

The Linguistic Landscape of Public Tourism Spaces in Tanjungpinang: Language Functions, Identity Representation, and Spatial Dynamics

Taufik Afdal¹, Nur Hidayatulshima Omar^{*2}, Yulia Efnawati³

^{1,3} English Education Department, Institut Agama Islam Miftahul Ulum Tanjungpinang, Kepri, Indonesia

²Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka, Alor Gajah, Melaka, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the linguistic landscape of Tanjungpinang Old Town to explore how language use in public signage reflects broader sociolinguistic dynamics, including national language policy, tourism development, and the representation of local cultural identity. Using a qualitative linguistic landscape approach, data were collected through photographic documentation of public signage across key locations within the heritage district. The collected signs (N = 120) were analysed based on language distribution, sign types (top-down and bottom-up), and their informational and symbolic functions. The findings reveal that Bahasa Indonesia dominates the linguistic landscape (60.8% overall), particularly in top-down official signage (76.2%), produced by government institutions. This dominance reflects the influence of national language policy and the role of Indonesian as the primary medium of public communication. Conversely, bottom-up commercial signage demonstrates significantly greater multilingual hybridity (35.9% bilingual/multilingual and 12.8% foreign monolingual), driven by market demands, private branding, and tourism commodification. English appears selectively (21.7% bilingual interaction) in tourism-related contexts, such as informational boards and directional signs, indicating an emerging orientation toward international visitors while still maintaining the centrality of the national language. In addition, the study finds that cultural diversity within the district is represented largely through visual symbols—such as Malay decorative motifs and Chinese cultural imagery—rather than through multilingual written language. Comparative analysis reveals that while the Old Town prioritizes historical authenticity and national identity, modern commercial sectors (e.g., Bintan Centre) display higher English penetration and globalized branding. The study contributes to the growing body of linguistic landscape research in tourism settings by highlighting how public signage reflects the interaction between language policy, globalization, and cultural representation in a heritage tourism destination.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, language policy, Tanjungpinang Old Town. Top-down vs. bottom-up signage, Cultural identity

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in shaping public spaces and mediating social interaction within urban environments. One of the most visible manifestations of language in public space is the linguistic landscape (LL), which refers to the written language displayed on signs, billboards, street names, commercial advertisements, and other public texts (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). These visual representations of language not only serve communicative purposes but also reveal sociolinguistic dynamics such as language hierarchy, identity construction, and ideological positioning within society. Public signage functions as an important medium through which authorities, businesses, and communities communicate information and regulate behaviour. Beyond their informational role, signs also carry symbolic meanings that reflect power relations, cultural values, and social structures (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). The presence, absence, and prominence of particular languages

in public signage often reveal broader sociopolitical and economic processes shaping language use in a given region.

In the context of tourism, linguistic landscapes become even more complex. Tourism destinations frequently attract visitors from diverse linguistic backgrounds, requiring signage that accommodates both local residents and international tourists. As a result, tourism spaces often exhibit multilingual signage designed to facilitate communication, promote accessibility, and enhance the visitor experience. At the same time, the choice of language on signage may also function as a marker of cultural authenticity and local identity. Scholars have emphasized that linguistic landscapes perform two main functions: informational and symbolic (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). The informational function refers to the practical role of signage in conveying directions, instructions, and public information. The symbolic function relates to the ways in which language visibility reflects the relative status of linguistic communities and expresses cultural or national identity.

Indonesia provides a particularly rich setting for linguistic landscape research due to its multilingual and multicultural context. The coexistence of the national language (Bahasa Indonesia), over 700 ethnolinguistic regional languages, and international languages such as English and Mandarin often produces complex patterns of language use in public spaces. These patterns are especially visible in tourism areas where communication needs intersect with cultural representation. National language policy, codified in Law No. 24 of 2009 (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 24 Tahun 2009), strictly mandates the prioritized use of Bahasa Indonesia in public services, official signage, road infrastructure, and public institutions. However, regional tourism development and commercial globalisation frequently generate tension between national policy compliance and market-driven multilingualism (Darmawan, 2019).

Tanjungpinang, the capital city of the Riau Islands Province (Kepulauan Riau) known for its historical heritage, maritime culture, and tourism attractions, including cultural sites, coastal tourism areas, and historical landmarks. As a gateway to international tourism routes and a culturally diverse urban centre, the city presents a dynamic linguistic landscape shaped by local traditions, national identity, and global tourism influences. Public signage in tourism spaces within Tanjungpinang may therefore reflect multiple linguistic and cultural layers. Languages displayed on signs may include Indonesian as the national language, local languages associated with regional identity, and foreign languages aimed at international visitors. Examining these patterns provides valuable insight into how language is strategically used to communicate information, construct identity, and support tourism development.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study focuses on three primary theoretical frameworks in linguistic landscape research: Geosemiotics, the Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Signage Taxonomy, and Tourism Linguistic Commodification.

Geosemiotics and Spatial Placement

A key theoretical perspective in linguistic landscape studies is geosemiotics, proposed by Scollon and Scollon (2003). Geosemiotics examines the relationship between the placement of signs and the social meaning they convey. According to this approach, there are three interconnected visual systems: interaction order (how actors interact with signs), visual semiotics (layout, font, image-text relationships), and place semiotics (spatial location and urban context). The meaning of a sign is influenced not only by its linguistic content (authority, commercial branding) but also by its spatial context, design, and interaction with other signs.

Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Sign Taxonomy

Another important distinction in linguistic landscape research is the classification of signage into top-down and bottom-up signs (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). Top-down signs are produced by official institutions such as government agencies and public authorities. Bottom-up signs are created by private actors such as shop owners, restaurants, and local businesses. This distinction allows researchers to examine how language policies implemented by institutions interact with language practices adopted by individuals and commercial actors. Researchers have also explored code preference and language hierarchy in multilingual signage (Backhaus,

2007). In multilingual contexts, the order and size of languages on a sign often reflect the relative prestige or dominance of particular languages.

Tourism Commodification and Multimodal Semiotics

Overall, linguistic landscape studies provide insight into how language visibility reflects social structures, cultural identities, and ideological perspectives embedded within public space. Tourism environments frequently display highly diverse linguistic landscapes because they must address multiple audiences simultaneously. The use of different languages in tourism signage can serve practical communication purposes while also shaping the cultural image of a destination. Heller, Pujolar, and Duchêne (2014) introduced the concept of linguistic commodification, which refers to the transformation of language into an economic resource in tourism and service industries. In tourism settings, languages are often strategically used to market cultural authenticity or attract international visitors. Several studies have documented this phenomenon in tourism destinations worldwide. For example, Moriarty (2014) examined the linguistic landscape of Dingle, Ireland, and found that the Irish language was used to emphasize local authenticity, while English ensured accessibility for international tourists. Similarly, Bruyèl-Olmedo and Juan-Garau (2015) observed the use of Catalan in tourism signage in Mallorca as a means of reinforcing regional identity. Research in East Asian and Southeast Asian tourism destinations has also highlighted the role of English as a global lingua franca. In many tourism environments, English appears alongside local languages to facilitate communication with international visitors (Lee, 2019). In Southeast Asia, multilingual signage in tourism spaces often reflects a combination of national language policy, local cultural identity, and global tourism orientation. These linguistic practices illustrate how tourism spaces function as sites where global and local identities intersect.

In recent years, linguistic landscape research in Indonesia has gained increasing attention. Scholars have examined public signage in urban areas, educational institutions, and tourism destinations to understand patterns of language use and identity representation. Studies conducted in Indonesian tourism destinations reveal the coexistence of Indonesian, English, and local languages in public signage. For example, research on tourism areas such as Labuan Bajo and Lake Toba shows that Indonesian often functions as the dominant language due to national language policy, while English appears as an international communication tool.

Local languages may also appear in signage to symbolize cultural heritage and regional identity. However, their visibility is often limited compared to national or global languages. These findings suggest that linguistic landscapes in Indonesian tourism destinations reflect a complex negotiation between language policy, cultural preservation, and global tourism demands. Despite the growing body of research on linguistic landscapes in Indonesia, studies focusing specifically on the tourism environment of Tanjungpinang remain limited. Given the city's strategic position as a cultural and tourism centre in the Riau Islands, examining its linguistic landscape offers valuable insights into the interaction between language, tourism, and identity.

Research Objectives

This study fulfils four specific research objectives:

1. To establish the sample sizes, sign actor types (top-down vs. Bottom-up), and language pattern distributions (monolingual, bilingual, multilingual, visual-only).
2. To contrast top-down official signage with bottom-up commercial signage according to language choice, code preference, and communicative function.
3. To examine the informational, symbolic and multimodal functions of signage present in the linguistic landscape of the area.
4. To compare the heritage district's linguistic landscape (Tanjungpinang Old Town) with modern commercial and tourism sectors (e.g., Bintan Centre).

Research Questions

Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate the following research questions:

1. What are the distributions of language patterns and sign types used across the public signage of Tanjungpinang Old Town?
2. How do top-down official signs and bottom-up commercial signs differ in language choice, code salience, and national language policy compliance?
3. What informational, symbolic and multimodal functions do the signs (written and visual) perform within the heritage district?
4. How does the linguistic landscape of the historic heritage district compare with modern commercial tourism sectors in Tanjungpinang?

METHODOLOGY

This section details the photographic sampling, data collection protocols, coding schema, and quantitative categorization procedures.

Spatial Boundaries and Sampling Transects

The data collected for this study was taken across strictly demarcated spatial transects within Tanjungpinang Old Town. Sampling boundaries were established along three primary heritage areas to capture representative public signage:

1. Transect A (Jalan Merdeka Commercial Corridor): A linear pedestrian containing retail shops, heritage coffee shops (*kedai kopi*), financial institutions, and colonial-era shops.
2. Transect B (Lorong Pasar & Jalan Teuku Umar Heritage Alleyways): Traditional market streets with dense commercial activity, traditional Malay-Chinese residential shops, and local cultural landmarks.
3. Transect C (Dermaga Penyengat Ferry Hub & Waterfront Precinct) A public maritime transit zone encompassing the primary passenger terminal connecting Tanjungpinang to Penyengat Island, public plazas, tourism information boards, and government welcome signs.

For comparative analysis, the data was collected from Transect D (Bintan Centre) representing Tanjungpinang's modern suburban commercial hub featuring contemporary shopping complexes, modern cafes, and corporate service centres.

Photographic Sampling Protocol

Photographic documentation is conducted systematically to capture a representative sample of signage across these locations. Each photographed sign is treated as a unit of analysis, defined as any piece of written text displayed within a clearly identifiable frame in a public space. The collected data are analysed using qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013). The unit of linguistic analysis includes words, phrases, and sentences appearing on signage intended for public communication (Backhaus, 2007). Strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were employed to prevent sample bias:

1. Inclusion Criteria: All permanent and semi-permanent signs including street infrastructure, building facades, shop entrances, public plazas, and tourism information boards.
2. Exclusion Criteria: Posters, hand-written notes, moving vehicles, license plates, and promotional flyers.

Each of the photographed sign (N = 120) was categorised using a structured digital coding matrix recording six analytical variables:

1. Sign identifier.
2. Sign Type: Top-Down (Official/Government) vs. Bottom-Up (Private/Commercial).
3. Linguistic Pattern: Monolingual (Bahasa Indonesia), Monolingual (foreign languages), Bilingual (Bahasa Indonesia-English, Bahasa Indonesia-Chinese, English-Chinese), Multilingual (3 languages), or Visual-Only.
4. Code Salience: Top placement, font size, colour prominence, and translation placement (Backhaus, 2007).
5. Communicative Function: Informational (directions, warnings) vs. Symbolic (identity marking, heritage storytelling).
6. Visual Semiotic Features: Presence of cultural graphics (Malay sculpture, Chinese lanterns, dragon symbols)

Inter-coder reliability was established by having two independent researchers code a random 20% sample of the corpus. Agreement calculated via Cohen's Kappa yielded $k = 0.91$, indicating excellent inter-rater reliability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The linguistic landscape (LL) of Tanjungpinang Old Town provides insight into how language, space, and cultural identity interact in a historically significant urban environment. The primary photographic corpus collected across Tanjungpinang Old Town comprises N = 120 public signs.

Sign Types and Language Patterns

Language Pattern	Top-Down Signs (N = 42)	Bottom-Up Signs (N = 78)	Total Sample (N = 120)	Overall %
Monolingual Indonesian	32 (76.2%)	41 (52.6%)	73	60.8%
Monolingual Foreign / Chinese	0 (0.0%)	10 (12.8%)	10	8.3%
Bilingual Indonesian - English	8 (19.0%)	14 (17.9%)	22	18.3%
Bilingual Indonesian - Chinese	0 (0.0%)	4 (5.1%)	4	3.3%
Multilingual (3+ languages)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0	0.0%
Visual-Only / Semiotic Motifs	2 (4.8%)	9 (11.5%)	11	9.2%

Table 1. Sign Types and Language Patterns in Tanjungpinang Old Town (N = 120)

Table 1 shows the sign types and language patterns displays in Tanjungpinang Old Town. Bottom-up commercial signage constitutes the majority of public displays (65%, $n = 78$), while top-down official signage recorded 35% ($n = 42$). Monolingual Bahasa Indonesia dominates across the total corpus (60.8%, $n = 73$). This confirms the national language's policy in public space.



Fig. 1. Bilingual sign

Top-Down Official Signage & State Language Ideology

Out of 42 official signs, 76.2% ($n = 32$) top-down signage are strictly monolingual in Bahasa Indonesia exhibiting a strict adherence to national language policy. For instance, government agency office (e.g. Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata), official street markers (Jalan Merdeka), public instructional warnings, and historical boundary markers at Dermaga Penyengat.



Fig. 2. Top-Down signage

For bilingualism in official signage, it is restricted to Bahasa Indonesia-English combinations (19%, $n = 8$). Significantly, in all bilingual top-down signs, Bahasa Indonesia occupies the primary code position which is at the top with larger font sizes and bolder typography. This distribution reflects state language policy under Law No. 24.2009, in which institutional signage is deployed to assert national sovereignty, administrative standardisation, and civic hierarchy (Shohamy, 2006; Ben-Rafael & Ben-rafael, 2021).

Bottom-Up Commercial Signage vs. Top-Down Signage

In contrast to top-down signage, bottom-up commercial signage shows greater linguistic diversity.

Dimension	Top-Down Official Signage (N = 42 / 35%)	Bottom-Up Commercial Signage (N = 78 / 65%)
Primary Language Choice	Bahasa Indonesia (76.2% monolingual); 19.0% Indonesian-English bilingual.	Bahasa Indonesia (52.6%); foreign/multilingual & visual integration (47.4%).
Secondary Script Integration	English only (secondary position, standardized translation).	English (17.9%), Chinese characters (17.9% total monolingual/bilingual), local dialect expressions.
Typographic Hierarchy & Code Salience	Strict Indonesian dominance: top placement, larger font size, bold weight.	Flexible & hybrid: foreign scripts/English branding frequently occupy primary top/center placement.
Primary Communicative Function	Informational navigation, public regulation, state boundary marking, institutional authority.	Commercial branding, customer attraction, product commodification, heritage authenticity.
Policy Compliance vs. Market Orientation	100% compliance with Law No. 24/2009 national language regulation.	Pragmatic market orientation; responds directly to client demographics and tourist branding.

Table 2. Comparison between Top-Down Official and Bottom-Up Commercial Signage

Table 2 shows that 52.6% of the commercial signs use monolingual Bahasa Indonesia and nearly half (47.4%) of the commercial signs incorporate foreign languages, regional expressions, or visual semiotics. Monolingual foreign signs (12.8%, n = 10) featuring Chinese characters are visible on traditional medicine stores, and English language on modern cafes (Coffee & Eatery).



Fig. 3. Bottom-Up signage

Language Use and Globalisation

The presence of English language (21.7%, n = 26) across the entire corpus serves as a primary medium of local social interactions with English as a strategic auxiliary code. In top-down contexts, English functions to facilitate international tourist at waterfront entry points (You're on Jalan Merdeka). In bottom-up commercial contexts, English serves as commodifying function (Heller et al., 2014) to project modernity without displacing the national language. The use of English in Tanjungpinang Old Town remains relatively limited compared to Bahasa Indonesia. Rather than functioning as an equal language, English appears mainly as a secondary or

supportive language. This pattern indicates what researchers describe as functional bilingualism, where different languages serve different communicative purposes within the same space. Recent linguistic landscape research highlights how tourism influences language visibility in public signage. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2021), tourist destinations often display multilingual signs to accommodate diverse visitors while still maintaining the dominance of local or national languages. In this context, the inclusion of English does not replace Indonesian but complements it by providing additional accessibility. The selective use of English also reflects the broader economic and geographic context of Tanjungpinang. Located near Singapore and Malaysia, the city has potential to attract international tourists from neighbouring countries. By incorporating English into key informational signs, local authorities signal openness to international visitors while maintaining linguistic consistency with national policy. This pattern illustrates the tension between globalization and national language preservation. While global languages facilitate tourism and international communication, governments often maintain strict control over linguistic representation in official spaces (Shohamy, 2015). In Tanjungpinang Old Town, this balance is evident in the limited but strategic use of English in selected signage.



Fig. 4. Sign based on globalisation

Visual Semiotics and Symbolic Representation

Recent studies emphasize the role of linguistic landscapes in place branding and heritage representation. Puzey and Kostanski (2020) argue that signage in heritage areas often combines language, imagery, and spatial design to create a coherent identity for visitors. In this sense, the linguistic landscape becomes part of the tourism experience itself, guiding how visitors understand the historical significance of a location. The use of Bahasa Indonesia in these heritage narratives also integrates local history into the broader national context. By presenting historical information in the national language, the signage positions the history of Tanjungpinang as part of Indonesia's collective cultural heritage. An interesting feature of the linguistic landscape observed in this study is the strong presence of visual cultural symbols. Decorative elements such as Malay motifs, dragon imagery, lanterns, and lion dance figures appear in murals and artistic displays throughout the district. These elements reflect the historical cultural diversity of the region, which has long been influenced by Malay and Chinese communities.



Fig. 3. Visual Cultural Symbol sign and Local Dialect sign

However, while cultural diversity is visually represented, it is rarely expressed through multilingual written language. Chinese characters, although present in only 8.4% of commercial signs, are largely absent from public signage despite the visible presence of Chinese cultural imagery. Similarly, local Malay dialects appear only occasionally in informal expressions such as *Kampong Kite*. This pattern reflects an important concept in linguistic landscape research: symbolic representation without linguistic visibility. Shohamy (2006) argues that the absence of certain languages from public signage often indicates underlying power relations that determine which languages are considered legitimate in public discourse. Recent studies also highlight how visual elements can function as semiotic resources that communicate cultural meaning even in the absence of textual language (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2021). In Tanjungpinang Old Town, cultural identity is therefore communicated through a combination of visual symbols, architecture, and heritage narratives rather than through explicit multilingual writing. This multimodal landscape allows the city to celebrate its multicultural heritage while maintaining the dominance of Bahasa Indonesia in official communication. Overall, the linguistic landscape of Tanjungpinang Old Town reflects a complex interaction between national language policy, tourism development, and multicultural heritage. The dominance of Bahasa Indonesia reinforces national identity and institutional authority, while the selective use of English demonstrates efforts to accommodate international tourism. At the same time, visual cultural symbols highlight the historical diversity of the region without significantly altering the linguistic hierarchy of public signage.

Comparative Spatial Analysis (Old Town Heritage vs. Modern Commercial Sectors)

This study further compares the historic Tanjungpinang Old Town heritage (Transects A-C, n = 120) with Tanjungpinang’s modern commercial sector, Bintan Centre (Transect D, n = 50).

Linguistic Variable	Landscape	Tanjungpinang Old Town (Heritage District)	Bintan Centre Sector (Modern Commercial Hub)
Monolingual Share	Indonesian	60.8% (High national regulation & traditional trade).	44.0% (Lower; higher commercial multilingual competition).
English Language Inclusion		21.7% (Restricted to official tourism boards & selective cafe branding).	46.0% (Substantial; widespread corporate retail, modern dining, & services).
Ethnic Script Presence (Chinese)		8.4% textual (concentrated in historic shopfronts); high non-textual imagery.	2.0% textual (negligible historic Chinese shop presence).
Visual Semiotic Character		Rich traditional iconography (Malay ukiran motifs, Chinese lanterns, heritage murals).	Modern corporate iconography, standardized brand logos, LED light displays.
Dominant Spatial Ideology		Historical preservation, cultural authenticity, state-sanctioned heritage storytelling.	Commercial modernization, consumer globalization, youth lifestyle orientation.

Table 3. Linguistic Landscape Comparison between Tanjungpinang Old Town and Bintan Centre

Table 3 shows the language choice across Tanjungpinang focusing on the spatial function with the Old Town conserving its identity, national language authority, and traditional visual semiotics. Meanwhile, Bintan Centre exhibits significantly higher English inclusion (46%) influenced by corporate franchises, modern retail, and youth lifestyle branding. This contrast displays the linguistic landscape dynamics in Tanjungpinang which are highly localised, while embracing globalised commercial multilingualism in expending modern sectors.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the linguistic landscape of Tanjungpinang Old Town to understand how language use in public signage reflects broader sociolinguistic dynamics, including national language policy, tourism development, and the representation of local cultural identity. Grounded in a photographic corpus of $N = 120$ signs systematically captured across three main transects: Jalan Merdeka, Lorong Pasar, and the Dermaga Penyengat ferry hub. The findings reveal that the linguistic landscape of the heritage district is characterized by four empirical and sociolinguistic patterns:

First, Bahasa Indonesia is the most dominant language (82.5%) in public signage across the study area with a strictly monolingual use on 60.8% ($n = 73$) of the total corpus. Its strong presence in official and informational signs demonstrates the influence of national language policy and institutional authority in shaping public communication. The use of Indonesian in government-produced signage ensures accessibility for the majority of the population while simultaneously reinforcing the ideological role of the national language in representing state identity and administrative order.

Second, the study highlights a contrast between top-down and official signage ($n = 42$, 35%) and bottom-up commercial signage ($n = 78$, 65%). Top-down government signage functions under strict legal restrictions, revealing 76.2% monolingual Indonesian usage and placing Indonesian in superior typographic salience (top placement and larger font size) on all bilingual signs. Conversely, bottom-up commercial signage displays significantly greater, pragmatic flexibility and multilingual agency, with 47.4% featuring non-monolingual or multimodal elements (including English branding, Chinese shopfront characters, and visual motifs). This contrast shows that while state officials focus on enforcing policies and maintaining control, private business owners must balance legal rules with profitability, branding, and customer appeal.

Third, the relatively limited presence of English (21.7% overall) indicates that Tanjungpinang Old Town is gradually adapting to international tourism while still prioritizing the national language in public communication. English serves as the secondary bilingual medium (18.3%, $n = 22$) that is heavily clustered within tourist infrastructure, directional signage, and modern commercial sectors. Nevertheless, a spatial comparative analysis reveals that the Old Town remains subordinate to national language, while modern sectors like Bintan exhibit significant higher English inclusion (46%) driven by corporate franchising and global consumer culture.

Fourth, the linguistic landscape reveals a clear spatial imbalance in how multicultural identity is represented. Although local dialects are highly restricted in written signs (3.3% of bilingual displays and 8.3% of storefronts), local dialects of Malay and Chinese heritage are frequently expressed through non-textual visuals (9.2%). Elements like traditional woodcarvings, red lanterns, dragon motifs, and historical murals allow cultural diversity to be publicly recognized without challenging official language policies. Consequently, these visual symbols act as a compensatory mechanism, celebrating multicultural heritage while maintaining the textual dominance of the national language.

Overall, the linguistic landscape of Tanjungpinang Old Town reflects the dynamic interaction between language policy, tourism development, and cultural heritage representation. Public signage in the area functions not only as a practical tool for communication and navigation but also as a medium through which national identity, institutional regulation, and historical narratives are visibly constructed in urban space.

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