LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE IN INDONESIA:
A CASE STUDY OF SEMARANG

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the relationship between linguistic landscape and the sociolinguistic context in Semarang by asking a specific question: linguistic landscaping by whom? Such a question cultivates language policies and practices, both in macro (government) and micro level (individual, private enterprises). The data collection focused on Semarang as the capital city of Central Java province. The data has been derived from signs or written messages on public display, including office signs, billboards, shop signs, advertisements, traffic signs, topographic information or area maps, emergency guidance and political poster campaigns, and of course, graffiti. In the aggregate, they constitute the linguistic landscape of a place. According to the space they belong, the corpus data is divided into two: public (government) and private (non-government). Throughout the paper, I will show that while national language policies in Indonesia in the last two centuries have been succeeded in unifying the archipelago's linguistic heterogeneity, thus homogenising the multilingual society; however a growing number of middle class who perceives English as an important international language in recent years has yielded a new trend of linguistic diversification. This shift can be seen from the changes of the linguistic landscape displayed in Indonesian urban cities.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, top-down, bottom-up, public, private, Semarang, Bahasa Indonesia, English, Javanese.

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the relationship between linguistic landscape and the sociolinguistic context in the capital city of Central Java province of Indonesia, that is Semarang, by asking a specific question: linguistic landscaping by whom? Such a question cultivates language policies and practices, both in macro (government) and micro level (individual, private enterprises).

It enables us to distinguish between public spaces where official and non-official signs are displayed. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), government signs refer to the official signs used by government displayed in public spaces such as government buildings, road signs, street names, and inscriptions; whereas non-official or private signs refer to commercial signs and advertisements on business institutions and shops, and billboards. The distinction between public and private signs can further distinguish the top-down and bottom-up forces in linguistic landscaping (Backhaus, 2007). All government-related or official

signs can be classified as top-down signs, whereas those displayed by private enterprises.

Throughout the paper, I would argue that while national language policies in Indonesia in the last two centuries have been succeeded in unifying the archipelago's linguistic heterogeneity, thus homogenising the multilingual society; however a growing number of middle class who perceives English as an important international language in recent years (Tanu, 2014) has yielded a new trend of linguistic diversification. This shift can be seen from the changes of the linguistic landscape displayed in Indonesian urban cities.

To that end, this paper is going to explore this issue by firstly unpacking the concept of linguistic landscape. The second section explains about the methodology employed. The third section elaborates the points where linguistic landscape has been shifting.

LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

Linguistic landscape is "linguistic objects that mark the public space" (Ben-rafael, Shohamy, Amara, & Trumper-Hect, 2006, p. 7). It functions not only as an informational marker but also as a symbolic marker which has the potentials to communicate a degree of power and status of linguistic communities in a given territory. Linguistic landscape indeed constructs and constitutes the surrounding scene, including streets, corners, parks, and buildings where public life takes place. In other words, linguistic landscape represents the "symbolic construction of the public space" (Ben-Rafael, 2009)

Cenoz and Gorter (2006) argue that the relationship between linguistic landscape and sociolinguistic context is not linear and monodirectional. The bidirectional relationship is evident in the way the linguistic landscape carries with it informational and symbolic function on the one hand. But it also influences the perception about certain languages, affects linguistic behaviour, and constructs the overall sociolinguistic context on the other hand. Ben-Rafael et. al (2006 in (Shohamy, 2015, p. 153)) makes the point that linguistic landscape is "not random and arbitrary, but rather systematic and consistent".

According to the space they belong, the corpus data is divided into two: public (government) and private (non-government). The public or government landscape is characterised as a top-down linguistic landscape items because they are issued by national and public bureaucracies. Contrary to the top-down, bottom up items are markers which are issued by individual social actors, such as companies, private enterprises, shop owners. The items are like names of shops, signs on businesses and personal announcements.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper has been derived from signs or written messages on public display around the main roads and streets of Semarang. Data had been collected from 2018 up to 2019. The data includes office signs, billboards, shop signs, advertisements, traffic signs, topographic information or area maps, emergency guidance and political poster campaigns, and of course, graffiti. In the aggregate, they constitute the linguistic landscape of Semarang as the capital city of Central Java, Indonesia. Data were then

thematically categorised and analysed based on the emerging patterns, i.e. top-down and bottom-up items. These data were then triangulated with interview data and document analysis (language policy documents). Five interviews were also taken to passers-by to triangulate the argument.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the themes that emerged from the empirical data. Firstly, it begins with the top-down items or the government related corpus. Secondly, I contrast those findings with the bottom-up items or the private sector's corpus. Thirdly, theoretical implications will be discussed to expand the discussion of this chapter.

Top-down category

The top-down linguistic landscape items include those markers issued by national and regional bureaucracies, such as buildings belong to public institutions, signs on public space, public announcement and street names.

The patterns that emerge within this top-down category are the use of Javanese traditional script *(aksara Jawa)* and the use of correct and proper national language (*Bahasa Indonesia yang baik dan benar*).

The use of traditional local language demonstrates the efforts to maintain local culture and languages, as explicitly regulated in the government regulation. The use of Bahasa Indonesia in public spaces has been regulated by national laws, i.e. Law number 24 year 2009 on national flag, language, symbol and anthem. This particular law ensures the use of Bahasa Indonesia in public spaces, especially that of government offices.

For example, verse 30 reads that "Bahasa Indonesia is compulsory used in public administrative services in government offices and institutions" (Indonesia, 2009, p. 14). This line is further explained in verse 33 that reads "Bahasa Indonesia is compulsory used in formal communication in government and private offices" (Indonesia, 2009, p. 15).

The following pictures illustrate the implementation of the language regulation on public display by government authorities.

Picture 1. Biology Laboratory

Picture 2. Police department office

While those two pictures (picture 1 and 2) illustrate the use of correct and proper national language, data also demonstrates the use of regional language, in this case Javanese. Javanese script is taught at primary and secondary schools around Central Java regions with an aim to maintain the language and culture.

The following are some examples of the use of Javanese script in the government buildings and signage. Picture 3 is the slogan of the Central Java Governor's office located in Pemuda Street. The slogan is written in Javanese script, but when translated into English, it says: Let's build Central Java.

Picture 3. Central Java Governor's office (Let's build Central Java)

Another picture is from the naming of the faculty of languages and arts of a public university in Semarang. As it suggests language, culture and arts, the faculty uses Javanese script to name itself.

Picture 4. Faculty of languages and arts in Javanese script

English also appears in public spaces, especially those in area where foreigners usually come. This includes airport, train station, and immigration offices.

Picture 5. Semarang airport

In short, the patterns emerge from the data is that the languages used predominantly in the public landscape of government buildings and signage are national language, local language and English.

Bottom-up category

While top-down category projects consistent use of three languages, bottom-up category presents a more fluid linguistic phenomenon. Language used by private sectors and individuals in the forms of signage in the public display is not merely informative, but most importantly persuasive and sometimes provocative. Companies, for example, use public space to commercialise their products and to attract more customers.

The following picture best illustrates this point where a Thai tea stall uses Thai script to present that their products are authentic and original from Thailand, despite the fact that costumers might not be able to decode the Thai script.

Picture 6. Thai tea stall in Semarang

The main reason behind the fluidity of bottom-up category is actually on the market. As private sectors carefully read their market, so they adjust their branding and marketing strategy through language to achieve their goals. This is in contrast with the top-down category which is regulated by law.

Linguistic landscape of Semarang

The discussion above demonstrates that while national language policies in Indonesia in the last two centuries have been succeeded in unifying the archipelago's linguistic heterogeneity, thus homogenising the multilingual society; however a growing number of middle class who perceives English as an important international language in recent years has yielded a new trend of linguistic diversification. This shift can be seen from the changes of the linguistic landscape displayed in Indonesian urban cities.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued of the importance of linguistic landscape as a means of studying linguistic aspects of social reality. Linguistic landscape has a great potential to see the shift and dynamics of linguistic phenomenon from what is displayed in public spaces. Semarang is one vibrant city to explore, yet other places in Indonesia need to be investigated.

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