

## LANGUAGE CHOICE AT THE AIRPORT WITHIN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way humans act in public, and airports are no exception. The sets of signs related to health protocols placed within the area of the airports are one of the stakeholders' efforts to limit people's physical behavior. This study aims to describe the language choice used in formulating the signs that curb the protocol for preventing the transmission of the COVID-19 at the airports. The data collected consist of the visual documentation of verbal signs related to the virus prevention protocols at I Gusti Ngurah Rai International Airport, Bali. Language variation found in all data are English and Indonesian languages. Within the scope of linguistic landscape, the data are analyzed by distinguishing between top-down and bottom-up signs, which, respectively, represent the airport authorities and the private parties. The results of this research show that, first, monolingual top-down signs are predominant with 10 signs, followed by seven bilingual top-down signs, two monolingual bottom-up signs, and one bilingual bottom-up signs. Second, in terms of language order and positioning, there are four signs with English positioned on top as the main language, and the same number of signs feature Indonesian as the main language. Third, the function of the signs is varied, with 14 signs are predominantly used for instruction, two signs for caution, one sign for direction, one sign for assertion, and two signs feature both instruction and assertion.

### Keyword:

language choice, linguistic landscape, signs, COVID-19



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## INTRODUCTION

Public spaces, as it refers to public places that are open to many people, cannot be separated from the phenomena of language. In this case, the use of language can be found in textual forms such as those displayed on shop windows, commercial signs, posters, official notices, traffic signs, etc. (Gorter, 2006). This academic study of the use of language in public spaces is then known as the linguistic landscape.

Geographically, the discussion of the linguistic landscape includes the role of language use in its territorial aspects. Landry and Bourhis (1997) introduced that the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. From this view, it can be concluded that the study of the linguistic landscape includes all forms of language in the public sphere, which can then provide information and classification of a particular geographic area.

One of the social aspects in the study of linguistics is the diversity of languages. Choices in language diversity, which include monolingualism, bilingualism, and multilingualism, is a fairly popular focus in the study of landscape linguistics. This is considering that public spaces are social media that cannot be separated from the diversity of the identities of its users. In addition, the globalization factor has an important role in the emergence and development of the phenomenon of the use of more than one language. The fact that there are nearly 7,000 languages

in the world and only less than 200 independent countries implies that multilingualism is a common phenomenon and that linguistic diversity is indeed very different in each country (Cenoz and Gorter in Shohamy and Gorter, 2008).

The airport as a public space has an important role in terms of language use and choice. As one of the entrances to a region, a commercial airport can be interpreted as a portico of an area that represents the socio-cultural identity of the region. This is of course based on the function of a commercial airport, especially one that serves international flights, as an entry and exit route between regions or countries. Thus, the phenomenon of language diversity becomes an unavoidable thing in the scope of international airports, including on the available information signages.

Social conditions at international airports, even at domestic airports, have experienced a significant escalation in terms of public order recently. This is caused by the ongoing global COVID-19 virus pandemic situation at the time this research began. The impact of the COVID-19 virus pandemic on air travel has been dramatic, making it the worst aviation crisis ever (ICAO, 2020). Therefore, airport authorities around the world are required to tighten health protocols to prevent the transmission of this virus in the area of each airport. Efforts to enforce this protocol are in accordance with the decision at the 2010 ICAO general assembly, which urges all countries to join and participate in the Cooperative Arrangement for the Prevention of Spread of Communicable Disease through Air Travel (CAPSCA). (ICAO, 2010 in Tabares, 2020).

Through a preliminary study of this research, it is known that one of the airport authorities' efforts in controlling the protocol for preventing the transmission of the COVID-19 virus is through the use of warning signs. This preliminary study in the form of field observations was carried out at the international and domestic terminals of I Gusti Ngurah Rai International Airport located in Bali, Indonesia. Observation results show that warning signs are placed on various surfaces in the front area of the airport terminal, such as distance limit signs on the floor, caution to keep distance on chairs, and instruction to wash hands at the sink. These signs mostly show verbal language in the form of phrases and sentences.

From the object of the preliminary study above, it can be seen that the use of language at the airport as a public space during the adaptation of new habits or new normal has the potential to be investigated further. The inconsistency of language choice (monolingual and bilingual) is interesting to be studied in depth. The urgency of this research on the phenomenon of language use related to the protocol for preventing the transmission of the COVID-19 virus at airports is still and will be very relevant in the next few years, considering that the impact of this pandemic is predicted to continue to affect the commercial aviation sector for at least the next four to five years (IATA, 2020).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Attention to the use of language in the surrounding environment, words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces, is the center of attention in the linguistic landscape (Shohamy and Gorter, 2008). Shohamy and Gorter (2008) also state that language that can be found everywhere is very closely related to society, because they are the ones who produce it and who choose how to represent and display it in various spaces. That is, the phenomenon of linguistic landscapes pays attention to how humans as social beings use language in a common space where they share places and interact with one another.

One approach in the study of linguistic landscapes is based on Bourdieu's (1993) concept of power relations that shape social reality. This power relationship refers to the extent to which certain actors are able to impose a pattern of behavior on others even though it is against their will (Weber in Bendix, 1960). In relation to the linguistic landscape, this principle of structuration can occur in the capacity of the stronger party to impose restrictions on the use of linguistic resources by the weaker party (Shohamy et al., 2010). This approach is relevant to the study of linguistic landscapes, as it pays special attention to the distinction between top-down and bottom-up concepts of linguistic landscape items.

According to Shohamy et al., (2010), landscape linguistic items with a top-down flow come from public bodies, namely governments or public organizations that produce linguistic landscape items to disseminate official information. This top-down item includes linguistic landscape items issued by the public bureaucracy such as building names, street names, and public announcements. In the social context, the actors behind these strands have more or more power than those who participate in the bottom-up stream, allowing the exercise of control over them.

Meanwhile, bottom-up items include unofficial items made by commercial companies, private organizations, or individuals (Gorter, 2006). This item includes the store name or company name

and announcements that are personal or autonomous. According to Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), the main difference between top-down and bottom-up items lies in the fact that top-down items are meant to reflect a general commitment to the dominant culture, while bottom-up landscape linguistic items are designed much more freely according to individual strategy.

## **METHODS**

In this study, the authors use a qualitative descriptive method in presenting data analyses. This method is chosen with the consideration that this research will produce a descriptive summary related to socio-cultural phenomena that occur in society. In contrast to quantitative methods, qualitative methods examine social and cultural phenomena based on questions such as what, why, and how (Keegan, 2009: 11). In collecting the data, the authors conduct direct observations at the airport and collect language data on signs related to the COVID-19 virus prevention protocols in the form of visual documentation. The data are then identified according to the choices of the language, and lastly classified into top-down and bottom-up categories.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### Results and Discussion

The data in this research are in the form of language choices on signs related to the COVID-19 prevention protocol at I Gusti Ngurah Rai International Airport in 2021. There are 20 data analyzed for this research, which will be presented in this section. The presentation of the discussion of the data will be grouped according to the language choices and the top-down/bottom-up categories.

### **1. Monolingual Top-Down Signs**

From 20 data of this research, 10 data are classified into the monolingual top-down signs. The language choices found in each data are either Indonesian or English only, where eight data are in Indonesian and two are in English. The actors of these public signs are Angkasa Pura as the airport management authority, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, Class I Port Health Office of Denpasar, Indonesian National Armed Forces, Indonesian National Police, Denpasar City Police, and State-owned enterprise. Based on the function, most of the signs are used for instruction, such as presented below:

- (1) Sign by Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia and Class I Port Health Office of Denpasar

*Protect yourself and others from COVID-19 by taking these simple*

*Wash your hands with soap and running water (at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol*

*Wear a mask properly, covering your nose and mouth*

*Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and others*

*Avoid going to crowded places*

*Let's care our environmental health, community and our family together*

- (2) Sign by Indonesian National Armed Forces and Indonesian National Police

*Ayo pakai masker*

*Kesehatan pulih ekonomi bangkit*

- (3) Sign by Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia and Class I Port Health Office of Denpasar

*Bagi penumpang yang hendak berangkat diharapkan untuk melakukan validasi dokumen kesehatan (rapid tes) pada counter petugas karantina kesehatan*

*Gunakan masker saat keluar rumah, jaga jarak saat berbicara, sering mencuci tangan pakai sabun*

- (4) Sign by Indonesian National Armed Forces and Indonesian National Police

*Be aware of COVID-19*

*Adhere to health protocol*

*Wash your hand, wear a mask, keep distance, avoid crowds*

*Reduce your mobility*

*“No mask no service”*

- (5) Sign by Denpasar City Police

*Bersama lawan COVID-19*

*Pakailah maskermu!*

*Maskerku melindungimu*

*Maskermu Melindungiku*

*Jaga jarak, cuci tangan, dipakai maskernya*

- (6) Sign by Denpasar City Police

*Bersama lawan COVID-19*

*Jaga diri dan keluarga Anda dari virus Corona dengan GERMAS (Gerakan Masyarakat Hidup Sehat)*

*Jaga jarak*

*Cuci tangan*

*Pakai masker*

- (7) Sign by Denpasar City Police

*Kepolisian Resor Kota Denpasar siap kawal penegakan pendisiplinan protokol kesehatan*

*Ayo cuci tangan pakai sabun!*

*Pakailah maskermu*

*Terapkan jaga jarak!*

*Bersama lawan COVID-19*

*Jagar jarak, cuci tangan, dipakai maskernya*

- (8) Sign by Angkasa Pura

*Mohon perhatikan jarak Anda*

All eight data above considerably function as instruction signs. The instruction includes the health protocols such as wearing a mask, maintaining distance, washing hands, and avoiding

crowds. Data (1) and (4) are written in English only, while the others are written in Indonesian. It can be seen from the data above that monolingual COVID-19 instruction signs in Indonesian language are used predominantly in the airport. The next sign function found in the data is caution. One data below functions as caution:

- (9) Sign by State-owned enterprise and Angkasa Pura

*Peringatan*

*Pemalsuan dokumen kesehatan hasil rapid test antibody, rapid test antigen, dan swab PCR untuk kepentingan perjalanan udara merupakan tindakan melawan hukum. Setiap pelanggaran akan dikenakan sanksi hukum sesuai dengan peraturan yang berlaku.*

*\*Pasal 263 dan 268 KUHP tentang Membuat Surat Palsu atau Memalsukan Surat*

Data (9) above is a monolingual sign in Indonesian language which functions as caution. The sign warns the readers about the regulation and law of document forgery, specifically in terms of the COVID-19 test result documents. This caution sign is considered as a top-down item, since the actors responsible for the sign are the State-owned enterprise and Angkasa Pura as the airport's authorities. Another function found in the data is direction, which is presented below:

- (10) Sign by Angkasa Pura

*Lokasi swab*

*Terminal kedatangan domestik. Lokasi di sini*

*Gedung Ex-Wisti Sabha. 300 meter*

Written in monolingual Indonesian language, Data (10) functions as direction. It gives information to the readers about the location of COVID-19 swab test within the airport area. The actor of this sign is Angkasa Pura as the authority of the airport, thus it is classified as a top-down item.

## **2. Monolingual Bottom-Up Signs**

The next category of the data found in the observation is monolingual bottom-up signs. Two data are classified into this category. The language choice for both signs is Indonesian language only. The signs are classified as bottom-up items as they represent commercial private companies, which are, in this case, coffee shops. Based on the function, the two signs are used as instruction and assertion. See the data below:

- (11) Sign by Starbucks

*Gunakan masker*

*Cuci tangan teratur*

*Jaga jarak min. 1 m*

*Gerai ini telah dimodifikasi demi kesehatan dan keselamatan bersama*

- (12) Sign by Gloria Jean's Coffees

*Protokol kesehatan new normal Gloria Jean's Coffees*

- 1. Karyawan telah lolos uji tes kesehatan secara berkala*
- 2. Menyediakan alat pengukur suhu.*
- 3. Menyediakan hand sanitizer*
- 4. Karyawan dilengkapi APD (masker, sarung tangan dan face shield)*
- 5. Sterilisasi alat makanan dengan lampu UV*
- 6. Pengantaran makanan/minuman selalu tersedia tutup (tutup saji dan tutup gelas)*

7. *Tersedia pembatas/penyekat meja/kursi*
8. *Tersedia penyekat/pembatas kasir*
9. *Transaksi pembayaran via lampu UV*
10. *Meja dan kursi secara berkala disterilisasi dengan cairan disinfektan*
11. *Sterilisasi ruangan dengan lampu UV*
12. *Sterilisasi ruangan dengan fogging disinfektan*

Both data above are found from the signs made by two different private companies, which are, respectively, Starbucks and Gloria Jean's Coffees. Data (11) mostly provides instruction to the readers, which includes the COVID-19 related health protocols, such as using mask, washing hands, and maintaining distance. However, the sign also contains assertion that informs the readers that the outlet has been modified for the sake of its customers' health and safety. In the other hand, Data (12) functions as assertion altogether as it informs the readers that the outlet has been adapted to meet the public health requirements. The assertion in this sign, unlike the previous one, is more detailed, where the sign informs every installment of the required health protocols.

### **3. Bilingual Top-Down Signs**

From 20 data of this research, seven data are classified into the bilingual top-down signs. The language choices found in each data are both Indonesian and English languages. The actors of these public signs are Angkasa Pura as the airport management authority, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, and Class I Port Health Office of Denpasar. Based on the function, most of the signs are used for instruction, such as presented below:

- (13) Sign by Angkasa Pura

*Maintain social distancing, please leave this seat empty*  
*Mari laksanakan social distancing, mohon kosongkan bangku ini*

- (14) Sign by Angkasa Pura

*Hand Sanitizer*

*Apply*  
*Tuang pada telapak tangan*

*Rub*  
*Gosok pada tangan*

*Dry*  
*Biarkan mengering*

- (15) Sign by Angkasa Pura

*Langkah Mencuci tangan*  
*Steps to wash hands correctly*

*Cuci tangan 20 detik dengan sabun dan air bersih*  
*Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap & clean water*

*Gunakan air mengalir*  
*Use running water*

*Gunakan sabun cuci tangan secukupnya*  
*Pour enough soap*

*Gosokkan telapak tangan dan antara jari-jari tangan*  
*Rub your palms and between fingers*

*Gosok punggung tangan dan sela-sela jari*

*Rub the back of the hand and between the back fingers*

*Pegang ibu jari & bilas dengan posisi berputar*  
*Grasp your thumb & rinse in a rotating position*

*Bersihkan ujung jari hingga bagian kuku terkena sabun*  
*Clean the fingertips until part of the nail exposed to soap*

*Gunakan kain/tisu sekali pakai untuk mengeringkan tangan*  
*Use a one time use cloth to dry hands*

(16) Sign by Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia

*Validasi dokumen rapid test atau PCR swab*  
*Validation of COVID 19 test result (rapid test or PCR swab test)*

*Siapkan*  
*Please prepare*

*Identitas diri (KTP/passport)*  
*Identity card*

*Dokumen hasil pemeriksaan rapid test atau PCR*  
*Rapid test or PCR swab test result*

*Lindungi dirimu dan sekitarmu*  
*Protect yourself and Others*

(17) Sign by Angkasa Pura

*Maintain social distancing, please keep 1.5 meter between you and others*

*Mari laksanakan social distancing, mohon jaga jarak anda minimal 1.5 meter*

(18) Sign by Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia and Class I Port Health Office of Denpasar

*Cegah penularan COVID-19*  
*Protect yourself and others from COVID-19*

*Ayo lakukan 4M*  
*By taking these simple precautions*  
*Mencuci tangan dengan sabun dan air mengalir*  
*Wash your hands with soap and running water (at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol)*

*Memakai masker dengan benar menutupi hidung dan mulut*  
*Wear a mask properly, covering your nose and mouth*

*Menjaga jarak dengan orang lain minimal 1 m*  
*Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and others*

*Menghindari kerumunan*  
*Avoid going to crowded places*

*Ayo peduli kesehatan lingkungan, masyarakat, dan keluarga kita Bersama*  
*Let's care our environmental health, community, and our family together*

All six data above function as instruction signs. The instruction includes the health protocols such as wearing a mask, maintaining distance, washing hands, avoiding crowds, and preparing

health documents. It can be seen from the data that some signs are distinct with the others, in terms of the use of language order. Data (13), (14), and (17) are written with English as the first language, placed on the top of Indonesian language, while the rest of the data show the contrary. These particular orders considerably specify which language is the main language, by considering which one is placed on top of the other. Furthermore, unlike other signs, Data (14) shows that the sign does not actually show bilingualism for translation purposes, as the two languages are apparently mixed in the same discourse, where English is the main language with Indonesian used as the complementary.

In the other hand, one data below functions as caution:

(19) Sign by Angkasa Pura

*Anda memasuki Kawasan wajib menggunakan masker*  
*You are entering a mask-required area*

Data (19) above is written in both Indonesian and English, where Indonesian is placed on top of English, thus it can be considered that the former is the main language for the sign. Based on the function, the sign is used as a caution. It reminds the readers that they are entering a mask-required area of the airport. The actor of this sign is Angkasa Pura as the authority of the airport, thus it is classified as a top-down item.

#### **4. Bilingual Bottom-Up Signs**

The last data to be presented in this research is classified into the bilingual bottom-up signs. One data is found for this category, which is a sign made by a private coffee shop company located in the airport area, namely Pod Chocolate. Representing a private company's interest, the sign thus can be classified as a bottom-up item of linguistic landscape. The function of the sign is mainly considered as instruction, with minor assertion. See the data below:

(20) Sign by Pod Chocolate

*New Normal Protocol*

*Customers are required to wash their hands using soap before entering the area*  
*Pelanggan diwajibkan mencuci tangan dengan menggunakan sabun sebelum memasuki area*

*Customers will have their temperature tested*  
*Pemeriksaan suhu tubuh pelanggan*

*At the reception desk a physical distance 1.5m will be maintained*  
*Penerapan jarak fisik 1.5m pada meja tamu*

*During activities, wearing a mask and maintained distance is a must*  
*Wajib menggunakan masker dan menjaga jarak selama berada beraktifitas*

*We provide cashless payment*  
*Kami menyediakan pembayaran non-tunai*

The sign represented in Data (20) above informs required health protocols which must be obeyed by the customers. The health protocols include instruction to washing hands, having temperature test, and maintaining distance. It thus can be considered that the sign mainly functions as instruction. However, the sign also contains assertion that informs the readers that the shop provides cashless payment that is presumably for the sake of maintaining health and safety protocols. In addition, the sign is written in both English and Indonesian, where English is placed on top of its Indonesian translation, thus it can be considered that the former is the main language for the sign.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The study of linguistic landscape includes all forms of language items in the public spaces, which can then provide information and classification of a particular geographic area. In a



linguistic landscape study, items in public spaces are classified into two categories: top-down items and bottom-up items. Top-down landscape linguistic items come from governments or public organizations, while bottom-up items include unofficial items made by commercial companies, private organizations, or individuals. Public signs, as linguistic landscape items, is not different in terms of following this categorization.

In the COVID-19 pandemic time, both government and private parties cooperate in preventing the spread of the disease. One of the efforts made is by placing signs related to the COVID-19 prevention protocols in public spaces, including airports. This research studies 20 COVID-19-related signs from I Gusti Ngurah Rai International Airport, which are used as the research data. Language variation found in all data are English and Indonesian languages. Each data is classified and analyzed in terms of the language choice and linguistic landscape item categories. Using qualitative descriptive method, this research presents several findings. First, from 20 data of this research, the classification results 10 monolingual top-down signs, two monolingual bottom-up signs, seven bilingual top-down signs, and one bilingual bottom-up signs. Second, in bilingual signs, there is particular order which considerably specifies the main language, by considering which one is to begin with or placed on top of the other. In this case, there are four signs with English as the main language, and the same number of signs feature Indonesian as the main language. Third, the function of the signs is varied, with 14 signs are predominantly used for instruction, two signs for caution, one sign for direction, one sign for assertion, and two signs feature both instruction and assertion.

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