a considerable number of Japanese nationals work. Close to Cowboy alley is Nana Plaza. The linguistic make up of signs are quite similar where English only, and English and other languages are mostly used. These languages appear in differing salience and preference as I discussed in Chapter 4. These are the observable physical dimensions viewed through linguistic practices or what Trumper-Hecht (2010) calls perceived space, her renaming of Lefebvre's (1991) spatial practice.

The dialogic interaction of linguistic and semiotic resources is important in Bangkok sex tourism spaces. They participate in the construction of space. This is explained through Lefebvre's (1991, p. 39) representation of space, i.e., "the conceptualized space constructed out of symbol, codifications and abstract representations." These include linguistic fetishization, color selections and the human body that make up a gendered space. The by-product of such linguistic practices are the multilingual signs which are fetishized. As linguistically fetishized, multilingual signs work beyond the utilitarian purpose where they communicate to particular audiences; they operate within their symbolic value where the multilingual signs are perceived as materially embodied practices. These practices are mapped as a

chain of activities which participate in creating a tourism space. In constructing gender and sexuality identity, different words relating to gender such as “*Boy*”, “*Girls*” and “*Ladyboy*” are used. They do not only serve as identity markers but also as subjects of bars.

Based on the data, three common colors emerge in different places. These are rainbow, red and pink. The rainbow is known to be linked to LGBTQIA+ culture (Motschenbacher, 2020) and serves as a queer boundary marker (Ghaziani, 2014). Their presence indicate that spaces are constructed towards queer audiences. Red is in sex tourism spaces as it is juxtaposed with “light districts,” hence “red light district”- a term associated with Western—constructed erotic tourism that is found in wider geography studies. It is also used to construct heterosexual spaces which are directed towards male heterosexual audiences as observed in some literatures (Hubbard & Whowell, 2008). Pink, a color choice indexing femininity (Koller, 2008), is found to be used in trans woman spaces. They appear as font color in signs advertising trans women. The use of colors in spaces serve as semiotic modes (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996) which is observed to be strategically emplaced in embodied gender identities.

Besides color selection, what is noticeable is the objectification of the body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The employment of the human body, particularly the male body, female body and trans woman body, presented in shadow figures and photographic images offers the sexual and gender commodification of the place. The sexualization of the muscular male body indicates the aim to attract queer audiences, mainly male homosexuals. This is more articulated when visually presented and linguistically described alongside trans women where the muscular male body is made



prominent, and the trans woman body is downplayed. Such practice reveals the sexual politics governing sex tourism where the male body is privileged. It subscribes to a global queer culture (Hubbard, 2011) highly influenced by Western practices. This also unveils the hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Wood, 2005) in homosexual culture. In places where female heterosexuals and trans women are advertised, they are presented uniquely. They are differentiated by various elements such as the bikini, wavy hair and heels. These work as tools in creating iconic (Irvine & Gal, 2000) gender identities and the presence and absence of certain visual elements such as clothing detail becomes key in the process of fractal discursivity (Irvine & Gal, 2000) where gender identities are made distinct. Contrasting their depiction with the male body, trans women are portrayed equally in the space they share with female heterosexuals. They are described overtly to attract patrons who seek trans woman workers, a practice also observed in advertising female heterosexuals. Moreover, symbols representing the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly rainbow colors and flags, are used by some bars displaying female heterosexual bodies. This, I interpret, as a way of establishing solidarity between female heterosexuals and trans women workers. Based on these resources, Bangkok sex tourism spaces reveal the discursive practices seen through the semiotic elements and the construction of gender and sexuality in eroticized spaces.

The patrons and workers are significant in the spatialization of Bangkok sex tourism spaces. This is explained by Lefebvre's (1991, p. 39) through representation space which means the "directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of inhabitants and users." In my observation, I interpret the representation space through the ways workers represent themselves and the way patrons respond to them. In Silom areas, in bars advertising the male body, men work

topless reveals their lean muscular bodies. They sit and sometimes stand in front of the bars to entice patrons. Their interaction through gaze and the help of other workers who directly communicate with potential customers participate in realizing the signs through interaction and negotiation. Their patrons are commonly overtly effeminate gay men, and some somewhat discreet gay men. In Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley, even with areas in Silom such as Phatphong 1, women and trans women wear color-coordinated bikinis which represent the bar they work for. They sit outside the bars in plastic color-coded chairs. Similar to Silom, there are people who directly communicate with the patrons to offer them services. These interactions reveal the way humans discursively participate in constructing sex tourism spaces.

The spatialization of Bangkok sex tourism spaces is mapped through linguistic and semiotic resources, and the interaction of patrons and workers. As discussed, the linguistic and semiotic resources emplaced in sexed signs dialogically operate in mapping commercial sexual tourism spaces which are embellished through commodification and objectification. The linguistic fetish process works in providing understanding as to how languages appearing in signs are given economic value by making them prominent to the target audiences. This commodification process is observed inherent in commercial spaces such as sex tourism areas. The colors and embodiment of gender and identities are used to construct spaces dedicated to specific viewers. The representation of the human body unpacks the sexual politics in sex tourism spaces, where the male body is favored. Furthermore, the signification of the LGBTQIA+ culture through rainbow flags constructs solidarity and even safe spaces (Motschenbacher, 2020) which also appears to bars advertising female heterosexuals.

The human's lived experience through the interaction of patrons and tourists concretizes the construction of gender and sexuality of the place.

#### 7.4 The Bangkok Sex Tourism Space

Based on the discussion in the previous chapters and sections, I discuss here the constructed sex tourism spaces in Bangkok. I link all the linguistic and semiotic resources and my observation on the patron and workers' interaction to demonstrate the construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces.

Silom areas, as discussed in Chapter 5, are heterogenous spaces. They are made up of spaces dedicated to heterosexual audiences, mainly female heterosexual workers and male patrons (Phatphong 1, see section 5.2); queer audiences, specifically male homosexual, some heterosexual male patrons (Phatphong 2, see section 5.3); and queer audiences (Silom 4, see section 5.4).

The construction of heterosexual spaces in Phatphong 1 is done through the use of heterosexualizing shop names and of eroticized female body depicted through shadow figures. The utilization of *King* and *Queen* serves as gender markers of place. Looking at the visual representation, the women bodies are presented as objects of desire that appeal to the male patron's gaze. I interpret this as a way to attract male patrons and spark their curiosity on the kind of female entertainers in the area. This stems from the limited photographic images used in the signs displayed.

The construction of the queer spaces is done through a rich visual depiction of trans women and male homosexuals, and through their linguistic description. The visual representation aligns with a global practice where muscular male bodies are

privileged (Hubbard, 2011) while trans woman bodies are marginalized. However, this exists only in Phatphong 2, the place known to target male homosexual patrons. I, as an openly gay individual, find this a common practice as male homosexuals may be visually enticed by muscles and abs. These have been strategically done by flexing the biceps through feminine touch (Goffman, 1979) and by showing the body through body display (Kang, 1997). They operate to capture the male homosexuals' attention. These are even amplified by the topless men who stand in front of the bars, serving a human menu or displays. Linguistically, it is interesting to mention that despite their masculine depiction, "boy" serves as an important male gender marker. "Boy" appears unique as it denotes a young guy which is less appealing in eroticized spaces. This means that their employment in the sign creates a distinct feature of Bangkok sex tourism where a young and lean male is preferred.

Silom 4 differs slightly from Phatphong 2 as trans women are equally favored. This is due to the entertainment services that are available in the area which include drag shows. Silom 4 also has diverse activities apart from drag shows. It offers erotic dances where muscular men are featured and relaxing tourist spaces where majority of the servers are men. Thus, the configuration of Silom areas as heterogenous spaces stem from the wide array of activities available in the area to eclectic audiences.

Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley are found to be male heterosexual spaces where feminine bodies such as female heterosexuals and trans women are available for their consumption. This is observed through the use of the female body which is distinctively made to index a particular gendered body. This means the female heterosexual body is linguistically marked through the use of "girls" which is similar

to the use of “boy” in Phatphong 2, suggesting a preference for young and lean girls, and “ladies”. They are also visually represented by nude human silhouette or shadow body displays with wavy hair and high heels, and a few photographic images displaying women in bikini.

Trans women are also linguistically marked through “ladyboy”, despite being derogatory, which is a preferred gender tag in sexed signs. They are visually presented, similar to female heterosexuals. This is done through shadow figures but with prominent semiotic element – pink bikini which is the only distinctive visual marker of trans women. It is to make clear that while bikini is also used by female heterosexuals, it is specifically used with trans women in shadow figures alone. This means in photographic image, they both wear bikinis. Furthermore, they both wear seductive clothing in front of the bars they work for. Thus, the construction of femininity in Bangkok sex tourism spaces is anchored on the stereotypically depicted image of an idealized woman who is sexy, slim, and in bikini and heels.

The distinguishing features of Bangkok sex tourism lie within the strategic commodification of young workers through the use of “boys” and “girls” and visual elements like bikini which serve as gender markers.

## **7.5 Chapter Conclusion**

The discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces is done through the constellation of various discursive practices that are imbricated in language choices and semiotic elements. These discursive practices are found in varying levels. At a linguistic level, commodification and desire are employed. At a semiotic level, sexualization is observed through a high degree of nudity which works in realizing

desire. Finally, the interaction of patrons and workers is significant in concretizing the identity of space.

Linguistic resources are aggregates that serve as observable practices. This means their appearance in the signs operates as identity of space and identity of gender. The use of English, without a doubt, has served as a tool to internationalize the sex tourism spaces that Bangkok has to offer. However, this is stretched through the employment of other languages that target foreign tourists such as those from Japan, Korea and Chinese. Because of this use, the multilingual sense of the signs serves as a fetishizing tool to highlight their symbolic value. They are also used as a mechanism in sparking sexual expectations.

Semiotic resources are also aggregates that materialize the expectations driven by the linguistic description. They realize the imagined participants that patrons seek through the display of bodies in signs. They also reveal the politics in sex tourism spaces where a particular gender is privileged as they are favored by specific patrons. Visual elements also serve as distinctive markers to create another identity of the same body, in this case the feminine body, to explicitly present the workers' gender identity. Finally, the use of visual elements participates in configuring the space as shared by different workers through the use of rainbow flags.

The observation of the workers and patrons crystalizes the production of Bangkok sex tourism spaces. Their interaction captures the circuit of discursive practices where the signs, places, and humans jointly construct the gendered sex tourism spaces of Bangkok. Other elements that contribute to this construction are the

presence of the workers in front of the bars and the clothing they wear which espouses a place of desire.



## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion and Discussion

In this chapter, I present the conclusions, discussion, and contributions of the study. In the conclusion, I return to the objectives of the study and explain how they have been achieved. I continue with the role of English as an international language in public spaces and the semiotic practices in the sexed signs in the areas under study. I likewise discuss the difference of Bangkok sex tourism spaces to their other sex tourism international counterparts. Finally, I offer the contribution and the implications of the study to Thai linguistics, semiotic landscape and to the growing field of the sociolinguistics of sex work.

#### 8.1 Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the semiotic landscape of Bangkok sex tourism spaces. I identify the patterns of linguistic and semiotic choices in sexed signs; analyze their role in constructing gender and sexuality in Bangkok sex tourism spaces; and investigate the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism. Drawing from a multimodal discourse analysis, I examined a total of 122 sexed signs, comprising shop signs and promotional signs, and recorded data from non-participant observation. Findings reveal that the prevalent language choices are English-only, English-Thai, and English and other languages, while semiotic choices include human body, body part, animal and object. The linguistic and semiotic resource participate in creating heterogenous and male heterosexual spaces. It is found that the linguistic fetish and sites of desire work in concert in discursively constructing Bangkok sex tourism spaces.



English is the most common language choice in every sign while the human body is the most salient semiotic choice. English appears with Thai and other languages as well. Of the linguistic patterns, English-only appears to be prominent as the areas in which they appear are known to be flocked by international tourists. Its presence does not only indicate the audiences it is intending to communicate to, but also serves as a tool to create an international space. Employing code preference (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) and compositional meaning (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996, 2006), it is found that preferred codes differ across signs, but salience is given to English. Apart from the human body, semiotic elements include body part, animal and object. Human bodies are depicted as shadow figures which commonly appear in shop signs while photographic images are for promotional signs.

Linguistic resources function as gender markers while semiotic resources serve as their visual realization. Lexicalization processes which emerge from the sexed signs are personalizing, characterizing, fetishizing, heterosexualizing, queering and fantasizing. Heterosexualizing appears mostly in Phatphong 1 and followed by Phatphong 2, while characterizing is prevalent in Phatphong 1 and Silom 4. Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley both reveal the use of personalizing, characterizing and fetishizing. Linguistic elements are also used to index specific gender identities which contributed in marking the place. These include the use of “Boy” and “Male” for male homosexuals, “ladies” and “girls” are for female heterosexuals and “ladyboy for trans women. Semiotically, wavy hair, heels and shadow nudity are used to index female heterosexual bodies which are objectified and commodified. Bikini is more common in the trans woman's body. They serve as markers that distinguish them from female heterosexuals. Muscular bodies are apparent in depicting the male heterosexual body.

The salient tool in sensualizing them is through pole dancing which is consistently used in different signs. With the linguistic and semiotic resources working together, several gendered spaces are created such as heterogenous space for Silom areas and male heterosexual space for Nana Plaza and Cowboy alley.

Sexed signs are semiotic aggregates that construct Bangkok sexed tourism spaces as culmination of diverse gendered spaces. They are used to fetishize languages, spark erotic desires, and commodify human bodies. It is found that multilingual signs operate beyond their utilitarian purposes as they symbolically give economic value to them, resulting in them becoming a fetishized commodity. Jointly used, they create different sites of desires which are built upon the sexualization of the body and the activation of social expectation from erotic entertainers. They are governed by intimacy through transgression and power. The appearance of sexually explicit images in public spaces serve as transgressive materials that spark viewers erotic desires. The visual representation of gendered images indicates the socially constructed power where female heterosexuals and trans women are subservient while male homosexual are dominant. This power enables the viewers to take in the models as imagined objects of their desires.

The findings of the study have mapped the discursive structure of sex tourism spaces in general. The constellations of different linguistic and semiotic systems participate in creating eroticized spaces dedicated to specific audiences. Looking at the Bangkok sex tourism spaces, the translocal linguistic practices through the influence of Thai in English and the glocalized identity through the incorporation of “Bangkok” in signs cement the identity of place. The rich historical bodies of

Thailand are also imbricated in signs, specifically in areas like Cowboy alley where the meeting point of the East and West is enshrined in the linguistic and semiotic resources appearing in sexed signs. Thus, Bangkok sex tourism spaces are an aggregates of diverse gendered and sexualized tourist entertainment spaces, catering to eclectic audiences.

## 8.2 Discussion

Based on the discussion in the previous chapters, Englishization, semiotic structure and difference of Bangkok sex tourism from its international counterpart require more explication which I discuss in this section.

The English language emerges to be an important language choice in sex tourism spaces and in public spaces, more generally. Huebner (2006) notes that English in Thailand is used for wider communication. It is now evident in public spaces. This is because using English in shop signs has become a trend in Bangkok (Prapobratanakul, 2016). English is not new in Thailand though. Historically, it is more than a century old (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017). This can be traced back to the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851) where English was used in language teaching (Darasawang, 2007). At present, English remains a significant language in Thai society despite not being considered as an official second language (Darasawang & Watson, 2012). It still holds a “de facto” status as a primary foreign language (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017) and is normally “characterized as a lingua franca used to connect economically, culturally and politically with the rest of the region and world” (Baker, 2015, p. 207).

Given its role in Thai society, English words are creatively used in the sexed signs. For example, *Fresh boys*, though grammatical, is an uncommon noun phrase in

English. In Thai sex tourism space, the term *Fresh* connotes younger age and suggests someone who is untouched. *Playskool* and *Afterskool* are examples of word play which are a combination of “Play”, “After” and “Cool”. Another interesting one is the use of *Cum in* in public space. The verb “Cum” is a slang referring to having an orgasm. The word play here is the use of *Cum* in replace of “Come” as the two words are homophones. Thus, its combination with the preposition *in* is comparable to *Come in*. These combinations are some of the ways English as an international language function in public spaces.

Semiotic resources in sex signs reveal the use of shadow figures or color saturation (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996), and ideal-real and given-new compositional structures (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). Color saturation, as defined by Kress and Leeuwen (1996, p. 233), is “scale from the most intensely saturated or ‘pure’ manifestations of a color to its softest, most ‘pale’, or dull and dark manifestations, and ultimately, to complete desaturation, to black and white.” In the sexed signs collected, they are used quite excessively, mainly in the shop signs, which I call shadow figures. They function to “express emotive ‘temperatures’” (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996, p. 233). This is true in the sexed signs which evoke an erotic desire. It is also observed that the compositional structures of signs are mostly ideal-real and given-new. Ideal-real is a top-down structure where the top position represents what the bar promises, and the bottom is its actual product or in this case services. To capture clearly, the top position in the sexed signs is occupied by the shop names and the bottom section is the images or shadow figures of what the shop sign describes. Similarly, given-new structure is also used. Given is the information that is already known by the readers/audiences which is typically on the left. On the contrary, new is

the information that is unknown to the readers/audiences. This is visually depicted through the use of the given position as the name of the show and the new is the visual realization of the show. While the ideal-real and given-new structures emerge from Western visual designs, such practice is partly similar to that in the Thai context where the most important information tends to be placed on the top. The given-new structure is also influenced by the way Thai language is written from left to right.

Signage in sex tourism across countries—particularly, the case of Ni-chome, Tokyo, Japan and Basel, Switzerland—differs slightly from Bangkok. For example, the materiality of erotic images of male homosexuals in Ni-chome is not permanent (Baudinette, 2017). The reason being is to not offend heterosexuals. This is in contrast with Bangkok sex tourism sexed signs where erotic images of male homosexual are in permanent signs and are made visible to all. Moreover, the preference for masculine male homosexuals in Bangkok is not a choice in Japan. Altman (2013) argues that desirable homosexual men in Japan are those who are softer and androgynous. This means that while Bangkok's construction of queer spaces subscribes to Western-influenced global queer culture (Hubbard, 2011), Japan deviates starkly as the normative gay workers are those who are not masculine (Altman, 2013). In Basel, signs advertising sex tourism are strategically placed in various places ranging from the airport, public transport spaces, to the sex tourism places. This is what Piller (2010) calls sexualization of places. Bangkok sex tourism spaces are rather different as sexed signs are not publicly and explicitly displaced in transport services nor in the airport. Signs showing erotic images are situated only in their respective places. Another difference is the role of the multilingual signs. Multilingual signs in Basel sex tourism serve as “evidence of ‘high standard’” (Piller, 2010, p. 131) which is

different in Bangkok. The use of multilingual signs functions instrumentally to communicate with diverse foreign audiences whose native language may be the one used in the sign or symbolically to fetishize the sign for those who have a different native language.

While the said sex tourism spaces are distinct from each other, they share some practices. English, for instance, is used to convert Ni-chome spaces into international and cosmopolitan spaces (Baudinette, 2018). Also, rainbows, considered as queer semiotics, are employed to produce queer spaces (Baudinette, 2017). Joined together, the English signs and rainbows construct Ni-chome as an international queer tourism place. This is similar in Bangkok, particularly in Phatphong 2 and Silom 4 where rainbow flags are used to signal queer space. Moreover, the utilization of carry-on signs or *Kaban* in Japan which contain highly erotic images of men in Ni-chome (Baudinette, 2017) is also a practice in Phatphong 2. Carry-on signs in both areas (i.e., Ni-chome, Tokyo, Japan and Phatphong 2, Bangkok, Thailand) contain naked men and aim at gay patrons. Lastly, the use of “boy” in signs likewise appear in Ni-chome but minus the male figure. The practices discussed here suggest that Bangkok male homosexual spaces, i.e., Phatphong 2 and Silom 4, are comparable to Ni-chome gay district in Tokyo.

### **8.3 Contribution and Implications**

This thesis investigates the discursive construction of Bangkok sex tourism spaces. The findings contribute to the understanding of the role of linguistic and semiotic resources in creating eroticized tourism spaces. It provides concrete evidence on how Bangkok sex tourism spaces are constructed and how gender and sexual

practices are produced. The findings contribute to the understanding of the discursive infrastructure of eroticized spaces where their building blocks lie in multilingual practices, language desires and visual representation of commodification and objectification. Thus, the present study adds to the literature on language, gender and sexuality in Thai linguistics and contributes to the growing field of the sociolinguistics of sex work.

The present study offers practical and theoretical implications. The analysis of linguistic resources and linguistic fetish provides information to the tourism sector on the symbolic and economic value of language choices. The semiotic resources are found salient in creating desire and constructing identity. By understanding their impact, the tourism industry can use such evidence in reconfiguring tourism spaces and use semiotic resources strategically. At a theoretical level, the present study, at least to my knowledge, is one of the few that takes serious interest in devoting a serious scholarly investigation of sex tourism spaces in the premise of semiotic landscape. Following an interpretive approach, diverse analytical tools are found useful in unpacking the linguistic, gender and sexuality discourses that are imbricated in sex tourism spaces. Finally, the present study may also serve as reference in pursuing a similar study.

Given the limited time period, I admittedly have missed some salient points of discussions which may be furthered, particularly in expounding the work on the production of economies of pleasure. The study has also been limited by research tools that can work in the current COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, an ethnographic work

may add layers to the discussion and the incorporation of interviews and participant observation may reveal important discourses in the wider field of sex work.





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