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Pho as the embodiment of Vietnamese national identity in the linguistic landscape of a western Canadian city

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between Pho, a type of Vietnamese soup, and Vietnamese national identity in the linguistic landscape of Edmonton, Alberta (Canada). The study suggests that Pho has not only been used by Vietnamese restaurants in Edmonton for indexical function but also for symbolic evocation associating with Vietnamese cuisine and national identity. The data comes from three Vietnamese restaurants in Edmonton. A multimodal analysis of shop signs, window signs and notices, menus, websites, and other relevant semiotic resources is carried out using geosemiotics, a multidisciplinary framework that analyses the meaning of the material placement of signs and human actions in the material world. The results indicate that Pho has a dominant visibility in the linguistic landscape of three restaurants. Furthermore, the symbolic relationship between Pho and Vietnamese identity is evident in the way it is used to address the feelings of nostalgia among migrant patrons.

Introduction

The statement 'we are what we eat' demonstrates the clear relationship between food and identity. Möhring (2008) claims that 'eating is an incorporation of what is considered as "the (kn)own" and "the other", and thus functions as a primary means of producing ethnic identities' (p. 138). The article studies the way Pho, an iconic Vietnamese dish, is used to represent Vietnamese national identity in the linguistic landscape of Edmonton, Alberta (Canada). Following Anderson (1983)'s concept of nation as 'imagined community', national identity is understood as socially constructed to represent a series of assumptions about nationhood. Since it is embedded in life's routines, national identity is identified as something which is both natural to possess and natural to remember (Billig, 1995). In order to find whether there is a connection between Pho and national identity by way of 'banal nationalism', the unnoticed ideological habits by which established nations are reproduced as nations (Billig, 1995), the study uses linguistic landscape as an approach to decode Vietnamese identity in the multiethnic setting of Edmonton, where there is a contest among diverse national identities. Taking into account the assumption that we

are what and where we eat (Bell & Valentine, 1997), a linguistic landscape analysis with a special focus on Pho is used to uncover Vietnamese national identity through the examination of linguistic and culinary practices. I reason that Pho is used in Vietnamese restaurants in Edmonton not only for indexical function but also for symbolic evocations associating with Vietnamese cuisine and national identity. By investigating the intersection of language, food, and nationalism in the linguistic landscape of Edmonton, the study also shows how national identity in a globalised setting is maintained by migrants through their linguistic and culinary practices.

Theoretical background

In the 1960s, Lévi-Strauss considered 'food as a way of decoding the unconscious attitude of a society' (Nützenadel & Trentmann, 2008, p. 1). It is also mentioned in Imilan (2015) that 'classical anthropologists such as Malinowski (1985) or Boas (1987) approached food practices as central elements in the understanding of group solidarity' (p. 229). Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) see liquorice candy and salted herring as embodiments of Dutch culture. They claim that the Dutch 'eat their culture', in the same way that 'we now all eat the mythologies of Americanness in McDonalds, of Frenchness in the ubiquitous croissant' (p. 78). Barthes (1972) in his famous book entitled *Mythologies* indicates that French fries, besides steak, have become the nostalgic and patriotic symbol for French nationals. He told the story of General de Castries who, after the armistice in Indo-China, came back to France and asked for French fries for his first meal. General de Castries's request 'was certainly not a vulgar materialistic reflect, but an episode in the ritual of appropriating the regained French community' (Barthes, 1972, pp. 63–64). The General was believed to understand national symbolism very well and he knew that French fries are the alimentary signs of French identity. Nguyễn Tuân, a Vietnamese writer and a gourmet, in an article about Pho, described his suffering from Pho nostalgia during his business trip to Finland in 1957. Upon his returning to Hanoi, he had Pho for his first meal (Nguyễn, 1988). Thomas (2004) emphasises that Pho is not only a national passion in its homeland, it is also considered 'the sensory essence of life in Vietnam' (p. 59). Pho serves as the emblem of Vietnamese normality and even becomes the Vietnamese addiction (Greeley, 2002; Peters, 2010).

Even though the centrality and importance of food to human life and identity have been well acknowledged and considered a cultural truism, the relationship between food and national identity has yet to be investigated systematically (Ichijo & Ranta, 2016). With such relative absence of research on food and nationalism, Bestor (2005)'s work is significant as he demonstrates convincingly a close link between sushi and Japanese nationalism. Even though sushi has been globalised and has experienced changes to cater to various local tastes throughout the world, it has not lost its Japanese identity. The availability of sushi in different forms from an exclusive restaurant on Fifth Avenue to a snack cart in Amsterdam's airport has never changed its status as property of Japanese culture. In other words, 'sushi remains firmly linked in the minds of Japanese and foreigners alike with Japanese cultural identity' (Bestor, 2005, p. 18). The Japanese identity associated with sushi is therefore never lost even if sushi restaurants are operated by non-Japanese restaurateurs from China, Korea, and Vietnam. Bestor mentioned the case of a Chinese restauranteur who decided to convert his chain of restaurants in Texas from

Chinese to Japanese cuisine to make better profits from the global prestige of Japanese sushi. The Japanese cultural identity associated with sushi is so clear that the Japanese control of sushi is never questioned by the customers, even though the chefs behind such sushi bars are not Japanese.

According to Ichijo and Ranta (2016), the relationship between food and national identity can be approached from three different perspectives: the unofficial or the bottom-up, the official or the top-down, and the global level. The first one focuses on phenomena that are not controlled by the nation-state and is approached by way of everyday or 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995). The second one studies food and nationalism as mediated by the nation in different forms such as national branding or standardisation of 'national' cuisine. The third one looks at food dynamics in the global economy. This study chooses the first perspective, which approaches food and national identity by way of 'banal nationalism'. Billig (1995) claims that we do not forget our national identity because 'we are constantly reminded that we live in nations: our identity is continually flagged' (p. 93). However, he also adds that there are other banal national symbols that he names 'the unwaved flags' (p. 40). Food should be seen as one of them (Ichijo & Ranta, 2016).

Food migration is understood as 'the movement of foodstuffs and culinary practices during human migration' (Imilan, 2015, p. 227). Globalisation brings food with migrants to different corners of the globe and continuously reshapes the culinary landscape of urban areas around the world. Food migration plays a fundamental role in redefining cultural identities (Nützenadel & Trentmann, 2008). Therefore, it has opened up a field where multiple geographies intersect and reorganise references to what is local, national and global (Imilan, 2015). The ever-changing culinary landscape resulting from food migration is represented by the language use of migrant restaurants. Language plays an important role in building the ethnicity inside and outside of such restaurants. Therefore, language use and food practice work together to co-construct the ethnicity of a migrant restaurant. It is where linguistic landscape, food practice, and national identity intersect. The intersection has increasingly become obvious 'in a world in which self-identity and place-identity are woven through webs of consumption, what we eat (and where, and why) signals, as the aphorism says, who we are' (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 3).

Pho, as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary, is 'a type of Vietnamese soup, typically made from beef stock and spices to which noodles and thinly sliced beef or chicken are added'. Though the definition may not satisfy Vietnamese gourmets who require a separate use of beef or chicken stock for each respective type of Pho, the presence of Pho as an entry in the OED since 2007 is an indication of the transnational popularity of this Vietnamese dish among English-speaking communities. In Vietnam, Pho has been seen in Hanoi, the capital city, since the 1930s. The etymology of the term is still a controversial issue among Vietnamese people. A widely known theory has it that Pho is a Vietnamese adaptation of the Chinese dish, which combines beef with noodle and is called 'niúròu fěn' (牛肉粉) (Nguyễn, 1988, 2007). The sound of the final word 'fěn' used by Cantonese Chinese vendors in Hanoi streets at that time is believed to give birth to the Vietnamese word 'Phở'.

In spite of having a rather unclear origin, Pho is still one of the most popular dishes that Vietnamese have on their contemporary national menu. Vietnamese migrants have brought Pho with them through two main migrations over the course of history. In the first migration, Pho along with 810,000 Northerners found its way to the South of

Vietnam when the nation was divided into two halves, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North and the State of Vietnam in the South, after the Geneva Agreement in 1954 (Frankum, 2007). It was the first time Pho landed in Saigon and it experienced changes in various aspects including ingredients and serving styles. After the fall of the State of Vietnam and the withdrawal of Americans from the South in 1975, once again Pho followed the footsteps of Vietnamese political refugees abroad. The first Pho restaurants opened in the United States and Canada were owned by these Vietnamese refugees. Vietnamese restaurants named *Phở 75* that can be found in North America remind Vietnamese people abroad of the historical event that forced about 130,000 Vietnamese people out of their homeland (Rumbaut, 1996). Globalisation has now also brought Vietnamese migrants to different parts of the world and more Pho restaurants have opened up. Pho abroad, though experiencing various changes in comparison to Pho in Vietnam, has always been seen as a typical dish of Vietnamese cuisine, which is demonstrated by its dominance in ethnic restaurants run by Vietnamese and its increasing popularity in the linguistic landscape.

Linguistic landscape, in Landry and Bourhis (1997)'s original framework, 'refers to the visibility and salience of language on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region' (p. 23). Since then, linguistic landscape has developed into a field that is expansive in perspective (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Pütz & Mundt, 2018; Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009) and diverse in research aims. The fundamental issues include but are not limited to transnational English and multilingualism (Nikolaou, 2017; Selvi, 2016; Shang & Guo, 2017), power and ideology (David & Manan, 2015; Lanza & Woldemariam, 2009; Zhang & Chan, 2017), and identities (Aristova, 2016; Manan, David, Dumanig, & Nageebullah, 2015). Since the strict focus on written texts is not sufficient for accurate interpretation of public spaces (Shohamy, 2018), linguistic landscape, with the influence of multimodal theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), has witnessed a semiotic turn by incorporating semiotic modes other than languages, such as image, music, and smell (Shohamy, 2015; Shohamy & Waksman, 2009). Together with an inclination towards 'semiotic landscape', more '-scapes' have been added to the field including smellscape (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015), soundscape (Hu, 2018), and cyberscape (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009), just to name a few. Even though the addition of such semiotic resources puts the boundaries of the field into question, the multimodal orientation of 'semiotic aggregates' (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) or 'semiotic assemblages' (Pennycook, 2018) significantly contributes to the breadth and depth of linguistic landscape and hence increases the efficiency in reading the messages from public spaces. Such superiority justifies the expanded perspective in this study in which language is one among the resources that have a potential for meaning making in the linguistic landscape of Edmonton.

The preliminary observation reveals that a majority of Vietnamese restaurants in Edmonton include Pho into their business names, even though it only accounts for a small percentage of the menus in these restaurants. The practice is markedly different from Vietnam where Pho restaurants only serve some versions of the dish. Furthermore, Pho is visually presented as the main item in comparison with other dishes in the menus. The observation raises a question as to whether Pho is considered representative of national cuisine by Vietnamese restaurateurs. In other words, is it possible to consider Pho as the national dish of Vietnam like sushi in Japan, bulgogi in Korea, and dim sum in China?

Research questions

For the purpose of identifying the relationship between Pho and Vietnamese national identity, the study asks the following research questions: (1) How is the Vietnamese language used in relation to English and other language(s) in the shop signs and menus of Vietnamese restaurants in Edmonton? (2) How is Pho used in the shop signs and menus of Vietnamese restaurants in Edmonton? (3) What can the practice of using Pho by Vietnamese restaurateurs in Edmonton reveal about their national identity? The first two research questions aim at the use of language(s) with a special focus on Pho in shop signs and menus. Answers to such questions help identify whether Vietnamese in general and Pho in particular are used for informative or symbolic values or even both. The concern is justified by the fact that the Vietnamese restaurants under study are located in the setting of Edmonton, where English is the official language and the *lingua franca* of various ethnic groups. Linguistic landscape has seen a 'linguistic fetish' phenomenon (Kelly-Holmes, 2014), which is the symbolic use of English associated with modernisation and style rather than with communicative purposes in non-English-speaking countries. Hence, it is reasonable to ask if there also exists a symbolic use of a minority language, in this case Vietnamese, in an English-speaking context like Edmonton. While the first two questions pay attention to the symbolic values associated the word Pho, the third one is concerned with the overall practice of using Pho by Vietnamese restaurants. It is designed to investigate the practice of Vietnamese restaurateurs as social actors and their use of Pho in an aggregation of semiotic systems available at the settings of the restaurants in the material world. The purpose is to have a multimodal analysis of not just language but other semiotic modes, such as visual or auditory, that are possible resources for communicating meaning in the linguistic landscape.

Research site and corpus

Edmonton is the capital city of Alberta, a province in Western Canada. According to Statistics Canada (2016), Alberta has the fourth largest Vietnamese community in Canada after Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia. The census 2016 indicates that there are 14,190 Vietnamese people living in Edmonton. The first Vietnamese people who migrated to Edmonton were asylum seekers from the South of Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975 (Edmonton Viets Association, 1990). Later, the city became one of the most popular destinations for Vietnamese immigrants to Canada (Lindsay, 2007). In Edmonton, there is a considerable number of Vietnamese restaurants that have been in operation for decades, which is represented by the visibility of the Vietnamese language in the linguistic landscape.

The data comes from three different Pho restaurants in Edmonton: *Phở Hoàn Pasteur, Phở Hoàng,* and *Phở Langs*. There are three things that explain the choice of the sample. First, the restaurants are located in three distinctive areas that are differentiated by the number of Vietnamese inhabitants, which helps avoid the bias of studying Vietnamese restaurants in an area dominated by Vietnamese inhabitants. Second, the three restaurants are also varied in terms of the length of time in operation. *Phở Hoàng* is among the oldest Vietnamese restaurants in Edmonton with a tradition of more than two decades. *Phở Hoàn Pasteur* is in the middle with more than ten years. The most recent one is *Phở*

Langs that had been running for less than a year when the study was carried out. Such differences are used to identify whether there has been change over time or whether Pho and practices have remained constant, which is done by considering the traditional practice associated with Pho restaurants especially in terms of language use. Finally, the variety of the three restaurants in terms of popularity among Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese customers makes it possible to analyse how it may affect the overall business strategies, including language use. The combination of three selection criteria including location, tradition and popularity makes such restaurants highly representative for Vietnamese restaurants in the linguistic landscape of Edmonton.

The study collected data of the language use both outside and inside the restaurants with a special attention paid to the shop signs and menus. For the purpose of a geosemiotic analysis, the data is also supported by ethnographic observation with relevant reference to the places in which the restaurants are located. The ethnographic part refers to recurring fieldtrips to each restaurant during which the researcher played the role of a customer who dined in these restaurants to carry out observation and perform relevant interaction. The fieldwork provided additional information relating to the audiovisual and spatial characteristics inside each restaurant, which was also supported by necessary consultation of the websites run by the restaurants. During the research process, the website of *Phở Hoàng* was under renovation so no access was available. However, updates relating to the business could still be found on a Facebook page which was taken as a representation of the language use in the virtual space of the restaurant.

Methodology

The qualitative analysis was carried out using the geosemiotic framework, which is defined as '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. 2). The framework facilitates a multimodal analysis of not just linguistic but also visual and spatial discourses. Therefore, in linguistic landscape, geosemiotics is seen as a way to study various aspects of meaning that depend on the placement of signs in the material world. Geosemiotics is also appropriate because of its comprehensiveness, which helps analyse meanings that are produced by social semiotic systems and governed by an aggregation of relevant social relationships (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). The framework incorporates three interconnected social semiotic systems of *interaction order, visual semiotics*, and *place semiotics*. First, the interaction order system, which is based on anthropological and cultural geographical theories, puts emphasis on the social interaction of people as social actors and the meanings they 'give off' for others to read. Second, the visual semiotic system, which makes use of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996)'s theory of visual interpretation, is significant in analysing the social interaction when reading an image. And finally, the place semiotic system, which is the contribution of the Scollons, helps find out the meanings of a sign based on its placement in the material world.

Among the three broad semiotic systems that are combined to form the single framework of geosemiotics, visual semiotics and place semiotics are of primary relevance to the analysis. It does not mean that the interaction order system is not relevant or excluded, which will be shown in the case of *Phở Langs*. The logical connection between two broad systems of interaction order and visual semiotics is shown by various social

relationships that readers of an image may identify such as 'the relationships between producers and represented participants, between represented participants and viewers, between producer and viewer' (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 18). Therefore, with a focus on studying shop signs, it is much more relevant to discuss the interaction order through the above-mentioned social relationships.

The study takes the language use in the shop sign and menu of each restaurant as the unit of analysis, which is justified by the assumption that 'each text belongs to a larger whole instead of being clearly separate' (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006, p. 71). Even though the primary shop signs, which consists of 'the shop name and frequently the shop type' (Nikolaou, 2017), and menus were used mainly for the analysis, data for the geosemiotic analysis was not limited only to the shop signs and menus. Instead, the study considered 'each establishment but not each sign' as a text (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006, p. 71). In other words, the use of language in each restaurant was analysed all together as a text. Therefore, in addition to the analysis of the shop signs and menus, the language use in the virtual space together with other relevant semiotic resources were also discussed in order to reveal a consistently ideological discourse of restaurant owners.

Geosemiotic analysis of three restaurants

In order to decode language use in the shop signs of three restaurants, the following analysis takes into accounts two main categories, i.e. *composition* and *modality*, of the visual semiotics developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). *Composition* is concerned with how information value is presented using different structures: left–right (given-new), top–bottom (ideal-real), and centre–margin. *Modality* discusses the presentation of colour such as colour saturation, colour differentiation, and colour modulation etc. The analysis also discusses two other categories of place semiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) that are *code preference* and *inscription*. While the former helps identify the preference for languages used in each shop sign, the latter looks at the role of elements such as fonts, layering and material qualities.

An analysis of the names of three restaurants reveals that these Pho restaurants all adopt the same motif of business naming that is often used in Vietnam in which Pho is followed by the first name of the owner. The case of *Phở Hoàn Pasteur* goes beyond that principle to include another favoured way of naming Pho restaurants, which is also practiced popularly in Vietnam, in order to generate a symbolic connotation among Vietnamese immigrants in Edmonton as discussed hereafter.

Case 1. Phở Hoàn Pasteur

Phở Hoàn Pasteur has a rather hybrid name but Vietnamese patrons, especially those living in the South, can easily recognise that it is a reminder, even though there is no connection between the two, of a famous Pho restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City called *Phở Hoà Pasteur* (Phan, 2015). 'Pasteur' is the well-known Pho street, named after the famous French scientist Louis Pasteur during the French colonial period, in which *Phở Hoà Pasteur* is located. It is also another preferred way of naming Pho restaurants in Vietnam. Pho is followed by the name of the streets or the locations where the

restaurants are situated. In the case of *Phở Hoàn Pasteur* in Edmonton, the word 'Pasteur' has lost its indexical meaning of pointing to the actual location of the restaurant. Instead, 'Pasteur' is used symbolically to evoke for Vietnamese migrants in Edmonton a feeling of homeland. The transnational fame of the restaurant is shown by the visibility of a Pho spices product, with the same name *Phở Hoà Pasteur*, which can be found in the Vietnamese stores in Edmonton. Such a nostalgic and symbolic way of business naming has been practiced with Pho throughout its migration history (Nguyễn, 1988). The presence of *Phở Tàu Bay* in Edmonton Chinatown is another typical example. It was a successful business name right from the early days of Pho in the form of street vending carts. The name then travelled with migrants to the South who opened *Phở Tàu Bay* restaurants in Saigon. After the fall of Saigon, Vietnamese refugees continued to bring the name with them to their new restaurants abroad. This story reveals an indispensable role of Pho in the lives of Vietnamese migrants.

In the shop sign of *Phở Hoàn Pasteur* (see Figure 1), the position of Vietnamese content 'Phở Hoàn Pasteur' in bigger font above the English content 'Fusion Noodle House' represents the favour of the use of Vietnamese over English in terms of both inscription and code preference. With regard to the composition, the position of Vietnamese on the top and English at the bottom of the frame are for ideal and real information respectively, which provides insight into the functional value of each language. The symbolic versus informative use of Vietnamese and English is also indicated by the difference in the content of each language as discussed later. Furthermore, the position of Vietnamese and English to the left and Chinese to the right of the frame shows how code preference is shown through the use of text vector, the direction of writing from left to right. With the normal left-to-right vector of writing and reading in English-speaking countries, the

Figure 1. Phở Hoàn Pasteur.

languages to the left will be read earlier and are therefore favoured by the restaurant owner. Consequently, the position of Chinese to the right means that it will be read later, which means it is a less favoured code. The preference for Vietnamese and Pho is also represented in the menu in which the presentation of Vietnamese in red colour makes it more salient than other languages. Moreover, in the menu, the code preference is also shown through the position of Vietnamese in the top position, followed by English and finally Chinese, which is also consistent with the code preference displayed in the shop sign.

English in the shop sign of the restaurant is used with a smaller font under Vietnamese, which aims at non-Vietnamese customers and logically indexes its location in a city where English is the official language. While Pho is a Vietnamese dish, the use of the English word 'fusion' in the shop sign is noteworthy. A look at the shop signs of other branches of *Phở Hoàn Pasteur* in Edmonton and Calgary available on the website reveals that the word 'fusion' has been replaced by 'Vietnamese' in some branches. The use of 'fusion' for an indexical purpose, based on its position in the frame and the emplacement of the shop sign, should be understood as a strategy to bring Pho to a wide variety of non-Vietnamese customers. It is logically justified by the popularity of the restaurant among non-Vietnamese customers in reality and its location in a popular shopping area for non-Vietnamese locals. The 'fusion' practice is evident in the menu with a number of Pho variations that can never be found in the homeland. Seafood Pho is an example. It goes beyond the above-mentioned definition of Pho by the OED. However, such evolvement of Pho reflects a popular practice of stylising a certain dish before making it the embodiment of national cuisine. According to Möhring (2008), the construction of a national dish can take place both inside and outside the borders of a nation. A typical example is Pizza in Italy, a typical food of Naples, which becomes internationally recognised as the national cuisine of Italy only after experiencing many renovations in America. Another explanation for the absence of 'Vietnamese' in the shop sign of the restaurant is the presupposition that the word Pho includes in it an indication of Vietnamese cuisine, which is normally made explicit in other Vietnamese restaurants.

The use of Vietnamese in the restaurant should first be understood as a signal of its ethnic origin, as a

> self-consciously ethnic restaurant will show its colours in one of three places: in its name, in its inclusion under an ethnic heading in a special section of the telephone directory, or by listing the specialties of the house in a display ad. (Wilbur Zelinsky, as cited in Möhring, 2008, p. 131)

The arrangement of Vietnamese, English and finally Chinese in the restaurant is consistent in both the shop sign and menu with Vietnamese being given more importance in a more salient position. With regard to the composition of the shop sign and the logic of text vector, the position of Vietnamese to the left in the bigger font and upper position above English confirms Vietnamese ethnicity and complements the English label of 'Fusion Noodle House'. In the shop sign, the use of Chinese in the least favoured position to the right indicates a number of Chinese-speaking customers. However, the use of Chinese, as discussed more clearly in the case of *Phở Hoàng* below, has additional meanings especially when the ethnographic observation inside the restaurants shows that the language used by restaurant employees with non-Vietnamese Asian customers is normally English.

Case 2. Phở Hoàng

Although surrounded by Vietnamese and Chinese communities in Chinatown, the preference for English in the restaurant reflects its marketing strategy toward a broader English-speaking community. If taking into account the composition and code preference, both the shop sign and menu show the dominance of English over Vietnamese and Chinese. The language use in the restaurant's Facebook page also shows that English is the only language used for every single post. However, the logic is challenged if one scrutinises the use of Pho in the menu where it is put in a prominent position above English. Furthermore, the secondary shop sign (see Figure 2) shows that even though Vietnamese is put in the middle position under English and above Chinese, 'Phở Hoàng' stands out with a larger font in a colour distinct from both English and Chinese. Such details demonstrate the possibility of Pho to stand on its own as a recognisable Vietnamese dish among non-Vietnamese communities. The fact that the English caption 'Vietnamese Noodle Soup Restaurant' printed in much smaller font and put in an inferior position in the shop sign strengthens the assertion. The translation of Pho into 'Vietnamese Noodle Soup' exhibited in the shop signs can be explained by the fact that the restaurant had been opened before Pho was added to the OED.

Consistent with *Phở Hoàn Pasteur*, the use of Chinese in *Phở Hoàng* should be discussed for a number of reasons. To begin with, Chinese appears in the least favoured position in both restaurants. Besides indexing a group of Chinese customers, the visibility of Chinese reflects a close relationship between Vietnamese and Chinese communities in Edmonton, which is especially true in Chinatown where many restaurant owners are Chinese Vietnamese who can speak both Vietnamese and Chinese. The absence of Chinese in *Phở Langs* hereafter helps prove the point. In the meantime, if looking at the Chinese content in *Phở*

Figure 2. Phở Hoàng.

Hoàng, one can see a translation of Pho into a Chinese dish called 'niúròu fěn' (牛肉粉), even though they are actually two separate dishes cooked in different ways and with different ingredients. Therefore, the translation of *Phở Hoàng* into 'bà wáng niúròu fěn' (霸王牛肉粉) (King Beef Noodle) in Chinese should be understood as a way to provide practical information for a number of Chinese customers. Even though there is dissimilarity between Pho and 'niúròu fěn' (牛肉粉), the Chinese content has certain informative values for Chinese-speaking customers about the types of food served inside the restaurant. With regard to the visual presentation, in the shop sign and menu of *Phở Hoàng*, an image of a Pho bowl is used as the logo of the restaurant. Another logo with a Pho bowl is also displayed in *Phở Hoàn Pasteur*. Together with the language use, these restaurants choose the image of Pho as a symbol that represents Vietnamese cuisine. In a country where food is normally served hot, the image of an evaporating bowl of Pho may evoke a sense of homeland and a nostalgic feeling among Vietnamese migrants. The fact that the owner of *Phở Hoàng* is a refugee with a two-generation family tradition in running Pho restaurants in Vietnam brings further evidence of the vitality of the dish among Vietnamese nationals and how closely it is associated with their everyday life. The routine consumption of Pho within the diasporic home illustrates the construction of 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) as well as the identification and remembrance of Vietnamese national identity. National identity, as Billig (1995) puts it, 'is remembered because it is embedded in routines of life, which constantly remind […] nationhood' (p. 38).

Case 3. Phở Langs

Phở Langs puts Pho into a Vietnamese cultural space constructed by the interior decoration and Vietnamese music. The consistent use of the image of 'Chim Lạc' (see Figure 3), a

Figure 3. Phở Langs.

symbolic bird associated with the origin of the Vietnamese people, as the logo in the shop sign, menu, and website of the restaurant turns Pho into a symbol of Vietnamese culture and a spirit of the nation. Among the three restaurants under study, *Phở Langs* is the most typical representative of an ethnic restaurant as a diasporic 'home' (Möhring, 2008) where the furniture and decoration are supported by music to co-construct an authentic Vietnamese space. The material dimensions of the restaurant accompanied by the social interaction between Vietnamese staffs and patrons, especially those who are Vietnamese nationals, work together to form a *platform event*, a unit of interaction order in geosemiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). The platform event 'can be conceptualised as a theatrical space, with the kitchen as backstage and the dining-hall as centre stage, where a certain ethnic performance is expected and practiced by both sides, whether intended or not' (Möhring, 2008, p. 139).

Language use in the restaurant is marked by the tendency to consider Pho as a representative of 'Vietnamese cuisine', which is much broader than the use of 'noodle house' in the other two restaurants. The language use in the shop sign, menu, and website shows a consistent discourse of introducing Vietnamese cuisine with Pho as the representative. Moreover, Pho is also symbolised by the image of 'Chim Lac', the embodiment of Vietnamese nationalism. With a location away from the Vietnamese community and a menu dominated by English with a minimum use of Vietnamese in inferior position, the restaurant aims primarily at English-speaking customers. The use of Vietnamese in the restaurant has a lot to do with the purpose to signal that it is a Vietnamese ethnic restaurant. While the absence of Chinese can be explained by a lack of connection between the owner and the Chinese community in Edmonton and the new trend of the restaurant, leaving out Chinese should also be seen as a way to confirm the ethnicity of Pho, which is a purely Vietnamese dish and different from 'niúròu fěn' (牛肉粉). Another notable detail concerning language use in the restaurant is again the use of the word Pho. A quantitative consideration throughout the menus of three restaurants reveals that Pho only accounts for a small part of the menu, which is shown most clearly in the case of *Phở Langs* where only 14 out of 80 (17.5%) dishes are Pho. However, throughout the menu, all other names of Vietnamese dishes are put behind or under English in order to specify the name in Vietnamese for customers. Pho is an exception. It finds itself in a dominant position ahead of English with a larger font. Pho also mingles with English words to generate the names of different versions of it with respective ingredients. Such special treatment has been seen in the case of *Phở Hoàng*, but it is shown much more clearly here. The practice implies an outstanding position of Pho in Vietnamese cuisine and its popularity as an iconic Vietnamese dish among non-Vietnamese gourmets.

Discussion

The geosemiotic analysis carried out in three Vietnamese restaurants has revealed significant nuances relating to the use of Pho as the embodiment of Vietnamese identity. The dominance of Pho as a dish used to represent Vietnamese cuisine and identity is shown through the use of language, the visual presentation of shop signs and menus, and the ethnic dimensions of space inside the restaurants and in the websites. The inclusion of semiotic resources other than language indicates the expanded perspective on linguistic

landscape of the study as specified earlier. The following discussion illustrates how the above analysis helps answer the three research questions.

With regard to the first research question, the composition of the shop signs reveals a tendency for Vietnamese to be in a favourable position in comparison to English and Chinese. The indexical and symbolic functions of language use are well presented by the interplay between English and Vietnamese in the restaurants. While Vietnamese dominates in the outer spaces of the restaurants, which is shown by the composition structure of the shop signs, English is put in a more favourable position in the menus, which can be explained by the indexical function of language use in a place where English is the first and the official language of the local patrons. Even though there is a close relationship between the Vietnamese and the Chinese communities in Edmonton, the least favourable position for Chinese or the absence of it in one restaurant is logically explained by the need to confirm the ethnicity of the Vietnamese restaurants. At the same time, the use of Chinese in two restaurants presupposes a number of Chinese customers, which is well supported by the translation of Vietnamese Pho into Chinese 'niúròu fěn' (牛肉粉).

The answer to the second research question is quite clear when we take into account the dominance of Pho in the language used outside and inside each restaurant. While the outside space is predominated by the use of Pho in shop signs, there is a humble quantity of Pho in the menus of three restaurants. However, Pho – through visual presentation – has a rather unique and distinctive position in comparison to the majority of other Vietnamese dishes. In other words, Pho has found for itself a superior position regardless of any preferred choice of code that has been displayed in the restaurants. In all cases, Pho is put in a dominant position even though in *Phở Hoàng* and *Phở Langs*, English is preferred in the menus.

In order to answer the final research question, it is reasonable to claim that Pho has been used both linguistically and non-linguistically to stand for Vietnamese cuisine and national identity. The following discussion discloses it.

First, the nostalgia for a national dish is well represented by the long tradition of business naming supported by an evocation of national identity through the symbolic use of the names of Pho restaurants such as 'Pasteur' and 'Tàu Bay'. Since such practice is well preserved throughout the migration journeys of Pho, the noodle bowl is one thing that keeps reminding Vietnamese of their identity or 'flagging' their nationhood. In the state of dislocation, Vietnamese immigrants continue to search for a taste of nostalgia, a type of 'nostalgic consumption' (Imilan, 2015), which makes Vietnameseness remain. According to Vignolles and Pichon (2014), nostalgia and food practice share a social and cultural function of strengthening self-identity and increasing 'people's feeling of belonging to a culture' (p. 228). It explains why Thomas (2004) identified a link between Pho and the identity of young Vietnamese people in Australia who all argued that Pho 'makes' them Vietnamese.

Second, the presentation of Pho in the restaurants serves as a means to introduce a cultural icon and perform Vietnamese national identity. In terms of visual presentation, Pho is chosen as an iconic image for two out of three restaurants. Beside evoking a sense of homeland among Vietnamese immigrants, this 'cultural icon', in Imilan (2015)'s words, functions as 'a point of reference for the collective construction of national identities' (p. 232). The connection between Pho and Vietnamese identity is most clearly shown in the case of *Phở Langs*, which uses a logo with a legendary bird image associated with

Vietnamese spirit and culture. While such a Vietnamese spiritual icon is assumed to be understood by Vietnamese immigrants since it is a symbol of their origin, an explanation about the iconic bird in English found in the website of the restaurant should be seen as a way to introduce Vietnamese cuisine as a cultural product to non-Vietnamese customers. It is consistently justified by the use of language and the targeted customers of the restaurant. The presentation of Pho in the assumption that the authentic Vietnameseness in it is unknown to the customers highlights the performance of national identity in the restaurant. Here, the restaurant's setting functions as the stage for Vietnameseness to be performed, identified, and communicated through the culinary practice of Pho. The juxtaposition of Pho and 'Chim Lạc' has built a strong relationship between Pho and Vietnamese identity. In that relationship, Pho emerges as the icon for Vietnamese cuisine, which is supported by the subtitle 'Vietnamese Cuisine' in the shop sign. And if one looks more broadly, Pho can be associated with the identity of Vietnamese migrants, which results from the implication that the image of 'Chim Lạc' has brought about. The spatial display supported by Vietnamese music further strengthens the relationship. The inclusion of soundscape in this case shows how a broad perspective on linguistic landscape can increase the efficiency of reading messages from public spaces.

Third, the discursive practice of presenting it by the restaurants reflects the commodification and reproduction of the national identity of Pho in Canada. It is in line with Möhring (2008)'s findings about how the Turkish identity associated with Döner Kebab was reinvented in Germany. The regionality of Pho is rather evident either in its homeland where its authenticity and quality are credited to Hanoians or in the memories of foreigners who lived in Vietnam as the name 'la soupe d'Hanoi' (the soup of Hanoi) or 'la soupe tonkinoise' (the soup of Tonkin) suggests (Peters, 2010; Thomas, 2004). According to Greeley (2002), Hanoi, in the North of Vietnam, is precisely the true home of Pho. However, such regionalism has been blurred and erased by Vietnamese restaurateurs, who made no distinction between Pho of the North and Pho of the South, in order to highlight the conception of Vietnamese national identity in Pho. Through the elimination of Pho's regionalism, the national identity associated with it is foregrounded in the transnational setting of Canada.

Conclusion

Using the geosemiotic framework by Scollon and Scollon (2003) to study the linguistic landscape of Edmonton, the study has identified a connection between Pho and Vietnamese national identity and how the relationship is shown in three Vietnamese restaurants. The analysis of the culinary and linguistic practice of Vietnamese restaurant owners in Edmonton sheds light onto a social phenomenon concerning the dominant visibility of Pho in Vietnamese ethnic restaurants in a foreign context and how this 'unwaved flag' is used as a national emblem by Vietnamese restaurateurs to evoke Vietnameseness. The national identity of Pho is highlighted through the incorporated practice of addressing the taste of nostalgia, performing national identity, and eliminating regionalism. Besides answering questions relating to the use of a minority language in a setting where English is the official language, the findings help understand another facet of globalisation, which is how migrants show their identity in a global context through culinary practice.

The study has also indicated how Pho, when put into a context outside its national framework can acquire further symbolic value as a national dish and an icon of Vietnamese national identity. An explanation that I may come up with for the dominance of Pho in the culinary landscape of Vietnamese diaspora is that Pho is a manifestation of 'eat out' culture in Vietnam. Vietnamese have rice for everyday meals at home and Pho for meals away from home. The fact that Vietnamese people almost never cook Pho at home and eating out is seen as a quick getaway from rice explains the dominance of Pho in dining spaces outside of home. In a diasporic 'home' where eating out is preferred, the visibility and popularity of Pho therefore become more dominant. The finding supports quite well the theory that 'the construction of national dishes not only takes place within a national, but also within a transnational framework, with feedback effects on the homeland' (Möhring, 2008, p. 132). It is also a reasonable judgment as a number of Pho brands, which were born in America, are finding their way back to their homeland and making some changes to the consumption of Pho in contemporary Vietnam.

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