

## AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF MENUS AND BILLBOARDS IN SAPA TOWN, LAO CAI

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### ABSTRACT

In today's global world, English which is used as a global means of communication, has been playing an important role in many sectors including science, education, medicine, engineering, economy, etc. English is extremely essential to the field of tourism business in many nations especially in Vietnam. With the increasing number of international visitors, the use of foreign languages plays an important role in tourism, particularly in supporting international travelers to travel. In fact, English is used widely in Sapa; however, the locals have made a number of mistakes in using English in menus and billboards. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out the current state of using English in menus and billboards here to design a menus and billboards' guidebook using English for shop owners in this area. Through the field investigation using checklist method, the study has collected the errors that menus and billboards have such as grammar, semantics, vocabulary selection issues, etc. in order to analyze and resolve them. The product of the study will be useful for menus and billboards in Sapa.

**Keywords:** *mistakes; menus and billboards; a menus and billboards guidebook; Sapa's shop owner; checklist method.*

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## NGHIÊN CỨU CÁCH SỬ DỤNG THỰC ĐƠN VÀ BIỂN QUẢNG CÁO Ở THỊ TRẤN SA PA, TỈNH LÀO CAI

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### TÓM TẮT

Trên thế giới hiện nay, Tiếng Anh được sử dụng như một phương tiện giao tiếp toàn cầu, và đóng một vai trò quan trọng trong nhiều lĩnh vực bao gồm khoa học, giáo dục, y học, kỹ thuật, kinh tế,... Tiếng Anh vô cùng cần thiết đối với lĩnh vực kinh doanh du lịch ở nhiều người các quốc gia đặc biệt là ở Việt Nam. Với số lượng khách quốc tế ngày càng tăng, việc sử dụng ngoại ngữ đóng một vai trò quan trọng trong du lịch, đặc biệt là hỗ trợ du khách quốc tế khi đi du lịch. Trên thực tế, tiếng Anh được sử dụng rộng rãi ở Sapa; tuy nhiên, người dân địa phương đã mắc một số sai lầm trong việc sử dụng tiếng Anh trong các thực đơn và biển quảng cáo. Do đó, mục đích của nghiên cứu này là tìm hiểu hiện trạng sử dụng tiếng Anh trong thực đơn và biển quảng cáo ở Sapa để thiết kế tay hướng dẫn sử dụng tiếng Anh để thiết kế thực đơn và biển quảng cáo cho các chủ cửa hàng trong lĩnh vực này. Thông qua điều tra thực địa bằng phương pháp kiểm tra danh sách, nghiên cứu đã thu thập các lỗi mà các thực đơn và biển quảng cáo có như ngữ pháp, ngữ nghĩa, các vấn đề lựa chọn từ vựng, ... để phân tích và giải quyết chúng. Sản phẩm của nghiên cứu sẽ hữu ích cho các menu và biển quảng cáo ở Sapa.

**Từ khóa:** *lỗi; thực đơn và biển quảng cáo; sách hướng dẫn thiết kế thực đơn và biển quảng cáo; các chủ cửa hàng ở Sapa; phương pháp kiểm tra danh sách.*

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## 1. Introduction

Foreign language plays an essential role in the tourism industry, especially English. The use of foreign language can influence international travellers' satisfaction about products or services. Nevertheless, the authors have conducted an investigation into reality of English used in menus and billboards in Sapa and discovered drawbacks of this problem. The study shows the current state of using English in menus and billboards in a famous tourist attraction – Sapa, and proposes a guidebook to improve this issue. The fact that a vast number of mistakes are found after the field surveying. Through 21 restaurants and shops the authors analyze and classify errors into four main groups: spelling errors, not parallel errors, heterogeneous translation and grammatical errors. The authors carry out this task from general to details in order to gain exactly data. In addition, authors also interview foreign travelers to have extra information as well as have objective assessment. The result of the conveying shows that this problem partly makes foreigners feel annoyed, or sometimes they may misunderstand the meaning of the words in the menus and billboards. The guidebook is a useful thing to help shop owners correct all mistakes in their menus and billboards. They can use the guidebook as a tool to compare with the originals and correct the errors easily. This effect a change that businessmen can avoid these mistakes, especially common ones at any time they use English during the working time. Besides, this is a good choice for local people to improve their knowledge of business in English as well as make a good impression on foreigners. The guidebook can be considered as a high quality book to refer and apply creatively in Sapa practical conditions.

## 2. Literature review

Menu maintains its dominant position in restaurant firms, since it is the core of food and beverage operations. Specifically, menu is an instructor that clearly dictates (i) what will be produced, (ii) what type of equipment and ingredients are needed, and (iii) which qualifications employees should have. Menu also functions as a communicating and selling tool [1]. More specifically, it communicates not only the food and beverage offerings, but also the image of the firm. Furthermore, menu is a base on which the customers make their food choices and a well designed menu can direct customers' attention to the items the firm wants to sell more [2].

Billboard are broadly defined as any large outdoor printed (or projected) sign. Artists' Billboards have been a key medium or vehicle to explore and express the ideas and strategies behind the most important art movements over the last fifty years; conceptualism and dematerialization, temporality, appropriation and authorship issues, socio-political critique, institutional critique, direct political engagement (defending the voices of minorities like women, gays, blacks, different ethnicities, etc.), postmodern concerns about the difference between reality and representation, among many others (indooradvertising.org).

The power of menus and billboards: When using television or radio ads, people can have turned off or skipped it easily. However, menus and billboards, especially billboards are encountered everywhere. Iveson (2011) [3] pointed out how, “[It] has become the only mass medium capable of reaching consumers as they go about their everyday lives,” (pp. 151-174). People spend most their time going outside to work, and menus and billboards may pay their attention when they are on the road. Williams (2009) [4] noted in his study how billboards are ultimately the

last method of communication consumers' fathom before taking action. It is likely for consumers to see the same billboard more than once a day in various locations.

Textbook authors and academic researchers have identified a variety of distinctive characteristics of billboards and outdoor advertising. The advantages of using billboards include, among other things: (1) potential placement of the advertisement close to the point of sale, (2) high frequency of exposure to regular commuters, (3) high reach, (4) 24-hour presence, (5) geographic flexibility for local advertisers, (6) economic efficiency in terms of low production costs and low cost per thousand exposures, (7) visual impact from advertisement size and message creativity, and (8) brand awareness.

### 3. Methodology

The study is proceeded in Sapa (Lao Cai, Viet Nam) which is a famous attraction in Viet Nam. The researchers collect samples from 20 restaurants, 1 spa and 45 billboards. Then, the authors use checklist to find out the errors of menus and billboards. Beside using checklist to find out the errors, the researchers also interview some foreigners. They saw the menus then pointed out mistakes in the menus and billboards. Then, the foreigners give some advices to create better menus and billboards.

### 4. Finding and discussion

After the field survey about English used in menus and billboards in Sapa, all restaurants and billboards have problem in English used. The authors collected and analyzed data on the errors of twenty restaurants' menus, one Spa's menu and forty- eight restaurants' billboards. According to the gathered figures, there are 569 errors in total and the authors classified these mistakes by four main aspects: spelling errors, not parallel errors, heterogeneous translation and grammatical

errors. Going into particulars, these errors are enumerated and converted into percentage through the tables below. The tables compare four different errors in terms of spelling errors, not parallel errors, heterogeneous translation and grammatical errors.

Firstly, as can be seen from table 1, 21 restaurants and spa and 45 billboards have a total mistake of 569, among them spelling errors are 259 errors accounted for approximately 45.52% which are the highest. Moving to grammatical errors, there is a slightly lower percentage of spelling errors, at 220 errors accounted for around 38.66%. Not parallel are the lowest errors at only about 20 errors related making up 3.15%, which are thirteen times as low as that of spelling errors. In terms of heterogeneous translation errors, there are with the figure of 70 errors accounted for roughly 12.3% of the total.

**Table 1.** Total errors in menus and billboards in Sapa

Errors	Number	Frequency
Spelling errors	259	45.52%
Not Parallelerrors	20	3.51%
Heterogeneous translationerrors	70	12.3%
Grammatical errors	220	38.66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>569</b>	<b>100%</b>

Secondly, table 2 shows the errors' data of 20 restaurants and 1 spa. The authors also divided these mistakes into 4 main groups in order to have an overview as well as compare each one with others. There are 511 errors in total. The rate of spelling errors is highest, at 226 mistakes accounted for approximately 44.23%, which are over seventeen times as high as that of not parallel errors, just 13 errors with roughly 2.54% of the total, whereas heterogeneous translation errors are with 69 errors, only about 3 times lower than that of spelling ones, just 13.5%. The last one is grammatical errors slightly lower percentage of spelling errors, at 203 errors accounted for around 39.73%.

**Table 2.** *Total errors in menus in Sapa*

Errors	Number	Frequency
Spelling errors	226	44.23%
Not Parallel errors	13	2.54%
Heterogeneous translation errors	69	13.5%
Grammatical errors	203	39.73%
<b>Total</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>100%</b>

In addition, in 569 errors, the authors also separated the errors of 45 billboards for analyzing. Spelling errors, not parallel errors, heterogeneous translation and grammatical errors with the figure is 33, 7, 1 and 17 respectively. According to table 3, the rate of errors among 4 groups has relatively large difference. Going into details, the proportion of both heterogeneous translation errors and not parallel errors was a mere, only around 1.72% and 12.07%, respectively. The highest rate of errors is spelling errors, which accounted for over a half of the total, are 56.9%, followed by grammatical errors with the figure are 29.31%.

**Table 3.** *Total errors in billboards in Sapa*

Errors	Number	Frequency
Spelling errors	33	56.9%
Not Parallel errors	7	12.07%
Heterogeneous translation errors	1	1.72%
Grammatical errors	17	29.31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4.** *Some typical restaurants having mistakes in menus*

Restaurant	Number of mistakes	Frequency
H'mong BBQ	77	15.1%
Fansipan	52	10.2%
Bar - restaurant	3	0.6%
The rest restaurants	379	74.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>100%</b>

As shown in table 4, in 21 restaurants and spa, H'mong BBQ restaurant's menu has the highest errors of 77 mistakes accounted for approximately 15.1%, followed by Fansipan

restaurant with the figure being lower, at 52 errors accounted for around 10.2%. The errors in Bar – restaurant's menu is the lowest, at only 3 mistakes with roughly 0.6% of the total.

When analyzing errors in groups, it was found that the restaurants had the most errors in spelling errors, with 226 errors. In it, the menu of H'mong BBQ restaurant has the most spelling errors: 33 errors. The menu of Phuoc Lan and Viet restaurants has the second highest number of errors with 26 errors about spelling. Behind the spelling error groups, the grammar error group has all 203 errors. The menu of the H'mong BBQ restaurant still has the most grammatical errors with 41 errors. Error groups with heterogeneous translation has 69 errors. Fansipan restaurant has the most errors and their menu has 10 errors. The error groups with not parallel only has 13 errors. Of those 13, Sky restaurant has 6 errors, another restaurant has 1-2 errors, and some restaurants do not make mistakes in this error group.

In terms of grammatical errors, there are several different kinds of mistakes, for instance the locals can not distinguish which nouns are countable or uncountable (meats, salads, breads, wines, ...). Next, they make errors on word order, in fact some words are reversed their positions (fried rice Duong Chau, corn fried, pork spinning, pork stir-fried, cucumber young, beef stir fried,...). Besides, a number of phrases not only have no accompanying preposition but also are used in erroneous way (Hot pot vegetable Sapa mushroom, fried rice vegetable, steamed chicken lemon leaves, steam rice, mix fruit, mix salad, sauted mix vegetables, ...). Moreover, the locals are mistaken between plural nouns and singular nouns (2 person, 3 or more person, two egg, ...). Furthermore, they use wrong grammatical structures, sentences do not have verbs or the verbs are nouns used as verbs (sour and sweet pork

chops, “A very refreshing, easy drinking champagne style pale straw in color, showing an attractive, lifted her baceousness on the nose and fresh fruit flavours, finishing clean with delicate, creamy mouth feel and a crisp finish. The perfect wine for any celebration, slightly drier the dB Classique”, you choice one of the types of fried rice or noodle, ...).

Besides, spelling errors are also divided into three main groups: wrong words (fist, coffe, sweer and sour, foof, bufflo, passioon, mustrooms, cappucino, chesee, stawberry, eeg, galic, pinaple ...), devided or combined words by space (sand wiches, water melon, lemon grass, choco late, sea food, pine apple juice, milk shake, hotpot, Aglass), the authors have to identify these words by checking dictionary, pictures or search the Internet.

In addition, principle error of not parallel is unbalanced between plural nouns and singular nouns (fried rice with eggs and vegetable, mix fruit/seasonal fruits, chicken/sandwiches/Club sandwich, bacon/eggs/onion/mushroom/olive, fried rice with vegetable/fried noodles with vegetables, ...).

In heterogeneous translation errors, they do not have equivalent meaning between English and Vietnamese (egg: trứng vịt lộn, egg: trứng nướng, bitter melon: mướp đắng nhồi thịt, sauted Sapa mushroom with pork: thịt xào hành nấm Sapa, boiled vegetable: ngồng xu hào luộc, boild chayote: quả su su hấp vừng, orange with milk: sinh tố cam, ...).

Moreover, there are several other errors like: writing miscellaneous capital letters (sapa), using a half English and a half Vietnamese (Ba con, xà lách, cà chua, dưa chuột Mayonaise sauce, cheese. Therefore, foreigners misunderstand the ingredients having in the dishes.

In order to have more information about the current state of English used in menus and billboards in Sapa, the authors interviewed one shop owner and six foreigners. The shop

owner said that her restaurant’s menu was based on other restaurants’ menus or translated by Google Translation. Besides, the authors begged foreigners for commenting on English used in menus and billboards they saw. The result was these foreigners said that they could understand the content of menus and billboards by general way; nevertheless, they sometimes did not understand completely what were the meaning of some English words. Particulaly, the authors showed foreigners some pictures of restaurants’ menus and billboards, they found down many errors related to spelling and grammar of these. This problem affects more or less to owners’ business.

There are a lot of previous researches studied about English used in menus and billboards; however, no researches carried out this field in Sapa; therefore, this study will contribute extra document for menus and billboards in Vietnam. Furthermore, it can be used as reference not only for Sapa but also for other tourist attractions.

## 5. Conclusion

This research bases from many menus and billboards in Sapa which still have many errors. From the collected data, there are 569 mistakes in 21 restaurants, one spa and 45 billboards. Especially, spelling errors account for approximately 45.52%. Not parallel are the lowest errors at only about 20 errors related making up 3.15%. The result of this issue is that foreigners sometimes can not understand completely the meaning of some English words. The researchers found that English language have a significant effect on customers intention in Sapa. Therefore, the study proposes a guidebook affected customers’ purchase intention, which no previous researches have done before. The restauranteurs can base on this English guidebook to correct all mistakes in their menus and billboards or design high quality ones easily.

Base on the results of this study, it is hoped that the guidebook will be applied in most of restaurants and spa in Sapa. This product improves menus and billboards' quality with the hope of bettering service's quality. This research also wants to help restaurateurs avoid some common errors while using English in menus and billboards. This study was conducted in Sapa but it is hoped that it will be useful for other tourist attractions in Vietnam.

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