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## **CHAINS ARE KING: A PRELIMINARY LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SINGAPORE'S MID-TIER HOTEL NAMES**

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**Abstract:** *The intersections between tourism and language have been studied from a largely sociolinguistic perspective, particularly on the Linguistic Landscapes (LL) of tourist sites. The linguistic study of names, which have ramifications for the socio-cultural and marketing realm of tourism, has often been neglected. This communication focuses on the naming strategies of Singapore's mid-tier hotel names. The authors extracted and analyzed the names of 122 mid-tier hotels to answer three research questions: (1) what are the keywords used to describe the type of accommodation provided, and how frequently do they appear?; (2) what are the naming strategies used to name mid-tier hotels in Singapore?; (3) what words are used to market the services and/or experiences that hotels provide? The paper finds that mid-scale hotels often clearly indicate the service they provide with the word "Hotel" in their name. These hotels are also often owned by chains and, hence, refer to such companies in the related hotel names – be they openly or more obscurely. Furthermore, hotel names convey important information to travelers on the type and quality of service they can expect through the use of certain lexical items and, thus, functions as a means of social communication between the hoteliers and guests.*

**Keywords:** *Hotel Names, Onomastics, Tourism, Urban and Linguistic Landscapes, Singapore*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Language and Tourism

Since the 1980s, there has been an increasing body of literature on the intersection between language and tourism. Cohen and Cooper's seminal work studied the sociolinguistic features of verbal encounters in tourist interactions in Thailand<sup>1</sup>. Other authors have also looked at how language is used in travel brochures to market a place as a travel destination<sup>2</sup>, along with the linguistic and cultural changes brought about by tourism in a region<sup>3</sup>. Over the past two decades, research concerning Linguistic Landscape (LL) has become more prominent in the study of language and tourism. LL is defined as "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region"<sup>4</sup>, which is "an expression of multilingualism in society, a site where language, together with other semiotic resources, is involved in the symbolic construction of multilingual spaces"<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, tourism and LL have come to dominate discussions on tourism and language<sup>6</sup>. As Moriarty suggests<sup>7</sup>, Semiotics, or the study of signs and how they convey meaning, has also occupied a prominent position in the study of tourism and language. Scholars have studied the use of semiotic language in tourism marketing<sup>8</sup> and the relationships between the semiotics of text and space and globalization in tourism<sup>9</sup>. This is unsurprising, as LL and Semiotic Studies are highly intertwined; Adam Jaworski writes that LL "is a prime semiotic resource for the tourist consumption of place", given that written signs comprising the LL create a sense of place and are "performative displays of identity for their producers and consumers"<sup>10</sup>.

### 1.2 Hotel Names as Brand Names

Notwithstanding, research at the intersection of language and tourism tends to get overshadowed by the scholarly analysis on LL (and Semiotics) in the tourism industry. As noted by scholars, hotel naming has rarely been discussed in academic literature, be it on linguistic studies on tourism or works on hospitality<sup>11</sup>. Hotel names can be regarded as brand names<sup>12</sup> that identify the product or service that they sell. Brand names, beside distinguishing one brand from another, also matches the "unconscious meanings" associated with the product<sup>13</sup>, and hence, can promote positive associations that help to market tourist destinations.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cohen, E., Cooper, R.L., (1986), pp. 533-563.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Moeran, B., (1983), pp. 93-108.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hoffman, P.R., (1992), pp. 77-92.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Landry, R., Bourhis, R.Y., (1997), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Moriarty, M., (2014), pp. 457-463.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kallen, J.L., (2008), pp. 270-283; Bruyèl-Olmedo, A., Juan-Garau, M., (2015), pp. 598-619; Ruzaitè, J., (2017), pp. 197-220; Lu, S., Li, G., Xu, M., (2020), p. 104005; Bruyèl-Olmedo, A., Juan-Garau, M., (2020), pp. 157-174; da Silva, A.M., Tjung, Y.N., Wijayanti, S.H., Suwartono, C., (2021), pp. 295-318; Yan, X., (2019), pp. 198-217; Thongtong, T., (2016), pp. 72-87; Remlinger, K.A., (2018), pp. 261-286.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Moriarty, M., (2014), cit., pp. 457-463.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Kot, S., Grabara, J., Kolcun, M., (2014), pp. 1-6.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jaworski, A., Thurlow, C., (2010), *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Jaworski, A., (2012), p. 569.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kormazina, O.P., Ruban, D.A., Yashalova, N.N., (2022), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Kotler, P., Armstrong, G., (2010), *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Danesi, M., (2011), pp. 175-185.

Hotel names are crucially, “are becoming part of a persuasive strategy in the process of selecting a destination”<sup>14</sup>. A good hotel name facilitates hotel recognition, which, in turn, leads to more guests selecting the hotel due to a good brand image, and higher profits for the hotel in the long term. The decision to use a chained-brand name, for instance, *Ascott*, *Hilton Hotel* or *InterContinental Hotel*, of which many hotels are named after (and hence the title, “chains are king”) is connected to greater brand recognition and an association with trusted, quality service. This point will be noted in the article as the authors discuss about the use of chains in hotel naming strategies in this paper. It is evident that hotel names are integral to the marketing strategy and thus, as aforementioned, function as brand names.

### 1.3 The Linguistics of Brand/Hotel Names

Consumers often use brand names to make their first decision on whether to purchase a product, which explains the need to have a positive brand image as aforementioned. Accordingly, brand names should have certain traits that result in memorable names that allude to a good image<sup>15</sup>. This has led to a set of rules to make brand names memorable and easy to remember, one that draws heavily from linguistic research. Chan and Huang developed a three-point checklist to create good brand names: marketing, legal, and linguistic<sup>16</sup>. One suggestion by the authors is to utilize phonetic knowledge to form pronounceable, simple, and positive names. While other criteria of a good brand name exist in their taxonomy, they concurred with previous studies that the linguistic component is perhaps the most important, given that linguistic strategies of naming accord the brand name market promotion and legal protection, thereby encompassing the other two components<sup>17</sup>.

Such linguistic requirements also extend into the realm of hotel names, which are brand names, and convey information about the qualities of the hotel (and brand) experience. Nash rightly points out that names are shaped by economic considerations, since “attractive, memorable, and remembered names can lead to better business and greater hotel occupancy”<sup>18</sup>. Hotel names, according to Nash, must be readable, thereby supporting Chan and Huang’s phonetic requirement that a brand name should be pronounceable and pleasing when read or heard<sup>19</sup>. The hotelier walks on a tightrope; on the one hand, he/she may wish to add a touch of linguistic innovation to the hotel name to differentiate itself from other hotels. Yet, these linguistic operations cannot be at the expense of profitability; after all, the hotel name is part of the overall marketing strategy of hotels to generate revenue.

Hotel naming has been framed “an act of social communication”<sup>20</sup>, where the hotel establishment communicates certain information about the hotel (for instance, the location of the hotel, the types of available accommodation) to travelers who might have specific travel requests. Adjectives and other emotive words are routinely used to denote positive feelings, experiences, or expectations brought about by the hotel and/or its

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Plenković, M., Galičić, V., Kučič, V., (2010), cit., pp. 207-218.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Robertson, K., (1989), pp. 61-71.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Huang, Y.Y., Chan, A.K.K., (1997), pp. 320-335.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Charmasson, H., (1988), *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Nash, J., (2016), cit., pp. 541-547.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Huang, Y.Y., Chan, A.K.K., (1997), cit., pp. 320-335.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Chen, L.N., (2021), cit., pp. 236-242.

provided services<sup>21</sup>. Similar to the identity-building function of other names, the choice of hotel names “is an essential feature of a hotel that conveys its identity, uniqueness, and value proposition”<sup>22</sup>, and is part of the marketing strategy to create an effective brand image.

#### 1.4 Place Names and Tourism

Names convey information about the locality’s culture, heritage, and spoken languages. Scholars have noted that names can transmit cultural knowledge and even guide people in their course of action<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, as Light argues, the cultural importance attached to seemingly simple place names can make them extraordinary<sup>24</sup> and prompt many tourists to visit them. The author provided notable examples such as *42nd Street* (a musical set in New York), *Mornington Crescent* (a London tube station that features in a popular comedy show), and *Baker Street* (the fictional address of Sherlock Holmes in London), that have been sacralized through popular culture. In these examples, it is representations of the name, that have been created and shaped by popular culture, that “play an important role in validating the visit”<sup>25</sup>.

At the same time, the links between hotels and tourism, as well as the economy, cannot be understated. Hotels are means of support for local tourism. They are used as sites to provide tourists with accommodation, when they want to visit urban touristic areas<sup>26</sup> and when they intend to organize their visits as forms of educational tourism<sup>27</sup>, as well as different types of entertainment tourism<sup>28</sup>. Domestic tourism<sup>29</sup> and international tourism<sup>30</sup> are, indeed, indispensable elements of sustainability for the national income to many countries worldwide. This point is notable especially in the context where cities have increasingly competed for national and international flows of capital, people, businesses, and even tourists due to the entrepreneurial agenda that characterizes neo-liberalized urban political economies<sup>31</sup>. Consequently, many entrepreneurial strategies have been implemented to shape the image of these cities – one that is defined by economic growth, modernization, and progress. Naming practices, as scholars have noted, play an important role in the process. Place names can have a certain form of symbolic capital (i.e., they are seen to be prestigious and valued for it), one that is cultivated through place branding and marketing strategies, which can be exchanged for economic capital and becomes a resource to be sold<sup>32</sup>. This is what is known as toponymic commodification or the use of place names as commodities; oftentimes, urban public spaces are renamed by corporate sponsors and naming rights are sold<sup>33</sup>. A major shift “that will likely reshape the toponymic landscape of the next century is the commercialisation of public

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ivanov, S., Seyitoğlu, F., Dimitrova, F., (2021), *passim*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Al-Jarf, R., (2021), *cit.*, pp. 160-170.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Leslie, P.L., Skipper, J.K., (1990), pp. 273-282.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Light, D., (2014), p. 145.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Light, D., (2014), p. 146.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Light, D., Crețan, R., Voiculescu, S., Jucu I.S., (2020), pp. 465-477.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Light, D., Crețan, R., Dunca, A., (2019), pp. 565-584.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Urry, J., (2002), *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Light, D., Crețan, R., Dunca, A., (2021), pp. 742-754.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Urry, J., (2002), *cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Harvey, D., (1989), *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Light, D., Young, C., (2015), p. 437.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Rose-Redwood, R., Vuolteenaho, J., Young, C., Light, D., (2019), p. 748.

placenames systems”<sup>34</sup> and hence, the study of marketing technologies used by businesses yield important insights in both transforming the toponymic landscape and producing urban spaces<sup>35</sup>.

This research note aims to add to the small, but growing body of scholarly discussions on hotel names, an area that has yet to be fully studied<sup>36</sup>. There have been some studies of hotel names in recent years. Besides the linguistic studies by Nash and Chen on hotel names, Crețan and Matthews write of how a tour operator from a tour agency reacts to martyr inscriptions in Timișoara, Romania, where streets were renamed to commemorate local heroes. The rapid shifts in place renaming and the lack of updated maps resulted in confusion amongst tourists<sup>37</sup>. Likewise, the commodification and subsequent renaming of sporting arenas, like stadia, can be a source of competition among fans who may travel from afar to watch their favorite teams play in these places, thereby exacerbating social tensions and inequalities<sup>38</sup>.

This study aims to broaden the existing literature on the linguistic analysis of hotel names which has only been studied by a few authors thus far and limited to a small number of contexts. Two reasons motivate this study: the importance of names in the overall marketing strategy of the hotel<sup>39</sup>, as is the case with how other brand/product names market their respective brands/products<sup>40</sup>, along with Singapore’s importance as a tourist destination (see Section 2). The authors paid particular attention to studying the semantics of words used to name mid-tier hotels in Singapore, and in so doing, contribute to studies on how hotels (as brands) market themselves in the act of social communication. By utilizing words that convey a positive connotation about the services they offer, hotels can also attract the coveted tourist dollar, and hence, fits into the wider arguments on toponymic commodification and the economic value of place names.

## 2. SINGAPORE AS A TRAVEL DESTINATION

Singapore is an island city-state located in Southeast Asia. In 2016, the Republic was the second most visited destination in the Asia-Pacific region by international visitors<sup>41</sup>. International visitor arrivals hit a record of 19.1 million, in 2019. In the same year, the tourism receipts, defined as the expenditure of international inbound tourists, reached S\$27.7 billion. The top five markets for Singapore’s international visitor arrivals are Mainland China, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, and Australia<sup>42</sup>.

Notwithstanding, research on hotel names, despite being an important marketing strategy that can attract tourists as illustrated, has received little attention in Singapore. Tourism research has focused on the planned development of Singapore’s tourism<sup>43</sup>, as

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Rose-Redwood, R., (2011), p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Basik, S., (2020), p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Plenković, M., Galičić, V., Kučič, V., (2010), pp. 207-218; Susanto, P.C., Erfiani, N.M.D., Hartika, L.D., (2015), pp. 235-239; Nash, J., (2016), pp. 541-547; Chen, L.N., (2021), pp. 236-242; Al-Jarf, R., (2021), pp. 160-170.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Crețan, R., Matthews, P.W., (2016), pp. 92-102.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Crețan, R., (2019), pp. 805-825.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Plenković, M., Galičić, V., Kučič, V., (2010), cit., pp. 207-218.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Kapferer, J-N., (2004), *passim*; Lim, S.T.G., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2020), pp. 374-397.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Kok, X.H., (2017), *passim*.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Singapore Tourism Board*, (2019), *passim*.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Teo, P., Chang, T.C., (2002), pp. 117-128.

well as Singapore's tourism management and policies<sup>44</sup>. These studies have focused on how Singapore markets itself as a tourist destination<sup>45</sup>. They have analyzed the role of the state, especially, through the promotional materials of the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and the subsequent reactions of tourists and locals in contesting the STB's tourism marketing strategy. What this study aims to do, which hitherto has not been done, is to investigate the naming strategies adopted by hoteliers as they seek to market their services to tourists.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The authors utilized *Google Hotel Finder* to search for "Hotels in Singapore". A total of 265 hotels located island-wide were shown. The authors did not limit their searches to hotels situated within a particular geographical location, although they focused on mid-tier hotels given that there are generally more of rooms available within the mid-tier range in Singapore<sup>46</sup>, as well as the fact that majority of rooms built in recent years were constructed in mid-tier hotels<sup>47</sup>. These hotels are usually within the 3-star to 4-star range on *Google Hotel Finder*. Collectively, this yielded a total of 122 hotels, of which 50 were classed as 3-star hotels (40.98%) and the remaining 72 were rated 4-stars (59.02%). The ranking provided was allocated based on factors like the price, amenities, services, and types of accommodations available at the hotel.

The hotel names were compiled in an Excel spreadsheet and annotated for lexical items. The authors noted the frequency according to which these words appeared. Consequently, the authors asked the following three questions. Firstly, what are the keywords used to describe the type of accommodation provided, and how frequently do they appear? This ties in with how brand names are used to identify the product; in the case of hotels, the hotel name often gives overt clues on the type of accommodation the hotel provides. Next, what are the naming strategies used to name mid-tier hotels in Singapore? Lastly, what words are used to market the services and/or experiences that hotels provide? By using certain keywords, meanings relating to efficiency, or quality, or even a personalized travel experience can be communicated to the travelers. The findings for these three questions would be taken up in the next section.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Keywords Describing the Types of Accommodation

The first question discusses the keywords used to discuss the type of accommodation that hotels provide. From the dataset, it is evident that a large majority of mid-tier hotel names, i.e., 73 hotel names (59.84%), include the word "Hotel" (for instance, *D'Hotel Singapore*, *Carlton Hotel Singapore*, *M Hotel Singapore City Center*, *Populous Hotel*, *V Hotel Lavender*, *Village Hotel Changi*, *The Warehouse Hotel*, *Hotel Mono*, *Hotel Clover 33 Jalan Sultan*, *Hotel Bencoolen @ Hong Kong Street*). In the minds of travelers, the word "Hotel" is the clearest indication that the establishment provides

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Chang, T.C., (2016), pp. 139-148; Tan, E.S., Yeoh, B.S.A., Wang, J., (2001), *passim*.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Henderson, J.C., (2007), pp. 261-274; Chang, T.C., Lim, S.Y., (2004), pp. 165-185; Henderson, J.C., (2000), pp. 36-44.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Horwarth HTL*, (2019), *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Savills Hotels*, (2017), *passim*.

accommodation for the weary traveler. These hotel names tend to have locational identifiers to indicate that they are hotels in Singapore (*D'Hotel Singapore*, *Carlton Hotel Singapore*, *M Hotel Singapore City Center*) or the place where the hotel can be found at (*V Hotel Lavender*, *Village Hotel Changi*, *M Hotel Singapore City Center*), and, in some cases, even the exact street of the hotel's address (*Hotel Clover 33 Jalan Sultan*, *Hotel Bencoolen @ Hong Kong Street*). An interesting name is *Aerotel Singapore*, which is one of four hotel names in the sample that blends two words. The hotel name combines two words, *aero* 'of the sky' and *hotel*, and is concomitant with the hotel being an airport transit hotel found in Singapore's Changi Airport.

Nine hotel names (7.38%) have the word "Inn" in their designations. Six of them belong to the *Holiday Inn* or *Holiday Inn Express* brands, under *IHG Hotels and Resorts*, while another is run by *Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc.* Examples include *Holiday Inn Singapore Atrium*, *Holiday Inn Singapore Orchard City Center*, *Holiday Inn Express Singapore Katong*, *Holiday Inn Express Singapore Clarke Quay*, *Holiday Inn Express Singapore Serangoon*, *Holiday Inn Express Singapore Orchard Road*, and *Hilton Garden Inn Singapore Serangoon*. Two hotels in the sample, *Lloyd's Inn* and *Mayo Inn*, are boutique hotels with generally fewer rooms and a smaller hotel capacity, and the word "Inn" conveys this idea.

Among the budget-conscious who still seek a mid-scale hotel, hotel names with words such as "Lodge" or "Rooms" might appeal to them, as it suggests a simple, no-frills, and inexpensive place to spend the night. One hotel name (0.82%), *Travelodge Harbourfront*, has this lexical item, ostensibly a shortened version of the word "Lodging", while three hotel names (2.46%) have the word "Rooms" – *ZEN Rooms Novena*, *ZEN Rooms Arab Street*, and *ZEN Rooms Stevens Road* – all of which are named after the chain *ZEN Rooms*.

On the other hand, there are two hotel names which show words denoting an opulent stay (1.64%). For example, the word "Villa", in *Villa Samadhi Singapore*, suggests a large house located by the countryside or sea. The name supports how the hotel markets itself as a "sanctuary of heritage, nature, and rustic-luxury"<sup>48</sup>, and "a tranquil oasis in the city" that is located by the Labrador Nature Reserve<sup>49</sup>, which, in the Singaporean context, is a rustic area away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Meanwhile, *D'Resort @ Downtown East* is well-known for being a family-friendly accommodation with its larger rooms and a nature-inspired *décor*. The name could also be a play on the word "The Resort", with the apostrophe between the two words giving the brand an air of luxury. A mix of French and English names is observed in some shops in Singapore<sup>50</sup>, as well as other hotels, like the *D'Hotel Singapore*, and such a naming strategy could also appeal to a more cosmopolitan clientele, in line with Singapore's drive to position itself as a global city and give the hotel name a grand feel.

Finally, 34 hotel names (27.87%) do not have any clear indication within their name of the accommodation they are providing. Examples of these include *Mercure Singapore On Stevens*, *Ascott Orchard Singapore*, *M Social Singapore*, *Capri by Fraser*, *China Square*, *Dorsett Singapore*, *YWCA Fort Canning*, *Amara Singapore*, *AMOY*, and *Park Avenue Rochester*. That most of these establishments are owned by chains such as *Accor*, *The Ascott Limited*, *Millennium Hotels and Resorts*, *Dorsett Hospitality International*, and *Amara Hotels & Resorts*, just to name a few, is one plausible reason

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Villa Samadhi Singapore*, (2021), *Homepage*.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Villa Samadhi Singapore*, (2021), *cit.*, *Rooms*.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Ong, K., Ghesquière, J., Serwe, S., (2013), pp. 19-25.

of why most of these hotel names do not have words denoting the type of accommodation given, since there is high brand recognition for these hospitality chains. For savvy travelers, the words “Mercure”, “Ascott”, and “Dorsett”, or a shortened name of a chain (for example, “M”, which denotes properties owned by *Millennium Hotels and Resorts*) in the hotel name alone, conjure notions of the hotel being associated with a group of hotels owned by a larger hospitality company. For the unacquainted, the naming patterns evident in *YWCA Fort Canning*, *AMOY* or *Park Avenue Rochester*, for instance, where a geographical location appears in the name, seem to suggest that the companies might be offering some form of service which is situated at those localities.

#### 4.2 Naming Strategies of Mid-tier Hotel Names

The second research question aimed to study the naming strategies of mid-tier hotel names in the Singaporean context. A whopping 99 hotels in the sample (81.15%) are owned by chains. Of these, 41 hotels are named after the hospitality group owning them. Among other examples, *Ascott Orchard Singapore* (owned by *The Ascott Limited*), *Carlton Hotel Singapore* (owned by *Carlton Properties [Singapore] Private Limited*), *Hilton Garden Inn Singapore Serangoon* (owned by *Hilton*), *Dorsett Singapore* (owned by *Dorsett Hospitality International*), *Hotel NuVe Bugis* (owned by the *NuVe Group*), *Park Hotel Alexandra* (owned by the *Park Hotel Group*), *Hotel Clover 33 Jalan Sultan* (owned by the *Hotel Clover Group*), *Amara Singapore* (owned by *Amara Hotels & Resorts*), *Genting Hotel Jurong* (owned by the *Genting Group*), *Furama RiverFront* (owned by *Furama Hotels International*), *Villa Samadhi Singapore* (owned by *Samadhi Retreats*), and *ZEN Rooms Novena* (owned by *ZEN Rooms*).

Another 10 hotels are named partially after the hotel chains they are owned by. One common strategy is the shortening of the name of the hotel chain in the hotel name. These hotels are *M Social Singapore*, *M Hotel Singapore City Center*, *Studio M Hotel Singapore*, and *Hotel G*. The first three hotels are owned by *Millennium Hotels and Resorts*, while the last is owned by the *GCP Hospitality Group* and, taken collectively, the hotel names reflect a shortened version of the company’s name – one that contains only their first letter. In other instances of a hotel named partially after its brand, such as *Capri by Fraser*, *China Square*, *Capri by Fraser*, *Changi City*, *Wanderlust*, *The Unlimited Collection by Oakwood*, *Ramada by Wyndham Singapore at Zhongshan Park*, *Days Hotel by Wyndham Singapore at Zhongshan Park*, and *XY Hotel Bugis by ASANDA Hotels & Resorts*, the first part of the hotel name, for example, *Capri* or *Ramada*, does not allude to which chain owns the hotel. Yet, the chain running these hotels is clearly evident in the second half of the name (e.g., *Fraser*, *Oakwood*, *Wyndham Singapore*, *ASANDA Hotels & Resorts*). It is also interesting to note that global hotel chains like *Wyndham Hotels* differentiate that the property it owns functions in Singapore through adding the locality behind its name.

Finally, the remaining 48 hotels are not named after a chain. However, upon closer inspection, names such as *Mercure Singapore On Stevens* and *Holiday Inn Express Singapore Katong*, although not indicating the hotel chain that owns these hotels, are rather telling about the portfolio (for example, the *Mercure* portfolio of hotels under *Accor* or *Holiday Inn Express* hotels by *IHG Hotels and Resorts*) that these properties fall under and, consequently, the chain that runs these portfolios. There are other hotel names, like *Village Hotel Bugis*, *Village Hotel Changi*, *Village Hotel Katong*, *Village Hotel Albert Court*, and *Village Hotel Sentosa*, that point to a chain managing these hotels and,



therefore, result in a similar naming strategy. These hotels are run by *Far East Hospitality*, which, although does not lend its organizational name to these five hotels, adopts a similar name and is separated only by the hotel's geographical location.

The trend to name hotels after an organization is also observed in hotels which may not be owned by a hotel chain. Three hotels (2.46%) have such naming practice. They include *YWCA Fort Canning* and *YMCA @ One Orchard*. These hotels are social enterprises of the *Young Women's Christian Association* and *Young Men's Christian Association* respectively, and profit from the hotel support social initiatives from these organizations. The other hotel named after an organization is the *RELC International Hotel*, which is part of the *Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Regional Language Center (RLC)* and is a popular accommodation choice for Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing, and Exhibitions (MICE) travelers.

Associative naming, a common practice among Singaporean toponyms, where the place is named after nearby topographical features or landmarks, be they physical (such as nature reserves or water bodies) or man-made (like roads and buildings)<sup>51</sup>, is also evident in Singaporean mid-tier hotels. A total of five hotel names (4.10%) can be grouped under this category. Unlike other names, like *Hotel Clover 33 Jalan Sultan* or *Village Hotel Changi*, where the hotel name comprises a name pointing to a hotel chain running the hotel and its geographical region or exact location, associative names are purely given after the physical and/or anthropic landscape. *The Warehouse Hotel*, for instance, is named after an iconic warehouse building from 1895<sup>52</sup>, while *Lloyd's Inn* and *The Keong Saik Hotel* are named after the streets where they are located.

Finally, there are 11 descriptive hotel names (9.02%). Two hotel names, such as *The Scarlet Singapore* and *Hotel Mono*, describe the color of the hotel interior and rooms, while another, *Porcelain Hotel*, expresses the hotel's layout of traditional Chinese porcelain. Three hotel names describe certain aspects of where they are located. The name *Nostalgia Hotel Singapore*, which is situated at the historic district of Tiong Bahru, pays homage to the "Singapore's blend of heritage, art, and food culture all in one location"<sup>53</sup>, while *Populous Hotel* describes itself as "an urban mid-tier luxury hotel" for travelers keen to explore the "multi-racial and multi-cultural city"<sup>54</sup>. Just as the word "populous" means 'densely populated', the name is a reference to its location in Singapore, one of the densest cities in the world. Furthermore, the Chinese name of the *Mayo Inn* (美雅) can be translated literally as 'beautiful and elegant'. This beauty derives from the hotel's old-world charm and exterior, especially since it occupies the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> story of a Pre-World War II building. The hotel, like other surrounding shop houses and properties, retains many architectural features of the 1930s.

The remaining hotel names describe certain experiences that the hotels hope to provide their guests with. The quality of these experiences, in turn, gets reflected in the names. One prominent example is in the name *Arcadia Hotel*. The word "Arcadia" indicates a place (region) in Ancient Greece and, over the centuries, was idealized, in literature and poetry, to describe a place which provides simple pleasure and quiet<sup>55</sup>. This tranquility is aligned with the hotel's philosophy, which is to provide guests with "a

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Perono Cacciafoco, F., Tuang, S.Q., (2018), pp. 9-30; Lim, S.T.G., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2020), pp. 1-20.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *The Warehouse Hotel*, (2021), *About*.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Nostalgia Hotel Singapore*, (2021), *About*.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Populous Hotel*, (2021), *Homepage*.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, (2021), s.v. *Arcadia*.

peaceful and comfortable space away from the bustle of the city”<sup>56</sup>. The hotel name in this example also functions as a brand promise and communicates how it wants the guests to feel during their stay.

### 4.3 Marketing Service and Hospitality

Lastly, we look at other relevant lexical items which appear among the hotel names and seek to answer the question: what other words do mid-tier hotels use to market service and hospitality? Even amongst mid-tier hotels in Singapore, themes related to being cost-efficient or providing reliable services appear in names such as *Travelodge Harbourfront*, *ZEN Rooms Novena*, *Ibis Budget Singapore Clarke Quay*, and *Holiday Inn Express Singapore Katong*. The latter two, although owned by chains, speak of their brand promise to provide “awesome rates” and “affordable hotels”<sup>57</sup>, as well as a “clean, consistent, and comfortable stay whenever you need to be there in person”<sup>58</sup>. There appears to be a dichotomy, here: although some mid-scale hotels market themselves as providing economical stays, there are other hotels which convey the idea of a luxurious experience for the patrons. To this end, their names contain words like “Grand” (*Hotel Grand Central*, *Grand Mercure Singapore Roxy*, *Hotel Grand Pacific Singapore*, *Santa Grand Hotel East Coast*) or terms like “Villa” (*Villa Samadhi Singapore*) and “Resort” (*D’Resort @ Downtown East*). These words, along with big hotel brand names (*Ascott Orchard Singapore*, *Dorsett Singapore*, *Mercure Singapore On Stevens*, *Novotel Singapore on Stevens*) and foreign words (*Villa Samadhi Singapore*, *Amara Singapore*, *Orchard Rendezvous Hotel*), may appeal to patrons who might want a higher quality of ambience, amenities, and service, without forking out the prices of upscale hotels.

Royalty is another common theme in mid-tier hotels, evident through the use of words like “Royal” (*PARKROYAL on Beach Road, Singapore*, *PARKROYAL on Kitchener Road, Singapore*, *Hotel Royal*, and *Hotel Royal @ Queens*), “King” (*Copthorne King’s Hotel on Havelock*), and words with the Latin root *reg-*, such as “Regis” (*Park Regis Singapore*). In Latin, *regis* is the genitive singular masculine of *rex* ‘king’. Taken together, *Park Regis* could read as ‘the park of the king’. Furthermore, hotel names like *The Elizabeth Hotel* are inspired by Singapore’s colonial past and are named after British royalty. The idea behind these names is related to the type of services the customers can expect to get at the hotels – that the patrons too, will be treated as a royal, and service standards and the overall experience will be fitting for a royal.

True to Singapore’s position as a global city-state, hotel names often articulate Singapore’s status as a cosmopolitan city, most ostensibly with the word “City” (*Carlton City Hotel Singapore*, *Furama City Center*, *Champion Hotel City*, *M Hotel Singapore City Center*, and *Holiday Inn Singapore Orchard City Center*) or the adjective “International” (*RELC International Hotel*). Foreign words may be used: in the example of *Citadines Rochor Singapore*, *citadine* is the French word (feminine singular) for ‘citizen’, ‘townsman/townswoman’, ‘inhabitant of a city’, ‘city dweller’, and reflects the brand’s target audience, i.e., those who love cities and see themselves as citizens of the world<sup>59</sup>. Most of these hotels are also located in the central areas, or the Central Business District (CBD), and, thus, the addition of the lexical item “City” may not only appeal to

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Arcadia Hotel*, (2021), *About Us*.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Ibis Budget Hotels*, (2021), *passim*.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Holiday Inn Express*, (2021), *Experience*.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Ascott Star Rewards*, (2021), *Discover Our Brands*.

travelers seeking a stay in Singapore’s CBD, but also serves as a selling point for the hotel, i.e., that the hotel is located at the heart of the city center of the city-state.

Finally, Chen documented euphemistic names amongst Taipei’s hotels, which “freely express the immediate hopes and desires of travelers looking for a wonderful experience”<sup>21</sup>. A similar trend is also observed in Singaporean mid-tier hotel names. Names may also include words relating to a sense of adventure and love for travel (*Wanderlust, The Unlimited Collection by Oakwood*). Another way in which this is done is through the inclusion of objects and places of travel in the hotel name. For instance, *Mercure* (in *Mercure Singapore On Stevens*) is named after Mercury, the Roman god of travel and commerce<sup>60</sup>. *Capri by Fraser, China Square*, and *Capri by Fraser, Changi City* are linked to a popular island of the same name (*Capri*) off South Italy in the Campania region. *Capri* is surrounded by a wonderful sea and is a popular tourist destination already loved by the Roman Emperors. Hotels may also communicate their desire that travelers regain a sense of serenity by entering their premises through seeing the hotel as a garden (*Hilton Garden Inn Singapore Serangoon* and *Hotel Clover 33 Jalan Sultan*), and they can use, in their names, words denoting a relaxed state of mind. The latter is probably best illustrated by *Villa Samadhi Singapore*, which is owned by *Samadhi Retreats*. The group designs its properties with the aim of helping their guests reach the *Samadhi*, a Sanskrit word which means “the highest state of meditation” and occurs when the mind is still. Its corporate overview is instructive, and describes its aim to “deliver a transcendent experience, where the anxieties of daily life are surrendered at our doors and guests transition to a relaxed state of mind”<sup>61</sup>. The hotel name not only reflects the desire for the traveler to leave with a peace of mind (“*Samadhi*”), but also to stay in lavishness (“*Villa*”).

## 5. CHECKING OUT: CHAINS ARE KING

In summary, this research note aimed to answer three questions: (1) what are the keywords used to describe the type of accommodation provided, and how frequently do they appear?; (2) what are the naming strategies used to name mid-tier hotels in Singapore?; (3) what words are used to market the services and/or experiences that hotels provide?

The authors found that an overwhelming majority of hotel names contain words that describe the type of service they provide. Over half of the hotels in the dataset contain the word “Hotel”, a clear indication on their service type. A smaller number of hotel names contain the words “Inn”, “Lodge”, “Rooms”, “Villa”, and “Resort” – all of which convey the idea that the establishment provides lodging for tourists at varying levels of grandeur. For hotels whose names do not immediately communicate information on the nature of their services, a closer inspection reveals that many of these hotels are part of portfolios owned by chained-brands (e.g., *Accor, The Ascott Limited, Millennium Hotels and Resorts*) which have a higher level of brand recognition. In turn, this reduces the need to include the word “Hotel” in its name.

Turning to the naming strategies adopted by the mid-tier hotels, the authors discovered that over 80% of the hotels studied were owned by chains. As a result, hotels are directly (e.g., *Ascott Orchard Singapore, Dorsett Singapore*) or indirectly (e.g., *M Hotel Singapore City Center, Capri by Fraser, China Square*) named after the chain

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Mercure Hotels*, (2021), *Why Invest in Mercure?: Accor Global Development Q1 2021*.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Samadhi Retreats*, (2021), *Corporate Overview*.

owning them. Furthermore, it is commonplace for hotels to be named after the portfolio that hotel chains own, as in the case of *Holiday Inn Express Singapore Katong* and *Village Hotel Changi*. In this sense, the naming strategy amongst mid-tier hotels have come to be dominated by powerful hotel chains, echoing a 2018 report on Asia-Pacific Chains and Hotels which found that chains run 83% of Singapore's total hotel rooms<sup>62</sup>. Other less common naming practices include hotels named after organizations, associative naming (where the hotel is named after nearby physical features and/or landmarks), and descriptive naming (where the hotel describes a particular trait or feature it has or wishes to be associated with).

Finally, the authors analyzed words used to indicate the services and/or experiences that hotels provide. Hotel names communicate social information in their naming strategy. The authors note that there is a dichotomy amongst mid-tier hotels; while some express their desire to provide economical stays through lexical items like "Budget" and "Express", there are other hotels that carry visions of opulence in their naming patterns; they tend to use words like "Grand", "Villa", "Resort" or words borrowed from foreign languages. By conveying information on the type of services, hotels can better market their services to the clientele they hope to attract. Other ideas conveyed in hotel names include qualities associated with the global city-state of Singapore, for instance, "City" and "International" and words relating to travel such as "Wanderlust" and prominent holiday destinations like "Capri". Some hotel names, for example, *Villa Samadhi* use foreign words to describe the relaxed state of mind that its customers should walk away with after a stay at its compounds.

What the authors have done was to conduct a linguistic analysis on Singaporean mid-tier hotel names, an area that has not been commonly explored thus far in tourism and language research, as well as studies on marketing and brand naming. In so doing, one can witness how hotels in a popular tourist destination in South East Asia choose to communicate valuable information between the hotelier and customers with specific travel goals. This helps to personalize the travel experience for patrons and ultimately lead to better business for the hotels. In the final analysis, naming practices are impelled greatly by economic goals and supports the view undertaken in recent research on Critical Toponymies that the naming of urban landscapes is linked to capitalist discourses, economic success, and the furtherance of corporate interests.

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Horwarth HTL, (2018), *passim*.

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