

**BETWEEN LOCAL IDENTITY AND GLOBAL APPEAL:
A LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE STUDY OF COMMERCIAL SIGNAGE
IN TEBING TINGGI**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines language choice in the commercial linguistic landscape of Tebing Tinggi, North Sumatra, with particular attention to the meanings associated with different linguistic resources. Data were drawn from 76 commercial signs documented along Jalan Jenderal Suprpto and interviews with five selected business owners. The signage data were analysed descriptively to identify patterns of language use, while the interview responses were examined qualitatively to explore the meanings attached to those choices. The findings show that Indonesian occupies the most prominent position in the commercial landscape, both independently and in combination with other languages. English represents the most visible additional linguistic resource, particularly in bilingual Indonesian–English signage, while Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Minang occur more selectively. The interviews indicate that Indonesian is associated with familiarity, accessibility, and continuity, whereas English is linked to modernity, youth orientation, and commercial appeal. Indonesian–Arabic signage, meanwhile, is associated with religious positioning and consumer reassurance. The study suggests that the commercial linguistic landscape of Tebing Tinggi is locally grounded yet selectively incorporates wider linguistic resources to construct particular social and commercial meanings.

Keywords: Commercial Signage; Language Choice; Linguistic Landscape; Local Identity; Tebing Tinggi

I. INTRODUCTION

Language displayed in public space does more than convey information; it can also reflect the visibility, status, and social meanings associated with particular languages and communities. The term *linguistic landscape* refers broadly to the presence of languages on public and commercial signs, including road signs, advertisements, shop names, billboards, and other written displays (Backhaus, 2007; Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Such signs may perform both informational and symbolic functions, providing practical information while simultaneously indexing identity, language status, mobility, and social change (Blommaert, 2013; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Shohamy, 2006; Shohamy et al., 2010). Because signs are situated within particular social and spatial environments, their meanings are closely connected with the places and communities in which they occur (Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009).

Commercial signage is particularly relevant to linguistic landscape research because language choice may contribute not only to identifying a business but also to constructing its public and commercial identity. The use of Indonesian, English, regional languages, or combinations of languages may index familiarity, locality, cultural affiliation, modernity, prestige, religious orientation, or particular market positioning. In Indonesia, for example, Denil et al. (2024) found that foreign languages on coffee-shop signboards in West Padang were



associated with globalisation, modernisation, prestige, and commercial purposes, while Setiarini et al. (2024) reported that English on shopfront signage in Bali frequently indexed modernity and efficiency. Such meanings, however, are not inherent in particular languages; rather, they emerge from the relationship between linguistic choices, sign producers, intended audiences, and local contexts.

Research on linguistic landscapes has expanded across diverse sociolinguistic settings. Studies in China, Zambia, Brunei Darussalam, Thailand, and Malaysia have shown how public and commercial signs may reflect multilingual practices, cultural identity, and urban transformation (Banda & Jimaima, 2015; Haji-Othman, 2020; Mansoor et al., 2023; Sheng & Buchanan, 2019, 2022; Yothinsirikul, 2022). Similar studies in Indonesia have examined English preference in Acehnese shop names (Faridah, 2019), multilingual signage and mobility in Bandung (Goebel, 2020), language use in Malioboro, Yogyakarta (da Silva et al., 2021), the linguistic landscape of Sidoarjo (Fakhiroh & Rohmah, 2018), and the distribution of Indonesian and English in Medan (Sianipar, 2021). Research in Mataram, Padang, and Makassar has likewise revealed different configurations of Indonesian, English, regional languages, and other linguistic resources (Jupri et al., 2022; Syamsurijal et al., 2023; Zahara & Wijana, 2022). More recent work has reported comparable variation in Deli Serdang (Fibriasari & Rahmadany, 2024), Bali (Purnawati et al., 2025), and shop signage in Medan and Kuala Lumpur (Nurmala et al., 2026). Collectively, these studies indicate that linguistic landscapes are locally configured and that the visibility and social functions of languages vary according to their urban and commercial contexts.

Despite this growing body of research, Indonesian linguistic landscape studies have largely focused on metropolitan, tourism, heritage, or highly visible commercial areas. Comparatively less attention has been given to secondary cities where commercial activity remains strongly embedded in local everyday life. Such settings are important because the use of English or other non-Indonesian resources cannot necessarily be explained by international tourism or metropolitan mobility. Furthermore, studies that identify the frequency and distribution of languages provide important descriptions of linguistic patterns, but these patterns alone do not fully explain the meanings that sign producers associate with their language choices. Examining business owners' accounts can therefore provide an additional emic perspective on how commercial language choices are understood locally.

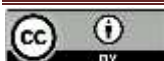
Tebing Tinggi, a secondary city in North Sumatra, offers a useful context for examining these issues. Jalan Jenderal Suprpto, one of its principal commercial corridors, contains a dense concentration of shops and businesses displaying Indonesian, English, and other linguistic resources. This setting provides an opportunity to investigate how locally familiar languages coexist with linguistic resources associated with wider commercial and contemporary orientations. Accordingly, this study examines patterns of language choice in commercial signage in Tebing Tinggi and the meanings that selected business owners associate with those choices. By combining visible language patterns with sign producers' perspectives, the study seeks to contribute to linguistic landscape research on secondary Indonesian cities and to explore how local identity, accessibility, cultural positioning, and commercial appeal intersect within an urban commercial space.

Hence, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What patterns of language choice characterise commercial signage in Tebing Tinggi?
2. What meanings do selected business owners associate with their language choices in commercial signage?

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

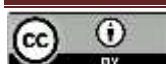
The study of linguistic landscapes developed from an interest in the visibility of languages in public space and in what that visibility can reveal about the communities in which signs are



situated. Landry and Bourhis (1997) provided one of the foundational formulations of the concept, describing the linguistic landscape through the languages displayed on public road signs, advertisements, street and place names, commercial shop signs, and signs on public buildings. Their distinction between the informational and symbolic functions of linguistic landscapes remains particularly relevant to the present study. The informational function concerns the practical use of language to identify a place, business, service, or intended audience, whereas the symbolic function concerns the status, value, and identity represented by the presence or absence of particular languages. Subsequent scholarship has substantially broadened this early conception. Backhaus (2007) demonstrated how public signage can be systematically examined to understand multilingualism in urban space, while Shohamy (2006, 2012, 2015) approached linguistic landscapes as sites in which language policy, ideology, and social power may become publicly visible. More recent accounts have emphasised that linguistic landscape research is no longer limited to counting the languages occurring on signs but encompasses questions of multilingualism, identity, mobility, language policy, place, and the social meanings attached to public displays of language (Gorter & Cenoz, 2024; Kallen, 2023). Gorter and Cenoz (2024), in particular, describe linguistic landscape studies as an increasingly diverse field in which quantitative descriptions of language visibility can be combined with qualitative approaches to the meanings and practices surrounding signs.

Public signs can also be understood more broadly as semiotic objects. Classical semiotic theory establishes that signs do not carry meaning independently of the systems and contexts through which they are interpreted. Saussure's distinction between the *signifier* and the *signified* foregrounds the conventional relationship through which linguistic forms acquire meaning, while Peirce's account of iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs extends signification beyond language itself (Heiskala, 2014; Nöth, 1990; Peirce, 1931–1958; Saragih, 2020; Saussure, 1974, 1983). In linguistic landscape research, however, the interpretation of signage requires attention not only to the linguistic form appearing on a sign but also to its social and spatial location. Scollon and Scollon (2003) conceptualised this relationship through geosemiotics, arguing that meaning emerges partly from the emplacement of signs in the material world, while Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) similarly approached semiotic landscapes as environments in which language, visual resources, and space participate in social meaning-making. Blommaert (2013) further situated linguistic landscapes within changing patterns of mobility and social organisation, showing that apparently ordinary signs can provide evidence of broader sociolinguistic processes. More recent semiotic discussion has continued to examine the conceptual relationship among signs, symbols, and significance (Van der Veer Martens, 2023). For the present study, these perspectives are important not because every visual feature of the signs is subjected to a detailed semiotic analysis, but because they prevent language choice from being treated as an isolated lexical phenomenon. A shop name appears in a particular commercial environment, is produced for particular audiences, and participates in the construction of a recognisable business identity.

Within commercial linguistic landscapes, language choice therefore involves both communicative practicality and social positioning. The presence of a language may help customers identify the nature of a business or understand the information being conveyed, but it may also evoke associations that extend beyond referential meaning. English, for example, has acquired considerable visibility in commercial linguistic landscapes internationally, yet its presence cannot be interpreted uniformly across locations. Gorter and Cenoz (2024) devote particular attention to the widespread visibility of English and show that its meanings vary according to local sociolinguistic conditions, while Kallen (2023) likewise treats linguistic landscapes as socially situated environments in which languages interact with questions of place, prestige, identity, and audience. A language associated with modernity or international orientation in one setting may serve a different function elsewhere; similarly, a national or



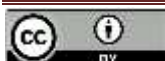
regional language may simultaneously communicate accessibility, local belonging, cultural authenticity, or institutional authority. This context-dependent understanding is especially important in commercial signage, where sign producers make choices within particular histories, customer bases, and cultural settings. The distinction between informational value and symbolic value offered by Landry and Bourhis (1997) is therefore useful, provided that symbolic meanings are not assigned to a language in advance but are interpreted in relation to the local context and, where possible, to the accounts of those responsible for the signs.

This study adopts that position by examining the linguistic landscape at two related levels. The first concerns the observable pattern of language choice in commercial signage: which linguistic resources are displayed and how they occur in monolingual or mixed-language forms. The second concerns the meanings associated with those choices by selected business owners. The latter is necessary because the social meaning of a language cannot be established reliably from its visual presence alone. For instance, the use of English on a shop sign may appear to index global orientation or modernity to an outside observer, but the business owner may have selected it for reasons of memorability, target market, personal preference, or a specific branding strategy. Conversely, the use of Indonesian may reflect more than communicative convenience and may carry associations with familiarity, locality, or continuity. The analytical framework of this study therefore combines the established linguistic landscape concern with language visibility (Backhaus, 2007; Landry & Bourhis, 1997) with a socially situated interpretation of signs and sign-making (Blommaert, 2013; Gorter & Cenoz, 2024; Kallen, 2023; Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Shohamy, 2006). This allows commercial signage in Tebing Tinggi to be examined not as a simple opposition between “local” and “global” languages, but as a site where linguistic resources may acquire different communicative and symbolic values through their use in a particular urban commercial environment.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative orientation (Creswell, 2013), using a linguistic landscape approach supported by descriptive frequency counts. The study focused on commercial signage along Jalan Jenderal Suprpto, one of the main commercial corridors in Tebing Tinggi, North Sumatra. The site was selected because it contains a dense concentration of shops and business establishments and represents an important area of everyday commercial activity in the city. The original data were collected on 4 November 2023 through video documentation of visible establishment signs along the street. A total of 77 signs were initially recorded. One non-commercial sign was subsequently excluded in accordance with the focus of the study, resulting in a final analytic corpus of 76 commercial signs. Because the present study specifically concerns commercial signage, the dataset was re-examined prior to analysis so that only signs relevant to the commercial linguistic landscape were included in the final analytic corpus. This screening was necessary to ensure that the unit of analysis was consistent with the focus of the study rather than simply reproducing the broader list of buildings recorded during the original fieldwork.

The primary unit of analysis was the written business name displayed on each sign. Each sign was examined for the linguistic resources visibly present in its wording and was classified according to identifiable language use. The analysis distinguished signs containing Indonesian, English, other identifiable languages, and combinations of more than one language. Monolingual and mixed-language patterns were then calculated descriptively to show the relative distribution of language choices across the commercial landscape. Particular care was taken with proper names and registered brand names. Classification was based on identifiable linguistic material displayed on each sign rather than on the presumed national origin of the brand or business. This procedure was adopted to make the classification more transparent and to avoid equating brand provenance with actual language use. The resulting frequency patterns



were used to address the first research question concerning the distribution of language choices in commercial signage.

To complement the signage data, interviews were conducted with five business owners whose establishments represented several of the language patterns found in the corpus. The original sample included two owners whose business names used Indonesian, one whose sign used English, one using a combination of Indonesian and English, and one using Indonesian and Arabic. The interviews were designed to elicit the owners' own explanations for choosing particular linguistic resources in their business names. Their responses referred to considerations such as familiarity, ease of pronunciation and recall, the age and history of the business, attractiveness to younger customers, perceptions of modernity, and religious or halal positioning. The five interviews were not treated as representative of all businesses included in the signage corpus; rather, they served as purposively selected accounts that provided an emic perspective on the meanings associated with particular language choices. In reporting the interview data, participants were anonymised as Business Owner 1 to Business Owner 5.

Data analysis proceeded in two related stages. First, the signage data were coded according to language choice and sign type, after which frequencies and percentages were calculated to identify dominant and less frequent patterns. Second, the interview responses were analysed qualitatively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing following Miles et al. (2014). Recurring explanations were grouped into interpretive categories such as local familiarity, continuity, market orientation, modernity, and cultural or religious positioning. These categories were then considered in relation to the visible patterns in the linguistic landscape rather than being generalised to all sign producers. The analysis was informed by the distinction between informational and symbolic functions in linguistic landscape research (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) and by socially situated approaches that view signs as products of particular spatial, commercial, and sociolinguistic contexts (Backhaus, 2007; Gorter & Cenoz, 2024; Scollon & Scollon, 2003). In this way, the study combined a descriptive account of which linguistic resources were visible in the commercial landscape with a qualitative interpretation of the meanings that selected business owners themselves associated with those choices.

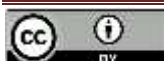
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Patterns of Language Choice in Commercial Signage

The analysis of commercial signage along Jalan Jenderal Suprpto reveals a linguistically varied landscape in which Indonesian remains the dominant resource, while English and several other languages occur either independently or in combination. The original field documentation contained 77 establishment signs; however, one non-commercial sign, *Masjid Raya Nur Addin*, was excluded from the present analysis in accordance with the study's focus on commercial signage, leaving a final corpus of 76 signs. In addition, language combinations that differed only in their order of appearance were consolidated. Thus, signs originally coded as Indonesian–English and English–Indonesian were treated as a single Indonesian–English category, while Indonesian–Japanese and Japanese–Indonesian were similarly combined. This decision was made because the study investigates language choice rather than the visual sequencing, prominence, or salience of individual linguistic elements. The resulting distribution is presented in Table 1. The original data show that Indonesian was the most frequent single-language category, while Indonesian–English and English constituted the two most prominent alternatives.

Table 1. Distribution of Language Choices in Commercial Signage

No.	Language choice	Frequency	Percentage
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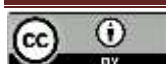


1.	Indonesian	40	52.63%
2.	Indonesian–English	14	18.42%
3.	English	13	17.10%
4.	Indonesian–Arabic	2	2.63%
5.	Indonesian–Chinese	2	2.63%
6.	Indonesian–Japanese	2	2.63%
7.	Japanese	1	1.32%
8.	Indonesian–Minang	1	1.32%
9.	English–Chinese	1	1.32%
Total		76	100.00%

As Table 1 shows, Indonesian alone accounts for more than half of the commercial signs, with 40 occurrences (52.63%). Its prominence becomes even clearer when mixed-language signs are taken into consideration. Indonesian appears in 61 of the 76 signs, or approximately 80.26% of the corpus, either independently or alongside another language. This extensive visibility indicates that the commercial landscape of Jalan Jenderal Suprpto remains firmly grounded in the national language. The finding is broadly compatible with earlier Indonesian linguistic landscape studies in which Indonesian retained a prominent position despite the presence of English and other linguistic resources (da Silva et al., 2021; Fibriasari & Rahmadany, 2024; Jupri et al., 2022; Sianipar, 2021; Syamsurijal et al., 2023; Zahara & Wijana, 2022). In the context of Tebing Tinggi, where the businesses along the street primarily operate within an everyday local commercial environment, the extensive use of Indonesian is consistent with its broad communicative accessibility. The numerical pattern itself, however, should not be taken to establish why individual owners selected Indonesian; the meanings attributed to those choices are examined separately through their interview accounts in Section 4.2.

English nevertheless occupies a substantial secondary position. Although only 13 signs (17.10%) use English independently, a further 14 signs (18.42%) combine Indonesian and English, while one additional sign combines English and Chinese. English therefore occurs in some form in 28 of the 76 signs, representing approximately 36.84% of the commercial corpus. Its presence is consequently more extensive than the English-only category would suggest. This finding is important because it shows that the relationship between Indonesian and English in Tebing Tinggi is not adequately represented as a simple choice between two competing languages. English is frequently incorporated into signs while Indonesian remains present, producing bilingual forms that allow businesses to draw simultaneously on locally accessible and more translocal linguistic resources. Similar uses of English within Indonesian commercial landscapes have been associated with contemporary branding, prestige, modernity, and wider market orientation (Denil et al., 2024; Faridah, 2019; Setiarini et al., 2024; Zahara & Wijana, 2022). In the present study, however, such symbolic interpretations are not inferred solely from the visibility of English; they are evaluated in relation to the explanations provided by the business owners themselves.

The remaining linguistic resources occupy comparatively small but distinct positions within the landscape. Indonesian occurs in combination with Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Minang, while one Japanese-only sign and one English–Chinese sign are also present. Numerically, these forms account for only a small proportion of the corpus, yet their limited frequency does not necessarily imply limited social significance. Linguistic landscape research has long distinguished between numerical visibility and symbolic value: a language need not dominate public space quantitatively in order to index a particular cultural, religious, ethnic, or commercial orientation (Backhaus, 2007; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy, 2006). The presence of several linguistic resources alongside Indonesian and English therefore suggests that the commercial landscape is not linguistically homogeneous, even though its diversity is



highly uneven. Rather than displaying widespread multilingualism across individual signs, Tebing Tinggi's commercial landscape appears to incorporate other languages selectively for particular establishments and purposes.

This pattern becomes clearer when the signs are grouped according to whether they use one or more identifiable languages. As shown in Table 2, monolingual signage substantially exceeds bilingual signage. Following the exclusion of the non-commercial mosque sign, 54 of the 76 commercial signs are monolingual, whereas 22 contain two languages. No sign in the dataset contains three or more identifiable languages. The original corpus similarly showed a clear predominance of monolingual over bilingual forms.

Table 2. Distribution of Monolingual and Bilingual Commercial Signage

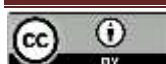
Type of signage	Frequency	Percentage
Monolingual	54	71.05%
Bilingual	22	28.95%
Multilingual	0	0.00%
Total	76	100.00%

The predominance of monolingual signs indicates that linguistic diversity along Jalan Jenderal Suprpto is realised primarily across the commercial landscape rather than within each individual sign. In other words, several languages are visible when the street is viewed as a whole, but most individual businesses rely on a single linguistic resource for their displayed names. Bilingual practices are nevertheless sufficiently frequent to form a meaningful component of the landscape, accounting for slightly more than one-quarter of the corpus. Indonesian–English combinations are particularly important in this respect, representing 14 of the 22 bilingual signs. The pattern suggests that bilingualism in this commercial setting is selective rather than pervasive and that English is the principal language combined with Indonesian when businesses move beyond monolingual naming practices. This differs from highly internationalised commercial environments in which multilingual displays may respond directly to tourist populations or intense cross-border mobility. In Tebing Tinggi, the coexistence of Indonesian and English occurs within a predominantly local commercial setting, making the symbolic and market-oriented motivations behind these choices particularly relevant to the present study.

The overall distribution therefore presents a more nuanced picture than either linguistic homogeneity or straightforward language replacement. Indonesian provides the principal linguistic foundation of the commercial landscape, while English functions as the most visible additional resource and appears especially prominently in bilingual naming. Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Minang occur much more selectively, contributing further layers of linguistic and cultural differentiation. Importantly, these frequency patterns establish which linguistic resources are visible and how they are distributed, but they cannot by themselves explain what those resources mean to the people who selected them. Whether Indonesian represents familiarity, English represents modernity, or another language indexes cultural or religious affiliation cannot be determined from the signage alone. The second stage of the analysis therefore turns to the accounts of selected business owners to examine the meanings they themselves associate with their language choices.

4.2 Meanings Associated with Language Choices in Commercial Signage

The second research question concerns the meanings that selected business owners associate with their language choices. Unlike the distributional analysis in Section 4.1, which



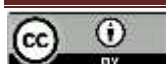
describes what languages are visible in the commercial landscape, the interview data provide an emic perspective on why particular linguistic resources were chosen. Five business owners were interviewed, representing Indonesian, English, Indonesian–English, and Indonesian–Arabic signage. Their responses indicate that language choice was shaped by several considerations, including familiarity, continuity, ease of recall, perceptions of modernity, target-market orientation, and religious positioning. Because the interviews involved only five selected owners, these explanations are treated as situated accounts rather than as motivations that can be generalised to all businesses along Jalan Jenderal Suprpto.

Table 3. Meanings Associated with Language Choices by Selected Business Owners

Business Owner	Language choice	Owner's explanation	Interpretive meaning
Business Owner 1	Indonesian	The business had existed for more than thirty years; the name was inherited from the owner's father, from a period when foreign-language naming was less common.	Continuity and established local identity
Business Owner 2	Indonesian	Indonesian was considered easier to pronounce and easier for customers to remember.	Familiarity, accessibility, memorability
Business Owner 3	English	English was considered <i>keren</i> and suitable for attracting younger customers.	Modernity, youth orientation, commercial appeal
Business Owner 4	Indonesian–English	The mixed-language name was associated with the modern era and with appearing <i>keren</i> .	Contemporary branding and modern image
Business Owner 5	Indonesian–Arabic	The business was located close to a mosque, and the language choice was intended to signal that the food was halal.	Religious positioning and consumer reassurance

The use of Indonesian was associated most clearly with familiarity and continuity. Business Owner 1 explained that the establishment had operated for more than thirty years and that its Indonesian name had been given by the owner's father. The participant also suggested that foreign-language business names had been less common when the establishment was first opened. Business Owner 2 offered a more practical explanation, stating that Indonesian was easier for customers to pronounce and remember. These accounts help qualify the quantitative predominance of Indonesian reported in Section 4.1. Indonesian is not simply visible because it is the national language; for these participants, it is also connected with the history of the business, communicative accessibility, and recognisability among local customers. Its value in the commercial landscape is therefore both informational and symbolic. In Landry and Bourhis' (1997) terms, Indonesian facilitates communication with the intended public while simultaneously participating in the social identification of the business within its local setting.

The English and Indonesian–English signs reveal a different set of associations. Business Owner 3 explicitly connected English with being *keren* and with attracting younger customers, while Business Owner 4 similarly associated the use of English alongside Indonesian with modernity and contemporary style. These accounts correspond with findings from other Indonesian commercial landscapes, where English has been associated with prestige,



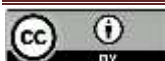
attractiveness, modernity, and market-oriented branding (Denil et al., 2024; Faridah, 2019; Setiarini et al., 2024; Zahara & Wijana, 2022). In the Tebing Tinggi data, however, English does not appear to function primarily as a language required for communication with international visitors. The participants instead describe it as a symbolic commercial resource through which a business can construct a contemporary image and position itself towards particular consumers. This distinction matters because it suggests that the local use of English is not necessarily evidence of a shift away from Indonesian. Rather, English can be appropriated within a predominantly Indonesian commercial environment for the additional meanings that owners believe it conveys.

The account provided by Business Owner 5 introduces another dimension to the linguistic landscape. The participant explained that the use of Indonesian–Arabic wording was related to the business's location beside a mosque and to the intention of indicating that the food being sold was halal. In this case, the additional linguistic resource is not associated with modernity or global commercial appeal but with religious identification and consumer reassurance. The example is important because it complicates any simple distinction between “local” Indonesian and “global” English. Different languages enter the commercial landscape with different indexical possibilities: Indonesian may support accessibility and continuity, English may contribute to a modern or youthful commercial image, and Arabic-associated linguistic elements may communicate religious positioning. The social meaning of a language therefore depends on the specific relationship among the sign, the type of business, the intended audience, and the local environment in which it is displayed, consistent with socially situated approaches to linguistic landscape analysis (Blommaert, 2013; Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Shohamy, 2006).

The interview findings also illuminate the relationship expressed in the article title, *Between Local Identity and Global Appeal*. The contrast should not be understood as a rigid opposition in which local linguistic resources are gradually replaced by global ones. Instead, the participants' accounts suggest a more flexible commercial repertoire. Indonesian remains associated with locally grounded considerations such as accessibility, familiarity, historical continuity, and ease of recognition, whereas English may be selectively introduced when owners wish to project modernity, youthfulness, or wider commercial appeal. Other linguistic resources can enter the landscape for quite different purposes, as the Indonesian–Arabic example demonstrates. The commercial linguistic landscape of Tebing Tinggi is therefore shaped not by a single hierarchy of language values but by the strategic use of different linguistic resources for different audiences and communicative purposes.

These findings also show why the owners' perspectives are necessary for interpreting the visible landscape. The frequency of a language can establish its relative presence, but it cannot independently establish the meaning attached to its use. An English sign may appear modern to an analyst, for example, but that interpretation becomes considerably more defensible when the business owner explicitly relates English to being *keren*, contemporary, and attractive to younger consumers. Likewise, the visibility of Arabic-associated wording does not by itself demonstrate religious positioning; that meaning becomes available through the owner's explanation concerning the nearby mosque and the signalling of halal food. The combination of signage analysis and selected owners' accounts therefore enables the study to distinguish between observed linguistic patterns and participant-attributed meanings, reducing the risk of assigning symbolic values to languages without empirical support.

Viewed alongside the findings in Section 4.1, the interview data suggest that Tebing Tinggi's commercial linguistic landscape is locally anchored but selectively outward-looking. Indonesian provides the principal linguistic basis of the landscape and is associated by the interviewed owners with familiarity, continuity, and communicative ease. English, although less frequent, is drawn upon for contemporary and market-oriented meanings, particularly in relation to younger consumers, while other linguistic resources may serve more specific cultural



or religious functions. Rather than indicating a straightforward movement from local to global language use, the findings point to the coexistence of linguistic resources whose values are negotiated according to particular commercial purposes. This interplay between local grounding and wider symbolic appeal constitutes the central sociolinguistic pattern emerging from the present study.

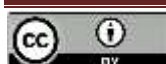
V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study examined patterns of language choice in the commercial linguistic landscape of Tebing Tinggi and the meanings that selected business owners associated with their linguistic choices. The findings indicate that Indonesian occupies the most prominent position in commercial signage along Jalan Jenderal Suprpto, appearing both independently and in combination with other languages. Although monolingual signs predominate, the presence of English and other linguistic resources demonstrates that the commercial landscape accommodates different forms of linguistic expression. English is particularly visible in bilingual combinations with Indonesian, whereas Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Minang occur more selectively. The interviews provide further insight into the meanings associated with these choices. Indonesian was linked to familiarity, ease of recognition, and the continuity of established businesses, while English was associated with modernity, youthfulness, and commercial attractiveness. The use of Indonesian–Arabic signage was also connected with religious positioning and the communication of halal identity. These findings suggest that local identity and wider commercial appeal are not necessarily competing orientations within the linguistic landscape of Tebing Tinggi. Rather, different linguistic resources coexist and acquire particular meanings in relation to the histories, audiences, and commercial purposes of individual establishments. The study thus contributes to linguistic landscape research by demonstrating how the visibility of languages and the meanings attributed to them by sign producers can be examined together within the everyday commercial environment of a secondary Indonesian city.

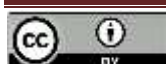
The findings should nevertheless be considered in relation to the study's geographical and methodological scope. The signage data were collected along a single commercial street in November 2023, while the interview data were obtained from five selected business owners. Consequently, the observed language distribution cannot be assumed to represent the entire linguistic landscape of Tebing Tinggi, and the participants' explanations should not be generalised to all business owners in the city. Future research could extend the geographical coverage to other commercial areas and examine whether similar patterns occur across different types of businesses and urban settings. A larger and more varied group of participants, including business owners and customers, could also provide a broader understanding of how the meanings intended by sign producers correspond with those perceived by their audiences. Furthermore, longitudinal investigations could examine changes in commercial language choices over time, particularly in relation to the visibility of English and the continued use of Indonesian and regional languages. Such investigations would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how local linguistic identities and wider commercial orientations develop within the changing linguistic landscapes of secondary Indonesian cities.

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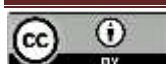
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