

Linguistic Landscape Labelling on Business Signboards in Medan, Indonesia and in Bangi, Malaysia

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Abstract: *This article is the result of the community service activity of a team of lecturers and students of Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah from the English literature study program. The purpose of this community service is to share knowledge of linguistic landscape labelling of business signboards. Landscape linguistics is a study of language use in public spaces. Signs on business signboards use some languages based on the regulation of the city or country. Medan and Bangi are two cities that have different rules of using language on business signboards. The location of community service at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia. This activity was carried out using the extension method and socialization of the linguistic landscape labelling on business signboards. The benefit of this activity is to add the knowledge of the participant about linguistic landscape labelling on business signboards. The stages of activities carried out are location surveys, licensing arrangements, material preparation and community service training. Through this activity, it is hoped that it will increase the knowledge and insight of the participant.*

Keywords:

Linguistic Landscape, Labelling, Business Signboards, Medan, Indonesia, Malaysia

Introduction

Linguistic landscape is a study of language about the use of language in public space. Language in public space could be seen in the public area such as in the advertisement of the signboards, the signboards of a company, or the signboards of government agency. The linguistic landscape was pioneered by Landry and Bourhis (1977) who stated that the linguistic landscape of language on public signs, billboards, street names, place names, signs on government buildings, and posters that use language form the linguistic landscape of an area. The linguistic landscape relates to the language used in public spaces. Related to the language use in public space, there

are some rules about the use of language in public space. In Indonesia, there are some rules from the government and the Law of the Republic Indonesia Number 24 of 2009 about Flag, Language and Country Symbol, and the National Anthem. The law states that Indonesian must be used for the names of buildings, roads, apartments or residences, offices, trade complexes, trademarks, business symbols, educational institutions, organizations founded or owned by Indonesian citizens or Indonesian legal entities (Ministry of National Education, 2009).

In addition to the law, there are regional regulations that regulate the use of language in line with the law, namely the regional regulation of North Sumatra Province number 8 of 2017 concerning the Prioritization of Indonesian language and the Protection of Regional Language and Regional Literature in article 9 states that Indonesian must be used for the name of buildings or buildings, roads, apartments or settlements, offices, trade complexes, trademarks, business institutions, educational institutions, organizations established or owned by Indonesian citizens or Indonesian legal entities. From this rule, it could be seen that linguistic landscape in the public space must be in Indonesian. The government signs in Medan usually use Indonesian for the name of the service office but for the private signs such name of restaurant or café used variant of language. There are many various languages in the public space such as English, traditional language, Indonesian and English. The signboards example in Medan could be seen in the signboards of restaurant and café below.



Figure 1. Orinko City Hotel



Figure 2. Toko Zulfi

From the examples above, there are signboards name in English and the combination of Indonesian and English. These signboards show that the rules of writing the name of the business do not follow the rules. This phenomenon happens in Medan Indonesia. In another country such Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia, the use of language of signboards is different from Medan Indonesia. English served as the official language of colonial Malaya, while Tamil, Mandarin, and Malay were referred to as vernaculars. Following independence, the major communities came to an agreement that recognized Malay as the national language, which was seen as a

representation of the oneness of the country. Asmah (1997, p. 15) claims that the Malay language was given this status because of "its role as a lingua franca, its position as a major language." Article 152 of the Malaysian Constitution attests to its status.

However, until linguistic nationalism among nationalist Malays emerged, English remained the unofficial official language from 1957 to 1967. Language policy decisions in Malaysia have been made top-down by "people of power and authority to make decisions for a certain group, without consulting the end-users of the language," claim Kaplan and Baldauf (1997, p. 196). According to David and Govindasamy (2003), Malay nationalists became dissatisfied and demanded a status change when the Malay language was gradually institutionalized as the official language of the nation in comparison to English, which was used in administration, education, and other formal domains. The idea that "English came to be regarded not only as the language of colonial education but also, after independence, as an obstacle to the educational, social, and economic advancement of the majority of Malays" served as the impetus for the demand for Malay to have a higher status than English (Chai 1971, p. 61). These are some data of linguistic landscape in Bangi, Selangor.



Figure 3. Name of a Restaurant in Malay



Figure 4. Names of Store in Chinese Language and English

Methods

This community service activity was conducted on February 19, 2025, at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, starting at 10:00 AM. The implementation of the service activities carried out is as follows:

1. The survey was carried out by the Community Partnership Program team to the service location, namely in Bangi.
2. The partner helps in providing space, equipment and providing Community Partnership Program participants.

3. The material to be delivered includes aspects related to the use of language in the linguistic landscape.
4. Implementation of activities and evaluation carried out after the Community Partnership Program.

A. Program Implementation

Activities in the Community Partnership at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in Bangi are as follows:

1. Conducting socialization with Partners through exposure to material regarding linguistic landscapes.
2. Providing opportunities for students to be creative in creating 'notice' regarding the development of the people in Bangi.
3. Discussion with service implementers and partners.
4. Presentation of student work in creating linguistic landscapes related to signboards in Bangi.

Here is the implementation of the activity



B. Socialization and Training

The classical approach is used during material delivery, while the individual approach is used during practice, which is to teach employees about linguistic landscape, and socialize with the lecturers and students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) so that they are fully involved.

C. Participation

A consultative approach to partners will be used in this program for matters of principled nature. Partner participation in the Community Service program includes:

1. Partners provide training at UKM.
2. Partners play the role of socialization participants and actively play a role in discussion / question and answer activities.
3. Partners are involved in the knowledge transfer program.

D. Evaluation

All activities will be assessed, including the performance at UKM's during socialization and training. Upgrading and updating knowledge will be done during

the evaluation of this activity, if necessary.

Result

A. The Language in Business Signboards in Medan City and in Bangi City

The differences in the language used on business signage in Medan (Indonesia) and in Bangi, Selangor (Malaysia) are influenced by each country's official language policy as well as local social and cultural factors. Here are some of the differences:

1. Official Language Used

- a. Medan: Using Bahasa Indonesia as the main language, in accordance with the national policy that requires the use of Bahasa Indonesia in business signage.
- b. Bangi, Selangor: Uses Bahasa Melayu as the main language, following Malaysia's policy of requiring Bahasa Melayu in all commercial signage, often with Jawi script in addition or with Chinese. The examples are as follows.



Figure 5. Names of Restaurant in Indonesian Language



Figure 6. Names of Clinic in Malaysian and Jawi Language

2. Use of Foreign Language

- a. Medan: English is sometimes used, especially in international business or modern endeavors, but Bahasa Indonesia must still be included, and it is usually to be code mixing.
- b. Bangi, Selangor: English is often used as a second language, especially in businesses that cater to international customers. In some cases, Mandarin or Tamil is also used, depending on the local community.

The examples are as follows.



Figure 7. Names of Restaurant in Indonesian English



Figure 8. Names of Restaurant in English

3. Writing and Script

- a. Medan: Only use Latin script in business signage.
- b. Bangi, Selangor: Some signboards use Jawi script in addition to Latin script, especially for businesses that have Malay or Islamic cultural values.

4. Government Regulation

- a. Medan: There is a regulation that requires the use of Bahasa Indonesia with a dominant font size if a foreign language is used.
- b. Bangi, Selangor: The local government stipulates that business signage must be primarily in Malay, although other languages may be added.

5. Business Terms and Local Culture

- a. Medan: Many uses local terms such as “Warung”, “Toko”, “Usaha Dagang (UD)”, or “Perseroan Terbatas (PT)”.
- b. Bangi, Selangor: Uses local terms such as “Kedai”, “Perniagaan”, “Sendirian Berhad (Sdn. Bhd.)”, and sometimes Islamic terms such as “Halal Mart”. The examples are as follows.



Figure 9. Names of Restaurant Using The Word 'Warung'



Figure 10. Names of Restaurant Using The Local Term Sdn.Bhd

From this difference, it can be concluded that language regulations in Malaysia are stricter in emphasizing Malay and Jawi script, while in Indonesia, Indonesian is more dominant, but still opens space for the use of foreign languages with certain restrictions. Besides, the activity of community service done in UKM are documented at the pictures below.



Figure 11. The Material Delivery by The Speaker



Figure 12. The Speakers and The Participant

Conclusion

Sosialisasi Undang-Undang No. 12 Tahun 2022 tentang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual (UU TPKS) dan penguatan peran IR Clinic merupakan langkah konkret dalam menciptakan lingkungan kerja yang aman, nyaman, dan bebas dari

The community service initiative on linguistic landscape labelling of business signboards in Medan, Indonesia, and Bangi, Malaysia, has successfully raised awareness of the participant of community service about the importance of clear, inclusive, and culturally sensitive signage. In Medan, the focus was on encouraging the balanced use of Bahasa Indonesia alongside local and international languages to enhance both accessibility and market reach. In Bangi, the program emphasized maintaining Malaysia's multilingual identity by supporting the use of Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and English in accordance with national language policies. The initiative fostered dialogue between stakeholders, promoted best practices in public signage, and highlighted the role of linguistic landscapes in strengthening cultural identity and economic vitality. This program underscores the ongoing need for community engagement to ensure that business signage not only complies with regulations but also respects and reflects the linguistic diversity of each community.

Then, the linguistic landscape labelling on business signboards in Medan, Indonesia, and Bangi, Malaysia, reveals both similarities and contextual differences shaped by local sociolinguistic dynamics. In Medan, signboards predominantly feature Bahasa Indonesia, with occasional inclusion of regional languages and English, reflecting national language policy and growing globalization. In contrast, Bangi's signboards display a more multilingual pattern, prominently featuring Malay, English, Chinese, and Tamil, indicating Malaysia's officially recognized multicultural framework. Both sites show evidence of English as a marker of modernity and prestige, though its prominence is more pronounced in Bangi. The community service acitivity highlight how language policies, ethnic compositions, and commercial strategies intersect to shape public language display, emphasizing the role of linguistic landscape in constructing local identity and accommodating market demands.

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