



# Reviving the language at risk: a social semiotic analysis of the linguistic landscape of three cities in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Indonesia is one of the most multilingual nations in the world, with approximately 700 spoken local languages. This multilingualism is at risk from the imposition of the national language and the dominance of English as an international language. Adopting a social semiotic approach to linguistic landscape study, this paper explores how languages are being used and manipulated in three big cities in Indonesia, namely Jogjakarta, Semarang and Depok. We look at signage from private enterprise (i.e. shops and restaurants) and compare them to the public signage on government buildings. We look at the tension between the micro-language policy (the personal and individual language choice rights) and the macro-language policy as stated in national/regional language policies. This study reveals different linguistic landscape patterns: public signs – Indonesian language, Javanese language, and English; private signs – Indonesian language, English and other foreign languages (Korean, Japanese, and Mandarin). By building on the linguistic landscape constructs, we argue that the language choice is not arbitrary. Thus, throughout the paper, we argue that linguistic landscape is an effective mechanism to revive the local languages at risk, in this case Javanese.

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## Introduction

With over 280 million people and approximately 700 spoken local languages, Indonesia is certainly one of the most multilingual nations in the world. Despite this remarkable language diversity, Indonesia is in favour of monolingualism. Local languages are currently endangered (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014; Ravindranath & Cohn, 2014) as a consequence of the imposition of the ‘made-up’ national language, *Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian language; hereafter Bahasa Indonesia). Since Indonesia gained its independence in 1945, the National Constitution has mentioned and secured Bahasa Indonesia as the only national language.

Throughout the paper, we will show that while national language policies via the Bahasa Indonesia imposition in the last two centuries have succeeded in unifying the archipelago’s linguistic heterogeneity (Errington, 1992), thus seemingly homogenising

the multilingual nation, there is a growing number of the middle class who perceive English as an important international language (Lie, 2007; Tanu, 2014). This shifting linguistic attitude has yielded a new trend of linguistic diversification. This shift can be seen from the changes of the linguistic landscape displayed in Indonesian cities, which is the focus of the current study. To this end, we build upon Pavlenko's (2009) insights on the diachronic nature of linguistic landscape across time, as well as Jaworski's (2015) study on the recognition of a new visual-linguistic register. More specifically, by using a social semiotic approach, we are going to look at the tension between the micro-language policy (the personal and individual language choice rights) and the macro-language policy in Indonesia. Indonesia has a complex historical, political and economic background and this study will explore the forces and drives behind the moulding of the Indonesian linguistic landscape.

To explore the tension between language policy and individual language behaviours or choices, this paper begins with the review of the relevant studies followed by a description of the method adopted for this study. In this section, we also discuss the most relevant studies in linguistic landscape to showcase the conceptual framework adopted in our study. Linguistic landscape in Indonesia is under-researched, so to do this, we need to historically trace the language policies that govern the use of language in public spaces. In the methodology section, we explain the data collection process and we also discuss the semiotics and interpretive and discourse analysis that we use when approaching the data, i.e. language use on multilingual signs. We then describe and explain our research findings and argue that the emerging patterns of linguistic landscape are a result of contingent interaction between multiple factors, including national government policies, regional/local policies and market forces. The public signs highlight the importance of the visibility of minority languages and the impact of language policies on the linguistic landscape (Mezgec, 2016). The private signs are market-oriented in the sense that the choices made about displaying specific languages do not necessarily correspond with the languages used daily (Shohamy, 2015).

## Linguistic landscape

In this study, we define linguistic landscape as 'the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region' (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 23). Compared to other sub-linguistic fields, linguistic landscape is a new research field globally and it remains under-researched in Indonesia, at the time of writing in mid-2019. To our best knowledge, our current research is the first to comprehensively discuss the relationship between linguistic landscape (LL) and language policy (LP) in Indonesia. This LL-LP nexus is in line with Shohamy's argument that 'LL findings can contribute to a new understanding of what LP is within the context of public spaces, a major component of language use that has been overlooked' (2015, p. 156). In other words, in analysing the language use of the LL, we are trying to unpack and understand both the macro- and micro-LP in a given community.

In order to theorise languages in public spaces, it is inadequate to refer only to written texts on public display. As Shohamy (2015) advocates, the discussion of linguistic landscape needs to include a broader framework that consists of multiple components beyond signage, such as history, politics, location, people, and all other dimensions

that are practised, conceived, and lived in a given territory. Ignoring these components runs the risk of inaccurate interpretations (Waksman & Shohamy, 2010). The broader LL framework is thus central in this current study to understand a complex field, enable deeper interpretation and uncover multi-layered meanings.

This broader LL framework is anchored in the research conducted by Backhaus (2007) on the multilingualism of signs in Tokyo. He argues for more holistic methodology to deal with the complexity of signs in order to enable a better interpretation of language choices displayed in LL. Other linguists point out that there are various semiotic devices beyond language to consider in LL and offer a multimodal methodology to analyse visual signs (Banda & Jimaima, 2015; Iedema, 2003). These authors agree that LL does not only carry literal information as stated in the written texts, but also functions to communicate symbolically the relative power and status of that particular language (Ben-rafael et al., 2006). To borrow Ben-Rafael's words, linguistic landscape serves as the 'symbolic construction of the public space' (Ben-rafael et al., 2006) because it influences the perception about certain languages, affects linguistic behaviour and constructs the overall sociolinguistic context.

In distinguishing signs displayed in the public space, Landry and Bourhis (1997) offer two distinctive categories, i.e. public signs and private signs. Public signs are made by the government and refer to the official signs displayed in public spaces such as signage attached to government buildings, road signs, street names, and inscriptions. Private signs refer to commercial signs and advertisements on businesses, shops and billboards. This distinction between public and private signs can further distinguish the top-down and bottom-up forces in linguistic landscaping (Backhaus, 2007). The nature of government-related or official/public signs are governed by official regulations from the 'top', thus can be classified as top-down forces; whereas those displayed by private enterprise come from the 'bottom', and can be categorised as bottom-up.

## Indonesia and multilingualism

With approximately 500–700 spoken local languages, Indonesia is undoubtedly one of the most multilingual nations in the world. Along with *Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian) as the national language, every Indonesian can potentially be bilingual at a very young age if their parents have different ethnicities, excluding the second generation of the migrant parents living in the urban areas, such as Jakarta (the capital city of Indonesia), Depok, Bekasi, among others (Sneddon, 2003). In many other areas, the main challenge now is battling against the threat of losing its local languages, such as Sundanese and Javanese, among others. According to a web-based statistical database of world languages named Ethnologue, out of 138 Indonesian local languages under study, 98 languages are considered as 'threatened', 28 languages are 'nearly extinct', and 12 languages are 'extinct' (Lewis et al., 2014). When a language is labelled as 'threatened', it signals a significant decrease of use by its speakers in its respective community (Ravindranath & Cohn, 2014).

As it is in some other countries, Indonesia is also experiencing a similar endangerment of its local or regional languages (Ewing, 2014). In this study, we use either term interchangeably. Relevant factors that lead to this linguistic phenomenon are a lack of inter-generational transmission (Ravindranath & Cohn, 2014), and a low level of research and initiatives in studying local language maintenance (Ewing, 2014). In the urban areas,

the intergenerational linguistic shift from the local language to Bahasa Indonesia primarily occurred during the New Order era in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, many Indonesians from other islands and regions in Indonesia migrated to the capital city of Jakarta and its satellite cities, such as Depok, Bekasi and Tangerang for a better life. These parents became the first generations of the 'new land'. While aspects in life may have improved for some families, most of them failed to maintain their mother tongue and spoke primarily in a variant of *Bahasa Indonesia*. Thus, this second generation growing up in Jakarta and its surrounds no longer speak their parent's first language or the regional language where their parents came from (Sneddon, 2003).

Recently, a shift has occurred from Bahasa Indonesia to English, particularly in Javanese cities such as Jakarta, Bandung and Semarang. Due to the global spread of English and the socio-economic benefit that many people perceive English can offer, bilingualism for most Indonesians means the introduction of English rather than the regional languages to the younger generation (Tanu, 2014). This linguistic shift in Indonesia has been observed particularly after the collapse of the authoritarian regime in 1998, when the nation celebrated freedom, including freedom of expression (see Martin-Anatias, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a).

In the educational sphere, English has been taught as a foreign language for six consecutive years of middle/junior to senior high school since the 1950s (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Sakhiyya et al., 2018; Sneddon, 2003). Due to the high demand and pressure from parents in urban areas, English was eventually taught at primary level from 2006. However, it received mixed reviews from multifarious organisations and individuals. The controversy encouraged the Ministry of Education and Culture to review and cancel the policy in 2013–2014 (Martin-Anatias, 2018a). Another controversy was when English was imposed as the medium of instruction through the establishment of the International Standard School (Sakhiyya, 2011). This policy received strong criticism from the public and was then declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in 2013. Consequently, Bahasa Indonesia still remains the primary medium of instruction and the main language.

The celebration of linguistic freedom unfortunately comes at the expense of local languages. Javanese, one of the most spoken regional languages in the world (around 80 million speakers), is also categorised at risk of extinction (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014; Ravindranath & Cohn, 2014). It is predicted that Javanese will be extinct in 20 or 30 years. Despite the fact that Indonesia is often regarded as one of the most successful examples of language policy and planning, many other regional languages in the archipelago are under threat. Taking this into consideration, in this current project, we are examining the tension between the government policy (macro policy) which tries to maintain the national language and the micro-language policy which may do otherwise.

## **Indonesian language policies**

Because the discussion focuses on the tension between micro-language and the impact of macro-language policies on the linguistic landscape, we need to firstly map the landscape of Indonesian language policies itself. Policies shape not only the public realm but also the private domain. The related policies central to the discussion in this paper are the content of the Youth Pledge 1928, National Constitution 1945, Decree of the People's Consultative

Assembly Number 11/MPR/1983, Language Law number 24 year 2009 and the most recently published regulation, President Regulation No. 63 year 2019, with article 40 that specifically requires the buildings in Indonesia to use Bahasa Indonesia.

The Indonesian language or *Bahasa Indonesia* is not merely a linguistic reality, but far more a political matter (Heryanto, 2006). The language developed along with the development of Indonesia as a nation (Anderson, 1966; Heryanto, 2006). Bahasa Indonesia has been partly derived from Malay, a *lingua franca* used mostly in coastal and insular South-east Asia as early as the twelfth century (Errington, 1986). In seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, Malay was also used by the Dutch colonial government as an administrative language in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia's name under Dutch colonialism) due to its simplicity in lexicon and deference system compared to Javanese. To envision a nation born out of colonialism, the nationalist movement saw the need to have a national *lingua franca* to glue 400 distinct ethnic languages of more than 200 million people across the archipelago. The early colonised intelligentsia heroically proclaimed in the *Sumpah Pemuda* (Youth Pledge) of 1928: 'One island, One people, One language' (Errington, 1986). More specifically, the third pledge declares that 'We, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, respect the language of unity, *Bahasa Indonesia*.' Through this 'imaginative' linguistic unity, the Indonesian nation and 'Indonesian-ness' were constructed. Similarly, Bahasa Indonesia is the most crucial identity emblem for Indonesians (Martin-Anatias, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b).

After gaining independence in 1945, nationalism was at a great height. President Soekarno, the first president of Indonesia, made a politically and ideologically laden decision that Bahasa Indonesia and English would be taught at schools and spoken in public spaces, rather than Dutch or Japanese. In addition to Bahasa Indonesia and English, the 1945 National Constitution chapter 32 article 2 mentions that 'the state respects and maintains local languages as the nation's cultural diversity'. The next Indonesian president, Soeharto, even made a direct top-down policy of the institutionalisation of the national language by establishing a Language Centre (*Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa* – literally translated as the Centre for Supervision and Development of Language) to standardise and engineer the proliferation of the national language (Anderson, 1966; Heryanto, 1995). This language policing commenced in the early 1970s and was an integral part of the development agenda of the New Order (Anderson, 2006; Errington, 1992; Heryanto, 1995). President Soeharto, the President of the New Order administration, attempted to standardise the use of national language with an emphasis placed on its 'correct and orderly' use through the Decree of the People's Consultative Assembly Number 11/MPR/1983. The emphasis on the 'correct and orderly' usage was not for aesthetic reasons, rather 'as a means to the establishment of a desired cultural regime' (Hooker, 1993, p. 273). This was enforced through an institutionalising language use via educational institutions, radio, television, and information networks. With such systemic language proliferation and standardisation, it is still astonishing to learn that Bahasa Indonesia is currently spoken by almost 250 million people, while a century ago, it was nobody's mother tongue (Heryanto, 1995).

The development of Bahasa Indonesia demonstrates the power of top-down language policy on the daily use of the language. These days, the use of Bahasa Indonesia in public spaces has been regulated by national laws, i.e. Language Law number 24 year 2009 (Language Law 24/2009) and the President Regulation number 63 year 2019 (PR 63/

2019) on national flag, language, symbol and anthem. The laws ensure the use of Bahasa Indonesia in public spaces, especially that of government offices. For example, verse 30 reads that 'Bahasa Indonesia is compulsorily used in public administrative services in government offices and institutions' (Government of Indonesia, 2009, p. 14). This line is further explained in verse 33 that reads 'Bahasa Indonesia is compulsorily used in formal communication in government and private offices' (Government of Indonesia, 2009, p. 15), which are in line with the PR 63/2019.

Despite being applauded as one of the most successful stories in language planning, the unintended consequence of such a top-down policy is the endangerment of local languages. Cohn and Rabindranath's (2014) study on Javanese language reveals that the dramatic decrease in the use of Javanese, both high and low Javanese, can be traced back to the predominance of the national language in public spaces. Responding to this issue, the Indonesian government instructed local language maintenance tasks to regional or local government. The LL 24/009, especially articles 41 and 42, explicitly mention the national government officially mandated the local government to preserve the sustainability of the local languages and its literature in their respective authority. The use of foreign languages (*bahasa asing*) on the other hand, is officially limited. Per Language Law No. 24/2009 & RP 63/2019, *bahasa asing* is defined as any language other than Bahasa Indonesia and local/regional languages. English is the most visible foreign language mentioned in both laws as it is used for any bilateral agreement and cooperation with foreign countries. In this vein, one could argue that the Indonesian government strongly regulates linguistic selection in the national landscape, particularly the government buildings, while one can also see resistance coming from the grassroots. With the government's *de jure* approach on the language choice, it becomes vital for us, the sociolinguists, to learn how the grassroots use their *de facto* language choice. Indonesia has consequently become fertile soil for further linguistic investigation. Thus, in order to unpack the tension between the macro- and micro-LPs, we are using interpretive and discourse analysis as our approach, which we will discuss as follows.

## Methodology

Data collection began at the end of 2017 and concluded in January 2020 across Semarang, Jogjakarta, and Depok. All data were collected by digitally capturing signage ranging from government-related signs to privately owned commercial signs and billboards.

Out of more than 500 samples collected, we focused on bilingual or multilingual signs. In approaching the data, we explore the bilingual practice of the signs. One of the main principles in selecting our pictures was to have at least two languages on the signs that the grassroots or local community living in those areas could access. Interestingly, we also found some private advertisements which were legally displayed in a train station, which is a government-owned building. In this particular case, we try to unpack the blurry distinction between public and private signs that we found in our data collection.

Semiotic approach is employed to unpack the discursive functions and the social meaning of linguistic use. We take some cues from the Barthian's visual semiotics in which we are unpacking the two layers of meanings; the denotation and the connotation

**Table 1.** Profile of the three cities under study.

| Aspects              | Semarang                                      | Jogjakarta  | Depok  |
|----------------------|---|---|--|
| Status               | Capital city of Central Java Province         | Special Region (the only Indonesian city ruled by a monarchy)   | A city in West Java Province   |
| Population size      | 1,610,605                                     | 3,842,932   | 1,803,708  |
| Area                 | 373.8 km <sup>2</sup>                         | 46 km <sup>2</sup>  | 200.3 km <sup>2</sup>  |
| City characteristic  | Capital city of Central Java                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of (Javanese) culture</li> <li>• City of education</li> </ul> | A city on the border of West Java and Jakarta (the capital city of Indonesia)  |
| Regional language(s) | (a variant of Semarang/Central Java) Javanese | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (a variant of Jogjakartan) Javanese</li> </ul>                     | <i>De jure</i> , Sundanese should be the official language, but <i>de facto</i> many speak the variant of Jakartan (or <i>Betawi Depok</i> ) or a variant of Bahasa Indonesia. |

(symbolic). The denotation layer literally signifies the ‘what or who is being depicted in the picture’, while the connotation layer analyses the represented ideas and values and the ways they are represented (van Leeuwen, 2011). In addition to this, we also take other semiotic elements into consideration, such as the visual images, size, colour and position of the language used on the signs and the absent languages, among others. These modalities contribute to making sense and meaning out of the multilingual signage on the landscape (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2011; Wee & Goh, 2020). In an attempt to understand the connotative meanings, we also examine how the power dynamic and power relations of the multilingual and public signage reveals or tries to exercise influence on the LL (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Shohamy, 2006).

This semiotic approach complements the textual and interpretive approach that we use in this study by taking the social, cultural and political contexts into consideration (cf.; Shohamy, 2006, 2015). The ethnographic notes made during the data collection helped us to interpret and ground the analysis.

We approach our data and present our discussion in a purely qualitative manner in which we offer a set of in-depth, nuanced and multi-layered analysis. Without trying to be reductive in summarising the different characteristics of the three cities, we collected the data from them, as shown in Table 1.

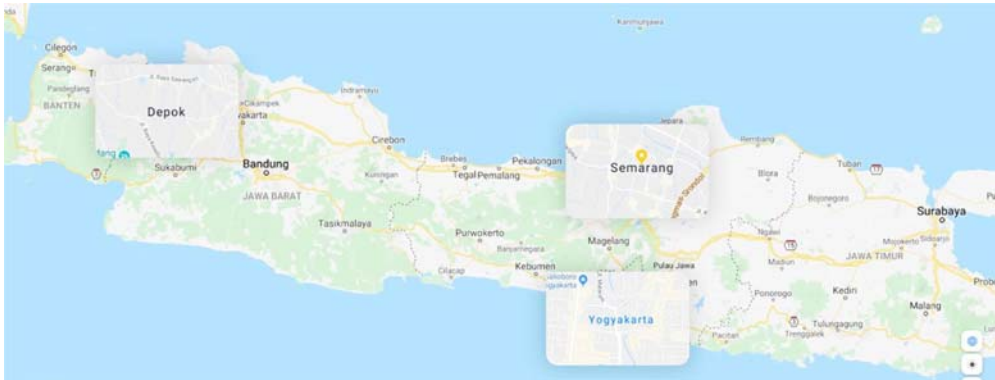
The geographical locations of the three cities are highlighted on the map (Figure 1).

## Findings

### *The general picture*

We find a similar pattern in the linguistic landscape corpus gathered from the cities researched; that is, the linguistic landscape of the public signs differs from the private. Table 2 shows integrated linguistic landscape profiles by also including bottom-up and top-down items in the three-demographic classification of localities.

In all three localities, Bahasa Indonesia remains the predominant language appearing, either with or without English and/or other languages, including Javanese. English comes second, appearing either solely or together with Bahasa Indonesia in the LL items. The Javanese language (written either in Javanese script or the Latin alphabet) appears in less than 20% of public signage in the LL.



**Figure 1.** Map of the three cities (Java Island).

**Table 2.** LL items by languages in three localities (percentage).

| Languages of LL items                 | Areas    |            |       |
|---------------------------------------|----------|------------|-------|
|                                       | Semarang | Jogjakarta | Depok |
| Bahasa Indonesia only                 | 25%      | 20%        | 10%   |
| Javanese only                         | 5%       | 0          | 0     |
| English only                          | 5%       | 5%         | 20%   |
| Bahasa Indonesia – Javanese           | 15%      | 20%        | 0     |
| Bahasa Indonesia – English            | 40%      | 40%        | 60%   |
| Bahasa Indonesia – English – Javanese | 5%       | 10%        | 0     |
| Other languages                       | 5%       | 5%         | 10%   |
| Total                                 | 100%     | 100%       | 100%  |

Contrary to patterns found in Semarang and Jogjakarta, Javanese never appears in the signage in Depok either monolingually or bilingually. Depok, as earlier mentioned, is a city in West Java province whose official regional languages are Sundanese and Betawi (Jakarta dialect). As shown in [Figure 1](#), both languages are not present in the public space.

The public signs show consistency in the use of Indonesian language throughout the country, but Javanese language in Central Java regions only. English occupy the space where it is potentially visited by foreigners. Private signs demonstrate more linguistic variations – they may use Indonesian language, English and other foreign languages (Korean, Japanese, and Mandarin) or even mixed. The general patterns show that if LL is not governed by the regional/national policies, it is governed by the market forces. This finding confirms Backhaus' (2007) argument that public signs are the result of explicit intervention and the decisions of central and local government agencies, rather than the result of individual/institutional choices of the sign owner or maker.

### **Public signs**

The following are some public signs that belong to government buildings. Bahasa Indonesia remains the predominant language used on public signs as it is the national language of Indonesia. In several places that foreigners frequent, public signs use English. In Semarang and Jogjakarta, Javanese is used to accompany Bahasa Indonesia.

Our findings on public signs extend Shohamy's (2006, p. 2015) argument that LL is a powerful tool to create and negotiate language policy. Inspired by this idea, we



explore the possibility of LL as a tool to maintain and revitalise languages at risk, such as Javanese. The local government of Central Java and Jogjakarta have their concern over the decreasing number of Javanese speakers, and thus need public space to maintain the language. Figure 2 is the office sign/nameplate of the Department of Industry and Trade of Central Java located in the central business district of Semarang. The first two lines are in Bahasa Indonesia, whereas the third and fifth lines are in Javanese script.

Whereas language maintenance is visible in the public sign, the local government still appears to prioritise Bahasa Indonesia, as projected by the size and the position of the language usage. In this public sign, Bahasa Indonesia semiotically outsizes and outranks the Javanese script. Bahasa Indonesia is written in a much bigger font and occupies the top position on the sign and sits right over the less prominent Javanese script. This means as if the local government indicates the importance of Bahasa Indonesia in the realm of the macro language policy. In other words, although the sign is bilingual, Bahasa Indonesia is still given the priority as a national and official language. The macro language policy is mediated and projected in a semiotic manner. Due to its function and status as the government building, it makes sense if Bahasa Indonesia is given such an important highlight and position, because the government needs to abide to the Language Law 24/2009 and PR 63/2019 where Bahasa Indonesia is mandated to be given a much more priority and visibility.

We also found the same pattern on the faculty wall sign of a public university (a state-owned university) in Semarang (see Figure 3). The Department of Javanese Language is one of the departments that is hosted by the Faculty of Languages and Arts (or School of Language and Art) of the State University of Semarang (hereafter UNNES). As a host of many language and arts departments, the faculty has a particular mission and concern about Javanese language usage, which *de facto* has been decreasing, particularly among the younger generation (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014; Ravindranath & Cohn, 2014). Thus, as a way to preserve the local language, the name of the faculty is written in Javanese letters. This same philosophy is also evident with the choice of font and size, as we discuss below.

Unlike the local government building shown in Figure 2, the sign on the Faculty of Language and Art of UNNES (a state-owned building) seems to put the emphasis on Javanese rather than Bahasa Indonesia. The Javanese script takes up a higher position than



**Figure 2.** Department of Industry and Trade, Central Java Province (located in Semarang).



**Figure 3.** The Faculty of Languages and Arts of a public university in Semarang.

Bahasa Indonesia, and printed in white, is much more visible than the gold. UNNES is a public institution that receives significant public funds from the national subsidy, and the university appears to put emphasis on the local language, rather than Bahasa Indonesia. Being a university from Central Java, it also projects and promotes its local or regional identity.

This LL practice of using Javanese script on government buildings is clearly written in the regulation released by the provincial government of Central Java (located in Semarang). It aims to ‘socialise the use of Bahasa Indonesia accompanied by Javanese scripts to name public places and government buildings’ (The Provincial Government of Central Java, 2012, Chapter 13).

A similar landscape is seen in Jogjakarta’s public signs. It even demonstrates an extreme case. Javanese script is even used in signage that names every animal in its public zoo (Figure 4), and on every street sign in Jogjakarta city (Figure 5). Semiotically, *Kuda Nil Kerdil*, which is in Bahasa Indonesia, occupies a top position and is written in a bold font, while the Javanese term is not bolded and positioned underneath. Both the positioning and the size of the fonts signify a difference in power relations and hierarchical ranks between the two languages. We can conclude from this that Javanese may be considered less important than Bahasa Indonesia, although both are displayed.

Jogjakarta regional government is concerned with the precipitous drop in the use of Javanese language in the public space, but they do not explicitly state it in a legal regulation. At the time of writing, more Javanese script can be found in Jogjakarta than Semarang. Since 2016, Jogjakarta government has allocated funding to replace all street names and government buildings with double scripts: Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese. This concern and revival strategy was born out of the Congress of Javanese Language on 8–12 November 2016 conducted in Jogjakarta.

In addition to reviving the local language, presenting it in a public space is also a form of ‘city marketing’ – an attempt to emphasise the exoticism and authenticity of the city (Papen, 2012). The use of Javanese script helps build a nostalgic sense of identity for the local people while also demonstrating certain aesthetic and cultural values which potentially attract tourists.



**Figure 4.** The name plaque of the hippopotamus in Jogjakarta Zoo.



**Figure 5.** A street name plaque in Jogjakarta (post-2016 Javanese congress).

The pattern we found in Semarang and Jogjakarta was completely different to Depok. Depok is located in West Java, on the outskirts of Jakarta (the capital city of Indonesia) as we can see in [Figure 1](#).

The city is characterised by a metropolitan ambience and cosmopolitan culture. The local language in West Java is not Javanese; many speak Sundanese and/or a variant of Betawi/Jakartan Indonesian or Betawi Depok. While Sundanese is the official regional language of West Java, only those who are ethnically Sundanese (those coming from West Java) can speak the language. The majority of Depok residents are immigrants from other regions in Indonesia, including Sumatra, Kalimantan, other areas in Java and other islands in Indonesia (see Martin-Anatias, 2019b). Because of this, Javanese is visibly absent in the LL of Depok. Interestingly, Sundanese is equally absent on the signs, and English is more frequently observed, as we can see in Figure 7(B). Its appearance is either as an accompaniment to Bahasa Indonesia or it appears alone. In interpreting this, we should take into consideration the social aspects of Depok, particularly in its role as the host of the largest and most prestigious university in the nation, the University of Indonesia. Depok is home to many college students. This may have influenced the prevalence of English, the language that indexes their cosmopolitan identity (Martin-Anatias, 2018a, 2018b).

Figure 6 shows the public service and safety announcement for passengers in the train station, which is a government building. The train line connects Depok with Jakarta and its surrounding cities. The language used is mostly English with no direct translation into Bahasa Indonesia or other regional languages at all. This implies what comes first, and what comes second. As this is a public sign on a government-owned building, it becomes a contested space – the official language is unapologetically missing and English, the foreign language, is clearly used (cf. Coupland, 2010). As argued by Pavlenko (2009), there is a language replacement process in this sign where English, the global



**Figure 6.** Public service announcement for train passengers of commuter line in Depok.



**Figure 7.** (A) A fast food (fried chicken) restaurant named 'Dirty Chicks' in Jogjakarta. (B) A fast food (fried chicken) restaurant named 'Dirty Chicks' in Jogjakarta.

language, has taken over from the national and local languages. Additionally, the government via the LL24/2009 and RP 63/2019 has mandated that Bahasa Indonesia must be used on public buildings, so the use of English in this space appears to oppose and conflict with the government's language policy.

Moreover, in terms of accessibility, this public sign is obviously unintelligible to communities in Depok who do not speak English. Therefore the use of English here is peculiar: while the sign functions as a public announcement, it targets only a specific audience, while excluding other groups who do not speak or understand English at all. The

information is then only accessible to the bilingual English-Indonesian train riders, leaving others uninformed. Via this practice, the public signage marginalises non-English speakers; the information remains inaccessible to them.

### **Private signs**

Private signs show more variety, as they are bottom-up in nature, or produced creatively by private enterprises or individuals. Due to the position of English as a foreign language in Indonesia, we were shown that the private sector uses language more creatively than the public sector, and the choices made do not necessarily reflect the spoken language they use daily. Experimenting with the words/languages serves as an attention-getter to attract more customers. [Figure 7\(A\)](#) is a picture of a fast-food restaurant in Jogjakarta serving fried chicken under the name of ‘Dirty Chicks’.

The name of the restaurant can be interpreted in different ways and demonstrates the creative and experimentative process of LL. The owner of the fast-food business deliberately uses English and chooses words that are multi-interpretative, i.e. dirty chicks. In branding and marketing strategy, the more unique the brand name, the more chance that it will stick in people’s minds (Banda & Jimaima, 2015). It uses English to imply their fried chicken is Western-style. Authentic Indonesian fried chicken does not use any flour. Instead, it requires rich spices such as turmeric, garlic, ginger, galangal, coriander, pepper, cumin, bay leaf and lemongrass. The chicken is simmered slowly until it becomes tender, then it is deep-fried. Western-style fried chicken also appeals to some Indonesians as it offers a ‘modern’ taste. So, the English brand name is important to maintain this impression. For this purpose, the linguistic resources in this sign are semiotically organised from the most global to the local scales (Jaworski, 2015). This *order of indexicality* delivers the sense of locality of Bahasa Indonesia, while English indexes the global sense (Bloommaert, 2007).

The next interesting private sign was found in Depok. [Figure 8](#) shows a sign for a small teahouse called ‘Together Whatever’. It is unclear what ‘Together Whatever’ entails exactly – its meaning is ambiguous for passers-by, even those with knowledge of the English language. The visible use of English in this non-English space may invite us to wonder if the linguistic choice is trying to deliver globalese performance (Jaworski, 2015). Furthermore, we interpret this as a challenge to the construction of Indonesianness.

Moreover, we find the font size and position of the texts of the sign to be semiotically interesting. There are two signs visible, as illustrated in [Figure 8](#): The banner at the top is partially obscured and contains an Indonesian name *warung poci* (or a small tea shop) an identification for the store, while the bigger sign below is a combination of both the English and Indonesian name of the store.

On the large sign, we see that ‘Together Whatever space’ is written in two different sizes. ‘Together Whatever’ is composed in a much bigger size taking a central position, with ‘space’ as the noun written in a strikingly smaller font. The Indonesian translation of the space *warung poci* (similar to the upper sign) is positioned on the lower part of the sign. In other words, *warung poci* as the Indonesian linguistic resource is in a subordinate position that signals its lack of prominence, compared to its English counterpart ‘Together Whatever space’.



**Figure 8.** A teahouse named 'Together Whatever space' in Depok, and right under the sign, 'Hauuz' is visibly written ('Hauuz' (is derived from the Standardised Bahasa Indonesia 'Haus' (thirsty))).

The sign semiotically delivers that English is more important to identify the teahouse, as opposed to the Indonesian *warung poci*. All Indonesians understand that semantically *warung* refers to a small, traditional shop. It is the opposite of an urban and modern shop. In other words, the meaning of *warung* not only infers the space is not urban, cool, and modern, but it may also infer that its customers (presumably non-English speakers) are less educated or traditional and provincial. This intention of embracing the lower class is also semiotically projected. The use of English in this particular sign appears to deliberately challenge the provincial and traditional undertone, portraying a cosmopolitan identity to attract younger, urban and cosmopolitan customers. Thus, in this vein, the language selection occurs at the intersection of the local and global forces. Unlike in the neighbouring country of Singapore, where English can act as a lingua franca among the Singaporeans (Tang, 2020), English in this space is most likely to claim or enhance modernity or cosmopolitan identity. This sense of cosmopolitanism is also projected to the potential customers: college students who are presumably English-knowing bilinguals if not English-Indonesian speakers. It is also with this sense of cosmopolitanism that *Together Whatever* is written. The typography in the logo design is unconventional also, using a mix of upper- and lower-case letters. This serves more as a decorative purpose which is not meant for communication purposes, but it offers aesthetic cosmopolitan value (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; as cited in Jaworski, 2015). In Jaworski's word (2015), the atypical typography may embody the globalese performance.

Unlike Figure 6 where English is used on a public government building, the space in Figure 8 is privately owned. It is true that the LL 24/2009 and PR63/2019 still require private enterprise to prioritise Bahasa Indonesia in their signage, as opposed to other languages. However, as they are not government-funded, the regulation does not bind them tightly, so they are able to be creative when selecting their language.

## Conclusion

Unlike Shohamy (2006, p. 2015) who argues that LL is a mechanism to introduce Hebrew to new immigrants, our findings on public signs suggest that LL can be a mechanism to revive an almost extinct local language, in this case Javanese. Top-down policy is clearly visible in both Jogjakarta and Semarang. In Semarang and Jogjakarta, particularly on the government signage, both Javanese and Indonesian are co-present and co-available to their residents. The presence of both languages in these two cities indicates the bilingual nature of the majority of the population. Particularly with the role of Jogjakarta as a cultural city, the preservation of Javanese is not only noticeable and enforced on the government buildings, but also on the road signs.

In relation to language policy regarding government space in Semarang and Jogjakarta: language selection shows there is a clear imposition of macro language policy by the government (via the local government) with the use of Bahasa Indonesia and the regional language, Javanese. It may also index the bilingual communities (cf. Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Depok, the small city on the borders of Jakarta and West Java with its multilingual signs, does not appear to be a loyalist to the provincially official language, *Sundanese*. This can also be interpreted that many Depokers (the people of Depok) are mostly regional language-illiterate, with Bahasa Indonesia (or its variant) as their dominant language. English may be well understood by the younger generation. However, it is far-fetched to assume that most Depok residents are bilingual speakers of English and Bahasa Indonesia (and/or its variant).

In multilingual private signage, however, it shows that many Indonesians, be it in Central Java, Jogjakarta, and Depok, try to challenge this and may also index their cosmopolitan identity and follow the global trend by utilising English. In this sense, English is yet to become a 'serious' threat to the presence of Bahasa Indonesia, as we can see in the multilingual signage in these three cities.

The implication of these findings with regard to language policy is that LL is a potential tool to revive the language at risk. The visibility of Javanese in the public space aims to give the impression that the language is still operating in the region and it should encourage people to learn to read and speak the language again (Shohamy, 2006). The co-existence of Javanese and Bahasa Indonesia in public space means that the national language could co-exist with the local language.

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