

# **What is Expected of the Clerks by Wearing “In-training” Tags?: An Analysis of Roles of the Tags**

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**The 27th International Conference of the  
International Association for Intercultural  
Communication Studies**

**June 27-July 1, 2022**

**Online [Toledo, USA]**



# Backgrounds

- **When walking through Japanese cities, one can see a variety of *linguistic landscapes*, such as public signs and commercial signs on roads and buildings. It can be said that the city is filled with a variety of written information.**
- **Definition of *Linguistic Landscape*:**  
“Linguistic landscape refers to the visibility and salience of language on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region.” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, 23)

# ≡ Signs as Linguistic Landscapes

- The study of *linguistic landscapes* is limited, as the above definition indicates, to fixed and printed signs in specific locations, such as:



- Are they the only ones belonging to the *linguistic landscapes*?

## Other Examples: Stickers on Cars

● For example, in Japanese society, textual information is found not only on such fixed signs, but also on moving objects such as cars (Nishijima, 2022).



「赤ちゃんが乗ってます」  
('Baby on board')



「ドライブレコーダー録画中」  
('Dashcam in operation')

Stickers with linguistic expressions on a car can be also seen as *linguistic landscapes*.

## ≡ Other Linguistic Landscapes?

- In order to clarify the overall picture of the *linguistic landscapes* of a particular society, not only the textual information found on such fixed and moving objects, but also the textual information found in a variety of situations should be targeted.



Maternity mark

*Onaka-ni akachan-ga imasu*  
'I have a baby in my tummy.'



*Shingata korona wakuchin sesshuzumi*  
'Vaccinated against new coronas'

[https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASP8M6WFFP8MULFA00M.html?iref=pc\\_photo\\_gallery\\_bottom](https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASP8M6WFFP8MULFA00M.html?iref=pc_photo_gallery_bottom)

# Objectives

- The aim of this presentation is twofold:
  - 1) to consider the tags that we frequently see in supermarkets and convenience stores, such as「研修中 *kenshūchū*」 (‘in-training’) and「実習生 *jisshūchū*」 (‘trainee’) as part of *linguistic landscapes*, and
  - 2) to understand what the purposes of these tags are in relation to the stickers on cars.
- The analysis of the tags reveals that Japanese society is one that demands consideration from others.





# Outline

- 1. Description of the Problem**
- 2. Research Questions**
- 3. Voices about the Tags**
- 4. Discussion of Problems in relation with  
the Stickers on Cars**
- 5. Concluding Remarks**

## ☰ Description of the Problem

- When you enter a convenience store or other shop in Japan, you are greeted with an unreplyable welcome greeting expression of 「いらっしゃいませ」 “irasshaimase”.

Cf. Nishijima (2020)



- If you look at the shop clerk who is greeting you at the time, you will notice that he/she has a tag of some kind on his/her chest:

「研修中 *kenshūchū*」 (‘In-training’)





# Research Questions

**The tag 「研修中」 ('In-training') basically indicates that the shop clerks wearing it are not fully equipped with the skills.**

**1) What do customers think when they see the clerks wearing such tags?**

**2) Why do they wear such tag?**

**In other words, what do they expect of the customers?**

**3) Is the role or function of the “in-training” tag the same as that of the stickers on cars?**

## A Survey to Customers

As a pilot study, I asked several students how they would feel if shop assistants were designated to serve customers with a “in-training” tag. The answers were, for example, as follows.

- “That clerk must be slow at his/her job. I’ll have to be patient.”
- “That clerk must be slow at his/her job. I’ll go to another clerk.”
- “I don’t know why the shop owner or manager allows the clerks in training serve customers. They should be given the necessary skills before being allowed to serve customers.”

→ Respondents speculated that shop assistants would be slow at work because they lack the necessary skills. They will either put up with that clerk’s customer service or try to avoid customer service by that clerk.

## A Survey to Clerks Wearing the Tag

Furthermore, I asked some students actually working part-time in convenience stores about the role of tags during training. The answers were, for example, as follows.

- “I am expecting that customers can tolerate my slower work because of the tag ‘In-training’.”
  - “I think that no one enquires me thanks to the ‘in-training’ tag and that customers should avoid me. It makes my job easier.”
- They are new to their job, so they often get confused and cannot respond accurately to enquiries.
- They consider the “in-training” tag as an “amulet” badge to prevent such things from happening.

## A Survey to a Manager Employing Clerks Wearing the Tag

In addition, I also asked one manager who employs staff wearing tags in a gym about the role of the tags. The answer was as follows.

- “This is for on-the-job training. The reason why we have them wear such tags is so that other staff can immediately go to the person in-training and offer help and guidance.”

My response: “I don’t understand. If that is the case, I don’t see the point of tagging them in such a way that customers can see them, as they only need to be able to identify each other. It is just an excuse for not training staff in advance, isn’t it?”

→ This is just an excuse to allow unskilled staff to serve customers without prior training.

## ☰ Relation to the Stickers on Cars

- Unlike ordinary signs that are fixedly installed in the city, many stickers on cars do not always have a clear meaning. For example,

「赤ちゃんが乗っています」(‘Baby on board’)



「安全運転宣言車」(‘Safe Driving Declaration Vehicle’)

「法定速度を守っています」(‘Legal speeds are observed’)

→ “So what????”

- These signs indicate that understanding of messages on car stickers requires the readers’ active interpretation due to “reader/hearer responsibility in understanding” (Hinds, 1987):

For example, an interpretation of the examples above.

→ These stickers convey: “I apologise to all following vehicles for driving slowly and causing inconvenience. Please forgive me.”

## Relation to Traffic conditions in Japan

- **Conveying the message of driving safely and observing the legal speed limit is inherently meaningless, as it is dictated by the rules.**
- **However, the fact that these are put up seems to assume, in effect, that it is habitual or normal to drive unsafely, in the sense that the legal speed is not observed.**
- **Stickers seem to be an *excuse* not to drive in such “normalized” traffic conditions.**
- **This can be understood as an attempt to communicate that the expectations of those around them are not being met.**

## Concluding Remarks

- **The pilot study has shown that the “in-training” tags are demanding consideration (generosity) from customers or using them as an excuse.**
- **The “in-training” tag, like some stickers on vehicles including the beginner’s mark, can be seen as an excuse for not providing “expected” adequate behaviour (service) by informing customers in advance that they may cause inconvenience.**

## **Concluding Remarks (continued)**

- **Traditional linguistic landscape studies have been limited to fixed signs in public spaces.**
- **However, textual information can also be found on vehicles on the streets of Japan and on the chests of staff in shops and institutions. If such a variety of textual information forms the linguistic landscape of Japan, then in order to properly capture the linguistic landscape of Japan, these textual information should be also investigated as part of the linguistic landscape.**
- **This study is one attempt to extend the scope of linguistic landscape research.**





**Thank you for your attention.**

# References

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# Maternity mark

- What is a maternity mark? Maternity symbols are worn by pregnant and nursing women when using public transport, etc., to make it easier for those around them to show consideration for pregnant and nursing women. In addition, the mark is to be displayed as a poster or similar with a statement of the initiative and a call to action by transport, workplaces, restaurants and other public institutions to promote the creation of an environment friendly to pregnant and nursing women.
- Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare  
([https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/kodomo/kodomo\\_kosodate/boshihoken/maternity\\_mark.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/kodomo/kodomo_kosodate/boshihoken/maternity_mark.html))