

# Linguistic Landscape in Tanjungbalai

*By Bambang Gulyanto*

## Linguistic Landscape in Tanjungbalai

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**Abstract:** *This study investigated the texts used in public spaces in Tanjungbalai, North Sumatera, Indonesia. From 182 signboards analyzed, it was found that the items in the bottom-up category had a large number than in the top-down category. This finding approved that shop notes, private business notes, and private broadcasts dominated the Tanjungbalai's linguistic landscape. The texts used in top-down and bottom-up categories were monolingual (using BI/FL/LL) and bilingual (using BI and FL/ BI and LL/ FL and LL). In terms of monolingualism, BI was dominantly used in both categories. In the top-down category, BI was used in 19 nameplates of public institutions, 7 public notes of common interest, and 11 public broadcasts. In the bottom-up category, BI was used in 46 shop notes, 11 private business notes, and 16 private broadcasts. However, LL had the least number in use. It was merely used in 1 public broadcast and 2 shop notes. In terms of bilingualism, in the top-down category, bilingualism was only found in public broadcasts while in the bottom-up category, it was found in all types of items. Public broadcasts in Tanjungbalai combined BI with LL. Such combination will allow a culturally diverse society to comprehend the information provided by state and local government. In the bottom-up category, BI and FL were the major combinations identified (found in 15 shop signs, 2 private business signs, and 14 private announcements), followed by FL and LL combination (found in 3 shop signs), and BI and LL combination (found in 1 shop sign). Low LL usage in all categories (top-down, bottom-up, monolingual, and bilingual) indicated the failure of local government to promote LL and the potential for the death of LL. This study, then, can be a self-reflection for the local government in Tanjungbalai to redesign language policy and planning.*

**Keywords:** linguistic landscape, monolingualism, bilingualism

### 1. Introduction

Language is caught sight wherever we go. It presents on pamphlets, banners, billboards, names of buildings, names of shops, names of roads, names of streets, names of parks, names of gardens, or public transport. Generally, people ignore the linguistic landscape which presents around them. For the time being, however, there are so many researchers who have studied texts that exist in public spots. Some experts considered the linguistic landscape as a novel path to multilingual community since the language used may be more than one language (Gorter, 2006; Stroud, 2009, Vandenbroucke, 2010).

The language employed in public signs indicates a locally relevant language (Hult, 2009; Kasanga, 2012). In multilingual areas, multilingual signs indicate tolerance and allure as people

are aware of being multilingual in society. Besides, the language used in public signs is able to represent evidence of the role of disparate language through history (Jam, 2013; Ramamoorthy, 2002).

The people of Tanjungbalai, which are multiethnic, must have spoken more than one language. In their daily interaction, they used Malay, Batakese, Chinese, or Bahasa Indonesia. They are spread over six sub-districts; *Tanjungbalai Selatan*, *S. Tualang Raso*, *Tanjungbalai Utara*, *Datuk Bandar*, *Teluk Nibung*, and *Datuk Bandar Timur*. As Tanjungbalai has a ferry terminal with services to Malaysia and Singapore, modernization sways its citizen. Thus, English is used in naming some spots. However, in naming historical spots, the people of Tanjungbalai still preserve the use of the local language to respect the Asahan Sultanate.

There were many previous studies done by many researchers related to linguistic landscapes. Hong et al (2012) found that in Singapore, English was used on unofficial signboards while Malay and Mandarin were widely used on official signboards. Wanting and Sze Min (2012) found that multilingual phenomena occurred in the surroundings of Singapore. Some Singaporeans used their official language (Malay) on signboards and the rest used English and Mandarin. In general, English is used to adjust to business needs. This signifies that business people in Singapore tend to use English to promote their products or services. Then, Coluzzi (2016) found that Italian dominated the nameplates of fashion products. The perfume shops, shops of toiletries, and boutiques used Italian. Italians maintained their local language as a world fashion symbol. Furthermore, Taylor (2015) found that four languages dominated signboards in Dili, Timor-Leste; Tetum (state language of Timor-Leste), English, Portuguese, and Bahasa Indonesia. Then, Fajar and Ardhian (2017) found that Malang (one of the cities in Indonesia), in naming public spaces, used monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual codes. When using monolingual code, Bahasa Indonesia is widely used. Yet, there were some areas in Malang that only use Javanese. In particular, public spot appellation of various tourist attractions in Malang contains a composite of Javanese and English, Bahasa Indonesia with Javanese, or Bahasa Indonesia with English.

This research, specifically, investigates the texts used in public spaces such as pamphlets, banners, billboards, names of buildings, shops, parks, and gardens which are found in Tanjungbalai (a city located in North Sumatra, Indonesia, on the firth of the River of Asahan). The texts, then, will be classified into Bahasa Indonesia (BI), Foreign Language (FL), and Local Language (LL) using top-down and bottom-up categories. Besides, the texts used in these public spaces will be compared and analyzed in terms of their proportions of occurrences—whether they are monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual—to know; (1) the salient language used in public spaces in Tanjungbalai, (2) the motives behind the use of BI, FL, or LL in the texts of public spaces in Tanjungbalai, and (3) policy or planning taken or applied by the local government of Tanjungbalai to respond to the phenomenon of the linguistic landscape.

## 2. Literature Review

### General Overview of Linguistic Landscape

The word “landscape” means visible attributes displayed in a certain area that represents a natural condition of heartland scenery. The use of the linguistic landscape concept itself varies greatly among researchers. Sciriha and Vassalo (2001), for example, applied the linguistic landscape concept to describe and analyze the situation of language use in a particular country. Then, Kreslin (2003) used the concept of the linguistic landscape in a larger geographic area. Here, the linguistic landscape is associated with the multilingual social context. So, the

researcher resumed the phenomena of the linguistic landscape by connecting them to multilingual phenomena.

Linguistic landscape meaning can be occasionally extended to cover the history of languages or different levels upon language knowledge. Specifically, it can relate to the internal variation of a certain language—not only about its vocabulary but also other elements (Fleitas, 2003). In addition, Labov et al (1997) asserted that dialect boundaries and their deployments can also indicate linguistic landscape. More specifically, the linguistic landscape covers language used on signs of road, advertising billboards, names of streets, names of tourist spots, shop notes, and public notes of state buildings. Thus, it also covers the written forms of language usage in the general realm. Shohamy and Gorter (2009) have truly broadened the scope of linguistic landscape. They accommodated displayed images and language(s) in public spots.

Accordingly, linguistic landscape study undertakes language displays in public places. Its research objects are displayed written language(s) and signs, and the interaction of people with them. Consequently, the linguistic landscape is a greatly interdisciplinary field of research, based on extensive theories and domains such as sociology, anthropology, geography, politics, language policy and planning, semiotics, and literacy studies. In other words, the linguistic landscape has been a promising research area for those interested in language, society, and their affiliations (Helot et al, 2012).

In fact, Gorter (2012) recognizes linguistic landscape as a role reflection played by language(s) in a community, either directly or indirectly, as referred to "a mirror of carnival". The research of linguistic landscape, thus, can help society to acquire perception to describe linguistic heterogeneity which emblemizes la<sup>31</sup> modern society's concepts of multi-layered and multilingual contexts. Additionally, the linguistic landscape can be considered as a combination of social activity outlines. So, short or <sup>10</sup>g-time changes in a language and its users (society) can map and interpret the phenomena of the linguistic landscape.

### Defining the Observable Phenomena of Linguistic Landscape

Researchers have produced numerous studies on the areas of linguistic landscape <sup>16</sup> make its observable scope, researchers have also formulated a number of variables of linguistic landscape. Landry and Bourhis (1997), for example, identify six signs indicating the spread of linguistic landscape; signs of public roads, billboards, names of streets, tourist spots, shop notes, and notes on government buildings. Then, Rafael et al (2006) proposed all signs and announcements displayed outside and inside public or private places in a certain location. Hu<sup>17</sup>ner (2006), in addition, includes "linguistic tokens" and "linguistic <sup>17</sup> facts" as the nature of a sign in the linguistic landscape. Moreover, Backhaus (2007) defines a sign in the linguistic landscape as written texts within a spatial and definite frame.

However, the nature of a sign in the linguistic landscape has dramatical<sup>14</sup> developed and it encloses immense artifacts and tokens found in public spots as well as T shirts (Coupland, 2010), machines of stamps (Van Mensel & Darquennes, 2012), honey bottles (Blackwood & Tufi, 2012), soccer banner (Siebetchu, 2016), postcards (Jaworski, 2010), and tattooing (Peck & Stroud, 2015). Besides, Hanauer (2010) and Pennycook (2010) addressed a different aspect of a sign in the linguistic landscape, namely graffiti.

### Categories of Linguistic Landscape

There are two categories of the linguistic landscape; <sup>5</sup> top-down and bottom-up. The top-down category refers to state or local government signs. Signs of roads, names of buildings, and

names of streets are some examples of the top-down category. Such signs represent particular language policy. Then, the bottom-up category refers to private signs which are probably affected by language policy but mostly represent personal alternatives. Private stores and agencies are some examples of this category. Shohamy et al (2010) gave further explanation on these two categories as shown in the table below:

**Table 1: The Categories of Linguistic Landscape**

Category	Item Types
Top-down	1. Public institutions 2. Public notes of common interest 3. Public broadcasts 4. Notes of street names
Bottom-up	1. Shop notes 2. Private business notes 3. Private broadcasts

To analyze the above-mentioned linguistic landscape categories, this research employs two approaches, examining language(s) displayed in the notes and classifying the establishment where the signs are located. In addition, the location of the signs, the font size, language order on multilingual notes, the cohesive significance of language(s)—whether a text has been entirely or partially reworded, and signs’ raw can also be taken into consideration when coding the linguistic landscape. To accommodate correspondence in the midst of studies established upon diverse sections of nature, similar coding use is a requirement.

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 28 **Problems and Difficulties in the Research of Linguistic Landscape**

The study of the linguistic landscape encounters some problems and difficulties. Gorter & Cenoz (2007) highlighted some problems and difficulties related to linguistic landscape studies covering theoretical frameworks, units of analysis, the dynamicity of linguistic landscape nature, and sampling and representativity. In terms of theoretical framework problems, linguistic landscape study has to go through several works at theoretical levels since it is multidisciplinary. It means that linguistic landscape study may be related to distinctive theories of sociolinguistics, language policy and planning, language mixing, or other disciplines.

A considerable number of language signs interwoven with others creates complications to know what sort of language sign is. Questions such as, “Are all items in shop windows categorized as linguistic signs?”, “Are advertisements, graffiti, and posters displayed next to shop windows also part of linguistic signs?”, or “Can an entire street be regarded as an analysis unit?” must be carefully considered because they contribute to the methodological issues. Then, the nature of the linguistic landscape which is dynamic is another difficulty of this study. Many signs are rigid but the others may be changed over time. Posters and graffiti are some examples of signs which can be swiftly changed because of market demands and current development.

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 22 Sampling and representativeness are other problems in the area of the linguistic landscape. Besides capturing language signs in a certain area, establishing the criteria which improve language representativity is much more important to accomplish in the analysis of the linguistic landscape. Selecting areas that share similar characteristics but are located in different cities is one of the possible attempts that can be done to analyze all signs. In addition, selecting localities that represent disparate multiethnocultural communities in the same areas are also important to consider to draw entire linguistic landscape phenomena.

### 3. Methodology

This study is qualitative that aims at analyzing the linguistic landscape phenomena to know; (1) the dominant language used in the texts of public spaces in terms of monolingualism (BI, FL, or LL) and bilingualism (BI and FL, BI and LL, and FL and LL), (2) policy or planning to be taken or applied to respond to the phenomena of the linguistic landscape based on the occurrence of BI, FL, or LL and the combination of them in the texts. The data of this research were taken from inscriptions displayed on pamphlets, banners, billboards, names of buildings, names of shops/cafes, names of parks, and names of gardens along Sudirman, S. Parman, and Teuku Umar Streets in Tanjungbalai, North Sumatera. Cameras and field notes were used as two instruments in this research.

To collect the data, this research uses the observation technique. The observation was done for 2 months (April 4, 2021- June 4, 2021). Then, the data analyses were completed by categorizing them (using top-down, bottom-up, monolingualism, and bilingualism categories). The findings (the ratio of BI, FL, and LL occurrences as well as their combinations), in addition, are furtherly analyzed to verify the rationales in relation to the linguistic landscapes phenomena and the policy designed, taken, or applied by the local government in Tanjungbalai. Specifically, there were 182 signboards analyzed including 19 nameplates of public institutions, 9 public notes of common interest, 18 public broadcasts, 91 shop notes, 17 private business notes, and 28 private broadcasts covering offices, factories, and agencies.

### Findings and Discussion

There were 182 signboards analyzed including 19 nameplates of public institutions, 9 public notes of common interest, 18 public broadcasts, 91 shop notes, 17 private business notes, and 28 private broadcasts covering offices, factories, and agencies found in Tanjungbalai, North Sumatera, Indonesia. These signboards are grouped into two categories; (1) top-down and bottom-up, and (2) monolingual and bilingual. The detailed findings of the top-down and bottom-up categories can be displayed in the following table:

5 **Table 2: Findings Based on Top-Down and Bottom-Up Categories**

Category	Type of Item	Number
Top-down	Public Institutions	19
	Public Notes of Common Interest	9
	Public Broadcasts	18
Bottom-up	Shop Notes	91
	Private Business Notes	17
	Private Broadcasts	28
<b>Total</b>		<b>182</b>

The data presented in the table showed that the bottom-up category had a larger number compared to the top-down category. This finding implied that shop signs, private business signs, and private announcements dominated the linguistic landscapes in Tanjungbalai. The state or local government was less active in promoting their featured programs. The local government in Tanjungbalai still did not maximize the use of public spaces to announce crucial matters such as excellent service in public institutions, achievements, or short-/ long-term development plans.

Then, the findings displayed in the above table showed that Tanjungbalai still had a very limited number of general interest facilities. Specifically, along *Jalan Sudirman*, *Jalan S.Parman*, and *Jalan T.Umar*, there were only 9 public signs of general interest. This signified that local government paid less attention to public spots such as parks, gardens, bus stops, etc.

Among all types of Items, shop signs had the highest number (91 signboards). This finding indicated that the people of Tanjungbalai had good entrepreneurial spirits to build and refix their economic conditions. To promote their products and services, they advertised and announced them creatively. Thus, the private announcement was ranked second (28 announcements).

The language used in both categories was varied. Some texts were monolingual (written by using BI/FL/LL) and some texts were bilingual (written by using the combination of BI-FL, BI-LL, or FL-LL). The specific findings can be displayed in the following table:

**Table 3: Findings Based on the Monolingual Proportions of Occurrences**

Category	Type of Item	Number of BI	Number of FL	Number of LL
Top-down	Public Institutions	19	0	0
	Public Notes of Common Interest	7	2	0
	Public Broadcasts	11	2	1
Bottom-up	Shop Notes	46	23	2
	Private Business Note	11	6	0
	Private Broadcasts	16	1	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>3</b>

The findings above showed that BI was dominantly used in both; top-down and bottom-up categories. In the top-down category, public institutions only used BI. This implied that the local government realized the legal basis as stipulated in Ministerial Regulation of Home Affairs No. 81/2012 related to naming, abbreviations, and acronym guidelines. The state government released this regulation to provide uniformity, exemplary, and communication among local government and its stakeholders. To achieve these goals, standardized BI was used. This regulation is in accordance with Act No. 24/2009 which requires the use of BI as official and state language in naming buildings, streets, apartments, settlements, institutions, trade centers, trademarks, business factories, schools, political parties, and corporations (Article 36, Verse 3). Then, public notes of common interest used BI dominantly (found in 7 signboards), followed by FL (found in 2 signboards). Unfortunately, there were no public notes of common interest in Tanjungbalai written by using LL. Similar to prior findings, BI was prevalent in public announcements as well (found in 11 billboards/ pamphlets/ banners), followed by FL (found in 2 billboards/ pamphlets/ banners). LL was only used in 1 public announcement.

The findings of the top-down category implied that local government failed in promoting LL even in potential sectors such as in public facilities including parks, gardens, tourism attractions, and public announcements. The local government of Tanjungbalai had more pride in using FL to introduce its landmarks such as “Water Front City” and “Tanjungbalai Food Courts”. Consequently, LL was not used in any public notes of common interest. This phenomenon can be a starting point to local language death. The local government of Tanjungbalai must give serious attention to maintain LL. Then, the use of jargon such as “I

love Tanjungbalai” and “Welcome to Tanjungbalai” announcing the devotion and hospitality of the citizens implied that modernization affected the mindset of local government.

In the bottom-up category, shops also used BI dominantly (found in 46 signboards). Only 23 signboards of shops were written in FL and 2 signboards were written in LL. Private business notes such as offices, factories, or agencies and private broadcasts had the same phenomenon. BI was used in 11 nameplates/ billboards/ pamphlets/ banners while FL was used in 6 nameplates/ billboards/ pamphlets/ banners and in 1 announcement. Yet, LL was not used in any private business notes and private broadcasts. These findings denoted that the citizens of Tanjungbalai had a negative attitude towards LL. They adjusted their marketing to the social condition of the citizens. Since most of the citizens of Tanjungbalai were newcomers coming from different cultural and social backgrounds, business people tend to use BI and FL to penetrate business opportunities and to gain profits. By using BI, they assumed that the citizens would have a good understanding of their products and services. To offer advantages, they announced them by also using BI and FL. According to them, both languages were very effective to attract old-fashioned customers (by the use of BI) and modern customers (by the use of FL).

Low LL usage in top-down and bottom-up categories indicated the failure of the local government of Tanjungbalai in promoting LL. The local government has to find strategies for maintaining LL to make citizens proud of their LL and provoke positive attitudes towards LL. Otherwise, LL will be history shortly. The local government of Tanjungbalai may start by refixing the top-down category through renaming public signs of common interest and refixing the texts of public broadcasts. If the government does them, it will influence business people in the bottom-up category. Accordingly, language death will be prevented.

Besides monolingualism, bilingualism was also found in top-down and bottom-up categories. Many texts written in public announcements, shop signs, private business signs, and private broadcasts mixed BI with FL, BI with LL, or FL with LL. The following is the specific display of the phenomena:

**Table 4: Findings Based on the Bilingual Proportions of Occurrences**

Category	Type of Item	Number of BI-FL	Number of BI-LL	Number of FL-LL
Top-down	Public Broadcasts	0	3	0
Bottom-up	Shop Notes	15	1	3
	Private Business Notes	2	0	0
	Private Broadcasts	14	0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>31</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>

The table above showed that in the top-down category, bilingualism only occurred in public broadcasts while in the bottom-up category, bilingualism occurred in all types of items; shop notes, private business notes, and private broadcasts. The use of BI and LL were mixed in public broadcast texts (found in 3 local broadcasts). The local government used such a combination to make multiethnic citizens in Tanjungbalai comprehend the information and messages displayed in announcements. Thus, they could transfer them to other society members. The act of mixing BI with LL or vice versa became an effective way to convey messages to the public. Consequently, the bilingual use of BI and FL or FL and LL was not found in public announcements.



In the bottom-up category, the mixing of BI with FL was widely used in all types of items such as shop notes, private business notes, and private broadcasts (found in 15 shop nameplates, 2 private business nameplates, and 14 private broadcast texts). These findings implied that business people tend to use bilingualism—BI and FL—to promote their products and services for business needs. They used these combinations to modernize their language styles. The more unique and modern the business signboards and private broadcasts are, the more attracted the customers are. The combination of BI and LL was only found in 1 shop note. Then, the combination of FL and LL was found in 3 shop notes. In private business notes and private broadcasts, those combinations were not found. Such findings described that business people in Tanjungbalai had different marketing strategies in designing shop notes. Some preferred to use BI combined with FL, some preferred to combine BI with LL, and others liked using the combination of FL with LL. Whatever strategy they chose, they must have considered market opportunities and language maintenance of the local language.

#### 4. Conclusion

36 The study of a linguistic landscape can draw language policy and language planning in a certain area. In Tanjungbalai, North Sumatera, Indonesia, BI is dominantly used in the top-down category (in public institutions, public notes of common interest, and public broadcasts) and in the bottom-up category (in shop notes, private business notes, and private broadcasts). The use of LL in both categories is increasingly under threat since it is only used in 1 public broadcast and 2 shop notes. 34

The texts in public places are written monolingual and bilingual. BI was dominantly used in terms of monolingualism while in terms of bilingualism, the combination of BI with FL was widely used. These findings imply that on one hand, the local government of Tanjungbalai has realized Ministerial Regulation of Home Affairs No. 81/ 2012 related to naming, abbreviations, and acronym guidelines and Act No. 24/ 2009 related to the use of BI as official and state language in naming buildings, streets, apartments, settlements, institutions, trade centers, trademarks, business factories, schools, political parties, and corporations (Article 36, verse 3) very well. Conversely, the local government has failed in preserving LL. The local government cannot attract societies in using LL, specifically in the category of bottom-up. Business people like using FL better than using LL to introduce their shops, brands, products, and services. Thus, it is suggested that the local government has to promote and maintain LL more seriously and attractively. Having talks and discussions with language planners, linguists, or practitioners are some alternatives that can be done to redesign and re-execute local language policy and planning. 10

Overall, the linguistic landscape study can assist the study of multilingual and bilingual phenomena as the language marks are indicators of language usage in particular setting. The spreading of multilingualism and bilingualism can be a self-reflection to local government to determine further language planning and policy to maintain the local language. 37

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