

Language Identity in a Tourist Town Context: The Naming of Accommodations on Chiang Khan Walking Street, Loei Province, Thailand

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1307000364>

Received: 07 August 2026; Accepted: 12 August 2026; Published: 19 August 2026

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between language and identity as manifested in the naming of tourist accommodations along Walking Street in Chiang Khan District, Loei Province, a prominent riverside tourist destination in Northeastern Thailand (Isan). Framed within the sociocultural-linguistic construct of language identity, and drawing specifically on Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) relational and semiotic approach to identity, the study analyzes a corpus of sixty-two accommodation names collected through systematic field observation between March and June 2026. Names were examined along three linguistic dimensions: language choice (Thai, English, or bilingual), name structure, and word choice and meaning. The results show that bilingual names combining Thai and English were the most frequent pattern, accounting for thirty-four of sixty-two names (54.8 percent), followed by Thai-only names (sixteen names, 25.8 percent) and English-only names (twelve names, 19.4 percent), indicating that linguistic hybridity pervades the naming practice even within nominally monolingual categories. Structurally, two dominant patterns emerged: a kinship-oriented, family-based structure realized as [dwelling term] + [kin term/personal name] + (place name), which indexes intimacy and community belonging, and an internationalized commercial structure realized as [proper name] + [accommodation type] + [Chiangkhan], which mirrors global hotel-naming conventions. At the lexical level, eight recurrent identity markers were identified: Isan dialect words, kinship terms, positive emotive expressions, geographic nouns (most notably "Khong," referring to the Mekong River, present in 17.7 percent of all names), abstract or nostalgic phrases, prestige and luxury loanwords, personal names and nicknames, and the toponym "Chiangkhan" itself. The study argues that accommodation naming in Chiang Khan constitutes a deliberate, dual-oriented identity project in which local and regional distinctiveness is preserved through Isan lexis and kinship idiom, while international legibility and commercial standardization are pursued through English loanwords, digital-era orthographic conventions such as the symbol "@," and internationalized hotel-naming syntax. These findings extend the literature on commercial linguistic landscapes and language identity in Southeast Asia and offer a transferable linguistic model for place-branding in Thailand's secondary tourist cities.

Keywords: language identity; onomastics; place branding; linguistic landscape; cultural tourism; Isan; Chiang Khan

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

Language is one of the most powerful markers of cultural heritage, capable of reflecting the identity of individuals and groups in much the same way that other cultural practices do. Speakers of the same mother tongue tend to share closely related identities, because language conveys phonological, lexical, and paralinguistic patterns that mark a community as distinct from others. Thai society, for instance, uses the greeting "sawatdee," accompanied by the wai gesture, as an internationally recognized identity marker: foreign visitors readily adopt the word, together with the accompanying gesture, when greeting or thanking Thai people. Verbal and non-

verbal behavior thus combine to constitute one important facet of Thai national identity, illustrating the general principle that language and identity presentation are intrinsically related.

Within linguistics, the construct most directly concerned with this relationship is language identity, also referred to as linguistic identity. It is a multifaceted concept referring to the ways in which individuals and communities use language to express selfhood and to position themselves in relation to particular social groups. Identity is conveyed not only through what is said but through how language is used — accent, dialect, and lexical choice all index culture, ethnicity, and social status (Salhi, 2025). At the same time, language identity is not static: as Norton (1995, 2013) emphasizes, it is shaped by social, cultural, and historical context and evolves over time through the interaction of social phenomena, producing identities that continuously adapt to the outcomes of those interactions.

Beyond spoken and gestural behavior, the language used in naming practices also reflects the identity of individuals and groups. Helleland (2012) compiled a collection of studies on names and identity — place names, personal names, family names, and related categories — drawn from countries across the world, converging on the finding that names encode the identity of ethnic and social groups. Thai onomastic research, even where identity is not its explicit focus, points in the same direction: place names can reflect ethnic identity, social grouping, or attachment to locality. Jordan (2012) study of place names as an ingredient of space-related identity, for example, demonstrates from a cultural-geographic perspective that the use of natural resources gives rise to local culture, one manifestation of which is the incorporation of natural features into place names in order to construct the character of both persons and places: personal and family names frequently encode nearby natural features, and nature terms are similarly recruited to name the localities in which people live. When such names index identity, they mark the personhood, dwelling, and social belonging of a group, reinforcing collective self-perception among people bound together by an interlinked network of names. In a directly comparable Thai case, Choeirod and Chanthao (2023) examined the linguistic landscape of shop signage in the tourist district of Patong Beach, Phuket, and found signs displaying more than seventeen languages, most prominently Chinese, Hindi, English, Russian, Japanese, Korean, and Thai — evidence of the multilingual character of the area and of a modern, tourism-driven spatial identity.

Language identity within any given society is inseparable from social and spatial context. It forms part of the ongoing process through which a distinct "self" is constructed, differentiated from other individuals or groups. Identity further encompasses a semiotic system connected to other facets of a group's culture, while that same semiotic system contributes, in turn, to the construction and transmission of cultural identity. Identity is therefore inextricably linked to social structure, politics, and context (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).

The present study applies the construct of language identity to written language — specifically, to the names of shops and accommodations along Walking Street in Chiang Khan District — situating the analysis within the broader field of language in tourism contexts. Chiang Khan is a major tourist destination that attracts both domestic and international visitors throughout the year. Its natural topography, stretching along the Mekong River at the border between Thailand and Laos, its scenic mountains, and its near year-round cool climate, together with its position as a route connecting the North to Upper Isan and Upper Isan to other Mekong riverside provinces, have made Chiang Khan a densely developed accommodation hub, particularly during the cool season. Walking Street itself is renowned for preserving the vernacular architecture of Isan houses, both in their traditional form and in adapted, modern guesthouse form. Buarapha, Meenakanit, & Meesommai (2012), in a study of the vernacular landscape of Chiang Khan District from the perspective of architectural landscape studies, trace the town's historical development into a tourist economy and describe the construction of Chiang Khan's identity as a synthesis of Lan Xang and local Isan culture adapted to the demands of nature- and culture-based tourism, culminating in its emergence as one of Thailand's significant tourist destinations.

The commercial expansion of Chiang Khan began at the accommodation and retail cluster on Walking Street, where guesthouses, shops, and restaurants line both sides of the road, offering convenience to visitors. Accommodation has since expanded southward along the same corridor, so that both sides of the street are now densely filled with lodging and retail businesses. As accommodation providers have adapted to rising visitor numbers, the number of hotels and houses for rent has grown accordingly, though the sector remains predominantly family-run, preserving the identity of homestay-style hospitality (Lengwiriyakul &

Charoensiriphonkul, 2017). Beyond the natural beauty of the Mekong riverside, visitors also engage in Buddhist religious activities, such as offering alms to monks and visiting significant temples along the tourist street, as well as early-morning tractor rides organized by local residents to view the sunrise and morning mist. These activities lend Chiang Khan's tourism an identity distinct from ordinary nature-based tourism, blending nature tourism, small-town urban tourism, and Buddhist tourism.

Developing Chiang Khan as a town with a distinctive tourism identity also carries potential for creative-tourism development, given its multiple areas of untapped potential; the primary constraints are personnel expertise and budget. Providing knowledge of creative-tourism management and expanding creative-tourism activities could increase the capacity of a locality already rich in natural resources to generate additional income for the community from creative tourism (Khopphonklang & Kaesosa-nga, 2021).

Chiang Khan is presently constructing a tourist-town identity that differentiates it from other tourist towns. Existing research, however, has predominantly addressed architectural, economic, developmental, and cultural dimensions of the town; no linguistic study to date has examined the language identity of shop and accommodation names in Chiang Khan District, particularly those situated on Walking Street. This constitutes a clear research gap. Field observation of shop and accommodation names in this area reveals recurrent shared vocabulary, notably the words "Loei" and "Chiangkhan," as in names such as Baan Chiangkhan, Hug Na Chiangkhan, Chiangkhan Ko, Ki Chiangkhan, Chiangkhan Riverside Pool Villa, Huen Din Chiangkhan, Nang Loei Beer, and Loei Ma Long Beer, among others. The linguistic choices embedded in such shop and accommodation names thus constitute one component of place identity. A study of the "language identity of accommodation and shop names" therefore promises to generate linguistic knowledge that can be applied to the dissemination of the identity of Walking Street in Chiang Khan District, Loei Province, while also contributing to an integrative linguistic research agenda addressing cultural tourism, secondary-city tourism, and the distribution of tourism revenue to peripheral and rural areas. The findings of this study may accordingly serve as a strategy for constructing the place identity of Chiang Khan, Loei Province.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to analyze the language identity reflected in a tourist-town context, as manifested through the names of shops and accommodations on Walking Street in Chiang Khan District, Loei Province.

Research Question

What are the characteristics of the language identity manifested in accommodation names on Walking Street in Chiang Khan District, Loei Province, within the context of a tourist town?

Scope of the Study

Spatial scope. The study is limited to accommodation names located within the Walking Street area of Chiang Khan District, Loei Province (see Section 3.3).

Temporal scope. The research was conducted over twelve months, of which four months — March to June 2026 — were allocated to field data collection. Names appearing after this period are outside the scope of the present dataset.

Data scope. Data consist of the names displayed on accommodation signage or lettering appearing at the front or rear of each property, reflecting the identity that owners intend to communicate to observers. Field-collected signage names, rather than legally registered business names, were used, since signage is expected to reveal more directly the linguistic and orthographic features implicated in the construction of language identity.

Significance of the Study

- 1) The findings contribute academic knowledge on language identity within linguistics, integrated with the theme of cultural tourism as a mechanism of local income generation in Northeastern Thailand.
- 2) The findings may inform policy on promoting cultural tourism in other localities, particularly strategies for constructing place and destination identity through the naming of accommodations and related businesses.

3) The findings have direct commercial application: entrepreneurs in the vicinity may draw on the shared identity markers identified here — notably "Chiangkhan," "Rim Khong" (Mekong riverside), "Hug," and "Na Chiangkhan" — to reinforce the distribution and recognizability of these terms across the area.

Definition of Terms

Language identity: Language and identity has emerged as a transdisciplinary of researches and has concerned with how languages, broadly understood, shape and are shaped by diverse identities (Zenker, 2018). In this study, the term refers specifically to linguistic expression realized through the accommodation names of all lodging businesses within the research scope.

Accommodation: in this study, refers to all categories of lodging serving tourists — hotels, guesthouses, and houses for rent — located within the Walking Street research area of Chiang Khan District, Loei Province.

Accommodation name: refers to the name displayed at or near an accommodation, such as on a name sign or lettering, that functions as the representation through which the business owner communicates with tourists and guests.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Orientation

This study is situated within the theory of language identity as developed in sociocultural linguistics, which holds that language functions not merely as a tool of communication but as an instrument through which selfhood is constructed and expressed in ways that differentiate one individual or group from another. Language thus indexes belonging as well as social positioning, contributing to the construction of self: individuals and social groups can construct identity through their choice of language, accent, or vocabulary across differing contexts.

Bucholtz and Hall (2004), in a chapter devoted to language and identity, describe how repeated linguistic usage can crystallize into a salient feature of identity construction, drawing on the concept of markedness: language that expresses identity carries markedness, while language that does not express identity, or that appears in ordinary usage, is classed as unmarked. The present study adopts this concept to identify the word markers that construct identity on shop and accommodation signage along Walking Street in Chiang Khan District.

Bucholtz and Hall (2004) further elaborate the relationship between identity and culture as mediated through the construction of contextually relevant sociopolitical relations along three axes: similarity and difference, authenticity and inauthenticity, and legitimacy and illegitimacy. Identity, in their formulation, is an outcome of cultural semiotics accomplished through the production of such relations within a given context.

This study applies that framework to the analysis of language identity within a tourist-town context, selecting Walking Street in Chiang Khan District, Loei Province, as a site emblematic of tourism in Chiang Khan District as a whole. Through the analysis of shop and accommodation names, the study investigates how the language of these names reflects or expresses the selfhood of this tourism area and community, examining word choice, name structure, and meaning in order to characterize the language identity of this significant tourist town.

Related Studies

Scholarship on language identity has progressively illuminated the relationship between identity and language among individuals and groups. In the early twenty-first century, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) argued that language is not merely a communicative tool but actively "constructs" a selfhood that differentiates the individual from others; identity-marked language is inevitably related to social structure, power relations, and context. Edward (2009) monograph, *Language and Identity*, demonstrates that identity-marking language use is bound up with a wide range of other dimensions, including gender, religious affiliation, nationality, and dialect use. Language and identity are further connected through the process of learning a new language: Norton (2013) found that fluid and multiple identities facilitate adaptation and accelerate language learning, suggesting that identity at the individual level can drive broader personal development.

Among early Thai-language treatments of the relationship between language and identity, Amara Prasithrathsint (2005) in *Language in Thai Society: Diversity, Change, and Development*, remains a widely cited sociolinguistic reference. Although the book does not explicitly foreground identity, many of its themes concern variation in spoken language according to residence, regional dialect, and social class, expressed through differential language use — particularly with respect to residence, which connects directly to the study of regional dialects in Thailand. Kingkham (2007) study, "Dialect and Ethnic Identity: A Study of the Relationship between Dialect Use and Identity Maintenance," demonstrates clearly that spoken regional dialects across Thailand serve as a key instrument for constructing ethnic identity, for expressing group belonging, and for maintaining group identity. In the early 2020s, Suwilai Premsrirat established a center for the study and revitalization of languages and cultures in crisis, highlighting the importance of maintaining the mother tongues of Thailand's various ethnic groups so as to preserve their linguistic identity and sustain the wisdom of each group through the use of the mother tongue — since the loss of a single cultural term entails the loss of the accumulated wisdom and culture that ancestors pass down to subsequent generations (Premsrirat, 2006).

The first Thai-language monograph dedicated explicitly to the relationship between language and identity, by Phakdeephassook (2018), provides an analytical framework for the study of Thai language and identity, addressing naming practices that reflect Thai culture and identity in varied contexts, as well as the relationship between metaphor, pronoun use, and discourse in the expression of individual and group identity. Language identity is also shown to persist among Thai communities living abroad, who continue to use Thai to express group identity; Nanthajantoon (2010), for example, describes the language and cultural identity of the Lao Song, an ethnic Tai group residing in Central and Northeastern Thailand, who continue to prioritize the transmission of their language as an expression of Lao Song cultural identity amid globalization. At the level of phonological analysis, Ronakiat (2012) in the Volume, *Phonetics: Voice System Analysis for Speaker Identity*, demonstrates that a speaker's pronunciation, articulatory positioning, pitch, emotional expression, and manner of speech constitute a form of language use through which individual identity can be identified via acoustic analysis. Sampos (2023) documents the language identity of the Tai people (khon Tai) who migrated to the Koh Kong area of Cambodia, showing them to be clearly bilingual speakers, competent in the Trat dialect of Thai and in Khmer, with pronounced code-switching in daily life. Similarly, Panchote and Chanthao (2025) reveal the language identity of Thai women married to foreign husbands, who emerge as multilingual speakers competent in Bangkok Thai, regional dialects, English, and/or their husbands' national languages. Research most directly comparable to the present study, in its combination of language identity and tourism, includes Pawei Peng and Angkapanichkit (2025) comparative study of tourism language on Thai and Chinese tourism websites, which collected online tourism-language data and found that Thai and Chinese tourism language share similar lexical, phrasal, and sentential choices, while differing functionally: Thai tourism language emphasizes interpersonal interaction between interlocutors, whereas Chinese tourism language emphasizes poetic depth and imaginative resonance. Language identity in the naming of local Isan woven-textile patterns is examined in Chaowalitkitkun and Chanthao (2025) study, which reveals the identity embedded in the naming of Isan handwoven textile patterns within the context of constructing local cultural identity in line with the government's soft-power policy.

This body of scholarship, produced by both international and Thai linguists, consistently demonstrates the relationship between identity and language, or the capacity of language to express the identity of individuals and groups. Discussions of identity and language are generally situated within sociolinguistics or sociocultural linguistics; nonetheless, language identity remains inseparable from its user community, its context of use, and its broader language ecology. Given this pattern, the present review confirms that no existing Thai study duplicates the scope of the present research; at the same time, this study is positioned to extend knowledge of language identity within the context of Isan tourist towns specifically.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is a qualitative linguistic study situated within sociolinguistics, addressing the theme of language identity. It is a field-based investigation in which data were collected by recording the names of shops and accommodations along Walking Street in Chiang Khan District, Loei Province. Data were analyzed using

linguistic methods, including word choice, name structure, and semantic analysis, and findings are presented through descriptive analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The study is situated within linguistics, specifically sociolinguistics, and accordingly applies the construct of language identity, integrating linguistic analysis with anthropological perspectives on identity. Following Bucholtz and Hall (2004), the study analyzes accommodation names along two linguistic dimensions — name structure and name meaning — both of which are taken to reflect the language identity of the Chiang Khan tourism community as it emerges from the co-occurrence and recurrence of accommodation names within this culturally significant tourist area.

Research Site

The study delimits its research area to Walking Street in Chiang Khan District, Loei Province, centered on the section of the street running parallel to the Mekong River. The study also incorporates the town's principal connecting roads, given the concentration of accommodations situated in adjoining lanes (soi) that connect to Walking Street, so as to ensure comprehensive coverage of the Walking Street district of Chiang Khan town.

Data

The data for this study consist of accommodation names appearing on signage, or in lettering appearing in the area in front of or behind each accommodation, that the business owner intends to communicate to tourists and guests — for example, Heuan Rak Rim Khong Chiangkhan, Heuan Sabai Rim Khong, Baan Chan Khiang Thi Chiangkhan, and Arun @ Chiangkhan.

Research Procedure

- 1) Reviewing prior research to avoid duplication of scope.
- 2) Reviewing concepts and theory relevant to language identity.
- 3) Designing the study and delimiting the spatial scope of the research area.
- 4) Conducting field survey and data collection in the Walking Street area of Chiang Khan District, Loei Province.
- 5) Organizing and analyzing the collected data.
- 6) Compiling the research report and the resulting research article.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The research framework begins with the research question — what are the characteristics of language identity in a tourist-town context, as manifested through the names of shops and accommodations on Walking Street in Chiang Khan District, Loei Province? — from which the theoretical construct of language identity is applied to a defined dataset, namely accommodation names on Walking Street in Chiang Khan District. The scope of analysis encompasses word choice, name structure, and meaning, converging on an account of the identity of these names within the tourist-town context. This sequence — from research question, through theoretical framework, to data (shop and accommodation names), through the analytic dimensions of word choice, name structure, and meaning, to the resulting identity of names within a tourist-town context — constitutes the conceptual framework guiding the study.

FINDINGS

Accommodation Names on Chiang Khan Walking Street

Field data collection along Walking Street in Chiang Khan District, Loei Province, yielded a total of sixty-two accommodation names. Because some properties display both a Thai-language and an English-language name, both were recorded in order to capture the full range of identity constructed through the interrelation of the two

languages within the tourism context. Names are accordingly counted per accommodation, with the English-language form given in parentheses where applicable. Names were classified into three groups according to the script in which they appear: Thai-only names, English-only names, and names in both Thai and English.

Thai-only names (n = 16)

Sixteen accommodation names were recorded in Thai script only, including Baan Phraphai Na Chiangkhan, Heuan Yai Bubpha, Choe Loei, Mae Nam Mi Kaeng Guest House, Heuan Sabai Di Soi 8 (Baan Yai Dok), Baan Siao Kan Homestay Rim Khong, Thi Phak Ta On, Villa Chiangkhan Zone 1, Baan Suk Samran, Frank Fa Rim Khong Na Chiangkhan, Baan Rabiang Khong, Rongraem Dai Heng Boutique, Rongraem Non Nap Dao Rim Khong, Homestay Chiangkhan Yai Sarit, Baan Klai Khong @ Chiangkhan, and Ta Num Homestay Chiangkhan, Duean Tem Duang Guesthouse Rim Khong. Although written in Thai script, this group displays a high frequency of recurrent English loanwords — "guest house," "villa," "boutique," "homestay" — as well as the international symbol "@." When names are examined for Thai-only lexis alone, only seven of the sixteen contain no English loanword at all. This indicates that the marker terms constructing the identity of accommodation names on Chiang Khan Walking Street, even where the name is nominally Thai, characteristically incorporate internationally recognizable English loanwords denoting accommodation type.

English-only names (n = 12)

Twelve accommodation names were recorded in English script only: The River House Chiangkhan, Sky Bay Chiangkhan, Le Moon Home, T-Time Home, Soi 5 Home Stay, K Khan. Garden Walking Street, The Local Chiang Khan, Full House Chiang Khan, Chiangkan Homestay, Granny One Guest House, Riverside Chiangkhan, and Mae Nam Kiang Sook. This group retains recurrent identity markers denoting accommodation type — "Guest House," "Homestay," "House," "Home," and "Walking Street" — reflecting the diversity of lodging along Walking Street and signaling home-style rather than hotel-style accommodation. The use of English in accommodation names thus helps standardize tourists' expectations of the lodging experience; moreover, given that room reservations are now predominantly made through online booking systems, English-language naming facilitates recognition among foreign visitors and supports discoverability through map-based search. In addition, the words "River" and "Chiang Khan" function as important markers indexing location and place.

Bilingual (Thai and English) names (n = 34)

The remaining thirty-four accommodation names appear in a combination of Thai and English forms, recorded here as collected in the field without further regrouping: Suneta Hostel Chiangkhan; Hugloei Hugkan; Na-Baiboon; Once Upon a Time (Kan Khrang Nueng Na Chiangkhan); Chic Chiangkhan Hotel; Suk Somboon Hotel; The Royal Chiangkhan Boutique Hotel; Phu Chiangkhan Hostel; Wong Sai Siri Srichiangkhan Hotel; PlantThai ChiangKhan; With A View Hotel @ Chiangkhan; The White House Chiangkhan Villa; Space & Stranger House (Mueang Lamoe); Nachan The Antique Courtyard; Chantravarin; Muiphang Guesthouse Chiang Khan; Muiphang De Ville; The Old Chiangkhan Boutique Hotel; Ban Kong Rim Khong; Tonkong Guesthouse; Chandra Varin; Pakkaipakjai (Baan Phak Kai Phak Jai); Baan Khun Tong Chiangkan; Chiang Khan River View Guesthouse; Tao Kae Lao Guesthouse; Jan Deang Rim Khong Homestay; Beng Khong Homestay; Home Hug Chiangkhan; 9 House Chiang Khan; Baan SiS Homestay; Thai Kan Eng Guesthouse; Dao Reuang Guesthouse; Ton Boon 306 Guesthouse; and Panisa Guesthouse.

Names in this group display two translation patterns between the Thai and English forms. The first is direct transliteration, in which the phonological shape of the Thai name is preserved in Romanization — for example, Thai Kan Eng Guesthouse and Jan Deang Rim Khong. The second is a sense-based, non-literal translation that departs from the Thai form to convey a more evocative meaning — for example, Ton Boon 306, Panisa Guesthouse, Tao Kae Lao Guesthouse, Pakkaipakjai, Space and Stranger House, and Once Upon a Time.

A notable observation concerns the orthographic instability of the toponym "Chiang Khan" itself, which appears variously as Chiangkan, Chiangkhan, and Chiang Khan across the dataset. Local authorities and the district

administration may wish to issue guidance standardizing the Romanization of the district name in line with correct Thai orthographic principles.

Name Structure

Analysis of the sixty-two accommodation names yields two principal analytic dimensions — name structure and word choice/meaning — both of which inform the discussion of language identity developed below with reference to Bucholtz and Hall's framework. Six recurrent structural patterns were identified; the two most productive and theoretically salient are presented in detail below.

Structure Type 1: Kinship-based, family-oriented structure

This structural type incorporates an Isan or Thai dwelling term — "baan" (house) or "heuan" (house/home) — as a component of the name, as in the following pattern:

Structure Type 1: *[Thai/Isan dwelling term] + [personal name/kin term] + (place name), e.g., Baan/Heuan/Ta/Yai + [personal name] + Na/@ Chiangkhan.*

Table 1. Accommodation names with Structure Type 1 (kinship-based)

Accommodation Name	Structural Components
Baan Phraphai Na Chiangkhan	baan + name + na + place
Heuan Yai Bubpha	heuan + yai (kin term) + name
Heuan Sabai Di Soi 8 (Baan Yai Dok)	heuan + modifier / baan + yai + name
Baan Khun Tong Chiangkan	baan + khun (honorific) + name + place
Baan SiS Homestay	baan + nickname + homestay
Ta Num Homestay Chiangkhan	ta (kin term) + name + homestay + place
Homestay Chiangkhan Yai Sarit	homestay + place + yai + name
Ton Boon 306 Guesthouse	baan + name + house number + guesthouse
Granny One Guest House	granny (kin term, English) + number + guest house

This group foregrounds senior kinship terms (yai "grandmother," ta "grandfather," granny) or personal nicknames as the naming core, in place of commercial or promotional vocabulary, thereby conveying a family-based, intimate identity. This corresponds to the study's broader finding of predominantly family-run accommodation businesses in Chiang Khan and is consistent with findings on the construction of family-level tourism businesses within the Chiang Khan community as a means of preserving local identity.

Structure Type 2: Internationalized commercial structure

The second structural type combines a proper name with an accommodation-type term and the identity marker "Chiangkhan"/"Chiang Khan," following the pattern:

Structure Type 2: *[Proper noun] + [accommodation type, English] + [Chiangkhan], e.g., The River + House + Chiangkhan.*

Within this structure, "Chiangkhan" occurs most frequently in final position, followed by medial position, with only one instance of initial position. In both Thai and English, the toponym Chiangkhan thus overwhelmingly occupies the terminal slot of the name.

Table 2. Accommodation names with Structure Type 2 (internationalized commercial)

Accommodation Name	Structural Components
The River House Chiangkhan	The River + House + Chiangkhan
Suneta Hostel Chiangkhan	Suneta + Hostel + Chiangkhan
Chic Chiangkhan Hotel	Chic + Chiangkhan + Hotel
The Royal Chiangkhan Boutique Hotel	The Royal + Chiangkhan + Boutique Hotel
Phu Chiangkhan Hostel	Phu + Chiangkhan + Hostel
The White House Chiangkhan Villa	The White House + Chiangkhan + Villa
Sky Bay Chiangkhan	Sky Bay + — + Chiangkhan
Home Hug Chiangkhan	Home Hug + — + Chiangkhan
Chiang Khan River View Guesthouse*	Chiang Khan (initial) + River View + Guesthouse

* This is the single instance of the toponym occurring in initial position.

This structure closely reproduces the grammar of international hotel naming conventions, positioning the accommodation-type noun (Hotel/Hostel) after the proper name and consistently closing with the toponym. It reflects a global/commercial identity oriented toward communication with international tourists and toward elevating the perceived standard of the accommodation through internationalized, English-medium naming.

Geographic, Emotive, Digital, and Numeric Identity Markers

Beyond overall language choice and name structure, the data reveal a set of thematic identity markers highlighting distinctive features of Chiang Khan, most prominently its riverside geography ("Rim Khong," "Khong," in both Thai and English), analyzed in the four subsections below.

Geographic nouns: "Khong"/"Rim Khong" + accommodation type

Eleven names (17.7 percent of the sixty-two-name corpus) contain the word "Khong" (the Mekong River) or "Rim Khong" (Mekong riverside), or otherwise reference riverside geography: Homestay Rim Khong, Baan Rabiang Khong, Rongraem Non Nap Dao Rim Khong, Baan Khong Rim Khong, Tonkong Guesthouse, Baan Klai Khong @ Chiangkhan, Jan Deang Rim Khong Homestay, Beng Khong Homestay, Frank Fa Rim Khong Na Chiangkhan, Mae Nam Ni Mi Kaeng, and Riverview Chiang Khan.

The word "Khong," whether standing alone or embedded in a phrase such as Rim Khong, Rabiang Khong, or Ton Khong, functions as a geographic word marker, one of the most frequently recurring in the dataset — eleven of sixty-two names, or approximately 17.7 percent. This finding directly corroborates Jordan's (2012) argument that natural resources, in this case the Mekong River, are recruited as raw material for constructing space-related identity in place naming. Even where the word Khong itself does not appear, terms such as "Mae Nam" (river) or "River" continue to index the same identity, referring implicitly to the Mekong River on which the accommodation is situated.

Emotive and abstract phrases

Five accommodation names were found to convey positive emotion or feeling associated with rest and relaxation: Once Upon a Time (Kan Khrang Nueng Na Chiangkhan), Pakkaipakjai (Baan Phak Kai Phak Jai), Hugloei Hugkan, Baan Suk Samran, and Thai Kan Eng Guesthouse.

These names construct the accommodation's identity around rest, happiness, joyful contentment, and familial warmth, as reflected in the following glosses: "Kan Khrang Nueng" evokes fond memory, in the manner of a fairy-tale opening; "Phak Kai Phak Jai" denotes the restfulness of both body and mind; "Hug" carries a double meaning — "love" in the Isan dialect and "embrace" in English — conveying love, care, and warmth; "Suk Samran" denotes happiness and joyful contentment; and "Thai Kan Eng," in the Loei/Isan dialect, uses "Thai" to mean "people, our own kind," while "kan eng" conveys friendliness and familiarity — together expressing a sense of belonging to the same in-group, of closeness and intimacy.

At the structural level, this group of names characteristically omits the accommodation-type noun (Hotel/Baan) altogether, substituting an emotive or narrative phrase — an emotive-branding strategy that prioritizes affective resonance over descriptive information. Linguistically, this represents the most heavily marked pattern in the dataset, since it deviates most sharply from the baseline convention of accommodation naming.

The symbol "@" as a locative preposition

The dataset displays a distinctive use of the English symbol "@" (at) and the Thai locative particle "ณ" (na) to indicate location — specifically, Chiangkhan — in names such as With A View @ Chiangkhan, Baan Klai Khong @ Chiangkhan, Panisa Baan Phak @ Chiangkhan Soi 20 Bon, and Homehugchiangkhan.

In conventional written usage, the symbol "@" performs a grammatical function equivalent to the Thai locative preposition "thi"/"na"; in this context, however, it further indexes a digital-era, social-media identity, since the symbol is most familiar from handles, usernames, and email addresses. The choice of "@" over the Thai particle "na" thus enacts a hybridization between formal written language and contemporary digital language — as in Homehugchiangkhan, whose unspaced concatenation resembles the format of a handle or hashtag on social media.

Numerals and soi (lane) numbers as identity markers

Accommodations along Chiang Khan's Walking Street are arrayed along the Mekong riverside and along the parallel inland road, extending along numerous small lanes (soi) branching from the main corridor. The proliferation of accommodation businesses along Walking Street evidences the deliberate use of spatial positioning as a marketing device to attract tourists; given the large number of small soi along this street, each clearly marked and numbered, some accommodations incorporate the soi number or house number into their name to assist guests in locating them. Six such names were identified: Heuan Sabai Di Soi 8, Thi Phak Ta On Villa Chiangkhan Zone 1, Soi 5 Homestay, Ton Boon 306, Panisa Baan Phak @ Chiangkhan Soi 20 Bon, and 9 House Chiang Khan.

Numerals in these names serve a dual function: a practical function (indicating actual location or house number) and an identity function (marking the specificity of a given sub-area within Walking Street). This suggests that name-givers conceptualize the Walking Street area as a kind of cognitive map, subdividing it into soi-based sub-identity units through the combined use of soi numbers and house numbers, as in Ton Boon 306.

Summary of Identity Markers in Chiang Khan Accommodation Names

Taken together, the findings indicate that accommodation naming along Walking Street in Chiang Khan District constructs place identity through eight recurrent lexical strategies: Isan dialect words, kinship terms, positive emotive expressions, geographic nouns, abstract or nostalgic expressions, prestige/luxury and international status terms, personal names and nicknames, and explicit reference to the toponym "Chiangkhan." Each is discussed briefly below, followed by a summary table.

Isan dialect words

Although Chiang Khan District, located in Loei Province, is characterized in everyday spoken usage by the Loei variety of the Isan dialect, the appearance of Isan dialect words in the written medium of accommodation names is a deliberate identity strategy, one that fosters a sense of linguistic belonging among tourists, many of whom

travel from other Isan provinces or nearby regions. Words identified in the dataset include thao (elderly), lao (alcohol), berg (to look/gaze), heuan (house), hug (love), and siao (close friend). One name, Muiphang Guesthouse Chiangkhan, reflects a distinct ethnic-minority identity, connected to a community of highland (Karen/Hmong) migrants originally from Phetchabun Province who cultivate strawberries and operate seasonal fruit stalls under the same name in the district; the accommodation business run by this family appears to be linked to their existing shop or family name.

Kinship terms

Kinship terms identified in Thai and Isan include ta (grandfather), yai (grandmother), and thao (elder), alongside the English loanword granny. These terms reflect the broader Thai cultural practice of extending kinship address to non-relatives; when used in accommodation names, they evoke the warmth of staying at one's own grandparents' home, in contrast to prestige markers such as "boutique" or "villa," which convey luxury rather than familial relationship.

Positive emotive expressions

Words expressing positive feeling — conveying rest and happiness to guests — include Suk Samran (happy and content), Sabai Di (comfortable/well), Phak Kai Phak Jai (rest for body and mind), Khiang Suk (beside happiness), and Kan Eng (familiar/one's own kind). Although relatively few such names were found within the riverside Walking Street area specifically, this category may occur more frequently in accommodations situated away from the Mekong riverside, where geographic naming strategies are less available.

Geographic terms

Given that the research area borders the Mekong River, a substantial number of accommodations use geographic terms — "Khong" (Mekong), "Rim Khong" (Mekong riverside), "Ton Khong" (denoting a location near the beginning of Walking Street, not a tree name), "Kaeng" (rapids), and "River" — together with "view," indicating a river-view room. The use of "Khong" and related terms constitutes a salient identity marker in accommodation naming in Chiang Khan District.

Abstract or nostalgic expressions

Only one name in the dataset, Once Upon a Time (Kan Khrang Nueng Na Chiangkhan), employs purely abstract, emotion-laden vocabulary, evoking fond memories of a visit to Chiang Khan and conveying a sense of attachment and lived experience through tourism. This represents a naming strategy distinct from the norm and may constitute an emergent identity feature within Chiang Khan accommodation naming.

Prestige, luxury, and international status terms

Vocabulary denoting luxury and international standard — villa, boutique, royal — reflects a level of service aligned with international tourism standards. Such terms convey greater prestige than local vocabulary and may be oriented toward visitors from other regions of Thailand, particularly Central Thailand, and toward international tourists who seek an authentically local experience while expecting internationally standard accommodation and services.

Personal names and nicknames

A number of accommodation names derive from personal names or nicknames — Ton, Frank, Fa, Tong, Bubpha, Sis — alongside a smaller number of given names, such as Sarit and Panisa. These reflect the broader Thai convention of naming houses or buildings after the owner's nickname or given name, signaling ownership. Nicknames considerably outnumber given names in the dataset, reflecting the informality and family-business character typical of Chiang Khan accommodations.

The toponym "Chiangkhan"

The word "Chiangkhan"/"Chiang Khan" occurs with high frequency to mark location, in addition to identifying the district itself; its use in accommodation names also aids online discoverability. Its pervasiveness likely reflects a deliberate identity strategy intended to reinforce the recognizability of Chiang Khan District, rather than incidental or unmotivated repetition.

Table 3. Language identity markers of Chiang Khan accommodation names

Semantic Category	Example Words/Names	Meaning/Function
Isan dialect words	heuan, hug, siao, berng	heuan = house; hug = love; siao = close friend; berng = to look — word markers of Isan ethnic/regional identity, illustrating dialect as an instrument for constructing ethnic identity
Kinship terms	yai, ta, granny, khun (+ nickname)	Conveys kinship-based intimacy/family warmth, distinct from prestige terms such as "boutique"/"luxury"
Positive emotive expressions	Suk Samran, Sabai Di, Phak Kai Phak Jai, Kiang Suk, Kan Eng	Foregrounds psychological rest (well-being), not merely physical accommodation
Geographic terms	Khong, Rim Khong, River	Anchors identity in the Mekong River as a spatial axis; appears in both Thai and English (River/Riverside) forms
Abstract/nostalgic expressions	Kan Khrang Nueng (Once Upon a Time)	Borrows fairy-tale narrative structure to construct an imaginative, nostalgic identity
Prestige/international status terms	Boutique, Royal, Antique, Villa, Deluxe	English loanwords conveying modernity and international standard, distinct from Isan-marked vocabulary
Personal names/nicknames	Bubpha, Dok, Tong, Sis, Sarit, Panisa	Uses the owner's/relative's name as the place name, indexing personal ownership identity
District name	Chiangkhan/Chiang Khan	Marks location and reinforces the marketing-oriented spatial identity of this well-known tourist street

Overall, the findings in this section demonstrate the language identity of Chiang Khan accommodation names along three principal dimensions: (1) the joint use of Thai and English in naming; (2) a name structure typically composed of [proper name] + [accommodation type] + [Chiangkhan], with the toponym "Chiangkhan" occurring most frequently in the second or final (terminal) position of the name; and (3) at the lexical-semantic level, the most salient identity markers are geographic terms — "Rim Khong," "Khong" — indicating the position and distinguishing feature of Walking Street accommodations, together with Isan dialect vocabulary. The use of English in naming, meanwhile, primarily supports discoverability and dissemination via online media. In addition, the terms "baan," "heuan," "guesthouse," "homestay," "home," and "house" occur, in combination, in thirty-six of the sixty-two names — more than half of the entire corpus — indicating that accommodation names on Walking Street in Chiang Khan District predominantly construct an identity of small-scale, warm, home-like lodging characteristic of Isan domestic hospitality, since the prevalence of "guesthouse" and "homestay" reflects family-run businesses renting out rooms within domestic space, through which guests gain a cultural experience of Chiang Khan as part of their stay.

DISCUSSION

The findings point to two broadly contrasting orientations in the construction of Chiang Khan's tourist-town identity through accommodation naming. The first comprises unmarked names, typically instantiating Structure

Type 2 — [prefix + proper name] + [Hotel/Hostel] + [Chiangkhan] — a pattern common to accommodation businesses throughout Thailand and not specific to Chiang Khan or Isan identity; such names locate the property through the toponym "Chiangkhan" alone, without further indexing local distinctiveness. The second comprises marked names, corresponding to Structure Types 1, 3, and 4, which draw on Isan dialect vocabulary (heuan, hug, siao, berng), kinship terms (yai, ta), and emotive expressions (suk samran, kan eng). These words function as deliberate word markers constructing an "Isan–Chiang Khan" identity, distinct from standard or international language use, consistent with Bucholtz and Hall's (2004, p. 382) account of identity as constructed through relations of similarity and difference: this group of accommodations deliberately differentiates itself from generic international lodging by foregrounding Isan vocabulary as a point of distinction and market appeal.

A further point of interest is the recurrence of hybrid names, such as Suneta Hostel Chiangkhan, which combine a Thai proper name, an English accommodation-type term, and the toponym within a single structure. Such hybrids reflect the multiple, layered identity of Chiang Khan itself: a town that must communicate simultaneously with international tourists as a globally oriented destination while preserving its original local identity. Accommodation names in this area therefore function simultaneously as instruments of communication and as instruments for actively constructing the identity of place.

These patterns also resonate with, and extend, the linguistic-landscape literature on Thai tourist destinations. Where Choeirod and Chanthao (2023) document extensive multilingual diversity on Phuket's Patong Beach shop signage — reflecting a genuinely international visitor base — the Chiang Khan data display a narrower, more deliberately bilingual (Thai–English) pattern oriented toward domestic and regional Isan tourists as much as international visitors. This suggests that linguistic-landscape strategies in Thai tourist towns are not uniform but are calibrated to the specific composition of each destination's visitor base and to the particular local resources — in Chiang Khan's case, the Mekong River and Isan vernacular architecture and dialect — available for identity construction.

The finding that geographic terms referencing the Mekong River constitute the single most frequent identity marker (17.7 percent of names) also lends further empirical support to Jordan's (2012) argument regarding the role of natural resources in space-related identity construction, while extending it to a commercial, tourism-driven naming context rather than the toponymic or surname contexts more commonly examined in that literature. Similarly, the prevalence of kinship terms and family-oriented naming structures corroborates prior findings on the family-business character of Chiang Khan's accommodation sector (Lengwiriyaikul & Charoensiriphonkul, 2017; Kenkum et al., 2023), demonstrating that this economic pattern is not merely incidental but is actively encoded, and reinforced, at the linguistic level through naming choices.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study analyzed sixty-two accommodation names along Walking Street in Chiang Khan District, Loei Province, in order to characterize the language identity constructed through naming practices in this tourist-town context. Four principal conclusions emerge.

Language choice. Names divide into three groups by script: Thai-only (sixteen names, 25.8 percent), which nonetheless frequently embed English loanwords functioning as identity markers (guest house, villa, boutique, homestay) or the symbol "@"; English-only (twelve names, 19.4 percent), which favor "Guest House," "Homestay," "House," and "Home" over "Hotel" so as to convey a home-like, welcoming character while also supporting recognition among foreign visitors and discoverability via online mapping systems; and bilingual Thai–English names (thirty-four names, 54.8 percent), the largest category, which display both direct transliteration (preserving Thai phonology, as in Thai Kan Eng Guesthouse) and sense-based translation conveying deeper emotional resonance (as in Once Upon a Time).

Name structure. Two structural dimensions reflect contrasting identities: a family/community-oriented structure using Thai or Isan dwelling terms (baan, heuan) followed by a personal name or kin term (e.g., Heuan Yai Bubpha, Granny One Guest House), which favors kinship terms over commercial/promotional vocabulary

and thereby conveys family-based identity consistent with Chiang Khan's family-business accommodation sector; and an internationalized commercial structure — [proper name] + [English accommodation type] + [Chiangkhan] (e.g., The Royal Chiangkhan Boutique Hotel) — that reproduces international hotel-naming grammar to communicate with external tourists and to project an internationally standardized level of service.

Content and symbolic identity. Beyond structure, Chiang Khan accommodation names deploy identity markers across several dimensions: a geographic identity anchored in the Mekong River, with "Khong"/"Rim Khong" occurring in eleven names (17.7 percent) — confirming that natural resources are recruited directly as raw material for space-related identity construction; an emotive/affective identity in which some names omit the accommodation-type term altogether in favor of emotive branding (e.g., Pakkaipakjai, Hugloei Hugkan), with "hug" carrying the double sense of "love" (Isan) and "embrace" (English) to convey warmth and care; a digital-era identity marked by the use of "@" in place of the Thai locative particles "na"/"thi," or by unspaced, handle-like concatenation (e.g., Homehugchiangkhan), reflecting a hybridization of formal written language and contemporary digital language suited to present-day tourist behavior; and a sub-spatial identity in which soi (lane) numbers or house numbers are incorporated into names (e.g., Heuan Sabai Di Soi 8, 9 House Chiang Khan) to aid practical wayfinding along Walking Street's many small lanes.

The study further identifies an important inconsistency in the Romanization of "Chiang Khan" itself, which appears as Chiangkan, Chiangkhan, and Chiang Khan across the dataset; local authorities are accordingly encouraged to establish and promote a single standardized Romanized spelling consistent with correct Thai orthographic principles.

Language identity, overall. The language used to name accommodations actively strengthens the identity of this tourist town through eight recurrent lexical strategies: (1) Isan dialect words, reflecting regional linguistic identity; (2) kinship terms, reflecting Thai cultural patterns of language use; (3) positive emotive expressions oriented toward tourism and rest; (4) geographic terms anchored in the Mekong River; (5) abstract expressions conveying emotion and memory; (6) prestige/luxury terms drawn from English loanwords (e.g., villa); (7) personal names and nicknames; and (8) the toponym "Chiangkhan" itself.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

- 1) Future research should extend beyond Walking Street to accommodation names in surrounding areas of Chiang Khan District, in order to assess whether the identity patterns identified here hold, intensify, or diminish outside this core tourist corridor.
- 2) Future research should examine the naming of other categories of tourism-related business — retail shops, restaurants, and service providers — within Chiang Khan District, to determine whether the identity markers identified in accommodation naming extend across the broader commercial linguistic landscape.
- 3) Comparative research examining the naming of tourist sites and accommodations in other secondary Thai tourist towns, at the district or town level, is recommended, both to test the generalizability of the present findings and to support the deliberate construction and reinforcement of place identity in other locations.

Note: This research was funded by Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Khon Kaen University

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