

Exploring The Linguistic Landscape of Public Signs in Jalan Tunjungan Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the linguistic landscape of Jalan Tunjungan, Surabaya, focusing on language use and the functions of public signs. Drawing on Landry and Bourhis's framework, the research employs systematic photographic documentation and qualitative analysis to examine signs as informational and symbolic resources. The findings reveal that Indonesian dominates top-down signs, particularly in official notices and public facilities, reinforcing its role in national communication and regulation. English is mainly used in bottom-up commercial signs, where it serves a symbolic function to express modernity and global orientation rather than convey essential information. Other languages, such as Javanese, Arabic, Mandarin, Japanese, Dutch, Sanskrit, and Latin, appear selectively in cultural, religious, and heritage contexts, reflecting the area's multicultural character. Functionally, top-down signs emphasize clarity and authority, while bottom-up signs foreground identity and branding. Overall, the linguistic landscape of Jalan Tunjungan reflects the interaction between local identity, national language policy, and global cultural influences.

Keywords: Jalan Tunjungan, Language Function, Linguistic Landscape, Multilingualism, Public Signs.

1. INTRODUCTION

The linguistic landscape refers to the visible use of language in public spaces, including signs, advertisements, and other written texts that reflect the presence, status, and interaction of language communities (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). In an era of increasing globalization, public signage has become an important site for examining how language functions in society. Languages displayed in public spaces shape perceptions of identity, power, policy, ideology, and multilingualism, revealing how people interact with their social and cultural environments (Hong, 2020; Sena & Laksmi, 2022).

Language use in public spaces also shapes a place's identity. When individuals enter a particular area, the written language they encounter provides immediate cues about its cultural, social, and linguistic character (Ekawati et al., 2023). This visibility has made linguistic landscape research increasingly significant within sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, as it highlights how language symbols operate in relation to social, economic, cultural, and political processes in public space (Siziba & Maseko, 2024; Motschenbacher, 2020).

Landry and Bourhis (1997) identify two primary functions of the linguistic landscape: informational and symbolic. The informational function facilitates communication by providing directions, warnings, or public information, while the symbolic function conveys meanings related to identity, authority, and social status. Therefore, public signs do more than transmit

information. They also reflect cultural values and social realities embedded in specific locations (Mulyawan et al., 2022). Examining linguistic landscapes in particular settings offer insight into how language operates simultaneously as a communicative resource and a marker of social identity.

Previous studies on Surabaya's linguistic landscape provide an important foundation but also reveal research gaps. Studies by Agustin et al., (2024) and Savitri et al., (2024) focus mainly on public facilities and heritage sites, emphasizing communication and tourism rather than symbolic identity construction. Similarly, Eliza et al., (2025) examine Kya Kya, a historically Chinese neighbourhood shaped by community-driven initiatives and multilingual signage that foregrounds ethnic identity.

In contrast, Jalan Tunjungan represents a different urban context. Known for its colonial architecture and its role as a government-led cultural corridor, Jalan Tunjungan combines historical heritage with contemporary commercial and tourism activities. Public signs along this street display Indonesian, English, and Javanese, serving functions such as advertising, wayfinding, and identity expression. Unlike Kya Kya, which reflects grassroots cultural representation, Jalan Tunjungan emphasizes institutional identity, national history, and official heritage narratives.

Despite the growing body of linguistic landscape research in Surabaya, most studies have focused on categorizing language variation, with limited attention to how signs function within specific spatial contexts. Addressing this gap, the present study analyzes the language use and functions of public signs along Jalan Tunjungan. By examining both informational and symbolic functions, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how multilingual signage shape's urban identity and reflects the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of contemporary Surabaya. This study aims to identify the language variations present in public signs along Jalan Tunjungan and to analyze their informational and symbolic roles within the urban environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is theoretically grounded in linguistic landscape research as a branch of sociolinguistics that examines the visibility, distribution, and functions of language in public spaces. Linguistic landscape focuses on written language displayed on signs, billboards, shopfronts, street names, advertisements, and public notices, which together construct the visual linguistic identity of a place (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). As an analytical framework, linguistic landscape enables researchers to investigate how language operates beyond spoken interaction, revealing how linguistic choices in public space reflect social structures, cultural values, power relations, and ideological orientations.

Within sociolinguistics, language is understood not merely as a system of communication but as a social practice embedded in specific contexts. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) emphasize that language use varies according to social variables such as community, status, and institutional authority, and these variations carry social meaning. Linguistic landscape research extends this perspective by examining how such meanings have materialized visually in public space. As Holmes (2013) suggests, language simultaneously conveys information and index's identity, a dual role that becomes especially salient in multilingual and multicultural environments. In this sense, linguistic landscapes offer a tangible site where language, identity, and social order intersect.

Multilingualism is a central concept in linguistic landscape studies, as public signs often reflect the coexistence of multiple languages within a single space. Multilingualism arises from sociocultural processes such as migration, globalization, tourism, and historical contact, leading

to complex patterns of language visibility and use (Kahraman, 2024). In linguistic landscapes, multilingual practices become visible through the presence of monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual signs, each indicating different levels of language dominance, accommodation, or symbolic recognition. As Saleem and Ahmad (2025) note, these patterns may signal language maintenance, shift, or marginalization, depending on how languages are positioned relative to one another in public texts.

Linguistic landscape research also provides insight into power relations and the implementation of language policy. Landry and Bourhis (1997) argue that the visibility of a language in public space is closely tied to its perceived status and vitality within a community. Languages used in official signs often reflect institutional authority and state language policy. In contrast, those appearing in commercial or informal signs may reflect market forces, identity expression, or grassroots multilingual practices. Following Gorter (2006), linguistic landscapes are commonly categorized into top-down signs, produced by governmental or institutional authorities, and bottom-up signs, created by private individuals or businesses. This distinction allows researchers to examine how authority, regulation, and agency shape language choices in public space.

A key analytical dimension of linguistic landscape studies is the function of public signs. Landry and Bourhis (1997) identify two primary functions: informational and symbolic. The informational function concerns the practical role of signs in conveying directions, instructions, or warnings, facilitating communication in public environments. However, the symbolic function relates to the broader social meanings encoded in language choice, such as identity construction, cultural affiliation, prestige, and power relations. As Song et al. (2022) argue, these symbolic meanings are often as significant as informational content, particularly in spaces where history, tourism, and commerce intersect.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the linguistic landscape of Jalan Tunjungan, Surabaya. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research focuses on describing and interpreting language use and its functions in public signage within a specific social and cultural context. Qualitative research enables in-depth exploration of linguistic and social phenomena as they naturally occur in real-life settings (Creswell, 2018). Guided by a sociolinguistic perspective, this study views language in public spaces as closely linked to social structure, cultural identity, and community interaction. The analysis is grounded in the linguistic landscape framework proposed by Landry and Bourhis (1997), particularly their distinction between informational and symbolic functions of public signs.

3.1 Data Collection

The data consists of written languages displayed on public signs along Jalan Tunjungan, including advertising billboards, shop signs, and public information boards. Jalan Tunjungan was selected due to its historical significance and its role as a commercial and tourism area where heritage and modern urban life intersect. Data was collected through field observation and photographic documentation. The researcher directly observed and photographed public signs using a smartphone camera as a non-human instrument, while serving as the primary analytical instrument. The observation was conducted over two days to capture a wide range of official and non-official signs. In total, 126 public signs were documented and compiled into a dataset for analysis.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, all photographed signs were examined to identify the languages used on each sign. The signs were then classified into monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual categories to identify patterns of language variation. Next, the analysis focused on the functions of the signs based on Landry and Bourhis's (1997) framework, distinguishing between informational and symbolic functions. This process allowed for an interpretation of how language in public signs serves both communicative purposes and broader social and cultural meanings within the urban space of Jalan Tunjungan.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

This study analyzes the linguistic landscape of Jalan Tunjungan, Surabaya, based on 126 public signs collected from advertising billboards, public information boards, and commercial shop signs. The findings reveal a diverse yet patterned use of language that reflects the area's role as a historical, commercial, and tourism-oriented urban space.

In terms of language variation, Indonesian emerges as the most prevalent language, particularly on official and institutional signs, reaffirming its role as the national language and primary medium of public communication. English ranks second among languages, especially in commercial signage, where it signals modernity, global orientation, and commercial appeal. Other languages, including Javanese, Chinese (Mandarin), Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Italian, Dutch, Latin, and Sanskrit, occur less frequently but play important symbolic roles. These languages often index cultural heritage, religious identity, historical references, or global affiliations of businesses and places.

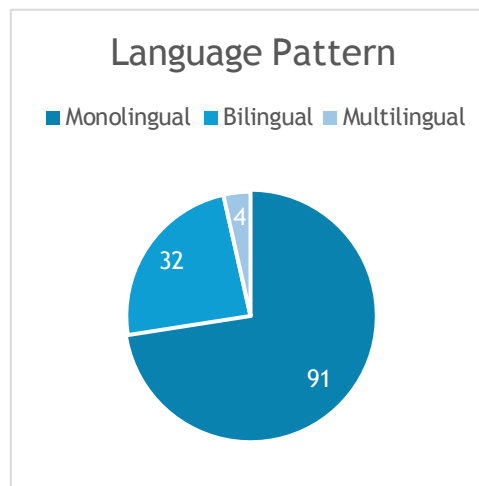


Figure 1

The distribution of language patterns in Jalan Tunjungan is further clarified through the table and chart, which summarize the frequency of monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual signs across the 126 collected items.

4.1.1 Monolingual

Table 1.

Language Used	Frequency
Indonesia	49
English	36
Japanese	2
Javanese	2
Korean	2
Total	91

Monolingual signs dominate the linguistic landscape, accounting for 91 of the totals. Indonesian appears most frequently with 49 signs, especially in official and institutional settings, strengthening its role as the national and primary public language. English comes next with 36 monolingual signs, mainly in commercial areas where it represents modernity and a global outlook. Other languages, including Korean, Japanese, and Javanese, are less common and mainly serve as symbols of cultural identity and niche branding.



Figure 2



Figure 3

Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate the dominance and functions of Indonesian signs along Jalan Tunjungan, especially those in Indonesian. Official signs like “Badan Pertanahan Nasional – Kantor Pertanahan Kota Surabaya” and regulatory notices such as “Menyeberanglah secara berkelompok...” are shown exclusively in Indonesian, highlighting its role as the national language and the primary medium for official communication. These signs serve a strong informational purpose, ensuring clarity, authority, and compliance in public administration and traffic regulation. Their monolingual format emphasizes the state's presence, institutional legitimacy, and accessibility for the general public.



Figure 4

Indonesian also appears in commercial settings, as seen in the sign “Aroma Makassar.” Although created by a private business, the exclusive use of Indonesian serves a symbolic purpose, highlighting local identity and cultural authenticity. The name reflects regional culinary heritage, attracting local customers while emphasizing cultural uniqueness within a modern urban environment.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Figure 5 provides directions for hotel parking in English only. Using English on a functional sign signals an appeal to international visitors and tourists, emphasizing the hotel's global accessibility. While primarily informational, English also projects modernity and professionalism typical of a commercial and hospitality environment.

Conversely, Figure 6 features an English-only shop sign that reflects branding tactics often linked to lifestyle and cafe culture. English is used to create a modern, trendy, and cosmopolitan image, attracting young urban customers and tourists. In this context, the symbolic role of English is prominent, as it reinforces the brand identity and market appeal rather than just conveying information.



Figure 7

Figure 7 shows how the Japanese sign is used symbolically to create a sense of authenticity. The “Nishiki Teppanyaki” sign combines Romanized Japanese with kanji (錦) and Japanese script (鉄板焼き), strengthening a clear Japanese cultural identity. While it remains easy to read through a standard letter, the use of Japanese characters signals tradition, quality, and authenticity. It carefully uses language to attract customers looking for an authentic Japanese dining experience, highlighting symbolic elements.



Figure 9

In areas where Javanese is part of everyday speech, its presence on public signs in Jalan Tunjungan underscores the local cultural identity. Figure 9 shows the sign “Mlaku Mlaku Nang Tunjungan,” entirely written in Javanese, clearly displaying the community's linguistic identity in public spaces. As an official sign created by local authorities, it symbolically promotes regional culture and positions Jalan Tunjungan as a hub for social and leisure activities. The use of Javanese

reflects cultural pride and enhances the street’s local character amid the diverse multilingual environment.

4.1.2 Bilingual

Language Used	Frequency
Indonesian – English	20
Indonesian – Javanese	3
Indonesian – Mandarin	2
Indonesian – Arabic	1
English – Vietnamese	1
English – Mandarin	1
English – Japanese	1
English – Italian	1
English – Arabic	1
English – Sanskrit	1
TOTAL	32

Bilingual signs in Jalan Tunjungan feature various language pairings, with Indonesian–English as the most common, appearing on 20 signs. Other combinations, like Indonesian–Javanese, Indonesian–Arabic, and Indonesian–Mandarin, are much less frequent, along with several English-based pairs that appear only once. Thus, these patterns indicate that bilingual signs are used selectively, mainly to balance local accessibility with broader cultural or international appeal.



Figure 10



Figure 11

Figure 10 shows a bilingual public safety sign featuring the Indonesian term “Titik Kumpul” alongside its English translation, “Assembly Point.” This pairing clearly provides information, making emergency instructions understandable to both locals and tourists. It reflects language policy while recognizing the multilingual nature of Jalan Tunjungan.

Figure 11 also features a bilingual commercial sign that reads “KLUB breakfast,” blending Indonesian and English. This creates a symbolic and international appeal. English is used intentionally to project a modern, cosmopolitan image, while Indonesian roots the sign locally.



Figure 12

Figure 12 shows the storefront of Ladeed Deli, which features a bilingual sign with both English and Arabic. The English text “DINE-IN & TAKE-OUT LADEED DELI” highlights accessibility and modern food-service approaches, while the Arabic word لذيذ (ladhīdh, delicious) adds cultural depth and emphasizes a Middle Eastern culinary identity. This combination reflects how bilingual

signs strategically mix global visibility with cultural symbolism to boost branding and attract a diverse audience.



Figure 13

Figure 13 further demonstrates bilingual practices on Jalan Tunjungan through an English-Italian sign. Using the Italian term *Gelateria* signals authenticity and links the business to Italian dessert culture. At the same time, the English words “Coffee,” “Waffle,” and “Frites” help clarify the products for a broader audience. This mix blends symbolic cultural branding with accessibility, showing how foreign languages are strategically used to project prestige while keeping communication clear in a commercial setting.



Figure 14

Figure 14 displays a business sign for “Waras,” a traditional food stall that blends Indonesian and Javanese elements. The Javanese word “waras” (healthy/well) highlights local identity, while the Indonesian terms “warung” and “tradisional” emphasize home-style cooking. Overall, the language choices strengthen the sense of authenticity and cultural familiarity within the local community.



Figure 15

Figure 15 shows a bilingual Indonesian-Arabic sign guiding people to Masjid An-Nur. Indonesian is used for straightforward navigation (Masjid and 150 Meter) and provides information, while the Arabic calligraphy (النور) highlights the mosque’s religious identity. The mix of languages reflects authority and also symbolically emphasizes Islamic presence in the public space.



Figure 16

Figure 16 shows a bilingual sign for “Dimsum – Lima Satu Lima,” combining Indonesian and Mandarin Chinese. The Indonesian name “Lima Satu Lima” is supported by the Chinese characters (五一五), which share the same numerical meaning, visually linking the brand to Chinese culinary identity. The use of “DIMSUM” in standard letters also signals the type of food while remaining clear to local audiences.



Figure 17

Figure 17 features a storefront sign for “Co^ Ba Phở” that blends Vietnamese and English. The Vietnamese name emphasizes cultural familiarity and culinary heritage, with “phở” indicating the restaurant’s specialty and emphasizing a popular Vietnamese dish. The English caption “Vietnamese Rice Noodles Café” helps non-Vietnamese visitors understand the nature of the business, balancing accessibility with cultural authenticity.



Figure 18

Figure 18 shows the storefront sign of “Varna Culture Hotel Surabaya,” a commercial sign that combines English, Sanskrit, and historical spelling. The Sanskrit-derived name “Varna” indicates cultural richness and heritage, while the English phrase “Culture Hotel” makes it accessible worldwide. The use of “Soerabaia,” an old colonial spelling of Surabaya, further emphasizes the hotel’s historical identity, matching its location in a renovated colonial-era building on Jalan Tunjungan.



Figure 19

Figure 19 displays the storefront sign for “BINGXUE,” featuring a mix of Mandarin and English. The name Bingxue, which means “ice” or “snow” in Mandarin, highlights Chinese cultural identity while remaining easily readable to local audiences using standard letters. The English text “Tea, Ice Cream & Coffee” explicitly states that the products are available to a wide range of customers. This bilingual design effectively combines cultural branding with clear communication, attracting both local residents and visitors.



Figure 20

Figure 20 displays a storefront sign for “natsu” that blends English and Japanese elements. The name “Natsu,” from the Japanese 夏 (summer), suggests a Japanese aesthetic while being easily readable with standard letters. The English tagline “Japanese Ice Cream & Coffee” explicitly states the business type, making the sign understandable to a wide audience and emphasizing its cultural theme.

4.1.3 Multilingual

Language Used	Frequency
English – Indonesian – Japanese	1
English – Indonesian – Javanese	1
English – Indonesian – Dutch	1
Indonesian – Latin – Javanese	1
Total	4

Multilingual signs are scarce but present along Jalan Tunjungan, with only four examples identified. These include combinations such as English–Indonesian–Japanese, English–Indonesian–Javanese, English–Indonesian–Dutch, and Indonesian–Latin–Javanese. Primarily found in commercial settings, these signs use multiple languages to attract diverse audiences, highlighting the area’s tourism focus and growing international presence.



Figure 21

Figure 21 shows the storefront sign for “EDOYA,” a bottom-up multilingual sign that combines Japanese, Indonesian, and English. The Japanese elements, including 江戸屋 (Edoya) and the samurai motto 風林火山 (Fu rinkazan), strongly evoke traditional Japanese culture and culinary authenticity. The Indonesian phrase “Warung Jepang” localizes the business within the Indonesian food context, while the English phrase “24-hour” ensures accessibility for a broader audience. Together, these languages serve symbolic functions, reinforcing cultural identity while facilitating communication in a tourist-oriented area.



Figure 22

Figure 22 shows a multilingual heritage plaque for Hotel Majapahit (formerly Hotel Oranje), featuring Indonesian, English, and Dutch. Indonesian and English provide parallel accounts of the 1945 Flag Incident, making the information accessible to local and international visitors, while the Dutch name Oranje symbolically recalls the site's colonial past. Furthermore, these languages position the hotel as a historically significant landmark within both national and global narratives.

4.2 Discussion

This research shows how the interaction between national language policy, local cultural identity, and global influences shapes Jalan Tunjungan's linguistic landscape. The prominent use of Indonesian in official and institutional signs reflects its role as Indonesia's main public language. This supports national policy, which emphasizes Indonesian for clarity, inclusion, and social cohesion in public spaces. In Jalan Tunjungan, a historic site, commercial area, and tourist spot, consistent Indonesian usage reinforces its function as a unifying language that facilitates communication among diverse groups. Simultaneously, the widespread presence of English and other foreign languages in commercial signage reveals globalization's impact on urban language practices. English often functions more symbolically, representing modernity, prestige, or an international outlook rather than serving primary informational purposes. Business owners strategically use English to shape brand images, attract tourists, and appeal to younger, globally minded visitors. This aligns with previous studies viewing English as a symbol of capital in urban commercial settings.

Beyond Indonesian and English, the use of languages like Javanese, Arabic, Mandarin, Japanese, Dutch, Latin, and Sanskrit adds layers of meaning to the streetscape. These languages are used selectively, mainly in contexts like restaurants, religious signs, and heritage information. They act symbolically, expressing cultural authenticity, religious ties, historical continuity, or ethnic identity. For instance, Javanese underscores local pride, Dutch and Latin evoke colonial history, and Japanese or Mandarin indicate culinary specialization and global cultural trends.

These patterns suggest that Jalan Tunjungan's linguistic landscape not only facilitates communication but also serves as a visual record of social memory and cultural identity. Public signs become spaces where history, commerce, and modern urban lifestyles intersect. The coexistence of national, local, and global languages reflects the layered identity of Jalan Tunjungan, a place where heritage is preserved amid ongoing economic and cultural modernization.

Practically, these findings highlight the importance of analyzing linguistic landscapes for urban planning, tourism, and cultural policies. Recognizing how languages serve informational and symbolic roles can help policymakers design signage that is accessible, meaningful, and visually appealing. A balanced, context-aware approach to language use in public spaces can improve visitor experiences, strengthen local identity, and support sustainable city and tourism development.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the linguistic landscape of Jalan Tunjungan reflects a layered interaction between national language policy, local cultural identity, and global influences. Indonesian dominates official and institutional signage, reinforcing its role as the national language and a unifying medium for public communication. In contrast, English and other foreign languages appear primarily on commercial signs, where they function symbolically to project modernity, prestige, and international orientation rather than serve purely informational

purposes. The selective use of local and heritage languages in the streetscape expresses cultural authenticity, religious identity, culinary specialization, and historical memory.

The findings indicate that public signs on Jalan Tunjungan serve not only as communication tools but also as visual representations of social identity and cultural continuity. The linguistic landscape thus serves as a space where history, commerce, and contemporary urban life intersect. By highlighting both informational and symbolic functions of language in public space, this study contributes to linguistic landscape research in urban Indonesian contexts. It offers practical insights for culturally sensitive urban planning, tourism development, and heritage preservation.

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