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LANGUAGE FOR TOURIST SPACES: LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES IN TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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Abstract

Language contributes in presenting experiences of tourists and showing identities of destinations. This article studies the concepts of linguistic landscape towards tourism context. It tries to show how language displays in public spaces reflect cultural identity, multilingualism, and marketing strategy. Related and latest studies are collected and formulated to provide the theoretical review. This study attempts to show language uses in tourism destinations are not merely symbolic, but also informative in representing cultural values, market interest, and global-local relation. In the correlation of language and tourism, the discussion includes language policy in tourism as the language planning to build sustainable tourist experience. The conceptual findings in this study contribute tourism sector development in the perspective of language to create inclusive and well-prepared management. Finally, the article tries to give academic and practical implications to future studies and policy makers.

Keywords: tourism destination, language; linguistic landscape; space

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a crucial determinant of the quality of tourists' experiences and the image of destinations. It serves as a medium for conveying local cultures by articulating cultural values, customs, and indigenous wisdom. In tourism, we are not talking about foreign tourists, but also locals. They are the people should be served well. Language in tourism sector represents identity and the image that wants to be implemented (Qulub & Rusmawati, 2024). By language use, a tourism environment can be studied in the perspective of its openness and readiness to receive tourists with heterogeneous backgrounds including language and culture (Damayanti et al., 2024; Paramarta, 2022). The discussion of this article is directed to the study of linguistic landscape (LL), especially for tourist spaces.

LL studies arouse from the practice of language in public space. Tourist destinations are public spaces because they are visited by people from various backgrounds. Moreover, they were built in open space so that it is possibly accessible for people to gather. Nameplate, signpost, banner, other related media that are shown publicly are the examples of LL data. As public space, tourist destinations depict the places where a culture has its particular characteristics. Language in LL shows it to the people and tries to present positive impression in various ways. (Salim &



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Fosterharoldas Swasto, 2022) found the positive impression towards tourist destination impacts tourists' movement and visit as reflected in the length of time tourists are in an area.

1.1. LL Theory

LL study was pioneered popularly by (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) and investigated its implementations in various contexts through researches to this day. In LL, language display practices informative and symbolic media. Informative medium supports effective communication by conveying messages, rules, and important information to tourists while symbolic medium influence visitors' perceptions and experiences towards the destination by articulating cultural identity, social values, and the image of a place.

For informative use, (Oktavianus, 2022; Widani & Suktiningsih, 2021) analyzed the use of language in health protocol poster in Covid-19 pandemic era by integrating text and symbol or icon for educating citizens in obeying the virus' transmission. (Devina et al., 2023) had exemplified that LL gained comfort and convenience towards visitors in tourism, hotel, and culinary sectors. LL in the place was arranged well so that the information was acceptably received.

For symbolic use, LL in the context of language use and visual design in public space reflected opened attitude of the destination to tourists and preserved local values at the same time (Lahpan et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2023). Those findings became cultural attractions.

The implementation of LL in tourism study the way of multimodal signs (i.e. text, picture, symbol, and color) in tourist spaces interact with physical layout, language, and social context to build meanings. Geosemiotics in LL study bridges this interaction. (Alhaider, 2023) and (Zhang, 2024) analyzed bilingual signs in tourist area purposed for both informatively navigation and symbolically openness to foreign tourists while maintaining cultural identity. Geosemiotics approach the interactions between the placement of signs and visual design describe social dynamics, economy, even politics in tourist spaces.

1.2. Tourism and Discourse

Language for tourism use is commonly designed for constructing narration about culture. Sometimes, tourist destinations are romanticized by representing authentic local culture in order to negotiate economy, politics, and identity. For example, the narrations of cultural diversity and exotic nature are highlighted in the official Indonesian tourism site (Sukma, 2021). Language in LL strategically shapes tourist destination image through signage, promotion, and digital media. Applying global language in signage and advertising is the effort of being international and easily accessible to foreign tourists. However, Sukma (2021) reminded that cultural identity, like using Balinese script in tourist space in Ubud, created authentic impression.

Local and global languages are pulling each other in the middle of economic and cultural interests. Using English massively in public space is sometimes seen to reach pragmatic need in attracting foreign tourists. This option is risky towards local language as the identity marker as explored by (Screti, 2022) in analyzing the documentary *Tourist Go Home!* that criticized language in public space and considered ignoring local communities to their linguistic identity.



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Based on the background above, LL has crucial role to help tourists in understanding information and creating meaningful tourist experience. LL is also used for preserving culture in particular places. However, to know the potential of LL in tourism, deep study is needed in theoretical perspective. This article is written in order to explore LL concept theoretically in the context of tourism.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Paradigm

This article is theoretical study treated in literature review approach. This method is chosen to explore and analyze the concept of LL in the context of tourism. The study is done in order to give comprehension deeply about the concept, theory, and findings related to LL as discussed in previous researches.

This article is provided by studying related the articles published by scientific journals. The articles are selected with relevant topics including LL, tourism, and language study. Those are the sources of getting the required data. The data are also taken from compiling the related studies of linguistic landscape, geosemiotics, and tourism discourse as the bases of developing the theories into the implementations as published in the scientific journals.

The data collection is applied by searching the literatures in academic database such as Google Scholar, Garuda, Sinta, and DOAJ. The literatures are chosen based on their relevance, novelty, and contribution to the study of LL. The literatures are collected based on the criteria including: discussing about LL in the context of tourism and public space, studying the relationship between language and cultural identity in tourist space, and choosing the last-10-years publication to have the novelty.

The study uses content analysis for analyzing the data. The data are analyzed descriptively by involving the LL key concepts. Besides that, relevant theories and research findings referring to cultural identity, language ideology, and language domination are applied to enrich this study.

2.2. Research Limitation

In order to make this study focused, the discussion is limited to LL studies in the context of tourism and public space that tourists gathered to have their experience. The findings in this article are conceptual in nature. The explanation is purposed to give insights for further studies so that potential topics and researches are stimulated. The discussion about LL in this study is finally directed to language policies for tourist spaces, especially in Indonesia.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In LL study, language performs its function by communicating with tourists and building identity of the destination. This condition makes language does not only play a role as practical



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communication tool, but also symbolic element in shaping image, especially when language display in tourist space is success to attract positive impression. LL is the realization of preferring policy, social dynamic, and economy. When language in LL attract tourists in getting positive experience, it turns to be worthy commodity. Through signage, information boards, and other promotional materials in tourist space, language in LL is the result of considering social, culture, and economy.

3.1 Multilingualism in Tourist Space

As tourist destination, the place presents people with various backgrounds to interact for feeling the experience. This condition causes multilingualism because of using multiple languages. Languages displayed in the signage, information boards, and promotional materials contain cultural identity besides marketing strategy.

(Rastitiati & Suprastayasa, 2022) found multilingual condition when they observed language uses of signage in Nusa Dua, Bali. They identified eight language variations including the combination of Bahasa Indonesia, Balinese, English, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Hindi, German, and French. Their findings show that language variations in the area reflected the effort of fulfilling foreign tourists and preserving local culture identity at once. In Yogyakarta, (Vitasari & Setyawan, 2025) analyzed in the context of culinary signage. In the observed area, they found three variations including Bahasa Indonesia-English, Bahasa Indonesia, and Bahasa Indonesia-Japanese-English. The findings were concluded that those language variations practice branding strategy for attracting foreign tourists while communicating the services. (Wirza et al., 2025) highlighted the tourist destination Alamendah applied attractive interest to tourists by combining Bahasa Indonesia, Sundanese, and ancient Sundanese script. The destination contributed in strengthening local identity.

Multilingualism in LL of tourist destinations reflects the dynamics of global communication need and preserving local identity. The findings of those researches facilitated interaction between tourists and local communities. This condition constructs how the destinations set themselves in shaping social and cultural life.

3.2 Language Visibility and Cultural Identity

LL allow the visibility of language shown in public. This way is utilized for representing cultural identity and symbol. The studies by (Pathanasin, 2025) in Phuket Island, Thailand and (Lombu et al., 2024) in the Nias Heritage Museum, Indonesia provided the practices of LL through signage about using both local and foreign languages. The findings showed that signage purposed as the media of preserving culture and expressing ethnicity. Based on the two contexts, it can be highlighted that using local and foreign language reflects the effort of maintain cultural identity while adapting global tourist need. The practices gained accessibility of information and awareness of local cultural heritage.

People are faced by the need of global communication while showing their specials as the important elements of tourism sector. Therefore, it is crucial for tourist destination managers to



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consider language visibility aspect in planning and developing sustainable along with inclusive destinations.

3.3 Language as the Marketing Strategy

Language use in LL has important role in practicing marketing strategy. By implementing correctly in signage, language in LL gains attraction towards the destinations. Previous studies showed that language in LL strategically supported tourism image and experience. (Kholifah et al., 2021) found that English use in LL of Baturaden had a role as the symbol of prestige and modernity in gaining attraction for international tourists. (Khazanah & Kusumaningputri, 2021) observed that English in signage reflected higher economic values and constructed cosmopolitan destination. (Kholifah et al., 2021) and (Khazanah & Kusumaningputri, 2021) viewed local languages existed in signage to present authentic nuance and culture. Multilingual signage in Kutuh village in Bali were highlighted by (Utami et al., 2024) as the support of strengthening the bonds between tourists and local communities. The previous studies convey language use in LL does not only perform as communication, but also marketing strategy by integrating economic, cultural, and sustainable aspects.

3.4. Implications for Language Policy in Tourism

The development of language use in tourist destination reflects social, cultural, and economic changes. Language policies in tourism sector should be considered comprehensively to fulfill the requirement of communication, cultural conservation, and economic growth.

When (Utami et al., 2024) explained that multilingual signage contributed in gaining tourists' experience, promoting sustainable tourism, and strengthening proximity between tourists and local communities, there remains inequality happening in other area. (Datang et al., 2022) found foreign language that dominated signage in Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara threatened local language. The government should encourage the implementation of *Undang-Undang No. 24 Tahun 2009* to maintain the use of national and regional languages in tourist space. On the other hand, the confusion experienced by tourists raises because of lack of standardization in using language on signage. It also reduces the effectiveness of communication. The research conducted in Ambon City, Maluku by (Sari et al., 2024) suggested the presence of regulation to apply multilingual signage for upgrading accessible information for international tourists. They observed 68% of tourist accommodation signage uses monolingual Indonesian, while only 32% uses multilingual, most of which is English.

In order to strengthen language policy, local government should develop guidelines about the signage design that proportionally include the use of local, national, and international languages. The guidelines should consider aesthetic and functional aspects. This way help creating tourist environment that is inclusive and friendly for tourists with heterogeneous backgrounds. Developing language policies requires collaboration among government, tourism industry practitioner, local communities, and academics. The involvement of all stakeholders will ensure the designed policies reflect the needs and aspirations of various parties and can be implemented



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effectively. Socialization and training about the importance of using language in public space and tourism sector should be done in order to arouse awareness and ability of tourism industry practitioners in managing tourist destinations' LL.

4. CONCLUSION

This article provides insights that language in tourist destinations' LL has complex function, more than its communicative role. Language has developed as the representation of cultural identity, symbolic power instrument, and effective marketing strategy. Along with all happenings in the observed public and tourist spaces, languages in signage reflect the efforts by stakeholders to balance between global tourist needs and preserving local values. Multilingual LL contributes in improving attraction of tourist destinations, tourist experience, and preservation of cultural identity. However, inter-language visibility gap (e.g. the domination of English) can blur local values and even marginalize regional language.

Based on the literature review, first, the author recommends developing an inclusive and balanced language policy. This way requires cooperation by local governments and tourist destination managers in planning language policies. It is hoped that the policies should accommodate all tourism information and promotion. Second, official guidelines are required to maintain design, content, and language in signage of tourist space by considering informative, aesthetic, and accessible for tourists with heterogeneous linguistic backgrounds. Third, local community should be gathered in planning and implementing language policies. It should be ensured that the policies are responsive towards cultural and social contexts at their places. Forth, academics, tourism industry practitioners, governments, and communities should be synergized to maintain research-based LL policies sustainably and contextually. Fifth, field studies are required in various tourist areas of Indonesia to enrich comprehension about LL practices and its implication to construct inclusive and sustainable tourism.

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