

1 Introduction

Pride is a phenomenon that has reached well beyond its historical and political roots in post-Stonewall USA to become a truly global celebration of the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual etc.) movement. With Pride events and Pride-like movements now taking place in diverse areas of the world, we see various expressions of LGBTQIA+ solidarity that, while ostensibly tethered to Pride's historical and symbolic roots, have also taken on both regional and localized forms in accordance with the particular experiences and circumstances of each community. Given the variety of forms that Pride takes (e.g., political demonstrations, parades), Markwell and Waitt (2009) see an ideology of Pride informing and shaping most LGBTQIA+ festivals, explaining that these events are undergirded by a creative politics that opens "possibilities of novelty, new narratives and alternative futures" (p. 163). Pride events may therefore be thought of as polysemic rather than monolithic or inherently homogenous (Ammaturo, 2016). Simply put, and despite surface observations of commonality (e.g., the use of rainbow flags and universalizing slogans such as "Love is Love"), it is evident that Pride is neither a "one size fits all" phenomenon, nor, and more critically speaking with respect to this Element, simply a neocolonial imposition of Western value systems on "others" with different cultures and interests.

It is therefore with this understanding in mind that we assemble as sociolinguistic/discourse scholars who have research interests in how Pride is manifested and practiced in Asian contexts to provide a contemporary account and analysis of recent Pride(like) events in this region of the globe. To this end we traverse interrelated yet also distinct manifestations of Pride across, respectively, Thailand (Pavadee), the Philippines (Christian), Taiwan (Li-Chi), and Hong Kong (Ben) by bringing together aspects of individual projects we have recently conducted as situated researchers and residents in these locales. In doing so, our research on Pride draws on Gopinath's (2007, p. 343) notion of "an alternative mapping of sexual geographies that links disparate transnational regions"; an approach which attempts to move beyond what often appears to be a singular focus on either the local, or national, or the global (Chiang and Wong, 2016). Our collective aim under such an approach is therefore to unpack how ideologies of Pride may be appropriated, negotiated, and often reworked by people on the ground across these locales in their pursuit of alternative queer futures (i.e., futures that are not foretold under dominant Western discourses of LGBTQIA+ Pride but that are bound to particular sociohistorical flows in the building of more equitable, resilient, and sustainable communities).

Bringing together our research in this way means that we are able to establish a dialogue that encompasses points of theoretical and methodological synergy. This is a synergy that, in turn, leads, we hope, to a richer understanding of Pride in Asia and its significance as an indicator of LGBTQIA+ sociolinguistic action and stasis/change in the region. As such, we all work to various degrees in alignment with the approaches of linguistic (or semiotic) landscape (LL) research. Specifically, with our focus on Pride events, we are concerned with how language and other semiotic forms related to gender and sexuality, and their intersections with other social categories, are impacted by, interact with, and (re)shape the LL of public spaces (Borba and Hiramoto, 2024) with relation to the events we investigate. Most importantly, and as stated above, our work is incumbent upon a prioritization of the local vis-à-vis the transregional, as we seek to highlight sociolinguistic actions that are not always visible in a research field that is often dominated by Western-centric accounts and perspectives.

Accordingly, our LL research is presented here in dialogue with theoretical and methodological formations initiated through the interdisciplinary approaches of what may be loosely termed as queer Asian studies or “Asia as method” (Chen, 2010). As above, these approaches foreground local queer perspectives with the aim of provincializing hegemonic Western-derived theories of gender, sexuality, and social action, as well as addressing global imbalances in knowledge production and representation. Emphasizing transregional commitments and possibilities (Chiang and Wong, 2016), research in queer Asian studies recognizes not only extant commonalities across Asian regions but also the heterogeneities that incorporate diverse scales of queer sexualities related to flows of people, ideas, and actions toward a conceptual understanding of “Asias” in the plural (Ho and Blackwood, 2022) rather than a monolithic “Other” in counterpoint to the West. As a consequence of the drive to provincialize knowledge production from the West, scholars working within the approaches of queer Asian studies have sought to displace theory from high academia by building on understandings from those taking action on the ground (Luther and Loh, 2019).

In practice, working in alignment with such a position means that although we may draw upon concepts that have developed from post-structuralist Western (queer) theorizing, namely identity, intertextuality, intersectionality, sexual citizenship, and homonationalism, we seek to understand how these constructs may be understood and/or (re)imagined through Pride events via a local or transregional lens. A case in point is Puar’s (2007) theory of homonationalism which was originally posited in response to the cynical co-option of Pride discourse by the US state to draw a distinction between the progressive and inclusive policies supposedly practiced by the West and the regressive,

misogynistic, and homophobic policies of the enemy, in this case some Islamic states. In most of the Asian Pride events we cover here, we can certainly discern actions that might be labeled as homonationalist, in that the organizers seek to maximize the mutually beneficial relationship between the state and the LGBTQIA+ community. Yet, unlike Puar's concept of homonationalism, in these cases homonationalism is more a strategy from below, mobilized by people who often have to work in spaces of civic restriction, illiberalism, and authoritarianism (see also Lazar, 2017; Kong, 2023).

It is therefore by following this grounded approach, with all of us using participatory methods in our studies, that we aim to establish a transregional overview of Pride in Asia via our research narratives from a selection of Pride(like) events. Ultimately, this involves highlighting aspects of these Asian Pride movements where we see significant discursive and material overlaps in strategy, staging, and direction, and also particularities and peculiarities that demonstrate the significance of localness and the use of specific linguistic/semiotic resources to spread the message of LGBTQIA+ solidarity, equality, and legitimacy in the region.

In this introductory section then, we first provide the necessary background to Pride movements, along with a brief overview of LL research that has explored the significance of Pride events as gatherings of people who collectively aim to “queer” public spaces (Ammaturo, 2016). This section of the Element ends with an outline of the research contained herein. It is therefore our hope that by bringing together this research, we can establish more concretely and in greater detail the significance of linguistic/semiotic practices observed in Pride events in Asia that rework and often depart from globalizing LGBTQIA+ discursive flows. In this way, we expect our Element to provide readers with more expansive and inclusive conceptions of what Pride may mean to communities and in places outside of dominant Euro-American spheres of understanding and interpretation.

1.1 Researching and Understanding Pride Movements: Linguistic Landscape Approaches

Pride events stand as an enduring expression of the transnational LGBTQIA+ movement, providing opportunities for LGBTQIA+ people to gain visibility and legitimacy in their respective locales. Decades after the first Pride march in 1970, held in Christopher Street, New York, Pride and Pride-like movements have spread to urban and rural areas internationally, contributing to Pride's status as a symbol of the global struggle for LGBTQIA+ recognition (Markwell and Waitt, 2009; Ong, Lewis, and Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2021; Pak and Hiramoto,

2021; Rowlett and Go, 2024). According to Outright International (2021), ninety-two countries celebrated Pride in 2016. This number grew in 2022 with 105 countries holding Pride in their respective locales (Outright International, 2022). The growing number, in part, represents the continued role of Pride marches as a predominant platform for reaching out, creating visibility, and political claim-staking for different LGBTQIA+ communities. By marching in Pride parades, LGBTQIA+ people and their allies can claim public space in heteronormative dominant societies and build a collective bond with other members of the community (Engel, 2001).

While Pride marches within liberal and democratic domains of the Global North have largely taken on a celebratory tone, it is crucial to note that outside of these conducive environments, Pride assumes distinctive contours to manage social, political, and cultural norms and mores according to where such events take place. Adaptations of Pride in Asia, for example, which has sixteen member organizations affiliated with the international organization Interpride (2020), present a variety of opportunities for rethinking what Pride is and looks like in the countries of this region. In Singapore, for example, the annual Pink Dot event is held in a context where nearly all forms of public protest are outlawed. This means that the organizers have had to carefully strategize their rendering of Pride to align with governmental priorities regarding the traditional values that constitute good citizenship in Singapore. In practice, this involves the use of a nonconfrontational display of entertaining public engagement in place of Western-style protest marches (Phillips, 2013; Lazar, 2017; Rowlett and Go, 2024). Likewise, Pride in Phnom Penh highlights the carnivalesque in its Tuk Tuk Race, reflecting commercial and touristic forces that figure strongly in Cambodia's state sanctioned national imaginary (Rowlett and Go, 2024). Meanwhile, Shanghai Pride consisted of different activities, such as art and film exhibitions and themed talks rather than a public gathering, before being shut down in a climate of increasing censorship in Mainland China in 2020 (Jiang, 2020).

It is in this sense therefore, that one understanding of Pride in Asia might be reached via a transregional approach that is sensitive to discursive constructions of what Chua (2012) has theorized as “pragmatic resistance” (see also Rowlett and Go, 2024). Such acts of pragmatic resistance might therefore be read into how the organizers of Pride events in illiberal contexts, such as those above, are compelled to repurpose both ideologies of Pride and nationalist-oriented ideologies of good citizenship, resulting in discursive entanglements that tread a fine line between stating their cause and complying with societal and/or governmental expectations of what is or isn't permissible with respect to challenging the status quo. At the same time, however, and given the diverse sociocultural

contexts we cover in this Element, we need to be wary of oversimplification in subscribing to dominant themes of commonality, recognizing that Pride, in the cases represented here, often intersects with broader, yet locally derived social movements and concerns.

In terms of researching Pride, it is understandable that these public-facing LGBTQIA+ events have provided rich sites for investigation in the field of language, gender, and sexuality, particularly from an LL perspective. Linguistic landscape is a field that draws from sociolinguistics and language policy to study how languages are visually displayed and hierarchized in multilingual societies. As Shohamy and Ben-Rafael (2015, p. 1) define it, LL is research focused on “the presence, representation, meanings and interpretation of languages displayed in public spaces.” While this concern with the visibility of language in a given territory is the foundation of LL, such scholarship has also taken on a multimodal and multisemiotic orientation, reflecting a more holistic understanding of the relationship between language and other semiotic modes that constitute public space (Lazar, 2021). In this respect, LL analysis has extended to a consideration of, for example, the visual and corporeal, and the interplay between offline and online spaces (Maly and Blommaert, 2019). Especially pertinent to the examination of Pride events is an analytical focus in LL studies on how “spaces are themselves performed semiotically i.e. spaces accrue particular social meanings through the process of semiosis” (Lazar, 2021, p. 488). That is, in what ways does the use of meaning-making resources (signs, bodies, actions) create spaces for visibility and representations of LGBTQIA+ people?

In recent years there have been a number of gender/sexuality-related LL studies that investigate how semiotic processes facilitate the spatialization of sexuality. A few important examples include research on the use of English signage in the LL of Tokyo’s gay district (Baudinette, 2018), and in the adult entertainment areas of Bangkok (Santos and Saisuwan, 2023), as well as on homonormative signage used in middle-class residential areas of the US (Motschenbacher, 2020b). On Pride events specifically, Milani (2015) used an LL approach to analyze the Johannesburg Pride Festival, arguing that Joburg Pride’s claims to urban space are based on “an alignment with state-sanctioned, rights-based discourses of lesbian and gay identities,” while counteractions in these urban spaces by the One in Nine Campaign (a queer activist group) can be seen as “spatial disruptions that problematise an overly optimistic reliance on sexual identities as catalysts for political action” (p. 436). In Singapore, Pak (2023) focuses on the offline/online nexus to investigate the circulability of Pink Dot counter discourse, through messages posted to a publicly accessible virtual map of the city. Meanwhile, Rowlett and Go’s (2024) LL study of Phnom Penh

Pride illustrates the ways in which queer visibility and issues in an illiberal context are strategically made in conjunction with other discourses. These are commercial discourses of consumption and tourism, and international LGBTQIA+ discourse, that are brought together with the Cambodian government's discourse of national development and public health. At the same time, however, this strategy results, the authors suggest, in the privileging of certain LGBTQIA+ identities (e.g., gay and lesbian expatriates and tourists) over others (e.g., the urban poor).

In sum, all these studies illustrate the value of LL as a methodological/analytical approach in elucidating and interrogating the role of sexuality in the discursive configuration of spatial contexts. Furthermore, these studies highlight how the visibility of sexuality within these spaces is intricately enmeshed in wider sociopolitical and cultural contexts and regimes of power. For example, one consequence of these entanglements is that the empowerment frequently associated with visibility can unintentionally perpetuate and establish hierarchies within communities marginalized due to their sexual orientation (Milani and Levon, 2016).

By building on many of these foundational insights, the research presented in this Element therefore aims to provide a transregional account, from an LL perspective, of more recent Pride events in Asian contexts. Methodologically speaking, our LL data encompasses, for the most part, the capture of audiovisual and textual data (signs, interactions, speeches, media reports) from each Pride event, which are analyzed qualitatively according to the semiotic processes (e.g., indexicality, stancetaking) that inform the linguistic/visual/discursive choices on display across both physical and online spaces. Additionally, our research operationalizes observational methods through on-site/online participation in the events (Pavadee, Christian, and Li-Chi) along with our perspectives as LGBTQIA+ community members with vested interests in the promotion and organization of local/international events (Ben). Our participatory orientations to the research are, in this way, aimed at harnessing the experiential qualities that go into the creation and formation of the LLs, where reflexive practices of “looking alongside” rather than “looking at” participants in the LL (Seals, 2017) have allowed us to gain insights from multiple perspectives. In turn, these methodological practices have enabled us, in accordance with approaches from queer Asian studies, to provide a grounded analysis in our respective sections – one that is aware of historical and social developments in each context, alongside sensitivities with relation to locally specific ways of knowing and doing.

1.2 Preview of Sections

We begin with Pavadee Saisuwan's study in the Thai context which investigates the LL of the first LGBTQIA+-led pro-democracy protest that took place in Bangkok in 2020. The analysis involves examining signage, speeches, and activities during the protest through the lens of the three semiotic processes of iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure (Irvine and Gal, 2000). The findings demonstrate the prominence of male femininity or *kathoeyness* in various linguistic resources, including lexical choice and intertextuality. While other LGBTQIA+ identities received less acknowledgment, there was a differentiation between LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ individuals, who united in an alliance for democracy against "dictatorship." The LL of the protest highlights how *kathoeyness* was used as an icon representing and embracing Thai LGBTQIA+ people of diverse identities. It created an inclusive space within the protest and allowed Thai LGBTQIA+ communities to assert their identities not only as LGBTQIA+ individuals but also as Thai citizens.

In the following section, Christian Go investigates the ways in which the 2023 Metro Manila Pride march (MM Pride) is constructed as a space for intersectional LGBTQIA+ activism. Using photographic data he collected during the event, the section examines the deployment of discursive and semiotic resources and the concomitant stances that MM Pride participants take up in their representational tools (e.g., banners, placards, clothing). The stances exhibit adaptation and negotiation of discourses concerning sexual identity politics as well as socioeconomic and political issues. The agglomeration of these discourses in the LL reflects MM Pride's evolution as a platform for intersectional advocacy and solidarity. This section therefore contributes to the understanding of how a Pride march in an Asian context offers an entry point into understanding how intersectional discourse motivates alternative imaginings of Pride and a collective push for visibility, inclusivity, and social change.

The next section details an LL analysis of Taiwan LGBT+ Pride from 2010 to 2020 by Li-Chi Chen. The analytical focus is on how heteronormativity is challenged and how Taiwanese localness (i.e., *tai-ness*) is reified in Pride slogans and fashion. The findings suggest that Taiwanese Pride marchers challenge heteronormativity through homonormative practices, the discursive construction of sexual desire, the struggle against traditional Confucianism, the redefinition of masculinity, and the marginalization of heterosexuality. On the other hand, they were found to reify *tai-ness* through the construction of dual identities, the application of local semiotics, the participation in issues of social justice, and the use of mockery as shared humor. These strategies were used by LGBTQIA+ Taiwanese to negotiate their local identities as multiethnic and

humorous queer Taiwanese and their global identities as knowledgeable sexual moderns. The diachronic data also revealed the intersections between Pride and the social problems that Taiwan has faced over the past decade.

The final context of Pride covered in this Element departs somewhat from on-site LL research on Pride events to focus on the discursive construction of place vis-à-vis the Gay Games in Hong Kong. In this section, Ben Rowlett draws on the notion of “homotopia,” as used in sociolinguistic studies of sexuality and sexual citizenship in relation to space and place, to interpret a survey and critical discourse analysis of the (online) LL of the Gay Games, an international LGBTQIA+ mass-scale sporting and cultural event, which was held in Asia for the first time in November 2023. The analysis focuses on the tensions that emerge within this LL, particularly in relation to entanglements of socio- and geopolitical discourses of Pride, nationalism, security, and (sexual) citizenship.

After a short conclusion that brings together all sections, our Element wraps up with a commentary by Mie Hiramoto. In her commentary, Mie adds her own perspective to the findings of this research and the ongoing significance of sociolinguistic studies of LGBTQIA+ public-facing events in Asia and beyond.

2 Male Femininity, Citizenship, and Democracy in the Linguistic Landscape of a “Pride” Protest in Bangkok

In this first section, I (Pavadee) focus on *Mob mai mungming tae tungting kha khun ratthaban* “Not a cutesy mob but a flamboyant one, sir, Mr. Government,” which was the first LGBTQIA+-led pro-democracy protest that took place in Bangkok in 2020. Unlike previous political protests, this movement had a Pride-like atmosphere, incorporating elements from queer culture and pop culture, making it unique to the pro-democracy movement in Thailand. By considering the signage and activities during the protests as part of semiotic assemblages (Pennycook, 2017), my objective is to explore how Thai LGBTQIA+ communities utilized linguistic resources within the LL of the protest to express their citizenship (Isin, 2017) in the localized form of pro-democracy “Pride” protests. Using the analytical framework of three semiotic processes: iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure (Irvine and Gal, 2000), my analysis reveals the underlying ideologies present in the protest and the significance of male femininity or *kathoeyness* in contributing to the inclusivity advocated by the protest.

Thai society has displayed considerable engagement in promoting gender equality and related issues. In Thai LGBTQIA+ movements, as in other societies worldwide, the principles of equality and inclusivity have played a central role, notably showcased through Pride events. The focus on LGBTQIA+ rights in Thailand predominantly revolves around the interests of LGBTQIA+

communities and activists. Despite the growing awareness within society, this concern remains somewhat detached from mainstream Thai politics. However, in 2020, Thai LGBTQIA+ communities made a significant stride in Thai national politics. They spearheaded Pride-like protests that intersected with other demonstrations addressing political and royal reform, equality, and human rights, thus elevating their visibility and impact.

With a focus on the pro-democracy protest, I address the concept of citizenship with relation to the LL. In line with previous research (e.g., Milani, 2015; Milani and Levon, 2016; Milani et al., 2018), I examine the intersection between the LL, sexuality, and citizenship. The protest is considered an act of performative citizenship (Isin, 2017), as the protesters, by participating in the movement, assert their rights as citizens of the country. Furthermore, as Richardson (1998, p. 88) argues, “claims to citizenship status, at least in the West, are closely associated with the institutionalisation of heterosexual, as well as male, privilege.” The movement led by LGBTQIA+ communities in Bangkok also engages with the concept of sexual citizenship, which is defined in terms of sexual rights (Richardson, 2000).

Adopting the concept of sexual citizenship within the protest demonstrates how Thai LGBTQIA+ communities align with their counterparts worldwide through Pride-like movements. Altman (1997) argues that sexual citizenship relies on rights shared across national and cultural boundaries and presumes universally recognized forms of homosexual or transgender identities, leading to the concept of global sexual citizenship, which assumes homogenization. This is reflected in the Pride movement, which has become a global phenomenon connecting people with diverse gender and sexual identities from various contexts. The movement enables these individuals to move in the same direction as an imagined community, despite their differences. Jackson (2004) claims that there was no homosexual rights movement in Thailand, which undermines the idea of global sexual citizenship. The protest under study here demonstrates the progress in Thai society over the past twenty years, as LGBTQIA+ people have united and expressed a standpoint that is not only national but also aligned with the global Pride movement and the concept of global sexual citizenship.

Despite aligning with the global movement, the term *gay*, which is adopted from the West and associated with modernization and participation in the international sphere (Jackson, 2004), is not prevalent in the protest. The localness of the protest under study lies in the use of a local gender category and the local performance of male femininity as important resources. As will be shown later in this section, the identity of *kathoei* (male-to-female transgenders in Thailand) is a significant part of the protest. Male femininity, or effeminacy, is considered central to the gender identity performance of Thai *kathoei* and gay

men. According to Duangwiset and Jackson (2021), femininity is not exclusive to women and male-to-female transgenders in Thai society but can be adopted by gay men depending on the social context. Effeminacy does not carry the same negative perception for gay men as it does in the West and is associated with “playful bitchiness” (Duangwiset and Jackson, 2021, p. 10). This provides an opportunity for Thai LGBTQIA+ communities to use various resources associated with male femininity to make a powerful statement or an impactful assertion during the protest.

2.1 Pro-Democracy Protests in Thailand in 2020

The year 2020 was an important time in Thai politics. A series of protests led by different groups of people took place across the country. This pro-democracy movement was built up from people’s dissatisfaction with the “undemocratic” election in 2019, which resulted in the pro-military government, originally the coup government of 2014. The series of protests began in earnest after the constitutional court’s decision to dissolve the Future Forward Party, one of the main opposition parties, and ban its leaders from politics for ten years. In addition, the outbreak of COVID-19 exacerbated dissatisfaction with the government’s ineffective management, leading to continuous protests. The anti-government protests not only expressed dissatisfaction with the government of the time, calling for its resignation, but also included demands for constitutional reform and monarchy reform.

University and high school students both played a leading role in the 2020 pro-democracy movement. The student activist group Bad Student started with demands based on the school context, such as school uniforms and hairstyles and the education system (see Kraijariyawet, 2021). Their movement also touched on values that have long been influential in Thai society, such as gratitude, patriarchy, and authoritarianism. The student-led protests later broadened to include issues beyond the school context, such as equality and freedom of expression. They are also part of the movement calling for reform of the monarchy. The protests, including those organized by Free Youth and the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration (UFTD) in 2020, are believed to be the first time in Thai history that students have organized large-scale protests against the monarchy (Lertchoosakul, 2021).

The pro-democracy protests that took place in Thailand in 2020 took a different form from the pro-democracy protests of the past. The protests were organized as flash mobs, sometimes simultaneously in different places, both in Bangkok and other provinces, rather than as prolonged protests. They were also leaderless, which made the protests agile and effective without